



Helping, Fixing, Serving, by Rachel Remen

Service is not the same as helping. Helping is based on inequality, it's not a relationship between equals. When you help, you use your own strength to help someone with less strength. It's a one up, one down relationship, and people feel this inequality. When we help, we may inadvertently take away more than we give, diminishing the person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

Now, when I help I am very aware of my own strength, but we don't serve with our strength, we serve with ourselves. We draw from all our experiences: our wounds serve, our limitations serve, even our darkness serves. The wholeness in us serves the wholeness in the other, and the wholeness in life. Helping incurs debt: when you help someone, they owe you. But service is mutual. When I help I have a feeling of satisfaction, but when I serve I have a feeling of gratitude.

Serving is also different to fixing. We fix broken pipes, we don't fix people. When I set about fixing another person, it's because I see them as broken. Fixing is a form of judgement that separates us from one another; it creates a distance.

So, fundamentally, helping, fixing and serving are ways of seeing life. When you help, you see life as weak; when you fix, you see life as broken; and when you serve, you see life as whole.

When we serve in this way, we understand that this person's suffering is also my suffering, that their joy is also my joy and then the impulse to serve arises naturally - our natural wisdom and compassion presents itself quite simply. A server knows that they're being used and has the willingness to be used in the service of something greater. We may help or fix many things in our lives, but when we serve, we are always in the service of wholeness.

--Rachel Remen, from Zen Hospice