

The Sacred Pause That Stopped A Fight

by Aryae Coopersmith

[I shared the story below at an Awakin Circle in Santa Clara, CA. I'm grateful to volunteers who made the transcription below possible, and who continually encourage such stories of transformation.]

A couple of months ago I was taking my regular afternoon walk along the coastal trail, and heading back home. My wife and son were waiting for me and I was a little late, so I was walking fast and thinking about getting there on time, not really noticing what was going on around me.

Then I thought, this isn't much fun! What if I just slow down? What if I can just be present and start noticing what's going on around me? So I did that. I was about to cross the highway.

Suddenly I noticed that there was a teenage girl yelling and screaming and running. "What's this about?" I thought. She ran across the highway. Without any particular agenda, I walked across the highway to follow her and see what was going on.

Turns out her car was parked on the next block and there were two guys in the car. Apparently they had broken in. So there were these two young men, and they were pretty big, and she was just losing it -- running up to the car and screaming.

Well, what am I going to do about all this? I don't know. But then I think, I'll walk up to the car, and just be somebody who's present. So I walked up to the car. These two guys looked at me, looked at her, and then opened the door and ran out. The girl got in the car, frantically started the engine, and raced off.

Then I looked across the street and saw that these two guys were now mad at each other, yelling and starting to punch each other. I was still in my "pause" mode. I'm like, here I am; so what am I going to do?

A familiar voice inside my head, the voice of reason and common sense, says, "This is not your business. These are big guys. You can't do anything about this. They have to sort it out themselves. Get out of here!"

Then there's a second voice, coming from a deeper place. That voice says, "People are in danger. How can you walk away?"

"What can I do?" I ask.

"Just be present. You're an adult. You're calm. You care about them."

So I paused again and took a deep breath. Then I walked up.

They had pulled out knives and were circling each other. I walked up there ... and I just said ... I said to each of them, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" They stopped and looked at me. I said, "Do you really want to hurt each other? What's the point of that?"

They looked at me and one guy sort of scowled and spit and turned around and walked away. The other guy started walking in the other direction.

I started walking up the hill, heading back home. Then I heard one of the guys walking behind me. I'm thinking, uh-oh. But as he came up to me, I turned, looked at him, and said "Hey, man, are you really okay?"

He looked away and said, "Yeah, yeah, I'm all right." Then he turned around and walked away.

I kept walking up the hill. "How did I know what to do?" I wonder.

"You didn't," says the second voice. "What you did was, you decided not to decide. You decided to step back and let go. You made space for the spirit of guidance."

I turn around and look at the young guy walking back down the hill. He seems more relaxed, and is looking at the trees around him.