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These days a lot of us are full of huge hairballs. Unfortunately, cats get them out better than people. Telling the truth can be risky but not speaking up can also have serious consequences. If peace and closeness are what we want, communication is imperative.

Keeping silent and stuffing down resentments can make us flat, fat, agitated or flatulent. It can exacerbate back pain, bring on a cough, acid reflux, or a migraine, trigger rage and weaken the immune system. Words unspoken can dull a flame; end in loneliness, distorted perceptions, addiction, affairs, road rage, populations overtaken by power mongers, fatigue or spending sprees. Words unsaid can create battlefields, hiding, clinging, or screaming. None of these work well.

Speaking the truth to friends, family, co-workers or in the political arena is an act of courage but can cause our hair to stand on end. If we speak up we might be taking risks like getting fired, going to jail or alienating others.

We can get caught in thoughts like “Let it go,” or “Why bother, things never change anyway?” “What if I hurt his feelings?” “How do I say it?” What if this is the last time we see them and we’ve said the wrong thing? Anger can destroy relationships. What to do?

For example, I was standing near an old friend recently, frozen in my tracks and distant. I was afraid of talking to him, believing he might blow up or shut down in conflict. I hate that feeling of standing next to someone, smiling, but feeling no connection. Rather than walk around like zombies, we mustered the courage to talk and did pretty well. Hairball gone!

“Don’t rock the boat,” we say and can be true. It’s unsafe to dialogue with an attacking person and sometimes we aren’t skilled enough to handle the exchange. At times I feel too fragile to speak up. You have to know when to carry the ball down the field or take a time out.

Sometimes we need to better understand our own reactions before we run with them. I remember walking down the hall in Graduate School when an old friend showed up. I screwed up my courage, took a deep breath and uttered, “I’ve always wondered if you judged me.” She chuckled, “No way!” We talk all the time now. Can you imagine the wasted years living inside my paranoid head? Another hairball gone!

The art of speaking out can be difficult, whether it is a personal relationship or in the greater community. I struggle with this everyday, yet it is so damaging to hold things in. We must keep communications open. The risks of speaking up and speaking out can be great, but do they outweigh the consequences of being silent? In the end, everyone must make their own decision.

No matter how we look at it hairballs happen. The question is when do they help, when are they healing and how can they create change? In my own personal conversations that resulted in resolution both of us owned our part in it, we allowed ourselves to be vulnerable, and disclosed our deepest fears and needs without attacking.

I started writing this hairball after talking to friends who were wondering how to tell the truth in different situations. I asked myself whether any of this matters at a time when people are losing everything they own or care about. The 'worldball' is buckling under the power of greed.

Here's where the personal becomes political. If we don't change the way we view others and ourselves and learn how to deal with our differences and stand up for what we believe in, will we have the skill and the strength to deal wisely with global issues?

Just think, if we found a way to talk to each other and to listen, we would have a quiet worldball – no hairballs.

Gandhi used words well: *"When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it always."*