Seriously?

The Cat Would Like to Open a Dialogue

By Jennifer Fumiko Cahill

jennifer@northcoastjournal.com

Let me start by saying I am here to listen and this is a safe space. I want you to know that and feel comfortable. Maybe you could start by explaining exactly what your problem is. I hope it’s cool if I keep one back leg extended straight up toward the ceiling while we talk.

I’m hearing that you’re feeling “attacked” when your bare ankle has been slashed from under the bed and, well, I’m a little taken aback. It’s never happened to me and I walk by there all the time. The parakeet hasn’t mentioned anything like that and we spend a lot of time just staring at one another. I’m not saying I don’t believe you, but there’s got to be more to the story. Again, not that I’m saying you’re making it up but did anyone else see it? Might it have been your perception? Could you have scraped against the ab machine I’ve never seen you take out from under the bed?

OK, looking at them in this light, your ankles do, in fact, bear a few fine, horizontal scars. I see that. Can you run through when you got each of them? Were they all walking by the bed? And were you skittering in a mouse-like fashion in anticipation of something? I guess I’m asking what energy you’re putting out there.

I mean, I’ll admit to an occasional swipe in the spirit of frisky play and I’m sorry you took it as hostile and reacted by making that high-pitched sound and bleeding. I will own my part in that. I will own my frizziness. But just so you know, I have a human friend you don’t know who is fine with it. And nobody else has ever brought it up as an issue before, including your stupid parakeet in its stupid cage on that weighted stand I can’t knock over.

Not to minimize your legitimate feelings but I feel I should point out that cats have been living with humans for 10,000 years and it’s been fine. But now you’re complaining. It’s not a negation of your position, I just think you need to read up on the history and get a little context.

And before you start casting blame, please keep in mind that I called for this dialogue. I’m hearing a lot about what I need to stop doing — stop slashing at your skin, stop biting your hands when they smell like chicken — but where is your responsibility? I’m looking to empower you here, not treat you like a victim.

For example, you could avoid the whole situation by leaping onto your bed from a couple of feet away. That’s what I do. And the exercise would do you some good.

I just offered you a legit solution but you’re not hearing me. And honestly, you’re coming off a little angry. If you want love, you need to practice love. Listen to yourself and all that anger. Who’s really being attacked here?

If you could let go of your anger for a second we could try to find common ground. But you need to compromise. You want to pass by ottomans, sofas and beds without your Achilles tendons being razored by unseen claws. I want the freedom to lie in wait and launch my forepaws at you in a swift arc of pain and potential infection. Can you not meet me halfway here?

You keep bringing up this stuff about me slashing your ankles, shredding the side of the couch, peeing in your slippers, trying to jump from the bookcase to knock the cage with your stupid bird, and it’s just perpetuating the negativity. Maybe we should try not dwelling on all that stuff in the past and just try to go forward. I keep asking you what I can do to heal our relationship without changing my behavior in any way and you’ve given me nothing. I give up. There’s no talking to you.

Our relationship means a lot to me. Ever since your ex left me here with you and your inane chirping bird, I’ve come to think of you as family. I want us to have a positive relationship and bridge our differences. And I feel like we’re doing a lot of good work opening the lines of communication here. You just need to look beyond your own position and use a little empathy. Here, rub my belly.

OK, that was an involuntary reaction. You can’t judge me for taking a swipe when you hesitate like that. Anybody would have sliced your hand open with it lurching and retreating like that. Apply a little pressure and it’ll stop bleeding. Come on. You’re being a baby.

Jennifer Fumiko Cahill is the arts and features editor at the Journal. Reach her at 442-1400, extension 320, or jennifer@northcoastjournal.com. Follow her on Twitter @JFumikoCahill.

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