

In our reading this morning, Meg Wheatley tells us that it's a "challenge to refuse to categorize ourselves". It's "much better", she says, "to dwell in uncertainty, hold the paradoxes, live in the complexities and contradictions without needing them to resolve."

It seems to me that to dwell in uncertainty, to hold the paradoxes, can be summed up in a single word: acceptance. To dwell in uncertainty, to hold the paradoxes is to accept the truth that life exists on multiple levels simultaneously, that life is multifaceted... always.

When we collapse life, reality, into a single dimension, we essentially are attempting to force-fit life into the certainty of our analysis, our preference, or our interpretation. When we make life either/or, we deny the truth of the universe, we endeavor to be in control, to dictate. We create a false world that we then perceive or define ourselves as living within.

There are things that our culture, history, through experience tells us we should simply accept. There are some things we do not need to go through in order to learn their truths, and the wisdom that comes with such understanding. These truths are often passed down through the ages in idioms, phrases or colloquialisms.

For example: "a stitch in time saves nine", meaning do a small thing now or you'll likely need to do a bigger thing later. "All things in due time" or its corollary "you can't hurry the harvest". Both encourage patience by letting us know that we are not in control and that things have a natural progression or lifecycle, all their own and we can't change it.

And a favorite of mine, "you can't push the river". We as individuals do not have the power to control the course of the river's flow. It will seek its own way, the course of least resistance. In life, we too, should seek the course of least resistance. That, in effect, is what we do when we simply accept what is. And that's why Meg tells us it's a healthy place to dwell.

“Make no bones about it”, “take it as gospel”. Two more colloquialisms.

When we become defensive, blame others---including God, fate or the universe---when we do not accept and surrender to the moment, our lives meet resistance. This is what Deepak Chopra tells us in “The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success”. (I would take it a step further and add, we engender, or create resistance when we do not accept the moment, as it is). Suffice it to say, non-acceptance is a form of resistance.

The Universe, God or the mystery of life, gives us each moment. There is no guarantee of a next moment for any one of us. None of us earn the right to any particular moment. And there will never be this exact moment again. Nor this one. Nor this one.

In the fourth chapter, “The Law of Least Effort”, Depak says, “when you struggle against this moment, you’re actually struggling against the entire universe”. Hmmm, a struggle against the entire Universe! Any wonder so many of us, so often, feel like we are up against untenable odds??!!

He says, we can choose to accept things as they are, as they are in this very moment. He makes clear that acceptance is fundamentally different than hoping for things to be different, lamenting how things have been or could be.

Don’t get me wrong. I’m not suggesting, nor is he, there is something wrong with hoping, wishing, preferring. There is nothing wrong with lamenting, missing, longing for what was. But it is important to be clear that none of these are the same as accepting what IS in the moment.

Accepting what is, allows us to take responsibility for our lives, for ourselves, for the truth of our reality. We don’t have to take responsibility for having “caused” where we are, just for the fact that we are where we are, for whatever “reason” we have arrived here.

I'm fond of chess, there is nothing hidden, all the pieces are right there on the board in front of you---there are no surprises about how the rooks or pawns move. The possibilities of their next moves are wholly visible. Whether you can see them all or anticipate the moves is something else altogether---but there is nothing hidden.

The beauty of chess is that you are not dependent on the roll of the dice, or what card may come up next. There is nothing capricious in the game. The outcome is in your hands, and those of your opponent. The game always hinges on simply making the next best move; finding the best move given what's in front you at this very moment---regardless of how we arrived at this position. The question always remains the same: what's the next best move?

In chess, there is no avoiding responsibility for the next move. Deepak says that when we accept our current reality, when we take responsibility for the next move, we have what he calls the "ability to have a creative response" to the now. We have the ability to transform the now into a better situation.

He suggests that it's all about our interpretation of reality. The Buddhists make a similar point. They say it's all an illusion, which essentially gets us to the same place. Reality is an interpretation. If we choose, we can interpret the now as an opportunity to learn, an opportunity to evolve and grow spiritually.

A common reaction to difficulties in our lives is essentially, a call to resistance. We often ask, "why me", or "how could this be"? Or a statement to the effect that this is unfair, it shouldn't have happened, I don't deserve this, no-one should have to experience this. It's horrible.

As I've taught in a number of classes on loss, grief and bereavement, grief is a process. Like the river, it takes it's own course. It can not be forced into any particular shape or timeframe. And grief is a natural response to loss.

We must grieve our losses or else the natural flow of our lives meets resistance. A part of us gets dammed up, or becomes stagnant or deformed. Grief is something we can't go around, and we can't just skip over it. If we are to evolve, we must go through it. Going through it is the next best move. We need to accept the truth of our loss, the truth of our grief. In doing so we learn to accept the pain of our loss.

Some amount of loss and grief comes with any change, even change we have chosen. There is a disequilibrium that accompanies change. Concepts and beliefs about loss, and death---which is a particular kind of loss, our beliefs just aint the same as the experience of it.

I've helped others navigate the terrain of loss, grief and bereavement. Experiencing loss, living with loss is something else all together. I want to share with you a little of what I've learned by living with loss, grief and pain.

Accepting loss, living with loss, disabuses us of any sense of being in control, of being in charge. When grief grabs hold, in that moment, it's unequivocally clear, we are not in control. You can attempt to resist the feeling, but you can't make it go away.

With practice, I've learned to accept the pain, the anguish, that comes with grief. By not expending energy on trying to push it away, I've discovered, in that very same moment, there is enough awareness to recognize that I am more than my grief. The me that is, that was, that is becoming, is the me that remains, even when experiencing grief.

I've also discovered that even love is not strong enough to stop death, the dissolution of relationships, children choosing a life different from what we wish for them. At some point all one is left with is the now, this very moment.

I've had to practice living in the moment, accepting the truth of what is. It takes work. It takes effort and conscious attention. As a result, I've gotten better at being intentional in seeking the next best move.

As ministers we are trained to be who we are, as best we can. For that's all there is ultimately. We are trained to share our lives with others---we are very visible after all, so in a real sense, we have no choice.

We are called to be judicious in our sharing---we are trained not to share for the benefit of our egos—to impress, seek approval, or acceptance, nor to seek consoling or empathy. We are encouraged to have our most personal needs met outside and away from the congregation. We are pushed to develop a strong spiritual foundation that can sustain us.

When we share, it is in the belief that that which is most personal is most universal. We all have our ups and downs, our trials and tribulations. We all have lifelong issues we grapple with. And we have great joy, hopes and aspirations.

We are called to simply accept the truth of what is. And to share our gifts with the world, to endeavor to make a difference. It's my hope that by sharing some of my learnings about loss, and acceptance, you will be better equipped to deal with the inevitable loss that will enter into your lives.

Reality is all about interpretation. Having faith, a mature spiritual grounding, helps us to interpret life in a particular way. In a way that does not diminish our hearts, spirits, or souls, nor those of others.

Deepak says, “you don't want to stand rigid like a tall oak that cracks and collapses in the storm. Instead, you want to be flexible, like a reed that bends with the storm and survives.”

I believe the act of acceptance increases our ability to weather the storms that will inevitably pass through our lives. Acceptance allows us to bend without breaking.

May it be so