

Mending Nets
UUF

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This is the quintessential time of the year for growth. I doubt any one could fail to notice. Crocus and daffodils have already begun to sprout, some are already in flower. But for the most part, plants are just beginning to think about poking their heads out from under the earth.

We can sense it, even where we don't see it yet, we can sense it. The days are longer, the sun is stronger, birds are singing in the morning. And for those of us who've experienced springtime in the northeast, we can feel it, sense the growth and change. We know leaves, flowers, pollen and mowing grass will soon be upon us.

We know stuff is happening down inside the earth. But our focus tends to be on what's happening in the visible realm, what's happening before our eyes. Me too, I'm out almost every day looking to see what's popping up. I'm out checking for new growth, even as I rake and put lime on dormant grass and gardens.

But every now and then I stop to consider the fact that luscious, new, green growth doesn't just happen all by itself. It doesn't even just begin with the turning of spring. It began last fall with plants going to seed; leaves falling so roots could store reserves to get through the cold weather.

Then came winter, what many of us could call the adversity of winter, especially this winter. The earth became frozen, numb, by all appearances. Some of us too became numb or essentially hibernated for most of the winter. Being numb is one way plants, animals and we, can deal with the adversity of winter.

Like the birds, some of us pushed winter away, by heading south. Another reasonable approach to dealing with adversity is to push it away or otherwise attempt to avoid it. The rabbits and deer seem to essentially ignore it. As do seeds.

Others, fully embraced what the rest of us might have called the adversity of winter. I'm not one of them but there are folks who simply do not define cold, snow and freezing temperatures as adversity. In many respects, they see it as an opportunity...to spend lots of money in order to careen down the face of a mountain, or to break a new path through the woods on skies or snowshoes. Some play hockey or make snowmen and snowwomen. Others make money by plowing our driveways and parking lots. Winter for some people is an opportunity, a gift of sorts to be embraced.

I've read that plants thrive when we have hard winters with good snow cover. I understand it helps the plants become more hardy, and they are further benefited by the death of an increased number of eggs, larva and insects.

Over the last few months, I've found myself, often, pre-occupied by the thoughts and feelings of adversity. Some originate with adversity or constraints I experience in my own life. Some thoughts and feelings are based on the adversity I see in the public square. And some are based on the adversity and constraints I experience here in our congregation at times.

I want to focus this morning on the necessity of dealing with adversity or perhaps better termed, constraints, even severe constrains.

One of my spiritual practices includes pulling Nordic Runes and meditating on the interpretation of the glyph that was pulled. For many years, I've used a particular set of runes associated with the Book of Runes, by Ralph Blum. Blum tells us, in ancient times, the Runes and their symbols were used by warriors intent on conquest. Their contemporary use is intended for the Spiritual Warrior, the one whose quest is doing battle with the self, with the goal of self-change.

He quotes the Bhagavaad Gita, chapter 6, verse 5:

“Lift up the self by the Self and don't let the self droop down. For the Self is the self's only friend, and the self is the Self's only foe”. Those words sound profound to me, which is why I chose them for our chalice lighting this morning. I hope they didn't just sound dense. I wish I could show you the verse as written; it then truly becomes profound I think.

The verse makes a distinction between the ego-based self and the Knowing Self or Oracle Self. It's written with a small "s" representing the ego-self. The "S" is the Knowing Self or Oracle self. Let me read the verse again with it's proper intent. **"Lift up the [ego] self by the [Knowing] Self..."**

Some time ago I pulled the Rune Nauthiz, I did the reading and meditated. It's a rune I had meditated on many times before. But this time, the only thing I could focus on were the words: "when fishermen can't go to sea they repair nets." The next sentence reads "let the constraints of the time serve you in righting your relationship to your self."

For fishermen, not going to sea is a very real constraint. It might even be experienced as adversity if their lives or livelihood depends on catching fish. But in truth, catching fish, either for food or a livelihood, requires the effective functioning of a mundane thing called a net.

Like spring requires winter, catching fish, requires useful nets. Sometimes we are required to turn away from fishing so we can repair nets.

I don't know why, maybe it's just human nature to look down the road, to see only what's in front of us, to plan and focus on the future, outcomes, goals and objectives. Sometimes, if we are to be successful, to achieve our aims, we need to stop and be self-reflective. Sometimes, we need to stop leaning into the future and seek balance in the present moment.

The Rune Nauthiz teaches us about the necessity of dealing with severe constraint. Either in the form of limitations we directly cause ourselves. Or, in the form of other people's limitations which we attract to us. Both can be a bear to wrestle with.

Like Loki, the trickster god, adversity or constraint, can be a great teacher, appearing in the form of pain or limitations. Blum tells us "when something within us is disowned, that which is disowned wrecks havoc...a cleansing is required..." He says "begin with what is most difficult and proceed to what is easy. Or conversely, begin with what is easy and proceed to what is most difficult".

He also tells us that in its original sense, the term “suffering” simply meant, “undergoing”. So in this sense we are being asked to undergo the dark side of our passage. We are being asked to bring the light of the Knowing Self within us to the task at hand. And to do it with modesty and good temper.

Blum is clear, rectification comes before progress. Rectification is not a term we hear very much. Simply put, it’s the process of refinement, of removing impurities. It can be the simple act of improving something, or a transition big enough to be called a transformation.

But however we define it, it requires our active participation. It requires us to “do”. Trying is not sufficient. Thinking about it is not enough. Rectification requires that we “pay off old debts, restore balance, mend, redress”. Rectification requires us to accomplish.

I think of mending nets as a metaphor for connecting with a deeper sense of self. It’s a way of knitting ourselves back into wholeness. It’s a process by which we seek greater awareness of the Knowing Self, the Oracle within each of us.

The Oracle does not give out instructions, it doesn’t give us answers. But it does guide our attention to what is important. It guides our attention to significant choices that are ours to make; choices that allow us to come into greater union with our Knowing Self.

The Knowing Self, or our inner Oracle, helps us to illuminate the hidden fears and motivations that shape our behavior. It allows us to see that our egos trigger the egos of others. And that heart-felt energy triggers a heart-felt response.

It helps us to gain experience and knowledge of the fact that others feel safer in our presence when we are grounded and in-balance with ourselves. The Knowing-Self, helps us to answer the question: “what helps me come home to myself?” “What net am I in need of mending at this point in my life?”

The quest of the Spiritual Warrior is self-change. The battle is always with the ego-self. Over the years we come to learn that whatever our souls truly need, is already inside of us. It's already a part of us, even if only as a seed or kernel. This I think, is what dwells in the realm of wisdom.

I also believe that when we are in alignment with what is truly ours to do, we find we are also in alignment with what science might call "natural law" and what Christians might call the will of God. This too is knowledge or understanding that we must work at to discover.

So lets do this work together. Lets help one another. Many hands do make the burden lighter. I want to remind us that ego energy begets an ego-based response, while heart energy begets a heart-felt response. And let us remember that when we can look upon the troubles, denials, and setbacks of life as our teachers, we will know how to smile.

Smiles make the world brighter. Lets do the work that allows us to smile.

Amen