



The Dignity Project

Guiding the Way

Promoting awareness and understanding of dignity
through education, communication and spirit.

Navigating Chaos

Centering

Recently I purchased a mobile of our solar system. When I lie on the bed watching the planets turn round and round in the air current from the ceiling fan, I remember lying under a night sky as a child and feeling peaceful. As an adult, living almost thirty years with the wide open sky of New Mexico, I was in awe of the vast spread of stars, the shooting stars in summer, and I welcomed Venus like an old friend at the blush of evening. Here, at my cottage away from the world, I prepare for sleep by stepping out on the grass, to drum the earth with bare feet. I can hear the creek spilling over rocks and I see the stars glowing between the tall pines. It's all there, all I need to feel my human self and something immeasurably light and unbound.

The easiest way for me to center is to sense both dimensions of my being. I quickly lose attachment to a fixed identity and gratitude streams through my blood as I consider existing for a time in a flesh body. And though I seem to be alone, or far from Venus or the Seven Sisters, I feel a part of everything around me and above me. Sound and words are also centering. When I was a child I made up chants and I wrote original prayers in a small journal. My father told me that one day as he met me outside my Sunday school classroom, I declared that I didn't like biblical stories. When he asked why, I said, "Because God is sound and light." Drumming the earth, nourished by moonlight, feeling the heavens humming, touching into the shadows cast by the old trees, I am ecstatic, stirred by beauty and wonder to a state of equanimity where I can be healthy and not fearful for myself.

I am realizing that throughout my life I was preparing for the decline and collapse of civilization by leaning into something beyond humans: to steady me through personal upheaval of divorce or brain injury, the damage done to friends by the Vietnam War, the collapse of trust after Watergate, and the escalation of the industrial military complex with each new president. As a child, the chants, prayers, and explorations into the natural world sustained me, no matter the climate in my household. As a teenager, the relationship I had with the light in all beautiful things translated to Jesus, as the Christ, the even playing field, the equalizer. I talked with him as one who I imagined had seen beyond the domain of Earth. I sensed that he knew love that is beyond human understanding. And then, after years of exploring religions, philosophies, and psychology, I felt the weight of structure - like I did inside famous cathedrals. Though I experienced wonder for how they were designed and erected, at times weak in the knees before such potency, ultimately, I gravitated once again to God as I experience It in Nature. I am made of Earth, and because I came here, not to another planet, I choose to know this temporary home, this generous host. During times of chaos I find certain recourse in orienting myself to a template of order that gave rise to human existence.

There's a cumulative effect to multiple crises. Deadening our senses. Overwhelming our instinct to act. Distorting our thoughts and speech about it all. The dysfunction of our branches of

government has been, for me, the straw that broke the camel's back.... My mind already loaded with statistics and studies of world issues, I can experience anger and thoughts of helplessness, and too often truncate the grieving that's trying to happen: grieving for honesty, integrity, leadership, cooperation. When I experienced the death of fifteen beloveds in a few short years, grief eventually overwhelmed my body as severe pneumonia. Once my lungs completed their process, I broke with a lifestyle to retreat to a place of lush beauty. I knew my body would gradually adjust to loss when the mind's conditioned response to death and ideas about it as wrong, unfair, and tragic were addressed.

So too, with the massive upheaval of human life and ecological systems. I can make room for tears and waves of grief as I steer away from manipulative reporting and manufactured fear. I feel sane when I gaze into an open rose, its geometry imprinting in my brain. And I feel strong when I realize that however many days I have left on Earth, I choose to learn from the harmony expressed in Nature, and its cycles of birth, death, rebirth, that contain no resistance or overwhelm of emotion. Chaos happens. Order comes. Change is sometimes monumental and we will find within what it takes to ride the waves. I desire to be present to this enactment of Life, the same as what happens when a star erupts and gives life to far reaching regions of space!

My mobile turns silently, the planets in relationship to one another in ways that scientists have not discovered. I see Jupiter coming around, then Venus, and Pluto way out there but in celestial alignment that is both mystifying and reassuring. Scientists say that Jupiter's large mass determined the size of Earth and perhaps this relationship allowed for it to stabilize. I cannot articulate all the ways I have been influenced by being in relationship. Who would I be without a fine and noble father helping me to stabilize? And who would I be without the Buddha, who came before me to find what matters, eternally? And I cannot imagine life without the light that seems to find me everywhere I go, and the sounds that renew and reorganize my being.

The planets orbit and revolve, their movement imperceptible to the naked eye. At times when I think I'm stuck, upon inquiry I see that change is happening deep in the layers of my being, one layer at a time, until it reaches perceptible expression. New order emerges both in spite of us and with our influence. I sense that we can have immeasurable influence on new order by developing, or returning to, sensitivity to our surroundings.... something as simple as being present to a flower, letting go of its name, fixing our gaze on it long enough that it ceases to be what we think it is, and from a new perspective it is revealed in relationship to everything! Graduate practice is to try this with a human:-)

May we experience reverence for form and how sound and light structure, infuse, and enliven it, in waves and particles and tones and scales. Life is music. Life is light. Life is intelligent movement in harmony with all. As humans we can experience this when we are loving and loved, respecting and respected, and engage with change and evolution from our hearts.



(This image of an atom, if viewed from the right vantage point, appears strikingly similar to our solar system... :)