



The Dignity Project

Guiding the Way

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

Navigating Chaos

Containment

The past months have, in part, been about forced containment. We want to move about our day, our community, as we used to. We wonder what freedoms may not return soon and what new protocols and restrictions may become a way of life.

Containment is not only about physical space. It's tension around the eyes when we think too much. It's overstimulated nerves and tears held back too long. It's the withdrawal of natural curiosity and receptivity from repetitive and uncertain reporting on an event, such as COVID-19. It's when personal expression becomes limited when others aren't able to meet us where it matters. It's the restriction of our potential to meet situations and events when we are foregoing something essential, or stretching time and leaving out pauses, reflection, and integration.

My dictionary defines containment only as "keeping something harmful under control or within limits", but I have also experienced it as positive. When my big life in New Mexico pared down to a writing cottage in the Pacific Northwest, I began to see limited options as a chance to expand aspects of myself that were under-expressed because I was moving too fast in wide open freedom. Wide open freedom is for 'some times', like my horse cantering when she comes to an open meadow. She has other gaits, each designed to serve wellbeing, and like her, I needed to engage other 'speeds' or 'gears'.

Now I know a type of containment, in a small dwelling perched on a hillside, trees hiding the sun and moon from me. It feels like a setback from open vistas, and staying fit by working all aspects of the ranch. There was a natural balance of energy output, pleasure, and playfulness, when my horse and I hiked alongside one another, or she trotted off when I began to meander looking for old Indian pottery shards. Our gait would change once again as she returned spirited, taking my coattail in her teeth and we climbed the mesa back to the barn. Here, I sit and write and use the phone to stay in touch with clients. Here, I live with road noise for the first time in my life. Here, I am separated from friends and family, and the need to be inward has left out other gaits and dynamics that defined me and my wellbeing.

I am exploring the possibility that at the heart of either setting and lifestyle is the same essential freedom that is present when the body is respected and allowed to function.

Then a slew of freedoms - movement, breath, sleep, eating, and communing with the environment- can be appreciated as communication with Life itself. As culture, as nation, humanity has from the beginning tried to define essential freedoms, and battlefields and courtrooms play out the fight. But without the aliveness and balance that the body offers, all other human freedoms can be a burden to express consistently or with dignity.

I am newly considering that personal dignity begins with respect for the gift of the body as our personal domain. My horse, a Mustang born in the wild, kept her dignity even when she was in such extreme pain that she could not stand or walk. I say 'dignity' because as I sat on the sand close by, I could feel that she was contained within herself. Not wavering in thoughts. Not going into the future. Aware of her body. Present to all that is there. I choose this kind of containment.

I learn from observing her what is also true for me. Too much containment destroys the natural movement that keeps all parts of her body toned and flowing. Closing her in a barn, away from the rising and setting sun and the moonlight, diminishes endocrine function. Restricting her alpha nature and need to move agitates the spirit. She is adaptable, to a point, to containment and limitation imposed by a human. I am in charge of my own body and its needs. If I question my mind's assessment of containment, or the restrictions placed on us by COVID, I can find a counter balance to each seeming challenge. Like limiting energy output in the winter, or in a meditative period of our lives, containment can offer the "less that is more". As John Michael Greer explains in *The Mystery Teachings of the Earth*, the Law of Balance is working within the Law of Limitation.

There is spaciousness to be found at anytime, anywhere. Maybe we only have ten minutes to rest in the afternoon, but we can drop so truly into those moments of no demand that we are revitalized. If we cannot travel or mix at events, we can discover spaciousness in our days by pacing differently, scheduling in time for whatever feels good to arise spontaneously. The best part of my days, whether at the ranch or here on the hill, have been connections that arose with my animal companions, or weather changes, or the heart calling me to be newly present with my surroundings.

Would we truly know or appreciate freedom without experiencing some type of containment or limitation? Would we discover stillness without restricting activity? Would we learn how to share ourselves with others if not for intimate engagements apart from the larger world? Perhaps containment is an idea that serves the evolution of consciousness through comparison. Perhaps we are contained in ways, at times, to focus on experience - without perception of negative and positive. Experience is what evolves us. When we are present with our experience we can move more freely with all that is. When we are aware of our body we can better navigate containment.

My horse, Renata.





*Be like the forces of nature:
when it blows, there is only wind;
when it rains, there is only rain;
when the clouds pass, the sunshines through.*

Tao te Ching - Stephen Mitchell