



The Dignity Project

Guiding the Way

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

Navigating Chaos 12

Time-Out

Power eclipsing power, people hating people, economy devouring economy, we look on as the proxy for the few takes our young nation into further chaos. Anger can be justified. Fear intensifies as we see further threats to democracy. Anxiety displaces presence. Revenge is archaic. Protesting is not everyone's path. We can lean into the tenuous mind to the point of instability. Fear destroys precious moments of existence with its anticipation of woe, its pronouncement of wrongs. I need a time-out, a pause, to sit and be present to all that is happening, without expectation, without value judgement. To say "enough!" to the polarizing and reacting of the mind. To be passive for a few moments: accepting what is happening, without active response or resistance, that I may approach the neutrality advocated by the heart.

The heart is a mysterious cavity, of both silence and radiant articulation, never withdrawing, never changing tone. As we attune to its presence, listening for the steady rhythm of universal and timeless wisdom, we can choose to consciously participate in this chaotic world. We can choose to know the new order that is assembling through humans. We can choose to regard Life as a continual birth, death, rebirth cycle, and not limit ourselves to a singular story that insists on endings.

Tomorrow is unknown. Leaders and citizens are continuously remade within the expression of humanity and civilization and our relationship to consciousness. I realized years ago that I cannot pray for outcomes. My preferences may or may not align with the conditions at large, the forces that participate in all action and events. It is in knowing that we aren't separate from the forces that we will truly experience ourselves as participants in Life, in a wider and deeper way than we might want to think.

I wonder, how often in human history have we worked with the forces of expanding consciousness, the forces of the planet, the solar system, and evolution? We have developed civilizations on partial ideas of the functioning whole. With the participation of greater Intelligence at certain junctures in history, we have managed to create structures of beauty, systems that intend to

provide for the people (albeit absent in addressing the ultimate provider: the planet) and arts and sciences that reveal pieces of the universe from whence we came. But fear of death, domination, and lack, have driven humans to establish worlds that have little to do with universal or planetary forces. We deny or defy them, imagine we can conquer them; we rewrite Reality based on a mindset that polarizes and divides.

When life is threatened, or democracy is threatened as it is now, we break out of old mindsets and see another way. It has happened again and again in American history: the people acquiesce to any particular repression and then a crack in the system, under the right conditions, gives them impetus to break things wide open. I endured my mother's need to mold me into another Princess Grace, until I seized a moment to break out of her construct for my life and discover options. And after I was done rebelling (wearing clothes she wouldn't approve of and laughing from my belly, for starters), I found my own style and became a bit less self-conscious because I knew I was being 'me'.

This is a minuscule example compared to the watching the increase of presidential power over the decades and the recent deconstructing of democracy and the expressions of a multicultural nation. But my rebellion was the big turning point after the teenage rebellion that is a staged part of the brain's development, just as a two-year-old begins to assert will. All along the way our lives are designed for growth as an individual: rebellion creates a pathway in the brain essential for thinking, seeing, and acting from within. Repression of individual expression by inflicting conformity through control eliminates the use of certain neural pathways, such as spontaneity, creative imagination, and speaking from the heart.

We are at a juncture in the development of our nation that will require rebellion as well as opening the compartments where we've held trauma - what is called *shadow*. Trump has precipitated this process. There are many of us like him, who were seriously diminished at an early age and adapted the attitudes and behavior of the abuser. When sex-offenders are exposed, as we have seen in mass lately, (Olympic gymnastic physician Larry Nassar comes to mind) I ache for the lack of compassion in the telling, for not reminding us that this didn't happen 'out of the blue', and for the limited reaction of shock and disgust. Abuse is cyclical, going back through lineage. Exposing shadow requires the whole story, as able as we can, putting pieces together that belong together if we are ever to understand human behavior and get beyond 'punishment' as the first or only reaction to those who violate our expectations of humanity.

Some years ago while on a bus ride in Washington D.C., Robert Bly, poet and leader of a men's consciousness movement, sat down beside me. He initiated a conversation about the shadow of America and shared the premise of a book he would publish on the subject of the human shadow. I recall that serendipitous half hour again and again, for he was ahead of the times in saying that we would face a decline in democratic practices because our government hid and

denied motives and actions both at home and abroad. Since then we've seen a period of 'exposing what lies beneath' and we are now face-on with the shadow. What is called for is bringing light to the shadow on a personal and systemic level.

I became passionate about unearthing the many traumas in my life, buried by time and the imperative to climb higher and keep smiling. I am an advocate of self-inquiry, done with love and pacing, into the hurting places in the psyche, the ones that life has to navigate around because understanding and integration never happened. I am also passionate about delving into human history and the patterns evident there that give context to current events. My late partner, Paul, ignited a fire in me with his stories from war zones and the connection to climate disasters, migration of peoples, and loss of cultures that represent and speak for aspects of Earth. Ultimately, a healthy relationship with others and with the environment will require awareness of human nature and the domains of the planet.

Coming full circle, back to a time-out... to enter the place of observing. Can we see collective patterns? Such as: democracy collapsing under the weight of authoritarianism that gets its life from autocrats in other parts of the world; anger at injustice and stripping of basic support of citizen needs; advancing our innate ability to organize, rise up, and make known the will of the people. Repression can dampen the spirit for a time, but we can clearly see the shadow of America at work. Are we prepared to fight for the life-blood of our country? There have been moments for each of us on the journey to personhood when we did not exercise freedom of speech, when we failed to advocate for innocence. But we have also had moments of experiencing strength and clarity, viscerally recognizing the power of an individual who knows his or her voice matters.

To navigate this rough terrain, that will get rougher, we need to pause now and again to be present without thought of action or even understanding - to stand for a time in the circle of peace inside our own being, noticing the breath, the spine, the feet, and the food we receive, with gratitude. Tonight as we sleep, the moon and trees and sounds of the night creatures will nurture us whether or not we acknowledge them. But as humans whose thinking says we are separate from everything else, we will feel more whole if we remember that we participate in life through gratitude. Gratitude is the awareness of interdependence.... We could meditate on this for the rest of our lives, for it is where we will find compassion and reality that is beyond cause and effect.



Claiming the inner sanctuary in the midst of devastation is the way to future restoration.