

Rear View Mirror

Mark Zenchuk

Sunday, December 28, 2008

It's a good time of year to try to make a change for the better. I've only just realized this. I have previously run down the celebration of New Year's and it's accompanying resolutions, reasoning, if a change needs to happen why wait for an abstract day on a calendar?

But here's something I never put together: I also believed for a long time that the love we create is eternal. And that we can utilize the loving energy that beings have been creating throughout time to help ourselves improve our internal positions. If we're in an angry or depressed mood we can literally open ourselves up to the loving energy all around us. And I know this sounds crazy to at least some of you because I thought it was crazy until I gained experiential understanding of it. But whatever you do or don't believe, you've at least witnessed that the general mood at church and in the larger community positively improves at this time of year. And therefore it's a good atmosphere for attempting to make a positive change.

It's no accident that so many faith traditions have major celebrations at this time of year.

It's the returning of the sun (the big, round bright one).

That must have been a huge relief back when homes didn't have things like central heating, or ... homes. On the basis of that knowing people could more easily face the rest of winter.

It's OK spring is coming.

The seeds are already planted and below the ground the earth is doing its work ... and we are reminded to have confidence that the land will soon be resurrected.

What better time is there to have a "New Year" and to have "start again" celebrations, and make commitments? There's so much positive energy to get tuned up with. The atmosphere around us is charged with it.

As we do with the earth, we internally – constantly - plant seeds ... with the volition of our minds ... our intentions. But those thoughts are not always conducive to making positive change. Negative energy (from defilements such as fear, hate/anger, lust, etc.) is also eternal. It never dies. So it, too, is all around us. And based on our internal choosings, we can get tuned up with either type of vibrations.

It's very much like having the ability to cross dimensions. Without moving we make an internal shift into a reality that we would call positive and then shift again into one that we tend to consider is negative.

I remember the line from my financial advising days: "If you stand for nothing you'll fall for everything." I know from experience that without solid underpinnings – internally committed to rules or principles for approaching life situations, morality codes, etc – without them we are like a plastic bag blowing in the wind: helpless in a storm and at the mercy of every prevailing breeze. Sometimes that wind is filled with positive energy and we get tuned up with those vibrations. Sometimes, we feebly get carried off in that other direction.

After a day of ... participating in hateful office politics, making coworkers fearful ... in a business of questionable ethics, driving home with road-rage, and then screaming at the neighbours because their kid's wagon wheel is on the sidewalk in front of our house instead of theirs ... we think, now we're going to walk into our house and will ourselves to have to have a pleasant evening with our family. It's not possible. All day we've immersed ourselves in negative energy and that's the wind we're (now) helplessly riding on. Yes, we may recognize that we need to change gears ... but we need help for that. And the help is all around us but we can't access it because we're tuned up to the negative dimension. We just can't shift that quickly. All day we've been planting seeds of negativity. And now it's too late ... the fruit must be negative.

And this is why there are no neutral acts. Yes, perhaps there was no one around to get hurt by your harmful thoughts, words or actions ... so they seemed neutral. But you were changed. You shifted dimensions one way when you're going to wish later that you had spent your time getting tuned up with something different. Our work now dictates what kind of resurrection we will create next year ... or tomorrow ... or in the next moment.

And society is a slightly more conducive place at this time of year for choosing to plant positive seeds ... and we internally tend to have fewer blocks to loving energy as well. So choice certainly is a factor in our happiness.

But only a factor. I recall hearing an audio recording of Walsch's "Conversations with God" telling us that if your thoughts are not working for you ... are not loving ... change them. Many self-help gurus give us the impression that this is easy. Brutally hard.

Because, even if we partially, temporarily, seem to succeed at changing the mental outcome of the past seeds we planted, our mental habit patterns are so well-ingrained that we change back the first time our mind wanders away.

We constantly have to get our focus back; re-commit; get our focus back; re-commit ... just as it is with diets. And how quickly and easily we get off track there: we've had two pieces of cake before we're even aware of what's going on ... three pieces this week. And the mind gets off track a thousand times quicker than our actions.

All our lives, we've been planting seeds. Maybe many lives. And usually ... seeds of negativity. A simple choice is not going to overcome that. We've made the past too powerful for that.

As a new driver I was once given the instruction to look not just through the windshield when slamming on the brakes, but also in the rear-view mirror ... for what's going to hit me.

Sometimes it's like we live our whole lives slamming on the brakes because we can't stop looking in the rear-view mirror.

Mostly we need to look ahead and, based on a conscious and discerning appreciation of the past, let what is ahead dictate whether we put on the brakes or not.

But most of the time, even when we do see what is in front of us, we don't only see what's in front of us. Our perception of current life situations are filtered through our rear view mirrors. And the past is full of pain. And we over-commit ourselves to avoiding situations that could potentially re-trigger such pain.

Fear.

If a current situation shows the slightest hint – however twisted or tiny – of resembling past traumas, they are treated by our psyches as full crises. And I know I'm not the only one here who has let a lot of life go by without living it because of my fears. It's not "the uncertain" that frightens us ... it's the possibility – even the remote possibility - that this uncertain thing in front of us may turn out to resemble something very familiar indeed.

I've often heard that 95% of what we worry about never comes to pass. I think that's a gross understatement.

And so we shut down to a lot of life.

We all have our own styles and techniques for avoiding fear. I'm quite associative in my thinking and fear for me shows up as a visual representation of a terrible sandstorm coming at me. Everything seems fine and then, suddenly it's there. This immense sandstorm ... moving so fast, it'll flay the skin off your bones. Deafeningly loud. Very anxiety-producing. And, I mean that. It's like our bodies are machines for creating fear (just like any other defilement -- or merit). Some threats in the world we're right to be afraid of. But mostly we create intense anxiety from slight resemblances of slight emotional triggers.

Anxiety always makes change difficult. And when I'm cowering from the sandstorm (or more accurately, usually distracting myself from it) change is not possible. "Change" feels like it's on the other side of a two-foot-thick steel wall.

But those few times that I do brave the sandstorm I am always surprised by how quickly it passes. And looking back from the other side of change, that previously thick steel wall is now revealed - to have always been - a thin waterfall ... that's exactly how it feels. And, once I'm on a roll and have faced my fears pretty well of late, I don't even experience the sandstorm because I'm not operating from a place of fear ... I'm not tuned-up with those vibrations.

Of course this begs the question of how does one brave the sandstorm long enough to allow change to happen? Many religious and spiritual traditions have quite similar answers to this. They all realize that relying solely on one's own will power is not very useful when we become overpowered by defilements such as

fear. So they set themselves aside and call on someone or something beyond themselves to help them face what's happening: to get tuned up with the immense positive vibrations created by such a holy mentor or deity. Supercharged at this time of year. My meditation practice is actually quite similar to this: utilizing the help of loving energy to help come out of mental habitual reaction patterns. And then we can all bring our rational minds to the problem and face it as it is ... without our rear-view mirrors distorting the image. At least that's the idea. It's a long path and it takes time.

I traditionally find that very difficult and awkward social interactions create the most sandstorms. Years after high school I ran into a girl who was surprised I was talking to her and knew and remembered who she was. She said she had always thought I was stuck up. I was just shy and awkward. And I consistently ran from the sandstorms ... so well that I was never once even conscious of their existence until years more after this interaction.

And I believe this is the main reason why I had prison dreams. The only recurring theme dreams I'm aware of ever having were of being in various forms of minimum security-type settings ... in which there was always an easily attainable exit from ... but I would never take it. I had all the excuses: this isn't so bad; I'll leave tomorrow; I'll just finish this project I'm working on; etc., etc.. And, what's worse, I often knew there was a limited timeframe in which the window of opportunity to leave would be open. And still, I always stayed in prison.

What an amazing metaphor for what I was doing to myself by not facing the sandstorms. I constantly had my hypersensitive guards up and made a break for it at the slightest hint that perhaps discomfort might be coming. I kept myself in a self-created prison ... preventing myself from living life.

I even knew what the dreams meant ... but for the longest time I felt I couldn't do anything about it. All those old messages reminding me "hey, you closed those doors for a reason", "there's danger there", and "remember, your life once depended on you not have access to your emotions."

Yes. Once.

But not anymore. Once I became an adult I had access – or was supposed to have access – to more healthy coping mechanisms.

So ... with time ... and inner work ... I sometimes braved the sandstorms.

And, eventually, I had a dream in which I walked out of the prison.

And the dreams stopped.

And now, sometimes, when anxiety strikes I even calmly remember that this sandstorm now facing me will soon look like a thin waterfall. So, I guess, some years ago I had my own internal fire communion. But I still need help with my ongoing commitment to let go of those old fears, so [burn it].

That's my personal one. Monica also instructed us to be mindful of something to let go of that would specifically benefit our church community, if we have one.

I have one. And it's very related to what I've just described.

We are in the midst of big change. In a few days it will be official – by all accounts – that Allison Barrett will no longer be our minister. And not too many years ago, such an announcement would have inspired me to resign my membership. But now, I can't even remember the last time that was true for me. So what's changed? Certainly not my fervent appreciation for Allison's many admirable qualities and abilities. In so many ways - not all of course, but many ways - she operates at the top of her field.

Instead, it's me that's different. I used to keep an emotional distance from ... well ... all of you. And now most of my closest friends are here. I feel committed to this place and invested in you. I'm doing volunteer work here ... with and for you ... that absolutely sings to me. I sometimes get less upset when things don't go my way because the little things pale in significance when compared to the wonderful relationships and benefits I find here; and sometimes I get more upset than I used to when things aren't going well because I care so much more passionately about the health of this community. (We do have to protect our church from the ravages of negative energy.) I don't know when it happened, but at some point I became happily immersed in our church.

... so it's the desire to keep my church community – you – at arm's length
..... that I am burning.

Spring is coming for our community. We're doing our work: walking out of our prisons; planting our seeds. And because it's healthy, positive work, the future's so bright so bright I gotta wear shades.

So may it be.