

Sunday, May 29th, 2022

“Reflection: Dandelion Christ”

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Welcome

The mythologist Martin Shaw recommends that we, “Move from just seeing the world to beholding the world. Seeing is assessment and analysis; beholding is wonder and curiosity. It’s not that we don’t need the former, but when we crank it up excessively, we always damage the latter. Make space for the miraculous, make space for grace—these energies show up constantly in our lives... That’s an infectious and noble position to take.”

May we be infected by beholding. May we cultivate that infection through honest ritual, reflective space, beautiful sound, trusted relationship, the earnest pursuit of justice, and abundant fun. This is our collective intention.

I invite you now, within that collective intention, to set a personal intention. What brought you here? What is your intent for this hour we craft together?

Take a moment. When you have the intention in mind, see if you can invent a gesture that embodies it. You could touch your third eye space or wiggle your fingers or tap some body part. This is called technique. Set your intention in a gesture. We will employ it later. You can use it as a reminder, even, later in the week.

Reflection

You have, with some frequency, heard me talk about home as a spiritual experience. Maybe you're tired of it or not sure why. I think I like this notion so much because it makes the idea of spiritual experience approachable and non-spooky. We all know how home feels. Knowing that feeling unlocks an ecological kind of theology.

Eco from the Greek Oikos meaning *home*. So *home* as spiritual experience begins to build an ecotheology. And to me, an ecotheology is required if we are to reverse climate catastrophe in any way that lasts. If we can figure out how to experience the ecorange in which we find

ourselves with the same intimacy with which we experience home, we are more likely to love it with consequence. One does not burn one’s home to keep warm or look good.

Expanding our home-sense is about something more primary than survival though. Recall a few weeks ago when the Green Knight taught us that life and death are not the primary puzzles. Likewise, ecotheology prioritizes the states of recognizing and being recognized. It is about meaning, perceiving, and identity... and saving the world.

Aside from that, it's not a big deal really. I mean, you know, take it or leave it.

Sometimes I think I came here, far from my home, in order to make the need for home personally pressing. How do we let a place settle into us rather than us settling it? How do settlers become *of a place*, which is to say, indigenous without doubling down on theft? How do we eco-integrate so we don’t anthro-segregate? How do we resource but not exploit? And in our culture, based on uprooting and migrating, how do we have wings and roots?

To that end, I’ve courted this land. I heard counsel to memorize a poem and offer it aloud to a specific ecorange. The wisdom there emerges from oral knowledge systems as we considered a few months back.

Short version is that the investment of memory or story into a landscape establishes both a relationship and a kind of medium. Eventually, the land uses the medium as well. Connection made, the land talks back after a fashion.

That’s the dream. So, I returned many times to that place and sang my poem. And yet... I know what it is to be recognized by a place... and, well, it just wasn’t happening. The puzzle persisted. I remained homeless.

Undeterred, I made this question the intention that set my course through a recent conference and retreat for religious leaders interested in exploring the spiritual application of plant medicine in institutional religion. I am delighted to say that the

power of that intention, processed through a supportive container, has moved me significantly down the path. Intention plus container is powerful.

The supportive container of the retreat was important. Our professional paths, spiritual geekery, and particular interest made, of strangers, a pre-ordained cohort. We became immediate friends. Not homogeneous, nor always in accord. But ultimately, if not always, safe and loving.

This made all the difference as the container of our community allowed us to unfurl and be fully seen and so fully present to our intention. It was, itself, a spiritual experience, a home-making, and patterned recognizing and being recognized. It allowed us to open our sensory and emotional capacities all the way.

Were we able to put down all our traumas and chronic stress I mentioned last week? No. But we had created a field which allowed us to move through them without being overcome.

Within that container we engaged in meditation, prayer, song, conversation, walks beneath a transcendent canopy of ancient, girthy trees, and, of course, various ceremonies. Each experience added another layer to both our bond and my query; how to become home in a transient culture?

I remember, during a service early in the week, a prayer poem was read to us in which I heard something like, "image yourself as Christ so that god might recognize you." Now within the Christian frame, I actually found that thought to be slightly problematic. But I'm not Christian.

The god I wanted to be recognized by was, basically, you know, a tree. So, "image yourself a tree to be recognized by a tree." This felt like a real clue to homebeing.

I know you think I'm crazy. But blessed by this new insight, I made my way outside to this one particular tree who had a knot where a branch used to be that looked kind of like an eye right at eye level. I stood there and beheld the thing up and down, root to leaf, in all its ancient vivacious altitude. I then had what may sound to you like an

incredibly obvious revelation: I cannot image myself as a tree.

I cannot approximate this magnificent creature before me; ancient and generous in ways I can not hope to comprehend. It was simply a difference in scale. To it I was as a gnat is to me. Except that other gnats, in this case, had done great damage to this god's ancestral kin and soil. And I was probably coming off as an overly adoring tree-creep, increasingly desperate for approval and acknowledgement. I mean, no one wants to go to that guy's party, much less a god.

It was a necessary humbling. I was myopic without it. It occurred to me then that I needed to adjust my scale. Image myself then, not as tree-god but as... what... a sapling maybe? A bush? I wasn't sure. But the week was young.

Later, as another ceremony was drawing to a close and I was simmering back into a more mundane quality, I found myself wandering the edge of a small manicured meadow just outside the retreat center and reflecting on that lesson in humility, returning to the puzzle: image yourself as what so that land might recognize you.

I scanned the meadow's rim for inspiration, my eyes drifting over flowers blue and red, and tall grasses, and just a bit further out, the hopeful yearning of adolescence trees. Lovely all, but not numinous.

The meadow's rim then came to a bit of an angle. Before me, a path seemed to emerge from the angle toward the woods. Except the path was all of two feet long and terminated at the feet, or rather, roots of precisely that for which I sought.

For there before me, rose a startlingly tall, fuzzy-crowned dandelion, rocking in a soft breeze newly arrived. I rocked likewise. And I remember thinking, "You have a head. And I have a head. We are both small!"

Here was an appropriate scale. I can image myself as a dandelion. It felt like both an invitation and a confirmation.

A gentle rain blessed our pact. Thus have I entered into a dandelion discipleship. It is my teacher, my medium of recognition, my map into holy terrain, my Dandelion Christ.

And here is what I have learned in taking my first, decidedly superficial steps into what I believe will be a path of increasingly subtle depths: Dandelions are remediative, regenerative, invasive but integrated, fortifying, humble, vibrant, generous, adaptive, medicinal, unpicky, first responders, and make a lovely tea.

Key to my puzzle of home; dandelions are not native. They were brought here, like most of us. Thus they, like us, are considered invasive. And yet, they have integrated themselves into the land such that I'm pretty sure they are a net benefit. They have done this by obeying a fundamental law of ecotheology: Give back.

They are both pollinators and nectar flowers and have become essential for bees (though not necessarily for our butterflies, sadly).

Where you see dandelions, you are seeing plants repairing land. They loosen soil for worms to do their work where other plants are not hardy enough to do so. They act as fertilizer and are calcium pumps; mother's milk for reborn earth.

So these are just some of many amazing facts about dandelions. But, more importantly, establishing a discipleship creates that medium for relating that I spoke of earlier. I do feel, oddly, a little more seen and see, in turn, a little more.

But how do I image myself as a regenerative, redemptive, invasive but integrated, fortifying, humble, vibrant, generous, adaptive, medicinal, unpicky, first responder? How do I loosen compacted soil? How do I make of myself a lovely tea?

That's the new question. I like to think we found each other due to some affinity, that I have some similar, if not fully developed, characteristics in common with this being.

The dandelions have invited my attention. They are infused with this very story. My hope, and

experience thus far, is that the story becomes a doorway into sacred terrain, the threshold of home, a spiritual experience. It does get a little spooky.

If it works, I will tell you. And where it fails or I fail, I will tell you. And, should you wish, I offer this same path to you. I offer you my story and my doorway. My trip is your trip. What is shown to me is shown to you and visa versa. Let us make a home with one another.