

What We Know: Open Territory and Our Line of Sight.

READING: The Fox and the Grapes/ Aesop

One hot summer's day a Fox was strolling through an orchard till he came to a bunch of Grapes just ripening on a vine which had been trained over a lofty branch. "Just the thing to quench my thirst," quoth he. Drawing back a few paces, he took a run and a jump, and just missed the bunch. Turning round again with a One, Two, Three, he jumped up, but with no greater success. Again and again he tried after the tempting morsel, but at last had to give it up, and walked away with his nose in the air, saying: "I am sure they are sour."

Introduction

Our lives are structured, and "safe" – or so we think. In reality, all of us are regularly "walking the line" and at the boundary between this world and the next, between living and dying, between life "as we know it" – and something completely different.

Sometimes we are provoked to see this boundary, and sometimes, we see into what lies beyond it.

I want to share with you some thoughts about being "at the frontier" – and use some language and poems from among my favorites to describe these. Along the way – during those times when the mind will wander - I'll invite you to consider some of your own stories of transition, of facing thresholds and boundaries, and of "crossing over". Perhaps some of these we can share with each other at coffee hour.

While this is a personal journey - I also believe that the world we live in today demands nothing less of us. we will have to bring our "whole new mind" to the world... my talk on global economic development and why, will wait for another Sunday.

- Sometimes we come to a threshold when we realize, like the fox, that we will not achieve something that we'd sought.
- Sometimes we come to a threshold when we realize that we've achieved what we had wanted
- Sometimes we're pushed, over a threshold, unclear why we were pushed, or how and what might have pushed us.

Some among you will find yourself today, youthful and alive, in early adulthood; you've finished school, taken a first job; perhaps some first relationships, taken as an adult. You're exploring, and still running toward a vision for yourself

Some, like me, will find early adulthood receding over the sternrail, with an increasing head of steam driving our ship onward through the middle years. We've seen a few years come and go, perhaps a few relationships and a few jobs – more and more these days. Like me, you may feel some relief, perhaps some satisfaction in having survived. Moreover, the dawning early glimmers that this incarnation and this life are changing. For me, reading glasses a must in the failing light. Aches and pains. Difficulties with physical athleticism, whether around house chores or recreation that no longer match my still-held ambitions and image of my being. Sleep that seems both less available, and more needed than ever. In this place, in the middle years, are we still running toward something? Perhaps, like me, something larger still nags at you – the work incomplete; the home life and its intimacies not yet fully explored; the creative spark straining against the pace and the demands of this economy, the checkbook, the "manner" to which we've grown accustomed to living.

Some of you find yourself moving bravely beyond the middle years to what lies beyond. Perhaps here the nagging feeling has grown clearer. Perhaps some sense of satisfaction at having “lived well”, you might see on the horizon.

What do we say – when we say anything at all – about what this inevitable move through the seasons brings? What do we say during those moments when what we perceived as our sure footing at the top of the current cliff becomes loose and risky? What do we say in those moments when a freak of nature, an errant wind, something we did not expect, pushes us headlong off of it?

- **Paying attention – sharp, regular, mindful attention.**
- **Naming – specifically, your own experience.**
- **Asking questions – first, yourself.**
- **Inventorizing the fears, constraints, limits.**
- **Letting go of the familiar, conventional, “the assumed” – and putting yourself in places where you can confront these.**
- **Taking the first steps.**

See if you don't recognize a moment – or more – of your own middle-years journey, or professional work dissatisfactions, or other sensations of a transition-a-coming. This is a poem that Linda Hansen has read/ shared with us in times past:

All of You Undisturbed Cities/ R. M. Rilke

*All of you undisturbed cities,
Haven't you ever longed for the enemy?
I'd like to see you besieged by him
for ten endless and ground-shaking years.*

*Until you were desperate and mad with suffering;
finally in hunger you would feel his weight.
He lies outside the walls like a countryside.
And he knows very well how to endure
longer than the ones he comes to visit.*

*climb up on your roofs and look out:
his camp is there, and his morale doesn't falter,
and his numbers do not decrease; he will not grow weaker,
and he sends no one into the city to threaten
or promise, and no one to negotiate.*

*He is the one who breaks down the walls,
and when he works, he works in silence.*

My story: Darkness at 20. light closing in. vision impaired.

My own story of being at GE – in my 20s – and being unable to go into the building. Fear; desperation. Not knowing where to go, or how to go on. The arguments with myself – about “how lucky I am”.

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But what does it take to let go – to move beyond?

- **Zen koan:**
How do we deal with our experiences and our most cherished beliefs? These artifacts are like a 100 foot pole off of which we must step off in order to realise the truth.

What do we say – and when do we say it – as we try to maintain our position at the top of the 100 foot pole – attached to all we know, and hold dear; attached to all we see; attached to my identity, and who I think YOU are – you, my friend, my spouse, my child, my boss, ... my congregation, my community, ... my leader?

What will be the “tipping point” – that gets us beyond this comfort to what the larger world has in store for us?

What do we do when we realize that we can no longer maintain the façade of control?

What do we do? What do we say – and in what language – to find our way?

I'd ask you to think of a time and a place in your life where you left something behind – to set out, in challenging times, alone – against other forces. Mary Oliver has written some words that have come back to me, over and over again, as I've set out from my places of comfort and “where I was known”.

The Journey/ Mary Oliver

*One day you finally knew what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you kept shouting their bad advice --
though the whole house began to tremble
and you felt the old tug at your ankles.*

*"Mend my life!"
each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.*

*You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried with its stiff fingers at the very foundations,
though their melancholy was terrible.
It was already late enough, and a wild night, and the road full of fallen branches and
stones.
But little by little, as you left their voices behind, the stars began to burn through the
sheets of clouds,*

*and there was a new voice
which you slowly recognized as your own, that kept you company as you strode deeper
and deeper into the world, determined to do the only thing you could do --
determined to save the only life you could save.*

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What do you do, when you're out on the road? What guides us?

Sometime, somewhere, as children, we start off running toward something – in pursuit, in exploration – drawn on by something inside us, a desire to see, to reach the horizon. In our youth, we may start out running toward our work, and what we do in the world beyond our schooling, in this way.

Somewhere along the way, we then begin to harness ambition – to achieve something in the world – to the desire we've captured; and then, almost without knowing, without seeing what happens, day after day – we move past the desire and wanting to the work involved in making the desire manifest. We become willing to postpone gratification in some measure, to bring the desire into some worldly embodiment. ...

David Whyte says that somewhere – along the way – somewhere as we're running across that field, in pursuit of what we want, we may stop and bury something in the ground, as we run on. Sometimes, as the middle years approach, we remember where we've buried it.

The way to find it is to return to the work of children. As I've been reminded – regularly by my son – regularly, when I ask him to do his chores – regularly, when the specter of work arises in the house – I am reminded of something I once shared with delight with him, when he was small. Now I hear it, reflected back to me.... (esp. when he's trying to suggest why he shouldn't do what I've asked of him) – “Dad, the work of a child is play...”

Pay attention to what feels like play - Desire – “of the stars” – following your own north star, the one that tells you what you want. What are you doing when you feel most alive? “talking with a friend recently”... (discovering photography)

The Half Turn Of Your Face/ David Whyte

*The half turn of your face toward truth
Is the one movement you will not make.
After all, having seen it before
You wouldn't want to take that path again.*

*And have to greet yourself as you are and tell yourself
What it was like to have come so far and all in vain.*

*But most of all
to remember how it felt again to see reflected in your own mirror
The lines of abandonment and loss.*

*And have those words spoken inviting you back
The ones you used to say, the ones you loved
When your body was young and you trusted everything you wanted.*

*Hard to look but you know it has to happen
And that it takes only the half turn of your face
To scare yourself to the core
Seeing again that strange resolve in your new reflection.*

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Letting go of the assumed can also mean facing some of what we named previously as sacred – and treating with it differently:

Zen:

In another Zen story, two travelers are caught in a blizzard and find an abandoned pagoda with a statue of Buddha in it. One says “perhaps the Buddha will help us”, the other nods and sets fire to the Buddha's statue.

What comes with change? Awkwardness. Difficulty. Labor. Discomfort. Let go of “how you should do it”. See some wisdom – nearby/ from another. Take a first step.

The Swan/ R. M. Rilke

*This clumsy living that moves lumbering
as if in ropes through what is not done*

*reminds us of the awkward way the swan walks
and to die, and to die, which is the letting go
of the ground we stand on and cling to everyday*

*is like the swan when he nervously lets himself
down into the water which receives him gaily
and which flows under and after him wave after wave*

*while the swan, unmoving and marvelously calm,
is pleased to be carried,
each moment, more fully grown, more like a king, farther and farther on...*

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In his poem “The Old Interior Angel” from Fire in the Earth, David Whyte writes of an experience he had trekking in the mountains of Tibet/Nepal. Alone, he came to a deep chasm, spanned by an old bridge:

*The taut cables snapped and the bridge planks concertinaed
into a crazy jumble over the drop,
four hundred feet to the craggy stream.*

He stops and sits, afraid to cross that expanse. Hour after hour. Sitting. “I’d always been the one to “do it”. Not going forward; not going backward.”

*Enter the old mountain woman
with her stooped gait,
small feet shuffling for the precious
gold-brown fuel for cooking food.
Intent on the ground
she glimpsed my feet and looking up
Said, “Namaste”
“I greet the God in you.”*

*I inclined my head and clasped my hands
to reply, but before I could look up
she turned her lined face
and went straight across*

*that shivering chaos
of wood and broken steel in one movement.*

*One day the old interior angel
limps slowly in
with her no-nonsense compassion
and her old secret and goes ahead.*

*“Namaste”
you say and follow.*

What is the time in your life when you received some guidance – some mentorship, an example, an inspired word – and what happened for you?

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Wrap up

I shared at the outset that “getting here” with a whole new mind is critical to our world and its future. Daniel Pink – [A Whole New Mind](#).

I hope you’ll take the opportunity to share some of your crossings, your thresholds, your language and your journey with each other at coffee hour.

What defines two things? A line, a border, a boundary, a wall
What crosses two things? Erasing/ dissolving the line; crossing over/ building a bridge; paying attention; learning more; speaking up; dissolving in fire.

Closing with the following poems:

The Opening of Eyes/ David Whyte

*That day I saw beneath dark clouds the passing light over the water
and I heard the voice of the world speak out*

*I knew then as I had before
Life is no passing memory of what has been
Nor the remaining pages in a great book waiting to be read*

*It is the opening of eyes long closed
It is the vision of far-off things seen for the silence they hold*

*It is the heart after years of secret conversing
Speaking out loud in the clear air*

*It is Moses in the desert
Fallen to his knees before the lit bush*

*It is the man throwing away his shoes as if to enter heaven
And finding himself astonished*

*Opened at last
Fallen in love with solid ground.*

Revelation Must Be Terrible/ David Whyte

*Revelation must be terrible with no time left to say goodbye.
Imagine that moment staring at the still waters with only the brief tremor of your body to
say you are leaving everything and everyone you know behind.*

*Being far from home is hard, but you know, at least we are exiled together.
When you open your eyes to the world you are on your own for the first time.
No one is even interested in saving you now,
and the world steps in to test the calm fluidity of your body from moment to moment
as if it believed you could join its vibrant dance of fire and calmness and final stillness.*

*As if you were meant to be exactly where you are,
as if like the dark branch of a desert river you could flow on without a speck of guilt and
everything everywhere would still be just as it should be.
As if your place in the world mattered and the world could neither speak nor hear the
fullness of its own bitter and beautiful cry without the deep well of your body resonating
in the echo.*

Knowing that it takes only that one, terrible word to make the circle complete.

Revelation must be terrible knowing you can never hide your voice again.

"This is courage in a man: to bear unflinchingly what heaven sends." -- **Euripides**

Wm Butler Yeats –

*I sat, a solitary man, in a crowded London shop, an open book an empty cup on a
marble table top...
As on the shop and street I gazed, my body of a sudden blazed
And 30 minutes more or less, it seemed so great my happiness
That I was blessed and could bless*

The Lightest Touch/ David Whyte

*Good poetry begins with the lightest touch,
a breeze arriving from nowhere,
a whispered healing arrival,
a word in your ear,
a settling into things,*

*then like a hand in the dark
it arrests the whole body,
steeling you for revelation.*

*In the silence that follows a great line,
you can feel Lazarus, deep inside.*

*even the laziest, most deathly afraid part of you,
lift up his hands and walk toward the light.*