



A Shift That Shines A Light Into The New Year

I would choose again, that I may see.

A Course In Miracles

This evening my son is flying-in for New Year's and I am only half finished cleaning the house. My wife left early this morning to shop for groceries, leaving me to finish the chores, and the list is long. I need to vacuum, mop the kitchen, sweep the front porch, rake leaves, mow the lawn and replace the broken toilet seat in the upstairs bathroom. Additionally, two friends are arriving at noon to watch the football game, leaving me with just three hours to get it all done.

The pressure gets to me and an old pattern takes over making me frenetic. As I go about cleaning the house, I don't move in a deliberate, orderly fashion. I jump on the proverbial horse and ride off in all directions. I seem to be going in circles, like a whirlwind, moving from room to room and returning again, cleaning things in increments. I have a nice bucket with dividers that organizes things for cleaning into various compartments, but somewhere along the way I've misplaced it. I end up with a duster in one hand, a toilet bowl brush in another, a rag flung over my shoulder and another squeezed under my arm, with the handle of a spray bottle hooked to the back pocket of my jeans. I'm moving fast, but not efficiently. I feel like I'm running, trying to get the housework over with before I notice I'm doing it. It's like Woody Allen's statement about dying: that he doesn't want to be there when it happens.



One can live life like that as well. There's the river, there's crossing the river and there's the shore on the other side. If one hates where one is, generally speaking, one is bound to miss the adventure of all three.

I hate housework. What I like about cleaning is the result. A clean house means my little nest is in order and that makes me feel at peace, as if I am safe from the chaos and dangers of the outside world. Of course, the irony is that I'm working in a way opposite to the goal I am seeking. The way I'm cleaning is stressful, making me edgy and tense. I am fighting with the toilet seat I have to replace and feel victimized that it won't come off. It is as if one of the trickster gods is tightening the screw as I am trying to loosen it. I can almost hear the coyote spirit howling with laughter as I struggle. Next, it's the dishwasher that my wife should have emptied and didn't. I dislike emptying the dishwasher and she knows it. My anger at having to do this chore turns her small slip-up into a betrayal that has my primitive brain screening flashbacks of past grievances.

Mercifully, I catch myself in time. *Oy vey*, I say to myself. *I don't want this*. I pull out a kitchen chair, sit down and give myself a good *talking-to*. *I don't want to waste or spoil another day that I've been given*, I tell myself. *Not anymore*. I take a breath and let go of the housework. I take another breath and let go of feeling hurried. As the tension clears, the strong passion I feel at this point in my life rises up, reaching for what I want, which is to embrace each day and live it fully. Which is to be present and at peace in whatever I am doing. As my willingness to let go and wake up gradually opens to a new attitude, what comes to mind are parts of a poem by D.H. Lawrence that I memorized years ago.

*As we live, we are transmitters of life.
And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us.*

*But if, as we work, we can transmit life into our work,
life, still more life, rushes into us to compensate, to be ready,
and we ripple with life through the days.*

*Give and it shall be given unto you
is still the truth about life.
It means kindling the life-quality where it was not,
even if it's only in the whiteness of a washed pocket-handkerchief.¹*

I experience a sudden glow of light that only can be seen from the inside. At that moment a cloud blocking the sun passes and the room fills with sunlight. All at once, everything is alive again and I am awake, as large as the moment. I stand up, slowly look around to see what chores still remain, and as I do my heart fills with gratitude to be living in this lovely house. From time to time I've worried that in this bad economy my income could dry up and I could lose my house. At this moment I feel grateful that it is mine to enjoy today. I also remember how my mother, who died last year, always cleaned her house top to bottom, whenever I came to visit. It touches me that she made

¹ D. H. Lawrence, "We Are Transmitters," *Selected Poems* (New York: Viking Press, 1959), 105.

the effort for me and that I am now doing the same for my son. I know it would please her.

Needless to say, the rest of the morning flows like a river. I laugh as I empty the dishwasher and take pleasure in mopping the kitchen floor to a sheen.

As I'm raking the last of the leaves at the front of the house, a bird flying by catches my eye and I watch it land in the Japanese maple tree across the street. The maple leaves have all turned a most beautiful color of red. Many of the leaves have now shed, creating a velvet blanket of red on the sidewalk. The exposed branches reflect the reddish hue. The maple tree seems to be celebrating the Holidays along with all my neighbors who have hung Christmas lights.



I live in a historic neighborhood of small, identical turn-of-the-century Victorians, each with a front porch, a lovely front garden, a white picket fence and a Sycamore tree. As I look down the street, I notice that the Sycamores are now completely bare. Their branches are dull gray, though the winter light has given them the look of polished silver in places. From where I stand, the street gradually slopes down to Santa Fe Avenue. Across Santa Fe Avenue a large field is covered in tall green grass and overhead a falcon, suspended in mid air, scans the field for mice. Above everything is a lovely welkin. My whole being merges with the beauty of all I see and for a moment my heart feels it might break.

All this! I think as I head back inside. *And it isn't even noon yet.* That night, as I'm about to go to sleep, I ponder that maybe that trickster coyote god wasn't toying with me at all, when I was trying to fix the toilet seat. Perhaps he was guiding me toward an experience that would shine a light into the New Year.

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