The Path of Descent March 22 - March 28, 2020

* I am not alone in my tiredness or sickness or fears, but at one with millions of others from many centuries, and it is all part of life.  —Etty Hillesum (Sunday)
* We abandon the self-improvement project and instead surrender to the Holy Fire. –Mirabai Starr (Monday)
* But crisis doesn't just happen to individuals. . . . It also happens to communities, particularly when a community shatters on the anvil of injustice.  –Barbara Holmes (Tuesday)
* The Compassionate One is our gracious friend, and we don’t have to earn anything, deserve anything, achieve anything, or merit anything to bring our needs to God. –Brian Mclaren (Wednesday)
* After years of being taught that the way to deal with painful emotions is to get rid of them, it can take a lot of reschooling to learn to sit with them instead. –Barbara Brown Taylor (Thursday)
* Love has you. Love is you. Love alone, and your deep need for love, recognizes love everywhere else. (Friday)

Practice: Following Life’s Rules

The spread of COVID-19 is requiring most of us to make significant changes to our lifestyles, at least temporarily. While not everyone has the privilege of more time off and many would prefer to work for needed economic reasons, I do believe it is possible for each of us to make conscious choices about how to spend any “downtime” we may have. We might look to the wisdom of author Ellen Laconte in her book Life Rules.

Ancient humans did not have to practice restraint. They had neither the technical capacity nor the cultural habits of excess. Indigenous cultures, living much closer to the Earth than we do, have traditionally passed the habit of restraint from one generation to the next [since] restraint in consumption, behavior, lifeways and relationships also confers survival advantage to the tribe.

When the word is used to describe truly sustainable relationships with provisions and resources, “restrained” is equivalent to “frugal”: being careful with the fruits of the Earth and of ones’ labors. The ancients and long-lasting indigenous cultures are habitually frugal.

“Simplify, simplify, simplify,” were Henry David Thoreau’s three rules for living a life in harmony with Nature, that is, within our own and Earth’s means. . . . Wanda Urbanska, author of several books on simplicity including 2010’s  The Heart of Simple Living explained that, “Simple Living’s four tenets are: environmental stewardship, thoughtful consumption, community involvement and financial responsibility.”  Though the scale of our simplification and restraint will have to be as grand and far reaching as the scale of our complexification and consumption have been, engaging in these four practices would lead us, Urbanska suggested, in the direction of living good lives rather than “goods lives.”

Humans have balked at both voluntary and involuntary frugality ever since greed and wealth have been an option. On the other hand, we have also often found peace of mind, freed time and a sense of belonging, self-worth and accomplishment when we have taken frugality up with the same passion with which we sought wealth. The desire to survive may stir that passion in us when we fully realize that doing more of what we have been doing is fatal.

One of the ways we can practice restraint is to follows Life’s pattern of downtimes, using day/night and seasonal cycles like premodern societies did, as opportunities:

To refurbish and repair tools, equipment, buildings, infrastructures and community and intercommunity relationships

To both help and allow bodies and ecosystems to renew themselves

To refresh and expand the community’s base of knowledge

To reflect on successes and failures and decide what needs to be done differently

These activities can be seen as investment in personal, family and community well-being rather than time off. . . . Ecological economist Herman Daly calls the process of building in downtimes “fallowing,” letting land regenerate after a period of cultivation. “Fallowing is investment in short-term non-production in order to maintain long-term yields” and is exemplified in the ancient Hebrew’s Jubilee.