

Friday Evening Message – 1 May 2020

Last August, long before words like 'unprecedented', 'uncertain' and 'unsettled' were the adjectives used to describe daily life and the charts that tell of suffering and death were the stuff of calamity movies, I led the pre-High Holy Days Newsletter with a poem by Howard Schwartz.

So much has changed since then. The last few weeks have taught us to live new versions of our lives. We have experienced individual and communal grief and collectively shared the ongoing pain of separation from those we love. The day after lock-down was announced the words of that poem came into my mind. And have remained there.

"Somehow
No one knows why
The frail vessels broke open
Spilt asunder
And all the sparks
Scattered
Like sand
Like seeds
Like stars.
That is why we were created;
To search for the sparks
No matter where they have been
Hidden"

In the second week of my new life, during a bracing hour of exercise (formally known as a dog-walk), I realised that seeking these sparks when all was well, was good practice. Searching for them now is essential.

These glimmering particles of reassurance, hope and gratitude are not easy to find, especially when they are obscured by this crisis. Yet looking for them has become part of my personal survival guide.

On-line yoga is great for keeping the soul (and the toochas lifted) but uncovering a spark during these tense and sorrow-laden days has more meaning, more promise and more joy than at any other time. And, finding a spark on the days when, as I woke, I didn't even know where to start looking, well, the sparks I discovered on those days — each carrying its 'little cargo of light' — were the most precious of all.

I'm going to keep looking and I hope you will too.

For anyone who is struggling to find something that brightens their world, here's one I found three days ago. It's called 'Gratitude' and was written by Mary Oliver

What did you notice?
The dew-snail;
the low-flying sparrow;
the bat, on the wind, in the dark;
big-chested geese, in the V of sleekest performance;
the soft toad, patient in the hot sand;
the sweet-hungry ants;
the uproar of mice in the empty house;
the tin music of the cricket's body;
the blouse of the goldenrod

What did you hear?
The thrush greeting the morning;
the little bluebirds in their hot box;
the salty talk of the wren,
then the deep cup of the hour of silence.

When did you admire?
The oaks, letting down their dark and hairy fruit;
the carrot, rising in its elongated waist;
the onion, sheet after sheet, curved inward to the pale green wand;
at the end of summer the brassy dust, the almost liquid beauty of the flowers; then the
ferns, scrawned black by the frost.

What astonished you?
The swallows making their dip and turn over the water.

What would you like to see again?
My dog: her energy and exuberance, her willingness,
her language beyond all nimbleness of tongue,
her recklessness, her loyalty, her sweetness,
her strong legs, her curled black lip, her snap.

What was most tender?
Queen Anne's lace, with its parsnip root;
the everlasting in its bonnets of wool;
the kinks and turns of the tupelo's body;
the tall, blank banks of sand;
the clam, clamped down.

What was most wonderful?
The sea, and its wide shoulders;
the sea and its triangles;
the sea lying back on its long athlete's spine.

What did you think was happening?
The green beast of the hummingbird;
the eye of the pond;
the wet face of the lily;
the bright, puckered knee of the broken oak;
the red tulip of the fox's mouth;
the up-swing, the down-pour, the frayed sleeve of the first snow—
So, the gods shake us from our sleep.

Stay safe and well, and Shabbat Shalom to all,

Kim
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