

The Winter Solstice of Cosmic Pilgrims

By Christine Loughlin, OP

The morning hours have brought the home-school children to class. They are out tramping through tall grasses, along the meadow's edge and into the mulched garden. They are here in the school room setting of the natural world to observe the ways of an organic world order. Their jackets, trousers, shoes are pocked and littered with seeds ~ goldenrod, ragweed, bellflower, chicory, thistle, aster, and their favorite sunflower. The lesson today ~ who carries the source of nourishment? The child's heart awakens to an understanding that they are one with wind and wing, feet and fur as they participate with those who require field and farm to survive. In the closing circle they ask of themselves ~ how does my energy seed the world?

And, what of this world into which they and we set forth this day to labor in the vineyard? A tropical storm blows up the east coast drenching and flooding coastal areas, giant jelly fish rarely seen a few decades ago appear in a dozen locations from the Mediterranean to the North Sea to the Chesapeake Bay and into our own watershed, Narragansett Bay. In our state 10% of families experience "food insecurity;" world hunger has become the silent tsunami. Hundreds upon hundreds of workers have no employment. New viruses appear and we struggle to determine who and where the 'enemy' is that we may assemble our armies to fight on that chosen front. A global economy believes recovery rests on "fair trade" of consumer goods.

In the past our collective virtuous acts were directed toward social and political reforming. Slowly we peoples of Earth awaken to the truth that the biophysical systems of our common home are in jeopardy. The planet is warming and biotic impoverishment looms large.

What of us here? What is our part in this small place to reinvent and restore this one small part in the devastated whole?

Thirteen years ago when we initiated our CSA garden we searched the NOFA (natural organic farmers association) map to locate the nearest farm. Not a one in this locale. Now just over a decade one doesn't have to travel more than eight miles to find a triangle of community farms; a few more miles and a quadrangle of CSAs. Take a ride every day of the week and add one more and you'll visit an octagon of Community Supported Gardens in this area.

Some days we turn our minds and hands to what seems insignificant in the bigger picture. But then you realize change happens from the grassroots up. To participate in our tri-town action on October 24th was to stand with the hundreds of thousands of caring people from 181 countries involved in over 5,000 events urging a reduction of the emissions that cause global warming. Ten year old Libby from our Summer Adventures and Home School Program was a "keynote speaker," as strong and sure as the energy expert who preceded her. She spoke on behalf of the creatures, the water and the air, the voiceless ones.

Cooking, bread-baking, preserving classes, mindfulness meditation, programs for learners of the new scientific story of our universe and the eco-spirituality that naturally emerges from the story mark our calendar. Music and the arts sustain the spirit of this place. As the CSA movement has spread, so too, our graced and particular program, the Religious Lands Conservancy Project. Six lands with over four hundred acres are now protected in a swath about the same size as the spread of the Community Gardens.

Ours is a most gifted time, with extraordinary insights and clear observations that we are cosmic pilgrims in a universe of extravagant phenomena. We travel a six hundred million mile journey on this home planet each year around our Sunstar, the source of warmth and energy.

Yet, more than the gravity propelled planetary voyage, we sense ourselves traveling the journey of unfolding cosmic consciousness. The seeds of a new consciousness are scattered everywhere, attaching themselves to people and places with the same ease that chicory and aster stick to a child's shirt.

It's the season for stories, particularly the stories that have stirred the human heart and inspired generosity, compassion, connectedness, sacrifice, and more. Stories begin with a word. In the beginning was the word. But the word grows to a phrase, a sentence, an idea, a breakthrough in consciousness. The stories of good and generous humans that have drawn out the best in human efforts will live on forever as they ought. But our task now is to find a new language, a new story that will inspire a response to the peril and the devastation that is upon us. The story of our human developmental history ignores the most ancient voices and creatures upon whom we are totally dependent.

Thanksgiving is the joy of going home to family and friends. For too long we have considered immediate family, close friends, maybe even a few strangers. Now the "going home" must become a more permanent practice and the community must include the running brook, the birds in the bush, the riverhead, the cedar stand. Our gratitude must extend far beyond our living memory to include the most ancient ones whose guidance and choices have gotten us this far. Our litany of gratitude must name the ancient ones, all the way back to the supernova, the star that died to birth the elements that dreamed us into being. Without this depth and breadth of memory we will never be disciplined enough to choose the limits or inspired enough to engage the work our times require. On the one hand, we are cosmic pilgrims, on the other, members of the biotic community learning to live within the constraints of our home place.

The human heart has always been drawn to the mysteries of death and birth. Is that not why so many of us gather in the oratory to celebrate Winter Solstice ~ to ritualize the hope and promise that is born anew? Hark, for the Sun is returning! Our death now is the passing of a planetary way of life known for millions of years. From the ocean depths to the highest land peaks 'the great warming' is altering all life. The rebirth will be planetary ~ the manifestation in accord with the labor and the love manifested in one's home place.

A small bowl rests on our windowsill, one of 107 other bowls scattered in various sites. The simple requirement ~ give attention to water. Each morn as tap water is poured from a little pitcher to the rim of the bowl our prayer is an act of gratitude to the sacred and wondrous hydraulic cycle spiraling around our planet, surrendering its waters that all may have life. May the work of Crystal Spring evoke within each of us the manner and grace to restore, recover, and re-inhabit our own home place.

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