

I'm feeling the weight of the season, and I'm not celebrating the darkness even as I write, here, of welcoming the dark. I realized today that I am not particularly interested in Christmas and certainly the official religious holiday yet I feel moved by this time of the year and want to cozy up to the full range of feelings evoked by this part of the cycle.

So my dark today was the rumbly non-functionality of the wood stove hot water coil, the non-arrival of the paper to do more calendars, the non-arrival of the keyboard, the non-ringing of the phone from my only viable customer, or anyone, actually, requesting some work.

A friend told me a few days ago about the solstice celebration rituals in ancient Norway, in which the wooden wagon wheels were removed from the carts so people could literally not go anywhere. It was a time of stillness, of non-movement, and that was symbolized, and manifested, in the removal of the wheels, which were brought indoors and decorated with garlands. Centuries later, this evolved into our tradition of hanging a wreath on the door.

I am trying to figure out what I want for a Christmas time activity and I'm futzing with trying to get quiet and sense what it is I want, or maybe need. I realized that the solstice was an unfamiliar yet important time, and thus were the days immediately before and after it. I decided that 10 days on either side would be a good window to hunker down and create a time frame to recognize and ritualize the celestial movement toward darkness and light, toward inwardness then growing outwardness. It feels like a time to examine and suspend if not bury some of the rules I've unconsciously created for myself—rules I've found myself living by even though I don't recall ever actually choosing them as operating styles.

I suppose one of those rules is getting up by a certain time every morning. I normally don't feel permission to suspend that rule. It would be a discipline to suppress the noise in my mind that tells me I ought to get up and get going, as if there were a clear obligation. The reality is that I am not planning to catch a ferry or meet someone at a specific time tomorrow, so I could suspend the rule. I could suspend the rule that I accomplish something, that I meet some objective to be accountable. This rule is driven, or originates, from a deep place that does not tolerate silence, stillness, emptiness, motionlessness. It presumes that idle hands do the devil's work. It presumes that motion is not only preferable to stillness, but superior. Stopping means death, chaos, is irreversible, thus once you stop, you'll never be able to start again. Inactivity means failure, not caring for oneself or others, depression or sickness, wasting time. There is this feeling, reinforced by our culture, and certainly by the motion that so many of my friends express, that there is no time to do all the things that need to be done, so sitting around being inactive is either a sign of hidden wealth or some variant of dementia. The strength of this rule comes from a multi-decade reinforcement from several powerful influences: family, the schools I attended, and the requirements of parenting—from the intimacies of infant care to the responsibilities of funding another's life needs, of always being on call.

This dark time is an opportunity to examine my rule, this motion notion, and force it to wiggle in its chair by demanding that it sit down for a while. It is part of what this time means to me, or what I want to allow and encourage it to mean. Translating this into the world, I might not answer the phone, but only return messages or at least monitor calls rather than take them. I might ensure that I not ‘rush off’ to anything. I might insist that I take a walk every day. I might go to bed earlier and just read or lie there for a while. I might simplify some space, or bring a new kind of beauty to a space.

I called a friend this evening to brew about Christmas; she was full of love and energy and support, and was thrilled to hear about my recent calendar project. She wanted me to not get lost in the cloak-of-the-law issues of making money or of calculating something before I did it. I’ve spent my life riding the interstices, falling through cracks, not grabbing ahold firmly because I never sensed whatever I was doing was worth a firm grasp. This is true of my work, my marriages, and my children.

I had no clue what I was getting into with my first child, and then some clue—amidst thick fog—with my second child, and more clues but only marginal visibility with my third. I am reacting, rather than proacting, and I find myself less and less satisfied with this stance. Perhaps the calendar, and the book, and indeed many of the things I’ve done, not for money, nor for fame, are examples, threads in the invisible fabric I’m weaving, that speak to a spontaneous energy that flows from me to do things because I sense they are right.

Even the damn hot water pipe construction project today was a manifestation of wanting to save money and electricity by sucking off some of the heat from the wood into hot water, and my disappointment is merely that the process will require more time and futzing—I wanted a quick fix, a quick solution, a quick ‘satisfaction’. Of course I’m capable of generating a solution, a better one, but I was operating under the illusion of something going really smoothly. I’m mad that I am out of synch with lady luck, with ‘right flow’ or ‘right action’, presuming that if it were ‘right’ it would be easy, fast, simple, clever, quick, spontaneous and, perhaps mostly, elegant on the first try. What could possibly have led me to this kind of delusion? Under what experience, training, teacher, situation, or fantasy did I develop and find myself continuously infected by such arrogance?