

Sermon by Reverend Nur'llah (Cathy) Layland, Emerging Light Sufi Center, Lehigh Valley, PA

Ah Spring!

The garden plans have been drawn up,  
the tools cleaned and oiled,  
seedlings started on the window sill,  
a bag of onion sets on the table.

There've been days,  
too many,  
teases of Spring!

Sunny warm temptation to get planting!

I dream of the coming weeks,  
watching the first leaves crest the soil's surface,  
the plants growing stronger and bigger until the soil is  
hidden (because I practice square foot gardening).

My mind races ahead to the first flowers,  
the warm first tomato cut over a bowl of crisp freshly picked  
greens.

I'm longing to begin!

But where I live,  
spring reminds me of the story line in Peanuts,  
the one where Lucy holds the football for Charlie Brown to  
kick.

At first he's oblivious....

Well, maybe not quite oblivious....

He's perhaps pleasantly surprised at her offer,  
given their history of sparring friendship.

But he is intoxicated by the invitation.

And so he steels himself, takes a big breath, and runs full-on  
toward that ball.

With all of his heart, he draws back his kicking foot and  
swings.

And of course, at the last minute,  
Lucy snatches the ball away.

Charlie Brown's own momentum throws him up in the air  
and then flings him to the ground.  
And then they do it again.  
And again.  
And again.

She just can't help herself.  
She is the slave of her nature.  
He just can't help himself.  
He is the slave of his habits, blinded by his desires and  
intoxicated with the idea of kicking that ball.  
Each of them, stuck in a pattern,  
trapped in the limitations of their habits, and their egos'  
desires.

The Buddha said "Every morning we are born again. What  
we do today is what matters most."

So how do we free ourselves from the limitations of our  
habits,  
our 'nature,'  
our ego's desires,  
or what Sufis call nafs?  
How can I free myself from the limitations I created in order  
to exist to this point?  
For the little piece of paradise I create around my home,  
I must discipline myself to hold,  
to wait,  
to delay until the weather is sure.

Don't we just want to scream at Charlie Brown, 'Stop!  
Think!  
Make a better choice!'"  
Don't we just want to shake Lucy,  
look her in the eye and say with conviction,  
"You are better than this!"

They just don't see it.

So I suppose the first thing is to see it.

Where am I limited by my habits that no longer serve me?

How do I free myself from my attachments

Attachments that perhaps at one time supported me

But now have become burdens, so that I am heavy with ballast ?

How do I renounce my small desires,

so that my true self can arise

and the desires of the Divine emerge?

So first, seeing.

Muhasaba.

Daily self evaluation.

Not judgement, just noticing.

And then choosing.

“My essential self, today, THIS was a good thing

and I wish more of it.

Today, this, not so much,

and I'd like to be free of it.”

Seeing, I can make a choice..

Murshid gives us many many ways to build this muscle of making better choices, freeing ourselves from the limitations we have written into our stories.

There are exercises of gazing, to build the mastery of concentration.

There are teachings on renunciation... did you give up sweets for Lent?

There are our daily practices, building the discipline of taking on ‘doing’ in line with your intentions.

Each of these, a myriad of drops to fill the sea, to move toward freedom.

Having held back from impulse  
which was triggered by unseasonable hints of Spring,  
noticing that desire,  
letting go of the habit.  
watching, waiting for each day to reveal itself....  
And as I let go of the limitation of the impulse,  
I find myself in a spaciousness,  
an ever increasing awareness,  
a knowing.  
And so watching for the Divine impulse  
The true emergence of Spring,  
over the ensuing weeks I'll be diving into the dirt.  
Planting and nourishing each seed in it's time.  
Beginning the journey towards tasty morsels,  
What will you dissolve?  
What might you find in the space that creates?  
What seeds might you plant?