



Initially, I thought it might be a religious festival or celebration, but it turned out to be a concert with local musicians. We decided to hang around for a while but actually stayed on almost till the end, because we enjoyed the music, but also the summer night atmosphere. When we arrived there were no seats left so I found a place to stand, and actually leaned against a warm wooden door frame for support, from where I could both hear clearly and have a view of the stage. There were other people standing in front of us; however, they were not blocking our view. And then a man shifted position and stood directly in front of me probably wanting to lean on the door frame as well, but since he was taller and bigger than me and at close proximity, momentarily and before shifting my position his back became the total view, the whole picture, and at the moment I thought of all the times I had lost sight of the bigger picture and had allowed others, often unwittingly, to literally block my view of the bigger life tapestry, blur my vision, hinder my walking, throw me off track. The present experience sort of naturally evolved into a metaphor that encapsulated this whole experience across time of how others can become human road blocks or barricades in our life. At times this experience may feel like a heavy door closing in on you and at other times like you're being knocked down, and the tragic part is that to some extent you are the facilitator of this whole process. You are the one who may fixate on the tree instead of seeing the whole forest. You are the one who may gradually relinquish your authority or get too distracted, forgetting your intentions and potential each time you come across a new human door or barricade or implicit cultural imperative. You are the one that's not noticing, minimizing, rationalizing. I think the well known Greek poet Konstantinos Kavafis' poem describes this process with economy in his 1896 poem *Walls (Τείχη)*:

*Χωρίς περίσκεψιν, χωρίς λύπην, χωρίς αιδώ
μεγάλα κ' υψηλά τριγύρω μου έκτισαν τείχη.
Και κάθομαι και απελπίζομαι τώρα εδώ.
Άλλο δεν σκέπτομαι: τον νουν μου τρώγει αυτή η τύχη·
διότι πράγματα πολλά έξω να κάμω είχαν.
Α όταν έκτιζαν τα τείχη πώς να μην προσέξω.
Αλλά δεν άκουσα ποτέ κρότον κτιστών ή ήχων.*

Ανεπαισθήτως μ' έκλεισαν από τον κόσμο έξω.

These people can often be family or friends, teachers or colleagues, neighbours or clients, within societal contexts. During the previous day I had listened to a couple of webinars on health and functional medicine. On one of these talks in relation to adrenal fatigue, Peter Osborne, had mentioned that among the various things we need to do in order to restore or treat this condition, is to distance ourselves from 'soul suckers'. Very briefly, adrenal glands are the two almond shaped organs on top of our kidneys, which regulate much of our bodily function and produce hormones like nor/adrenalin (nor / epinephrine) and cortisol, for instance, which control inflammation, help mobilize energy and also get us ready for fight-flight if we perceive danger. Chronic states of stress can deplete our adrenal glands and can lead to joint pains, fatigue, muscle loss and cramps, inability to exercise, vitamin and mineral deficiency, which in turn increase the risk for tons of autoimmune diseases. Being surrounded by toxic people and not setting healthy boundaries, can not only create chronic stress and deplete our adrenal glands with all the dire consequences and health risks, but can throw us off course. Consider a zebra surrounded by predator animals on an ongoing basis, and thus, living in a constant state of fight-flight. Too many toxic people in our close environment may feel like this and will inevitably exhaust us, disorient us, distance us from our true values, intentions and goals, and ultimately inflict losses directly or indirectly. Toxic relationships work like environmental pollutants, which slowly and discretely poison us. Distractedness and business and a learnt and almost deeply ingrained tendency to tolerate, to turn your glance away, to ignore gut feelings and bodily wisdom, to not discern and then to quickly shake things off and move on, may facilitate our survival or getting things done and moving on to the next thing in the short term, but ultimately propagate more toxicity.

Eventually, this accumulation of unfinished business, as I mentioned in the previous post, will present us with the bill at some point. The more distracted and busy we've been and the more unfinished business we have left unattended the greater the impact at some later point in our lives, and if we are lucky there will come a point when either circumstances will force us to see or we will decide to unravel and feel the depth of our emotions and experience. For some of us a time comes when there is a deep and pressing need for us to finally lift the curtain and take a better look, to truly open our eyes and look at the whole picture, and to reconnect with our deepest core and more authentic parts of our self. In his book 'To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings' the poet John O'Donohue writes:

*For everything under the sun there is a time
This is the season of your akward awakening
When the pain takes you where you would rather not go
Through the white curtain of yesterday to a place
You had forgotten you knew from the inside out;*

*And a time when that bitter tree was planted
That has grown always invisibly beside you
And whose branches your awakened hands
Now long to disentangle from your heart*



Almost everything is stored within our human spaciousness. What we need is courage to see and to speak and courage is love. Love inherently contains seeds of courage, the deeper the love the stronger the seedling of courage that will grow. Brene Brown says *‘Courage is a heart word. The root of the word courage is cor - the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage meant "To speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." Over time, this definition has changed, and today, we typically associate courage with heroic and brave deeds. But in my opinion, this definition fails to recognize the inner strength and level of commitment required for us to actually speak honestly and openly about who we are and about our experiences -- good and bad. Speaking from our hearts is what I think of as "ordinary courage."* (From *Thought It Was Just Me: Women Reclaiming Power and Courage in a Culture of Shame*). So, a time comes when the veil is removed; a time comes when it seems as if the Universe itself is urging us to finally see it all, the whole picture, the happy and the sad, the empowering and the defeating; to feel the depth of our sorrow, to cleanse our mind and home of all the fear, lies and toxicity that we have allowed to accumulate, like mould on the wall or dust on an old Persian rug. And then we will need to scrub and scrape and shake hard and discard. There comes a time when we need to fling the doors and windows wide open and to let the breeze and the sunlight flood the room and shed light on every little speck of dust; a time to look without flinching and a time to look at others straight in the eyes. Some things will instantly disintegrate, like the delicate wings of a moth or butterfly from some old natural science class

project, but other things will lie bare for us to see and feel and we will cry an ocean of tears, and then eventually we will stand again. Wokie Nwabueze writes *'When deconstruction comes spirit will rise through the air, water, earth and ether to open your eyes again or for the first time, to reveal to you the core of who you are and you will be unbreakable'* (2017, Emerging Women).

In order to heal or change or move on and out of we need to grieve and in order to do that we need to be able to remain present, to stay with the pain or the knowing. We need grit, tenacity and perseverance and patience and it will probably be the most difficult and courageous thing we have ever embarked on, yet once we have taken the first few steps we will not want to turn back. We will tentatively peel off layer after layer. As John O'Donohue writes in his poem *'You will have to scrape through all the layers of covering'* At times, we will be tempted to give up, but we will always return to the process, trusting it more and more. Those around us may not all welcome the process, but we will still persevere - over and over. We will feel the sorrow and the stinging ache of regrets and also colourful images of revenge may cloud our eyes, distract us every so often. These images may even give us fuel to carry on this journey for a little while, but in the end it is our tears and new knowing that will quieten these thoughts, cleanse the wounds, soothe our sympathetic nervous system and open our heart, and then the images of revenge will evaporate like fleeting thoughts that they always were or they will transform into actions not of revenge, but of restoration, activism or justice. It is our increased capacity to stay with what is, to stay centered in the midst of pain or to return to this place over and over. We learn to be with the sense of groundlessness when we are stripped of everything we believed in until it frightens us no more. This journey, among many other things, will involve the re-learning of returning to the moment, of finding sanctuary in one's being, of trusting and of reconnecting to our authenticity and everything out there, of knowing that it is all a constant and ever changing process (July 13th, 2017, Tonya Alexandri).