

Not speaking up and out had not kept me safe from accidents and other road events, had not kept pets alive, had not safeguarded what I had earned, had not prevented the rights violations and losses, or the assaults on my privacy and dignity across time and contexts. My working on not being vulnerable had not done the job either. For years I had thought vulnerability was equivalent to disempowerment and non safety and believed it would attract more harassment. However, through her research Brene Brown has found that although most of us associate vulnerability with emotions we want to avoid such as fear, shame, and uncertainty; we lose sight of the fact that vulnerability is also the birthplace of joy, belonging, creativity, authenticity, and love. In her work *On The Power of Vulnerability*, she claims that when we dare to let go of the armor that protects us from feeling vulnerable, we open ourselves to the experiences that bring purpose and meaning to our lives. She writes 'vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage. Truth and courage aren't always comfortable, but they're never weakness' (*Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*). Actually, not speaking one's truth and not fully defining oneself leaves more room for others to do it instead. Audre Lorde wrote 'If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.'

The creation of this site more or less coincided with an urgent conscious, and also, much less conscious intention to partake in a grand unraveling as part of a deeply needed cleansing and letting go process and grieving of unattended wounds. Breaking the silence and becoming visible was also my ultimate way of keeping safe. The unraveling process was messy and cyclical and it felt like a storm where one has little control over it, and yet one is also the driving destructive force. I found this short extract by L.J. Vanier (*Ether: Into the Nemesis*) that describes the process pretty well: 'Like a tornado swirling around you, you are the eye of the storm. A front row seat to the destruction of everything you worked so hard to build. But like all tornadoes, the rain will halt and the winds will calm. The pieces that remain from the cataclysmic destruction of your former self, will soon dissolve and you will find that the only thing that was destroyed was the illusion, the attachment. Allowing for you to rebuild a new, a stronger, a more mature, and spiritually evolved you, that you didn't even know existed. So have faith, this too shall pass.' It took me a while to realise that it was the culmination of many things and a lot of half-asleep living, but also my soul calling me back home. It was a

multifaceted process of dealing with unmetabolized grief, old conditioning, outer taxing contexts and circumstances and the fierce backlash and the shedding of all costumes, ideas, systems and identities that did not serve me anymore and were not a good fit to begin with. It felt like a death and then a birth and a heartfelt spiritual awakening. In his book *Dark Nights of the Soul: A Guide to Finding Your Way Through Life's Ordeals*, Thomas Moore writes 'During the dark night there is no choice but to surrender control, give in to unknowing, and stop and listen to whatever signals of wisdom might come along. It's a time of enforced retreat and perhaps unwilling withdrawal. The dark night is more than a learning experience; it's a profound initiation into a realm that nothing in the culture, so preoccupied with external concerns and material success, prepares you for.'

For a long time I lived in a sense of groundlessness and of trusting and then doubting the process again and wishing it to be over and then always eagerly engaging with what arose and what demanded my attention. Margaret Wheatley (*The Place Beyond Fear and Hope*) writes there comes a time when 'Life now insists that we encounter groundlessness. Systems and ideas that seemed reliable and solid dissolve at an increasing rate. People who asked for our trust betray or abandon us. Strategies that worked suddenly don't. Groundlessness is a frightening place, at least at first, but as the old culture turns to mush, we would feel stronger if we stopped searching for ground, if we sought only to locate ourselves in the present and do our work from here'. And yes, eventually, you stop searching for ground because it was never there to begin with, and you gradually manage to rest in the uncertainty for longer and longer stretches of time. And in your solitude you find you feel connected and slowly and painstakingly you learn to integrate and hold it all and you reclaim aspects of yourself, and you realise that some things could never be taken from you, and you feel gratitude for mastering the strength to deal with the challenges and for whatever resources you may have and for the learning. And you feel gratitude for all the people that have walked the path before you and for the availability of their work and the wisdom of their words.

You learn to stay in the moment with whatever arises because the process requires you wander through the thick forest or the maize for a while until the time comes to exit the cage and walk into the light. Jean Shinoda Bolen writes 'When we enter a forest phase in our lives we enter a period of wandering and a time of potential soul growth. Here it is possible to find what we have cut off from, to "remember" a once vital aspect of

ourselves. We may uncover a wellspring of creativity that has been hidden for decades'. There is no bypassing the sticky parts, but little nuggets of insight and truths surface constantly and your sense of being becomes a little more fluid and expansive each day and your breathing less shallow and more resilient and your heart like a ripe pomegranate cracks open. Jack Kornfield writes: 'The practices and teachings of Insight invite a beautiful movement of heart, a return to dignity, to the wise and gracious spirit that can be found within you always. When you learn to navigate your difficulties with compassion and grace, you will also discover that joy will return. Yes, life is trouble, as Zorbas declares, and yet your difficulties and sorrows do not define you. They do not limit who you are. Sometimes, during periods when your struggles overwhelm you or last for a long time, you can mistake them for your life. You become used to difficulty; you become loyal to your suffering. You don't know who you would be without it. But your difficulties are not the end of the story, they are one part of it—they are part of your path to great love and understanding, a part of the dance of humanity..... (Extract from <https://www.spiritrock.org/2016/the-teach>)