

The Unbearable Lightness of Being Terminal

When initiating Africans and Westerners alongside Mandaza Kademwa, into the *ngoma* of the water spirits firstly I tell them to be attentive to synchronicities. As we approach the village of the water spirits the synchronicities come thick and many.

“This is the crossing of the river – to where the invisibles live. The language of the invisibles is synchronicity. Through synchronicity they are saying they know you are coming and they say you are welcome. Through synchronicity they are beckoning you towards the village of the water spirits – the spirits of peacemaking and healing. This is the crossing of the river – one hasn’t nearly arrived.

“ Its important at this juncture not to get infatuated with this moment because you could drown.

“Do not think you are special because the spirits are talking to you. If you think you are special you interfere with you own initiation. If another initiate thinks you are special, the fiction of specialness will mess with his or her passage.

“On the other side of the river you will meet keepers of the threshold. They may know they are -- keepers like Mandaza and I who know the trails to the village or they may be completely oblivious to the role they are playing in your initiation.”

I am aware that I am in an initiation right now – of entering the extraordinary geography of knowing that my death knows my name and exactly when to come and visit as God intends.

In this initiation there have been many keepers but I will focus on two. The first was, of course’ Jesus the coke addict and thief who stole everything including my identity.)

Jesus stole all my cash and access to money – so very much that “identity” that inheres in the hallucination of “security.”

The keepers of the threshold arrive to take you to the next level.

“Freedom is just another word for nothing less to lose.”

We know the obverse truth, “Slavery is just another word for having everything to lose.”

Jesus delivered me to that kind of freedom and to the *mojo* of the trickster.

My Mormon landlady draws for me a biblically based diagram illustrating the God knows exactly who stole my wallet and will exact DIVINE VENGEANCE.

"No, no " I say – "amor su enemigo.. Love your enemy."
Thank you O thief for delivering me to Gods hands.
Never felt so free."

Jesus the liberator.

This was followed by my second keeper far more oblivious than Jesus. I ll simply call him G. to preserve his anonymity as he is the proprietor of a small, easily recognized *tienda*.

A white guy from up north -- a *norteamericano*..

Jesus delivered me to a very private kind of freedom.
It was G who exacted the wound of empathy..

It was when I was recovering from few years of relapsing/remitting multiple sclerosis episodes when I saw the essential sacred aspect of the wound was empathy.

From simple unalloyed rage and an assault, G opened the next episode that J for which Jesus had prepared me.

In that odd country up north, "anger management" is the current lingo – as if the murderous passions that sometimes overtake are really just a management problem.

G. accused me of stealing an item that cost 20 pesos – a little over a dollar,.

I was a few pesos short so promised to return with the balance.

G assaulted me as thief and pushed me out of the door of his store and out on the sidewalk where I broke my tailbone.

This assault happened at the best and worst of times.

By way of "best" I'd just meditated a couple of hours which is always a silent renewal with the vows I ve taken as a member of Thich Nhat Hanh peacemaking order,

The vow not to make enemies.

I didn't respond to rage with rage

I didn't deck G.

Aside from Jesus the thief preparing me I've finally come out that I have secondary progressive multiple sclerosis.

That I am terminally ill.

G. showed me how deeply my initiations of being a peacemaker and my Buddhist vows have penetrated.

Thus the wound of empathy. A thief I most certainly am not.

But rage and violence I know well.

Not a small part of my spiritual practice has been about tempering rage.

When G. assaulted me I saw my own face in the mirror

This letter I wrote for G. and his wife N.

Dear G. (and N.)

Just a note of concern and consequences – over your moment of rage.

It arrived at the worst and best of times.

I've conceded that I am terminally ill with secondary progressive multiple sclerosis.

Aside from this little detail – Jesus – my next door neighbor and a cocaine addict – stole my wallet, all my cash my ID and passport. My ATM and credit cards – so all access to money that I have.

Forgive me for being late with the payment – I was preoccupied.

The consequences.

Damn my ass hurts and I do think you broke my tail bone.

(The "humor," such as it is that I'd done two hour meditation before our altercation – which is to say I wasn't provoked by your rage).

I didn't deck you.

I am an Aries and I know what it is to answer rage with rage.

The real and durable consequences are in your daily life G.

Pay attention to your nightmares and learn from them – especially those where you are being pursued and can't get away.

Be most kind to yourself and your dear wife.

Taint Shakespeare but the question beckons, "To litigate or not to litigate" that is the question.

There is a blessed clarity in being terminal.

I will not litigate though I think you know there is not a judge anywhere where assaulting a manifestly disabled man in broad daylight would for a moment fly.

I return to "mi casa de soledad" where I will spend a few months meditating until the snows drive me back to La Paz.
(The snows mess with my MS.)

Which is to say I will meditate on my mending tail bone.

The wound of empathy will be vividly with me until I heal.

Dear G.,

I know as do you that such rage is not without context. I was in fact a member of a terrorist organization in my early 20s and the overwhelming question of my life was whether I was willing to point a gun at somebody and pull the trigger.

What resonates from your assault is genuinely simple gratitude. You have reminded me of the values I live for – at the moment when I know death and I have an appointment.

THE PERKS OF BEING TERMINAL

- Uncommon patience with peoples flaws and imperfections.
- And my own flaws and imperfections.
- Not in the least distracted by any kind of "self-improvement project."
- To renounce perfectability.

- The “quantum” of self – its limited dimensions – is itself sacred and borders on (though is not itself) the Infinite.
- To chose well ones battles – which is to say forego fighting – fighting myself or a lost and angry other.
- Savor that ones day to day life is the domain of the sacred.
- Present moment – only present moment. Nothing to distract from from or distracted to.
- Illuminate and release all self-amplifying habits.
- Be kind and humble. Illuminate and release all fantasies of being larger than life and thusly superior to all and sundry.
- Continue with the silent, perpetual breaking of the heart.
- Release all that the heart breaks for.

That Mexico be

An echo of an echo.
In the chambers of blood kin
and ancestors

Echo of echo
Crypto-Jew in Baja

Santa Fe

Let Judeo-Christianity
Let evangelicos, catolicos
Mormones and Judeos

Sound being merely vibration

Vibration going still

Present moment has no creed.

God just the air we breathe
Guadalupe the earth we walk on

So kind this air
So kind this earth

This gravity

This body

