Columns
Spirituality



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"*When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.*"

Since I ran across this proverb many years ago, I've asked a "What if?" question when unusual events occurred in my life. "*What if this event is a teacher for me? What might be the lesson I'm invited to learn? What is the homework attending it? To what change might it be pointing?*"

Which nudges me into deeper awareness of possible meanings to events unfolding in present reality.

Back in the 1960s I was still discovering what being a young adult meant, and was both intrigued and dismayed by the freedom of the "flower children." The song "Aquarius/Let the Sunshine In" fascinated me. Listening over and over to the words instilled hope — hope for "harmony and understanding, sympathy and trust abounding." As a young teacher this became my guide for interacting with students.

Fast-forward to the mid 1970s when I was in an externship in spiritual direction, exploring deeper understandings of Scripture. Several other "what ifs" clicked into place.

I learned that ancient Essenes believed that the love energy of God was being poured out on Earth. We sang at Christmas: "*In the sixth age of the world, Jesus Christ ... was made flesh.*" Umm, "sixth age": I wondered what that meant, especially because that "Aquarius" song also referred to an age of "peace" and "love." So I researched "age" and found it calculates to 2,160 years.

And one "great year" occurs every 25,920 calendar years — a period when everything is primed for change.

Furthermore, the Essenes believed it would take another full age of the world for this love energy of God to reach enough fullness to be made manifest, to unfold in our world. So, *what if* that Age of Aquarius was more than just a song? *What if* there is a deep-down pattern in events that heralds great change and the manifestation of the love energy of God?

What if some of the Judaic Scriptures heralded this awesome reality? So I opened my eyes to read some of the ancient prophecies in a "new" way:

> See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it (Isaiah 43:19)?
>
> For I know the plans I have in mind for you, says our God; plans for your welfare not for woe, plans to give you a future full of hope (Jeremiah 29:11).
>
> I will put my spirit in you that you may live. … I have promised and I will do it (Ezekiel 37:14).

Umm, there was a debate about what "New Age" might mean. For some it became associated with witchcraft, with Satanism, with cults, with an anti-religious movement. Others explored the meanings the ancient people gave to the term, and saw it as a time of new insights, great potential and unfolding transformation.

A specific focus was consternation at the time about "Y2K," questions whether electronic data and programmed calculations would be safe. There was a great collective sigh of relief when all seemed in sync at the start of the new millennium. (Note to self: pay attention — might this be related to that "dawning" of the Age of Aquarius?)

Then, when 2012 approached, there were terrifying ads, bulletin boards, videos and films. Some were convinced the "apocalypse" or the "end of the world" was imminent. The mistaken idea was that Dec. 21, 2012, was the coming together of calendars from ancient civilizations pointing literally to "the end."

Ancient wisdom saw it as the end of an era and start of a new time period, pregnant with a choice point — that we could do life differently, with understanding and compassion and hope, or we could let destructive, chaotic forces gather momentum and power.

What if as earth community (now seen from space as one fragile, blue ball without boundaries of separation) we collectively are making a hazardous choice? Certainly, there is much global chaos among nations/faith traditions/subgroups (racial, ethnic, sexual, age, sexual orientation) as we wrestle with the great pandemic. *What if* all of this is "teacher"? What might it ask us to learn? What is our homework? What change is needed?

What if the homework is to integrate harmony, understanding, sympathy and trust, replacing suspicion of and oppression of others? And to replace self-glorification, control, arrogance, extravagance and hostility — with acceptance, welcome, humility, sharing and connection?

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Concurrently we are expanding our understanding of the New Universe Story and creation-centered spirituality. The first aspect — *Via Positiva* — when all is going well and life seems good and all fits in place and makes sense: that seems easy. It has also been the experience of much of the human community for several hundred years.

Now, in this new age, a new pattern emerges: *Via Negativa*, the inverse of that — much more problematic.

Many years ago, I saw a powerful play by Tennessee Williams. In the first act, lots is happening as we meet the characters. And on the front porch an elderly woman is putting together a jigsaw puzzle. All through the action and dialogue she simply puts in piece after piece, saying nothing. In act two the audience is made aware that under the surface there is anguish and hate and fear and despair. At the end of the act the silent puzzle maker suddenly gets up and flings the unfinished puzzle in all directions, screaming "The pieces don't fit."

Today, with chaos growing and a global pandemic ravaging every corner of earth, we are screaming also: *The pieces don't fit. Via Negativa!*

What if when "the pieces don't fit" in the changing deep pattern of our new reality, a subtle learning beckons? That God is here in the dark and unknown and in the questions — present in a way that was not possible when all was going well. *What if* I/we are asked now to find a new appearance, maybe even a new name for God? What if God is teaching us something we need to wrestle with but cannot explain?

Creation-centered spirituality invites us to enter deeply into *Via Negativa* to find a new, emerging pattern, perhaps the path for the love energy of God to manifest more fully. Perhaps we cannot move through and beyond *Via Negativa* until we come to terms with the chaos.

Via Creativa — the new, the different, the unusual, something not tried and true but radically stretching, outside the box, away from comfort zones — is on the other side of *Via Negativa.* And whether our plan is for one or 20 years, I/we can only do our homework as it is placed before us. Our sacred task is to wait in darkness and silence for The New to reveal. And that "new" cannot reveal unless and until we deliberately indwell the darkness.

When we begin to learn the lessons of the chaotic, the dark, the "unknowing" and move with a new creativity, we come to *Via Transformativa* — the time of justice-making.

God reveals God-self and leads into the most extraordinary conditions and opportunities. The time revealed will initiate a "new heavens and a new earth; the former things will have passed away" (Revelations 21:4).

What if this time is our time? *What if* the teacher is here? *What if* there is homework to do? *What if* we are being asked to welcome change we cannot even imagine?