

HOMeward

(Reflections and Ponderables)



I have a plum tree which I bought about three years ago. I planted it in my back garden. Well positioned, facing the sun, I dug in bags of manure to feed the root system for its future fruits. I had visions of eating cold, sweet, juicy plums, in summer.

Just before the approach of Spring, my functional back garden looks like a denuded little forest ravaged by the long, cold, icy fingers of the Cape winter.

Where else in my life have I seen this, I thought?

Amidst all of the wintery gloom my plum tree announces itself adorned with the most delicate little pink and white flower blossoms all along its long, leafless, brown, leathery, stalky branches. What a show, what a breath-taking statement it makes to all. The promise of my sweet juicy plums this summer, must surely lay buried in the promise of its delicate beautiful pink and white blossoms. What a joy filled anticipation.

In November 2011, while the plums began to look plump, red and almost ripe they all fell off like red meteors, smashing themselves to the ground, in a squelchy

mess, littering the base of the tree. For the next three weeks I had to carry the disappointment of a miscarried harvest. I had invested so much time and effort into this potential harvest. Needless to say, my gardener and I were deeply disappointed by the turn of events, premature ripening and a feigned bumper harvest. Where else in my life have I seen this, I thought?

My gardener diligently counted each fallen plum and recorded a total loss of 2554 plums. What did I miss, what could so stealthily have caused so much destruction amidst the promise of the bloom?

It was the dreaded fruit fly. It laid its eggs deep into the maturing plums.

The hatching larvae then began its destructive work by feeding on the soft flesh of the plum fruit. Steadily they ate their way to the core of the plums. This caused the plums to prematurely ripen and rot. As the plums dropped to the ground the larvae crawled out and burrowed into the soil to develop into adult flies to start their cycle of destruction all over again. They are tiny, stealthy and insidious.

Upon reflection, I realised that my own inner dance of self-doubt and self-sabotage within the daily labyrinth of my life reminded me that my plum tree might well have yet, an important lesson to impart.

For, like a beautiful blossomed promise, I also stand contrasted in the cycled season of life, uniquely gifted. (We all do!)

I also stand contrasted in the cycled season of life uniquely gifted.



I hold within myself and for the world, the fruits of my giftedness to affirm that my life matters and to make things beautiful. When I share my giftedness with the world, my life takes on meaning and I move away from my narcissism and self-absorbed behaviour. To quote the late Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, A de Mello, "There is only one cause for every evil on earth, "this belongs to me"."

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I'm called to dance my life like a whirling dervish who receives from the great Divine, knowing that what is received must be shared to complete the generous act of unending reciprocity.

We all, like my plum tree, have to struggle through and emerge from our own winters of discontent to offer ourselves and the world something beautiful...cool, sweet and juicy.

It is not always easy to emerge from our Winters.

Let's consider how we deal with our emotions. I can so often get "stuck" in my emotions of anger, fear, sadness and

shame. In the first instance, these emotions are all very important indicators on the "dashboard" of my daily experiences.

They indicate what is actually going on inside of me. They signal to me what my sacred boundaries are, also telling me whether I lost something important, what might be frustrating or blocking me and whether I'm in danger of being harmed.

Essentially they are all important hints guiding me toward what really needs my attention. There is no standard or exact period when each of us should move thro-

ugh our emotions. It is different for each one of us. Sometimes we know when we are ready to move on, other times we know we need help and support to facilitate our moving through some emotions, e.g. grief or forgiveness etc.

I often find myself over identifying with my emotions so much so that at times it makes me just plain unproductive.

This habit of over identification can lead so often to fear, insecurity, weakening of self-confidence resulting in a poor self-image

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and an over dependence on others for approval.

It is not healthy to be slavishly dependent on others for your inner confidence, joy and peace. They may affirm and love you but to wait for others to do for you what you must and can only do for yourself will be like “waiting for godot”. You will only lurch from one sad, disappointment and empty episode to another. Worst still, you set yourself up to become a ball in someone else’s pinball machine. Hey, some people are master pinball players.

Ingrid Jonker (1933-1965) poem “Ragdoll” most appropriately speaks to this theme:

I am the ragdoll that does not speak
and only depends on your love
At night, i lay blind and deaf
and no longer lift my head
my hands do not move and my body
grows cold and stiff with your departure
without your help I cannot walk
you bought me without a second thought
and will probably burn me carelessly one
Guy Fawkes night and laugh about it
I am the ragdoll without a soul
my pain, your loudly celebrated feast.

Most, if not all of the people we admire as heroes have had to travel through their own trials and tribulation to find their gold.

I have learnt that happiness is a quiet, gentle confidence bubbling up from an inner knowing born from contemplation and generous action in the world.

Happiness is not my external façade, often based on a survivalist, primal-reactive, capricious and skittish base. To cultivate this inner bonded, self-assuredness, we can begin a journey of self-awareness in which we recognise our insatiable need to over-identify or over-invest in control, dominance, security, certainty, no-pain etc.

My plum tree experience has taught me that we must, like vigilant gardeners take care that the fruit flies of life do not burrow and invest these insidious poison egg larvae into our life; its encounters, experiences, challenges and circumstances.

When I refer to poison larvae I also mean them to be the prevailing air of over-optimism so prevalent in our corporate and public discourse which encourages its adherents to believe in a world without pain, disappointment and doubt (super-positivism). These recipes of blissfulness are sold with “gung ho” energy, business finesse and psychological and spiritual certitude by Colgate smiling, self-

confidence and personal mastery gurus. My word of advice...Run Forest run!

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So we too cannot escape it, we can only work with it and through it and therein, find our True Self.

There is a revealing story of a monk living in the Egyptian desert who was so tormented by temptation that he could bear it no longer. So he decided to abandon his cell and go somewhere else.

As he was putting on his sandals to carry out his resolve he saw another monk not far from where he stood who was also putting his sandals on.

"Who are you?" he asked the stranger.

"I am your Self," was the reply. "If it is on my account that you are leaving this place, I would have you know that no matter where you go I shall go with you."

We must understand that failure,

I would have you know that no matter where you go I shall go with you.

limitations and setbacks are all part and parcel of our life's journey. To merely wish them away forever on a cloud of positive mantras is inviting open season silliness. Rather than wishing away failure and setbacks it's better to know how to deal with it when they do appear, because they will appear. More often than not, these challenges come to teach us something, if we are prepared to hear the message.

Remember, "what you don't admit you will transmit." Anon

Back to my botany example

So what has this patchwork of "ponderables" got to do with the plums? Well, I believe that we all, without exceptions, have something beautiful and worthwhile to offer ourselves and the world, through which our lives become happy and meaningful. Each of us without exception has blossoms that promise to fruit and gift our world.

I now know after much asking around and research what I have to do this Summer to rescue my plums from that dreaded fruit fly. I guess we all from time to time have to hold reflection and become aware of the fruit flies we have allowed to influence our beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. How can we safeguard ourselves against them?

To begin with we can practice meditation, prayer or some form of spiritual exercise. This will assist you in becoming more self-aware and enter a grace-filled mystery beyond yourself. You can also study and read books, write by keeping a journal. You can seek a mentor, teacher or spiritual director who with care and sensitivity will guide you carefully. You can follow a teaching, your current religion, or explore one which after careful discernment appeals to your deepest needs. You can also put yourself out there and be of assistance by doing works of charity.

A fitting extract with which to end this motley of HOMEWARD reflections is Grimm's Fairy Tale Hansel and Gretel.

When they had walked for two hours, they came to a great stretch of water. "We cannot cross," said Hansel, "I see no foot-plank, and no bridge." "And there is also no ferry," answered Gretel, "but a white duck is swimming there; if I ask her, she will help us over." Then she cried:

"Little duck, little duck, dost thou see,
Hansel and Gretel are waiting for thee?
There's never a plank, or bridge in sight,
Take us across on thy back so white.



The duck came to them, and Hansel seated himself on its back, and told his sister to sit by him. "No," replied Gretel, "that will be too heavy for the little duck; she shall take us across, one after the other." The good little duck did so, and when they were once safely across and had walked for a short time, the forest seemed to be more and more familiar to them, and at length they saw from afar their father's house. Then they began to run, rushed into the parlour, and threw themselves round their father's neck.

The man had not known one happy hour since he had left the children in the forest; the woman, however, was dead. Gretel emptied her pinafore until pearls and precious stones ran about the room, and Hansel threw one handful after another out of his pocket to add to them. Then all anxiety was at an end, and they lived together in perfect happiness.

In conclusion, the journey homeward does not guarantee instant relief or answers. The journey homeward is less about success and certainty and more about being faithful and okay with the seeming ambiguity at times. The journey homeward to your True Self has its own unique footpath to show you, who you really are. As you journey, you will however, begin to discover a hard-to-explain knowing, peace and strength, an Ally to walk with you through your life.

You must attempt to build an intimate relationship with this Ally with much discipline and commitment (no desperation required). No one is more responsible for your growth, development, peace and joy than yourself.

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