

What is Most Important

well or beginning poorly, what is important is simply to begin – David Whyte

Dear beloved, One of the most common questions I receive is, "Where do I begin?". David Whyte's poem Beginnings is full of wisdom to answer exactly that question.

well or beginning poorly, what is important is simply to begin but the ability to make a good beginning is also an art form, beginning well involves a clearing away of the crass, the irrelevant, and the complicated to find the beautiful, often hidden lineaments of the essential and the necessary.

The clearing away of the crass, the irrelevant and complicated sums up exactly my sentiments on healing and what I have seen to be the potential power of Gemmos. Unfortunately, there is a dominant storyline that healing is complex and layered with complications. And the more experts one involves the better the results.

That is so far from what I have found to be true.

I believe healing is about taking one courageous step after another and those first steps are away from the systems that no longer serve you.

To do this one must be courageous enough to turn off the chatter and tune into your soul, that has known all along you would find your way back.

As Whyte says about beginnings, healing is an art form. It requires curiosity and creativity that can only be accessed when you have left your fear behind.

Leaving behind what you have been conditioned to believe and traveling this road alone has its challenges as fear is waiting at every turn.

That is why I've put together this visual guide to support your artful beginning. I think you will discover here what is needed to feel safe enough to explore the truth of what is essential and necessary for you.

I'll be stepping away for the next two weeks, spending nourishing time with family out and about in Western North Carolina. Pauses are so important. They provide an opportunity to recharge and realign to what is true and real and important.

I hope you have plans for a pause this summer for yourself whether it be a long weekend or a week. Perhaps in that time you can reflect on what is your next step and how you ensure you take it.

In the meantime be sure to follow me on Instagram where I will be sharing my travels.



Be well,

Gluten Free Berry Cobbler

Just in time for berry season, this simple cobbler is so versatile it can be made with whatever fruit is in season. A cast-iron skillet makes the perfect baking dish and use your toaster oven to keep your kitchen cool.

Inspired by Vegan Richa's recipe I changed it up to be GF and used a mix of berries.

Ingredients

Fruit

- 3 cups (444 g) of mixed fresh or frozen berries
- 1 tsp lemon or lime zest
- 2 tbsp lemon or lime juice
- A splash of maple syrup or 2 tbsp coconut sugar

Topping

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (75 g) sorghum or light buckwheat flour
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (25 g) tapioca flour
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (25 g) almond flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- Pinch or two of salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (50 g) coconut sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tea freshly grated nutmeg or ground nutmeg
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (175 ml) full fat coconut milk separating the thick cream and milk. Chill can for best results.

Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 375 deg F (190 C).
2. Add berries to a cast iron skillet (8 inch), mixing in lemon zest, juice, and sugar.
3. Blend the three flours in a bowl with a whisk adding, baking powder, salt, sugar, and nutmeg.
4. Add 1/2 cup of the thick coconut cream mixture blending lightly with a fork. Add just enough of the thinner milk until it is the consistency of a muffin batter.
5. Use a small ice cream scoop or serving spoon to drop and arrange spoonfuls of the thick batter on top berries. Sprinkle top with a tsp of coconut sugar/other sugar on the batter.
6. Bake for 25-30 mins checking after 20 mins if in a convection toaster oven.
7. Remove from the oven when the biscuit topping is baked through.
8. Allow it to cool at least 10 mins before serving.
9. While perfect on its own a scoop of vegan vanilla ice cream isn't a bad idea ☐
10. Keeps up to 3 days in the fridge, but who will have leftovers?

A Word on Phenology

"What I see in nature is a magnificent structure that we can comprehend only very imperfectly, and that must fill a thinking person with a feeling of humility." – Albert Einstein

Dear beloved, It's birthing season for our neighborhood white-tailed deer herd. Following the herd through the cycle of the year provides precious reminders of what is real and true. Their cycles are something I've grown to count on during times when other things feel less dependable.

In Autumn, as our Texas temps begin their slow descent, the bucks make their way from the woodlands to join the herd for mating season. It's not unusual to find an 8 point buck staring me down as I step outdoors to greet the day. Then, just as quickly as they arrived, the bucks disappear when winter arrives. We are then left with the peaceful contentedness of the does and their maturing offspring. As spring moves to summer and the Texas temperatures soar the does late in their pregnancy, heavy now with fawn, begin congregating in the shade of the small mixed wood grove in my back garden. There they spend lazy late afternoons grooming one another and resting.

Mid May the babies begin to arrive and what a treat it is. This week one was born right in the front garden and it has made our land his home. Heading out to pick herbs yesterday I spotted him curled up in the grass napping. So peaceful and innocent I wanted to join him. It will be a few weeks before he joins the herd and in the mean time I will treasure his presence, so honored to know that he feels safe and secure sharing space.

This simple act of becoming a careful observer has granted me a comforting sense of alignment. Co-residing with this herd that lives in balance with nature reminds me that I can choose to do that as well. That sounds in good in theory but what does that really mean? I believe it begins with first recognizing and acknowledging the change of seasons.

You can do this despite where you live by being a keen observer. It doesn't take much awareness to be awed by the everyday miracles within plants and animals. Discover a space for your observations where you can check in on a daily basis and note what is changing and why.

This actually has a name, it is called phenology, the observance of cyclical and seasonal natural events. These events occur all around us in nature: from plants blooming or setting seed, to migrating animals arriving or leaving, or the first or last killing frost of the year. For millennia, these kinds of observations were not only interesting and enriching to our human ancestors, but their lives and safety depended on it. To be successful with hunting, gathering and later cultivation of food sources our ancestors were required to maintain an intimate connection to the natural world through careful observations and record-keeping.

Aldo Leopold (1887-1948) America's grandfather of Phenology, dedicated his life to the observation and documentation of nature's cycles. Spending weekends at his farm property, "the shack" along the Wisconsin river he and his family conducted their own land restoration projects that included restoring prairie grasses and reforestation. His experiences inspired his prolific writing of essays, assembled upon his passing to become, A Sand County Almanac.

Another way to observe and document nature is through poetry. In my opinion no one has done that better than Mary Oliver. Her lens brings to life the minute preciousness that can so often be taken for granted. And so I will close here with a favorite of mine.

The Fawn, Mary Oliver Sunday morning and mellow as precious metal

The church bells rang, but I went
To the woods instead. A fawn, too new
For fear, rose from the grass
And stood with its spots blazing,
And knowing no way but words,
No trick but music,
I sang to him. He listened.

His small hooves struck the grass.
Oh what is holiness? The fawn came closer,
Walked to my hands, to my knees. I did not touch him.

I only sang, and when the doe came back
Calling out to him dolefully

And he turned and followed her into the trees, Still I sang,
Not knowing how to end such a joyful text, Until far off the bells once more tipped and tumbled
And rang through the morning, announcing



The going forth of the blessed. Be well,

Potato Leek Pizza

Make this once and you will wonder why you ever ate pizza any other way. The potatoes slices turn golden and crispy on top and soft and creamy where they lay against the earthy layer of greens. I like a bit of the heat that red chili pepper flakes offer, but adjust according to your preferences. Play around with the greens and allium addition, leeks, shallots, sweet onions and red onions will each bring their own unique signature.

Ingredients

- 1 large or 2 medium potatoes, slice thin as you can
- 2 leeks, cut lengthwise, wash and sliced thin
- 1 bunch of kale, strip from the stems and chiffonade (spinach and chard also work well)
- Sea salt
- Red pepper flakes
- Olive oil
- Fresh or dried thyme

Directions

1. Place potato slices in a bath of ice water and allow to sit for atleast 15 mins.
2. Steam or blanch greens until just tender. Drain and dry well, removing all water.
3. In a heavy skillet over medium heat warm oil. Add leeks, saute until soft, watching not to burn. Add red pepper flakes, kale and a bit of salt to taste. Cover and allow the greens and leeks to cook until quite soft. Drain off any accumulated liquid. Set aside to cool.

4. Drain potato slices and lay out on a dishtowel to dry.
5. Preheat oven to 450 degrees
6. On a sheet of parchment dusted with brown rice flour roll out this GF pizza dough or dough of your choice to desired thickness.
7. Pile on the cooked greens, smoothing the top.
8. In a bowl gently toss potato slices with a bit of oil to coat evenly.
9. Covering the full size of the pizza, layer potatoes in rows if your crust is a rectangle like mine or in a circular fashion if it is round.
10. Sprinkle with thyme, a bit of sea salt and slip it onto a preheated pizza stone or preheated sheet pan in a very hot, 450 degree oven for 30-40 mins. Cooking time will vary depending on the thickness of your crust. I bake mine in a convection toaster oven and it is often ready after 25 minutes. Allow to sit for 5 mins and slice to serve.

It's All OK

***“Promise me you’ll always remember:
You’re braver than you believe and stronger than you seem,
and smarter than you think.” – A. A. Milne***

Dear beloved,

As I reflect on my growth cycles over the past two years, it is difficult to pinpoint the moment I recognized I would be ok, my family would be ok and we are all being called to transform.

I certainly didn't get this message by reading or listening to the news or was it gleaned from any social media outlet. This comfort and reassurance came from the natural world. The river I swim in, the trees I share my land with, and the mama deer nursing her new offspring have shown up, again and again with the same message. Hey, you're doing great. You will figure this out, you already have the tools you need.

Over time I came to terms with the fact that physical, emotional, spiritual, and even financial challenges were there for my transformation and there was no need to be fearful. I can adapt, we can adapt to the changing environment despite the loud, constant, aggressive fear-mongering narrative that is shared by the "experts."

My increased ease and confidence didn't occur overnight but rather in cycles. Working with personal obstacles taught me that pain, emotional, physical, or spiritual can teach compassion. Pain has a purpose and it's not to inflict suffering. Pain encourages growth. I believe my ability to accept and hold space for the personal and collective challenges we face has been greatly supported by shifting my focus to a shamanic lens. When my eyes were able to adjust to this new way of seeing, so arrived a new way of being. This new way of being has led me to find meaning even in the face of heart-wrenching and in some regions life-threatening polarization that this orchestrated storyline of fear has caused.

So what would draw this Catholic educated, Irish woman to shamanism? And isn't shamanism a bit dark or woo-woo? Totally relevant questions and certainly ones I also asked myself. Delving into the topic I was first struck by the fact that Shamanism is not a religion, like Buddhism it's a philosophy. Shamanism is a way of seeing ourselves in harmony with the natural world. It has been practiced globally by all indigenous cultures to which we are all connected. My lineage is Celtic and shamanism was widely practiced by my ancestors.

As my explorations expanded and my practice deepened the teacher in me longed to pass along my learnings. And in a similar fashion to my Polyvagal Theory explorations, I have begun a new podcast series, Shamanism, Metaphysics, and Grace with my mentor Jyoti Wind. Discovering for myself the wealth of wisdom within Jyoti, I was compelled to capture and share what I could. The interview process has been a wonderful way to continue my growth and encourage others who might ordinarily pass on an invitation to study shamanism.

I'd love to demystify Shamanic practices for you. Have a look at our first two episodes on my YouTube channel and see if this could be a useful lens to apply as you navigate the dominant culture of fear in our current time. In the first episode Shamanism and Inner Tools you will find an accessible and clear introduction to the topic. And weaving in a bit of timely Astrology the second episode addresses Mercury in Retrograde and the Inner Child. If you prefer to listen to the podcast version you will find Shamanism, Metaphysics and Grace on Apple Podcasts, and Spotify. Be sure to subscribe to keep up with this series.

Until next week,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lauren". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the text "Until next week,".

Noodle Bowls with Spicy Tahini Sauce

I love a good noodle bowl; perhaps the freedom to design unique combinations speaks to my inner rebel child! Regardless of the reason, these are just pure joy to make and consume. I hope you can work this recipe into your menu next week.

Ingredients

Sauce

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup tahini
- One lime, juiced
- 1 T Maple Syrup
- 1 T White or Chickpea Miso
- 1-2 T Gochujang Paste, adjust as you prefer
- Water to thin to desired consistency
- Salt and Pepper to taste

Blend in a mini processor or with an immersion blender until smooth, thinning with water until you reach a pourable consistency. Adjust seasonings, adding more chili paste for heat if preferred.

Noodles

One package of noodles*, prepared according to directions, rinsed in cold water, and sprinkled with sesame oil to keep separated. I keep the noodles in a colander with a lid over warm water while waiting for the veggies to cook.

* King Soba offers a wide variety of organic, gluten-free noodles.

Vegetables

Steam or Stir-fry a selection of veggies.

I used Brussel sprouts, bok choy, scallions, sweet peppers, and mushrooms in the photo above.

Depending on their size, cut in half or quarter, brussels sprouts and baby bok choy. While they cook, in a skillet, quickly sauté scallions, sweet peppers, and mushrooms.

This recipe makes a perfect meal between shopping trips as it allows the freedom to use up the various bits of vegetables that remain. Try using a combination of textures, flavors, and colors for a well-balanced bowl. One type of bitter green is always a great addition.

Assemble bowls by dividing noodles, arranging vegetables, and drizzling them with sauce.

Sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds or chopped cilantro.

Do You Trust Your Body? Or, Lessons from Rowan

*“There is a life-force within your soul, seek that life.
There is a gem in the mountain of your body, seek that
mine.” -Rumi*

Dear beloved, Since I first held her tiny unfolding form hours after birth, it's been clear my granddaughter Rowan is here on a mission. She is a teacher and her lessons are there for all willing to receive. Last Sunday, as that hi-tone tension in my arm dissipated, I decided a healthy dose of sweet Rowan was exactly what was needed.

At nearly 10 months she wears well the genetic will and the determination of both her parents. But Rowan is also guided by something much more profound than will, her inner compass. It is that compass that she came into the world trusting. She wakes each morning checking in and receiving feedback that she is safe in her body and safe in her world.

Today, and hopefully for many days to come, Rowan accepts this without question. Her development actually depends on this relationship of trust. There are none of the stories or entanglements with fate that the adult mind likes to create. Rowan's trust is pure and true. Observing her master the art of walking, I notice the way in which she tests and accepts her limitations. When there's a bump or mom strays too far, she asks and welcomes comfort. And when she reaches her limit she surrenders to rest.

There you have it, a simple yet profound strategy for life, scripted not by the mind but rather an innate core trust in her body and the messages it provides. You were born with that same script, but along the way it was edited here and there. Then stories emerged to explain the edits and before long physical conditions to match the storylines. Like a ball of yarn, where it begins and ends is lost.

It's not right or wrong it just is, but as an adult you have the autonomy to hit pause, rewind, and rediscover that sense of safety, that trust. It will be like coming across that sparkling spring of water after an arduous hike in the blazing sun. You might not trust what you see, but one cool drink and you will remember. Because just like all of the trauma that is in your cells, so too is this innate trust in your body. It was there first. How do you get back there? Well you first have to recognize where you are. Let's go back to Rowan's lessons.

Do you test and then accept your physical, mental and emotional limitations? Trusting the process?

Are you able to ask and receive comfort, from yourself or a loved one?

When you reach your limit do you take the time to rest and rejuvenate?

Hmmmm. Anything come up for you in your answers? If so I'd say you just discovered the exact spot to begin. Beautiful. So, work with that this next week. Observe and catch yourself when you push beyond your limitations. Practice asking for comfort from yourself or others. And for goodness sake take time to rest when you've hit your limit. In the meantime I'll check back in with my teacher Rowan to see if she has some further lessons.

Until next week,



Sweet Potato Pizza Crust

I must admit that the pizza fan in me was a bit skeptical when my friend Jhuma proposed this recipe for dinner. But being a lover of veggies in all forms I was game to try. Not only did it win me over but I was anticipating the delicious leftovers the next day.

Adapted from the Medical Medium

Crust Ingredients:

- 2 sweet potatoes, peeled and diced (yields about 1 cup cooked sweet potato)
- 3 T tapioca starch
- 3 T coconut flour
- 1/2 t dried oregano
- 1/2 t sea salt

A purchased or prepared marinara sauce

Suggested Toppings

- ½ red onion finely sliced
- 3-4 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/4 red bell pepper, diced
- 5-6 olives
- 1/4 small zucchini, sliced
- Handful of fresh arugula
- Handful of fresh basil
- Vegan Cheese

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400F.
2. Place the diced sweet potatoes in a steamer. Cover with a lid and steam for 10-15 minutes, until tender. Remove and cool.

3. Mash sweet potatoes in a bowl with a fork or potato masher until smooth. Measure out 1 cup of mashed sweet potato and leave the rest for another recipe.
4. Blend together the mashed sweet potato with the flours and starch dried oregano and sea salt. Set aside.
5. Prepare a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and place the dough on top. Using your hands, spread the dough to 1/4 inch thickness. Bake in the oven for 20 minutes, until hardened on top.
6. Top the pizza with the marinara sauce and your choice of toppings. Bake for another 10 minutes, until browned on the edges. Add fresh arugula or basil and serve immediately.

Makes 1 amazing pizza- Enjoy!

Restoring Immunity Gemmo

Memo: Grey Alder

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