

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,

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,

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, appearing to read 'Lauren', written in dark ink.

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,



The Trickster Visits

"One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star." -Friedrich Nietzsche

Dear beloved, My writing inspiration likes to show up in those liminal hours of dawn and then a morning river swim fills in the gap. As my week progresses I will see glimpses of the same theme pop up here and there. Sometimes it's in a podcast, a book, a conversation with a friend or in classes I teach. I am so grateful to play my part in this co-creative process. The role I willingly accepted is that of synthesizer, sharing the finished product as your Saturday morning newsletter.

This week unfolded a bit differently. If you have been plugged into what's been happening in our collective energy field no doubt your week was as wonky as mine. We've had quite the astrological ride leading through Mercury's entering its preshadow on the 26th and today's new moon eclipse.

Last weekend I arrived home from Maine filled with inspiration for my Gemmo Village. Monday morning I began some notes on the theme of fate vs. destiny. The words flowed and my friend the river offered her support. Then came Tuesday morning when I was visited by an old, not so welcome friend. My fingers, wrist, elbow and shoulder joint of my right side were acutely inflamed. It was what Alaine Duncan refers to in her book, *The Tao of Trauma*, a high-tone sympathetic state.

A high-tone state is a term she uses for a neurological dump of stored energy that pours into the muscles and joints to support a fight or flight response. The state according to Duncan, "leaves us prone to musculoskeletal and emotional constriction and rigidity." I embodied that definition to a 't'. Not only was I physically constricted, but it flowed into to my emotional state as well.

Whether I attempted to convey the words swirling in my head by pen or keyboard, the pain would stop me in my tracks.

Having past experience with this state, I have learned that addressing the inflammation directly isn't helpful. Until I offer my nervous system the necessary cues of safety to shift out of fight or flight, my pain still remains. I am so grateful to have learned and avoid the trap of what can become excruciating physical therapy, chiropractic releases, or supplements that never reach the root of the problem. Only when the Autonomic Nervous System receives the cues of safety it needs will it drop the state of protection and relief is experienced.

If you happen to be new here you might want to tune into this episode on the states of protection that I recorded last year with colleagues Maegan Lemp and Cameron Scott. So here I am, stuck in this state of intense pain and the very tool that helps me process and regulate-writing-was physically impossible. I spent most of Wednesday and Thursday vacillating from a state of sympathetic fight to dorsal depletion. It was then the idea of the trickster archetype came to me in a dream.

The trickster loves to show up to weave doubt just as one takes determined steps forward toward destiny. The trickster's role is to test. Are you made of what it takes to meet your destiny or are you fated for failure?

Perfect. Now it all begins to come together. Developmental trauma creates within habitual patterns of flight or flight. Even when we learn this logically, our cells are still wired for this pattern. In my case it was likely a subconscious thought that triggered my protection shortly after I publicly shared my dream for a future Gemmo Village. And when that old chronic pain arrived unannounced, of course it made me question my capabilities. So here I am again reminded of that narrow strip of middle ground. The often hidden path between giving up my power or forcing something with my will.

I'm thrilled by this lesson in using my trickster archetype to elicit positive growth. Certainly it would have been more welcome with less pain, but it would not have been so profound. Note to self: I can surrender to what is AND keep my power and sovereignty.

Here again I am reminded of what I know without a shadow of doubt:

Our physical body IS our best teacher. It is our ally here while walking this physical world to lead us to incarnate fully and become our highest self.

Let's explore this further together,

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A Hoped-for Future

“A powerful mental shift takes place when we stop telling ourselves why something can’t happen. When we can envision a hoped-for future, we strengthen our belief that it is possible.” -Joanna Macy, “Allegiance to Life”

Dear beloved, When I'm called to go to the inner depths where my own voice is strong and clear, it is stillness that I seek. Midcoast Maine, unlike any place I have traveled, delivers a quality of stillness that is unique to this land. On this land, my heart and breath settles. The cues of safety received allow me to explore the deepest yearnings of my soul, the longing to create something lasting that will give for generations to come. I've spent the last seven days just outside Waldoboro, Maine. Residing in a refurbished barn with soaring ceilings, exposed beams, and windows open to the stand of trees that protectively circle the property. A walk across the hayfield and I am at the rocky shore. It was an idyllic spot to put words to big dreams and consider necessary steps to bring them to life.

Joining me were two dear Gemmo companions, women who were among a small group that physically held space as I taught my very first Gemmo class, nearly a decade ago. Today they tenderly hold that space again as we organically unfold this next Gemmo chapter. Do you have a dream you have carried close to your heart? If so, you know just how scary it can be to reveal it to others. Because once it is released it becomes vulnerable to thoughts and opinions that may not be in alignment with yours. So in its earliest stages I have been a protective mother, yet I know that sharing will give it the wings to take flight and evolve.

At the heart of my dream is a physical place, a home, for a Gemmo Foundation. A not-for-profit center for on-site training, research, and community outreach to support the sustainable growth of Gemmotherapy in the United States. Accompanying that will be a cooperative of growers in different regions allowing for the production of the widest range of extracts possible.

No small dream, but it is the next natural step for my work and at 62 I know with the help of this community there will be the energy to bring it all to reality in my lifetime.

When I set out to import Gemmos to the U.S. years ago it was simply the next step needed for my clients. I had built a private practice in which Gemmos were an integral piece. And so I got on a plane to Europe and returned with an agreement with Plant Extrakt. It took another six months to get them across a US border- learning more about regulations than I ever dreamed-but we did it and here we are.

I have accepted the shifts in how business must be done in years to come and local production is the responsible direction to take. It is a large undertaking that may take years to accomplish, but cooperatively it is within reach.

And so now in spring as the buds of the trees begin to open, unfurling leaves to collect sunlight, I will begin the process of collecting what I will need to build my hoped-for future and share the progress as it occurs.

I am grateful to include you in my dream and grateful for the stillness of this great land of the Wabanaki confederacy, People of the Dawnland, that we have renamed Maine.

Dream big,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lauren". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large, sweeping initial 'L'.

Following My Heart

"To know how to choose a path with heart is to learn how to follow intuitive feeling. Logic can tell you superficially where a path might lead to, but it cannot judge whether your heart will be in it." -Jean Shinoda Bolen

Dear beloved,

Two weeks ago we headed to Nashville, TN. The plan was to travel across the state in search of growing areas for Gemmo trees, shrubs and vines. What I was looking for has transformed these past days and I have come to realize my lens is now more defined.

Departing Texas on this journey my goal was to find suitable climates, soil and biodiversity. That list of requirements soon expanded.

Climate and soil are important but lose their value without a cultural respect for the land. How I define this continues to evolve, but on a basic level it is about working with rather than against the needs of the land. While soil can be amended, treating land as an inexhaustible resource can not. Certainly not inherent to Tennessee, we all live with great inconsistencies that play out in both small and large communities.

But with this now as my focus, I saw time and again examples of what appeared as commitment to restoration or preservation of the land accompanied with broad strokes of disregard.

A fine example was in Knoxville, a city that prides itself on its incredibly well planned and marketed urban wilderness that then allowed developers to line the banks of its rivers with golf courses that consistently drain pesticides into the flowing waters.

So after ten days of my heart growing heavier by the moment, I woke inspired. Do you remember the choose your own adventure books? The interactive series from the 80's where YOU decide the outcome of the story? I suddenly saw an alternative ending. Three days before this story in my search for Gemmo tree series was about to end I suggested a plot twist. And because I have a husband who also follows his heart, we packed up and headed further east to North Carolina.

Now to be fair North Carolina has it's own challenges with negotiating urban growth and protecting the land. But in spite of this I picked up an entirely different energy. So we have spent the last few days inventorying trees and learning what we could about the culture of several tiny mountain communities north of Asheville. With only a short spance of time I can't quite put words to what feels dramatically different, but my heart tells me its right and so far in my 62 years its always spot on.

And so today I bid farewell to North Carolina for now but have committed to return for a longer stretch very soon. My journey continues as I follow my heart back to mid-coast Maine.

Stay tuned for more tree search updates.

Be well,



Tennessee Trees

"Come to the woods, for here is rest." -John Muir

Dear beloved,

When I asked for trees, Tennessee certainly delivered. Oh my, are there trees-of every shape and size-and what a glorious season to meet them, all bursting with life. I can't seem to get enough of being in their presence. The dogwood's graceful beauty takes my breath away, the beech shows up where I least expect it, and the ever-present pines remind me to set my sights high. And so I am back to my teaching days, taking roll, checking them in tree by tree.

I'll let you know next week all of what I've found. Until then make note of all the life unfolding where ever you may be.

Be well,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Lauren". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large, looping initial 'L'.