

Let It Have You

by Jeannie Zandi

In the year that I was pregnant with my daughter and planning on marrying her father, I was plunged into an inexplicable darkness that ruled my life for four years. During that time, much of what had characterized me became eclipsed - I was no longer sociable, brilliant or on top of anything. My sole focus was a gnawing discomfort, a total loss of meaning and my inability to find what was "true" in order to right my life.

Why, as a well-adjusted woman who had kept up with her emotional work and led workshops on the topic, was I plagued to such depths? Was it a hormonal issue? A psychological issue? Had I made a wrong choice that resulted in my living a lie? Between working, mothering and doing the basics of daily life, I searched inwardly and outwardly, and mostly mentally, to find clues to this mysterious stalker who had performed a hostile takeover of my psyche.

As the months and years passed, as possible causes were exhausted (pregnancy hormones, postpartum depression, some early birth trauma of my own, some lie I was living, some way I had been bad that I was being punished for by a wrathful God), I entered into a sort of resigned despair. Many times I wished my life would simply end. I had fantasies of wandering out into the wilderness of Taos Mountain and being devoured by mountain lions. I would look up at the stars and long to disappear among them. The state of agony and anxiety was so acute, deep and constant that it hardly left my attention during my waking hours.

No matter what relative truth I would adopt in any given moment as the solution to my woes - keep the child, don't keep the child, stay with the man, leave the man, live alone - nothing held the promise of righting things. In retrospect, while I was searching for the truth that I could voice that would correct something "off" in my personal life, a much bigger truth was stalking me, one that could not be told, but only lived.

I could not light on this truth with my mind, but had to be born into it through watching who I had been wear down and pass away. As I was no longer performing the self I had been and as my mind struggled with and was bested by this conundrum, I watched the "good partner" die, the "contributing community member" die, the "one who knows" and the "one who can find the truth" die. More and more I was simply left in the present with no plan or strategy with which to approach anything.

I would go to a nearby river and lay on its banks. I noticed the anxiety that pervaded my body most of the day; I noticed the hell my mind was in, scurrying this way and that, trying to save me by finding the truth about the anxiety; and I noticed the way the wind blew, unconcerned, through the trees by the river and the way the ripples danced, unperturbed, in the water. At some point I discovered that if my attention was buried in the unconcerned wind and the unperturbed ripples, my body would relax just a little bit. Over time I saw that things-as-they-are were complicated by my thoughts and plans, which obscured actuality and created a hell if I paid attention to them. Out of exhaustion and despite a certainty that this was not in "my" best interest, I watched the "one who could figure it out" and the "one with a clue" die too.

I began finding my attention immersed in my senses in the present and in simple being. My mind faded as the central navigational instrument for my life, and I watched its incessant chattering fade as the thoughtless realm of things-as-they-are took the foreground. My mind could not offer a rationale for the shift - this new way simply took over as the only way to be that did not create misery.

Two years into it I wrote to an acquaintance, author and teacher, Steven Harrison: "It has been a good teacher in that I now know that I don't have a clue about anything, whereas before I was quite smug about having lots of clues about lots of things. I used to refer grandly to the "Great Mystery." I think I thought that someone named God was my pet. Or at least that whatever that presence was, I was certainly among its chosen ones. Now I've seen the underside of that mystery and have referred often to it as the "fucking Mystery." I really want to understand, and the more I try, the more I'm sat down on my butt. When I'm present these days it's not because I'm groovy or have a practice or think it's a good idea, but because anywhere else is painful."

He wrote back: "What you described is to me the breakdown of the mythology of life and the emergence of life-as-it-is. . . . From the vantage of the breakdown, it looks dark. From the vantage of the broken-down it looks fresh and full of potential and possibility. This is the beginning of new creativity in which the myth is transparent and perhaps something inherently integrated is possible in the forms we bring about. This is, after all, the creativity that we are born into but conditioned to forget, the creativity that is your daughter, that is life itself. To explore this requires the ongoing abandonment of the known and the attention to the movement of life-as-it-is, which is always new."

Not by my will, I had left the known and all my strategies for how to keep myself safe and moving forward. It is a feeling of being constantly naked and living by the seat of my pants as I watch life unfold and reveal itself a moment at a time instead of attempting to direct it. I find myself an explorer in the realm of what's actual, what is here now, outside of the mind's commentary about it. And outside of any plan for progress, improvement or goal attainment. It's amazing how simple life has become, and how full and luscious. Transformation happens within me and around me as I give myself to the present and leave the mind's commentary behind, as something essentially meaningless, like static on a radio.

What I have stumbled upon is the ground of being, who we are essentially, our birthright, and what is true about us in every moment, regardless of circumstance. This reality is Love, surpassing and dissolving all concepts of love - it is an alive, immediate experience of oneness that moves unpredictably and outside of concepts and social conditioning. Instead of something that is given or received, it is a basic fact of existence - not only mine, but existence in its entirety.

I can report on my findings from my explorations and elaborate on my experience of this Love. I can talk about how the past and future have faded as realities from my experience, how my life is pervaded by a sense of contentment, how full of radiance and mystery the moment is, and how this looks in my relationships and in my parenting. But that would move away from what is actual, now, for you, for me. And so what I really want to say is this:

To all those who struggle, to all those who wonder if there is something wrong with them, to all those who do not feel at home, at peace, whole and fine just as you are now, please know: You are Love. Your being is a mystery beyond comprehension. Each moment contains a miraculous myriad of sensations to breathe into and explore. Something greater than this you-with-a-plan is running your life and always has been. Let it have you.

Streaming Beggars

Now that you have moved into my heart,
taken the doors off their hinges and
removed the windows, glass, sash and all,
beggars are coming from everywhere
for your sweet embrace.

The beggars stream in from every direction
walking, running, crawling, rolling and being ... carried.
The neighbors have stopped screaming about it.
At first they had plenty to say but after weeks and weeks of this
they know there is no helping it.
This is beyond city ordinances.
Soon they will be coming themselves,
dropping rakes, dog leashes, clothespins,
leaving cars running in the street,
for a glimpse of your holy face.

What am I to do but

watch in awe at the blessed variety
... of your creation,
the myriad wounds, the incredible stories,
the way they gather around the door
quivering with the certain knowledge
that finally no one will be turned away,

and stay in the house making meals,
and carrying sheets up and down the stairs.

-J.Z.