Opinion
Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Daniel Mingook Kim)



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During the early months of the pandemic, when people were dying regularly and COVID-19 was still new enough that some news outlets attempted to publish the names and photos and brief bios of the dead, I started praying for those who had passed on, most likely, alone. I searched through the news clips, read their stories, and closed my eyes with their image in mind. Energetically, it felt right to accompany these souls as they transitioned. Unexplainably, it felt powerfully healing. A loving gesture offered to strangers. My own heart space softened and expanded in the process.

But, as COVID-19 mutated into one variant after another and now the delta variant sweeps through community after community, that sweet spiritual practice has dropped out of my daily ritual like a New Year's diet resolution the second week in February. I forgot about it. I stopped striving to search for names and stories. I left the dying to make their own way into a peaceful transition.

It's easy to do. To lose the incentive to pray for and care about strangers. Not because I'm a cold-hearted person. But I'm human, and there's a weak, self-centered, displeasing side of me that I'd prefer not to own. But here it is. Sometimes I'm lazy. Sometimes I lose focus, especially when so many pressing "issues" in the news howl for attention. Chaos in Afghanistan. Earthquakes in Haiti. The number of refugees growing worldwide. Sometimes I grow indifferent or even impatient with the demands of people dying and suffering, even if I'm the one who has placed those demands on myself.

And now it's happening again. Showing up in something else that has been going on for a long time — a lot longer than COVID-19. Immigration at our southern border.

It might be easier to understand why I feel this way if people were crossing illegally on my property and trashing it along the way. Or if I belonged to a far-right anti-immigration group. Or if I were just an average joe watching too much negative news about an "illegal invasion."

But I'm none of those. Just the opposite. I'm someone who's accompanied migrants and asylum-seekers for nearly five years in El Paso, Texas. Someone who's heard a myriad of painful, sometimes horrific, stories. Who's seen the effects in fearful faces and bent bodies. And someone who's been graced a million times over by encounters with these humble, lovely people blessing me with their gratitude and

faith.

It's been more than a year since I stepped inside one of our temporary shelters to accompany asylum-seeking families that have been vetted and are ready to move on to their sponsors. And now requests for volunteers have resurfaced. And I've willingly and gladly agreed to go.

So, why has this side of me shown up? This internal tension?

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I suspect it's because, just like the commitment to pray for strangers dying of COVID-19, what is being asked of me is unending. It's neither comfortable nor convenient. Nor is the outcome within my control.

And it's asking more of me than I fully realized when I said yes — yes to an open-ended commitment to love better, to be of service to my human family, to grow in spiritual maturity.

I am clearly still an apprentice.

Yet, I've been fledgling along in this apprenticeship for more than 30 years, studying the path of my spiritual teachers. Teachers labeled mystics and saints, contemplatives and criminals. All of whom have been led to places they would rather not have gone.

Why should I be any different?

Still, I was disturbed by these conflicting feelings, so I quieted myself and listened within.

"This tension is a holy thing."

I heard, and I understood, that those far greater and more advanced than I am have experienced such tension. Why would I not feel tension as I struggle to say yes and put down my personal preferences? Even Mary held an unbearable tension. As Fr. Ronald Rolheiser explained, Mary's "pondering in her heart" — whether it was in hearing disturbing news or while witnessing the torturous crucifixion of her son — was akin to "silently carrying the tension so as to transform it."

In carrying the tension, she said "yes" to whatever was before her. Isn't that what we are asked to do also? "Pondering," Rolheiser said, "… is waiting inside of tension in order that our own souls can grow."

Reflecting on this, I suddenly remembered a quote from Jacob Boehme, the 16th century German mystic, that one of my spiritual teachers had given us. A quote that deeply resonated: "I, God, press through your branches, into the sap, and bear fruit on your boughs."

Does that not sound like tension?

Just as the sun presses through the ground, creating the tension needed to bring forth the seedling buried under the surface. Just as the pressure of warming temperatures causes the sap to flow through "a wound or tap hole" in maple trees — (a description I came across on a maple tree farm website).

All these metaphors and images arose to help me understand that the transformation of myself as an apprentice will take what it takes. My "yes" is all that's needed. And it is God who makes manifest the fullness of love that lies latent within me.

This is an adapted version of a post from the author's personal website.