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A practicum in reverence with the polar vortex

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Eco Catholic

The Sufi practice of 'adab' means reverence for all things, including objects and animals.

Reverence, my friend Fred Brussat of Spiritualityandpractice.com argues, is an even more important value than compassion. Wow, what a rivalry.

Reverence means respect, recognition and awe at the existence of anything. Compassion means caring that the other -- as human, object or animal -- exists. Brussat argues that you have to know how to revere before you can care. I think he may be right.

I am not a Sufi, although as the saying goes, 'some of my best friends are Sufis.' They tell me that adab grounds them deeply in a capacity to revere all that is, even the difficult stuff. As a Christian, whose central rule is love or compassion, I wonder if we are missing something. Perhaps we can learn a lot from our 'best friends.'

Let's give a practicum in reverence a try:

I will start with the polar vortex that swept through much of the U.S. in early January. *Presente*: Weather. I am impressed. I assumed that my body could navigate the cold. It could not. Breath was difficult. My eyebrows froze. I spent more money on taxi cabs than I have in the past.

Then there was the ice. Not the Immigration Control and Enforcement Agency, although I know all too well how slippery they can make life. As writer Jennifer Murwin puts it in the January edition of *Sun* magazine, 'Ice had accumulated on the doorknob like a coat of nail polish, slick and clear and thick.'

You have to revere that kind of ice. Murwin also mentions many words for snow in a reverential Eskimo

imitation. There is flurry, sleet, hail, freezing rain, wintry mix, thundersnow. Each gives "full coverage," like a good basketball player. When we revere the storm called Hercules or its companion, the polar vortex, we enter an otherworldly beauty. It is the kind you don't have to love. But you may revere. When the ice sounds like "the groom crushing the glass under his foot," Murwin reveres the ice and gives words a way to hear it.

Brussat says we promote reverence in kids by teaching them contemplative practices. We can also teach them manners, which are a spiritual practice of reverence. You are polite because you are polite because you are polite. You don't have manners to get something or to care for someone. You have manners because you revere the existence of the other.

He also argues that without manners, civil and civic engagement becomes impossible. Interesting point. You have to start on the road toward compassion or civil engagement somewhere. It could be that the somewhere is reverence.

There is a need for a national month of reverence, Brussat suggests. Months for attention matter. In the maelstrom of daily messages, they give a way to notice something. Noticing reverence as a multipath spiritual practice strikes me as eminently doable, even while under icy systems or deep in flurry.

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Reverence addresses one of the major theological problems we face with the environment. It gives us a precondition to justice and morality. It gives us a prehistory to compassion. It allows us to be primitive on behalf of the post-modern. It joins the sacred to the profane at the hip. The word "sacred" implies that some things are profane. They are not. All things are sacred. All things are profane.

I want to become adept at adab.

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