



## Composting:

### The Slow Transformation of Life's Experiences into Wisdom

Early February I returned home after several weeks in Tasmania. I turned into my drive as the dusk was deepening, but even in the semi darkness I was shocked to see my garden looking so distressed from the recent heat wave and lack of watering. The level of compassion I felt for those plants and shrubs took me by surprise. Immediately I turned on the hose and spent the next half hour or so watering them copiously.

The next morning, I turned over my fallow vegetable beds, emptied the compost from the bin and stirred it into those beds. Then I planted and sowed a variety of vegetables that will be ready late autumn and into the winter. Each morning, as day breaks, I visit my veggie patch, delighting to see seedlings growing, seeds sending up their first tiny leaves and opening out for their next stage of growth. Coming up among them is a proliferation of seeds from the compost: tomatoes, pumpkins, melons... and I weed them out. I love them, but not there and not this time of the year.



Gardening is such a metaphor for life. Speaking with a friend earlier today, I mentioned that I am noticing as I age, I don't take in what I read as easily as I did when I was younger. I need to re-read stuff that is new to me, sometimes several times, before it finds its place in my inner world. He suggested an image that has stayed with me: *composting*.

I resonated immediately with the idea of composting: nothing is wasted, but nothing remains recognisable. What has broken down becomes nourishment for what is yet to grow. Here insights, together with our lived experience, transform into wisdom, a quality that permeates the deeper orientation from which we live, discern, and respond.

As I reflect on this mystery of slow transformation, I remember our theme for this year: *Seeing beyond seeing. The verities... we hold dear,*<sup>1</sup> which Madeline wrote about in her January reflection, are the fruits of wisdom that have taken root within us as we

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<sup>1</sup> Marty Haugen, "Each Winter as the Year Grows Older", GIA Publications 1975

slowly composted life and learning in prayerful contemplation, seeking the deeper truth within the Mystery in which we live and move and have our being.



The slow process of composting often takes place in dark and desolate experiences, both outer and inner. As we see our familiar and relatively safe social and political systems unravelling, with new wars breaking out almost daily, our hearts break for those immediately affected by the violence, death and destruction and we fear where this downward spiral is heading. We find ourselves yet again on Calvary on that fateful Friday we call good.

It takes profound wisdom to plumb *the verities we hold dear* while on our daily news we see so much senseless hatred which can no longer see the sacred within every being. Perhaps we can't see it either, while we live in the midst of such unimaginable chaos. Yet can we, in the blinding darkness, still hold on, somehow, against all odds, trusting that what we are seeing and experiencing is not the whole story?

That darkness also touches us closer to home. As I write this reflection, I am mindful of two women close to me who are in palliative care. One I can spend time with, mostly in silence as she no longer speaks, though she knows when I am there. The other lives interstate. I tell each of them that I'm holding her in my heart and my prayer. What do I mean when I say that? I asked myself this question while on my walk this morning. This is what came to me:

Holding them in my heart *is* holding them in prayer. It is holding them in love, not just my individual love, but the Love at the heart of the Mystery. I hold them with the desire that they will experience this love as an energy that brings healing. I hold them in gratitude for all they are and have been for me and for so many, and hope it brings to their awareness a recognition of the amazing gift of their own being, loved into being, and the many ways they shared themselves, their gifts and talents in loving service with countless people throughout their long lives, I hope that they now experience a sense of completeness: *it is finished*, and with it a readiness to let go into the larger Mystery that opens up to them in the next phase of their existence.

This is not something I can effect for them. But I believe that, in consciously holding them in the Mystery that is also holding me, my prayer directs towards them 'the

energies of love' in ways beyond my understanding. My Tasmanian dying friend tells me she feels the support of the people praying for her. It brings her comfort and peace.

The mystery of life and death is all around us. Many are the dyings we undergo daily:



the failures and disappointments, misunderstandings and negative reactions, situations in which we can't see beyond our worries, the loss of loved ones... We are invited to take these personal Good Friday experiences, as well as those on the world scene, into the slow dark composting process deep within us, experiencing them compassionately, in all their nuances of pain and suffering, holding them all for as long as it takes. Gradually the *hidden verities that we love* will dawn in us as the light of the resurrection: The Living One is risen. Love is stronger than death. Naturally there is sorrow, but it is sweetened by the knowledge that, once this deeper love *entangles* us with each other, nothing can separate us.<sup>2</sup>

It takes maturity and trust to love deeply in the face of the gathering darkness of our times. We need to have grown beyond the protectiveness behind which we tend to hide our inner selves, beyond the descriptions with which we might introduce ourselves, and discover who we truly are, our real identity. When I strip away all those descriptions, I am left with sheer Nothingness. Yet paradoxically, this Nothingness holds all that is. There I know myself as *I AM*, my true Self.

Beatrice Bruteau writes about that experience of I AM:

When we centre ourselves in the concrete experience "I am", we realise that it is living and luminous. We no sooner touch this "still point" at the core of our being, than we discover it as an explosion of energy. Our "I am" is

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<sup>2</sup> Physicists have discovered that, at the quantum level, once two particles have become entangled and then separate, they stay in instant communication: what happens to one, instantly affects the other, no matter how great the distance that separates them.

simultaneously a “May you be” also. We find that the energy of existence that we are is necessarily a radiant energy. It streams out from us in every way. It seems to be the nature of that which is “I am” to say, “Let it be”.<sup>3</sup>

The Love that is the heart of our essential being, chooses to pour out itself that the other may also be. This is the Good News: “I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full”. It is the same love with which the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, even to his death of the cross.

Yet *this* love cannot die. Death has no power over it. Though physically we will die, our essential “I am” lives on, into resurrection, in the holy communion of all such Love/Lovers.

This is the consciousness into which we CEN members desire to grow as daily we, together in our separate places, hold our fractured suffering world in the energies of compassionate Love that is our deepest reality. Here our I AM pours out itself on this world and all that constitutes our world, that it may become One in radiant Love. We ourselves yearn to live from that depth of consciousness as our constant reality, so that we do see beyond seeing, the *verities we hold dear* at the heart of every being and of all Being.



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<sup>3</sup> Beatrice Bruteau, *The Grand Option: Personal Transformation and a New Creation*, University of Notre Dame, Indiana 2001, p 52. I’ve taken the liberty to edit out some of the more technical expressions she uses.