

# Living in Festival

by Sharon Martin

This month marks the anniversary of the passing of a beloved friend and teacher who introduced me to Carl Jung, through whom I have found my vocation and my passion. He introduced me to many people and ideas, but perhaps his greatest gift to me and others who knew him was an astonishing capacity to simply enjoy life, come what may. He departed from this world five years ago, and I am still learning to live into his unique legacy, which he called “The Festival.” Just after finishing high school, he traveled to a tiny village in eastern France known as Taize. This monastic community, which still attracts tens of thousands of people every year, was founded in 1940 by a young man from Switzerland named Roger to welcome refugees, particularly Jews, who were fleeing invaders. But Brother Roger also dreamed of a gathering of people from different countries and diverse Christian traditions that would be a sign of reconciliation among divided Christians and, as a result, a refuge of peace in a war-torn world. This extraordinary community, where people of different faiths live together in simplicity and harmony, is a place my teacher sent many of his students like myself who were at a crossroads in life. It embodies a spirituality of celebration and a message of hope and festival. When Brother Roger was asked to explain what he meant by the word festival, he replied; “In every person lies a zone of solitude that no human intimacy can fill: and there God encounters us. There, in that depth is set the intimate festival of the risen Christ. So henceforth, in the hollow of our being, we discover the risen Christ: he is our festival.” He often prayed that “the spring of jubilation may never dry up in our hearts.”

Living according to this maxim became my teacher’s prescription for life. I well remember seeking his counsel on important matters and his response being: “What creates festival?” At that time this was a new concept for me, a southern woman with a religious and familial framework short on fun, celebration and pleasure and heavy on rules, responsibility and guilt. It is still a hard lesson for my saturnine temperament, but it is like a fresh breeze blowing in my soul. And I am learning. In spite of (or *because* of) my grief following his death, I am delighted to share some things that help me to create and live in festival.

Festival includes tears and sorrow.

There are numerous myths in which the world is created from the loneliness of the gods and their tears. In a Baluba myth, the tears of animals soften the earth and make it

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possible for seeds to grow and become shelter for animals. In Egypt, Atum wept tears of joy and where these tears hit the ground, men grew. Ra created vegetation directly through the tears of Eye the Overseer.

In Lakota Sioux mythology, the Creating Power cried tears that became oceans, streams, and lakes. In another the Earth-maker realized he was alone and began to weep. His tears fell below, creating a great sphere of water, from which the new earth emerged.

Weeping often accompanies the sowing of corn, which stands for the cultivation of nourishment—Kore, the Mother—for the soul. In Grimm's fairy tale of the Handless Maiden, the maiden is saved from the devil by her tears. Weeping and bewailing the death of the fertility god ensures his return in the spring.

*Solutio* is the stage of alchemy associated with tears. There are myths of a great flood in many cultures, sent by a god to destroy civilization, which is necessary for the cleansing of humanity and in preparation for a new birth. This can be interpreted as representing the experience of dissolution/destruction of how we think our lives should be, in other words, our unconscious expectations and entitlements. These usually take us back to the wounds of childhood, upon which the ruling principle of consciousness has been built. *Solutio* is the flood, or the baptism, or the immersion in unconscious contents, which dissolves the neurosis or complex into its original parts, purifying them in order to begin again from a new perspective. It is interesting that when we experience a catastrophe we use terminology such as "flooded, overwhelmed, or hit by a wave of grief." Very often this shows up in dreams in images of storms, floods, hurricanes or bodies of water.

Psychologically this means our tears and suffering create a "new world" of expanded consciousness and new perspective, if we embrace the experience willingly and consciously. Remember that in alchemy, the ruling principal of consciousness, represented by the king, must be a *willing participant* in each process. The sorrow and heartbreak that brings a deluge of tears is part of the Water which is the living power of the psyche which cleanses and purifies. And out of the water a new world is brought forth.

Letting go of guilt creates festival.

Guilt is not to be confused with conscience, which is something with much more depth and mystery. Guilt can be a defense against real suffering, a mask for more acute and difficult feelings such as loneliness, shame, unworthiness or even real remorse. Feeling guilty can make us feel that we are paying a kind of penance, except it is not nearly as painful as facing up to the pain, grief and loss that is underneath. There can be something manipulative and slippery about guilt. When we go on about how guilty we feel, an audience is usually required. Remorse (or repentance, in Christian language), is much deeper, more painful and no audience can redeem it, for it brings us into confrontation with our true selves.

Real remorse and grief are related to death—the death of an unconscious ruling system (such as the parental complex) which often serves to protect us from our authentic suffering. When we get close to the genuine pain of childhood wounds, there is always resistance and guilt. I have heard the most horrific abuse described as: "It wasn't *that* bad," "They did the best they could," "So many have it worse and why should I complain?" Recognizing the guilt for what it is can bring us into

meaningful suffering which can ultimately create "a new world" and a new perspective.

This process also brings about the possibility of finding one's own inner authority, which is almost always accompanied by a loss of faith in outer structures and a search for a new framework of values. To lose this structure, whatever it may be, is often a terrifying and difficult process which can feel like losing the very ground under our feet. But it is the experience we need to bring us to our own values, our own conscience and our own authority. When we are graced with some awareness of this and can enter into conscious suffering, there is transformation, which opens us up to new freedom and spaciousness within.

This is Christ consciousness, bringing resurrection, joy and festival into our lives.

Acceptance makes room for festival.

Until we can let go of guilt and judgment, we cannot disidentify with our situation or circumstances. In the words of Dr. Jung: "We cannot change anything until we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses."

If we can find a little distance from which to observe ourselves, it is possible to approach ourselves with some curiosity and even compassion. In this way we can accept ourselves just as we are. Pema Chodron encourages us to cultivate a practice of lovingkindness:

"But lovingkindness—*maitri*—toward ourselves doesn't mean getting rid of anything. *Maitri* means that we can still be crazy after all these years. We can still be angry after all these years. We can still be timid or jealous or full of feelings of unworthiness. The point is not to try to change ourselves...the practice isn't about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better. It's about befriending who we are already. The ground of practice is you or me or whoever we are right now, just as we are."

**Acceptance of our situation creates a structure that allows it to change. If we do not accept our suffering, but resist it by denial or self-medication, it is prolonged and we often get stuck. We compound our suffering by our resistance and it becomes meaningless and neurotic.**

Many enlightened teachers such as Eckhart Tolle teach that we create pain from nonacceptance, which is some form of unconscious resistance to what is. On the level of thought, resistance is some form of judgment. On the emotional level, it is some form of negativity. The intensity of the pain we feel depends on the degree of resistance to the reality of the present moment.

Rumi's poem *The Guest House* speaks eloquently about this and encourages us to welcome whatever meets us in the present moment.

My beloved teacher always encouraged me to welcome the demons, befriend the heartache, and invite the depression to dinner. He actually enjoyed his depression and was sorry to see it go! Perhaps this had something to do with his exquisite humor and the joy and delight that characterized his experience in life. It seems to me this is what Joseph Campbell meant when he spoke of participating joyfully in the sorrows of the world. We cannot cure the world of sorrows, but we can choose to live in joy—the great festival of life.