

Continuous Spring

by Annette Peizer

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“Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

Confucius

“...Enjoy the ancients and earnestly seek your knowledge there; and, new knowledge is acquired by re-invigorating ancient wisdom. Confucius promoted these ideas his entire life...If the student studies hard...mindful of these two ideas...[the student] will see new buds sprouting from old seeds, waving in a fine spring breeze.”

Cheng Man-ch'ing

Spring is the season of the wood element, a season of birth, new growth and hope. The lavender crocuses and ruffled edges of daffodils are opening their delicate lips to the light; the slender, furry poppy stems and buds are emerging, preparing to explode into crepe papery reds and oranges. You may be graced by the bluebirds, wrens, yellow-breasted songbirds, woodpeckers, or ruby-throated humming birds depending upon your locale.

Along with being witness to so much outer growth in our natural world, we experience so much inner growth whenever we learn something new or think about something old with new eyes and deeper insight.

In Chinese culture, Confucianism focuses on cultivating this inner human growth, while Daoism focuses on how we can learn from truths found in nature. With so much that has been going on in our world lately, I'd like to focus on inner, as well as outer growth.

Cheng Man-ch'ing wrote in his Hall of Happiness essay that what brings us true joy is inner growth. After stating what joy is *not*, such as the temporary

nature of a sumptuous feast, outer beauty, or our youth that “slips swiftly away and is gone,” he continues: “It is the joy of continuous growth, of helping to develop in ourselves and others the talents and abilities with which we were born—the gifts of heaven to mortal [humans]. It is to revive the exhausted and to rejuvenate that which is in decline so that we are enabled to dispel sickness and suffering...”

His words ring so relevant to our times.

I volunteer-teach a small group of beginning qigong and tai chi students from local community center classes who moved with me online as we try to help one another weather this pandemic. After we finished the water element, when I asked if they wanted to continue into the wood element they called out eagerly from their Zoom windows, “Yes! Yes!” So we embodied the wood element together—green, new supple wood, with qi moving from our *dantians* up through our arms, hands, and out through our fingers, reaching toward the light, our feet sinking and relaxing into imagined, rich, fecund soil.

“Spring is just around the corner,” I felt compelled to add, and glanced at their eyes brightening for a moment as they smiled a little wistfully on that gray, overcast day.

We’ve all been through so much together lately, haven’t we?

While limiting our activities, many of us find ourselves occasionally mining memories, dreams and insights, while pulling up whatever resilience we can muster.

I have made some basic, surprising discoveries which were right in front of me all along but I had apparently been too caught up in my regular daily routines to even notice them pre-pandemic.

On one of my daily walks in my neighborhood for example, I discovered what I call a bamboo forest straight down the street I live on. As I walked down this familiar street for 45 minutes, a little farther than I usually walk, *voila*, there it was! Almost a city block of lush, verdant, thick, mature bamboo, two stories high, so unusual for Seattle. Now, whenever I walk there, I pause and wrap my fingers around the towering stalks, taking in their healing green growth between my palms. I also discovered, after living in my home for over twenty years, that if I walk westward for only six

minutes down another familiar neighborhood street, I have a view of the sunset over the Olympic Mountains!

Lately, I have been thinking about how the material world consists of much denser substances of what already exists in the spiritual realms around and within us. So this new, colorful, fragrant growth erupting from soil, branch, bud and vine feels like physical manifestations of our inner growth telling us, "Now you see me, but I was alongside and within you all along."

Inlaid over a photo of Cheng Man-ch'ing in Single Whip hanging in his Memorial Hall in Taiwan is a motto he wrote, intended to be kept close at hand for constant reference.

Written in classical Chinese, he begins with layered meanings about physical ways to stand and move in the world, then devotes more lines to ways we can improve our characters to experience inner growth:

"Allow the hands to be led lightly and humbly;
Allow the feet to be heavy, stepping with dignity.
Hang straight; hang straight! Be poised and upright.
Speak sparingly, directly, and with great care;
Be forgiving and generous; out of a centered heart, give back.
Be loyal, tolerant and patient in your dealings;
Let your attitude toward others be temperate."
Repent, and correct your errors with silent contemplation."

Each of us, in our own ways, has been through so much lately and there will be more to go through. In the meantime, let's raise a toast to the inner and outer growth of the fresh wood element of spring!

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