

# Gratitude and Grief

October 19, 2023

It is fall in New England, where I presently spend my days. I recently had an experience I am moved to share with you, in the hope it will benefit you in your own explorations.

I have lived in the rural North long enough that I've had the sad opportunity to be witness to a huge amount of loss, courtesy of climate change. *Deterioration* is the word that comes to me. So much of what inspired me to flee the hot suburbia of the South and head to New England 40 years ago has altered before my very eyes. Autumn is warmer than it used to be. The foliage season, which occurs in October, has historically delivered spectacularly colorful leaves, drawing tourists from far and wide.

*How could I have let grief overwhelm my gratitude?*

A dear friend recently visited me. She is from an urban area, accustomed to a climate very different from my own. The lenses through which she gazes on the world are defined, as mine are, by what she's used to seeing. This is the case for all of us, although we may not be attuned to the phenomenon if we don't venture elsewhere occasionally. I had hoped the colors would be in their full glory during my friend's visit, which we'd scheduled well in advance so she might see those leaves. Sadly the colors were muted.

The changes here are rampant, as in so many parts of our dear world. There are many fewer bird calls; some creatures have simply disappeared from the area, relocating places farther south or north, where the food sources or temperatures are more beneficial to their ongoingness.

\* \* \*

For some years after I became a spiritual teacher, I traveled far and wide and was thereby reminded of how it is to be in other places. Each time on the long drive home from the airport, when the road sign reading *Welcome to Vermont* came into view, I got tears in my eyes. How glad I was to be home! But I

seldom venture far from home anymore, nor do I intend to fly anyplace unless it's absolutely necessary, in light of the impact of air travel on the atmosphere.

All of which means my opportunities to be reminded of what it's like to live in other places are not what they once were.

My friend and I took a walk one day that was a gift to me. She remarked on how delicious it is to be where it gets truly dark at night. Where things are so very quiet that it's possible to hear the breeze ruffle the leaves. How sweet the hay smells! Though she has been to this area before, nothing in her evident rapture indicated a drop of disappointment.

While she had not set out to teach me something, I nevertheless learned from my friend's shimmering appreciation a valuable lesson about gratitude. Because I keep close to home now, I forget how it is to live in a city, or where it is terribly hot or noisy all the time. Where there are nothing but buildings in my everyday. No silence. No creatures at all, except the ones we humans tether to the ends of leashes, or keep indoors where they can be safe.

Now here I was, looking afresh on my oh-so-familiar world, smelling the sweet air. Seeing — as if I'd not seen it in a very long while — the deliciously rural environment where I live my days. Where sorrow over the gathering losses can take my heart in its fist and put tears in my aging eyes.

What did I learn? What would I remind you of, fellow traveler?

\* \* \*

If grieving over the changes in the environment becomes potent enough to make me forget to pay attention to how glorious it is in Vermont, the losses notwithstanding, I am a fool. I can be so wrapped in lament that I fail to see — to celebrate — what I live in now every single day.

After all, the animals and plants do not grieve the changes. They simply adjust. They don't fret about how much worse things might get. They carry on the best they can, living moment-to-moment as they always have.

When I go for my daily walk now, if I start to lapse into grief over what is altered, probably forever, some quiet and fierce force puts its hand in front of my sad face and says, with something like ferocity, *Don't you ever lose sight of how lucky you are to live where you do.*

Nor do I live in a war zone.

\* \* \*

How could I have let grief overwhelm my gratitude? The wordsmith in me hears a “grrr” in that voice of reprimand. For those words *grief*, *gratitude* both begin with that sound.

Without her ever intending to do so, my friend opened my eyes anew to what surrounds my daily living. She reminded me to not ever take any of it for **granted**. I laugh just now to revisit my reminders to seekers, on my podcast, to take nothing for granted. Ha! The teacher learns her own lessons, again and again.

What a gift my friend left me with. I am learning to gaze on this world through new eyes.

May you do the same.

## Donate

*These teachings are offered freely, gladly. If you're moved to make a donation, as an expression of appreciation, I will welcome it. [Donate to Jan Frazier Teachings.](#)*

[SUBSCRIBE TO JFT EMAILS](#)

[Previous Post: « The Benefit of Looking Backwards](#)

---