

Facing the Worse-Case Scenario

A couple of years ago, I was diagnosed with lung cancer. I was shocked, dumbfounded, and afraid. The worse case was that the cancer had spread, metastasized in other areas, with few treatment options, and a future of pain-management in hospice. The best-case scenario would be for the cancer not to have spread, for the surgery to successfully remove the infected part of my lungs, and my future would be a healthy, long life with few consequences. And of course, the most-likely-case scenario lay somewhere in between.

I tell you this story, not to garner your sympathy, but to demonstrate how I think. My personality is such that I need to face the worse-case scenario, understand the best-case scenario, and the range of possibilities in-between. And then I invest my energies into making the best-case scenario more and more likely. And I don't have to invest alone, as I can join with others who are facing the same challenges, lean on friends and family for support, and I can seek out the wisdom of those who have traveled this way before.

So when I stayed awake the night of our most recent presidential election, I was like a deer in the headlights. Staring blankly at the election results as they slowly trickled in, blinking in the awkward moments of waiting, trying to decide if there was enough danger to bolt. As the hours passed, and the results became evident, I started to grieve.

It was easy for me to imagine the worse-case scenario: fascism, authoritarianism, arrests, deportations, elimination of social services, destruction of institutions, economic collapse, all while re-writing history. I had read Project 2025, the blue print for what comes next. I didn't sleep. I cried. I pounded the pillow, and stared directly into the abyss.

And I prayed, for sleep was elusive.

With the coming of the dawn, I remembered the survivors. There are always survivors. The ones who are left to rebuild after the destruction leaves the world in rubble. I began to imagine what the world might look like, and who might be left to rebuild. What world will the rebuilders create? Hadn't we already destroyed the world decades ago and were forced to rebuild. Now we are right back in the destruction born of fascism. Have we learned nothing but to revert to the same old destructive thought patterns? Had they ever really left? Or just gone underground?

But what if - (and this is a big *what if*) what if the world we rebuild is based upon a different framework, a different pattern, a different set of assumptions. Let's just start with "We the people" and "all are created equal". What if the power dynamics were not ones of power over or top down? What if the power dynamics shifted to shared power, sibling-hood, kinship? If the pandemic taught us anything, it is that we are all connected, to each other, and to our planet. We are a family. What if we just start there?

And then I began to envision a world I wanted to see. A world where housing, and healthcare, and education, and nutritious food, and clean water, were rights. And I remembered, I don't have to imagine this alone. What about the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights? Passed in 1948, this document recognizes "the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" and is considered "the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." [<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>] Certainly, this would be a place to start, and maybe we could add the inalienable rights of our non-human family.

All of these thoughts have been percolating me in this past year, as I've traveled the United States and Canada. I have visited all 50 states. I have befriended fellow citizens who politics are different than mine, and yet we care about many of the same things: family, friends, faith, and wellbeing.

Some places I have visited are vibrant and full of life, while others are smaller, atrophied. Yet I notice similarities: a wringing of hands, a sense of foreboding, a gloom of what might yet come to pass. The fear of what may occur seems to be causing a sense of constipation, a holding of one's breath while waiting for all of the shoes to drop.

For me, I'm looking past what might happen to the rebuilding effort. I have a sense of urgency around all the work that could be happening right now. Do you know who in your community might be getting regular meals on wheels. What will they do when that program is cut? Or when unemployment insurance, or medicaid cease to exit, who in your community might need help? Are you prepared to help them? Perhaps now is the time to think about mutual aid, and create ways for friends to help each other (financially and otherwise)?

I think about practical things like who might need a ride to the doctor's office, or help picking up prescriptions? Who has a leaky roof that might need some repair? Who might need a ride to work? Or gas money? There are so many practical ways we can work together today to help make lives easier and prepare for a time when services cease to exist.

And what about when they come knocking on the door. Do you know what your rights are? What ways to resist? If someone demands my cellphone, do I have to hand it over without a warrant? I've been so inspired by recent stories in the news of neighbors protecting each other from unlawful detainment. Why does this happen in some neighborhoods and not others? Is it because they know each other well? Have each other's backs? What does it look like in your neighborhood when they come knocking? Will you hide behind your curtains?

I also think of The Hague and the International Criminal Court. When the dust settles, and crimes are prosecuted, do we know what evidence they need? How do we collect evidence now that will hold up in court later? Do we know any lawyers who can help us with this? Are there records we should be keeping?

Or if they close the schools, and say education is no longer the role of government? How will we educate our children? Or perhaps, they might require all students to attend government boarding schools for their education. Would you send your child? What alternatives might we be developing today?

I could mention many more possibilities of worse case scenarios, as well as best-case scenarios and all the ones in-between. As you can probably gather, I have an active imagination. Imagining various scenarios can be helpful in any given moment, yet there is something *more*.

It seems to me that an old way of being in the world is dying, and it actually needs to die. The power over, top-down, constrained and controlling scenario has become toxic in its refusal to adapt and change. If that change does not occur, will the rebuilders just recreate the same old, tired story?

Perhaps, along with the old eroding away, a new way of being is trying to emerge. The new way shares power, focuses on equality and the inherent dignity of everyone, and seeks freedom from oppression. The new emergent way is a collaborative enterprise, and contains a deep, old wisdom.

Almost everyone I have ever encountered understands that there are intangible aspects of life. There are energies, vibrations, intuitions, knowings, insights - all senses that there is an unseen aspect of life that can guide and support us. I propose that in this emergent new, we also need to collaborate with these intangible aspects of life. I might call this wisdom Spirit. You might call it something else. Either way, now is the time to invite Spirit to the table.

What does it look like when we so transform how we engage the world today, with an eye on rebuilding a future we want to see, by collaborating with the Spirit that lives and breathes amongst us in this moment?

Might it look like a slowing down, a spaciousness, a listening for what is happening below the surface of our awareness? Might we engage our hearts and our guts, along with our minds, when making decisions? Might we offer prayers to those who've come before us and are hovering near? Might we seek to make decisions that will be in the best interests of future generations? Might we actually collaborate with the planet herself? And in doing so, might she also love us back?

What norms can we create in how we interact with each other today, that can be a foundation for a new world to come? Might the declaration of human rights provide guidance? What can you imagine? What is your best-case scenario and how can you work towards making it more and more likely? What wisdom can you tap into? And who can you collaborate with?

I still have my deer in the headlights moments. I still read the news and react in shock about what is occurring. I still fear that the lung cancer may return. Mostly, I fear all the unnecessary harm that is yet to come. And then I slow down. I breathe. I remember Spirit. I invite her to join me. I ask for assistance and guidance. I set my sights on the best-case scenario, and with loving intention, I focus on making the best case more and more likely. Perhaps you'd like to join me in this endeavor? And together, we can collaborate with Spirit and the emergent new. We can rebuild a world which honors the inherent dignity of everyone. We can cease to oppress each other. We can transform. Our best case scenario can become more and more likely every day. May it be so. Amen.