

***The Art of Facing Things, from The Book of Awakening by Mark Nepo***

“Salmon have much to teach us about the art of facing things. In swimming up waterfalls, these remarkable creatures seem to defy gravity. It is an amazing thing to behold. A closer look reveals a wisdom for all beings who want to thrive. What the salmon somehow know is how to turn their underside – from center to tail – into the powerful current coming at them, which hits them squarely, and the impact then launches them out and further up the waterfall; to which their reaction is, again, to turn their underside back into the powerful current that, of course, again hits them squarely; and this successive impact launches them further out and up the waterfall. Their leaning into what they face bounces them further and further along their unlikely journey.

From a distance, it seems magical, as if these mighty fish are flying, conquering their element. In actuality, they are deeply at one with their element, vibrantly and thoroughly engaged in a compelling dance of turning-toward-and-being-hit-squarely that moves them through water and air to the very source of their nature.

In terms useful to the life of the spirit, the salmon are constantly faithful in exposing their underside to the current coming at them. Mysteriously, it is the physics of this courage that enable them to move through life as they know it so directly. We can learn from this very active paradox; for we, too, must be as faithful to living in the open if we are to stay real in the face of our daily experience. In order not to be swept away by what the days bring, we, too, must find a way to lean into the forces that hit us so squarely.

The salmon offer us a way to face truth without shutting down. They show us how leaning into our experience, though we don't like the hit, moves us on. Time and again, though we'd rather turn away, it is the impact of being revealed, through our willingness to be vulnerable, that enables us to experience both mystery and grace.”

Reflect on a time you successfully opened yourself to something coming at you.

- ✧ In recalling this, consider these questions: what made you decide to open yourself, how did opening yourself change you or your position, and where has leaping like a salmon landed you today? (If time to discuss, would you do it differently now?)
- ✧ Breathe steadily, and invite the lessons of opening, being changed, and landing, into your heart. Turn the belly of your heart toward the day.

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***Love and Loss in the Anthropocene, by Elizabeth West CommonDreams.org***

“I cannot substantively change what lies ahead; I am afraid it is too late for that. But I can own my part in creating it. And, perhaps more meaningfully, I can try to be an honest witness, I can find the courage to look without flinching, no matter how painful it gets. I can decline to turn away, I can refuse to close my heart, I can continue to love even when it hurts like hell. It isn't much, it isn't nearly enough ... but it is what I can wholeheartedly offer today.”

Excerpt from: **Getting Real About it: Meeting the psychological and social demands of a world in distress** by Susanne C. Moser, Ph.D.

The first demand on a leader of the future is, according to American writer and climate movement builder Bill McKibben, to “do something braver than try to save the world we have known. *We must accept the fact that the world we have known is going to change in hideous and damaging ways*” (McKibben, 2010: 176, emphasis added). The bravest thing is to take this first step: get real. Facing the truth, and letting it sink in. A friend of mine, a coral researcher, once told the story how when the truth about a future without corals finally sank in, she had to run to the bathroom and vomit, it was so devastating. It took her years to accept it. So, this won’t happen quickly and it is not to be rushed, though the temptation to jump into mad action to fight for solutions that may still – against all better knowledge – avert the worst is indeed immense. In fact, taking action may well be the right response for many. But coming to grips with the reality we now are in takes time, and is critical that we give it a quiet space inside ourselves, and that we ground ourselves in the face of it with any practices of balance we may already have or could adopt.

The landscape you will find yourself in, once you allow this realization to take hold, is a different one. Despair lives there, along with helplessness and anger, fear and disorientation, undoubtedly also unspeakable sadness. You are likely to come to recognize that this is a new time. The time before was one in which we insisted and relied on hope, on better tomorrows, in the US on the “American Dream.” Now, we have to accept that “better tomorrows” may not come. It is akin to accepting one’s own mortality, maybe a doctor’s prognosis of one’s impending death, but on a much grander scale...

... As a leader in a time of rapid climate change, you will need to be grounded in this realization. But not just for yourself. Be real about it also with other people. Remember, as more and more impacts unfold, disasters disrupt our lives, and precious landscapes and assets fall apart or are lost, as much larger portions of society awakes to the emerging reality, there is likely to be a lot of confusion, a lot of not-knowing, uncertainty, and probably still a good deal of hanging on to hope-against-hope and denial. To speak clearly and calmly to what is, and what may yet come, cuts down on that confusion, cuts through the strange fog that people are in when they don’t understand or deny reality. It’s clarifying, grounding to be real with others.



“When I really let myself experience the state of the world, my first reaction is bottomless, unutterable sorrow. That moves quickly into outrage. The sorrow I can deal with; the outrage I used to suppress – after all, it might offend someone. Now I use it to give me courage. When I get mad, I have to move. With half-suppressed anger, I tend to swing out and do something impetuous and ignorant. But a fully felt, grounded, familiar anger can move me through a lifetime commitment to make things better” (Donella Meadows, 1997).