

My first year of Chaplaincy School is complete - kindof

I have completed the first academic year of the Chaplaincy Institute of Maine - hereinafter referred to as ChIME. And I'm sure I'll be mulling over it and getting insights and aha moments throughout the summer around what it really was all about.

But I'd like to back up a bit and give you the back story - How did I end up there? Was it part of my 10 year plan? Had I always wanted to be an Interfaith Minister? No and No.

My somewhat formal Spiritual journey began in 1989 when I quit drinking and began attending AA meetings. The "program" encouraged an exploration around a connection to a "higher power" framed within the 12 Steps of the program. The Third Step - "Made a Decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him" had a profound impact on me. By the time I got to AA I was alone and had become quite isolated - but I recognized that somehow I was being guided or led. In AA I was encouraged to pray and develop a faith in a higher power. This felt to me really comforting and really comfortable. I spent decades going to meetings and loved the discussions around other people's experiences digging into their faith- and at some point I began to explore my faith in a higher power or God outside of AA in non-traditional Spiritual contexts: I studied mediumship and attended Spiritualist church services; I studied other metaphysical modalities: energy healing, connecting to angelic beings, shamanism. I became a Yoga teacher and studied Hinduism and then Taoism through the study of Qi Gong and Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Five Elements Theory. The natural world, trees and animals, and the waters have been a huge source of comfort and inspiration to me.

Clearly I am a seeker.

Through my years of prayer and developing a connection to God and God's grace I have become confident that my intuition is Spiritual guidance and I go with it. A little over a year ago I landed in Mid-coast Maine without a clear plan. I landed here after selling my house and giving away my stuff and traveling in a camper van for 8 months. That experience forced me to become much more comfortable meeting people, asking

questions and asking for help which I found was quite easy. I learned to say yes - It also increased my confidence in my own decisions for where I wanted to go, what would be fun or comfortable or safe.

The upshot was when I landed here in Mid coast Maine I was mostly retired and I needed something to engage in - I'd met a few interesting people who were graduates of ChIME. It was a more formal Spiritual path I had not yet tried and I was intrigued. I thought it would be interesting and that I would learn a lot - That's really all it takes for me.

I applied and was accepted and began the academic year without a clue as to what it all entailed.

And its been a roller coaster ride. A deep internal dive precipitated by working on tough topics within a small cohort. There are 5 of us coming from very divergent internal spaces. And that is what the first year is all about - learning about our own internal spaces, being present to our internal spaces, even befriending these spaces, the good, the bad, the ugly. And without much control over how and when the good, the bad and the ugly will show up as we dive deeply into discussions around forgiveness, class, grief and loss, biases, boundaries. And not necessarily in an intellectual way but in a way that questions and can even dismantle our tried and true belief systems. Stripped, we see each other as the divine beings that we are and learn to cultivate compassion for ourselves and for our cohort members - as we all do the best we can. This compassion then ripples out to all those with whom we encounter.

This experiential exploitation for me has further developed the belief that I am a child of God and as such I need to treat my Self with true respect, kindness and compassion. That I walk with my heart and my Soul in tandem - my heart leads me to experience all things human and my Soul is my connection to the Divine, God's grace. My mind then becomes the means to act.

This belief allows me to approach myself and others in openness, and kindness around our human experience, letting go of expectation or judgment. Because what I do know is.... that I don't know.... and that not knowing demands a belief that I am loved and

supported by God (this is my Soul connection). Trusting this allows me to be curious; to be in joyful anticipation. And at the same time to be in a place of fear and suffering (this is my human beingness) and still with God's grace and love.

Its this thing of balance - cultivating equilibrium despite my external or internal turmoil on a daily basis. A little bit of the Tao there - the Yin and Yang -

Today, June 23 would have been my mother's 96th birthday - she died 6 months ago December 23, 2023 at the age of 95 and a half.

When I told her I was entering a Chaplaincy Program she scoffed. Religion to her was too confounding for her to engage in - She felt God had forsaken her in some ways and it was her own will that had led her to live a life that outwardly was enviable. I suffered because of her seemingly disregard for what I believed in wholeheartedly. I desperately wanted her to find the solace of God and God's grace before her death. I don't know if she did or did not.

But it was a real lesson for me to stay in my lane so to speak and allow her own unfolding however that may have looked.

The grief has been complex and profound but because of it I have experienced liberation - liberation from old constructs bestowed upon me by my mother's culture.

Embracing my grief, honoring it and my human expression of it has softened and opened my heart.

I tell you this because its just another layer to the internal experience I had this year that I will continue to mull over.

I have no pithy words of wisdom that have come to signify my first year, just more excavating and casting off the old cloaks I wore in defense of.....whatever. The cast off or stripping continues to occur because of my ever increasing faith that I am well supported and well loved.

I have no idea where this process will take me but I remain open and curious, softening into the belief that I don't need to know - that I am being guided and more will be revealed. A truly rich and blessed way to live my life.

May we all continue to experience God's Blessings and our own unfolding.