Reflection: The Others **Rev. Ron**

In 1799, as forces of the Ottoman Empire prepared to attack, a group of French soldiers were desperately shoring up the defenses of a run down fort in the town of Rasheed, near Alexandria on the Mediterranean Coast of Egypt. The fort was built of materials salvaged from prior eras, of which Egypt has had many. As they tore down a wall, they found in the rubble a slab upon which was engraved not one, but three types of writing.

This slab eventually found its way into the hands of scholars who recognized one of the languages was Greek, one was Egyptian hieroglyphics, and one was in another Egyptian script. At the time, no one had been able to decipher hieroglyphics, even though the innumerable artifacts and edifices throughout the region were covered in them. Thus the ideas of ancient Egypt remained an utter mystery.

But now, given that ancient Greek was well plumbed, this stone from Rasheed, also known as Rosetta, enabled us to unlock Egyptian Hieroglyphics, at which point our understanding of ancient civilization skyrocketed. This act of translation opened a door to our understanding of this ancient and ancestral era.

October marks our own attempt to translate our ancestors into our awareness and possibly unlock some understanding. This move culminates with an invitation for our ancestors to be with us during our All Souls Ceremony on the 29th. Our ancestors can be a bit of a strange dialect for us. In some ways they occupy the same country as all the *other* others; angels, and demons, personified plants, and various legends we carry in our bones. It is a potent land and they should be deciphered with care.

The first move toward that translation for us was the bone story we heard this morning; Tam Lin.

Now, when the Bone Story Collective - which I think is what I am calling our story telling cohort - first considered what tale we ought to tell this month, Tam Lin emerged as the one with the most energy behind it. But we also puzzled over its purpose; how was Tam Lin connected with our invitation to our ancestors?

For me, part of what emerged from that conversation was that the march of the Fae was a march within the liminal, the transition space, the wilderness, the dark-forest soul of the story, the dark-forest soul of our lives. As liminal space it is neither here nor there but also both. It is dusk, dawn, a place wherein a mortal could interact with the Fae. And as All Hallows is a transition time, it too is liminal and this story is indeed traditionally associated with this season.

But also, and perhaps more meaningfully, for me, within that liminality Tam Lin drew a ley line between our sensitivity to and sense of the Fae * and our sensitivity to and sense of our

Ancestors * and our sensitivity to and sense of our own * embeddedness with the world. In other words, developing our sensibility to the Fae is the same exercise as developing our sensitivity to our Ancestors is the same exercise as developing our sensitivity to home.

When we develop these sensibilities with intention and attention, we replace the irrelevance and powerlessness of existential loneliness with the sense of personal relationship and meaningfulness. This is how we build a home.

Does that sound way too woo woo? Here's how I got here:

1. The way I see it, we are all together and each expressions of being. That goes for everything, from molecule, to cloud, to tree. Everything is a unique and interdependent expression of being's inherent and necessary dynamism. If you want to put that in the religious vocabulary, you, we, and everything are expressions of goddess or Gaia. Everything is an interrelated emergence, articulation, expression of the fundamental creative energy of the Tao.

I use the term "expression" pointedly. It connotes communication. You, me, and everything are the speech of being, a story, if you will.

What this means is that everything can be read as a message. Of course, if you don't know how to read, if you don't know vocabulary, it's easy to look at hieroglyphics and only see abstractions of ink on papyrus. So we need to have a means of understanding raw events as meaningful events. Meaning is already there for us. We just need a rosetta stone to decipher it, to unlock meaning for ourselves.

In fact, even without attending to it, we swim through so much meaning on a moment to moment basis that we unconsciously and necessarily limit and filter the amount of sensory information available to us. It's no good to be gobsmacked by meaning while driving.

2. On the other hand, while we may filter out most of the information coming our way, it is also true that there is way more information happening… way more expressions of being, more story, than we are even capable of sensing with our material senses. Our senses are not cued to the odor of butyric acid like the deaf and blind tick, nor to electrical fields like the black ghost knifefish, nor to air-compression waves like an echolocating bat.[1] We are not aware of these things at all or in any significant way.

We limit the fraction of reality we can perceive.

But we have a tool that both opens our perception beyond the material senses while filtering that data in such a way that it becomes meaningful. We have that rosetta stone that, when intentionally deployed, brings us into deeper awareness of our dialogue with the cosmos. And

[1] http://www.eagleman.com/blog/umwelt

yea, we then experience the world as more vibrant, more vivacious, and more interested in us. It is made personal and alive. And therein is something like love, with all its comfort, danger, and ecstacy.

The tool we use to do this, the rosetta stone we employ, wittingly or not, is story.

3. Intentionally deployed or not, stories are the languages that frame and render reality comprehensible. Stories are how we translate the ongoing messaging from life itself.

As far as I can tell, stories do this in a three step process. First they condition our imagination to perceive events, or expressions of being in particular ways. They condition our imagination. What we do or do not perceive is not entirely, but significantly dependent on the scope and shape of our imagination.

Second, conditioned by story, we then perceive these expressions of being, these messages, some of which we'd otherwise be unaware of. It is often the case that we first encounter these expressions as something extraordinary, a capital O other. Faeries. Or angels. Ancestors. Luminous rocks. Burning bushes. Coincidence. Aliens. God. Meaningful arrangements of light and shape. Moments of saturated significance without subject. Moments of other, that are nonetheless, voluptuously intimate.

Once perceived, we are able to integrate these expressions into our being. We become aware, by that integration, of our deep connection with a living world.

Stories then begin to act as a kind of shared language with the world and open lines of communication, dialogues, previously untapped. This is magic. Stories are a kind of spell. And by this magic, we can sense that we are a known and knowing part of the great conversation.

Without doubt some stories are better, more articulate, more creative, more relevant to the time than others. We currently live in what philosopher Charles Eisenstein calls the story of separation. Some of the myths operative in this story are the myth of progress and individualism.

And at this point, given that it is killing millions of beings, entire species, our species and damaging the planet itself, I think we can safely say that that story has been poorly discerned and is not an accurate translation of the world. We must return to or discover a story in deeper alignment with the ongoing expressions of being.

To recap a bit. 1. Everything is an expression of the Tao, or Goddess, or Spirit, or the Universe or whatever. 2. There's a lot more being expressed than the senses we are accustomed to can perceive. 3. Those expressions are rendered meaningful, and sometimes even perceptible, by our imagination via stories. Stories enable us to encounter and then integrate the other.

Indeed, many stories that tell of the others tell us how to engage with the Others. In fact, stories may be the Other. They teach us that otherness is an ever present opening. But also, story is a means by which to perceive the other, become aware of their messages and establish dialogue with them.

From Jacob in Egypt, to Juan Dieago and Our Lady of Guadalupe, to Hildegard of Bingen, to faerie sightings at Findhorn, to angels, demons, extra terrestrials, past lives, little green men in the matrix, signs and oracles; humans have been interacting with spiritually construed others forever.

In our literal, materialist era, we've tended to brush off such occurrences, chalking them up to whimsy, narcotics, or mental illness. And maybe sometimes they are, which should not necessarily dismiss them, mind you. However, we are protected from lunacy by one another. Direct experience is one of our sources. But I would submit that none of our sources, on their own, are meaningfully trustworthy.

Indeed, it is easy to misunderstand, to mistranslate. And that can result in anything from embarrassment to murder and ecocide as has been the case for capitalism and the myth of progress. It can be very bad. So we must be careful.

I recommend verifying any understanding you have with at least two of our sources, as well as with the community in which you sit, in so far as that community is expressed in our covenant. Those are some good guide rails.

My hope is that I've at least prepared your mental soil to receive a few seeds. We are surrounded by meaning. We render that meaning through story wittingly or unwittingly and wittingly is by far better. Story is the Rosetta Stone of perception and gives body to the meaning inherent to experience. It makes space for us to perceive what might otherwise be outside of our frame of reference and what, therefore, is often perceived as some kind of other, the wisdom of which we are then able to integrate into our being. We are then more deeply aware of how lusciously embraced we are.

I bring this all up because I want us to be prepared this month to attend to the specific stories of our ancestors and the broader story of ancestral potency and relevance. The others in the case of ancestors are those of us made strange by time, death, and immateriality. But their strangeness is also an invitation, for it puts us in the position to welcome them back, to welcome the other in, to reclaim their wisdom, and pain, and love as our own. To honor and love and heal. And to find ourselves honored, loved, and healed in turn.

This is nothing more than experience, nothing less than magic, and is how we find our way back into alignment, vitality, and a more beloved way of being.