

It seems that our conversation this evening was in sync with this season of harvest, change, and the preparations for the coming winter.

The bittersweet vine is in full bloom this time of year with its berries and changing leaf colors. Whether one loves this prolific plant or not, one must respect its tenacity and be vigilant in pruning it, or it will diminish (and eventually kill) whatever it is wrapped around. What in our life is bittersweet vine that we are supporting, to our deep spiritual detriment? What needs to be pruned or eradicated so that we can live more fully, faithful to our spiritual core? How can we trellis our bittersweet so that it has room to grow without taking over the rest of our life's garden?

Change is much harder in reality than it is as a concept. For many of us, returning to, or beginning anew, spiritual practices help keep us centered and balanced. This is especially important when our lives are full. It is a challenge to be fully present to life, in all of its varied aspects, emotions and stages, some of which can be in sharp contrast to each other. We strive to live our days without panicking at the intensities, to resist urges to make sense of it all -- or control it. How much do we really control? And how can we remain grounded in the midst of much change and uncertainty? How can we take care of ourselves and how can we ask for help through stormy times?

A Friend recited this poem by Robert Frost:

*The rain to the wind said,
You push and I'll pelt.'
They so smote the garden bed
That the flowers actually knelt,
And lay lodged--though not dead.
I know how the flowers felt.*

We feel the weariness in some of us. Several of us have had major health challenges that have left us feeling like we died when essential parts of our lives -- careers, talents, abilities -- no longer existed or could happen. Who are we -- really? And what is ours to do in a day? We took solace in the story of a young teen's wise, compassionate graffiti message last weekend that proclaimed *It's okay if you don't know yet (or ever)*.

Our next gathering will be on November 7, 2016 (election eve) at 7pm in the Community House. All are welcome to join us. We decided to read a chapter from Parker Palmer's book *The Active Life* entitled *The Woodcarver* before this meeting. Copies will be made available soon.

Gretchen Baker-Smith