

May Day: Will this be a day to open or close?

Congratulations. We made it through another Minnesota winter. Our hibernations are over. You're now allowed to start sneezing and swatting. Only the die-hard ice fishermen are sad that their solitude has been interrupted for another six months. Most are quite pleased with May. Maybe not with the month itself, but that May signals the coming of summer. And we're not alone. For thousands of years, May and her greenery have been awaited and welcomed.

For the Druids, it's the time for the setting of the new fire to lend life to the burgeoning springtime sun, and to the success of the fertility gods and goddesses. In Old English, the month of May is also known as the Month of the Three Milkings. (Such fun they had back then with names!)

There's also the ancient English custom of bringing in the May by traipsing off into the woods at dawn to pick flowers and lop off tender branches to decorate their houses. May festivals are a time for the "wearing of the green," and the running of horses. May is named for Maia, grandmother, the Goddess of fertility. Maia scorns marriage, so it's a good idea to put weddings off until June.

For the Romans, devoted to the worship of Flora, the goddess of flowers, they spruced up all their conquests with bouquets. Only the Puritans -- who had little patience for the vagaries of fertility rites -- took no added pleasure from May, so the day has NEVER been celebrated with much enthusiasm in America like it has been in the British Isles where the Druid and pagan spirit still burns bright. But Unitarian Universalists have no compunction about celebrating the coming of summer, right?

Ok, let's say you have no ambitions to be crowned the Queen of May and you can't fancy yourself dancing around an ancient fertility Maypole at dawn, but that still allows the giving of small flower baskets left anonymously on neighbor's doorsteps. Anonymous flower baskets are not your style? No problem.

How about if you start celebrating May by looking at your own two hands. It's easy enough. Try it. Take a moment to hold up your hands right now and look at them. Same hands that you redeemer, right? Not so fast...

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I had this dream not long ago where I looked at my hands and they seemed to look back at me and say, there are only two ways of your being in the world, my friend: OPEN OR CLOSED.

In my dream, this simple observation feels like a revelation. Of all the choices, options and decisions available to my waking self, my hands have it easy: open or closed. It's not that easy, I protest. I feel weighted down and chained to a thousand other expectations and requirements.

My hands look up at me as if to say...

Do you want to be open or closed?

The facts seem clear enough, they say. You came into this world and one day you'll leave. What would you like to do in between your entrance and exit? Open or closed?

In my dream, my hands show me how they work and how they do their work well. When my hands wake up in the morning, they close around some task. When they go to bed, they are open. Sleeping hands are always open. Waking hands are often closed. Between sleep and waking, my hands find direction. More often than not, my hands are open.

I wake from the dream and look at my hands as if discovering them for the first time. Open or closed, I say to everyone I meet that day and they look at me with amusement or pity in their eyes. What is this poet babbling about now...

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One way to describe the universe is that it's a giant ever-expanding balloon filled with cosmic microwave background radiation. Say that ten times.

One way to describe the human body is as an electro-dynamic grid filled with a constant energy current. When any biological activity or movement takes place within your body, a measurable electrical action takes place. There are 200 million electrical particles, for example, in every breath. Conversely, you can't have life in your body without electrical pulse.

One theory has it that those people who live long and productive lives are able to increase their cellular conductivity as they age rather than have it interrupted and diminished. Their bodies becomes super conductors for ideas, creativity, passion and service. Said another way, their electrical circuitry remains open to any and all life including plants, animals, people. People who live long seem to expand in their thinking, not shrink. They often multi-task well. They get smarter as they age. They do things they have never done before. They don't TRY as much as they DO.

People who live long and well... are said to have a "spark." They take long walks, they swim, they dig their hands in soil where the minerals that conduct electricity are in abundance. Humility, gratitude and laughter come easily to them. People who live long move easily from the past to the

present and into the future. They don't fight time, but rather let pulse through them.

No matter where they live -- in Okinawa, Russia, Minnesota or Sardinia -- their days are built with many of the same things: animals, plants, sunlight, friends, family and creative outpourings of one kind or another. They have a desire and curiosity to learn which keeps their brain active and firing. They praise. They venture. They make. They don't seem to mind what happens to them personally because whatever happens they put back into their electrical grid.

Not surprisingly, people of long life all over the world often have a fondness for greenery. They grow things or watch things grow or make things from greenery. Even when there is no greenery, they go find it. My ninety-one year old mother who does not have cataracts, nor a hearing aid, plays a wicked game of bridge and still drives her own car, makes collage books of people, boats, animals and flowers. Her latest book is called, *The Character Seed Catalog*, and it ends with a quote from Phillipians that long ago took root at the center of her life:

Finally, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things

are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; think on these things.

(Philippians 4:8)

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Studies now confirm that there are multiple forms of intelligence and that each person is endowed with some expression of this intelligence.

There's linguistic intelligence (language), logical/mathematical (patterns), body intelligence (dancers and athletes), spatial (puzzles), musical (sounds), interpersonal (extrovert leaders who are masters of communication and consensus-building), and intrapersonal (introverted people who are keenly aware of their own insights and feelings).

The person who can crosswire multiple expressions of intelligence is said to enter the genius category, but what really happens is that this cross wiring allows them to reach a transpersonal realm of COMPASSIONATE INTELLIGENCE. And how do they accomplish this? By keeping their electrical grid open to possibility and transformation.

COMPASSION IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF INTELLIGENCE as expressed by the greatest leaders, teachers, and mystics including Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Helen Keller, Margaret Mead, Mother Theresa and many others, who were keen on asking two words routinely:

WHAT IF. AND NOT THE WHAT IF SOMETHING WENT WRONG
KIND OF WHAT IF, BUT THE WHAT IF I PUT MY HANDS TO WORK
OVER HERE AND TOOK ANOTHER ROAD HOME.

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There's a tribe in northern Mexico called the Tarahumara and they are the greatest high-altitude walkers and runners in the world. They wear only sandals so their feet will better grip the earth, and so even the elders do not suffer from foot or ankle pain. One story I read describes the incredible strength and stamina of 97-year-old man walking 30 miles across mountains above 10,000 feet. When the old man was asked how he could walk such great distances at such breath-robbing altitudes with almost nothing on his feet, he replied, "**NO ONE TOLD ME I COULDN'T.**"

The conventional view of age is that as you get old, you get slow. Slow in movement, slow in thinking, slow to change. But there are people in their 80s, 90s, and 100s all over the world, for whom exactly the opposite is true. They are quick, expansive and each day brings a greater survey of all that's before them.

I recently met a Native American man in Arizona who is well into his nineties. He's a retired doctor, veterinarian, but still an active scientist and he asked me if I would like to go hiking with him on the red rocks. He had a

little waist and broad shoulders. He looked strong enough to leave me far behind. His mind and eyes are clear, his thinking razor sharp, his energy unstoppable. I asked him what his secret was. I swear this really happened. He looked down at his powerful hands and said, "I stay open and grateful for all possibilities."

What is the implication of such a statement? Open and grateful for ALL possibilities."

ALL POSSIBILITIES would mean you are open to everything.

OPEN to speeding tickets and stock market crashes. Oh please.

OPEN to pickled onions and missed plane rides. Oh no.

OPEN to the loveliness of the sow and the roadside cone flower. If you insist.

OPEN to losing a loved one and a finding a new one. Not that.

OPEN to neighbors you've never met and friends you don't talk to anymore.

OPEN to the mysteries of not waking up one morning or waking up in a place where no one looks like you.

OPEN to runaway dogs, abandoned boats and stray adults.

OPEN to the idea you may be wrong about dozens of snap judgments that pilot your life.

OPEN even to the idea that you don't want to be open, but would rather shut down and practice your frozen, fastidious curmudgeon-hood to perfection. OPEN to the power of endings so the gift of new beginnings can find you. OPEN to May and January and grateful for what happens in between. O come on, do I have to be open to all that change and flux, all that Alpha and Omega, all that great unknowing and knowing that binds us and everything else within an immeasurable pool of cosmic microwave background radiation -- you ask.

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The wise elders the world over reply this way: When you do remain open -- no matter what happens to you -- you remain fed, no matter where you are in your life's story. You are able to pass through the hard, thin places and find yourself aligned with the whole of humanity.

In South Africa, there's a concept called Ubuntu. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished." In other words, Ubuntu is the essence of being human. The essence of being open. The essence of life itself.

When you are open, you have powers to think and act that far exceed anything that can be readily explained. Consider this tale...

I remember once when I was ten. I was standing barefoot on a metal dock in the rain. No one else was around. I reached down with both hands to grab the lifeline on my father's boat. I remember seeing that a electric cord was wrapped around the lifeline so our forty foot sailboat could have shore power. When I grabbed the lifeline, a metal line encased in plastic, a surge of electricity shook my body and I couldn't let go. There was a short in the cord and the lifeline was now electrifying my body. I couldn't let go. I had to let go. I was frozen by current. My life sparkled and trembled before my eyes.

The next thing I knew my locked and burning hands were free and I was flying over the lifeline and I landed on the other side of my father's boat, some ten or twelve feet from where I stood on the wet, metal dock in the rain.

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How could this happen? How could I have saved my own life? No one saw me flying through the rain. Did it happen? I looked down at my hands and I remember thanking them. My mother found me huddled in the

cockpit and she asked me what happened and I said, "I couldn't let go, so I started flying."

If you think back over your life, you can discover moments when your own internal current or divine spark revealed itself to be equal to whatever darkness or trembling came your way and wouldn't let you go. Divine spark stories (as I like to call them) are common among mothers, fathers, and children -- the world over. Like the sun, our own electrical grid links us to the seasons, to the cycles of life, to the cosmos itself -- whether we acknowledge its pulse or not. Called upon or ignored, the electrical grid/the divine spark is there... just waiting for us to use it -- to guide us, direct us, energize us, rescue us. Since I was ten, I've never once thought it was impossible for someone to fly.

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In my dream, my hands showed me how easy my choices could be: Open or closed. I could give myself a thousand other options and interpretations for how I might conduct my daily affairs, but my hands just waved them off. Sorry, they seem to say in sign language. You only get two choices.

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Now, that May is really here, we have this opportunity to help bring on summer which means... to open ourselves again, to walk in sunlight, to recharge our grid, to celebrate the simple pleasures of spending more time out, than in.

Don't worry. Nothing big is scored on your calendar. According to Maia, the Goddess of Fertility, there are no marriages planned this month. There's really no place you can go that can offer you as much as the patch of green in your own yard or patio or neighborhood park. Everything that is true, honest, just, pure and lovely and that you need right now to recharge your electrical grid is in the soil at your feet.

All you have to do is unplug from the house and plug back into the earth's grid. And then... look at YOUR hands and ask them where they would like to take YOU. What work would they most like to accomplish? How can your hands serve the current that runs through us all? What would your hands like to say they did here for a short time or a long time as the sparks flew through them like the cartwheeling stars?

What if you could say in May... you learned a great deal from your own two hands? What if all the flowers and vegetables were only waiting for your hands to open and greet them?

