

May 14, 2020

We are in a fallow time, a term used in agriculture when fields are left unplanted or planted with crops that have no harvest value but regenerate the soil with nutrients that have been depleted by harvest crops.

Given the use of chemicals in our times, fallow periods for natural regeneration of the soil is in a manner of speaking non-existent as chemicals can quickly support the same crops year after year but with their attending consequences which.

Animal husbandry, raising animals for food, used to depend on fallow times to allow the animals time to recuperate and bond with their offspring through periods of natural growth and development. That, too, has changed and animals raised for food has become an industrialized process with no fallow time and we probably don't want to know more but whether we know it or not it is happening.

In my experience with young people I have often used the term "fallow time" to refer to periods when in their minds they have reached a dead end. Fallow times come when a romantic or love relationship ends or when a pursued career or major in college proves to be a path to unhappiness and not what they expected.

The young person doesn't experience the fallowness but rather sadness or depression, even, hopelessness or despair. The best I can offer in these times with young people is a compassionate listening, an attentiveness that never lets them down and doesn't pretend everything will be okay.

It is a day by day process that requires stamina on my part so that the young person does not reach a tipping point that can hurt them more deeply.

New widows and widowers, lovers of all kind, when they lose a beloved in death or dementia or some other absence of the personal, the human, enter, quite often, a fallow time and, of course, they do not understand it as fallow, it has often been described to me as a hole in the ground of themselves, their days, and their lives, a hole that is always there that they have to walk around day and night.

In these situations, I find it very important to just listen and know with them. I find it helpful after a time of grieving to suggest a regular practice, that works for some, of intentionally deciding that just for a few minutes on a regular schedule, daily, weekly, not much less, to decide that I will not think of my loss but on what I have found that is a new discovery such as a walking path, a seated window view, trees are my personal favorites.

The idea is that even though you might have walked the same route thousands of times, looked out the same window for years, or passed by the same tree forever, now you notice the path and what you can see from it, the view and what you can really look at, or the tree that now has a “personality” that you never ever noticed before.

As I said, we are in a fallow time and it is hard to see how it can be useful to us or helpful or, even, necessary, but the virus in all of its complexity and potential for harming us in so many ways, is a manifestation of the mystery that surrounded us last year when we didn't even know we were surrounded by mystery.

And here we are! Remember, this, too, shall end, it can end well or badly, but it shall end and, in the meantime, we can become mean or we can become better at this business of bearing fruit, fruit that will last a lot longer than the virus.