

**What We Resist, Persists**  
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“Friend, I have lost the way.”

This line from the Edmund Muir reading today is so real to me, especially as we begin a new year. We don't know how the narrator lost his way, but we don't need to know to understand his plight.

“The way leads on,” say you all in the response lines, in the beginning and again at the end, alpha and omega.

The narrator is desperately resisting moving forward – he thinks he must turn back, or simply stay put, mired in fear, immovable in space and time, lamenting the things he has passed on his journey.

The thing that he is resisting, continuing on the way laid out before him, is the very thing he must do. It is natural for us to consider, at the turning of the year, the way before us, and if we will choose to move forward and resist the ever-present fear of the unknown – because our previous journeys are indeed done, and the way leads on.

Carl Jung once said: "What we resist, persists." We resist all kinds of things in our lives, and we put considerable effort into resisting.

The list of things we resist is long indeed: change, love (self-love and love from others), spending time on self-

care (I can't go paint right now because of x, y and z..., etc.), personal growth...the list goes on.

What happens if we stop resisting, like the rock in the stream, and instead be like the water, and flow around the rocks, following the path of least resistance? Water seeks to find its level, always -- it seeks balance and equilibrium, and takes the path of least resistance (which is how our basements get flooded, but perhaps that is a different sermon). What can happen in our lives if we seek to be more like the water and less like the rock?

Currents are persistent, and sometimes -- frequently, in fact -- there is nothing we can do about it.

It is the natural process of things, like in our Taoist story for today, where the current of the water simply is. If we resist, we waste our energy at best, and at worst, we can actually die. The old man allows himself to be shaped by the water instead of insisting that it conform to him, and in doing so he survives what would likely have been a deadly fall.

Consider the reality of the riptide; if you resist and swim furiously, trying to fight the current, you will drown -- the current persists, and it is stronger than the best of swimmers. One must either swim parallel to the shore, or simply float until the current has dissipated.

Both approaches that equal survival are about not fighting, not resisting, the current.

Sometimes our resistance is not a matter of life or death, but something more insidious, perhaps affecting our quality of life and not life itself.

This could be resisting a calling, whether that is a calling to service in church or social justice movements, or perhaps a calling to art or teaching or some other pursuit. Many of my Unitarian Universalist seminarian friends are pursuing ministry as a second or third career, having resisted a prior call of the spirit for years.

I thought I was following the path of least resistance and doing the right thing by first becoming an academic. It took me many years to see that I had actually been fighting the spiritual current of my soul, the current of Spirit attempting to draw me to ministry. Like the swimmer exhausted by swimming against the current, I had exhausted myself by trying to fight the current of academia and was drowning in my frustration and anger.

There are probably some of you out there who have found yourselves resisting the \*change\* in a calling and can relate to how difficult that struggle is. The sad part is that it is an unnecessary struggle -- if we were aware of the currents of calling in our lives, and how the Spirit of Life is working through us, we wouldn't be suffering.

The good news, though, is that at any time we can choose to be like our Taoist teacher from the story and flow with our call.

We are not alone in history, for sure! Consider for a moment how many Biblical characters resisted their calling to their detriment -- even Jesus asked God to take this cup from him before fully accepting his call.

In addition to water, electricity also takes the path of least resistance. Current will flow through all available paths, but if there is a dramatic difference in resistance among the various paths, it will flow through the least resistant path.

There is a beautiful efficiency about the way energy, in this case electricity, flows in principle. I like the metaphor of gaining energy in our lives through being conduits of flow rather than bulwarks of resistance.

A complaint I hear in most all of my communities is the common cry, "I just don't have enough energy for fill-in-the-blank: my family and kids, my hobbies, community service, self-care." Perhaps we can gain some energy back for the things that matter most to us by resolving to not create resistance where we don't need it, resistance in this case being things like unnecessary dramas of control.

As the Buddha supposedly said, change is never painful; only resistance to change is painful.

What can happen if we stop resisting our resistance?

Instead, perhaps we can just claim it, whatever it may be. If need be, we can just say our situation sucks, accept that's where we are right now, and sit with it.

Remember our swimmer from the riptide metaphor. If we can just float within the current of our feelings, without judgement or attempting to change, we will eventually find our way out or through. We can choose to stop putting energy into lying to ourselves about how we feel and thus save ourselves the additional grief and pain this response generates.

Returning to our water metaphors, I noted earlier that "water always seeks its own level," balance and equilibrium. I googled the phrase and found that the principle actually says that the water levels in two basins, connected by a pipe, must be the same. Surely, this was known long before Aristotle; but Aristotle articulated it and wrote it down.

The hydrostatic rules of water are efficient in the way that natural law tends to be, as we considered with electricity. This can be a dangerous thing, in terms of rushing rapids, and rip currents, and flooded basements (some of us here may well know a thing or two about all of these).

I got to thinking, though, about all the beauty that results from this principle even as I recognize the dangers and damage that can happen.

I considered the retention basin that is just off the Orchard Road exit on Interstate 88, where the water that has run off has created an amazing habitat for

birds and grass and flowers. This beautiful natural area nestled in a bastion of strip malls and car dealerships is a true oasis of beauty and peace. It's kind of a neat example of what can happen when people work with natural laws instead of resisting them. The businesses can operate without fear of flooding and property damage, and the rainwater and runoff that levels in the basin supports wildlife such as herons and cranes, and wild day-lilies and prairie grasses. The people who developed the area probably didn't have the best interests of the earth in mind when they built structures in the area, which is a natural flood plain – but by bending to the laws of water they managed to create something that served their purposes and generated a natural habitat as well.

Denise Levertov, in our reading today, says that she wishes to attain freefall into the Creator Spirit's embrace, and that she knows that “no effort earns that all-sustaining grace.”

This is, as I see it, the best gift that comes from letting go of our efforts at resisting things – we experience the grace of the Divine Spirit, the embrace of the Holy as we define it. This grace is not something that we fight for or create through our own efforts. It simply *is* – like the currents, and the flow of energy, and the axial spin of the earth, and it is attained through no effort, no resistance.

This view of grace bestowed by the Creator Spirit is akin in some ways to the inner peace achieved through Buddhist practices, or the gentle internal balance of the Taoist. It is achieved by what we do *not* do, not by the

actions we take. This is the grace that comes when we stop resisting the path before us, the way that leads ever on.

My prayer for all of us in this new year is to find the courage to acknowledge our feelings, to embrace the flow of life, and to know that grace is the gift that comes when we stop resisting and step onto the path. Be brave, my people – go forth in this New Year and commit to the way that leads ever onward. Look forward, not behind, and may you discover the treasures of ordinary life, like the herons and the lilies in retention ponds, along the way.

Amen, Ashé, and Blessed Be.