

SageWoman

Celebrating the Goddess in Every Woman



Serenity

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Sacred Seclusion · Serenity in the Fast Lane

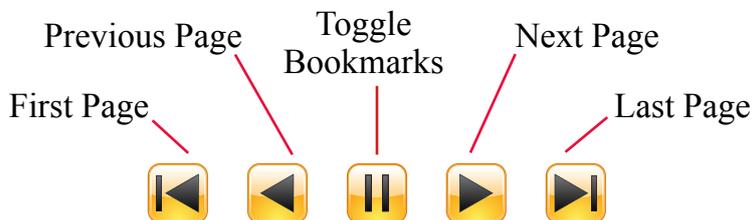


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Living the Dream: Letter from the Editor

by Anne Newkirk Niven

*Be like a bird, who,
halting in her flight
On a limb too slight,
feels it give way beneath her;
Yet sings, sings,
knowing she has wings;
Yet sings, sings,
knowing she has wings.*

Libana, "Be Like a Bird"
Fire Within, 2003
(from a poem by Victor Hugo)

I might be the worst person on Earth to discuss "serenity." You know, the quality portrayed in the traditional pose: one's legs crossed in the Lotus position, back straight-but-relaxed, peacefully emanating calm. Like the kids say these days...that's me — *not*.

My signature yoga posture (if anyone was deluded enough to create one based on my life) should be called "the Monkey Mind." Its characteristic stance would feature the practitioner swinging from tree-to-tree in the top of Life's canopy, always looking for the next hand hold, and rarely slowing down long enough to even glance down at the ground.

Truth to tell, I've spent most of the past fifty-plus years chasing inner peace. A word to the wise: hunting down Serenity as if it was some kind of exotic animal is pretty much the worst possible way to achieve it. You think you are fast enough to catch up with this luminous treasure but, just as you reach out your hand, She unfolds her iridescent wings and floats regally away into the sky.

I do have a pretty significant handicap in my quest for peacefulness: being "detached" (which seems to be the secret sauce of the serenity sandwich) is just not in my nature.

My parents, Goddess-love-them, careened out-of-control frequently during my childhood, and as the eldest daughter, it was my self-appointed mission to pick up the pieces. I also tried valiantly to keep everyone happy (or at least, not crazy-sauce) and therefore prevent the crap from hitting the fan in the first place.

From this, I learned the following: not to trust my folks to be safe and sane; to discount the authority figures in my life; and not to have faith in the Universe itself. As my mother used to say, "Assume the worst, and hope for the best." When I'm in a self-deprecating frame of mind, I explain my anxious habits by quoting Prince Humperdinck from *The Princess Bride*: "I always think that everything could be a trap — which is why I'm still alive."

This brings me to a realization: one significant reason that I became a witch in the first place was because I appreciated the Craft's emphasis on pragmatic practical workings. Asking JC for assistance (something I started doing as a child and still occasionally fall back upon today, even though I'm no longer Christian) was all well-and-good if you're desperate. But I wanted to have agency, too. After all, what's that saying, "God/dess helps those that help themselves?"

My predilection for do-it-yourself spiritual work isn't all bad news: due to my personal pressure-points I've developed a specialty in the realm of protection magic. I'm especially proud of the spell that I created to keep deer away from the family van back when we drove the notoriously windy, narrow Highway One in coastal Northern California and of my house-blessings.

However, my role as Protector-in-Chief often leads me to "mother-hen" the people that I love. What's more, my loved ones sometimes worry about worrying *me*. (Which is pretty ironic, as that was exactly the dynamic between my mother and I when she was still alive.) So, out of fear of causing my people to become anxious *about* me, I've developed some good glamours for hiding my own distress. I also often try to hide my anxious feelings because I'm embarrassed when my rational brain knows full well that whatever I'm freaking out about is not worthy of all psychic Sturm-und-Drang that I'm generating.

Yet, despite all the energy that I flush down the drain with the relentless chasing of my own psychic tail, I ordinarily accomplish a tremendous amount of productive work,* which would seem to require both focus and at least a modicum of calm. So, what gives?

*It has not escaped my attention that this decidedly ableist metric is a primary driver of my self-image. I need to work on that, it seems.

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Editorial Notes

We encourage all Goddess-loving women to write for *SageWoman*. Most of our articles come from our readers! *SageWoman* publishes primarily first-person prose written by woman to our announced themes.

Our "Body & Soul" department welcomes your creative submission(s) regardless of theme.

Visit www.SageWoman.com for writing guidelines, subscriptions and blog links. You can also call 888-724-3966, or write via postal mail to: SageWoman, P. O. Box 687, Forest Grove, OR 97116.

Next issue is #89 "Roots & Wings." Deadline is past.

#89 "The Magic of Trees" Deadline December 1, 2015

Ever since I was a little girl, I've loved trees, and shared a special relationship with them. Tell us your stories of the trees you have loved — especially the ones that have loved you back.

Coming Soon:

#91: *Worlds of Faerie*

#92: *Sunrise, Sunset*

What I'm beginning to intuit is that I might be entirely misunderstanding the quality of Serenity itself. I normally think of inner peace as a permanent condition: one that is either established in one's character at all times, or never present at all. In such a scenario, one is either a (metaphorical) Zen monk levitating slightly above the yoga mat in perfect bliss, or a human cockroach, dashing hither-and-yon motivated solely by the fleeting impulses of the moment.

But what if serenity — far from being a trophy that we can capture and display upon our interior altar — is one of the natural elements of the universe like wind, water, and fire? What if, instead of possessing serenity, the quality of Serenity can possess *us*? To use an analogy from the field of physics, what if the nature of Serenity, like that of light, is that is mostly an energy wave?

To follow this wave analogy a bit further: chasing after Serenity could be seen as charmingly naive (but ultimately futile): like a little girl attempting to capture a wave that splashes her feet at the seashore. She loves the feel of the water tickling her toes, but she's a little afraid of it, too. So she darts back-and-forth along the sand, her hands outstretched, trying to master the tides and command the sea.

I feel like that little girl, sometimes, and maybe you do, too. No matter how much we dash around, no amount of willpower, exertion, or striving will achieve that sought-after feeling of inner peace. But if we pause, take a deep breath, and wait at the right place at the right time, we are bound to get wet. In short, we can't control the circumstances under which the waves form, how fast they arrive and recede, or how high they come onto the beach of our lives. All that we can control is where we are standing.

Like a rainbow, a drop of rain, a gust of wind, or a flower unfolding, inner peace is deeply ephemeral and utterly unpredictable. Tranquility creeps in quietly, as poet Carl Sandburg said of fog, "on little cat feet" and offers the gift of a timeless pause during which we are not actually thinking at all.

That's another key: we can't understand Serenity by thinking, ruminating, or planning. Those strategies are valuable, and far be it from me to advocate distracting ourselves into the droning unconsciousness that masquerades as bliss in our consumptive culture. But thinking (especially obsessing) feeds the illusion that we can be in control if we just try hard enough.

Simply put: *nope*.

Serenity depends on trusting and open-hearted acceptance — in every way counter-cultural to the buzz, buzz, buzz of human endeavor — of the undeniable fact that we are not in control of our own destinies. Furthermore, serenity asserts — in a subtle, intangible way — that this existential reality is just fine.

These realizations have brought me a wee taste of peacefulness that I didn't anticipate. Perhaps, I am beginning to think, I might not be a stranger to Serenity, after all: maybe I just haven't recognized Her light-footed presence in my life. While I'm dancing from treetop-to-treetop, my worries and obsessions occasionally slip unnoticed out of my busy hands, leaving me swinging high in the dappled canopy sunlight in utter joy. Hmmmm. Maybe the idea of that "Monkey Mind" yoga pose isn't quite so ridiculous after all.

Blessed be,



ANNE NEWKIRK NIVEN is the Editor of *SageWoman* and *Witches&Pagans* magazines. She lives and works in her home office, across a gulch from a family of noisy suburban chickens in Forest Grove, OR.