



What a Time to be Alive

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The day after Congressman John Lewis died, I read a story from his memoir, *Walking with the Wind*, that stirred my heart so deeply that it still lives within me even now as I write this article nearly two weeks later. The story brought together the pain and fear around world events, my rollercoaster energy, and our current Seattle Insight practice around dependent origination. I found myself settling into the refuge of my practice with a renewed inspiration. But first, the incredible story...

[A]bout fifteen of us children were outside my Aunt Seneva's house, playing in her dirt yard. The sky began clouding over, the wind started picking up, lightning flashed far off in the distance, and suddenly I wasn't thinking about playing anymore; I was terrified... Aunt Seneva was the only adult around, and as the sky blackened and the wind grew stronger, she herded us all inside. Her house was not the biggest place around, and it seemed even smaller with so many children squeezed inside. Small and surprisingly quiet. All of the shouting and laughter that had been going on earlier, outside, had stopped. The wind was howling now, and the house was starting to shake. We were scared. Even Aunt Seneva was scared.

And then it got worse. Now the house was beginning to sway. The wood plank flooring beneath us began to bend. And then, a corner of the room started lifting up. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. None of us could. This storm was actually pulling the house toward the sky. With us inside it. That was when Aunt Seneva told us to clasp hands. Line up and hold hands, she said, and we did as we were told. Then she had us walk as a group toward the corner of the room that was rising. From the kitchen to the front of the house we walked, the wind screaming outside, sheets of rain beating on the tin roof. Then we walked back in the other direction, as another end of the house began to lift. And so it went, back and forth, fifteen children walking with the wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of our small bodies.

More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house, rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart. It seemed that way in the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, when America itself felt as if it might burst at the seams—so much tension, so many storms. But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away. They stayed, they came together, and they did the best they could, clasping hands and moving toward the

corner of the house that was the weakest. And then another corner would lift, and we would go there.

And eventually, inevitably, the storm would settle, and the house would still stand. But we knew another storm would come, and we would have to do it all over again. And we did. And we still do, all of us. You and I.

Children holding hands, walking with the wind.. . .

After reading this story, I saw Buddha's teachings in the storm, in Aunt Seneva's actions, and in the children. Dependent origination is about learning to see the how we react to the coming together of random causes and conditions. Our habitual reactivity is rooted in ignorance and will lead towards suffering every time. Not because we are somehow less than, but because we are trapped in a closed-looped circuit wrapped in fear of the unknown, unfamiliar, uncertain. This closed-looped thinking erroneously convinces us that safety, security and pleasure come from safe, secure, pleasant outer conditions. All of Buddha's teachings point away from this type of thinking, which is rooted in a misunderstanding of the gift of present moment awareness. Present moment awareness is not just about reaching a still presence of mind during meditation. It is about learning to always turn towards the present moment; to learn to live our lives within this present moment and not our memories, assumptions, projections, judgments, or expectations.

This is what came together for me in Congressman Lewis' story. I believe that once Aunt Seneva got the kids to hold hands and walk towards each rising corner, the moment became less about the storm or their fear about what was going to happen and more about moving together to wherever the next rising corner happened to be. Similarly, our skies seem to be covered in intimidating clouds and strong winds are blowing against us. These are random causes and conditions that have come suddenly, unexpectedly. We are all afraid while simultaneously being isolated inside our homes. We know the habitual way we act in a storm. We freeze, hide-out, hoping everything quickly blows over and returns to normal.

But what if normal is the problem. If Aunt Seneva had just reacted in the normal way, there's no telling how tragic that situation could have turned out. Instead, she had the presence of mind to respond with what was needed in *that* moment. Might we do the same? Could this moment be asking for something different from us? Might we join hands, and with presence of mind, walk together towards the mystery of whatever is in front of us (leaving whatever we thought of as "the way it's suppose to be" right where it is – in the past)? I am so grateful for the many online opportunities to practice that Seattle Insight offers. Maybe you start with simply attending the weekly Monday sit or maybe you attend the drop-in meditations. Eventually, I hope you will try out an actual online retreat – they are pretty spectacular -- different, but spectacular none the less. Come join with us as often as you can, and we will walk this path together.

With a deep bow...

Tuere