

The Life Coach

Francine Campone

Water in the Desert

Finding oases in every day life

THERE'S A CANYON NEAR PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA WHICH IS HOME TO AN ABUNDANCE OF CALIFORNIA PALM TREES. The palms in this oasis grow in thick, shady groves refreshed by a clear stream running along the canyon floor, protected by the canyon's rocky walls. What contributes most to the impressive stature of these trees, beyond their wonderful height, is that all the lower fronds remain on the trunk resulting in a heavy majestic skirt that seems to simultaneously anchor the tree firmly in place and thrust the green tuft of leaves at the top skyward.

It's a wonderful image to hold in mind. These trees thrive in the desert because they're able to tap their roots into the earth and draw sufficient sustenance from what's available. By growing in groves, the palms provide each other with shade and shelter. Their entangled roots hold each other firmly in place when there's an unexpected downpour and the stream overflows its banks. They are not shorn of their old leaves like the iconic palm trees of Hollywood. The resulting skirt preserves moisture and coolness in the desert sun and attracts and shelters a variety of creatures.

What would it take to be like this I wonder? It strikes me that such strength begins with a sound system of roots. The palms put out roots reaching toward the sole water source in the canyon. I invite readers to consider- how close are you standing to a steady source of water in your life: activities, ideas and experiences which nourish your well-being and which provide the raw material for your continued growth? When asked, many clients can easily articulate what's most important in their value system- a desire for more time with family or for spiritual practice or quiet time for reflection or journal-keeping. These are the obvious "gushers". But springs in a desert can be subtle and it often requires a closer, more tempered scrutiny to find them all. One client, for example, noticed over and over

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again that she felt calmer when her home environment was orderly and organized. Another saw how much she enjoyed those parts of her workday when she had an opportunity to brainstorm and invent new ideas. While more time for family is a laudable and attainable goal, a broader awareness of one's own water sources increases the opportunity to draw more from available resources. Notice, for example, those times during ordinary days that engender feelings of well-being. What are you doing? Who is present? What's the context or environment? What part of you is being satisfied in that particular moment? Even in a day that seems like a desert, there are trickles of moisture close to the surface if only we look closely.

This exploration of roots and water sources leads us to further look around and consider our grove. One of the most critical elements of a satisfying life is entangling ourselves with an interdependent community of people who support us and whom we, in turn, support. Again, it's helpful to look closely at the whole ecology, noticing the small acts of thoughtfulness as well as the grand gestures, what is present as well as what is absent. Unlike the trees which naturally spring up in groupings with others, humans can make choices about the people with whom they surround themselves and the kinds of interactions they have. Knowing where our "water sources" lie, we can place ourselves among others seeking similar sustenance.

And then there is the matter of those old fronds. Instead of always trying to tidy ourselves up, cut away or leave behind our "old stuff", let's consider the potential strengths that our old ways of being and doing suggest. Psychologist Martin Seligman notes that authentic happiness may be derived from knowing and cultivating one's inherent traits rather than focusing on what's lacking. Toward this end, he offers a list of twenty-four character strengths. Almost every person on earth possesses at least a few of these and they are made visible in our thinking, acting and speaking. Look over the list: which of these would an observer see in you? The traits which promote wisdom and knowledge are: curiosity, love of learning, judgment, ingenuity, social intelligence and perspective. The traits which

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promote courage are valor, perseverance and integrity. The traits which promote humanity are kindness and being loving. The traits which promote justice are citizenship, fairness, leadership. The traits which promote temperance are self-control, prudence, and humility. The traits which promote transcendence are appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, spirituality, forgiveness, humor and zest. Figure out which of these you want to have covering your trunk. Move closer to water. Find a grove.

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