

BY CLAYTON SPIVEY

Take a Bite Out of Life

Last week, Dennis died. No, this is not going to be a story about loss and death, but about fullness and abundance. Dennis was a patient of mine who had AIDS, and whose life was full of giving and the joy of the human spirit.

Dennis and I spoke often of his earlier life as a priest, and the joy he had felt daily as a minister to his congregation. He was solid, trustworthy, nurturing and giving. He took care of everyone's needs. Except his own. When he left the priesthood, he was "burnt out" and needed to regain, for himself, a feeling that he had something else to give. As a "civilian" (his word, not mine), his life's work was about serving others, too, and his colleagues felt blessed by his many gifts to make them feel special. Dennis was gifted with the element of the Earth—the ability to support us, feed us, nurture us, to be there when all else fails.

However, Dennis' gift was also his challenge. His illness robbed his body of the ability to sustain itself—his Earthly body was failing as he was unable to take in the nourishment, physically and socially, that Earth provides us. Like all gardens of abundance, Dennis couldn't continue to give without taking in, without being "fertilized," so that he could continue to thrive.

When I first met Dennis, he was unable to eat anything. He was being "tube fed"

through a line into his chest. Our basic contract for treatment was to enable him to eat fettucine alfredo (his favorite dish) for his birthday dinner in the winter. As we talked about nourishment on the physical plane, Dennis came to draw parallels between his inability to feast on food with his reluctance to have his friends and colleagues see him or interact with him at this stage of his life. He had also withdrawn from any spiritual pursuits and was "starving" himself on this level as well. When it became apparent that each level (body, mind and spirit) mirrored the others, it became clear that one level couldn't heal without the others being addressed, too.

So, Dennis went to some social events when he could, and he made plans to go "on-line" with his new computer when he felt too weak to socialize. He went back to church at the holidays, and connected with some individuals who had been important to his spiritual development. By his birthday week (this celebration of his life lasted at least a week) he ate Mexican food, Chesapeake Bay seafood, Greek specialties and his beloved fettucine alfredo. He left the tube feeder behind on his trip to Key West in February. Finally he had learned to take in nourishment for his body, his mind, his spirit.

So this August, when I go to my garden, I'm going to take a salt shaker.



Rather than just hastily pick some tomatoes and whip up something quick with them for dinner, I'm going to sit for awhile in the morning sun, holding the biggest and sweetest tomato in my hand, feeling its warmth, remembering the planting of the smallest seed, the staking of the gangly stalks, the exciting appearance of the early green tomato-balls in July, and the ripening of the fruit in August. I'm going to sit in the grass, wipe the tomato on my shirt, lick the skin to make the salt stick, and take a huge bite. I'll let the juice roll down my chin without worrying about the mess.

And I'll remember Dennis.

Practical Advice for Late Summer

Things you can do to enrich your Earth Element:

- The Earth is about satisfaction: making a "meal" of food, friends, work, play—having life activities be as fulfilling as possible. Take the time to be satisfied.
- Eat sensibly. The weather now is hot and damp. If you have problems with these climatic conditions, limit your intake of dairy, sugar, fried foods and wheat. All these produce mucous and heaviness of head and limbs.
- Besides eating a well balanced diet, allow enough time to eat in a relaxed

manner. Let your food digest for fifteen minutes before getting busy.

- In the high humidity, make sure your clothes are dry. Don't sit around in a wet bathing suit or sweaty sportswear. Especially don't get a chill (from an open window or air conditioner) when your clothes are damp. This can make for a crick in the neck, a stiff shoulder or a back that "just goes out."

- Take your vacation, if you haven't had one yet. This is a season to celebrate accomplishment. Be satisfied with your achievements.

- Teach someone something. If you are an expert in your field, identify an apprentice, someone who could carry on your tradition of excellence and knowledge.

- Get a mentor. If you want to know how to do something or understand something, go to someone who knows. Devour their knowledge and skill.

- Out-of-balance Earth often leads to worry. Find out what stops your pattern of worry (often, it's taking action), and do it.

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