



Twelve Acorn Rain in Birkenau

They thought they buried us. They did not know we were seeds.

~ Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos

Apparently, Grandmother Fuji was holding more secrets. In Her presence, I not only picked up a gift of vital importance of the 5th dimension, but also my next ally. This time a crone by the name Dr. Nina Meyerhof would take my hand, leading me all the way to Poland to pick up a seed, which was my next clue.

My favorite part of traveling to faraway places are the conversations I have with strangers in the seat next to me on a train, or who land next to me on a bench to take a break at an international conference. It is there where I typically meet my next inspiration, mentor, or best friend. Nina was one of the other guests of the Saionji family on our trip to Japan. As I was climbing into the group's luxury bus on our way to the United Nations University for a symposium, I was looking for someone whom I hadn't yet had a chance to

meet on this trip. I looked down and Nina was patting the seat next to her like a Bubby's warm invitation.

It did not take long to fall in love with her, her admirable life's work, and her vision for an institute for peace education adjacent to the grounds at Auschwitz. Before I knew it, I was part of the One Humanity Institute team and within a few months, found myself boarding a plane to Poland.

There I would find another astounding assemblage of peace educators, politicians, activists, a major motion picture film producer, and another adventure with Sally Ranney, also in Japan, whose vision for an environmentally sustainable compound was essential to this project. We spent nearly a week together, exploring the possibilities of this initiative, and the town of Oświęcim (the Polish name for Auschwitz).

On our second day, we headed for the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum on the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp. We were chatting away on the bus, and my gaze caught railroad tracks below my window. Suddenly the entire energy of the bus dropped to solemn as we made a hard right into the parking lot, lined with weeping willows, planted after the camp was liberated.

I took one step beyond those infamous gates with the ironwork lettering that reads "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work Shall Set You Free), and the first thing I noticed were the trees lining the road, like prisoners standing silently at attention. Thousands of people pass by every day, possibly never noticing them at all.

I could not take my eyes off of them, let alone pay attention to the tour guide. I quietly stepped aside and wrapped my arms around one of the trees and tried to listen. They didn't appear to be very old, certainly not 80+ years old. Throughout our nearly full day at both Auschwitz and Birkenau, I noticed every tree, wondering how old they were, what they witnessed, and what secrets and horrors they would hold forever in their trunks, branches, and roots. What sorrow did each tree cry out of its leaves and branches? Did they hear the sound of the orchestra of inmate musicians who were ordered to play for the pleasure of the soldiers and on the death marches to the gas chambers and selection?

Viktor Frankl is, by far the most famous of survivors of the Holocaust. In his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, he states he and other prisoners had to make a moral choice to submit internally or find meaning in their lives, giving them strength and the will to survive.

Depleted from what we had seen so far, Nina and I sat down on a small wall. I then realized; it was likely this was the same place Mr. Frankl himself once sat. Could I feel his strength? Could I muster the same capacity to find meaning in my life in such a situation? We were not even an hour into this tour, and I was wondering how I could go on.

The end of our tour consisted of visiting the memorial monuments at the back end of Birkenau, the adjacent death camp to Auschwitz, just past the burnt down building that was the crematorium where bodies were incinerated, then ashes disposed of in the nearby river. There I saw the most magnificent oak tree, a presence of nobility anchoring the far end of this large open park area.

She was at least 100 years old. And there she stood, regal yet humble, as if she were patiently waiting, waiting for someone to notice her pain. I broke free from the group and slowly approached this grandmother of a tree with reverence. After asking permission, I laid on a big hug, my arms barely reaching around a fraction of her trunk. I took a deep breath, and suddenly I heard what I thought were raindrops around me. I looked down and found I was being sprinkled with acorns. I took her gesture as a resounding, "thank you," and tucked a single acorn into my pocket.

The next morning while on an early morning jet lag stroll near my hotel, just two miles from the death camps and a hundred yards from a cow grazing in a small front yard, I stopped in the middle of a picturesque walking bridge over a narrow river lined with trees that seemed to be pregnant with life. I wondered if this is where Jews may have hidden. How long could someone live here undetected? Two ducks floated toward me, and the rich greenery was stunning. Everywhere I went in this small town of Oświęcim I wondered where Jews may have hid or been hidden. In every church I stopped in, I wondered if the wood panels on the walls were façades that covered up spaces of refuge and shelter. Did that bakery have an attic that was occupied by families for months or years?

As soon as I realized the river I was standing over was the same river where ashes were disposed of by the Nazis to hide their “evidence” it occurred to me that those ashes must have been fertilizing all the trees and plants lining this little river, absorbing those souls. If I was curious if those trees were once refuge for Jews, I had no doubt now. They were now homes, teeming with life-giving nutrients, oxygen, and sustainability for all the creatures.

I became overwhelmed with a sense of life, a fullness, and reverence for the sanctity of life, and with a certain grace of forgiveness. I was surprised because I should have been saddened by this realization. Why wasn’t my heart heavy? I looked deep into the trees and plants. I looked carefully at where the water met the dense greenery. I saw the faces of millions of prisoners. Then, I heard, *We choose Love*. As clear as the blue sky, I heard, *Of course, We Choose Love*. Then I felt the sentiment, *Mourning does not serve the memory of all of us who perished. It is your job to Love mercifully because we cannot. Love is all that matters. Love is all there is. Of course, We Choose Love*.

*If you cannot change a situation,
we are challenged to change ourselves.*

~ Viktor Frankl

Being The Sacred Gardener

When we look at what is before us, we are gifted the privilege to ask ourselves, what is the story, lesson, or treasure between the seams? Trust is to let go of the perceived idea of what is before us and simply assume there is a crevasse to see the light through, even if it requires pliers to pull it apart, or maybe a well-aimed hammer strike. We can know there is a priceless gem waiting to be found inside, and each element of the gem is a prism of deep, rich shades, and sometimes unrecognizable colors that dazzle and amaze the senses. Each experience contains a magical story and potential with rippling effects to spark hearts, imaginations, and wild creativity of everyone on the planet.

If Viktor Frankl could embody this belief amidst suffering the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp, I can muster up the courage to know it's alive inside of a heartbreaking punch to the stomach.

I am going to guess that Mr. Frankl may have had the disposition of a positive thinker but, come on! The internal steel cabling he walked out of that camp with was practiced, tried to an unimaginable extreme, and proven. He endured three years, 24/7 of big T-trauma which became his research and practice. Daily he carried a chisel to crack open his eyes and heart to the nature of possibility. After all, we change ourselves by changing our minds. As a prisoner, he had a choice, and he chose freedom.

The Seed In Our Pocket

A single oak tree can produce approximately 10,000 acorns a year, each with a potential to grow and drop 10,000 more. And those 10,000 will each possibly drop 10,000 and so on. Imagine just one tree's purposeful existence and the lives it alone impacts. From critters, bird nests, shade, impact on weather patterns, to each putting 260 pounds of oxygen in the air and removing 2.6 tons of carbon dioxide each year. That's a potential life well-lived nestled in my pocket.

A seed that lies underground, teeming with possibilities, must first dis-integrate so new life can emerge and fulfill its own master plan. Of course, not all seeds will make their way to being planted, yet the power of one little seed resting in my pocket knows something I don't. Its wisdom is coded into it with big plans. When I hold the seed (or oak embryo) I can almost feel its pulse. If every blade of grass can have an angel praying over it, so must this future forest in the palm of my hand.

What is my responsibility to care for it, the offspring of this magnificent and traumatized Grandmother Oak? My Mother/Crone was in full activation with a fierce determination. What potential am I coded with and what can this seed teach me? I made a solemn promise to honor her and her past seven generations of life somehow, as if my next seven generations depend on it. I was given the gift and the awesome responsibility to be the sacred gardener of one acorn that I slipped into my pocket at Birkenau. I was at the place of resurrection and a sacred call to action simultaneously.

A forest of potentiality lies within each of us. It is my crystal-clear prayer that the Liminal Odyssey supports us to be the sacred gardener of our life manifesting in bliss.

We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us. Find a place inside where there's joy, and the joy will burn out the pain. Follow your bliss and the universe will open doors where there were only walls.

-Joseph Campbell