

Kitchen as Mirror: A good night for soup.

Today, I came home and made soup. With all the demands and busyness available to lure me out on a Wednesday night, a freak spring snow shower corralled me home to my kitchen. So simple: a few stalks of celery, an onion roasted in a cast iron pan, a carrot, parsley, a few seasonings all topped with a drizzle of olive oil. A spring tonic soup, and the quiet to take a breath and enjoy it all.

Had I gone out, I would have been “hungry” all evening, looking for comfort, rest, and warmth at the end of the day. Instead I got to cozy up in my own nest and really feed myself.

Today, I had a conversation with a student before yoga class. She lamented how in a time of transition and turmoil, all she really wants to do is to go home and make herself some good wholesome food. Instead of feeding herself, she’s out in the wind and the traffic, searching for a job and delivering papers. She finds herself parceling out carefully saved cash to catch a quick meal here in town instead of retiring to her own country kitchen. By all appearances, she’s hungry, even if her belly’s full.

She came to talk to me about sustainability. And nutrition. And how with all the hype about green living and a sustainable future, we rarely look at how we eat and feed ourselves. We are little valued for the work we do as self-care, nor valued for the deep and ancient knowledge it takes to run a household or cultivate a vital life. We wonder why we don’t care for each other nor for the body of the Earth. Too often, we are told that this nurture is indulgent or selfish, and yet without calling home these essential resources, how much more depleted we become, and how much more we take from each other and the planet. “I can’t live on nothing,” she sighed. “It takes all of my faith that somehow things will work out.”

Today, with the cold grey sky more familiar to the Coasts than to the Desert, it strikes me more deeply how ironic it is that in a fear-based economy, so geared to savings accounts, insurance plans, and retirement funds, most of us don’t have the where-with-all nor the reserves of what really feeds and sustains us. Ayurveda calls this essence, *ojas*. The Chinese refer to it as *jing*. Ecologists might glance up, and call it *ozone layer*. It’s our protective coating, our vital energy, and our ability to stay moist and alive.

In the spring, with all the budding life, the wild things are taking the last ounce of last summer’s stores and turning it into leaves and baby bunnies. Yet in all the frantic living that is spring, there’s also a latent stillness of buds not yet open, still protected from the last tendrils of winter’s harshness. I can feel, already, my own sanctums quickening with the spring. Yet there is a lightness and a cleansing that is called for, and a caution. The seed of all possible harvests is set in place now.

It’s a cold grey night, and I’m drawing in. I’m making hot food. And I’m letting go of everything that isn’t essential so I can be ready for the sunrise. Who knows what will greet me; the rain is feeding the ground. It is moistening the soil. The damp raw weather may well bring a new layer of green and yellow and pink to the trees so busy budding; it may also redefine and refine the landscape with a hint of winter’s barren face. I’m drinking in the same rain of simplicity, and choosing carefully to cultivate the strongest shoots and protect tender budding leaves.

Today, I came home and made soup. It is a good night for soup.

-- Sarah Michelle Cutler 9 April, 2008