

Musings at the Edge of Things

Living on the edge. That sounds like a promotion for an adventure film or the next “Fast and Furious” episode. But no, I’m thinking about “the edge,” as in the transition zone between one phase and another. My birthday has come at the same time of year my whole life...in the week before the start of a new school year, as we end the open season of summer and refocus on getting things done. It wasn’t until I was teaching school that I realized what an impact this cycle had on me, a rhythm that had become imbedded in my body and emotional life.

So now I am sitting as this edge of time passes through and around me. And I feel uncomfortable. Things feel unsettled. The plan for the next phase is not clear. I’m a bit sad that the possibilities of the last phase were not fully realized. It’s summer into fall, but also the bigger time period of raising those boys and now sending them as young men off to school. That rental property is still not sold and those challenges of being a landlord persist. As seniors you know well the various phases of a life but also perhaps, that if we look clearly enough, we realize that we are always standing in some sort of edge time. So given that, may we learn to embrace the edges as the place where life is at its most full and where we have the most to learn.

My yoga practice is all about working the edge. I repeat the postures in each session and in each posture find where I am that day. Where does the tension begin? Can I sit on that edge and soften it with my attention and breath? Can I both accept where that edge of discomfort is and then work to make it more comfortable?

In the garden as in the forest, the most variety and the most struggle exists at the garden edge. That’s where the wild meets the cultivated. The master garden John Jeavons said “pay attention to the edges of the bed and the center will take care of itself.” Everything I am tending there has its cycle. Those plants need me to protect them as babies, cut off the spent growth and put them to bed at season’s end. All that stuff in the middle is just waiting for the next time I’m needed. The change phases are where the action is! It’s messy but it’s dynamic.

So what do we need to operate well at the edges? A willingness to go through it (or over it) of course. Trust that this change will eventually (and temporarily) become the new normal. Wisdom to know that we’ve survived the uncertainty of edge times before, perhaps with the Buddhist tinged teaching that “this too shall pass.” And of course practicing life at the edge, creating little opportunities to strengthen our tolerance of discomfort, to accept things being less than we want them to be. By so doing we tell ourselves and the world that we remain willing and prepared to go forward. We go to exercise class even when we’re not at our best. We look for things that we’re not already good at and see if we can become a little less bad (for me I’m thinking chess...) We put some iron in the fire for some project that will pull us into the future. And we sit, sit on the edge with our feet in the stream and feel what it feels like. It feels like living. It feels like change.