

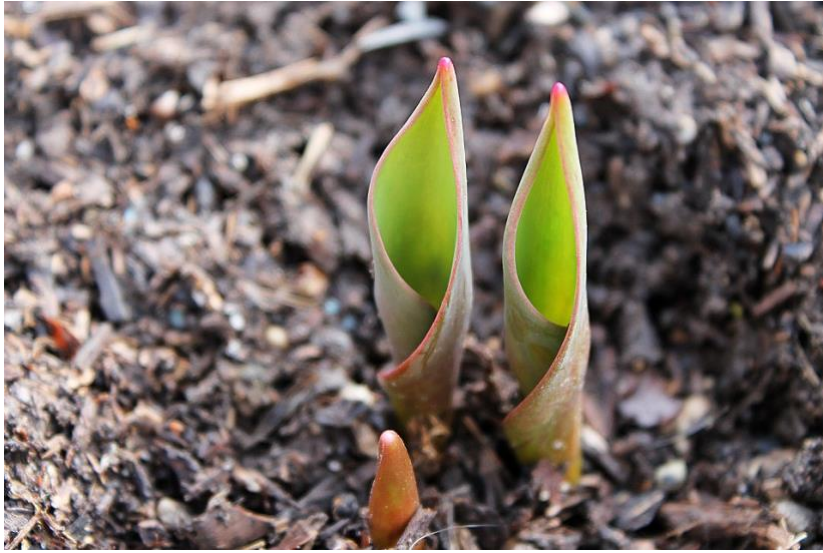
TEMPER TANTRUM

Sally Howell Johnson

I have not written in these pages for some time. There are many reasons for this on which I may elaborate at some time in the future. But over the last few days I have been drawn back to this place I named "Pause" over a decade ago. It seems these days we are living are bringing their own pause, a stopping point none of us anticipated or planned to take. A pause that is filled with a tapestry of emotion and much anxiety. A pause that has many in a heightened state of fear and feelings so raw that sometimes we hardly know what to do with ourselves. Listening to the news and the rapid-fire changing landscape that swirls around us provides what we feel is the information that we need. At the same time, taking all this in can have us walking in circles trying to figure out what we should do next, worrying for our future health or that of those we love or have never met, watching well laid financial plans roller coaster up and down. It is unnerving and perplexing to feel so out of control. It is as if the very air around us is pulsing with an uncontrollable energy...an energy that threatens to overwhelm us.

During all this, for some reason, I have kept thinking of the times when our sons would be in a state of frustration or anger that led to what might be called a temper tantrum. I can honestly say this did not happen very often but when it did I always felt as if I wanted to do something...anything...that would make them stop. Their tears, their hurt, their behavior was so painful to watch. The first time it happened I remember allowing my own frustration to rise with theirs as I tried everything I could think of to stop their crying or halt their tiny fists from pounding. I learned quickly that my entering into their frustration and anger only seemed to escalate what was happening. Over time I realized that the best way to help them and to keep my own heart from breaking as I watched them work out whatever it was they needed to do was to simply sit quietly and hold space for them, making sure they were safe and knew they were loved, allowing them to take control of their own emotions, their own frustrations and come to their own peace.

These memories have brought me a certain calm over the last days. I have asked myself what good it will do if I enter into the anxiety of the moment, whipping myself into a frenzy. There are so many elements of this global crisis and I have no control over any of them. What I do have control over is my own emotion, my own reactions, and the energy I put into the world. What I can do is hold the space. I can breathe deeply and send that breath into the world. What I can do is call people and offer kindness. I can walk outside and notice the change of seasons that is arriving without knowledge of the whirlwind we are experiencing. I can listen for the geese making their homing call as they return and watch for the early push of green from the earth. I can smell the earth returning to itself.



During these times which we continue to call unprecedented, we each will find our role to play. Many people are working countless hours to mend what has been broken, to heal what needs to be healed, to right the ship of our world. For this I am thankful beyond words. Some have chosen the role of hand wringing and hoarding. Perhaps it will always be so. Others are using their gifts for caring and compassion, for offering what they can to be of help. The truth of it is that we are all in this together and at times our role may be to simply hold the space, quietly, deeply, bringing calm as best we can.

The poet Pablo Neruda says this:

*Now we will count to twelve
and we will all keep still
for once on the face of the earth,
let's not speak in any language;
let's stop for a second,
and not move our arms so much...*

*...Perhaps the earth can teach us
as when everything seems dead
and later proves to be alive.*

*Now I'll count up to twelve
and you keep quiet and I will go.*