

From the Summer 2015 edition of my e-newsletter, available at www.dankeusal.com. ~Dan Keusal

The Bathroom Door

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"May what I do flow from me like a river, no forcing, and no holding back" ~Rilke

Just down the hall and around the corner from my office is an unmarked, locked bathroom. It is used mostly by the dozen or so therapists in our wing of the building during the 10-minute window each hour between the time when our last sessions end and the time when our next sessions begin.

The door to this bathroom has one of those hydraulic mechanisms that closes it slowly while preventing it from slamming. On occasion, when I've felt a particular sense of urgency, I've found that once I'm through the door, I start pushing against the resistance of the hydraulics, trying to get the door to shut a little faster, so I can lock it and get on with the matter at hand.

One day, as I was pushing in this way, Rilke's words came back to me, and I realized that I was violating both the spirit and the practice of "no forcing." Ever since then, I've tried to let the door close at its own pace, as a kind of everyday meditation on words that I had known for years.

We live in a culture that urges us to "force" things, that encourages the illusion that we should be in control at all times, that we should be able to get what we want, and get it immediately, even instantly.

Many of the people who come to me for psychotherapy bring with them this urge to force things, even though some form of that "forcing" is often what created their pain in the first place. Therapy, then, often begins with helping them learn how to slow down, to take a deep breath, and to listen for the calmer, quieter, wisdom of their own psyche, of their own truer, deeper Self.

The new possibilities that flow from this deeper wisdom often arise from places like dreams, flashes of intuition, and the experience of synchronicity, those magical moments when seemingly random outer events grab our attention because they feel meaningful, because they resonate with some part of our inner life, and point us in a direction that hints at meaning and purpose.

Where are you "forcing"? Where are you pushing against the natural unfolding of things? What might it look like for you to, instead, "flow like a river"? What if you were to welcome the guidance of dreams, intuitions, and synchronicity? How might that lead to a life that feels happier and more meaningful? Tending to questions like these is at the heart of Jungian psychotherapy.

I don't think Rilke had bathroom doors in mind when he penned his thoughts about forcing and holding back. But it is, I think, the nature of great wisdom...that it may be applied not only in pursuit of lofty ambitions, but also in humble, everyday circumstances.