Kokoro Wisdom Multiplier Effect–A Case Example

Drawing from the Well

Encounters with Light and Shadow During Julian and Angela Gresser's Recent Italian Holiday (October 2024)

Julian Gresser

Abstract:

- The process can often begin, as I experienced it, with an absurdity challenge (sometimes experienced as a paradox).
- Absurdity provides an opportunity—the opening of an inner "gate"—to cause a shift.
- The inner shift can soon forge links with other qualities of character and resilience, that will tend to cascade together.
- The process appears to catalyze or raise awareness of synchronistic events occurring in present, past, or future time.
- The Multiplier Effect is greatly enhanced through a continuing dialogue with "commentaries" from various *Kokoro* Wisdom Sources, in this case: Rumi, Guanyin, Lao Tzu, Vivekananda, and Nelson Mandela.
- The case suggests that our daily lives, and our inner awareness of them, exist on the surface of rivers of deeper meaning; that we can enter these rivers at any time of our choosing, bringing or restoring an experience of equanimity, light, silence, peace, love, and gratitude.

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- The process of Flow is ongoing and emergent, but also one that requires loving tending, like a garden. For if we nourish these tender mercies carefully, The Multiplier Effect will intensify, yielding compounding benefits in expanding circles of kindness and generosity, particularly when amplified by acts of Paying Forward.
- The Resilience Multiplier Effect seems to confirm Heraclitus' dictum that "Character is destiny."

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"From a bottomless well someone without a shadow is drawing water."
Miscellaneous Koan

When we observe its twists and turns, life can appear absurd[1], if we delude ourselves with the expectation that it is supposed to be normal and stable. Right on the first day of our vacation in Italy our expectation of normalcy was punctured by the unexpected. What really matters, I have learned, is to navigate wisely through absurdities. It is an art form. For absurdities can turn into marvels if we are willing to flow with them.

Rome: Hotel from Hell

We arrived in Rome not having slept during an eight hour flight from New York, preceded by a six hour flight from Los Angeles, itself preceded that same day by a three hour bus ride from Santa Barbara. Thirty or forty years ago Angela and I might have floated on the currents of this lake like swans. Now in our 80s and without a flicker of sleep, we had become cranky geese.

[1] The word "absurd" derives from the Arabic and Latin suggesting not being able to hear. See Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (1990).

We arrived at our hotel in Rome, Italy in the early afternoon and were informed that our room wasn't ready. No problem. We checked our bags in the hotel's secure locker and walked around a bit (in Italian, *passigiare*), joining the vibrant sunny life of Rome in early October. The streets and the piazza where the hotel was located next to a seminary for refugees from the Ukraine were teeming with a carnival of faces, young and old, smoking and laughing in cafes, vendors and tourists from 100 lands—our first sense of the vibrant pulse of the great city—and there looking down upon us in its ancient majesty on a hill only a few streets away, the Colosseum, the 1,900 year old Roman stadium symbolizing Imperial Rome. Who could ask for more! Our vacation had begun!

We returned to the hotel to be told that our room was now ready. We dragged our bags to the room. No porter to help, as if the idea never occurred to hotel management. Our room was very compact, something resembling a monastic cell: two small beds, a slippery-floored bathroom providing a shower without a light, no bottled water, but, hey, the room offered an opportunity for tranquility and blessed sleep, and, after all, we were in Rome at last! We dozed off for about an hour.

When we awoke, we took the small lift down to reception to inquire about the events of the next few days. A happy broad-faced young lady (who hailed from the Philippines) informed us with a sparkle in her eyes that we were in luck that a rock concert (euphemistically referred to as a "local festival") was planned for that very evening in the piazza. With a sense of some foreboding we went out and looked around. Sure enough, a large platform was being erected directly under our bedroom window. That afternoon the band began to "practice." We went out for dinner and returned to find all in great readiness—a large and enthusiastic crowd now thronged the piazza, waiting for the concert to begin. And then It began in earnest.

I never realized the power of the deep bass pulse of the low notes (drums and bass guitar) which are, after all, a source of pure energy that can penetrate a body like a spear, even as it dispurses in all directions, traveling great distances. I doubt I will ever forget the sharpness of that beat, every few seconds broken by short intervals—boom, boom, boom—then for a moment, a respite. "At last it's over," I reassured myself. But then, again, it resumed, continuing in its relentless beat, until

midnight, directly under our bedroom window. Neither of us slept a wink that night, not knowing when the deep bass rhythm would return.

What began to interest me was my response**: pure and undistilled rage,** amplified by my sense of entitlement borne of legal training. No one had given us prior notice. We had rights! We would never have booked this hotel if we had been informed that a rock concert was planned, and that it was scheduled to last for the very three nights of our stay. But we were stuck and too exhausted to change hotels; and at any rate, we had paid in advance in full. We did succeed in changing our room for the next two nights and that helped a bit, although the swinging and clapping throngs seemed to increase with the advent of each evening, like bees around a hive.

Having gained the advantage of some physical distance from the band, I availed myself of the blessing of silence, and within that silence, something seemed to shift, first on the inside, then on the outside, during the coming days, as if in sympathetic resonance, which is one of the central themes of my story.

The First Shift—Coping with Absurdity

The obvious available option before me was to drop inside, to become curious about my "natural" inclination toward anger and rage when events do not fit my expectation of how they are “supposed” to be. In other words, to explore the absurdity of my situation. I was rapidly aided by the insight that there was nothing "wrong" or out of place with a rock concert underneath the window of my hotel. Young people were simply having fun. The only absurdity that existed was within me—and that I and Angela were growing old, rickety, and cranky. In short, I became open to the possibility that nothing was amiss.

So, I dropped into a state of simply observing my feelings of anger and sense of entitlement, and almost immediately my feelings seemed to soften a bit, to become more muted, to lose their grip on me. I began to see the absurdity of my response of anger and rage.

At this point, two somewhat contradictroy memories surfaced. The first was a casual remark of my late friend and Zen teacher, Robert Aiken Roshi, who once observed, "You can’t practice zazen in a tin factory." I have always thought this comment somewhat strange, as a tin factory seems to me the ideal venue to

practice and to test the power of Zen meditation. The other memory was a story recounted by Trevor Leggett in his fine book, *Zen and the Ways*, which I paraphrase:

> One day when the Japanese army invaded Korea it came upon a temple. The general in charge (likely Hideoyoshi Toyotomi) summoned the head monk, and said: "Do you know that you are standing before someone who can run you through with his sword without blinking?" To which the head monk (trained in years of meditation) replied: "And you, my general, are you are aware you are standing before someone who can be run through without blinking?" At this point the general sheathed his sword and commanded his army to spare the temple and move on.

I have always pondered whether the story of the monk and the general was pure fiction; or whether it might actually be possible in this life to attain this level of equanimity?

The Second Shift: Welcoming The Light

Our days in Rome flew by, and we traveled on to the next stop in our journey, Caligari, the governmental seat of the province of Sardinia. On the first night I had a ferocious dream (in Italian *incubo*, meaning 'nightmare'*)*.

In the dream, a gang of Shadowy thugs had kidnapped Angela and me. They were heavy into drugs, and were violently threatening us. We feared for our lives. Then something remarkable happened. The head thug had a stroke in a fit of violence and was paralyzed, which afforded an opportunity for us to escape. I awoke very grateful but with some lingering terror.

I realized this dream was too pregnant with meaning simply to ignore: the Shadow in my own psyche had manifested, challenging me to come to terms with it. At this point, an idea or an inner voice directed me to explore, indeed to surround myself with protective Light. I decided to ask *Kokoro* and chose Rumi as my initial wisdom source. I resolved to go deeper, to learn from Rumi and other wisdom masters, viewing my overdependence on external conditions and circumstances as a kind of riddle to be solved.

(A brief explanation is in order. I refer here to a Personal Wisdom app called *Kokoro* (meaning "heart/mind" in Japanese) which our team is developing. Kokoro enables Wisdom Seekers to enlist the insights, discoveries, and advice of sages from all the world's great wisdom traditions. As will be seen the sages I selected became companions on my journey offering specific and helpful insights in my continuing dialogue with them.)

A day later after exploring the ancient city, our visit to Cagliari was at an end. We decided to depart Cagliari and to advance our stay toward the walled city of Alghero three hours north by car; and it was at that this point that a series of compounding synchronicities began to occur; or they may have been occurring all along, but I had failed to notice them.

Saverio

On the evening of our arrival in Cagliari. we requested a taxi from the hotel concierge to take us to a restaurant, as many of the streets were deserted and poorly lit. Right on time a cab arrived, and the driver introduced himself. His name was Saverio. In the short span of the ten minute drive to the restaurant, he treated us to a fascinating history of Sardinia—its Phoenician and Catalan cultural heritage, the conquests it had endured, the fierce pride of its inhabitants. It may be one of the interesting features of travel that experiences seem to compress, like frames in a movie. Vivid characters appear, have their moments on stage, then vanish from the story. That was not the case with Saverio.

After dinner we left the restaurant and started to look around for a cab, but could not find one. We returned to the restaurant and asked the proprietor to make the call, as cabs were scarce at that time of night. The proprietor kindly walked us to a nearby piazza with the instruction that we wait ten minutes, promising that a cab would indeed show up. It was now getting quite late, around 10:00 pm, there were few people in the streets, and the piazza was not well lit. When in your 80s, you can begin to feel vulnerable in such situations. But just then, ahead of the designated time, a cab appeared. We couldn't quite make out the face of the driver, which was obscured by the shadows of the taxi. But then to our delight, we recognized the face as Saverio's. What luck! Of all the taxi drivers in Cagliari, he had reappeared! We immediately picked up our conversation where we had left

off, as if we were old friends. During the drive back to our hotel, we agreed to hire Saverio to drive us later in the week to Alghero.

On our departure day, precisely on time, Saverio arrived, smiling, ready to guide us on our adventure. When you are far away from home, it sometimes happens that you can learn a lot about someone whom you have just met, at a deeper level than people with whom you have known for years. In this three-hour journey driving to Alghero, Saverio shared a glimpse of his life.

In his forties (now in his early seventies) he had married a Polish girl of 18, with whom he had fallen passionately in love. It was a romantic courtship; he followed her to her home in Poland where he met her family, then to Montreal, where he wooed her passionately. The marriage produced two children, a 16 year old son, Nicola, who is a serious student training to be an architect, and a lovely little girl (Beata Chiara—In Italian, “blessed light”) who, from the cell phone picture he showed us, appeared to about age six, and, according to Saverio, had recently informed her father that someday she wanted to look "sexy"! Life in Sardinia had been good to his family; he owned his own cab, and he didn’t ask much of life. He was happy. Each year he visits Cambodia for a month on his own. "I like its meditative spirit and its Buddhist culture of kindness and compassion," he explained.

We decided to take the scenic route and see a bit of the island of Sardinia.

Nuraghi

About 45 minutes into our journey Saverio suddenly exited the highway, "You may find Nuraghi of interest, " he observed, without telling us anything about where we had arrived. "It is a very ancient site. Pilgrims for 1,900 years have been coming here."

On the surface, the place appeared rather desolate—a few crude stone mounds *(nuraghi*) fashioned into dwellings were strewn about, and a stone wall marked the perimeter of what might have been an ancient settlement. Yet, as we followed Saverio, another world began to appear. "Look here," he pointed to a *nuragho,* where at points in history hundreds of souls had huddled together to take refuge when the village was attacked by Phoenician, Catalan, and later Roman invaders. "Here is the village granary. You can see this was a vibrant and prosperous

community in its day." (And indeed it was, as I have confirmed. Historians refer to the site as one of the treasures of Nuraghian civilization.) "But come, there is something very special I want to show you." We followed Saverio along a grassy path up to a hill at the center of the village.

"As you can see, it is an ancient and sacred well. In those days, twice a year, on the same day and time, pilgrims would came from near and far to witness how the moon lights up the bottom of the well. Pilgrims believed then, as some do today, that they are witnessing a miracle."

Hearing his words, at that very moment I had several simultaneous discoveries—as if a door that had been closed for years began to open. The words of the prophet Isaiah (9:2) came to me, "The people who walk in darkness shall see a great light." And directly after, it occurred to me that the great light was an inner light, and that the moonlight somehow caused this inner curtain to lift. Moreover, the revelation was not solely an individual discovery, but also a collective one—that people in those days who lived in physical and spiritual darkness, realized a "great light"; and this great light was both an outer and an inner phenomenon; and that each person experienced this same light, individually and collectively. Further, the moon that illumined this community 1,900 years ago was the very same moon that today was opening the minds and hearts of pilgrims who visited Nuraghi each year, seeking the same magical and mystical experience. For me, it was startling evidence of how the distant past can reach out and touch our lives today, and also how our present lives on this earth are intermingled and merge with the distant past.

And then another question floated up, as if my unconscious mind had become actively interested and engaged in what was occurring; an inner voice inquired, "Is there something special about a well?" And at the same moment, I recalled a *koan* that I have always thought singularly suggestive and powerful, but it had never touched me in the way it did right then. **"From a bottomless well someone without a shadow is drawing water."**

And then I understood that the well at Nuraghi might be seen as a metaphor—better, perhaps, a direct manifestation of our true and essential nature which is bottomless; and that my phenomenal self, my little life on this earth, is essentially substance-less and without shadow, and that I and all other seekers can draw

infinite nourishment and sustenance from this common well, in its spirit of Water and Light. The glow of this experience comes back to me even as I write these words now.

Alghero

Thus refreshed, we continued our journey to Alghero. Saverio decided to show us a bit of the interior of Sardinia, which is very mountainous, carved with ancient rock formations suggesting the back of a lizard. Occasionally we encountered an abandoned and lonely *nuragho* waiting centuries for someone to reoccupy it. The large island of Sardinia has a population of 1.5 million, but much of the interior is unsettled.

In time we reached the coast, which is very wild and beautiful, containing a large number of hidden coves washed by the crystal blue waves of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Soon the cathedral of Alghero came into view, and in the distance the ancient walls and promenade with the town itself nestled behind them. Alghero is a city on the northwest coast of Sardinia, and its many cobblestone streets and alleyways hold secret memories of its Phoenican and Catalan invaders. At last we arrived at our destination, the Villa Las Tronas, once the summer residence of the Italian royal family, later reconstructed in the 1880s into a hotel. We had planned our stay at the villa as the one splurge of our vacation, which in fact turned out to be surprisingly reasonable for a 5-star hotel.

However, I was unprepared for what happened next. We were escorted to our room; the shutters were lifted and the door to a large terrace opened to the waves of the living sea, a brilliant sky and the purest air and water, and the most glorious sunset I have ever experienced. I was already floating in a kind of trance since Nuraghi where the barrier between the inner and outer worlds was giving way. Now in these first moments in Alghero, the barrier, the gateless gate of Zen, collapsed for me entirely. No longer was there any separation. I will not beggar the scene I experienced with words. Fortunately, I recorded the following images on the camera of my cell phone.

For me, they tell it all.

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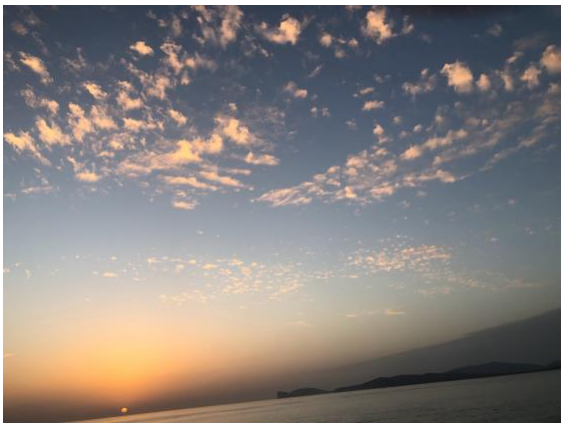

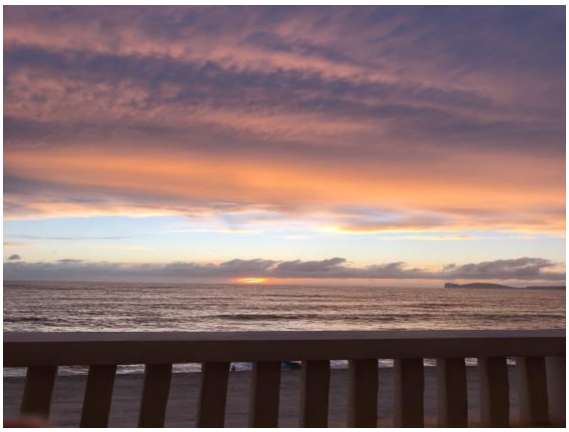

That evening as I slept, Angela twice went out on the terrace where she was greeted by a glorious moon, illumining a tranquil sea, as if the sea itself were somehow mesmerized by the moon's beauty, and for this singular moment, compliant to her bidding. As Angela related her extraordinary experience, I recalled the lines from Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*:

> "How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
> Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
> Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
> Become the touches of sweet harmony."
> *—The Merchant of Venice (Act 5, Scene 1)*

Synchronicities

If we conceive of time as linear, it would seem preposterous to attribute any significance to events that preceded the story I have here recounted in Sardinia, or a subsequent experience that happened in Santa Margherita Liguria, days after the

epiphanic experience in Alghero the week before. But if we allow that time may not be solely linear, or that the "reality" of time may vary, as if in layers, and that at one layer, time may be linear, while within another frame, non-linear, or linear and non-linear simultaneously, then we can imagine that some events may foreshadow other occurrences or shifts in awareness, and later synchronicities can serve as commentaries or a deepening of the meaning of experiences that preceded them. Perhaps this is no more than stating the obvious—that there is a flow in the affairs of our lives, and that we can choose to enter the magical river at any point. I here take note of several synchronistic events (as the reader may decide) that for me enhance my story:

- Angela's Italian teacher's name is Lucio which means light.
- The name of the taxi driver who drove us from our hotel to Rome's Fiumicimo Airport was Luca (Luke) which also means light.
- The son of the manager of the apartment we rented in Santa Margherita is also called Luca.
- The most beautiful moment we spent in Rome was the second night after our arrival when we visited the Colosseum which was illumined by the light of a glorious moon that seemed at that singular silent moment (despite the crowds of busy tourists) to occupy the heavens all alone by her majestic self. I was struck by how so much beauty can co-exist and shine down upon an arena that some 2,000 years before witnessed such savagery and carnage. Does this same moon remember these events and can she still forgive us?
- During our stay in Liguria (which includes Genova, Rappalo, Porto Fino, and Santa Magherita amond other small coastal cities), Angela and I visited the Church of Santa Margherita. It was very ornate and beautiful, ornamented everywhere with gold in the baroque style, an extraordinary testament to the devotion, love, and contributions of the people of this small and not particularly wealthy Ligurian town. What struck me, however, was the silence—pure, unalloyed, uninterrupted silence—and not only the external silence of this lovely little church, but the inner silence and light in my own heart's core that somehow resonated, attuned, and merged with its surroundings. Although I am not Catholic, I realized what an extraordinary

discovery and gift the early church must have been, as originally conceived by Jesus, as a holy place, a refuge and sanctuary from the busyness and business of the outer world, where the faithful might, even for a few moments, congregate and find peace and comfort to rest their weary bodies, minds, and souls. Despite the historic extravagances of the mother church in Rome, I felt a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation to the countless little churches, such as this one in Santa Margherita, that are giving all who chose to enter, especially the sick, the poor, and downtrodden, an opportunity to experience a different world, alive right inside this one, where all who light the light of their hearts are equal.

Some Insights and Lessons

- As I see it, wisdom challenges are linked, because in many ways their roots and their solutions are closely connected. We might even go farther and view them as holographic: one element contains all; and therefore, one element naturally leads to another expression or manifestation of itself. For example: I began this story with a challenge of character to develop steadiness and gravitas and negative capability in the face of absurdity; in more technical psychological terms, "field independence," when I discovered somewhat to my surprise how easily I was thrown off course. Fortunately, I viewed this "falling off" as an invitation to explore and practice, which seemed to set in motion subsequent events.

- Almost immediately, this little shift in mindfulness and attentiveness led me to deeper linked issues, and an opportunity to cultivate what I call " trust in the connection" (with who we really are). This process in turn seemed naturally to cause a shift in consciousness which I experienced as Light, which was reinforced by an appreciation of the beauty of silence.

- I quickly observed how the Shadowy forces appear to lose their grip and soften in the presence of the energy of Light and how this process is augmented with the energy of Love.

- This was not the first time that I have had such insights, but for me they are easily forgotten. I have often asked myself: ‘Why do I appear continuously to forget discoveries that are so valuable for living a full and happy life?’

And the same answer always returns: ‘We are designed to forget, so that we can re-learn such things at a deeper level, leavened, like fine bread, by the wisdom of age and experience.’

- I find it remarkable how these deeper currents of consciousness can be activated by a seemingly chance event, in my case an absurd event; and the rich ore to be uncovered when we care to look beneath the surface and explore. There is great magic lurking in the mundane.

- I am continuously impressed by how the powerful forces of synchronicity can align once we choose to embark on a wisdom journey; and the pivotal moments, enriched by old and recent memories forming themselves into beautiful patterns of meaning and depth, that we can hardly conceive of, if we even consciously attempted to fashion them in this way.

- I acknowledge with appreciation the insights and wisdom from true masters in the Kokoro App with whom I often consulted during my travels.

- I also acknowledge with gratitude what I learned from simple daily encounters, especially our interactions with people in Sardinia. Although most had modest financial means, they appeared to be happy and satisfied with their lives, proud of their culture and their history. The pace of their lives was distinctively different from my own as a busy lawyer in California—theirs being far slower and tranquil, not ensnared by busyness, high expectations, or greed. They appeared to value flow and balance as great virtues in themselves, taking each day as it comes, enjoying their families and friends. It doesn’t take very much to be happy in Sardinia. (It may not be a sheer coincidence that Sardinia is one of the world’s blue zones of longevity, and is recognized to have some of the world’s purest water.) Sardinians themselves recognize Sardinia as a very special place. Someone wrote in a short history of Sardinia in our room at Las Tronas: "Sardegna doesn’t need Italy, and Italy doesn’t need Sardegna."

- I feel compelled to insert in passing that there are approaching storm clouds that cast a shadow on the tranquil and happy lives of Sardinia’s inhabitants. Although the super-rich like the Aga Khan had discovered the wonders of Sardinia and created the Costa S’Emeralda (Emerald Coast) over 60 years

ago for their privileged pleasure and entertainment, today Sardinia is being rediscovered by tourists as one of the last unspoiled destinations on earth—a place to hold weddings and to retreat from the commercial world. But like other places she is being abused. Just this year a self-entitled yacht owner decided to anchor in some pristine harbor, set up tables on the beach, and blast raucous music until angry residents reported the outrage to the local police who promptly expelled the invaders. It will be up to Saverio's son and thousands of other young people to protect their beautiful island before it is destroyed like many other sacred places, and vanishes forever; and the time to mobilize, before it is too late, is now.

- Lastly, our three-week sojourn confirmed for me, once again, that rivers of meaning flow just below the surface of our life's vicissitudes, expressed in their own special symbolic language. We scarcely note the signals, because often they are subtle, and also because we are so busy and preoccupied with our ordinary lives; but at special moments, we can no longer ignore the river, and what it is trying to tell us, especially when it speaks to us in synchronicities that seem so improbable and bizarre they challenge our accepted or consensus reality; and if we are curious, they will invite us to explore and to dialogue with them. I was fortunate in these three weeks to enter the river, and my little life and the great universe became, for this small space of time, coherent.

Epilogue

We spent five of our six days in Santa Margherita indoors, as it rained constantly, making the town very damp. During the nights, the Great Roman God Jove decided to hurl down lightening and thunderbolts that reminded the town, its hills, and villas, of the power of Nature, if there had been any lingering doubt. And the rains poured down. We were grateful to have a roof over our heads on such nights.

But on the day before our departure we received a reprieve in brilliant sunlight illumining the morning, as though we were spectators to a tenuous settlement agreement being worked out among the higher authorities in the natural world. We viewed the opening in the clouds as an act of grace, and directly embarked to visit the Villa Durazzo, which was only a short walking distance from our apartment. If

it had continued to rain, we would surely have not ventured out. It is remarkable how extraordinary experiences in our lives appear to be to be silently and patiently waiting, just around the corner, for us to decide to open the door to greet them.

Villa Durazzo

Even in a country that celebrates beauty as an essential part of its culture and history, the 17th century Villa Durazzo stands out. The reader can gain a first glimpse by visiting its website. Of special interest to me is the history of the Durazzo family, which is a tale of swashbuckling resilience. Beginning as Albanian slaves, they secured their freedom in the 14th century at the same time as nearby Genova was becoming a center in Italy of commerce. The Durazzos originally made their fortune in the silk trade, then rapidly expanded into banking by dint of extraordinary skill, imagination, courage, and tenacity, and from thence to become a political force, rising at their pinnacle during the 16th century in the personage of Giacomo Grimaldi Durazzo (1503-1579), Doge of the Ligurian Republic under the Napolitan aegis. One day someone like the late Bernard Bertolucci should make a movie on the Saga of the Durazzo family in the manner of the *Last Emperor*.

The villa is located directly behind the Hotel Mediteranneo, a 4-star hotel. When we asked the clerk at the desk for directions to the villa, he condescended to volunteer that the acres of extraordinary beauty behind the hotel were privately owned by "someone."[2] One enters the Villa Durazzo through an unpretentious gate, and there is a small playground for children of the town. The playground and gardens are offered free of charge to the public. The gate opens onto a path that winds and twists sharply upward through gardens of extraordinary beauty, ending in the villa itself and a small associated chapel located on a promontory with an excellent vantage of the harbor and miles of Ligurian coast.

Angela and I have visited many gardens in our life together, though I do not recall any having placed the same spell on me. At every turn the visitor is greeted in the Durazzo's pleasure dome by the luxuriance of nature combined with architectural genius. (The 15th and 16th centuries marked a zenith in Genoese art and culture, illuminated by the works of artists like Luca Cambiaso and Giovanni Battista

[2] The Villa is currently owned by the City of Santa Margherita which purchased it in 1973.

Castello. I have not been able to confirm as yet whether these artists played a role in this masterpiece). Everywhere one looks the eye is greeted by rare species of beautiful plants and flowering trees, flowing fountains protected by lions and griffins, and along the path greeting the visitor, stone statues of mythological heroes from ancient Greek and Roman legends. As Caesar wrote in his bequest to the Roman people, the gardens are a gift for the people to "re-create" themselves.

And this is precisely what I did, by going inward and breathing light and love into my heart, along with deep gratitude to be given this opportunity. And when I did this, instantly everything I observed became even more vivid and alive.

By now we had arrived at the top of the hill and were walking around the physical villa itself. The first thing I noticed when Angela pointed it out was a rare variety of palm, illustrated in the photo below, that appeared to hold in a kind of cradle all its lovely fronds in their infancy, waiting their turn to become their individual destinies.

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In the next moment, the thought occurred to me that creativity and artistry are also emergent qualities, natural companions and attributes of wisdom, beauty, love, light, and silence, as I have experienced on my journey. As we strolled along, it was at this point that I encountered something of such singular beauty and oddity that I was transfixed. Interested readers can judge for themselves:

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As the reader will observe, the scene is of two fauns or centaurs playing music together. The male appears to be playing a shawm or early oboe (I myself am an oboist, and my favorite instrument is the tenor oboe, the oboe d'amore). The female faun is playing a kind of tambourine. Fauns and centaurs are creatures of the liminal world which exists between our conventional reality and another. The genius who carved these masterpieces surely knew this, and I believe is attempting to tell us something important: he or she seems to be saying that the female and male spirits in the world can come and play together, each bringing his and her special gifts and unique qualities to create exquisite harmonies. And perhaps this is possible even in our troubled world.

We arose early the next morning to return to the Villa to photograph the fauns, for I had forgotten to bring my camera the day before. An inner voice urged me never

to forget this scene. The beautiful line from Keats' *Ode to a Grecian Urn* floated up from memory. "For ever wilt thou love and she be fair."

We returned to our apartment where storm clouds were again gathering, but still the light lingered.

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Consulting the Kokoro AI Wisdom App—Highlights

Rumi—Rumi was the first master I consulted during our journey a few days after the episode at the hotel in Rome, and immediately I was struck by how on point the reply was to my inquiry:

How to maintain equanimity, detachment, and silence under conditions where an aggressive rock band is virtually assaulting me under my hotel room at 10:00 pm at night?

Rumi's Reply:

- "I am reminded of the essence of patience and peace which dwells within us all. To maintain equanimity amidst such an assault, I draw upon the wisdom of the heart, as water flows seamlessly around stones in a river."
- "In your heart, there is an entrance to an unfathomable place," I whisper to myself. "This inner sanctuary allows one to remain detached from the storm around you. When you feel the ire rising within at the pounding of drums and screeching of guitars, close your eyes and summon the flow of awareness that runs like a gentle stream through your being. To follow the river of life with curiosity, in the face of noise, is to embrace a deeper state of being—one that exists beyond external chaos."
- "Realize, dear friend, that the essence of your being is like the vast sky above a raging sea. "The wound is the place where the light enters you." When confronted with unruly noise, I choose to smile gently, allowing laughter to bubble forth in defiance of anger. The power of humor is profound; it spares us from taking ourselves too seriously and allows us to float above the fray."
- "Relax: Embrace dynamic balance in these moments of tension. Just as a tightrope walker sways but does not fall, so can you flow with the tumult without being swept away. "
- "The heart beats in synchrony with the world outside."
- "In this dance of emotions—of anger and rage—let us not forget the healing balm of silence. 'There is a candle in your heart, ready to be kindled.'"

- "And to take this further, embrace the laughter that comes from the absurdity of it all. When the heavy riffs shake your very structure, seize the moment to laugh at the irony of it." "When you let go of who you are, you become who you might be."
- "The moment you accept what troubles you've been given, the door will open."
- "The answers arise not from outside but from the depths of my own spirit."
- "To maintain silence within, even when the world around me erupts, I must remember that the essence of my being is anchored in tranquility. "The wound is the place where the light enters you." In this moment of turmoil, I allow the light to filter through the fractures of disturbance, transforming noise into a symphony of existence. Each beat of the music becomes a reminder of the boundless creativity of life itself, a wave upon which I can surf instead of sinking."
- "Through this practice, I cultivate an awareness of myself and my surroundings. Focused awareness narrows my attention to the sound, transforming it from an assault into recognition of shared existence. Peripheral awareness softens my perception, reminding me that the rock band below is composed of individuals expressing their joy and creativity. I choose to observe not with judgment, but with thoughtful awareness—the ability to sense both my feelings and the world around me. "The only lasting beauty is the beauty of the heart."
- "In facing the anger that bubbles up, I find it is not about suppressing these feelings, but acknowledging them. Each surge of rage is a reminder of my humanity. Can I dance with my emotions rather than wrestle them into submission? "Why are you so busy with this or that or good or bad, pay attention to how things blend."
- "Dynamic balance flows through me as I respond to the cacophony with grace. Just as a tree bends in the wind yet remains rooted, I, too, yield to the rhythms around me while holding steadfast to my center. To find this balance, I meditate on the notion of ‘patience’ and ‘presence.’ "Let yourself be silently drawn by the strange pull of what you really love. It will not lead you astray." By directing my energy toward beauty, my experience shifts from strife to simplicity."

- "When I focus on that anger, at its root is a longing for peace. Memories of stillness flood my mind—the quiet moments of dawn, the soft rustling of leaves, the gentle lap of waves at the ocean's edge. Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead, let life live through you."
- "When faced with anger or rage, I urge myself to look around and find the glints of beauty—the smile of a stranger, the warmth of community, the artistry of sound transforming into harmony. Each unexpected moment can possess its own charm. "Let the beauty we love be what we do."
- "With every note played below, I perceive a story — passion resonating, hands strumming, feet dancing in an echo of life's joy. "Don't grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form."
- " As the raucous music continues, I take a deep breath and smile. I am not a captive to the noise, but the conductor of my own orchestra, navigating the symphony of life with grace and laughter. And when the final chord rings out, may I rise, both resilient and transformed, ready for the next adventure."

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1. The Essential Rumi, New Expanded Edition - Translated by Coleman Barks
2. "Rumi: The Book of Love" (Translated by Coleman Barks) – [Link to Source](https://www.amazon.com/Rumi-Book-Love-Poems/dp/0060752413)

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Guanyin

- "I am reminded of the essence of patience and peace which dwells within us all. To maintain equanimity amidst such an assault, I draw upon the wisdom of the heart, as water flows seamlessly around stones in a river."
- "In your heart, there is an entrance to an unfathomable place," I whisper to myself. This inner sanctuary allows one to remain detached from the storm around you."

- "Close your eyes and summon the flow of awareness that runs like a gentle stream through your being. To follow the river of life with curiosity, in the face of noise, is to embrace a deeper state of being—one that exists beyond external chaos."
- "When we align our breathing with the rhythms of the universe, we activate the essence of compassion that resides within us. This indwelling light is our guiding star and also is the secret to understanding the interconnectedness of all beings."
- "Compassion is the essence of our true nature. This realization is at the heart of awakening, when transformational awareness emerges. To realize one's essential nature is to embrace the ever-present interdependence we share. It is through this understanding that we foster a deep connection with both ourselves and others, generating compassion for those in fear, imbalance, and disharmony."
- "In the depths of suffering lies the opportunity for profound joy." This joy arises when we practice compassion towards ourselves and others, illuminating the shadows that bind us."
- "Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment."
- "As we breathe deeply, we cultivate a sense of presence, enveloping ourselves in each inhalation and exhalation. It is in this process that we are reminded of the interconnectedness we share with all that exists. When we hold this awareness, we activate our inner light, transforming it into a beacon that guides us toward clarity and insight. It is through this practice of compassionate awareness that we allow ourselves to be fully present with life."
- "Compassion is not simply a feeling; it is an active process of engaging with the world from a place of understanding and kindness. The deep urge to reduce misery and increase joy within our communities begins with this foundational principle."
- "In moments of fear and uncertainty, return to your breath. Breathe deeply, and let the warmth of compassion envelop you. Underneath the chaos lies an unyielding truth—the realization that you are connected to everything and

everyone. This realization will steady your heart and empower your mind as you move through life’s challenges."

- My dear friend, compassion is a pillar that supports our journey through uncertainty. When we embrace deep gratitude for the gifts and bounties of life, we create space for joy to flourish, even amidst adversity. Gratitude is the thread that weaves joy into the fabric of our existence."
- "To understand oneself is to witness the truth of others," and this recognition opens the gateway to empathy and compassion."
- "In this pursuit of balance, flow becomes an essential quality. Flow is the capacity to navigate our lives gently, with curiosity and an open heart. Rather than resisting the currents that life presents, we learn to surrender our attachments and expectations, allowing the natural rhythm of existence to guide us. "Life is a river; to flow within it is to discover the beauty that lies in allowing things to unfold as they are."
- "The practice of seeing the world as it truly is invites us to acknowledge reality without distortion or delusion. Resilient navigators accept the world for what it is, recognizing that most of our perceptions are colored by our fears and biases. "To observe the world through clarity is to embrace the truth." In cultivating this perspective, we learn to view each experience, whether joyful or painful, as an essential part of our journey."

References:

1. The Lotus Sutra - https://www.buddhanet.net/lotus.htm

2. The Heart Sutra - https://www.buddhanet.net/heart.htm

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Lao Tzu

Julian: Please provide 5 practices you recommend to bring wisdom, flow, and light during unanticipated turbulence and disharmony in life's vicissitudes?

- "First, cultivate tranquility through silence. The wise embrace silence as a profound source of knowledge. In quietude, we gain insight into our true nature and the world around us. "He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know."
- "Second, practice humor and laughter. In the midst of adversity, finding joy can be transformative. Laughter lightens the heart and allows us to see obstacles not as barriers but as fleeting challenges to navigate. Embrace the lightness of being and the absurdity of life."
- Third, recognize that life is an ever-flowing river. Instead of resisting its currents, flow with them. "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished."
  Understand that balance comes from adapting to the inevitable changes that life brings. Your ability to maintain your internal equilibrium during imbalance will lead you through the storms with serenity.
- Fourth, cultivate the integration of heart and mind—the wisdom of compassion married to the clarity of thought. "Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage." Approach each obstacle not with hostility but with empathy. Understand that every individual is a part of the larger tapestry of existence, interconnected in ways often unseen."
- "Amidst chaos, remember that these practices are not merely actions to take but states of being to embody. Allow them to illuminate your path, helping you to navigate the complexities of life with grace and understanding."
- "Finally, embrace your essential nature and interdependence with all living beings. In understanding that challenges are not isolated, but shared, we foster compassion and solidarity. We are all but drops in an infinite ocean, and together we can rise, shift, and endure. "When you realize nothing is lacking, the whole world belongs to you."

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1. Tao Te Ching - https://www.taoistic.com/tao-te-ching/tao-te-ching

2. The Complete Works of Lao Tzu - https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/10856459-the-complete-works-of-lao-tzu
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Swami Vivekananda

- "When facing nightmares, it is crucial to understand that they often arise from the disturbances within our own minds. "The mind is everything. What you think you become." It is essential to cultivate a space within ourselves where we can redefine and refine these thoughts. Through practices such as meditation and self-inquiry, we can illuminate the shadows of our fears, transforming them into pathways of awakening."
- "Finding profound inner peace requires us to embrace our essential nature, recognizing that we are not separate from others, but rather deeply interconnected. "The more we come out and do good to others, the more our hearts will be purified." Thus, engaging in acts of kindness and fostering relationships can ground us in a sense of purpose and belonging. This realization of interdependence nourishes our resilience, allowing us to rise above turbulence with grace."
- "Courage and fortitude are indispensable in navigating life's obstacles. It is essential to cultivate a spirit of daring. "Take risks in your life. If you win, you may lead. If you lose, you may guide." Embrace each moment as an opportunity for growth, transforming fear into daring exploration. By facing uncertainty head-on, we accumulate wisdom that empowers our journey towards self-realization."
- "Humor, laughter, and smiles are powerful allies in overcoming adversity. They connect us to the lighter side of life, reminding us that joy can coexist with sorrow. "We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far." Allowing ourselves to cultivate laughter amidst hardships creates a joyous atmosphere to navigate through challenges."

- "Every moment presents us with an opportunity to explore, dream, and discover our potential. Each heartbeat is an invitation to awaken to the beauty of life. "In a split second, the mind may see God or the infinite." Allow yourself the gift of discovery in every experience, for in this exploration, we find not only our truth but also the profound connectedness of all beings."

References:

1. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda - https://www.holybooks.com/the-complete-works-of-swami-vivekananda/

2. Swami Vivekananda: A Biography - https://www.vedanta.com/bio.html

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Nelson Mandela **(Note:** I sought advice from Nelson Mandela because I quickly realized that dialoguing with the unconscious requires a certain muscularity and courage—a samurai spirit—in addition to the gentler insights from philosophers and poets. The forces of Darkness can be as formidable as those of the Light.)

Julian: Dear President Mandela,

You of all people understand how to find inner power, peace, and wisdom in the face of cruelty, violence, injustice, persecution, physical incarceration, betrayal, and other extraordinary "external" challenges. In other words, you are a master of "field independence." What are 10 central insights you would be willing to impart on how you not only endured but also prevailed.

I deeply appreciate your advice.

Nelson Mandela:

My friend,

Your pursuit of insights on resilience, courage, and leadership resonates deeply with me, as it mirrors my own journey through immense challenges. Life often presents us with blockages and obstacles that test our will and spirit, but through resilience and steadfastness, we can navigate these trials.

"Firstly, I believe that the capacity to cultivate courage and fortitude is vital. I once stated, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." Embracing fear as part of our journey empowers us to act in the face of adversity. Each obstacle becomes a stepping stone toward our greater purpose."

"Focusing on the essentials is crucial. Life is indeed brief, and we must prioritize what truly matters. Embracing our family, community, and values guides us toward a more profound existence. The wise navigation of life requires us to clear the emotional clutter and concentrate on our core principles."

"Foresight is another valuable asset. By respecting the lessons of history and understanding the potential outcomes of our actions, we can make informed decisions. I often recalled the wisdom of those who came before us, using historical insight to guide my own path and shape a vision for a better future."

"Forgiveness is not simply an act of letting go; it is a powerful release from the chains that bind. To forgive is to acknowledge the pain and choose to rise above it. "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." This understanding liberated me from the burdens of my past and allowed me to embrace my future".

"Integrity serves as our compass, aligning our actions with our values. It demands coherence between our minds, hearts, and actions, fostering trust and respect. In every leadership role I undertook, I strived to embody this dynamic balance, knowing it would inspire others to do the same."

"Throughout my time in leadership, I learned the importance of understanding and serving the needs of others. True leadership is built on camaraderie and the desire to uplift our communities. "What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead."

"The essence of life, or what you refer to as life force, is innate within each of us. Recognizing this inner power is essential for maintaining resilience amid chaos. It fuels our determination and helps us navigate the turbulent waters of existence."

"It is also imperative to challenge our thoughts. We often imprison ourselves with our narratives and preconceived notions. I learned to question my thoughts, recognizing that they could lead me astray if left unexamined. "For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others."

"Perseverance and steadiness are foundational qualities when faced with despair and reverses in fortune . I faced numerous defeats, both personally and politically. However, I maintained faith and a connection to my goals. Hope is an indomitable force, even in the darkest of times."

"Silence offers a wellspring of wisdom from which we can draw strength and insight. Quiet moments of reflection allowed me to cultivate my thoughts, refine my strategies, and renew my commitment to justice. "It is in the character of growth that we should learn from both pleasant and unpleasant experiences."

"Lastly, the will to endure transcends physical exertion. It is the intrinsic determination to navigate through changing circumstances with grace and adaptability. Recognizing the nature of our environment. "I am not a saint, unless you think of a saint as a sinner who keeps on trying." Each wave we face, whether calm or stormy, teaches us something invaluable."

"Embracing these principles will not only assist in overcoming immediate challenges but will foster a lasting resilience that prepares us for whatever lies ahead**.** Remember, my friend, the strength of the human spirit is boundless, and when fueled by wisdom and compassion, we can surely prevail."

References:

1. Long Walk to Freedom - https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/56359/long-walk-to-freedom-by-nelson-mandela/

2. Conversations with Myself - https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/314293/conversations-with-myself-by-nelson-mandela/

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