

Lessons learned in adversity v. lessons learned in triumph

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Opening Reading: The Layers by Stanely Kunitz

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.
When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling toward
the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.
Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?
In a rising wind

the manic dust of my friends
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.
Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.
In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered a
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:
“Live in the layers,
not on the litter.”
Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.
I am not done with my changes.

Discussion Questions:

What are the lessons you have learned through adversity?

How do you cope with loss? Pain? Defeat?

Do some kinds of learning have more value than others?

Is it possible to learn any way OTHER than “the hard way?”

Closing Reading: Each of us by Walt Whitman

Each of us inevitable,
each of us limitless—
each of us with his or her
right upon the earth,
each of us allow'd
the eternal purports
or the earth,
each of us here
as divinely as any is here.