

Palpable Dark & Light: Parenting in the Age of COVID-19

by Arathi Ravier

During a rare stretch of quietude on a recent afternoon, a mother of two young ones sat down to pen some reflections on her experience of parenting in the midst of a global pandemic.

A harsh light has illuminated the cobwebs that cloud my spirit. Subtle expectations, the drive to produce, a persistent need for external validation, a victim mentality, a relentless checklist of logistical calculations (Kids lunch? Check. Dinner prepped for tomorrow? Check. Time for a quick run in between meetings? Check. Check. Check. Check. Oops, missed that one. Check again.)

I both love and hate this time. I feel cooped up and starved of intimate social interaction. I wish I could hug a friend. Look at the crinkle of their eyes, laugh and hold hands over the ridiculous things our children say (Zayd's latest statement after haphazardly slapping a 1/2 inch piece of tape over a sheet of paper- "Mama don't touch that! I worked very hard on it." Then grabs the tape and stomps away. Astounded by my lack of sensitivity.)

Now, with no where to go, and no where to be - save a litany of zoom conversations for work - the days have taken on a remarkably different flow. The traditional set of metrics by which I inadvertently judge myself have been turned on their head. The conscious and unconscious creation of expectations have revealed themselves in what feels like one fell swoop. What I'm left with is a jarring reckoning with myself. A gratitude for this reckoning...

I also feel a deep sense of relief settling in. It is unmistakable. And there is a lingering question behind that relief. What am I relieved about? Why all of a sudden a letting go? What was I holding on to in the first place? Why didn't I realize that I was holding on to it?

As the days pass, I lean into the moment at hand. The chaos that surrounds me has surprisingly lead to an intuitive understanding of where my energy should go in any particular moment. There is little room for deliberation. A quietness has settled in. And, with it, a nagging tug of shame. The realization that I have fallen back down that slippery slope of "be" to "do". How to breathe into this moment? How to let the waves of gratitude and anxiety wash through me, leaving me their wisdom, and sparing their residue?

3:30pm on a Thursday afternoon. I am with my kids walking along a beautiful sunlit trail through the woods. There are wild white and purple flowers dotting the trail, a gushing stream below. The smell is intoxicating. Every inlet has a new surprise. A tadpole here, the perfectly shaped stick to be thrown there. We play a game. "Find a rock, the perfect stick, a purple flower, and a white flower". A magic scavenger hunt with a chocolate treat

at the end. In her excitement, Seva runs fast down the trail, tripping over the defiant root of a tree, and falls flat on her face. A loud wail, followed by a gush of salty tears. I envelop her in a hug and a thousand kisses. "Just was one more Mama" she says to me, her little chin quivering. I bury my face in hers, scoop her up in my arms, feel the crushing waves of love pound me as she wraps her tiny arms tightly around my neck. And before I know it, the moment is over. She has wriggled out of my arms, and is back to it, running head first into the trail. I brace myself for round two.

After the initial excitement wears off, we saunter. The kids forget about the scavenger hunt, about the chocolate treat waiting for them. We throw sticks in the water and feel the warmth of the sun gently brush our cheeks. The moment is seared into my brain. I can taste the gratitude.

This morning, we wake up to hear that cases of Covid have doubled overnight in California. Millions of Americans face economic hardship. So many have died, so many more will. The suffering of this moment is palpable. The beauty of it is palpable. The darkness and the light are in front of us. I realize, yet again, the darkness and the light are actually always palpable. And, the moment presents itself with an unmistakable blessing. To clear the cobwebs that have bravely appeared. Sweep them gently away. And start again