

BOOK REVIEW

The Spiral of the Seasons: Welcoming the Gifts of Later Life

by John G Sullivan

Chapel Hill NC, Second Journey Publications, 2009. 102 p., illus

Amid the haste and confusion of our lives, some of us pause, call a halt. “We don’t need more fast food,” we say, “pumped up with sugar, salt and fat. We need slow food, made by mindful cooks from fresh ingredients, eaten with family and friends amid conversation and laughter.”

We have learned to speed-read, to at least sample the news, journal articles, bed-time novels, and e-mails, texts and tweets that bombard us. It is all too much. Most of us struggle with chronic mental and spiritual indigestion.

Sullivan calls a halt to all that. His book isn’t one more thing to skim and put aside. It is for slow reading, for savouring, for sharing. It calls us away from haste and confusion. It calls us to contemplate the shape of our lives, our movement through seasons and lifetimes, and the still point at the centre of all.

Spring and summer, he tells us, are the time of rising energy. The first half of life is the time of the student and then the householder, busy with earning a living and raising children. In autumn we sense a turning. In the first half of life we strive, in the second half we release from striving.

Autumn is the time of letting go and letting be; winter is the time of the sage. The autumn of our lives is the time of forgiveness, simplification, return to nature and to the Source. In autumn we return to the simple elemental things of nature, and experience them as kin, as part of our own great family. Release allows expansion: as we are less attached to roles, duties, narrow identities, the canvas of who we are can expand . . . What needs emptying? From the mind: old ideas, opinions, certainties. From the heart: clinging, condemning, attachments, aversions.

Sullivan doesn’t provide a how-to manual. He points out ways to see, to recognize, and yet to encounter the familiar in new ways. He reframes; he leads us away from the need for frames. What used to define us and our place in the world is too small in autumn, too small for the winter sage to come. It is scary to shed the old skin, scary every time we do it. But its protection is limitation. In autumn we can dare what we could not with summer’s responsibilities. In autumn we can find the courage to let old skins fall away.

Beautifully written, this book will appeal to those searching for understanding, for ways to recognize and appreciate life’s gifts, and to live it to the fullest through all its seasons. Will it give us wisdom? No, nobody and nothing can do that: each of us has to find it for ourselves. As we search, we appreciate the wise voices of fellow seekers, of friends on the journey. *The Spiral of the Seasons* is full of wise and friendly voices to support us on our way.

Submitted by Marianne F. Vespry