

Living in Surrender

By Rev. Kirk Thomas

What a word, “surrender”! It conjures up images of soldiers in old war movies with their hands in the air, being marched off to prison camp by their smirking, armed enemies. Or perhaps the image of ancient, defeated warriors comes to mind. Stripped of their armor, with hands tied together, they are led off to slavery or sacrifice. Or perhaps just white flags, waving in the air, say it all.

But how about seeing another image, such as the Roman Forum in 390 BCE? It’s hot and dusty, and the city is strangely quiet until the silence is broken by the sound of invading Celts running through the streets. The Celts enter the Forum and stop in speechless silence. Seated around the Forum, still, like statues, are the elderly members of the Roman Senate. The Celts are astonished at the sight, and can’t quite fathom what’s going on. Are these statues made of flesh or marble? Cautiously, one Celt pulls the beard of a silent, seated Senator. The elderly man promptly slaps the Celt in the face, breaking the atmosphere of awe and silence. A Senatorial slaughter ensues.

The first two definitions of the word “surrender” in the *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* are as follows. For the purposes of this article, please note the second half of each definition:

1. to give up possession of, or power over; yield to another on demand or compulsion.
2. to give up claim to; give over or yield, especially voluntarily, as in favor of another.

The first definition sure seems to fit the images of the defeated warriors in the first paragraph above. “Giving up” and “despair” are two words that come to mind.

But how about those Roman Senators? Sure, they knew they were going to die when they took their seats in the Forum that day. There wasn’t room for everyone on the Capitoline Hill to take refuge behind the walls. But those Senators hadn’t “given up”. Nor were they in “despair”. They were defiant to the end, knowing that their deaths were unavoidable but also that they were enabling others to live. And yes, they surrendered, but not to the Celts! They had surrendered to the Gods and to their duty and honor.

But what can the last moments of a bunch of courageous old men 2400 years ago teach us today? In our busy lives, with all the marvelous, modern conveniences we have around us, what use is surrender?

I have a dear friend who used to drink far too much. For years he could keep his alcohol intake down to two or three drinks per day, but when his relationship broke up he went into a tailspin. He would party and drink and take drugs with young

people half his age, buying them whatever they wanted. At that rate he probably had a year or two left before disaster.

I have another wonderful friend who is kindhearted and generous and full of life. She also felt that she wasn't even remotely spiritual. While she understood that others claimed to have spiritual lives, she knew that spirituality wasn't for her, and doubted if spirituality actually existed at all.

In my own case, I was in the 20th year of what had been a productive relationship but now was filled with emptiness. I had spent much of my life doing what I thought others expected of me, living other people's versions of my life. Living in England those last few years, I had joined in with village activities, directing the village play every year and I even joined the local church, singing in the choir (which I loved), though I had no connection to the religion at all. I kept going by keeping up appearances, and was filled with quiet desperation. To split up with my partner was unthinkable – what would I do? Where would I go? How would I cope?

In each case, we were lucky enough to ask ourselves one question:

“Am I willing?”

Not, “Am I willing to do this,” or “Am I willing to do that.” But just, “Am I willing?” By responding in the affirmative, we opened ourselves up to the Gods and the Powers and allowed ourselves to go with the flow of the Universe.

The first friend hit rock bottom. And was finally willing to change his life. Though an ex-Roman Catholic Priest, he had no spiritual life and wasn't too sure about this “higher power” stuff that his 12-step program insisted he rely upon. But he accepted that he couldn't “fix it” by himself and finally just surrendered. He surrendered to his higher powers and finally let go. He's been sober for two years, now.

My second friend was asked, “Are you willing?” by someone who was mentoring her. My friend, playing along, finally agreed and said that she was willing. Some little time later, she found herself in a situation where she felt abandoned by her mentor. When she found him, she sputtered and raged with white-hot anger. Suddenly, the rage simply evaporated. She gazed at her mentor in open-mouthed surprise. She understood. Her anger at being abandoned was not about her mentor. It was about her anger at the Gods for abandoning her. But what she had realized was that the Gods had not abandoned her, for they had always been there. She had abandoned the Gods. At that moment she felt an intense spiritual connection with both the Powers and the world around her. She had surrendered to the truth.

I met someone who could fill the hole in my heart. And so I, too, let go. My ex and I sold everything, house and all, and split everything down the middle. Then I came back to America, giving up the life of a country squire, and moved into a

doublewide for a year. Finally, we ended up in Tucson where I found the Gods, or should I say, they found me? I had opened my soul to the Universe and truly surrendered.

Surrender, in this context, is not passive. It is not about "giving up," nor is it about defeat. And it definitely is not about taking the easy way out or only doing what we want to do. Surrender is a very powerful act. It is about choosing to open ourselves up to the power of the Kindreds. This allows our souls to flow with the natural direction of the Universe and lets the Gods touch our hearts.

Strengthened by meditation and my personal hearth practice, I am making my life one of service and one of willingness.

So, are *you* willing?