

Bare it all

My niece bought me an electric leaves blower. It was a thank you present for having her family stay at my house over the Halloween school break. Initially, I thought this gift would be a wonderful and practical addition to my outdoors collection. It would make the task of collecting the millions of tree leaves that shed themselves from the myriad of trees that surrounded my house along with the ones from neighboring properties. Life would be much easier for the annual fall ritual.

Later, doubts began to creep in and I decided to return the power blower to its place of purchase and felt much better financially. I survived the raking of leaves that first autumn and, with a sense of accomplishment and persistence, I accomplished my goal of a clean lawn.

In preparation for the following Fall and in anticipation of more leaves to be collected, I invested in a special rake for raking leaves and a large, hungry, green bag to collect them. Soon, the autumn winds came, the leaves began to fall. Armed with rake and bag, I began the almost daily task of collecting and disposing of the dying leaves. Neighbors suggested that I was facing a no-win situation with the leaves. They said, I should leave them alone and they would quietly rot away. Yet, I couldn't stand by and watch my lawn and driveway covered in leaves. After a few hours of cleaning the leaves, I thought I could sit back and enjoy the fruits of my labors only to notice that the places I had just cleaned were being thrashed again by wind and more leaves.

I looked up into the surrounding trees and wondered how many more leaves the trees had to let go. Then, I realized a valuable lesson. So much of life is about letting go. The surrounding trees had to shed and let go of their leaves before new leaves and new growth could happen in springtime.

This "letting go" was seen as "detachment" in the spiritual guide books. Even Thoreau saw this when he said, "I make myself rich by making my wants few." It seems that letting go is an ongoing, daily challenge to surrender something in order to achieve something greater. Life is filled with endless moments when we are called to let go. In letting go, the space that it occupied, no longer becomes empty; it is filled with something else. No longer have we let go of some "necessity" that another equally, if not, more attractive "necessity" takes its place. It reminds me of the basic scientific axiom I learned in high school. It was Greek physicist-philosopher Parmenides who reminded us that "nature abhors a vacuum."

"Letting go" always surfaces some negative feelings. Even Jesus experienced his own doubts, fear and anger. He even prayed that the chalice of letting go in death might pass him by but was able to let go in saying "not my will, but yours be done."

Nobody likes to be stripped, to be emptied, not even the God become human. Brave Peter had to face letting go of his fear when he stepped out of the boat in the storm in order to walk on the water towards Jesus on the shore of his life.

We hold on to life's hurts, life's unfulfilled dreams, life's dashed relationships and life itself with clinched fists that eventually will be opened permanently as we pass through the doors of death to the freedom and beauty of eternity.

So, when the autumn winds roll around again and the leaves begin to drop on the green apron of my lawns, I may not take out my trusting leaves rake and green hungry bag. Instead, I may just sit back, pause and reflect on nature's message as her trees let go of her foliage. Maybe, instead of panicking at the no-win situation of collecting the leaves, I will ponder on how nature teaches us a valuable lesson about "letting go." Metaphorically speaking, I will realise that, like nature, humans too must bare it all.