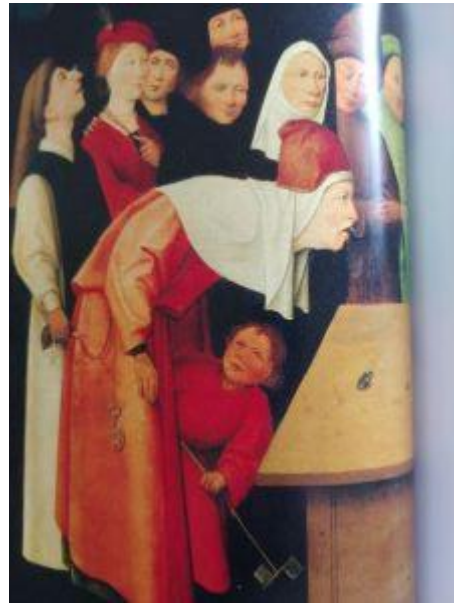


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Discovering Magic and Wisdom in Life



Images from: "The Conjurer" Attributed to Hieronymus Bosch van Aken (1450-1516)
Selected from "*Looking at Mindfulness*" by Christophe Andre
Blue Water Press 2011

After the conclusion of the two-year Forest Dwellers program at OST, a few of us (12-15 students) formed a Forest Dweller Elder circle comprised from participants from across the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. We have chosen the referenced book as a foundation for our monthly dialogs.

We have not discussed this painting so any observations are simply mine, so will not reflect the wiser observations of this group. So how might this painting sharpen one's awareness? There is so much going on that I cannot address in this short writing. Surely one's own journey will shape our awareness and thoughts about any painting and this is certainly true for me. A few of my initial responses to this amazing painting follow.

The conjuror or magician is in full swing in his practice (Magician definition = conjuror, a person with alleged supernatural power, sorcerer, even Shaman, all rooted in the Greek, Majikos). In the second picture above we more clearly see the audience. Have they gathered in full belief of all or any of the definitions? Maybe the older guy in front is astounded by the trick but the detail shows he is drooling, maybe a little confused or worse. He is also losing his wallet...perhaps even the reason for the show! Mostly though, the audience seems to be bored or at least their minds are somewhere else.. This gives me a sense of how often we seek refuge from our day-to-day demands by escaping into our own magical thoughts and distractions. Maybe they are hoping to find the real magic in their lives but fall into the illusion that someone else has the "magic " for them.

I wonder what may be different with our image of the Maji as reflected in Scripture. The dictionary definition is almost identical to that of magician but does point to wisdom or a deeper knowing even to the point of referencing them as wise men. They bring gifts not tricks.

These Maji brought gifts of great worth to a new born. The symbol can hardly be missed, as to what greater gift can be offered than wisdom, to support the greatest gift...new life and life itself. As wise men we may consider they have brought or channeled a new wisdom into our realm to guide us with the newest arrival of the Christ image.

How we greet life with its disappointments and challenges teaches us to trust in the natural order of life's blessings

Okay, now I will wander a bit with a trip to the Florida Keys. Five of us flew to Miami for a "fishing trip" with my son, Darren, my son-in-law Terry and 2 grandchildren – Darren's boys. Karen and I spent many summers in the Keys with our children and the memories are strong, as is the call to return. Months ago I planned this trip for the five guys and fishing was to be the highlight . The most difficult part of planning was finding the right boat for five of us in the height of the regular summer traffic now compounded by the pent-up demand from COVID. Traffic from the U.S. and South America is at an all time high. However, the boat was booked and ready.

A 5:45am flight from San Antonio direct to Miami had us in the Keys early and straight to the docks to confirm the trip. All was well for a 7am departure the next day. Up early the next morning and straight to the docks ????? #**#*

Frustration!...Disappointment!... The boat double-booked and the other booking was made earlier than ours. The booking group made minimal effort to locate alternate boats and the only offer was a trip that could take only 4 passengers. Our plans focused around fishing weighed heavily on us. This was the beginning of a major shift in our experience. I was NOT happy and felt our trip was to become a failure. An offer was made for a different boat. Unfortunately, there was room for only 4. It proved unacceptable as each one of us explained our individual reason for staying behind and the others going, even the two grandkids, each offering to be the only one to stay behind (18 and 20 years old). The entire group rejected the effort and agreed we all stayed together in all our activities. No one to be left out.

I was aware that our plans were moving in a new path that was exciting. Was losing this boat a moment of synchronicity that would interject new possibilities into our trip? Plans shifted to a trip to Key West, another 60 miles south. We now entered four days of in-depth dialogue, hopes, new expectations and new bonds that had not previously existed. In the presence of blue skies, great hosts at our accommodations and some of the most perfect weather one could hope for, we were blessed with new gifts of knowing one another. I observed Darren and Terry coming to know one another as brothers, who care about each other. It was no longer about the fishing, but the miracle of life being the great gift of living. The real miracle (magic!) was happening. I gave up searching for alternate boats after a couple of hours, but Terry continued on his cell and found trips for us. We did get to fish but all our discussions and our dialogue when returning, was about the family bonds being evident and even stronger.

How often I have set expectations on outside influences to guide my choices when the gift was open right before me. No need for The Supernatural Magic. Just be open to the ever present opportunity to engage life as it's offered and not as I wished it to be. I may still wish to be amazed at the skill of an entertaining magician but I will place my life on the wonder of the gift given freely with love and compassion by life itself.

Thanks to so many of you who provide the MAGIC in my life.



Key West Marker - 90 miles to Cuba

~~ Abbot Ron Poidevin