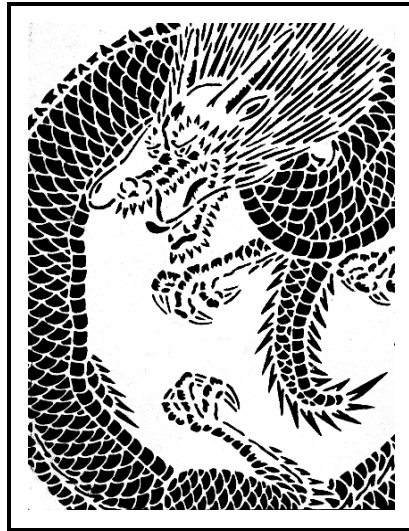


# YES

It is a short, simple word. The simplicity may be an indicator of its true nature. Like a tiny acorn that contains a huge oak tree, Yes is a seed that contains great potential on many levels. I recently had a river adventure that leads to a deeper exploration and appreciation of what is possible with Yes. Here is the story.

*New Year's Day, 2012.* In the early morning hours, I hear the river calling. I respond, like many times before. Each journey has its own teachings, often, maybe mostly, unknown until arriving on the river. It becomes apparent at a particular juncture of water and island, sunrise and moonset, eagle and heron and hawk. There is a rhythm of boat and paddle and water. At some natural, mysterious point they all merge. It's why I'm there. This day's lesson was a little different. I capsized. Going into the frigid January water was the last thing I wanted. It had been a noticeable fear for awhile. Before, capsizing seemed like my worst fear. Not so. What we spend so much energy in fear of rarely matches reality.



A surprisingly swift current slammed the kayak sideways into a dock. It pushed the boat underwater upside down with me wedged tightly inside, and pinned us under the dock. It took awhile to get untangled from the boat. I'm not sure how long. Time does funny things in these situations. It was long enough that the body automatically prepared to take a breath. It was clear there was nothing I could do to stop it. It's hardwired into the system. I calmly knew the consequences of inhaling a lung full of water. Seconds before that happened, I somehow twisted enough out of the cockpit to change the water pressure dynamic and the current pushed me through to the other side of the dock. That was phase one.

Phase two instantly became apparent as I was moving quickly downstream, away from potential help. I was approximately 80 feet from shore. It seemed like a mile. I could barely move, dog paddling with a submerged kayak and wet, heavy layers of winter clothing. Reaching shore took all the energy I had. Then, phase three.

It was one-quarter mile back to the park, my bike and help. The hypothermic clock was loudly ticking, 10-15 minutes, maybe, before serious results. Intense shaking and rapidly unclear thinking were dominant. Many extra pounds of wet clothing made walking a challenge. Walk. One step. One foot in front of the other. Hyperventilation began to block out almost everything else. Disorientation increased each moment.

Reaching the park seemed like a major accomplishment, yet I then remembered it was still pre-dawn on New Year's Day. No one was there. Brain sluggishly struggled to make sense, formulate a plan. Hypothermia continued to progress, the whole body focused on shivering and hyperventilating. There was not much available for anything else. I stumbled around and saw someone at a trash can. Peter, a city parks employee was cleaning up at 6 am. on New Year's Day. My brain couldn't form a coherent thought, much less a plan. We called 911.



The kind paramedics warmed me in the ambulance. Terry, Judith and Snidely arrived with dry clothes and warm liquids, retrieving bike and kayak and got us all to a warm home at sunrise on a new year.

There are an amazing number of dramatic, synchronistic and curious details that go with this story. However, this space requires something brief, concise

and to the point. What is the nature of this adventure? What is the essence?

Pause (thank you, Tara Brach). Sit. Listen. Ah... there it is.

From the moment of the obvious and inevitable sequence of swift water, boat and dock, there was Yes without any resistance whatsoever. It was the only sane response as anything else - fear, panic, thinking - would produce deadly results. Hmmm. So, without the usual fear and panic, without the incessant thinking, analyzing... what is there?

*Awareness.*

In the moment it was quite obvious. There was no effort, no trying. Just awaring (thank you, Toni Packer). It appears naturally with Yes to the reality of the moment, even when that moment includes the possibility of death. With natural, unfolding awareness there is an energy that provides clarity even as the brain declines into a stupor. It's not about thinking. It's about... being. Being in the moment. Being in the present. The power of now (thank you, Eckhart Tolle). The wonder of presence (again, thank you Toni Packer). Hypothermia as a gateway to presence, awareness and being. Life is hilarious! *Yes.*

Curiosity continues about this amazing process of awareness and its simple initiation with Yes. And, that clarity of awareness doesn't end with the conclusion of the drama. Or at least it doesn't have to. Even weeks afterwards, there is awareness of the tendency to think about, recall, relive all the details that happened, which takes me away from this present moment. There is also a tendency to think, plan and strategize for the future to prevent this from happening again. Also, taking me away from this present moment.

There is awareness of the kindness of so many people: Peter, Terry, Judith, the paramedics, 911, meditating friends, teachers of Boy Scouts, YMCA, swimming lessons, life-saving, scuba, martial arts, chi kung, meditation. All came into play. All were instantly accessible, even those from 50 years ago. Again, time does funny things. Without the kindness of others....

Also, awaring how good it feels when people say, *I'm glad you're alive.* Maybe we could say that more frequently to each other.

On a practical level, I've made some changes to how I kayak and my safety gear. But, as this episode demonstrates, we can't anticipate, plan and prepare for all the different variables and ways kayak journeys and life happen. Another aspect of preparation and training involves the ability to be fully present in each moment, to be able to say Yes to whatever arises. This deeper skill is then available for wherever we are in our lives: under a dock or parenting; confronting cancer or a vicious stomach virus; commuting to work or committing to marriage.

While it is easy to see this process at work during high drama, the exact same potential is available in each and every moment of our lives, from the mundane and boring, the laundry of life, to the intense adventure that unexpectedly appears.

### *The Guest House*

*This being human is a guesthouse.  
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

~ Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks

As Rumi reminds us in *The Guesthouse*, saying Yes, welcome, to all guests who enter, provides access to this energy of awareness and the resulting guides from beyond, teachings. Sometimes, this includes the dramatic and violent sweeping out. Can we also say Yes to these?

Life has been different since New Year's Day. Priorities are more clear. Life is simpler, happier. Saying Yes to it all allows qualities of spaciousness, stillness, harmony and balance that seem like natural states of being. All from a short, simple word applied to whatever arises on this day. *Yes*

Thank you for reading this story.

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