



## Steadfastly Gentle

*The New Year can tend to elevate expectations while simultaneously reminding us of our inadequacies. It may be tempting to consider bootcamps, extreme make-overs, and other shortcuts to transformation. Gentle practices and small gestures can seem a bit lackluster and inefficient when compared with more dramatic approaches.*

**But one month into 2023 I'm still pledging my allegiance to the gentle, not because I find it morally superior, but because nothing else has worked for me in any kind of sustainable way.** I don't respond well to anyone who claims to have the one true answer for any aspect of my life. And when I've tried to force myself towards some ideal version of myself, flog myself into new behaviors, or follow someone else's exacting program, it's always fizzled or backfired. So I engage in gentle practices. I feel that they, along with my trustworthy relationships and my work, water me, nourish me, and deepen my roots.

**One practice of mine is to write a monthly newsletter and to share it with you.** It helps me to take stock of what has been emerging in my work and my life and what feels like it might be useful to share. But January came and went with no newsletter. I was starting to feel like I needed to flog myself into having something wise to share before any more time passed. So, since flogging tends to backfire, I redirected myself to another one of my practices – writing pantoums. I decided to start by giving myself permission to relieve myself of any pressure to know more than I knew or do more than I had energy for. And then I just followed what emerged, doing my best to tell the truth to myself.

*I am taking the pressure off of myself.  
That pressure has been giving me a headache.  
Today I don't have to be wise or productive.  
Today I can be a soft creature wrapping myself in kindness.*

*That pressure has been giving me a headache.  
I don't have to have answers for myself or anyone else.  
Today I can be a soft creature wrapping myself in kindness.  
This is the way I am standing strong for a "gentle approach"*

*I don't have to have answers for myself or anyone else.  
I don't have to earn my place on the planet.  
This is the way I am standing strong for a "gentle approach."  
This is the way I can be a loving presence for myself.*

*I don't have to earn my place on the planet.  
Today I don't have to be wise or productive.  
This is the way I can be a loving presence for myself.  
I am taking the pressure off of myself.*

As soon as I wrote that, another pantoum wanted to be written. I didn't have to force it or even coax it. It seemed to emerge naturally. After I wrote it, I felt it expressed exactly what I really did want to share with you in this first newsletter of 2023.



*There is no need to prove ourselves by making our lives harder.*

*We don't need to flog ourselves into being more ideal versions of ourselves.*

*Some of our growth is slow and hidden, like root systems deepening.*

*Some growth comes in response to what the world offers up.*

*We don't need to flog ourselves into being more ideal versions of ourselves.*

*Life provides us with more than enough losses, changes, disappointments, and challenges.*

*Some of our growth comes in response to what the world offers up.*

*Sequoia cones open up and spread their seeds when there's a fire in the forest.*

*Life provides us with more than enough losses, changes, disappointments, and challenges.*

*The deeper our root system, the better we can weather what comes.*

*Sequoia cones open up and spread their seeds when there's a fire in the forest.*

*Out of devastation, something emerges that can grow hundreds of feet tall and live for thousands of years.*

*The deeper our root system, the better we can weather what comes.*

*Some of our growth is slow and hidden, like root systems deepening.*

*Out of devastation, something emerges that can grow hundreds of feet tall and live for thousands of years.*

*There is no need to prove ourselves by making our lives harder.*

If you, like me, respond better to a gentle approach, I encourage you to ponder this question, while meditating, taking a walk, or writing in your journal.



*What gentle practice might help to nourish me, water me, and deepen my roots this year?*

Sending you gentle support.



*Carolyn*