



Celebrating the Equinox

Traveling "In The Footsteps of Our Spiritual Ancestors" with Wayne Dyer

by Gillian Drake

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I am alone in Italy, sitting on a stone bench at La Spezia station waiting for the train to Rome. The train is not due for nearly an hour, so there is time to think, time to reflect, time to write. What luxury!

I pretend I am invisible; I am the observer, seeing the world go by, here to experience and record. The weather is changing, the warm sun tempered by a cool breeze, *aria fresca*, they call it here, a sign of cooler weather to come.

I am headed for Rome and a cruise to Istanbul with Wayne Dyer on a ship named, fittingly, the *Celebrity Equinox*. Today, at this very moment in fact, is the autumnal equinox, that marker of time when the hours of daylight and darkness are equal and we start to slip closer towards winter.

I shall miss celebrating this special day with my Cape women friends. We celebrated May Day together, the Summer Solstice, and Lammas Day on August 1st, and I would have liked to continue the practice. I found it useful and meaningful to take part in empowering rituals and affirmations, and to divide the passing of time into chunks of six weeks; it's enough time to make a plan and implement it or accomplish a goal, but not too long that you forget what you had planned to accomplish in the first place.

But today I am on my own, so I channel their energy, all those different amazing women, and know that even when apart, we are all here to support and honor each other.

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Though this trip was about following in the footsteps of our spiritual ancestors, I found to my surprise that I was tracing the footsteps of my actual ancestors.

As we were steaming towards Istanbul, the ship's captain announced we were passing Gallipoli lighthouse in the Dardanelles Strait. On the nautical chart they were marked *Çanakale Boğazı* and *Gelibolu*, so it was no wonder I didn't recognize where I was. But the names in English sounded so familiar that my blood ran cold, the words eliciting images of brutal fighting during the First World War, between British and Turks, with heavy loss of life on both sides.

My grandfather had been here as a teenager and almost lost his life to typhoid fever digging trenches. It seemed ironic that I would be sailing through this same waterway in a floating five-star hotel almost 100 years after my grandfather and other young soldiers had been experiencing such misery.

Most moving were the war memorials, easily visible from the ship. One was carved out of the mountain with the words, lit up at night: "DUR YOLCU" — "Stop wayfarer !" I later found they were from a poem written about this area, which had seen much warfare and conflict going as far back as the days of Troy:

*Stop Wayfarer! Unbeknownst to you this ground
You come and tread on, is where an epoch lies;
Bend down and lend your ear, for this silent mound
Is the place where the heart of a nation sighs.*



Gallipoli War Memorial

The focal point of the trip was a visit to Ephesus, the second largest city of the Roman Empire and home of St. Paul. Tradition has it that he brought the Virgin Mary to spend her last days here, and Wayne Dyer was to address us at the Virgin Mary's House, now a religious shrine.

The logistics of getting all 350 of us in 10 coaches up to that beautiful spot on the coast of western Turkey was a challenge, but we did it, we all got there – the young and the old, the fit and the infirm, people of all colors and races and religious backgrounds, for just one hour with Wayne Dyer in this holy place.

By now, I had picked up the sense from other cruise passengers that they were somewhat disappointed in his lectures, that they had expected more from him. On TV, he seemed more polished, here he had rambled a bit, reminiscing about key events in his life which were obviously still fresh in his mind from spending the summer writing his latest book, "I Can See Clearly Now." From his description of the book, it appears to be some kind of end-of-life review, and when in the last two lectures he invited his daughter Serena to join him on stage, it seemed as if he might be preparing to pass the baton to the next generation.

On this much anticipated day, there was a hum of excited expectation amongst the crowd, and after we were all settled, Wayne announced that he would read us poetry by Rumi, a 13th-century Persian poet whose day of birth was this day, September 30th.

"Sell your cleverness and purchase bewilderment," he read from Rumi's writings, "and be in a state of gratitude for everything that happens in our life." Rumi spoke about having no country and no religion, he told us, about "living in the now" and having no "longing for the past." A red squirrel scampered up an olive tree and ran across a larch branch high above him as he spoke.

As the precious minutes went by, the crowd seemed to be getting restless. I heard a few grumbings of, "We could have read Rumi at home by ourselves..." but to say it was a let-down would be missing the point. Just being here, being part of the group that he had gathered around him in this tranquil spot, was in itself a blessing.

Still, I knew that the crowd was hoping for something more from this man, this mortal who was expected to perform and inspire and even change people's lives. I had learned this myself on a previous cruise with Wayne Dyer and a host of other inspirational speakers; in reality, it was the whole experience and being part of a special group of people that made it a truly memorable trip, not the words of a single person.

As fellow traveler Laura Merkle told me after the cruise, "I went on this cruise expecting it to be a life changing event but thought it would be because of something profound Wayne Dyer would say in one of his lectures...but it turned out it was life-changing due to bonding with all of you." And Wayne was the catalyst for that to happen. That was the magic.

When he finished, he introduced to us an Iranian woman named Meryam who, 27 years earlier, had suggested he read the work of Rumi. She had been communicating with him ever since, but had never met him. This was her chance, and she traveled from Iran to Turkey to be with her hero.



Maria and Wayne Dyer

Photograph courtesy of Ann Gaboriault

Head modestly covered with a scarf, she addressed us in halting English and Farsi, telling us she found her way by "heart's eyes." She had taken a risk to come and talk openly about her beliefs in the supremacy of love over formal religion, one of the beliefs that Rumi expounded.

For a Muslim, being a follower of someone like Wayne Dyer is close to heresy. Books such as his are not allowed to be sold in Iran, though they can be brought in from other countries. When this talk is broadcast, she will need to have her face blurred out.

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Wayne didn't directly address the theme of the cruise until the last lecture on board ship when he read St. Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, believed to have been written in Ephesus circa 54 AD: "Love is patient, love is kind . . ." I was hoping he'd read it to us at Ephesus but he saved it for his last lecture, turning the lights down low in the theater to read us the beautiful words nearly 2,000 years after they were first written. Time seemed to stand still as we were gently enveloped by his familiar voice resonating in the darkness.

And then, after a gentle Namaste, he suggested we leave in silence, that no applause was necessary. So he came through for us in the end, giving us what we had all come for—a tender, magical, transcendent moment, the affirmation that we are all joined by love. Thank you, Wayne, and God bless you.



Gillian Drake is a writer, editor and publisher, and the founder of Cape Women magazine.

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