

## Jeremiah 18:1-11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Come, go down to the potter's house and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand. O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

### "Getting Over Overwhelmed"

Ours is a high demand, fast paced culture. It is as one humorist quipped: *In the early days, if you missed the stagecoach, you simply settled down to wait for the next one. After all, there was no problem. They ran every six months. Now people get excited if they miss one section of a revolving door (from Wisdom of the World, p. 4, source unknown).* In their workbook, *Self Renewal: A Workbook for Achieving High Performance and Health in a High Stress Environment*, Dennis Jaffe and Cynthia Scott noted: *When one does not get what one wants or expects and feels trapped by obligation or economic circumstances, one responds with a withdrawal of energy characterized as burnout.* Overwhelmed, we get underwhelmed with life. We get thoughts of retiring, our eye starts twitching, our stomachs begin to ache, we can't get out of bed, we take up our favorite addiction, and all the doctor says is ...it's stress.

Indian Johar Rishi tells this story from the Hindu wisdom tradition for spiritual insight and counsel when burnout strikes.

Once upon a time, a merchant who was vacationing in a small village went to see the village market. At one place he saw a man with a genie and he asked, "What are you selling, my friend?" "My genie," replied the man. "Well, what does it do?" the merchant asked. "Everything you want to get done," the vendor said. "It makes the impossible possible." "Then why do you sell it?" the merchant said. "Because I have no ambitions left," the vendor said. "It is a wish fulfilling genie, but it is very exhausting. It cannot stay idle and all the time it needs a new job, a new project, or otherwise, it destroys what it creates." "I have lots of ambitions, lots of jobs to be done," the merchant said. "I'll buy it." When they reached the place where the merchant stayed, the genie said, "Now, Sir,, tell me what I can do for you. Your satisfaction is guaranteed, but before enjoying it you must tell me my next job." "Your first job," the merchant said, "is to build boundary walls and mark my sites." The genie clapped his hands and said, "All your sites have been enclosed, Sir. Now tell me the next job." "You really are a wish-fulfilling genie. I am so happy to have you. Your next job is to create buildings on these sites." The genie clapped again. "It is done, my master. The factories, the theatre halls, the swimming pool and markers are all crowded with people." "Fantastic," said the merchant. "Now I want you to make me king of the world. Build me a palace. Organize a coronation. Invite all the important people. Bring poets and musicians and let the dancers dance and entertainers entertain." The genie clapped again and said, "you have been accepted as the solemn monarch of planet Earth. Your crown is right here. Dress yourself up and enjoy being the most powerful and important person on planet Earth. But . . . before you leave, please tell me my next job." The merchant became numb. All his desires were fulfilled. Suddenly he remembered the merchant's warning: If he could not keep the genie employed, everything he had achieved so far would be destroyed. Drops of perspiration started dripping down his forehead. Only one person could possibly help him. "Genie," he commanded, "before I become the emperor of the planet Earth, I would like to get the blessings of my spiritual teacher. Please take me to the holy one's cave in the Himalayas." So the genie clapped again and there he was. "Bless me, holy one, bless me," the businessman said. "I am in great trouble.

I bought a wish-fulfilling genie this morning and all my desires got fulfilled. But I bought this genie on condition that I have to keep him engaged or he will destroy what he has created. And now I don't know what to do with him." The holy one was sitting naked on a straw mat and greeted the merchant with a radiant smile. "Don't worry, my son. It is very easy to provide this genie with a never-ending job. But first relax," said the holy one. "I cannot relax," the merchant said. "I am agitated, anxious, excited, terribly disturbed and afraid. Save me." "Listen carefully, my child," the holy one said. "Ask the genie to bring the biggest bamboo pole he can get. Then order him to plant it inside the ground very firm and tight. After the pole is firmly fixed to the ground, ask the genie to climb it up and down until further orders. This will keep him busy and you will enjoy your life undisturbed and fearlessly. "How stupid I am that I could not think of such a simple solution," the merchant gasped. "When one is obsessed by fear and anxiety one cannot think of such simple solutions," the holy one said. "First you were blinded by your ambitions and you bought the genie. When the genie became too fast in fulfilling your desires you got scared by the speed with which he carried out your orders. Then you got nervous by the imaginary fear of destruction. Go now and feel free." The holy one paused for a moment. "But before you go," he went on, "know this. I too have a genie. And I, too, have a pole for it." Then the holy one opened his hands and showed the merchant his prayer beads.

Joan Chittister commented: *The story has all the earmarks of a fairy tale---except it isn't. . . The genie is the desire for achievement, the hope for popularity, the thirst for opportunity, and the hunger for excitement. The genie is also a gaping need for success, for adulation. . . The genie, you see, is inside of us. So the genie of "Possibility" can be bought only at great cost. This is the genie that we pay for with our lives* (WWW, "Why Does My Life Feel So Hectic? p. 9).

Centering prayer is the spiritual practice that helps us get over overwhelmed. When we focus on God, we turn our energy away from our genies and become grounded in Love.

Healing occurs, wrote Christinae Northrup, M.D. when you align with the pure, positive energy that created the planet---and that keeps your heart beating and your blood chemistry normal. Healing occurs when you release all your resistance to well-being

and allow yourself to be well. Healing occurs when you're in harmony with your life's purpose and those who are meant to accompany you on this path. Healing occurs when you've created a sense of safety and security in your life. Healing is a major leap of faith in this culture.

In our scripture reading for today, the prophet Jeremiah imagined God as The Potter who remakes the spoiled clay of burned out humanity into human beings whose wellness is in the hands of the Lord. In the Hebrew tradition, centering prayer heals us of our genies by shaping us through God's gift of prophetic Word.

*Thus says the Lord . . . turn now, all of you from your evil way and amend your ways and your doings (stop chasing after lesser gods and stop serving cultural idols). (From Jeremiah 13)*

In the Christian tradition overwhelmed is overcome at the Communion table with our Lord as we sing:

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
Thou art the potter, I am the clay.  
Mold me and make me, after Thy will,  
While I am waiting, yielded and still.  
Have thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
Search me try me, Savior today  
Wash me just now, Lord, wash me just now  
As in Thy presence humbly I bow.  
Have thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
Wounded and weary, help me I pray.  
Power all power surely is Thine  
Touch me and heal me, Savior divine  
Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!  
Hold o'er my being, absolute sway.  
Fill with Thy Spirit, til all shall see  
Christ only, always living in me.