

A Reading of the 8th Psalm:

*God, brilliant Lord,
yours is a household name.
Nursing infants hum choruses about you;
toddlers shout the songs
That drown out enemy talk,
and silence egotistical babble.
I look up at your giant skies, dark and enormous,
your handmade sky-jewelry,
Moon and stars mounted in their settings.
Then I look at my tiny self and wonder,
Why do you bother with us?
Why take a second look our way?
Yet we've so narrowly missed being gods,
bright with Eden's dawn light.
You put us in charge of your handcrafted world,
repeated to us your Genesis-charge,
Made us stewards of sheep and cattle,
even animals out in the wild,
Birds flying and fish swimming,
whales singing in the ocean deeps.
God, brilliant Lord,
your name echoes all the way around the world
And back again...*

I would guess that most of us will have had someone say to us at least once in our lives that "life is about the journey, not the destination." I'm sure we all said, "uh huh," and let the idea go. Generally, we are all so focused on the destination: getting through that class, passing that test or guiding our students through the next unit, that few of us realize at that time that it really is about the journey.

I have spent more than half of my life working with the Polynesian Voyaging Society and have had multiple opportunities to sail throughout the Pacific on Hōkūle'a and other canoes as a crew member, watch captain and navigator. When we start a new journey,

there is both excitement and trepidation. We know what our destination is, say Tahiti, but we have to get there first, and in between now and then is the great unknown.

When someone gets the call that they've been selected for an upcoming voyage, there's a lot of initial excitement. Who's on the crew? Who's the captain? What are my responsibilities? In most cases, the excitement outweighs any of the trepidations about the challenges. Have to stay up for a late watch (work shift)? No problem! Salt water baths? No problem! Sailing more than 2000 miles across the deep blue sea on a 62-foot canoe? No problem!

Then the planning begins...we start any voyage by creating a reference course: looking at the winds and currents in the area where we'll be sailing to understand what course we'll be able to hold. For those with specific kuleana like food, water and equipment, it's time to organize and get prepared. Plan the menu, pack the food, find all of our safety equipment, fill and load water bottles. Go on training sails and practice drills. Pack your belongings and remember the little things that make life better at sea.

For the navigator, it's time to study. That means learning stars and memorizing them and their paths through the sky. It means late nights watching the sky and many hours in front of the computer going through astronomy programs. It means looking at weather forecasts to see what we might expect and learning what different clouds mean. Preparation itself is a daunting task, but there are no convenience stores at sea, so we must be ready.

And then, before you know it, you're on your way. In the beginning, the wind is fresh and chill on your skin, and the sails billow, carrying you over deep blue waves. You adjust to new schedules, watch rotations and being with your small family of crew members for the next few weeks. When you sleep, your lullaby is the sound of the water rushing past the hulls. There are stars at night to follow, and rain brings fresh water showers. Hanapa'a! Fish hit the lines and there's sashimi and panko-fried fish. Mahimahi, ahi, aku

and even the rare small marlin. There's cocoa and saimin on night watches and you sing, play ukulele or guitar and joke with your watch. You bust out the M & Ms for afternoon poker games in the shade of the sails, or, my favorite, play cribbage. Every sunrise and sunset is more epic than the last.

As you continue south towards Tahiti, the air warms and the days get hot. Work continues and you seek the shade of a sail, or make your own with a pareau. Sometimes, a bucket of cold seawater over your head or feet refreshes you and keeps you cool. At this point, you're into the rhythm of the voyage and your schedule seems natural. Everyone is in synch and we know when to help each other and when to give each other space on our small wa'a...the deck is roughly 50 feet by 17 feet. Here we are...a tiny canoe in the midst of thousands of miles of ocean. This is your island and the only people you have.

And then...somewhere around 9 degrees north, you might hit the intertropical convergence zone, commonly referred to as the doldrums. Here, the cold California and Peru currents converge and battle with the warm Equatorial Countercurrent. Because of this, and the heat of the sun, the winds are unpredictable and often absent. Sometimes your sails droop in the heat and you drift on a glassy sea. Or, you might spend an entire night dodging squalls that could break your boom or rip your sails. The ocean currents are strange here, too. On the 1992 voyage to Tahiti, one of the crew dropped a coconut cup overboard, which floated away. The next day, it floated back past the canoe. Your progress is slow, and in the heat, your anxiety grows. At two weeks into a voyage, it seems everyone becomes a comedian, but sometimes, they just aren't funny.

Although you know that the wind will come, the wait can be interminable. You're halfway there, but when will you get through the second half? On some voyages, it only takes a few days to get through the doldrums, and on some it has taken weeks. In 1995, serendipitously faced with an almost non-existent convergence zone, navigator Kālepa Baybayan stood on the bow of the canoe and yelled, "You're not the doldrums! Show

me the real doldrums!” In contrast, in 2014, as we were sailing home from Tahiti, the doldrums cloud layer followed us north for days - the crack of dawn was always at the horizon, and it seemed that we would never reach it.

So here we are, in the doldrums of the school year. We've passed the thrill of a new school year, the craziness of homecoming, the excitement of the 'Iolani Classic and the warm glow of the holiday season, and the end of the semester looms. Now, looking ahead to a new semester and...eek! Finals! At this point in the year, you might be feeling strange currents running through your own life, or you may think that the wind has gone out of your sails, too.

Here's the thing about the doldrums, though. It is a sacred and magical space. When we get to the equator, we drop our sails and hold a quiet ceremony to recognize that we are entering a new ocean. While the goal is generally to get through the doldrums as fast as you can, sometimes Kanaloa, Ruahatu or Tawhirimatea has other plans for you.

What do you do?

One of my mentors told me that, to go to sea, you have to leave what belongs to the land behind. That is so there's mental space for you to open your mind and your heart and embrace your time at sea. When faced with a challenge on your voyage, you realize that there are lessons to be learned by simply existing in the moment. For me, those lessons were about my complete insignificance in the face of nature and the sheer, almost unimaginable magnificence of the larger world we live in.

In the doldrums, I have seen rain so thick that the canoe was encased in a gray room whose walls stood for hours on end. There are night rainbows - glowing white arches created by rain and moonlight. They are a sign that your ancestors are near, and as you sail the path that they, too, sailed, it is only too clear that they are present and guiding

you. Sometimes, I have had the feeling that if we stopped steering the canoe, it would still make its way through any challenge, because our 'aumakua guide us.

I have even seen UFOs. Really! I wasn't the only one! Lights in the sky that moved in a way that no aircraft could. There have been dolphins that swam through phosphorescence at night, softly glowing escorts weaving glowing trails through the water of ke ala i kahiki. In the daylight, those dolphins might become a pod of thousands, stretching from horizon to horizon. Once, I saw them work as a team to surround and herd fish to feed their pod and have heard their voices echo through the hulls of the canoe. At night, there are stars so bright and numerous that constellations like Orion, clear to us here, are lost in the brilliance.

One night, stuck in a high pressure system south of Tonga, even the jellyfish moved faster than we did. By 2 am, a light mist had obscured the horizon, blurring the line between sea and sky. For fun, we shone our flashlights over the side of the canoe, hoping to attract night fish. Instead, we lit up the ocean, painting a sea of phosphorescent stars around the canoe. The softly glowing points that shone from the water mirrored the stars in the sky, leading the crew to wonder if, like in "Pirates of the Caribbean", we had turned upside down, suspended in a globe of stars.

The most sacred aspect of the doldrums, however, is not external but internal. There is no room on the canoe for you to be anything but exactly who you are, flaws and all. In "real" life, we wear masks: different personas at school, at home, among friends. Make no mistake, voyaging, and especially navigating, is mentally, emotionally and physically challenging. Being on a voyage is an opportunity for intense self-reflection, as all the masks come off and you may or may not like what you see. When you face a tough challenge, what you learn about yourself changes you forever.

There's a song that the old-time Hōkūle'a crew members like to sing when they get together, called "Sailors of Fortune." One verse states that, "mind over matter can move

mountains and sailors find their dreams because they believe.” In the doldrums of the school year, I hope you will find a moment to look around you and just breathe. Appreciate the friends and family who are with you on your journey. Enjoy the small moments of peace and wonder. Be in the now. Take time to have a closer look at yourself in your moments of stress. Open your mind to see what really matters. Hold tight to your dreams and enthusiastically believe in them. Most of all, treasure these times, as crazy and difficult as they are, because they won't happen again.

One of the most interesting reactions to being on a voyage is that, when you sight your island, you are terribly excited that you actually found it, of course, but at the same time, you wish you could turn the canoe around and go back into the space of that journey, because the experience is so powerful. Coming back to cars, shopping malls, crowds and noise is a severe culture shock.

After returning from one voyage, I went to a UH volleyball game and realized that the number of people in the arena was greater than the total populations of the eight islands I had visited. I freaked out.

While I guarantee that none of you will end the semester, and especially the school year by wishing you could do it again, I predict that all of you will feel nostalgic for the experiences you had. Relish your journey, even when it feels like being in the doldrums. When you lose the wind in your sails, think of the challenge you face as a sacred space to reflect, appreciate and grow. Remember, life is about the journey, not the destination.