

## Pruning Inside and Out

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One of my tasks, while on a month long retreat at Pine Mountain temple, was to clean out the pyrocantha bushes behind the Sangha house. They were a thick tangle of strong spiny interwoven branches. Pyrocantha's name translates to Fire Thorn. I found this to be appropriate during my weeks pruning the bushes and as time went on, I appreciated more the mindfulness that working with this sharp bush necessitated. During these weeks I began to see ways my process pruning pyrocantha reflected my process of looking at the tangles within my heart and how a similar approach could be taken in both pruning and diving into my inner work.

At first the bushes looked like an impenetrable barrier of thorns and leaves and it was hard to tell where a branch connected to the trunk and where it ended. The hardest part was figuring out which branches to take off and which to leave, it was hard to tell from the outside and it was even harder to get inside without taking some off. It was often surprising how just removing one branch then opened up a series of next steps for pruning from one bush to the next.

I found this helpful diving into my heart when things seemed murky and I was just muddling around or glossing over the top because I wasn't sure where to start. It helped to notice something that had a charge and then take the time to look at it. To just start somewhere without worrying if it was getting to the root of what was there and then take it one step at a time. Often this seemed to have a cascade effect of uncovering other layers and interwoven lines of stories.

Another aspect of dealing with pyrocantha was that it could be going along so smoothly, seeing the next steps clearly and then suddenly I would be stumped - a bush that was dying and I didn't know how to prune it without leaving a strange looking half dead thing. I would leave it and the next day I could figure out how to dive in, how to save the few live branches. This was a good reminder to allow time and space to help the process naturally unfold and I tried to walk that line in myself of continued effort without forcing an outcome or striving too hard to detangle everything at once.

Then there was cleaning up. The heroic aspect of crawling around on all fours through sharp tangles and pulling out branches twice my height was over. I was simply cutting up the branches and trying to stuff them neatly into the dumpster. In the inner realm it seems the hard work has been done but the cleanup often takes as much time and can be less satisfying. I saw this as the step of 'what do I do with seeing this situation?' – What I had not realized at the time but know now was that Rev. Phoebe

was helping with the clean up all the while that I was immersed in the bushes. - Maybe there is an action that is good to take, a conversation to have, or a letter to write, other times maybe just opening the hand and acknowledging; letting things dissolve or just be as they are. In my heart tangle maybe I've seen interwoven patterns, maybe I've seen situations where I've been responding in a certain way and realize that this is an unhelpful way to respond. The cleanup becomes the continual training, the responding in a different way, even as I am still doing the task of the next thing that needs to be done. It is ongoing, and the training is the same at the beginning as it is at the end.

The Pyrocantha is still a tangle of wildly growing thorns

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