

DR OLGA RODRIGUEZ RASMUSSEN

*Everything in
God
and God
in Everything*



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*Meditations for Lent, Winter, and
Spring*

Dr. Olga Rodriguez Rasmussen

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Mardi Gras

Everything in God, and God in Everything

The Lenten Season arrives once more...

A dear friend shares this with me, and I realize I have been given the gift of my focus for this Lenten Journey:

“It is my intention daily to dedicate everything to God. Each note, every word, all the steps I take as they hit the earth. It’s quite delightful.”

My soul tries to imagine what it would be like to live a life so dedicated.

To embody the sacredness in everyday living is truly how we come to experience “everything in God, and God in everything.”

To live more fully and deeply is how we come to know “everything in God, and God in everything.”

This Lent, let me plant seeds that will lead to a more awakened and mindful life, teeming with God in every sound that we hear, in every encounter we have, in every experience and relationship – in every step we take – and every time we reach out...

*Dear Lord,
May I live more fully
In the Present Moment—
With Pure Awareness
For it is the only Moment that is.*

*Let me truly know, and live—
Everything in God,
And God in everything.*



Ash Wednesday

Dust and Ashes

Legions of Christians throughout many generations received ashes on this day, and heard the words:

*“Dust you are,
And to dust you shall return.”*

A more contemporary rendition, and the words I hear today are:

*“Turn away from sin,
and be faithful to the Gospel.”*

Ashes are a sign of penitence in many traditions, Jewish, Christian, and Hindu.

Ashes remind me of dusting. When we dust, we cleanse our homes and houses. Gunilla Norris, in her book, **Being Home: Discovering the Spiritual in the Everyday**, offers this wonderful insight, reminding that this mundane task, is the perfect opportunity to experience God in everything:

“Time to dust again. Time to caress my house, to stroke all its surfaces. I want to think of it as a kind of lovemaking...the chance to appreciate by touch what I live with and cherish.

I want to be a lover of all surfaces today. Let this be my prayer: that my hands not be ashamed to give and receive a passionate exchange... to luster and be lustered...and so come to feel Your inward touch.”

I drive home listening to a wonderful recording, given to me today by a student, **Beyond: Buddhist and Christian Prayers**. I become transfixed and transported, hanging on every note of intertwined mantras and chants from two traditions, losing myself in them, and realize, that in this moment, every note is the embodiment of the Divine...

*Dear Lord,
Be with me
As I embark on this Lenten Journey.*

*Let me realize
That these ashes on my forehead
Are a reminder of the impermanence
Of all things.*

*Let me live each day,
As if it were my Last.
Let me leave no stones unturned
Or task undone,
For it all brings me closer to You!*



Thursday After Ash Wednesday

The Present Moment

Committing to practices during our Lenten Journey invites us to be more aware of the present moment.

I seek this season, to embody and exemplify and see – everything in God, and God in everything...

It is a tall order in many ways, and at times, I miss the mark. Still, it seems like a wonderful thing to strive for.

The more we seek to dedicate every experience and moment to the Divine, the more it pulls us into the present moment, which is after all – the only moment there is.

In the practice of yoga, there is a pose called Virabhadrasana II – or Warrior II. In this pose, the front leg is bent at a right angle, and the back leg is straight. The torso is perpendicular to the floor and the arms are at shoulder – level height and outstretched. The tendency with most beginning students is to surge forward. I often tell students that this pose is a metaphor for our lives, and when we surge forward, we are often too worried about the future and what comes next. Other students hang back, more symbolic of being mired in the past.

Instead, I tell my students that staying in the middle, is being in the present moment, where we want to be. Most of the thoughts we have everyday are recycled. When our thoughts inhabit the realm of the past, or are too consumed with worries about what may happen down the road, we are not in the present.

When we are truly in the present – each moment seems infinite, and sometimes, even seems to transcend the space – time continuum. Notice how time spent with a beloved lingers, almost eternally!

Lent offers us an opportunity to stay in the present – through spiritual practices such as an increased dedication

to meditation and prayer. For some it may mean,
establishing practices for the first time.

Dear Lord,
Help me stay focused
And in the present moment.
The more I am present,
The more I will truly be able to see,
Embody, and reflect a deeper awareness
Of how everything I encounter
Is in God, and how God is in everything.



Day One

Deeper Still

One of my favorite songwriters and performers is Beth Nielsen Chapman.

Recently, I found one of her CD's that I had hardly listened to - entitled **Deeper Still**.

The material for this CD was written right before she discovered she had breast cancer. As if this weren't traumatic enough, Beth had also recently gone through the experience of losing her husband.

She writes about making this record:

"I don't know where to begin to describe the amazing journey my life has been during the making of this record. Lots of angels, detours, side trips through purgatory, bursts of grace and gratefulness have brought me to this place of finally releasing this music. I guess the songs will have to speak for themselves..."

Having come through the coldest of winters, I feel myself stepping back into spring...like 'every little seed trying to find where the light comes from.'"

And here are the lyrics to **Deeper Still**:

*In the tears you gave to me
I found a river to an ocean
Concrete sky, and a stone cold sea
I came to where the emptiness
Cracked open*

*All my fears came crashing through
And met the fire of my sorrow
But I found my strength
In forgiving you
I never even dreamed
How far my heart could go*

*To give my life beyond each death
From a deeper well of trust
To know that when
There's nothing left
You will always have
What you gave to love*

*In the this life the love you give
Comes back around
To be your treasure
What you lose will be what you win
Too deep to measure*

*A silver coin rings down that well
You can never spend too much
A diamond echoes deeper still...
And you'll always have
What you gave to love*

Truly, a beautiful song sprung from a beautiful heart...

And I thought of redemption and resurrection - of hope
and all that springs eternal - of goodness - and all the
wonderful gifts we receive in life which overshadow all
that does not prevail in the light...

And I felt warmth in my soul...

(Thursday, January 10, 2008)



Day Two

Prayers of Mother Teresa of Calcutta

Last night I finally allowed myself to finish the book - **Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light** - a collection of her private writings and letters - which not only disclosed the most intimate state of her soul - but were never meant for publication. I had been savoring these letters for months.

Here are some excerpts from the book - particularly some of her prayers. No matter what one's religious tradition or spirituality - Mother Teresa's fervent passion can be easily recognized and appreciated by all devout hearts:

*Jesus in my heart,
I believe in your faithful love for me.
I love you...*

*In union with all the Masses being offered
throughout the world,
I offer Thee my heart.
Make it humble and meek like yours...*

*WHO IS JESUS TO ME?
Jesus is the Word - to be spoken.
Jesus is the Truth - to be told.
Jesus is the Way -- to be walked.
Jesus is the Light - to be lit.
Jesus is the Life to be lived.
Jesus is the Love to be loved.
Jesus is the Joy - to be shared...*

*The fruit of silence is prayer.
The fruit of prayer is faith.
The fruit of faith is love.
The fruit of love is service.
The fruit of service is peace...*

And this final excerpt, was written to her sisters,

exemplifying the true vocation of a Missionary of Charity:

*True love is surrender.
The more we love -
the more we surrender.
If we truly love souls
we must be ready to take their place...
It is only thus that we make ourselves
their means and them our end.*

*We must be living holocausts,
for the world needs us as such.
For by giving the little we possess,
we give all - and there is no limit
to the love that prompts us to give.*

*To give oneself so completely to God
is to be...the victim of His unwanted love -
the love that made the heart of God
love men so much...
We have to satiate the thirst
of an Infinite God, dying of love...*

I closed the book shortly thereafter, in awe and genuine respect which prompted me to renew my commitment to do everything with love and to make every act, an act of devotion.

(Saturday, January 12, 2008)



Day Three

Mosaic

Last night I curled up in bed with Amy Grant's - **Mosaic: Pieces of my Life So Far.**

Amy Grant has always been one of my favorite songwriters and performers. (I think I have a lot of them!) I still remember seeing her in concert two decades ago with my college friend Pat - when I was the mother of a two year old - and Amy's son was only a few months old. Since then, I have followed her career and collected all of her recordings.

This book is a fascinating collection of musings using the lyrics of many of her songs as a backdrop. Some of the writing is indicative of the inspiration for the songs. But most of it reflects the heart of a woman of deep faith. The book is inspiring and touching.

She speaks of meeting so many other musicians along the way - and many of her favorite - are mine as well: Carole King, James Taylor, and so on.

Here are some parts of the book that spoke to me:

"We have a way of branding each other, of branding ourselves... You're puffy... getting older... I see gray hairs... In a culture that worships youth and beauty, the process of aging, even gracefully, is not the feel-good experience everyone is looking for. I decided it's time to start reminding myself of some other words that are true. Today as I was brushing my teeth... I spoke to my forty-six year old reflection:

*'You are made in the image of God.
You are the salt of the earth.
You are like starlight shining out in the darkness.
You're the light of the world.'*

What is it about these words that is so mysterious and powerful?

*I am just repeating what has already been said.
What is already true."*

I thought of the **So Ham Mantra** - "I am That."

I thought of the inner self that is contained within the Supreme Self - and how we are one with the Divine...Aham - I AM...All we need is to recognize this...

Much of Amy's writing reflects her insights and prayers. She prays that her children will also have faith:

"God, find them, the way you found me..."

And she summarizes:

"They say hindsight is twenty-twenty. On paper the direction of my life seems so clear. The experience of it, however, has felt much more like a twisting, curving road full of surprises. My passion has always been the connecting power of music, connecting us to each other, to ourselves, and to the love of God..."

Ah! So true!

(Sunday, January 13, 2008)



Day Four

A River Called the Arms of God

In her book - **Mosaic: Pieces of My Life So Far** - Amy Grant tells the story of being baptized in a river in Texas called "*Rio de los Brazos de Dios*" - The River of the Arms of God.

As I sat briefly in the cold wind by the banks of the Potomac River this morning - I thought of this river as being symbolic of the arms of God for me - for it too sustains and envelops me in the very same way.

Water is symbolic in all the major religious traditions. In the Christian tradition, water is used in baptism as it washes the soul of the penitent clean.

Amy speaks of the healing she experienced in this river that embraced her as she felt all the weight of grief and pain in her life released and washed downstream.

In an earlier portion of the book she speaks of the ocean and how it is "*constant and powerful, and like the love of God, whether we're immersed in it, standing on the shore, or a thousand miles away, it remains.*"

The stories in this book are breathtakingly beautiful, healing, and inspirational. I know I will go back to them again and again. Yes - they speak of pain and loss - but also of great faith and redemption - and magnificent love.

Towards the end of the book, I found the lyrics for this song titled - **What the Angels See**:

*If I could see what the angels see
Behind the walls, beneath the sea
Under the avalanche, through the trees
Gone would be the mystery
If I could see what the angels see*

If I could hear what the angels hear

*The thunderous crash of a falling tear
Holy, holy in my ear
I'd never doubt that God is near
If I could hear what the angels hear*

*If I could know what the angels know
That death is just a swinging door
And spirits go where spirits go
I feel them but they never show
If I could know what the angels know*

*If I could stand where the angels stand
And watch the world while God commands
And see how love designed this plan
Reminders on his feet and hands
If I could stand where the angels stand*

*If I could see what the angels see
Behind the walls to you and me
And let the truth set me free
I would live life differently
If I could see what the angels see*

And I closed my eyes and gave thanks to the river for reflecting the very Image and Love of God - and to all my angels and guides - who have been with me - making their presence known throughout these many months. Both the river and angels - have finally seen me safely to the other side...Blessings without end abound...

(Monday, January 14, 2008)



Day Five

A Prayer Service

As I went through all of my books in the last week, trying to weed out a good third to half of my collection, I found all sorts of interesting notes, cards, and pictures lodged between the covers of many of the books.

I found this script for a prayer service I wrote and led on October 2, 2001, just a couple of weeks after 9/11. Different faculty members read the alternating verses.

Faculty Meeting Prayer Service 10/2/01

Opening Reflection

Reading: Mathew 22: 36 - 39

Teacher: Which commandment in the law is the greatest?

Jesus said to him: You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind.

This is the greatest and the first commandment.

And the second is like it:

you shall love your neighbor as yourself...

This is the Gospel and the Word of the Lord...

Response to the Reading: Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

We are a good people...Terrorists have cells...well, we need to become cells of peace. It is not enough to defend ourselves against violence. The greatest antidote to violence is that we pro-actively create fields of non-violence, fields of peace. (Marianne Williamson)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Martin Luther King Jr., said we have a power in us more powerful than the power of bullets. The power of love can be harnessed...Prayer is a conduit for miracles...Love dismantles hatred. (Williamson)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

It is not just enough to say "God bless America." We must say, "God bless the world." Colin Powell has said we must listen to other cultures and respect other cultures in a way that has not been characteristic of American foreign policy. (Williamson)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

We should not condemn others because we do not like their political system. We can always talk to them. we must try to speak to the goodness that is in people. Nothing is lost in the attempt. Everything may be lost if we do not work together to save peace. (Pope John XXIII)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Peace is the tranquility in the order of all things...The peace of humankind is ordered harmony. (St. Augustine, **City of God**)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

We must love them both, those whose opinions we share and those whose opinions we reject. For both have labored in the search for truth and both have helped us in the finding of it. (St. Thomas Aquinas)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Intentions

Concluding Prayer

And I thought to myself as I re-read this service, that even though I had no recollection of writing it - I find the words as timely now as they were in the aftermath of that fateful tragedy.

(Saturday, January 19, 2008)



Day Six

God! God! God!

I awaken - on this - my 27th wedding anniversary - and my parent's 53rd - with thoughts of this lovely poem and prayer by Paramahansa Yogananda.

It has been a favorite of mine for nearly two years - especially the last verse which I often silently repeat and divinely chant. It is a fitting way to start this - and truly - any day. There is no better way to end a day either. Often I pray the last verse as my last words or thoughts of the day...

God! God! God! By Paramahansa Yogananda

*From the depths of slumber,
As I ascend the spiral stairway of wakefulness,
I whisper:
God! God! God!*

*Thou are the food, and when I break my fast
Of nightly separation from Thee,
I taste Thee, and mentally say:
God! God! God!*

*No matter where I go, the spotlight of my mind
Ever keeps turning on Thee;
And in the battle din of activity my silent war-cry
is ever:
God! God! God!*

*When boisterous storms of trials shriek
And worries howl at me,
I drown their noises, loudly chanting:
God! God! God!*

*When my mind weaves dreams
With threads of memories,
On that magic cloth I do emboss:
God! God! God!*

*Every night, in time of deepest sleep,
My peace dreams and calls: Joy! Joy! Joy!
And my joy comes singing evermore:
God! God! God!*

*In waking, eating, working, dreaming, sleeping,
Serving, meditating, chanting, divinely loving,
My soul constantly hums, unheard by any:
God! God! God!*

(Sunday, January 20, 2008)



Day Seven

Prayer of Abandonment

I know the title for this entry sounds rather bleak - but it is not meant quite as it is first understood. So let me clarify...

"The Prayer of Abandonment" is a prayer that was written by Charles de Foucauld - a North African priest and hermit of French origins that was martyred in Algeria in 1916. His was a fascinating life - born into great wealth - he went on to become a soldier, a Trappist, an adventurer, a hermit, and a mystic.

Years ago, I read his writings and was deeply moved by his passionate love for God.

A little over two years ago on my 50th birthday, I went to Notre Dame in Paris, arriving at the time Mass was being offered in celebration of his beatification on that precise day. I was very happy to share such a special day and occasion with him.

Here is one of the many prayers he wrote, and which I recently came across:

Prayer of Abandonment By Charles de Foucauld

*Beloved.
I abandon myself into your hands.
Do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you.
I am ready for all.
I accept all.*

*Let only your will be done in me,
and all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, my friend.*

*Into your hands I abandon my soul.
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart.*

*For I love you and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands
without reserve,
not without boundless confidence.*

*For you are the heart
of my heart.*

Truly, this is a prayer of abandonment. Not of being left behind - but of being lost totally in the Divine Love of God. This is what Charles de Foucauld sought to do with his life. And that is what he accomplished - in the end surrendering his mortal existence.

(Monday, January 21, 2008)



Day Eight

A Soul in Deep Surrender

Every Tuesday afternoon - I look forward to my nearly two hour commute on the metro - to and from my yoga class - for it gives me the opportunity to lose myself in uninterrupted reading.

As I continue to delve into **The Cave of the Heart** - about the life of Henri Le Saux - the Benedictine monk turned swami - the realization came to me that his sojourn in India was really an invitation he received spiritually - perhaps unknown to him in the beginning - to abide in deep surrender. This theme of the necessity of cultivating surrender is evident in the writings of all spiritual giants since there is perhaps - no more difficult or pertinent lesson for a soul.

Here are some passages that are indicative of Le Saux's experiences with his pursuit of greater solitude and what he described as being "stripped stark naked in my soul."

This excerpt follows an extended period of meditation in a cave in India:

"What if he knew he would be there forever? What if no one knew or cared that he was there? What if no one brought him his mid-day meal and he had to beg for his food? Would he still feel such joy?"

Then, in the depth of his soul, he heard what he called 'the call to total dispossession.'

*the call to total stripping,
which is the call to total freedom;
since he only is free who has nothing,
absolutely nothing that he can call his own."*

I thought of how difficult it would be to actually live this way in our culture and society - yet we are able to

considerably reduce our materialism and our spiritual attachments in particular - for these truly hold a soul back from its progression.

Later on, a friend and teacher notices the depth of Le Saux's spiritual progress and tells him:

"There is only one thing you need, and that is to break the last bonds that are holding you back. You are quite ready for it. Leave off your prayers, your worship. Your contemplation of this or that. Realize that you are, Tat tvam asi - you are That!"

In other words - you are already that which you seek and you are already one with the Source of your seeking...

The ultimate experience here was to transcend the ego which Le Saux began to have glimpses of - knowing he had to:

"Dive down into myself, to the greatest depth of myself. Forget my own 'aham,' lose myself in the 'aham' of the divine Atman which is the source of my being, of my consciousness of being. And in this unique - or primordial - Aham feel all being to be oneself."

It was so interesting to me to follow Le Saux's spiritual development - as he pursued his quest in two traditions at once - which mirrors my own quest to a large extent:

"It is through YOU that it is seen and heard, through you that it is thought and willed. You are what remains when nothing is any more seen or thought, willed or heard. That is the atman, the Self; it is what YOU ARE yourself in reality and beyond all outward appearances which change and pass away. Tat Tvam asi - You are That! What prevents you from realizing this?"

Le Saux experiences deeper surrender - letting go of even his attachment to his ashram - letting go of all his moorings, in his own words.

Later on in the book - there are beautiful descriptions of

what he referred to as his awakening. Truly, this work tells the story of the journey of a soul in deep surrender...

These two final excerpts are from his diary after a profound experience and from a letter written to his sister, who was a Benedictine nun:

"The solitude of the one who has found God, for there is no longer any God to be with: God is only with himself and one who has found God exists only in the Self. It is the Self that he finds everywhere, in God, in his fellow human being..."

And to discover oneself everywhere, what a draining out of oneself it is, what an emptying, kenosis. Everything is taken away from me. Supreme solitude, which is supreme emptiness, for how can the one who is Alone still define himself; no coordinates left by which to situate himself."

To his sister:

"...when you have discovered this I AM, scorching, devastating, then no longer even (can you say) God is - for who is there to speak of God? This is the great grace of India, which makes us discover the 'I Am' at the heart of the Gospel (John 8). May the devastating joy of this 'I Am' fill your soul."

He truly wished for others the beauty of his experience and the fruit of his life long quest for union with the Divine through the pursuit of solitude and deep surrender.

(Wednesday, January 23, 2008)



Day Nine

A Prayer by Thomas Merton

Since I've essentially been on this theme of 20th century Catholic mystics - I thought I would include this prayer by Thomas Merton which comes from his book - **Thoughts in Solitude** published in 1956:

*"My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following Your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please You
does in fact please You.
And I hope that I have that desire
in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart
from that desire.
And I know that if I do this,
You will lead me by the right road
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore, will I trust You always
though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for you are ever with me,
and You will never leave me
to face my perils alone."*

(Thursday, January 24, 2008)



Day Ten

Contemplative Musings

I am graced with the opportunity to share aspects of my sitting practice with a contemplative...

I am reminded that:

*"Meditation techniques
may bring you to the door
of Divine Presence,
but it is your love and devotion
that opens that door..."*

*"Continue developing an inner relationship with God
so that you can perceive His deepening Presence..."*

I am told:

*"Call upon God and flood your heart
with His blessings!
Feel yourself showered by them!"*

*Don't try so hard in your practice -
but have endless patience with yourself!*

*Enjoy the journey! And let go of the goal.
Be happy now - under all circumstances.
This is how we learn to be even-minded.*

*Learn selflessness
by giving up your own self interests..."*

Beautiful words spoken
by an Instrument of God's Love...
A message sent from Heaven,
inviting deep reflection...

(Wednesday, March 12, 2008)

Day Eleven

Devotion

One of my favorite books is a small tome titled - **Women Pray: Voices Through the Ages, from Many Faiths, Cultures, and Traditions**, by Monica Furlong.

The following prayer is from one of my favorite medieval mystics - Mechtild of Magdeburg:

*"And God said to the soul:
I desired you before the world began.
I desire you now
As you desire me.
And where the desires of two come together
There love is perfected.*

*Lord, you are my lover;
My longing,
My flowing stream,
My sun,
And I am your reflection.*

*It is a rare
and a high way,
Which the soul follows,
Drawing the senses after,
Just as the person with sight leads the blind.
In this way the soul is free
And lives without the heart's grief,
Desiring nothing but her Lord.
Who works all things well."*

This prayer arose from a soul in deep devotion...

I was reminded several times this week about what devotion means, especially last night, as I sat in a meditation group led by Dr. Rick Levy, a gifted therapist, healer, and author of **Miraculous Health: How to Heal Your Body by Unleashing the Hidden Power of Your Mind**.

Dr. Rick spoke about how all longing in love is ultimately a yearning for Divine Love - which is the only love that truly satisfies.

Human love is often tied up in needless melodrama and it is never really enough for us. Divine Love on the other hand - is Infinite - and if we pursue it with the same drive we use to look for human love - we will be fulfilled and rewarded in ways we did not dream possible.

During a week filled with many sacred openings as a friend noted - I was invited to deepen both my understanding and experience of devotion.

(Friday, March 14, 2008)



Day Twelve

Call to Love

While I was in Charlottesville, I bought a wonderful book titled - **Call to Love: In the Rose Garden with Rumi**, by Andrew Harvey. I also read an article about Rumi I will be referring to in my next posts.

This small tome with exquisite photographs of roses by Lekha Singh, seemed an appropriate book to read and savor on a glorious weekend with so many trees in full bloom.

Here are some excerpts of these poems by Rumi:

*The soul's extravagance is endless.
Spring after spring after spring...
We are your gardens dying, blossoming...*

*While the image of the Beloved burns in our heart
the whole of life flows in contemplation.
Wherever union with the Beloved exists
there is, in the middle of the house,
a flowering rose garden...*

*Love drives you mad
from revelation to revelation
through ordeal after ordeal
until humble and broken
you are carried tenderly
into the heart of the rose...*

*Before a flower can open in the rose garden
thousands of thorns come to pierce it.
Although the soul has received only grief,
Love has made her turn away from the world:
Look for the ecstasy of a lover of God--
all the joys of this world lie at its feet...*

*What was whispered to the rose to break it open
last night was whispered to my heart...*

(Monday, March 24, 2008)



Day Thirteen

Psalm 23

In the midst of so much busyness - I hear a voice inside me that says - Go down to the river and receive what you need...

The sky is overcast - it has been drizzling, but it has stopped now, and the sun is trying to peak through...

I look out at the river and hear this line in my head:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..."

I laugh, because of all of the psalms, it is my least favorite - and it is always used in funerals...

I have joked in the past that I do not want this psalm recited at mine - just as I do not want "Amazing Grace" sung either...

But I contemplate the words of this psalm - and for the first time they fill and comfort my heart...

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want...
He leads beside still waters,
He restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for His name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through
the darkest valley,
I fear no evil,
for you are with me...*

*You prepare a table before me...
my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me
all the days of my life,*

*and I shall dwell
in the house of the Lord,
my whole life long...*

(Tuesday, April 1, 2008)



Day Fourteen

Compassion

For the last several days I have been appropriately reading different selections on the topic of compassion from Paramahansa Yogananda's writings. Here are a few of these selections I have found memorable, useful, and inspirational:

*"Compassion towards all beings
is necessary for divine realization,
for God Himself is overflowing
with this quality.*

*Those with a tender heart
can put themselves
in the place of others,
feel their suffering,
and try to alleviate it."*

*"O Lord of Compassion,
teach me to shed tears of love
for all beings.*

*May I behold them as my very own--
different expressions of my Self.*

*I can easily excuse my own faults;
let me therefore quickly forgive
the failings of others.*

*Bless me, O Father,
that I not inflict on my companions
unwelcome criticism..."*

*"Thy divine light is hidden
in even the most vicious...man
waiting to shine forth
under the proper conditions:
the keeping of good company
and ardent desires of self-betterment.
We thank Thee that no sin is unforgivable,
no evil insuperable..."*

*"I will behold the person
who now considers himself my enemy
to be in truth my divine brother
hiding behind a veil of misunderstanding.
I will tear aside this veil
with a dagger of love so that,
seeing my humble, forgiving understanding,
he will no longer spurn
the offering of my goodwill."*

Sage and timeless advice for all of us to take in consideration as our lives and experiences flow from one side of the coin to the other. At times we are merely imbibing and drinking in the implied wisdom of these words - but in other moments - we may be simply embodying compassion for someone else...

There are so many opportunities daily to be compassionate, and to experience compassion - sometimes from the most unexpected sources...

(Saturday, April 5, 2008)



Day Fifteen

Blessings

Last night I curled up with the book - **To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings** - by John O' Donohue.

John Friend, the founder of **Anusara Yoga**, recently shared at the teacher training that I attended, that to bless our students is a very powerful and important practice.

I have a friend who always signs her letters "Blessings." I have several other friends who do this regularly as well. John Friend signs his emails and newsletters in the same way. I have always sensed the power of words sent as a blessing.

John O' Donohue says this in his book:

"When a blessing is being invoked, time deepens until it becomes a source from which refreshment and encouragement are released..."

Whenever one person takes another into the care of their heart, they have the power to bless...

It is such a privilege to have people who continue each day to bless us with their love and prayer. These inner friends of the heart confer on us inestimable gifts... There is such unusual beauty in having friends who practice profound faithfulness to us, praying for us each day without our ever knowing or remembering it... It is not a luxury to have such friends; it is necessary...

The beauty of the world is the first witness to blessing. In a land without blessing, no beauty could dwell...

While blessing is an act of the senses expressed in word and gesture, the source and destination of blessing remain invisible...

What is a blessing? A blessing is a circle of light drawn around a person to protect, heal, and strengthen...The beauty of blessing is its belief that it can affect what unfolds...

Our longing for the eternal kindles our imagination to bless...Regardless of how we configure the eternal, the human heart continues to dream of a state of wholeness, a place where everything comes together, where loss will be made good, where blindness will transform into vision, where damage will be made whole, where the clenched question will open in the house of surprise, where the travails of a life's journey will enjoy a homecoming. To invoke a blessing is to call some of that wholeness upon a person now...

A blessing is a form of grace; it is invisible. Grace is the permanent climate of divine kindness. There are no limits to it...For one who believes in it, a blessing can signal the start of the journey of transformation..."

I will share some beautiful lines from O' Donohue's blessings tomorrow, but here is his blessing and prayer for the morning, which I imbibe, as I write on this rainy, and slow, Sunday morning, full of love and grace:

"I arise today

*In the name of Silence
Womb of the Word,
In the name of Stillness
Home of Belonging,
In the name of the Solitude
Of the Soul and the Earth*

I arise today

*Blessed by all things,
Wings of breath,
Delight of the eyes,
Wonder of whisper,
Intimacy of touch,
Eternity of soul,*

*Urgency of thought,
Miracle of health,
Embrace of God*

May I live this day

*Compassionate of heart,
Clear in word,
Gracious in awareness,
Courageous in thought,
Generous in love."*

May you and your loved ones - be blessed!

(Sunday, April 20, 2008)



Day Sixteen

Blessings II

Here are some excerpts from different blessings from the book, **To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings**, by John O' Donohue...

*Blessed be the longing that brought you here
And quickens your soul with wonder...*

*May your listening be attuned
To the deeper silence
Where sound is honed
To bring distance home.*

*May the fragrance
Of a breathing meadow
Refresh your heart
And remind you are*

A child of the earth...

*May your inner eye
See through the surfaces
And glean the real presence
Of everything that meets you...*

*Awaken to the mystery of being here
and enter the quiet immensity of your own presence...*

May you listen to your longing to be free...

*May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world
to gather you, mind you, and embrace you in
belonging...*

For Absence

*May you know that absence is alive with hidden
presence, that nothing is ever lost or forgotten.*

*May the absences in your life grow full of eternal
echo.*

*May you sense around you the secret Elsewhere
where the presences that have left you dwell.*

May you be generous in your embrace of loss.

*May the sore well of grief turn into a seamless flow
of presence.*

*May your compassion reach out to the ones we never
hear from.*

*May you have the courage to speak for the excluded
ones.*

*May you become the gracious and passionate subject
of your own life.*

*May you not disrespect your mystery through brittle
words or false belonging.*

May you be embraced by God in who dawn and twilight are one..

May your longing inhabit its dreams within the Great Belonging.

For Friendship

*May you be blessed with good friends,
And learn to be a good friend yourself,
Journeying to that place in your soul where
There is love, warmth, and feeling.
May this change you.*

*May it transfigure what is negative, distant,
Or cold within your heart.*

*May you be brought into real passion, kindness,
And belonging.*

*May you treasure your friends.
May you be good to them, be there for them
And receive all the challenges, truth, and light
you need.*

*May you never be isolated but know the embrace
Of your anam cara.*

(Monday, April 21, 2008)



Day Seventeen

Stillness and Silence

In the book, **Stillness Speaks**, Eckhart Tolle presents some incredible gems of insights delivered in a "sutra" like fashion, so reminiscent of ancient yogic and Hindu texts:

"Look at a tree, a flower, a plant. Let your awareness rest upon it.

How still they are, how deeply rooted in Being.

Allow nature to teach you stillness."

"When you look at a tree and perceive its stillness, you become still yourself.

You connect with it at a very deep level.

You feel a oneness with whatever

you perceive in and through stillness.

Feeling the oneness of yourself

with all things is true love."

"Silence is helpful, but you don't need it in order to find stillness. Even when there is noise, you can be aware of the stillness underneath the noise, of the space in which the noise arises. That is the inner space of pure awareness, consciousness itself."

I pondered the depths of these insights and juxtaposed them with some of Rumi's verses, taken from the book, **The Spiritual Practices of Rumi: Radical Techniques for Beholding the Divine**, by Will Johnson.

This book explores both the silence and stillness that is implied and necessary when one is gazing at the Beloved:

"Friend sits by Friend,

and the tablets appear.

They read the mysteries

off each other's forehead."

In order to know the Divine - we must be willing to dive

deep into stillness and silence...

*"Come to the sea of charm and beauty.
Arrive at the mind of Union.
Gaze into the drunken eyes of that real beauty...
Dive into that sea which is full of glory.
Plunge into these languid eyes..."*

*"Thousand of times I ran away from you
Like an arrow is thrown by the bow,
And thousands of times I was caught again
As prey by your hunting eyes."*

*"The beauty of Love is the merger
Of the lover with the Beloved.
Come on now! Mix each other
Like butter and flour,
Just like thick soup
Which can't be separated."*

This merger of lover and Beloved transpires most perfectly in stillness and silence. But tomorrow I will explore Rumi's specific teachings on silence as it is more amply treated in Will Johnson's chapter on "Language of the Heart" from the **Spiritual Practices of Rumi**.

(Saturday, April 26, 2008)



Day Eighteen

Silence as Language of the Heart

In his book, **The Spiritual Practices of Rumi**, Will Johnson writes the following:

"The Sufis have a beautiful word for the mystical communion that two openhearted practitioners can enter into when they come into each other's presence.

They call this communion and sharing sohbet...

The word has most often been thought of as an extended mystical conversation in which two seekers after God come together and speak openly to each other about mystical matters...

In the purest shohbet, words are not used as the medium of communication...The primary language of the heart is silence."

And these verses from Rumi:

*"Be silent.
If someone tells you there is no speech possible
Without words or sounds,
Don't listen to him. It's not true.*

*Be silent.
Without the bread of God
And the wine of annihilation, that word and that
Alphabet are like two or three empty cups at best.*

*Be silent.
Speak the meaning without the alphabet.
If you can,
Say it without words, so the heart
Can take over the conversation."*

*"All our lives we've looked
Into each other's faces.*

*That was the case today too.
How do we keep our love a secret?
We speak from brow to brow
And hear with our eyes."*

*"Even 'friend' and 'beloved'
Are wrong words for this.
Even 'ahhhhh' retreats back into my mouth
Like the moon going behind a cloud.
A pure silent look is better."*

*"In the silence of our longing
We are together as one.
But as soon as we start talking,
We separate into two.
So be silent.
There is honor in silence.
For you and me."*

*"You have spent your whole life
With elegant speeches.
For some time you should
Walk alone in the gardens of silence."*

*"What would happen if you
Gave up thought for one moment,
Plunged into our sea like a fish,
And swallowed the waves there?"*

*Give them up...
And turn into a holy light,
Silent, exempt from thought.
Why don't you become like this?"*

And two more!

*"Thought doesn't come to your mind
Until you become quiet.
Heart doesn't open its mouth
Until you close yours."*

*"Tell my secret with your eyes,
Without lips or tongues." (Sunday, April 27, 2008)*

Day Nineteen

Jolt Me Into Joy

I still bask in the wonder and the beauty of meditating during **Maha Shivarati** - "The Great Night of Shiva," when Shiva pauses to rest after his Cosmic Dance...

I marvel at the gifts I have been given, the insight, the clarity, the bliss, and I think of **Gunilla Norris'** simple prayer, "Jolt me into joy!"

In the afternoon, I curl up with **Gunilla Norris'** simple yet divine spiritual and poetic musings - **Being Home: Discovering the Spiritual in the Everyday** - and I am not only jolted into joy, but into Pure Awareness and the gifts of deep sight, intuitions and realizations.

I think of a dear friend, who strives to offer ever moment and act to the Divine, and does so with both humility and grace, and I find it such a blessing, that this book falls into my hands, precisely at this time - it is such a simple testament meant for other souls in search of embodying the same experience...

Yesterday, after my evening meditation, I realized that there truly cannot be any separation between souls because Grace is everywhere, and separation is simply incompatible with a Presence that is all pervading...

Today, I realize, I have been given the incredible gift to be able to dive more deeply into spiritual practices by having a schedule that has opened up and loosened considerably. Now, with this book, I can also see, that I still have far to go into fully merging my spiritual and quotidian lives. Not only do I have the opportunity to practice in ways that I could not have done so before, I am being invited to open my eyes, and to delve deeply into each and every task, and glean the hidden messages and treasures silently being offered and disclosed in each and every one of my duties...

I certainly could not say it any better than **Gunilla**

Norris, and I highly recommend this simple, but very moving book. I know I will be savoring it over, and over again, for its richness, and deep insights...

And so, I offer here, sentences, gathered from pages here and there, each one honoring the simplicity and the joy of everyday living...

"Prayer and housekeeping - they go together. They have always gone together. We simply know that our daily round is how we live. When we clean and order our homes, we are somehow also cleaning and ordering ourselves...How we hold the simplest of life's tasks speaks loudly of how we hold life itself.

How then do we 'come home' spiritually and dwell there? In my own life I have found no better way than to value and savor the sacredness of everyday living, to rely on repetition, that humdrum rhythm, which heals and steadies. Increasingly it is for me a matter of being willing 'to be in place,' to enter into deeper communion with the objects and actions of a day and to allow them to commune with me. It is a way to know and to be known...

If anything in this life matters, then everything matters. There isn't living and Living. The only difference is how completely we give ourselves to the living...

There is no alternative utopia running parallel to this life. This is it.

We are intended for ecstasy - each day we are meant to be steeped in mystery, and so remember our true lives.

My foot falls. The ground rises to meet it. A holy, ordinary moment is repeating itself.

Let me wear the joy that matches this day.

My life is a continuous series of thresholds: from one moment to the next, from one thought to the next, from one action to the next.

Please open me like this window to the joy that is always right here. Jolt me open to joy!

Time to dust again. Time to caress my house, to stroke all its surfaces. I want to think of it as a kind of lovemaking...the chance to appreciate by touch what I live with and cherish.

I want to be a lover of all surfaces today. Let this be my prayer: that my hands not be ashamed to give and receive a passionate exchange... to luster and be lustered...and so come to feel Your inward touch.

Help me to surrender to the growth that only comes with pain, with division, with helplessness, with waiting.

Let me enter this moment and polish it bright.

I'm always wanting my own weather...How many things do I shovel aside?

The real work is revealed and I am discovered by the work...This is grace.

The breath always returns back. Over and over again my life is returned like this because Yu are breathing me.

Like tulips I am blooming and dying. How mysterious is this.

Now the sheets. My friends slept in them last night. Let the folding of these sheets be an intercession. Fold my friends into Your tenderness. Keep us in Your love.

Help me to remember the crumpled as much as the smooth. In You they are all one.

Hoarding is a lack of trust. There is no supply outside of You.

Make in my person a place setting for You. Remind me of my true nature which is recalled only in You.

I want my layers to peel away like the onion's.

I want to be as empty and clean as the universe in a sweet green pepper with its white star seeds.

I want. I want. In the heat of Your Will help me to give up wanting!

I am so full of urgency, expectation, image, I make myself spiritually hungry. You are here, therefore, there is everything to receive.

Let the sweet taste of You become the blessing on my tongue.

As I sort and I mend, I think of the fabric of life...Teach me to be humble when the patching goes wrong, when I join parts that do not belong.

What is torn apart breathes in its own way with You, mends when it can, if it can. Let me accept the frayed.

I dwell in the home as if it were a heart. When I feel that pulse I know that all that comes to me will also go..."

And so it is...And everyone of these morsels, contains an infinite amount of insight to be unraveled and savored for a very long time to come. Indeed, all the time that we have left...

(Saturday, March 5, 2011)



Day Twenty

I Go Beyond

There are gifts that are both providential and transformational - and arrive in our lives without expectation...

Two gifts received - one yesterday, and the other today - are both meant for my Lenten journey...

Yesterday, my spirit merged with a dear soul companion, as our meditations became intertwined while walking the labyrinth. My friend was led to bestow a healing on me, that was both physical and spiritual, and continues to dramatically unfold, gifting me with one miracle after another...

This gift take me beyond, in ways that defy articulation...

My walk and healing at the labyrinth was an experience of Oneness and merging with the Divine that now enables me to step into the next 40 days of the desert of my Lenten Journey more fully. It is a journey I dedicate to experiencing, embodying, and reflecting, everything in God, and God in everything...

*Today, I receive another providential gift from a wonderful student and friend. She brings the recording **Beyond: Buddhist and Christian Prayers**, exquisitely blending traditional Gregorian chants with Buddhist mantras, and I lose myself in the music, experiencing Pure Awareness and the Presence of the Divine in every note - as my dear friend whom I met at the labyrinth, a gifted musician - strives to do in her practice...*

Just yesterday I asked her, how can one dedicate every note to God, and be mindful of it? But today, I know how to do this! My spirit rejoices and dances in this music, and I know it will be the backdrop for my practice this Lenten Season...

And my body dances as well! My spirit coaxes my body

out of its Winter lethargy, inviting me to literally dance with the Divine!

Fortified with the prayers and healing of a dear friend - I am now able to scatter more blessings, and hold more Divine Light. So deep in the night, I hold a healing space, for two souls hurting very deeply, as I come in and out of sleep, chanting mantras and prayers...

Steeped in the sacredness of more prayers expressed as sacred chants and mantras on this recording I was gifted with, I continue to expand inwardly...I have the sense that this Lenten walk will be transformational in ways seen and unseen...

*I savor the spiritual message written and delivered by **Tina Turner on Beyond**, who is herself, a Buddhist practitioner, and it haunts me as I receive ashes on my forehead, today, on **Ash Wednesday**, the beginning of my Lenten Journey:*

"Nothing lasts forever, no one lives forever, the flower that fades and dies, winter passes and spring comes, embrace the cycle of life, that is the greatest love.

Go BEYOND FEAR...

Beyond fear takes you into the place where love grows, where you refuse to follow the impulses of fear, anger and revenge.

BEYOND MEANS TO FEEL YOURSELF...

Start every day singing like the birds - singing takes you beyond, beyond, beyond.

We all need a repeated discipline, a genuine training to let go our old habits of mind and to find and sustain a new way of seeing.

GO BEYOND THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS...

Prayer clears the head and brings back peace in the

soul.

**GO BEYOND TO FEEL THE O-N-E-NESS OF THE
UNITY...**

*Sing - singing takes you beyond, beyond, beyond,
beyond...*

*We are all the same, all the same, looking to find our
way back to the source, to the ONE, to the only ONE.*

GO BEYOND REVENGE...

*The greatest moment in our lives is when we allow us to
teach each other.*

TAKE THE JOURNEY INSIDE OF YOU...

*To become quiet to hear the beyond. To become patient
to receive the beyond. To become open to invite the
beyond and be grateful to allow the beyond. Be in the
present moment to live in the beyond.*

*Start every day singing like the birds - singing takes you
beyond, beyond, beyond.*

WHAT DOES LOVE HAVE TO DO WITH IT?

*LOVE grows when you trust. When you trust, LOVE
heals and renews. LOVE inspires and empowers us to
do great things and makes us a better person to love.
LOVE makes us feel safe and brings us closer to God.*

When you go beyond, that's where you find true love."

*This Lenten Season, may you go beyond your own
limitations, and live more fully and deeply, and embody
the Divine in everything you do, say, and are!*

*"Beyond right and wrong
there is a field,
I will meet you there."
~ Rumi*

(Wednesday, March 9, 2011)



Day Twenty-One **A Time to Begin Again**

It is always a time to begin...

It is always the time to begin again, and again, and again...

*I thought of this yesterday, as I sat and walked in meditation, praying very intensely for loved ones and friends, on a day, that was also one of great sadness, for a tremendous earthquake struck **Japan** and its people, sending dangerous tidal waves half a world away, and I thought to myself, God surely is hearing the magnitude of their cries...*

*I thought of this again, last night, in a yoga practice led by **Ross Rayburn**, a wonderful **Anusara Yoga** certified teacher, as I, recovering from an injury, practiced in between the two women who have been my primary teachers for these last five years. I had just returned to the mat, a few days before, after a few weeks of being side-lined...*

I thought of this, as a dear friend laid her healing hands on me earlier this week, bestowing a healing that was made manifest, over the course of the next few days, most explicitly in dimensions unseen, rather than in those that are...

*I thought of this, as I listened to, and imbibed the spiritual message imparted by **Tina Turner**, on the CD, **Beyond: Buddhist and Christian Prayers...***

I thought of this, as I reflected on the the profoundly painful experience of several friends, whose lives have been altered radically, in ways that could not have been foreseen...

I thought of this, as I reflected on Ross' message to us, to become heavy, and yet to become expansive - embodying the First Principle of "Inner body bright," not only in our side body, but in our pelvis, in our big toes, and even in our inner ears! And I realized, a new threshold in the practice, leading to a deeper level of exploration and experience, had been revealed. In the midst of Ross's invitation to us, he instructed us to not try so hard...

I thought of this, as I reflected on a conversation yesterday morning at breakfast, with a dear intuitive soul, where I shared the recollection of my first spiritual memory, knowing before the age of five, that I had not yet begun to live my mission, knowing that it was spiritual in nature...

*I thought of this, just this very morning, when I read a status post, in commemoration of **World Book Day**, which occurred on the 3rd of this month. It asked us to lay hands on the first book we saw, turn to page 56, and write down the 5th sentence we read, without disclosing the titled of the book. And so I read, this status posted online by a colleague,*

"It's the only one you will be given..."

I reflect on what this might mean - perhaps, the only time, or the only life? It does not matter, it is a reminder that every moment is precious, and so is every gift that we receive, those we cherish, and those we do not recognize as gifts...

And so, I pick up the book closest to me, and do the same, and these are the words I read:

"This was the providential opportunity for her to begin her new mission..."

Once more, finding myself, at a crossroads, plunging deeply into a Lenten journey, re-committing to practices of living my life differently and expressed in so many ways, these words are poignant and impregnated with many layers of meaning...

I think of my last entry...If we go beyond the surface, the boundaries, the limitations - and all of our spiritual practices invite us to do this - then we begin again - and again, and again. It is part of our life's purpose and journey. The mystical is always being disclosed in the mundane...

And yes, it is a time to begin again, and immerse ourselves much more deeply in the currents of life...

(Saturday, March 12, 2011)



Day Twenty-Two

Making Space For Grace

I have been reflecting on the portions of the weekend workshop that certified **Anusara Yoga** teacher, **Ross Rayburn** led, here at **Willow Street Yoga Center**, in Maryland.

More than what Ross did, it is what he said, but primarily what he embodied, that has most stayed with me.

I had never studied with Ross before, but had met him on numerous occasions at the annual gathering of certified **Anusara** teachers.

Ross was genuine, present, compassionate, and most of all, he was humble - despite his great wealth of knowledge and insight. It is perhaps, his humility that has most spoken to me...

While I did not take notes, something that is unusual for me, I was able to reconstruct the parts of the sessions I attended, that most spoke to me. Here are a few things I resonated with...

"There is nothing that at its essence is wrong or bad - because everything is Divinely made..."

Are you maintaining your relationship to your goodness in every thought word, and deed? This is the whole ball of wax in yoga! And if you do not become a better person through your practice, then do something else.

Can you go to the radical - to make it more mundane? This will make us less judgmental, and we do live in a judgmental culture...

If you connect with the omnipotence of God - all you can do is surrender..."

We worked a practice that was deep, and nuanced, and I realized yesterday, as I sat in meditation, that Ross had

given me a great gift!

For a couple of weeks, I had been sitting in meditation and focusing on expanding my heart center and field, and I particularly focused on this as I sent blessings and prayers to the people of Japan, in the wake of the tremendous devastation experienced there.

I know how to expand my heart and soul, and "inhabit" those higher chakras. But, "living" in those lower ones, that is another matter. One of my yoga teachers, whom I have now studied the longest with, has repeatedly stressed to me, the need to embody the practice more on a physical level...

As we worked on Friday night, and Saturday afternoon, Ross repeatedly instructed us to expand in our pelvis, not only by engaging principles we knew so well, but by employing the breath, and then, creating that spaciousness within ourselves, even beyond the breath...

The work we did was rich, and subtle, and nuanced - and I realize, it was an invitation to explore all of this more deeply. But, for the first time, I got what was missing for me, and that's why I was led to attend the sessions I did...

Ross instructed us, as I mentioned, with great humility. He saw the beauty that was being embodied in the room, and acknowledged it. He taught to a room with a number of certified teachers, who sometimes asked questions about a particular instruction. But rather than get defensive, Ross thanked them for what they offered, or for reminding him of things he had omitted...

Lately, I've been reflecting on how absent humility seems to be in many teachers. Things seem, from my perspective, much more competitive in yoga these days than I remember in my 14 years of teaching. I sense a lack of humility all across the board, some times in novice teachers whom I've had to evaluate, but also in more seasoned teachers as well...

I have always admired one of my first teachers, **Betsey Downing**, and one of my current, **Suzie Hurley**, for taking introductory workshops in **Anusara**, rather than assisting. A teacher who is humble, exercises good studentship, and realizes there is always more to learn, and that others - are no better or worse most times. There is, in humility, an inherent ability to truly listen, and be present...

I am lucky, to be surrounded by many colleagues who recognize and embody humility. As I shared some of my insights with my dear friend, **Lucy Lomax**, another **Anusara** certified teacher, she wisely observed, that humility in teaching, goes a long way, because it is Grace. We have to make space for Grace, and when we do, we connect to the Universal, rather than the individual, which she agreed, seems to be happening on some levels...

All of that being said, humility is never easy. As a former academic, I could be quite arrogant in the past about what I felt I knew...Yet, humility is something I strive to embody, and this Lenten season, gives me a perfect opportunity to revisit this quality.

Let us all reflect more deeply on the meaning of humility in our lives, in our teaching, and explore the areas where we need to be more attentive to it...

(Monday, March 14, 2011)



Day Twenty-Three

May the Road Rise to Meet You

It's a beautiful day here, in the **Washington DC**, area. The sky is a brilliant blue, it is warm, and spring is definitely in the air. It is a day when the Irish, and just about everyone else, celebrates **St. Patrick's Day**. There is not an Irish bone in my body, but I am married to a man who is half Danish and half Irish, and we became engaged on this day, eons ago, in 1979, when I was working on my **Master's** in **Systematic Spirituality**, and he was working on combined **JD-MBA** degrees. I know he picked that day so he wouldn't forget it!

Today, after meditating, and leaving to take my weekly yoga class, which was nothing short of divine, (and unexpectedly populated with other friends who came to visit), I was moved to send this traditional **Irish Blessing** to some friends, and I offer it here, to you all as well!

*"May the road the road rise to meet you
May the wind be always at your back
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the hollow of His hand."*

Blessings to all of you, and yours - now and always - on this day, and every day beyond it!

(Thursday, March 17, 2011)



Day Twenty-Four

Be Saturated With the Divine

*On this day of the **Vernal Equinox**, birthed in a full moon, I arise early, to meditate in the waning darkness before the gentle light of morning...*

*I have dispensed my husband, on a business trip to Paris, to visit the **Chapel of Miraculous Mary**, where **St. Catherine Laboure** is buried. I send him to deliver very special intentions, into which I have wrapped special requests for a dear friend and one of my yoga teachers as well...*

It occurs to me, that this gifted and wonderful teacher, will be teaching her class, at the very moment my prayers and intentions will arrive at their doorstep, and so it seems, only fitting, that I attend this class...

*The theme is the last of the "niyamas" of **Patanjali** - "Isvara Pranidhana" - or devotion to the Lord, which we work so very deeply, engaging Inner Spiral, in such a way that we not only open all the way into our back, but in our ribs and pelvic floor as well, and in the process, we sprout wings that give us a taste of the freedom that is ours for the asking and the taking, and which deposits us on the threshold of the Divine...*

My teacher assertively instructs us to "be saturated with the Divine..."

And this we seek to do, in ways that elude, and that require every ounce of our breath, and all the strength we have at our disposal...

Prayers of the heart and soul, merge with embodied prayer, and I have such a sense of the Sacred coming together in every way, so that there is nowhere - where the Beloved is not...

It is no accident I am led here this morning, and as an added bonus, I see a dear friend visiting from Italy, who

*has come from the heartland of **St. Francis of Assisi** himself...*

And so, in ways unexpected, two favored saints conspire to weave a web of connections that intersect in this Sunday morning yoga practice...

I drive home, with a such a sense of support from a Realm Unseen, spilling over into one that is both visible and tangible, recalling how my Italian friend described that the Italian word for support, really means to sustain, and so, in prayer, and in practice - both sides of the same coin, we truly become saturated with the Divine...

I drive home, grateful for this morning, its unexpected gifts and small miracles, for the web of connection, that both sustains and nourishes me, and for the opportunity to play, once again, in a playground that fed my body and spirit for many years...

I drive home, knowing that this day is special, and perhaps a turning point, that may be remembered for years to come...

(Sunday, March 20, 2011)



Day Twenty-Five

Become a Chalice for Grace

I've been reflecting and trying to practice and embody different pieces and insights gleaned from studying with **Ross Rayburn**, and **Desiree Rumbaugh**, both **Anusara Yoga** certified teachers, who visited **Willow Street Yoga Center**, here in the **Washington, DC** area, the last couple of weeks.

Each one of them, came bearing a special gift for me, a precious gem that I am just beginning to unwrap, knowing that these gifts will continue to yield layers upon layers of insights, for a long time to come...

In the practices that I attended with Ross, he instructed us to breathe into our pelvis, expanding there, all the way into our ribs and back as well. We worked strongly with **Inner** and **Outer Spiral** in a deep and nuanced way. Ross noted, that the psoas muscle connects all the way to **T12** in our spine, and when we inner spiral, we want to open all the way into that place.

Desiree showed us how to get into the heart more, and how to do all of our poses - including inversions and arm balances from that place. And that, is not easy, when we have been used to doing these things from our core. She noted that when we open all the way to T12, we can also open into our upper backs as well, because the trapezius muscle also connects to T12.

I started "seeing" the upper back, including the trapezius, as an creating a "V" connecting at T12, with the lower body and chakras, and the pelvis as an inverted "V," with the psoas connecting to T12 as well. I also knew that there are intercostal muscles at T12, and that the diaphragm, a sheet of muscles responsible for breathing and that stretches along the bottom of the rib cage is also located there, and separates the thoracic cavity with the heart, lungs, and ribs, from the lower body. A tight psoas, can affect our breathing capacity, illustrating how all these pieces and parts are

interrelated.

As I practiced, and led my more experienced students through a practice, I put all the various pieces together...

I envisioned these two "V's" intersecting at T12 - creating the framework of a chalice within us, that when open, could support us, and be filled with grace. And I also realized, as we opened one part - we opened others - opening in our pelvis - could open the heart - it could help us breathe more - and could also take our meditation practice to another level. I could sense the connection to where I needed to go in my body and how it related to where I wanted to go spiritually, and vice versa.

So many light bulbs went off for me that they are too numerous to note at the moment, but I began to see, that if I worked at embodying all the insights and keys that were given to me by Ross and Desiree, I - and others - could truly become a chalice for grace!

We would open deeply in the core of our pelvis and become expansive there. We could also become more expansive in the heart - and create a balance in our body between the lower chakras and the upper chakras. These expansions had to be embodied in a more energetic way - beyond merely engaging the outer form of the poses, and basic alignment instructions...

I knew that a greater sense of freedom could be had in both the body and the spirit, and that by becoming a chalice for grace, not only would a direct link be established with a deepening meditation practice, but that it would also be both a source of support and framework for the embodiment and reflection of greater compassion, and that would spill over into all aspect of our lives as well...

There is so much more here than meets the eye - so much more I wish I could express or write down, but I am overwhelmed with insights, and gratitude for teachers who provided pieces that were missing for me,

that will not only enable me to more fully become all that I am meant to be, but will also enable me to become a better teacher...

The interesting thing is, a lot of what I received from these teachers, I have heard before. But there is always a right time and right moment for each one of us to individually internalize it. There is always so much to explore, imbibe, and embody!

(Wednesday, March 23, 2011)



Day Twenty-Six

Be So Drunk With the Love of God

*Deep into the night, I read these words, that **Paramahansa Yogananda** once spoke to **Sri Daya Mata**, the woman entrusted with leading the organization he established:*

*"Be so drunk with the love of God
that you will know nothing else but God;
and give that love to all!"*

***Yogananda** says this, in response to a question asked by **Sri Daya Mata**, who cannot imagine how his work will continue without him.*

***Sri Daya Mata** recently passed, after leading the **Self-Realization Fellowship** that **Yogananda** established and entrusted with his teachings and writings. She was the spiritual mother of **Yogananda's** disciples and devotees for 55 years - having assumed its direction in 1955, the year that I was born.*

I reflect on how this incredible woman, was faithful to her Guru for my entire life span...

But, I am also deeply moved by these words, and try to imagine what it would be like to embody them, in every moment, experience, encounter - and even beyond that - in every thought and action as well...

I think to myself, I cannot know if I myself can do this, but I would like to die trying!

I also think of a few souls I know that are trying to live in this way, and think of what a different world this is - because there are some special and gentle spirits willing, with their very lives, to make a difference, by becoming embodied prayer...

To be so drunk with the love of God - that nothing else matters - and that we channel that love into the love of

others - whether we deem them loveable or not. This is truly the goal of every spiritual path...

*The sacred text of the Hindus, **The Bhagavad Gita**, a sacred song that the Divine sings to all of us, teaches that we can only act, but have no right to the fruit of our actions, for that belongs solely to God...*

All anyone can do - all I can try to do - is to be so drunk with the love of God - as best as I can - and offer it up - as an act of love - and as the ultimate act of devotion.

Can I do that? I do not know. But I would like to die trying!

(Friday, March 25, 2011)



Day Twenty-Seven

For God Alone

Last night I allowed myself to finish the book, **God Alone: The Life and Letters of a Saint**, about Sri Gyanamata, a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda. I had been savoring each page I read, my senses filled with the sacredness of the writings.

I want to share some passages from her letters, meditations, and diary entries, over the next couple of days. Her words are full of insight, wisdom, and unflinching devotion, and are sure to bring comfort and solace to all...

From a letter written to Daya Mata, now the head of the **Self-Realization Fellowship**, when she was a young nun in the community:

- " 1. See nothing, look at nothing, but your goal, ever shining before you.*
- 2. The things that happen to us do not matter; what we become through them does.*
- 3. Each day, accept everything as coming to you from God.*
- 4. At night, give everything back into His Hands."*

"But God says, 'No. Come, lay all the dear innocent pleasures at My feet. Everything. Hold nothing back.' Until we obey that command, we cannot know that God Himself is the gratification, the satisfaction of all desires, and the only real one. He is the Joy, the Bliss that we were seeking on the mountain and beside the sea."

From Yogananda to Gyanamata:

"God must be attained, life or death - all obstacles must be removed by yourself through the help of God and Gurus."

"I say unto you that God is ever with you through the Gurus, and ever will be, and They are waiting for you

when your work here is done. And whenever I join you there, we will talk about everything unsaid in this life, and there will be happiness unending, and I won't regret about not talking with you for lack of time here on earth. Your thoughts I ever treasure."

From Gyanamata:

"Observe some rule of silence. Outer silence is not to talk with the mouth. Inner silence is not to talk with the mind. It is in the silence of body, mind, and senses that you will hear God speak."

"When you become luminous there is no pain. There is only Bliss."

"This question was immediately presented to my soul. 'What did you come here for?' The answer was always, 'For God alone...'"

(Wednesday, January 7, 2009)



Day Twenty-Eight

More on - For God Alone

There is actually some sunshine today, after several days of rain and drizzle, encouraging the heart to rejoice in this, the dead of winter!

This morning, I reflect on several messages received that deeply warm my heart. We never quite know how we will touch another's soul - or how our own may be touched as well...I am often amazed at the resultant web of connections that can be made in most unexpected ways.

I go down to the river briefly this morning, after not having visited for about a week. It is breezy, and the river seems wider than usual because of the rains. I stand at the top of the cliff and look down at the rocks and launch area, watching wave upon wave coursing downstream, thinking of how we are all like those waves - a legion of blessed souls interacting with one another - sometimes randomly bumping into each other and unexpectedly touching each others' lives. We never know whose touch will extend to us God's hand...

I ponder sacred insights that come to me about my own life, its own ever-changing purpose, my vocation, and my calling - and inwardly relate and connect it all to a wonderful prayer by Yogananda that I always begin my morning meditation practice with:

*"Let Thy light shine forever
on the sanctuary of my devotion,
that I may be able to awake Thy love
in all hearts."*

Before I share some more passages from Sri Gyanamata's writings, I would like to offer these two quotes from Ralph Waldo Emerson, sent to me by a friend who read yesterday's posting. They are in keeping

with the tone and messages revealed in Gyanamata's letters:

*"What lies behind us
and what lies before us
are tiny matters
compared with
what lies before us."*

*"Make the most of yourself,
for that is all there is of you."*

And now from Sri Gyanamata herself:

*"Teach me to meditate until I intuit Thee.
Teach me to pray until I find Thee.
Teach me to demand until I receive Thy Kingdom.
Teach me to see Thee until I find Thee.
Teach me to love Thee whether it is Thy pleasure
to reveal Thyself or not.
Teach me to meditate until I feel Thy Bliss.
Teach me to see Thee until Thou dost answer.
Teach me to feel Thy Peace, until Thou does
reveal Thyself as Bliss."*

"I shall always remember the words of someone to me when I was undergoing the greatest suffering of my life. He was not a friend, but a complete stranger, who had the impulse to speak to me one day when I was out for a walk. He said, 'It had to be. It was all necessary for you.' And I answered, 'Yes, I know that what you say is true, I needed it.' His reply came quickly, and like a blow from the shoulder: 'Then glorify it!' That is the point. Since it is suffering that teaches us the truth and turns us toward God, why do we not thank and praise it for the work it does for us?"

And relating a dialogue between two great medieval mystics:

"[Henry] Suso describes a vision he had of Meister Eckhart after death...The Master [Eckhart] told him that he was in great glory, into which his soul was transformed and made godlike in God. Suso inquired what exercise was best calculated to advance a man who wished to be taken into the abyss of the divine essence. Eckhart's reply was that he must die to himself in entire detachment, receive everything as from God, and keep himself in unruffled patience with all men..."

These three instructions, plus meditation, contain the only rule of life that any disciple needs: detachment; realization of God as the Giver; and unruffled patience. As long as we fail in any one of these three, we still have a serious spiritual defect to overcome..."

(Thursday, January 8, 2009)



Day Twenty-Nine

For God Alone III

Here are some more excerpts from **For God Alone: The Life and Letters of a Saint**, and the writings of Sri Gyanamata...

"To improve the circumstances of your life, to raise yourself physically, mentally, and spiritually, change your attitude. Meet trials with courage, determination, and fortitude. When you need help, meditate deeply and try to contact God, but look to no lower source than to Him...Pray and affirm:

*'I will reason, I will will, I will act,
but guide Thou my reason, will, and activity
to the right thing that I should do.'*

"Late one afternoon...I was filled with apprehension. I knew that it was not the will of God that I should be saved from the experience. Even at that moment it was moving towards me. Suddenly God told me the prayer He would listen to, and I said quickly:

*'Change no circumstance of my life.
Change me.'*

*"The thing about the life of Brother Lawrence that has stood out in my memory ever since I read the book **The Practice of the Presence of God**, is the simplicity of his relationship with God. When he failed, when he did wrong, he said:*

*'That is the way I am;
that is the way I shall always be
unless you help me.'*

This simple prayer, this simple attitude of mind, shows the truest humility. It says,

*'I know well that I am nothing,
but let Your power flow into me
and I shall be saved.
I shall be all that You want me to be,
all that I long to be.'*

*Tears and groans of shame and agony will not do for the
soul what this simple prayer will do."*

(Friday, January 9, 2009)



Day Thirty

For God Alone - Renunciation

From Chapter 7, "Renunciation," from **For God Alone...**

"Having actively sought God for years before entering the ashram, Gyanamata was well aware that the essential aspect of renunciation - for the householder as well as for the monastic - is inner surrender of earthly attachments, and the cultivation of the one desire to seek God and follow His will.

To all who sought her counsel, regardless of their outer role in life, she recommended the inner renunciation of lesser desires and the practice of the yoga meditation techniques taught in the Self-Realization Fellowship Lessons. This, she declared, is the highest path to true freedom."

"I could understand why I must give up the wrong things, but I did not know that the seeker for God must lay all at His feet, must hold nothing back..."

What I could not understand was why everything must go; why things that were right, that were mine, that harmed no one, why all the dear little rights and privileges must be taken from me. But they were so taken by God. He was thrusting me out of a life of dependence upon small comforts into one that should be lived for Him alone."

"I saw that an attitude that is perfectly justifiable for a householder is poisonous for one who has stepped upon the path of complete renunciation, holding the soul in bondage. I saw that God is a relentless Master, never accepting anything short of perfection, never satisfied if only a part is laid at His feet."

"We should put a hedge around our wants. That is, we should control them. Do not let them grow into rampant weeds that will impede your progress and drag down your mind from God."

"Our sufferings do not come from Him. They are the result of our ignorance. We suffer because we love wrong things, and suffering comes as result of our actions..."

(Saturday, January 10, 2009)



Day Thirty-One

For God Alone - More and Better

Sri Gyananmata on quietly practicing the presence of God within:

"It can always be deeper."

"There is a mistake that we all need to guard against. A few days of happiness, of bliss, do not mean that the fight is over; it has to be waged again and again and again against our only real enemy, the self."

"The years pass in review before me, and leave me with two thoughts: The work performed by me - it could have been so much better done. My devotion to God and Guruji - it could have been so much deeper. The flame burning in my heart could have burned so much higher, have been so much brighter, so much more intense, if my only constant prayer had been: 'Change me.'"

To Paramahansa Yogananda:

"I have found a beautiful way to direct the mind to God. It is your poem, 'God! God! God!' Just the repetition of the Holy Name. How simple, and just suited to my present state."

Tomorrow, one last entry...

Day Thirty-Two

For God Alone - Suffering

This is my last entry on the book, **For God Alone: The Life and Letters of a Saint**, about the life and writings of Sri Gyanamata. I have shared so many passages because they spoke to me - and hopefully have spoken to some of you.

An English teacher once said to me: "*We write, in order to know.*" So I transcribe these excerpts and passages to deepen my understanding of what is meant by them.

I would also add that, "*we teach, in order to learn...*" By sharing the wisdom of this remarkable woman, I hope to embody the insights that were fruit of her practice, in a way that brings greater clarity into my life.

And so, for one last time, I share these insights and paragraphs from Chapter 12, "Suffering Can Be a Pathway to Greatness:"

"It is said that one never knows his or her spiritual strength until faced with adversity. Through her trials - physical, mental, and spiritual - Gyanamata developed heroic perseverance, endurance, and unconquerable attitude; she found that these tests strengthened her character as nothing else could have. In the letters that follow, Gyanamata shows others how to cultivate that same positive spirit and healthy spiritual perspective by which they also could come to experience that 'suffering can be a pathway to greatness.'"

"Do not make the mistake of holding on to your condition by mourning over it. Stress the points in which you have gained. Remember that part of the cure lies in forgetting the illness. We have to affirm health when we do not feel it."

"I have come to measure spiritual advancement, not alone by the light that surrounds one when he meditates or by the visions he has of saints, but by what he is able

to endure in the hard, cold light of day. Christ's greatness was not only that he could go into meditation and gloriously realize his oneness with the Father...but also that he could endure."

"All the devotion, wisdom, and faith that you have acquired are being now tested by God. You must now use all your spiritual acquirements to pass the test of God. Keep your wisdom-light ever burning during the darkness of this test. And this is what I pray for you, that you ever remember and love Him and forget the body."

"If one can delight in God only when he comes as joy, what is he? But suppose God comes only as pain? That it takes a spiritual hero to endure. If, in the darkness, the mind never wavers, if love and longing never grow weak, it is then that you prove to yourself that you really have the love of God."

"A Voice spoke to me. It was not my own voice. I was not talking to myself...It was clear and distinct and separate. It said: 'Endure what I shall send. That will be enough.'"

"After all that has been said, deeply I feel that I am being watched over and loved and the Plan is being worked out for my growth...There has been no failing of Divinity."

"To your question as to why we must suffer, I would answer that we are on the wheel of life. As it turns, we are hurt; and it is the part of our mind...that responds with pain that indicates the shortcomings that God wants us to rise above."

"What suffers...? The answer is obvious - that which must die if ever we are to reach the Goal..."

"What really matters can be put in a few words: complete surrender to God, to the Divine Will. If we did that perfectly, what else would we need to do? What else would we need to know? Doing, knowing, in one divine act, we would find Him on any plane, and would

*enter into Peace - for 'Thou has made us for Thyself,
and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.'"*

(Monday, January 12, 2009)



Day Thirty-Three

Let Nothing Disturb You

After yesterday's posting, I decided to look up some of the prayers and sayings of **St. Teresa of Avila**, a prolific writer, and the only woman accorded the recognition of being a **Doctor of the Church**. She is also sometimes referred to as the **Doctor of Prayer**, since she wrote so much on the subject.

Teresa is a complex figure, who lived in the 16th century in Spain, and her writings are not always accessible. She is perhaps best known for her work, the **Interior Castle**, in which she describes the various stages of the spiritual life by comparing them to various rooms in a manor one must go through in order to enter the most interior realm...

*"Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing frighten you,
all things pass away:
God never changes.
Patience obtains all things.
He who has God
finds he lacks nothing;
God alone suffices."*

*"Christ has no body now but yours
No hands, no feet on earth but yours
Yours are the eyes through which he looks
with compassion on this world
Christ has no body on earth now but yours."*

*"Lord, grant that I may always allow myself
to follow your plans,
and perfectly accomplish your will.*

*Grant that in all things,
great and small,
today and all the days of my life
I may do whatever you require of me.
Help me respond to the slightest prompting*

*of Your Grace, so that I may be
Your Trustworthy instrument for Your honor.*

*May Your Will be done
in time and eternity -
by me, in me, and through me..."*

*"May today there be peace within.
May you trust God and know
that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities
that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received
and pass on the love that has been given to you...
May you be content knowing
you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones,
and allow your soul the freedom
to sing, dance, praise and love.
It is there for each and every one of us."*

May these prayers bring the comfort to your heart that they have brought to mine. I have received the most adequate message for this day...

(Sunday, January 25, 2009)



Day Thirty-Four

I Will Just Say This

I re-visited the theme of joy in my classes this morning, inviting my students to create a bigger container to receive and express joy - and to embody an explosion of joy in their practice...

I recall my therapist friend affirming that we need to experience joy in our lives and must elicit its memory and experience as much as we can - even when it seems absent...

I review the poems of St. Teresa of Avila and find this one, and wish to share it, because it reminds me of hope, which somehow lays the groundwork for joy...

I Will Just Say This

*We
bloomed in Spring.*

*Our bodies
are the leaves of God.*

*The apparent seasons of life and death
our eyes can suffer;*

*but our souls, dear, I will just say this forthright:
they are God
Himself,*

*we will never
perish
unless He
does...*

*There is always room for hope...for of that hope, is born
the experience of joy, because we are never far from the
Divine and cannot truly be - any less than God is...*

How can it be any other way? For we are made in the image and likeness of God...

(Monday, January 26, 2009)



Day Thirty-Five
The River, Falling Snow, and
Musings

I awaken to a gently falling snow for the first time in over a year...

I sit in meditation for an hour and hear the words over and over whispered in my heart:

"For God alone suffices..."

I repeat it like a sacred mantra and I know it is true, even if sometimes I cannot see clearly through the myriad of sometimes conflicting quotidian experiences that life continually offers and presents...

I drive out to the river to visit it, in this, the first true snow fall, and it is quiet and still...

I come upon a squirrel joyously scampering across the slippery road and I nearly slide off it, as I try to avoid hitting the squirrel, and I realize that it is the first one I have seen in a long time...

The boat launch area has been blocked off with orange cones. The river itself is halfway frozen - an imaginary line longitudinally bisecting the river. Half of it consists of frozen ice, cracked here and there, slabs of ice precariously perched on other slabs, as a result of heat

expansion. The other half, towards the Maryland riverbank, is thawed and looks cold...

It is silent here, the soft snow, gently falling, as I carefully make my way down towards the rocks. I feel the ground shifting beneath me, the falling snow sliding off a layer of ice, and I hear one lone bird singing very sweetly...

I survey a river that is as different as I have ever seen it - partially frozen, and empty, and yet so full of promise and possibilities at the same time...

*I reflect on the **Reiki Precepts** which I have not recited in a while, thinking of all the fear that is weighing heavily on this land and its people - recalling a therapist's suggestion to be vigilant about the manifestation of fear in regards to money at this time...*

I feel lost at a time I have given and released so much, that sometimes it clouds my ability to see what I have gained...

I think back to the precepts that very authoritatively remind me to let go of fear and worrying, for they are merely illusions which distract me from pursuing my spiritual path and true purpose...I must always be true to who I am - regardless of the immediate outcome, for the sake of my reason for being and the work that I am here to do...

I know that compassion towards myself and others is the only genuine path that I must follow. And for a brief moment, I recall a scene in the somewhat campy and dated, but extremely inspiring movie from the seventies, "Brother Sun, Sister Moon." This movie by Franco Zeffirelli, about the life of St. Francis of Assisi, was the catalyst for a profound mystical experience...

I walk away from the river, remembering the scene where St. Clare of Assisi exclaims with exuberant passion:

"And where there is sadness, please - let me always find joy."

I drive home once again to shovel, and pray that in the midst of all the sadness and loss experienced globally, and personally - that I may always find, express, and celebrate an explosion of joy - as I exhorted my students to do...

(Tuesday, January 27, 2009)



Day Thirty-Six

Snow Day Inspirations

I received both of these inspirational pieces in the last couple of days from two different friends. The first one was embedded in the sermon given at the **National Cathedral**, at the Prayer Service for President Obama, the day after the Inauguration.

Both of them warmed my heart and conveyed the exact message I needed to hear in each moment that it was received...

The Wolf Story

There is a story attributed to Cherokee wisdom: One evening a grandfather was teaching his young grandson about the internal battle that each person faces.

"There are two wolves struggling inside each of us," the old man said.

"One wolf is vengefulness, anger, resentment, self-pity,

fear...

*The other wolf is compassion, faithfulness, hope, truth,
love..."*

The grandson sat, thinking, then asked:

"Which wolf wins, Grandfather?"

His grandfather replied,

"The one you feed."

I Wish You Enough

by Bob Perks

I wish you enough sun to keep your attitude bright.

I wish you enough rain to appreciate the sun more.

I wish you enough happiness to keep your spirit alive.

*I wish you enough pain so that the smallest joys
will appear that much bigger.*

I wish you enough gain to satisfy your wanting.

*I wish you enough loss to appreciate all that you
possess.*

*I wish you enough "Hellos," to get through the "Final
Goodbye."*

(Wednesday, January 28, 2009)



Day Thirty-Seven

Inner Renunciation

The series of readings in Paramahansa Yogananda's **Spiritual Diary** for this week, have dealt with the topic of "inner renunciation." Many of these readings are very relevant to me at this time, and I will share some passages that spoke deeply to my heart...

"Renunciation is the wise path trod by the devotee who willingly gives up the lesser for the greater..."

"To engage in actions without desire for their fruit is true tyaga (renunciation). God is the Divine Renunciant, for He carries on all the activities of the universe without attachment to them. Anyone aspiring to Self-realization - whether he be a monastic or a householder - must act and live for the Lord, without being emotionally involved in His drama of creation."

"The saints stress nonattachment so that one strong point of material attachment may not prevent our attaining the entire kingdom of God. Renunciation does not mean giving up everything; it means giving up small pleasures for eternal bliss."

"Renunciation is not an end, it is the means to an end. The real renunciant is he who lives for God first, regardless of his outer mode of existence..."

"At heart renounce everything, and realize that you are just playing a part in the intricate Cosmic Movie, a part that sooner or later must be over. You will then forget it as a dream. Our environment produces the delusion in us of the seeming importance of our present roles and our present tests. Rise above that temporal consciousness. So realize God within that He becomes the only influence in your life."

(Thursday, February 5, 2009)

Day Thirty-Eight

Inner Renunciation II

The series of beautiful readings on renunciation in Paramahansa Yogananda's **Spiritual Directory**, are about to conclude, and I wish to share today's entry, which I read on this magnificent Saturday morning, with a chorus of joyful birds chirping in the background to my meditation:

*"It is alright to enjoy life;
the secret of happiness
is not to become attached to anything.
Enjoy the smell of the flower,
but see God in it.
I have kept the consciousness of the senses
only that in using them
I may perceive and think of God.
'Mine eyes were made to behold
Their beauty everywhere.
My ears were made to hear
Thine omnipresent voice.'
That is Yoga, union with God.
It is not necessary to go
to the forest to find Him.
Worldly habits will hold us fast
wherever we may be
until we free ourselves from them.
The yogi learns to find God
in the cave of his heart.
Wherever he goes,
he carries with him
the blissful consciousness
of God's presence."*

(Saturday, February 7, 2009)



Day Thirty-Nine

When Great Love Comes

As I noted yesterday, I explored the notion of what is real and unreal in my classes this week - emphasizing how the practice helps to dispel delusions.

I reflected on this myself as I reviewed some of what Paramahansa Yogananda wrote on the subject. Everything I read touched me deeply, and these are some of the thoughts I had:

"What is real? All that comes and that is sourced from the Divine is real. That which comes from the material world is unreal...

What is connected to the Divine is eternal. What is connected to the earth plane, passes....

The more we connect to the Divine, the more clearly we will be able to see what is real...

We make that connection by seeking the Divine deeply in meditation. Only then will He reveal Himself. But we must search, and look, with unceasing dedication. Nothing else will satisfy...

We must recognize that God's Presence is in all things, and in all places - and at all times..."

I read this passage from Yogananda over and over again. Part of it I had shared in a December entry. But now, I had the whole passage, and it spoke much more deeply - with a purity and clarity I may not have had or appreciated nearly a month ago, when a dear friend shared part of it:

*"And when great love for God
comes in your heart,
you do not miss anything;
no matter what you have
or do not have in this world,*

*you nevertheless feel fulfilled.
Divine love transmutes
all material desires -
even the longing for human love...
Loving the Lord, you can never turn back
to being satisfied by lesser loves.
In Him you will find
all the love of all hearts.
You will find completeness.
Everything that the world gives you
and then takes away,
leaving you in pain or disillusionment,
you will find in God
in a much greater way,
and with no aftermath of sorrow."*

I read, and re-read, and drink in the solace of this wisdom dispensed as sweet nectar for the soul...

I nod softly, and gently, in acknowledgment of that moment when Great Love comes, and the heart blissfully accepts, that God alone suffices...

(Tuesday, February 10, 2009)



Day Forty

Wisdom from the Upanishads - The River of God

I picked up Eknath Easwaran's translation of **The Upanishads**, while I was at my yoga class yesterday afternoon, to add to my collection of Upanishadic translations. This particular volume is so much more accessible than the ones I already owned, and I would like to share some passages that spoke to me as I thumbed through the text in my first cursory examination. I look forward to curling up with this book, and giving it my undivided attention.

The inside cover of the book has this wonderful explanation of these ancient texts, which are collectively known as the **Upanishads** - the core teachings of **Vedanta**. The word *Upanishad* means - "*sitting down near*," and implied that these teachings were received at the feet of a master or teacher:

"Over two thousand years ago, the sages of India embarked on an extraordinary experiment. While others were exploring the external world, they turned inward - to explore consciousness itself. In the changing flow of human thought, they asked, is there anything that remains the same?"

They found that there is indeed a changeless Reality underlying the ebb and flow of life. Their discoveries are an expression of what Aldous Huxley calls the Perennial Philosophy, the wellspring of all religious faith that assures us God-realization is within human reach.

The Upanishads are the sages' wisdom, given in intense sessions of spiritual instruction in ashrams...[and other venues and this book, and] Easwaran shows how these teachings are just as relevant to us now as they ever were centuries ago."

Here are a few passages from the Upanishads:

*"You are what your deep, driving desire is.
As your desire is, so is your will.
As your will is, so is your deed.
As your deed is, so is your destiny."
- Brihadaranyaka IV 4.5*

*"When all desires that surge in the heart
are renounced, the mortal becomes immortal.
When all the knots that strangle the heart
are loosened, the mortal becomes immortal.
This sums up the teaching of the scriptures."
- Katha II 3.14-15*

*"The world is the wheel of God, turning round
and round with all living creatures upon its rim.
The world is the river of God,
flowing from Him and flowing back to Him.
On this ever-revolving wheel of being
the individual self goes round and round
through life after life, believing itself
to be a separate creature, until
it sees its identity with the Lord of Love
and attains immortality in the individual whole."
- Shvetashvatara I.4-6*

I loved that notion of the world as the river of God...

This morning was very breezy, and after routine blood work, I headed down to the river with my McDonald's "senior" coffee, to survey the broad expanse of the river, with its foaming waves adamantly lapping at the rocks along the riverbank, undulating like the waves of the ocean...

I have imbibed and learned many lessons at the mouth of this river. It has truly taught me the essence of what is contained in these passages: That attachments hold me captive, that I have within me an unlimited power to change things, and that the most important lesson for me to learn is my soul's connection with the Divine...

This notion of my soul's constant union with the Divine

was the message I came away from the talk given before I meditated with a group last night. Every time I meditate, I choose to acknowledge my connection to the Divine, by reciting the simple mantra that Paramahansa Yogananda exhorted his followers to always pray:

"I and the Father are One..."

Slowly, my constant recitation of this prayer is resulting in the gradual erosion of the illusion of separation. Slowly, I am letting go of so much, and each day, I feel lighter and lighter in spirit as I taste a little more bliss in meditation, and in my life experiences and opportunities...All is truly unfolding as it should...

(Friday, February 13, 2009)



Day Forty-One

The Greatest Romance

In the dark and late of night, on the eve of St. Valentine's Day, I listen to classic love songs sung passionately by Natalie Cole - delicious lyrics wafting in and out of my ears, stirring deeply in my heart and soul, bringing to mind so many treasured love songs, as I lose myself in these lines I now hear and once sang - eliciting memories of my greatest and most poignant experiences of human love - of loving most fully and deeply - moments calling me into greater union with Divine Love... So many feelings, freely flowing like a stream of emotional consciousness, transporting me from where I am into higher states and planes...

*"Even though its been so long
my love for you keeps going strong
I remember the things that
we used to do...
I try to deny it but I'm still in love with you
I miss you like crazy..."*

*"I never thought I could make it
I can't believe the hell I've through
Couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel
I didn't know what to do*

*I've been through the rain
I've been through the fire
There was something that I never knew...*

*I had an Angel on my shoulder
with a plan for me divine...
Who was right there all the time..."*

*"When I fall in love,
it will be forever...
When I give my heart,
it will be completely..."*

*"I have seen the bluest skies
Rainbows that would make you cry
I have seen miracles that moved my soul
Days that changed my life*

*I have seen the brightest stars
Shine like diamonds in the dark
Seen all the wonders of the world
But I've never seen a smile as
Beautiful as yours*

*A smile so beautiful
Comes one time in a lifetime..."*

*So much love and feeling flooding my heart - passion
that comes unbidden and surprises - human and Divine
love colliding - memories deeply treasured tumbling out
of the most profound recesses in my brain, echoing
heavily in my beating heart, slowly carry me off into deep
sleep...*

*I awaken, roused from slumber to commune deeply in
meditation, physical and human passion now transmuted
into a longing for Divine Love, the very subject that
Yogananda has been ecstatically and eloquently
addressing with me, in his gentle whisperings into the
depths of my soul:*

*"The greatest romance is with the Infinite.
You have no idea how beautiful life can be.
When you suddenly find God everywhere,
when He comes and talks to you and guides you,
the romance of Divine Love has begun."*

*"The love of God is the only Reality.
We must realize this love of God -
so great, so joyful.
I could not begin to tell you
how great it is!"*

*"God will not tell you that you should desire Him
above all else. He wants your love to be freely given..."*

*That is the whole secret in the game of this universe.
He who created us yearns for our love...
Our love is the one thing God does not possess,
unless we choose to bestow it..."*

*The thought of God yearning and pining for our love, is
deeply moving - and this is the essential message of the
Bhagavad Gita - which is nothing more and nothing less
that the Divine's Love Song to us...*

*"He is the nearest of the near,
the dearest of the dear.
Love Him as a miser loves money,
as an ardent man loves his sweetheart,
as a drowning person loves breath.
When you yearn for God with intensity,
He will come to you..."*

*And then more lyrics dance joyously in my heart, every
beat, every note, animating my soul...I am alive...I am
awake...I am drunk with Love...*

*"Your love, like wine,
tasting sweeter every day...
All of my life I've been waiting
for a love like this
And now that you're here...
its just a second away
it's gonna stay
Till snow falls on the Sahara
And the sun freezes over
Till the Mojave red turns blue
When my lungs get tired of breathing
And my heart stops its beating,
[Not even then] will I stop loving you..."*

(Saturday, February 14, 2009)



Day Forty-Two

I am Empty, I am Full

Today, as I ran around wrapping up errands and routine appointments, I thought to myself - "I feel full." I also reflected on how I had encouraged my students this week to soften as they opened to grace - but from a place of fullness. I wanted them to feel heavy with this sense of fullness.

Later, as I organized and attended to a myriad of tasks as I sat at my desk, I came across this newsletter by Amy Weintraub, the creator of **LifeForce Yoga**. Amy's newsletter is called: **LifeForce Yoga for Depression News**, and I am providing an excerpt:

*"When I look inside
and see that I am empty,
that is wisdom.
When I look outside
and see that I am everything,
that is love.
Between those two,
my life turns."
- Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj*

"For many years, I wondered if there was a way to reconcile the Buddhist notion of emptiness with my own experiences on and off the mat of fullness - my sense of connection to everything. When I came across this quote by the Nondualist teacher Nisargadatta, I felt the apparent duality dissolve.

Why would such a philosophical point matter, you might ask, when there is so much fear and heartache in the world, when so many of us are struggling with root chakra issues like job security and financial stability? For me, when I can embrace the nothing inside that needs nothing, as well as the everything outside that connect me to all that I am, then fear and constriction around money and basic survival needs diminish. I can act from

a place of clarity to fulfill those needs for myself and for others.

If you are worried now, please take a moment to breathe into the wisdom you are. Take a moment to breathe out love. Nothing and Everything. You are not separate from the wisdom and love of the cosmos. Nor are you separate from those who suffer. When you act in harmony with this knowledge, from this place of connection, you are in service to all."

(Friday, February 20, 2009)



Day Forty-Three

Emptiness and Fullness

This morning, I connected my theme of "emptiness and fullness" with engaging **kidney Loop** - as we worked through a flow of twisting poses.

I remarked to my students, how so often we must come to a place of emptiness - before we can experience being full. We must let go of what does not serve - to invite in what will nourish us more deeply...

Twists have an amazing effect on the body - releasing toxins and promoting a better flow of nutrients in the body. They have a very cleansing affect. But to maximize the healing effect of twists, we must create space and extension in the body first. **Kidney Loop**, one of the seven energy loops of **Anusara Yoga**, brings our awareness to our back bodies, where we initiate the action of the pose. Activation of this loop creates the necessary fullness in the back body. But we must first empty, and surrender - from a place of humility...

I thought about my theme and sequencing yesterday afternoon as I browsed at Border's looking for two books I did not find. On the other hand, I did stumble upon a book of daily reflections extracted from the journals of Thomas Merton, one of my favorite spiritual writers from the 20th century, and I almost immediately opened to this passage:

"I am the utter poverty of God. I am His emptiness, littleness, nothingness, lostness. When this is understood, my life in His freedom, the self-emptying of God in me, is the fullness of grace. A love for God that knows no reason because He is the fullness of grace. A love for God that knows no reason because he is God; a love without measure, a love for God as personal. The Ishvara appears as personal in order to inspire this love. Love for all, hatred of none, is the fruit and manifestation of love for God - peace and satisfaction..."

I loved this line, and read it to myself over and over again:

"The self-emptying of God in me, is the fullness of Grace."

I bought this book for this one passage - and this one line - for it exemplified what I want to convey about emptiness - and fullness. Emptiness conjured up **kenosis** - a theological term that refers to the self-emptying that Jesus experienced on the cross, discussed in Philippians 2: 6-8 - and it is the bookend experience to the fullness that is provided by grace.

I wanted my students to know - that every experience of emptying - opens the door to fullness and ultimately to grace. The practice itself is a playground for the interplay between emptying and filling...Some times we need to go for a long time emptying before we are ready to drink in the sweet nectar of fullness...

I taught to a packed class of wonderful women, including a former friend and student who now lives in Vermont and was visiting. It was a joy to see her, for we had been spiritual companions on our own respective journeys, 4 years ago. After class we enjoyed tea and coffee in my house and shared deeply very difficult experiences we had navigated in the last couple of years. When we parted, my friend thanked me for being a blessing in her life. As I hugged her, I thanked her back - for we had both - in different ways - filled one another's soul during a time of great self-emptying...

I picked up one last book at Border's - another book of daily reflections written by Thomas Keating, the Trappist monk who has taught **Centering Prayer** for decades. Again, I open the book at random - on the birthday of a child I love very deeply and at the end of the entry, I found this excerpt from Ephesians 3:19:

"May you be filled with the fullness of the Divine."

And that, is how I ended my class...

(Monday, February 23, 2009)



Day Forty-Four

Maha Shivratri and Ash Wednesday

This is a week that has seen special days for both Hindus and Christians...

Monday, Hindus celebrated **Maha Shivratri** - or the "Night of Shiva." A poison came out of the ocean which could have destroyed all of creation. The other gods prayed to Shiva to protect their lives by consuming this poison. Pleased with their prayers, and out of compassion for living beings, Lord Shiva drank the poison but it was so intense that something was required to cool its effects as his throat became blue.

Today, Christians celebrate **Ash Wednesday**, ushering in the liturgical season of Lent, which mindfully and prayerfully commemorates the passion, the death, and the ultimate resurrection of Jesus.

Both of these days are evocative of salvation on some level for the spiritual adherents of these two traditions.

I recently read the book, **Our Lady of Kibeho**, about a series of Marian apparitions that occurred in Rwanda about a decade before the ethnic genocide took place there. I was so surprised I had never heard of these apparitions. The author of the book, Immaculee Ilibagiza, survived the mass killing of her compatriots by hiding in a priest's bathroom along with several other women. Her whole family, except for one brother was slaughtered.

Yet, she managed to forgive those who killed her family, neighbors she had known all of her life.

The young visionaries share that Mary asked them to pray a special rosary reflecting on the **Seven Sorrows of Mary**. This rosary was commonly recited during the Middle Ages, but had fallen out of favor and simply been forgotten. I searched for one on the internet since I did not have one.

I have always been drawn to rosaries and mala beads, and the repetition of prayers - and have a wonderful collection of both, but I did not have one of these...

Last night, after my meditation, I lay in bed with both my malas and new rosary, and prayed in two traditions, feeling equally comfortable in both. All of my life I have been drawn by rituals, and prayers from all of the world's religions. As I often like to say, I'm sure I have all my bases covered!

(Wednesday, February 25, 2009)



Day Forty-Five

Forgiving the Unforgivable

Recently, I finished reading the book - **Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust**, by Immaculee Ilibagiza, whose whole family, except for one brother, was brutally murdered during three months of genocide in Rwanda. She survived by being hidden, along with 6 other women, in a very small bathroom in the house of a pastor, where none could truly sit or lie down. She went in weighing 115 lbs., and came out weighing 65 lbs.

The people who murdered her family and tried so unsuccessfully to hunt her down, were life long friends and neighbors she had grown up with. Even her childhood friends turned their backs on her because she did not belong to the right tribe. One of her brothers was hacked to death by friends, because other friends disclosed his whereabouts.

Even in the midst of this, Immaculee survives and does what is almost unimaginable - she forgives the unforgivable.

I thought of this, as I rode to my yoga class today. Like Immaculee, I could not understand how people you have loved and trusted for years can turn their backs on you. During the many months she was in that bathroom, she survived by praying 12 hours or more a day, until she experienced her anger dissipate. The killers came to the house many times, but a wooden wardrobe was placed over the door to the bathroom, and while the whole house was turned upside down, the wardrobe was never moved. Immaculee received a vision where Jesus told her she would survive, but that her family would not. Yet, she was also assured that they were happy in their present state, and full of joy.

After leaving this prison she was in for months, she still had a number of dangerous encounters where she almost lost her life. While in a camp guarded by French

soldiers, she learned the horrors of how each and every one of her family members met their brutal end.

Immaculee came from a family of very devout Catholic educators, widely known for their many good deeds - sometimes her parents even paid for the education of other individuals from their own salaries - and some of them participated in the very deaths of their benefactors. It was the death of her most beloved brother that was the most brutal one to read in the book.

After the genocide, she found out where the remains of her favorite brother and mother had been laid to rest, in shallow graves. She herself, participated in the exhumation of her brother, needing to look at his bones, to assure herself of his death. Both sets of remains were placed in coffins, and properly buried on the property of her destroyed home...

Later, Immaculee goes to prison to see the man who led the gangs that killed her family. He had been a friend of her father. When she looked upon him, she saw that he was a broken down man who could not look her in the eye. But she looked at him with compassion, and simply said: "I forgive you."

When she left, the man in charge of the prison was furious with her. "How could you forgive him?"

And she responded, "Forgiveness is all I have to offer."

I read these words, late in the evening a few nights ago. It was the only time I totally lost it while reading this book. I found I had to steel myself to get through it, though the simplicity and strength of her faith was so beautiful and moving throughout the gruesome account.

She writes, that it is impossible to know how long it will take a broken heart to heal, but in two years time, she met a wonderful man and went on and had two beautiful children.

She concludes by saying that the love of a single heart

can make a world of difference. Now Immaculee goes around telling her story to all who will hear.

After I finished the book, and lay down to sleep, I said to myself in the darkness, if she can forgive the unforgivable - forgive those who exterminated her family - then truly - there is nothing that I cannot forgive...I thought of those I had perhaps forgiven once - maybe half-heartedly, and thought to myself - you must forgive them - again, and again, and again...

I pondered all of these things in my heart, in the early evening, as I went down to the river. I needed to ground, and there is no better way for me to do this than to visit the river. The river is a constant friend - and is always there - rain or shine. It was biting cold and no one was around. The water was also very still. It reminded me - that even in the face of great turmoil - our hearts must remain still and grounded in the Divine, as my yoga teacher reminded us to do today.

There are many layers to forgiveness. And as I prayed several nights ago, and as I drove to class late this morning, I was moved to forgive, yet again. We can forgive, even when we still feel the sting or the pain of having been wronged because it releases us from bondage. But mostly, we must forgive, because it frees us to love more deeply...

(Thursday, March 12, 2009)



Day Forty-Six

Cave in the Snow

I have been able to get a lot of reading in of late, and a couple of nights ago I finished the book, **Cave in the Snow - A Western Woman's Quest for Enlightenment**, by Vicki Mackenzie. It documents the story of Tenzin Palmo, an Englishwoman who was the first Western woman to be ordained a Buddhist nun. She spent 12 years in a cave meditating, 3 of them without any human contact whatsoever.

This is a book I had been meaning to read for years, and I literally shuffled it from one room of the house to another. Finally, I passed by it last week, and it caught my eye. I picked it up, and couldn't put it down. There is a right time for everything, and since I have spent so much time in meditation and some isolation these last two years, it spoke to me.

After meeting Tenzin Palmo on a retreat, the author, Vicki Mackenzie, asks if she can write her story. Though Tenzin is initially reluctant, she allows it, describing her life in the following manner:

"My life has been like a river, it has flowed steadily in one direction. The purpose of life is to realize our spiritual nature. And to do that one has to go away and practice, to reap the fruits of the path, otherwise you have nothing to give anyone else."

The path of her life, leading to that cave was not easy by any means. She did not have a model she could look to or emulate but instead, tread a path where none had gone before her. When she found her cave, in northern India, at an altitude of over 13,000 feet, she knew instantly this was the place she would meditate in for the next several years.

"It had everything she need. Here, perched like an eagle on the top of the world, she would most definitely not be bothered by the clamour and clutter of human

commerce. She would have the absolute silence she yearned for. The silence that was so necessary to her inner search, for she knew, like all meditators, that it was only in the depth of silence that the voice of the Absolute could be heard. She could bury herself in the confines of her cave to pursue her spiritual practices without interruption. She could go out and look at the mountains and the infinite sky. She would see no one..."

She almost died on a few occasions. Once, when supplies were not delivered to her, she almost starved. And at another time - a blizzard walled her in and she was trapped. But yet she remained, without fear, totally dedicated to her practice, meditating 12 hours a day, and even sleeping upright in a meditation posture. She had vowed to reach Enlightenment in a female form, which most Buddhists believe is not possible - however long it took her to do so.

"What is Enlightenment but the heart knowing itself? This is very hard. Just as the eye can see the whole world but cannot see itself, so the heart can know everything but has great difficulty in understanding itself."

More tomorrow...

(Monday, March 16, 2009)



Day Forty-Seven

Cave in the Snow II

Yesterday, I wrote about Tenzin Palmo, and her experience meditating in a cave in the Himalayas for 12 years of her life. When it came time for her to leave, she traveled to a number of places in the West to lecture on Buddhism and meditation - though she discloses very little about her own personal experiences.

Here is a passage that spoke to me, because it is similar to something I constantly come across in the writings of Paramahansa Yogananda and other sages and Eastern scriptures:

"There is the thought [we have], and then there is the knowing of the thought. And the difference between being aware of the thought and just thinking is immense. It's enormous...Normally we are so identified with our thoughts and emotions, that we are them. We are the happiness, we are the anger, we are the fear. We have to learn to step back and know our thoughts and emotions are just thoughts and emotions. They're just mental states. They're not solid, they're transparent. One has to know that and then not identify with the knower. One has to know that the knower is not somebody."

And this on renunciation:

"The reason we are not Enlightened is because we are lazy. There's no other reason. We do not bother to bring ourselves back to the present because we're too fascinated by the games the mind is playing. If one genuinely thinks about Renunciation it is not a giving up of external things like money, leaving home or one's family. That's easy. Genuine renunciation is giving up our fond thoughts, all our delight in memories, hopes, daydreams, our mental chatter. To renounce that and stay naked in the present, that is renunciation."

On meditation:

"So often there's a fundamental division between the practice and ourselves. The practice remains outside of ourselves. It's very hard for us Westerners to get out of our heads. We approach meditation from the brain only and so we have duality - the subject and the object. The practice has to come down into the heart, it has to go somewhere deep within us. there is no subject (me) and object (the meditation). We become the meditation. Then there is a transformation at a very profound level."

All of these insights, from a woman who embodied practice more than anyone I have ever read about - and vowed to obtain Enlightenment - no matter how many lifetimes it took - in the body and soul of a female...

(Tuesday, March 17, 2009)



Day Forty-Eight

You are in the Heart - and the Heart is in You

I have not been able to write for a few days due to a flurry of activities, and the next few days will be equally busy...

I had the amazing gift and opportunity to take a workshop with Paul Muller-Ortega this weekend. He is an internationally known **Siva** and **Sanskrit** scholar. This was my third opportunity to imbibe from his wisdom, and I am looking forward to spending a week with him in Denver, and continuing to study the **Siva Sutras** in greater depth.

At the end of the second day, Paul said this to us:

"You are in the heart - and the heart is in you."

This is the essence of the **Tantric** teachings. And yet all spiritual paths talk about the heart and it's place in one's spirituality.

As one raised Catholic, I am very comfortable with such images and devotions to the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** - something that was often very mysterious to Christian friends of other traditions. As a theologian, I immersed myself in the **Patristic** writings and **Desert Mysticism** of the early Church - delighting in references to entering the cave of the heart where we encounter the Divine.

In **Tantric** studies, the heart is not actually a physical space. It is known as "*hridaya*" - or the **Great Heart**. This is the place of essence within us - the space of imminent transcendence that is inside of everything. As Paul noted - this is a place that is always breathing and pulsating within us - and where we experience the gleaming luminescence of consciousness.

I thought of this, after a session I had today with an

internationally known and very gifted craniosacral therapist. We focused on the heart and the thymus gland, and other places we zeroed in on - working on a very deep cellular level.

Paul spoke of the heart as being always alive, breathing, immortal and incandescent. His discourse was poetic, sensual, and passionate - and I got lost in it.

I used this theme in my classes this week:

"You are in the heart - and the heart is in you."

I was also reminded of stories I read years ago, in **The Heart's Code**, by Dr. Paul Pearsall, who described fascinating accounts of heart transplant recipients who often inherited the memories, or tastes of the donor - indicating that memory truly resides in our cells - and that the heart is the seat of so much of who we are.

The heart is the playground for the Divine. This is where we live, and breathe, and move - and have our being. The heart invites us to heal and to be most fully who we are meant to be - and when we get lost or feel we are in exile, it guides us back home...

Years ago, in a flash of deep insight, a Soul Name came to me, and it was **Antara**. I learned it's meaning only recently: *"The innermost place in the heart..."*

Yes, truly -

"I am in the heart - and the heart is in me..."

(Tuesday, March 24, 2009)



Day Forty-Nine

You are a Wave on the Ocean of Consciousness

I continue to read, re-read, imbibe, and immerse myself in the notes from last weekend's workshop with Paul Muller-Ortega. So many gems that touched my heart deeply. I will share some of my notes...

"You are a wave on the ocean of consciousness. A wave is a movement of energy or life force - it is the arising of the universality into a particular expression. You come from parents - and you have bodies that are not only physical, but subtle, and transcendental as well.

Life teaches many life lessons. What is our true home? There is a nostalgia we have for lost paradise. This is an intricate feeling in the heart. It is both sweet and sour. We are wanting to remember a place, time, and person that has been left behind.

We are currently in the midst of a planetary awakening - and just like in our lives - changes are occurring and an awakening is happening. Everything on the outside of our lives is going to change - sometimes it does so slowly - but sometimes it does dramatically. How can I surf through the tsunami waves of change? How do I find myself to be a willing participant in life - rather than a victim? It happens when we live from this very deep place inside of us - the heart - that has to be stabilized.

Where am I truly rooted? In the deepest space of consciousness - as a permanent abiding state - seamlessly one with the place that is no place - where there is no sequence. Can I be so powerfully united with that place that I become someone who can draw from that place - drinking in amrita - the nectar milkshake - so that I remain rock solid in any form of change?

Through real sadhana you become a manifestation of Divine energy that flows through you and supports you in

every stage of what you are supposed to blossom into.

In this present moment - may I be at home!"

(Wednesday, March 25, 2009)



Day Fifty

We are Born of Divine Consciousness

I continue to enjoy reviewing my notes from Paul Muller-Ortega's presentation this weekend...

"You are a walking temple of the Divine..."

The body is the place where the Divine manifested as Lord Siva, recognizes himself after losing himself. How did we arrive at our present set of circumstances? Is it because of sin? No - there is a huge vastness of infinite possibilities that seeks to express itself. Siva imposes on himself forgetfulness.

Siva says to himself: May I forget that I am infinitely capable - and therefore permit the arising of the rainbow dance of existence. In that forgetfulness - each of the waves of our individual consciousness arises. We are the product of that forgetfulness which is an act of the will. Every possible form of existence arises in that forgetfulness - including unimaginable sentient beings in other universes.

Why are we here? There is a great purpose to our lives, but it is shrouded in mystery. Why did my individual life wave arise? We must uncover this for ourselves. Someone from the outside can't tell us. Just as there is the dance of forgetfulness - there is also the dance of

recognition.

Despair and depression are often the form that the wake up call takes in our lives. Everything falls apart. This is the work of Divine Fire and it is not always so kind - but it is cool in the center - at its core. It causes you to question, deconstruct, and search. You go on a spiritual scavenger hunt - where we take something from here and something from there and produce a "mish mash" of spiritual teachings. We have a tendency to jumble things together.

There is a desire for clarity, and orderliness deep within us - and to setting things in their proper balance - where there is no longer a jumbling of things."

(Thursday, March 26, 2009)



Day Fifty-One

Kwan Yin and Compassion

*"May harsh speech from my companions
remind me to use sweet words always.
If stones from evil minds are cast at me,
let me send in return only goodwill.*

*As a jasmine vine sheds its flowers
over the hands delivering ax blows
at its roots, so, on all who act
inimically toward me
may I shower the blossoms of forgiveness."
- Paramahansa Yogananda*

On my meditation altar, I have a statue of **Kwan Yin**, who is the **Goddess of Compassion**. She is known as the one who "hears the cries of the poor," and the story is told, that as she was ascending to heaven and heard the cries of ones in need on the earth, she vowed to return until every last person obtained enlightenment.

The particular statue I have, shows **Kwan Yin** in the "pose of royal ease." One of her knees is bent, and her arm is extended over that bent knee. This pose is illustrative of one who has a fierce dedication to a meditation practice and has reaped its benefits.

When I look at this statue, it is a reminder to exercise greater compassion in my own life. Every day we have opportunities to do this more deeply - and sometimes very simply.

I also wear a bracelet given to me by a friend with the image of **Kwan Yin** on it. Today, one of my students commented on the bracelets I wear - the **Kwan Yin**, and a mala of rudhraksha beads. I explained to her the meaning and symbolism behind both.

As we enter into an incredible week - **Holy Week** for Christians - and **Passover** for Jews - with a **Full Moon**

thrown in for good measure - may we be reminded to enter more deeply into the mysteries of our faith, and renew our commitment to living more compassionately - always willing to extend both love and forgiveness to the least among us - and to all those who have hurt us in any way. May we do this without expectation - and may we in turn, atone for all those we have hurt and not been compassionate towards...

(Monday, April 6, 2009)



Day Fifty-Two

Compassion and Holy Week

I enter deeply into Sacred Space...

I enter more fully into Sacred Time...

I enter into this Holy Week, mindful of the sacredness of this week to different faiths. On Thursday, which is traditionally the Day of the Guru to devout Hindus, we commemorate the Last Supper and the beginning of the Lord's Passion, while our Jewish brethren commemorate Passover. It is also the Full Moon for good measure, and I cannot think of anything more auspicious! I think also of a dear therapist and friend now traveling through India, whose meditation and friend now traveling through India, whose meditation group I attend, and who has requested prayers for the work that he is doing...

I am privileged to share the gift of Reiki this morning with a beautiful young couple who were drawn to this wonderful practice...

Later in the day, I enter the labyrinth, for the first time in two months, asking to receive whatever it is that I should receive, recalling the last time I came to walk it - with a dear friend. I meditate at the center for almost an hour,

sending love, blessings, and healing energy to all those who have asked for prayers...

I drive home and stop by the river, now wishing I had gone in on Saturday, when it was warm and magnificent. I long to launch Grace once again, becoming one with the river. While so much is in bloom, it is cold and windy today, and the currents are very strong - hungrily lapping at the riverbank and boat launch area like ocean waves with reckless abandon...The river is swollen, and all the usual rocks I have sat on before are submerged...

It is a time for remembering, and entering deeply into spiritual practice, and extending compassion to all those in need...

*I come home to a phone message from a friend on the West Coast I have not spoken to in a long time, and I tell her about my Lenten practice of saying the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows, and the book **Left to Tell** about the Rwandan genocide...*

It is a good day. It is a holy day. It is a day well lived...It has been a day of inspiration, and spiritual practice, of good thoughts, and good deeds...

*"May I not increase the ignorance of wrongdoers by my intolerance or vindictiveness.
Inspire me to help them by my forgiveness,
prayers, and tears of gentle love."
- Paramahansa Yogananda*

(Tuesday, April 7, 2009)



Day Fifty-Three

Experiencing the Triduum Differently

*The sacred days pass in meditation and reflection, and I feel drawn to experience **Holy Week** in a different way, by practicing and experiencing rituals that I have not savored in over a decade...*

*I look forward to spending the evening at the **Easter Vigil** with my two guys - who somewhat reluctantly agreed to my suggestion to do so. We will return home late and sleep under the same roof as a family, for the first time in a long time...*

*The day is rainy, reminding me of deep soul cleansing, and I think of so many wonderful gifts received in so many ways - and some quite unexpected. Yesterday, a gifted friend took time out of her busy schedule to reconfigure a mala for me to accommodate the total number of **Kriyas** that I practice - so that I won't have to count or mark them off on one of my standard malas. I have been so drawn to malas and rosaries of late - bridging both my past and my present...*

I lounge at Starbucks for a long time, sipping my coffee and reading the paper and think to myself that truly - "All is well, and all shall always ultimately be well" - and wonder - how did Julian of Norwich get to be so wise?

I watch interesting things unfold, and truly comprehend - as I was told by a gifted intuitive recently, how it was necessary for me to be catapulted out of my past and into my present - like a rock propelled by a slingshot - because I would not have made the necessary changes otherwise.

It was this same person who told me that Jesus, and the Buddha - and Siva - in his form of Nataraja - are with me always. She used the term - "three in one..."

She who was not familiar with this manifestation of Siva as Nataraja - "Lord of the Dance" - sought the embodiment of this form among my collection of statues until she found it and pointed to it. She said this embodied presence danced within my heart...

I think of Siva dancing inside of me - even though it is his manifestation as Bhaivara that has called and spoken to me of late. I think of the story of him howling with passion in the cremation fields, carrying a skull, one of the artefacts attributed to him. Ironically, the day after I hear of Siva's presence in me, a lifelong friend sends me a beautiful skull carved out of carnelian. Coincidences? Synchronicities? Perhaps bizarre to some!

Life is interesting in all the turns it takes, and sometimes I feel I've lived several life times in one. Yet throughout every chapter, Spirit and has called and has spoken - and I have longed for that Presence...

We are here to merge with that Presence and embody its essence in our words, and our deeds, and our thoughts... There is nothing else that matters...

*"As the vital rays of the sun nurture all,
so must you spread the rays of hope
in the hearts of the poor and forsaken,
kindle courage in the hearts of the despondent,
and light a new strength in the hearts of those
who think they are failures."
- Paramahansa Yogananda.*

(Saturday, April 11, 2009)



Day Fifty-Four

Easter Blessings

*The **Easter Vigil** clocks in at three hours, and is absolutely beautiful. I enjoy all nine readings - closing my eyes - reciting them in my head - anticipating every line - beginning with the story of Creation. I enjoy the lighting of the fire and the candles, the incense, the organ, the trumpets - all of it, even though my guys squirm and are not truly happy campers! It is nothing less than an experience that is both spiritual and sensual at the same time - encompassing and satisfying all of my senses.*

*I enter deeply into the liturgy, and in my heart, I chant along with the cantor - the parts of the **Exultet - The Easter Proclamation** - that I can remember - a very beautiful and ancient chant:*

*"Rejoice heavenly powers! Sing choirs of angels!
Exult, all creation around God's throne!
Jesus Christ, our King is risen!
Sound the trumpet of salvation!*

*Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor,
radiant in the brightness of your King!
Christ has conquered! Glory fills you!
Darkness vanishes forever!*

*It is truly right that will full hearts and minds and voices
we should praise the unseen God...*

This is our Passover feast...

*This is the night when the pillar of fire
destroyed the darkness of sin!*

*The power of this holy night
dispels all evil, washes guilt away,
restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy;
it casts out hatred, brings us peace,
and humbles earthly pride.*

*Night truly blessed
when heaven is wedded to earth
and man is reconciled with God!*

*May the morning Star which never sets
find this flame still burning:
Christ, that Morning Star,
who came back from the dead,
and shed his peaceful light on all mankind,
your Son who lives and reigns,
forever and ever, Amen.*

*I come home after midnight, and fall sleep almost
immediately, only to rise later than usual, and meditate
blissfully in the quiet and cool, but sunny morning -
followed by a leisurely reading of the newspaper at
Starbucks. We then go for a spontaneous drive in the
country for a couple of hours, taking in and enjoying the
glory of quaint Virginia towns in horse country.*

*Back home, later in the afternoon, I finally spread the
mulch that has been sitting on my driveway for several
weeks!*

*Since my son had to work at the last minute -
experiencing his first busy season as a tax accountant,
we change our brunch reservations to dinner, and enjoy
the evening, returning home at around 7:30 PM, while it
is still light outside...*

*The day yields into the evening, of another day well
spent! A night truly blessed gives birth to glorious day!*

(Sunday, April 12, 2009)



Day Fifty-Five

Embodiment as Divine Revelation

I came across a poem by Kabir, that I read four years ago, and which touched me deeply. It, in turn, inspired a poem of my own.

This excerpt comes from the book, **Kabir, The Weaver of God's Name**:

"This poem expresses the devotee's bliss on realizing the Lord. He has found God within his own body. As a goldsmith tests the purity of gold on the touchstone, the devotee, who has purified his entire being through meditation, is tested by the Lord and made whole. The devotee now realizes that all the time he spent searching for God through external observances, rite and rituals was a waste of his precious human birth. When he conquers his mind and, through meditation and concentration, crosses the regions of mind and maya - the third stage of his spiritual journey - only then does he realize the Lord within his own body."

Pure as Gold

*The Lord has revealed himself
To me within my body;
My entire being, cleansed,
Now shines like pure gold.
Just as the goldsmith essays
Gold on the touchstone,
I have been put to the test
And made whole...*

*One after another,
Many births I took;
Many paths I followed
To escape this relentless cycle.
Only when I made my mind still
Did I attain the state
Of lasting repose.*

*I searched and searched for Him
In external pursuits,
But wasted the precious days
Of my human life.
When I became absorbed
In the realm beyond mind and maya,
Within my own body
I found the Lord...*

(Monday, April 13, 2009)



Day Fifty-Six

Offering the Day

I came across this beautiful Salesian prayer by St. Francis de Sales that I had forgotten. It seems like a perfect way to begin this day - and indeed, any day:

*"My God. I offer you this day.
I offer you now,
all that good that I shall do
and I promise to accept,
for love of you,
all the difficulty that I shall meet.
Help me to conduct myself
during this day
in a manner pleasing to you.
Amen."*

Let me add these beautiful quotes I found on cards I purchased when I did my spontaneous trip down to Charlottesville this week. They too, are perfect reminders, offerings, and blessings, for every day:

*"Let us be grateful for those
who give us happiness;
They are the charming gardeners
who make our souls bloom."
~ Marcel Proust*

*"Kind hearts are the gardens.
Kind thoughts are the roots.
Kind words are the flowers.
Kind deeds are the fruits.
Take care of your garden
And keep out the weeds,
Fill it with sunshine,
Kind words and kind deeds."
~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*

*"It's a simple procedure to calculate
the number of seeds in an apple.*

*But who among us can ever say
how many apples are in a seed?"
~ Dr. Wayne W. Dyer*

And so, as the inside of the card containing this last quote urges:

*"The seeds of greatness are within you.
Each one ready to grow in
countless and wonderful ways."*

I add these final thoughts as you embark on your day, or perhaps end it. It does not matter. The invitation is there to begin tomorrow differently:

*Today, and every day,
offer your day to God.
Give thanks for everything given
and received, even the challenges--
for they too, have their hidden blessings.*

*Give thanks for all the souls
that have come into your own
and have helped you become more fully
all that you are meant to be.*

*Tend the garden of your life.
Sow it with good deeds
and water it with constant repetition.
Become all that you are meant to be--
nothing more
and nothing less,
than an irrepeatable and unique manifestation
of the Presence of God to others.*

And as a dear soul friend of mine is so fond of say, "Be well!" For as Julian of Norwich still reminds us today, echoing from the 14th century - "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well!"

(Saturday, January 9, 2010)

Day Fifty-Seven

Let Nothing Disturb You

This day comes gently, easily, as an opening in the eye of a hurricane, or the calm before the storm - I know not which it may be - and it does not matter...

I reflect on these wise words given by a soul friend, who offered me her interpretations of Teresa of Avila's well know prayer, given as a precious gift, a blossom from her heart:

*"Let nothing disturb you.
Let nothing frighten you.
Everything passes away except God.
God alone is sufficient."*

I repeat these words over and over again - my soul masticating them - my essence nourished by their wisdom...

I think of the anchoress Julian of Norwich, counseling so many of those who searched her out, with these simple words: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well!" In the midst of incredible despair faced by the masses in the fourteenth century, her message was one of relentless hope...

There is always hope - in every moment - and in every circumstance...

Even Ety Hillesum, who died in Auschwitz at the age of 29, was capable of seeing the light of the Divine in the depths of her own soul and in those around her. I am edified by her words as well...

"It is sometimes hard to take in and comprehend, oh God, what those created in Your likeness do to each other...I try to look things straight in the face, even the worst crimes, and to discover the small, naked human being amid the monstrous wreckage caused by man's

senseless deeds...

I am ready for everything, for anywhere on this earth, wherever God may send me, and I am ready to bear witness in any situation and unto death that life is beautiful and meaningful and that it is not God's fault that things are as they are at present but our own..."

*Truly - how can I allow anything to disturb me?
Everything passes away, like the grains of the sand blown away by the wind...*

*This morning, I read these words by **Paramahansa Yogananda**, and I found strength and solace in them:*

"God understands you when everyone else misunderstands you. He is the lover who cherishes you always, no matter what your mistakes. Others give you their affection for a while and then forsake you but He abandons you never..."

The whole universe conspires to give you the messages that you need, and continues to do so in a relentless fashion until they are received and understood, deep within the heart...

Etty speaks again, touching the very fabric of my soul:

"Through me course wide rivers and in me rise tall mountains. And beyond the thickets of my agitation and confusion there stretch the wide plains of my peace and surrender. All landscapes are within me. And there is room for everything. The earth is in me, and the sky..."

I am without limit...We are truly "Limitless" as Danna Faulds writes:

"Be your own illumination...Do not stop for any obstacles...When the wind blows, bend easily, and trust your roots to hold...What you see is one small slice of a modest galaxy...Small does not mean powerless. Silence says nothing. In the quiet, everything comes clear. I say, 'Limitless,' I say, 'Yes.'"

That is what Danna says...

My friend says - paraphrasing Teresa - "Let nothing disturb you..."

Yogananda teaches that a good friend - a best friend - (and I have been blessed with a precious few beloved ones) - is the soul that leads one into deeper communion with the Divine...

I sit now, comfortable and content, in the quiet and the waning light of the day. I sit in the stillness and the calm that result from the shifted energies birthed in my saying yes...Nothing shall disturb me, for nothing touches my soul...

(Saturday, February 20, 2010)



Day Fifty-Eight

Easter - A Season of Rising

*On this **Easter Sunday**, I rise with the morning to sit in meditation. The day is magnificent - clothed in splendor - and every thing is in full bloom. From the depths of winter, a glorious spring has been birthed!*

*This week was holy to many - Jewish brothers and sisters commemorating **Passover** - and Christians of many traditions - celebrating the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord. In these momentous experiences, we are all one...*

*I look beyond traditional **Easter** texts and readings, and am taken by **Paramahansa Yogananda's** insights on the Resurrection and his entries on the subject of "compassion" for this season:*

"Heavenly Father, I am resurrected with Christ from the sepulcher of the flesh into Thine omnipresence. I am resurrected from the smallness of family affection into the grandeur of love for all Thy creatures. I am resurrected from ignorance into Thine eternal wisdom. I am resurrected from all worldly desires into a state of desire for Thee alone. I am resurrected from longings for human love; I yearn only for Divine Love. I am one with Christ. I am one with Thee...

O Lord of Compassion, teach me to shed tears of love for all beings. May I behold them as my very own - different expressions of my Self.

I easily excuse my own faults; let me therefore quickly forgive the failings of others. Bless me, O Father, that I not inflict on my companions unwelcome criticism...

Every day, try to help uplift as you would help yourself or your family, whoever in your environment may be physically, mentally, or spiritually sick. Then no matter what your part is on the stage of life, you will know that have been playing it rightly...

Thy Divine Light is hidden in even the most vicious and gloom-shrouded man, waiting to shine forth under the proper conditions: the keeping of good company, and ardent desires for self-betterment.

We thank Thee that no sin is unforgivable, no evil insuperable; for the world of relativity does not contain absolutes.

Direct me, O Heavenly Father, that I awaken Thy bewildered ones to the consciousness of their native purity..."

*Later, I enjoy a late brunch with my husband and son under the bluest sky and the freshest breeze, drinking Bloody Marys and Mojitos - feeling vibrantly alive - totally in the present moment - and I think - this is what **Easter** invites us to do: to begin again, again - and yet again - every day - to live life fully - in union with everybody - to do everything we can do to make this a better place and life for everyone - and to enjoy every moment for it is impregnated with the Divine!*

(April 4, 2010)



Day Fifty-Nine

Limitless

I visit the river for the first time in weeks...It is cold, and as I make my way through the park and to the riverbanks, I notice all the downed trees that succumbed to the 34 to 40 inches or so of snow that came down mere days apart...

The river is very wide and seems so vast. I cannot remember the last time that Grace, my kayak, took me out to enjoy and explore these healing waters...

The river is truly limitless - the theme I used in my yoga class this morning...

We live in a world that imposes so many limits on us - but perhaps not more than the limits we impose on ourselves...

And yet, if we are truly made in the image and likeness of the Divine - as so many religious traditions teach - how can we be in any way - truly limited?

Even poets and teachers have indicated that we are without limit:

*"The whole universe is inside of you.
Ask all from yourself!"
~ Rumi*

*"The universe is inside of you,
and you are the universe...
Return to the self
and know your own secret!
The whole universe
can be known within the self."
~ Nityananda*

I have shared these quotations before - the latter most

recently. But I felt that my students needed to be reminded of this as we worked with extending and blossoming in the poses with "Organic Energy" - one of **Anusara Yoga's Universal Principles of Alignment**.

We also worked with **Anuloma Pranayama**, with **bandhas**, and the focus of our **drishti** - or gaze while doing yoga asanas or poses to enhance its meditative aspects. We explored some things that were planned and part of the syllabus - and some that were not - but hopefully all helped to contribute to a greater awareness of our essence as being one that is fundamentally without limit.

As I gazed out at the river - these words by **Sri Ramakrishna**, whose birthday was on the 18th, came to me:

*"Dive deep, O mind,
dive deep into the Ocean of God's Beauty:
If you can plunge into the uttermost depths,
There you can find the gem of Love."*

May we always dive deep into ourselves and realize the Presence of the Divine is always there - however we envision that to be for us. For some of us, it may be more about realizing our fundamental connection to the universe. It does not matter. We are far greater than what we think we are. We are capable of so much. And our spiritual practices, are only a gentle reminder of that...

My theme this week was inspired by this poem by the yogini Danna Faulds, from her book, appropriately titled, **Limitless: New Poems and Other Writings**:

Limitless

*Sun says, "Be your own
illumination." Wren says,
"Sing your heart out,
all day long." Stream says,*

*"Do not stop for any
obstacle." Oak says,
"When the wind blows,
bend easily, and trust
your roots to hold."
Stars say, "What you see
is one small slice of a
single galaxy.
Remember that vastness
cannot be grasped by mind."
Ant says, "Small does not
mean powerless." Silence
says nothing. In the quiet,
everything comes clear.
I say, "Limitless." I say,
Yes."*

(Monday, February 22, 2010)



Day Sixty

Loving and Forgiving What Is

It seems that in the last week, everything I've read or every audio recording I have listened to - has given me a similar message. But, I've already said that - haven't I?

It never ceases to amaze me that the messages are there - always - for those willing to still the voices that often hold us captive to allow the Inner Voice to speak its wisdom...

As I drove to teach my yoga class at **Willow Street Yoga**, on the other side of the river these last two weeks, I listened to excerpts from two CD's - one based on the book, **Loving What Is**, by Byron Katie, and the other **Radical Forgiveness**, by Colin Tipping. Both contained very similar messages and practices aimed at the acceptance and forgiveness of what currently exists in our lives, in our relationships, and indeed all of our experiences...

Here are some gems of wisdom I jotted down after listening to Tipping's audio recording:

"Things don't happen to us - but for us... [They happen for us to grow and let go of separation]

Every action is either an expression of love or a call for love...

Everything is perfect as it is. We receive exactly what it is we need. We experience separation to come back union...

If you spot it - you got it. [Meaning, behaviors we see in others we don't like are the very ones we need to own up to or we are not fully aware of]

The people in our lives are mirrors that reflect back to us what it is that we need to work on...

Life itself is a mirror - what shows up for us is what we attract in order to learn what we must learn...

We are one with God...

Matter [reality, experiences, and so forth] manifests from consciousness..."

In order to practice radical forgiveness, Tipping delineates steps to be taken - and offers many helpful and practical exercises which I found myself doing mentally in the car.

Byron Katie is known for "The Work," which enables you to shift resistant perceptions. Both of these authors and speakers, Tipping and Katie, show how all of our suffering is due to not accepting and loving things as they already are in our lives...

From Katie's CD and book:

"You are the teacher you have been waiting for. You are the one who can end your own suffering..."

The only time we suffer is when we believe a thought that argues with what is...

Much of our stress comes from mentally living out of our own business...

Every time I had felt hurt or lonely, [Katie speaking], I had been in someone else's business...To think that I know what's best for anyone else is to be out of my business...

A thought is harmless unless we believe it. It's not our thoughts, but the attachment to our thoughts, that causes suffering...Most people think that they are what their thoughts tell them they are..."

Through "The Work," or what Katie call "Inquiry," one identifies one judgments and then proceeds to examine

them through the thorough application of four basic questions:

1. *Is it true?*
2. *Can you absolutely know that it's true?*
3. *How do you react when you think that thought?*
4. *Who would you be without that thought? and "Turn it around"*

There is obviously, much more to all of this, and I suggest exploring all of this work in depth.

But, just for today, be willing to entertain - that everything that happens to you is already perfect as it is. Every event and person in your life is an angel sent to you to help you transform - and help you remember your connection to the Divine - however you envision that to be. It certainly, can be a radical way of seeing things and living our lives!

(Friday, February 26, 2010)



Day Sixty-One

The Gift of the Present Moment

While I wait in line to gas up my car this morning, the insight comes, that to be, and live truly in the present moment is a gift...

The gift of the present moment, is that it keeps us here - not in the past, and not in the future...

The gift of the present moment, is that it makes us feel vibrantly alive...

The gift of the present moment, is that we are able to enter deeply into every emotion, and feel everything so fully...

The gift of the present moment, is that it clothes us in the freedom to dance through every challenge, and difficulty and phase of our lives...

The gift of the present moment, is that it enables us to realize and experience, that now is the only time there is...

The gift of the present moment, is that it teaches us that every second and experience discloses the Divine and is inherently sacred...

The gift of the present moment, is that there are gifts, lessons, and invaluable treasures surrounding us, if we have the eyes to see them...

The gift of the present moment, is that it enables us to accept things as they are, and not as we may want them to be...

And yet, most of the time, we are not in the present moment. We dwell in our pasts, wrapped up in our hurts, and every day we recycle the same thoughts over and over again - so it keeps us anchored in a moment that is no more...

I admire the people who can easily let go of the past, move on, and simply be in the present. Some can do this without a lot of work, but the truth is, we can all do it. We may just have to work at it a little harder...

When we are fully present, every detail is richer. Colors are more vibrant, sounds are exquisite, feelings are ecstatic in nature, and our sense of taste is overwhelmed by so many delicious choices!

When we are in the present moment, time is infinite - there is no past - and there is no future - there is only NOW! And it goes on, from one infinite moment to the next!

When we are fully present, every moment and every experience is a gift and a blessing on some level. We can see and understand - and imbibe in ways we could not do so if we were still mired in the past, or preoccupied with the future...

As often happens, so much of what I came across and posted this week, arrived to support these reflections...

*"Miracles lie not in the past or the future,
but in your complete acceptance
and embrace of this moment.
It offers everything you want,
in that it offers you an opportunity
to expand fully into the totality of your real self.
That experience - the experience of being truly who we
are -
is the peace we long for
and from which all miracles flow."
~ Marianne Williamson*

*"The whole universe is inside of you;
ask all from yourself!"
~ Rumi*

*"You are a microcosm
of the macrocosm."*

*"Do not seek to have events happen
as you would want them to.
But instead, want them to happen
as they happen,
and your life will go well."
~ Epictetus*

I fill up my gas tank, and drive off, and though unrest and uprisings are spreading from one Middle Eastern country to the next, and there are demonstrations in several state capitals - despite chaos and all that seeks to pull us all out of balance, I affirm to myself, as a quiet prayer, words uttered by Julian of Norwich, who in the 14th century, amidst so much calamity, was able to exclaim, and believe, that:

*"All shall be well,
and all shall be well,
and all manner of things
shall be well!"*

(Wednesday, February 23, 2011)



Day Sixty-Two

Life as Practice, Practice as Life

We can live - or simply exist...

We can live simply - embodying the extraordinary in the ordinary - or not at all...

We can live deeply, transformatively, and well, and when we do - our life itself becomes our practice...

I've been reflecting on the broader meaning and implications of practice. For those of us who practice yoga, we dedicate much of our time and focus on the practice of doing asana - or poses - setting ourselves the goal of achieving certain postures, or deepening in them.

But, what happens when you cannot do asana the way you once did? Or, what happens if all of a sudden, for one reason or another - you are unable to sustain a physical practice at all?

If you have cultivated a broader perspective of practice as one that is fundamentally a spiritual path, then asana is merely just one aspect of what constitutes your practice.

What then, is practice? What does it mean to you? What does it look like now? How will it evolve in 20, 30 or 50 years from now?

I picked up a book from my bookshelf today, **Living Deeply: The Art and Science of Transformation in Everyday Life**, published by the **Institute of Noetic Sciences**, and opened to a chapter titled, "Life as Practice, and Practice as Life." And I thought to myself, yes, I relate to this - it is my experience at the moment...

*"If you are really awake, conscious, and aware,
then your life is a practice.
Then everything you do is a practice."
~ Wink Franklin*

We must truly integrate our lives and our practice, and there are many tools available for us to do this. We can engage in something as solitary and individual as meditation, or, we can reach out and be of service to others...

There are practices that enable us to cultivate greater insight, and thus, are transformative. Other practices are conducive to greater purification, like *pranayama*, or, the yoga or practice of the breath, which can also be cleansing and healing. All practices enable us to be more present in the moment and invite us to let go and to surrender. For each one of us, our practice dances and flows into a unique expression, which changes and evolves throughout our various life stages.

Rachel Naomi Remen, a respected and published physician who has worked extensively with cancer patients, says this about her practice:

"Service is my practice. Service is one of the most powerful of the practices."

Gerald Jampolsky, another physician, defined service in this very meaningful way:

"Service defined broadly, can be seen as how you interact with each person and in each situation, no matter what the circumstances are."

So, life is practice, and practice is life...

The more we practice, the more easily we dance through life's circumstances and challenges...

Your practice becomes your own, when you stop doing someone else's practice, and do what works for you - it becomes yours when you make it your own.

Today, whether you step on to your mat, and do a modified practice because of injury or illness - or you decide to sit longer in meditation, or take a moment to slow down, be more mindful or conscious of your breath,

or you simply open your heart to someone in need - know that you are serving. Your life is practice, if you choose to make it so. Only then, will practice become your life...

(Friday, February 25, 2011)



Day Sixty-Three

Silence as Practice

This entry seems to very perfectly follow in the footsteps of yesterday's posting...In fact, I almost titled it, "Life as Practice, Practice as Life Part 2!"

I finish the first phase of organizing my books, a feat that has consumed several weeks in stops and starts - many arms filled with them, and boxes carried down to the basement - others juggled and redistributed from one room to another, but now the organization and rearrangement is much more logical and methodical, and volumes will be easier to find. All my theology and spirituality books from many decades of teaching and study, occupy one wall - with one shelf for example, exclusively dedicated to my massive collection of **Thomas Merton** writings, and multiple offerings by other authors, now all gathered together. Everything now feels right...

I find that I have two copies of **Inviting Silence: Universal Principles of Meditation** by **Gunilla Norris**, and though I have read this brief volume many times before, I curl up with it once again, and imbibe its nourishment for the soul, vowing to gift the second copy to a treasured soul friend...

And so, I share some of its insights, for silence - is perhaps the most important spiritual practice - and it permeates all the others. While I have meditated continuously, in silence for twice a day for over six years, after practicing on and off for decades, I now crave it throughout my days at home, and during my yoga practice as well, and so miss it when life gets too busy...

Yes, as **Mother Teresa of Calcutta** once noted,

"God speaks in the silence of the heart, and we listen..."

Or, as **Meister Eckhart**, once wrote,

"Nothing in all creation is so like God as silence..."

And from **Gunilla Norris**, these beautiful excerpts, which are nothing more and nothing less than a meditation in themselves. I invite you to consider reading the whole book:

*"Within each of us there is a silence
--a silence as vast as the universe.
We are afraid of it...and we long for it.*

*Silence is our deepest nature,
our home, our common ground, our peace.*

*Silence reveals. Silence heals.
Silence is where God dwells.
We yearn to be there.*

*One of the hardest lessons of any inner journey
is to understand that our ideal sense
of how things should be and the actual experience
are miles apart.*

*To be with our being...
is the most simple, direct, truly human capacity,
and it is the most difficult to sustain...*

Pausing often helps us remember

*and value our ability to choose.
Doing so with awareness, remembering to ask
What's enough here and now?
takes us deeper. We will find ourselves
ripening into another way of being...*

*Asking the simple question:
What will serve my life today?
is a penetrating practice...*

*Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in,
this question can help us focus our intentions.
It is so fundamental it should lie within
every small choice we make, not just the big ones...
What will serve life today?*

*Each of us can make a difference.
Politicians and visionaries will not return us
to the sacredness of life...
'Remember to breathe, remember to feel,
remember to care...
Let us practice for life's sake...'*

*When we make a place for silence, we make room
for ourselves. This is simple. And it is radical.
A room set apart for silence becomes a sanctuary
--a place for breath, for refreshment...for healing...*

*Silent spaces invite us to go to the inner room
--the room within ourselves.
By making room for silence, we resist
the forces of the world, which tell us to live
an advertised life of surface appearance,
instead of a discovered life - a life lived in contact
with our senses, our feelings,
our deepest thoughts and values.*

*When a space is reserved
solely for mindfulness practice
the silence seems to deepen. A room devoted to silence
honors and invites the unknown, the untamed,
the wild, the shy, the unfathomable
--that which rarely has a chance to surface*

within us...

*In silence we discover ourselves, our actual presence
to the life in us and around us. When we are present,
deeply attentive, we cannot be busy controlling.
Instead we become beholders - giving ourselves up
to the mystery of things. We become more willing
to let things be. And as a consequence
we can also let ourselves be...*

*Many of us have become uncomfortable with silence.
We do not regard it as friend...*

*Through silence our days are illumined - like rooms
filled with light - so we may inhabit our lives...*

*Walking, eating a meal, dancing, breathing, chanting -
anything can be a practice so long as we are mindful,
so long as we are fully present...*

*To bring silence into our bodies and minds,
we must learn to be quiet. We begin by being still.
If a period of physical stillness is all we can muster,
that is enough. We have begun to practice...*

*If we can simply learn to follow our breath
in a steady way - we have grown in practice.*

*The point of practice is not to perform,
but to participate...
Practice reveals that we are immersed in joy.
Practice also reveals what is blocking the flow...*

The lessons of silence are myriad...

*When we sit in silence we are profoundly active.
Keeping silent, we can hear the roar of existence...*

We become present..."

*"Silence is the friend,
that never betrays."
~ Confucius*

*"Every soul innately yearns for stillness,
for a space, a garden where we can till,
sow, reap, and rest, and by doing so
come to a deeper sense of self
and our place in the universe.
Silence is not an absence,
but a presence.
Not an emptiness,
but a repletion. A filling up."
~ Anne LeClair*

(Saturday, February 26, 2011)



Day Sixty-Four

Life as Practice - Redux

I continue to reflect on the notion, the observation, and the reality - that life is practice, and practice is life - as I teach and sub for a number of yoga classes this week, and as I reflect on my own life, its most pressing interior issues and concerns, and the work that I must do and am currently engaged in...

I remember how not too long ago, during meditation, a beautiful mantra arose from deep within my heart, unfolding simply, and softly whispering to my soul,

"Everything in God, and God in everything..."

*I recall insights that brought such solace, from **Sally Kempton**, the gifted meditation teacher, who observed, that spiritual development is never linear, but spirals*

forward and backwards, as if in a dance, as we evolve and expand, sometimes needing to retreat and drawn in, before we can journey more deeply in our growth...

Once again, I am touched by an essay of hers - I read it in the late evening, before bed, and it beautifully encourages and suggests the dedication of blessings as a spiritual practice. When we bless others, we are able to transform, transcend, and heal the limiting aspects of our relationships and experiences. To bless another is truly a sacred practice - and to bless another, endows us with the capacity to give life!

Life is practice, and practice is life, because grace is everywhere. There is nowhere that grace is not - ever! When we practice - we proclaim our blessings and radiate our heart energy to others, ever grounded in Divine love and grace, weaving the strands of our souls together into a beautiful tapestry, because we ARE all truly one, always - in each and every moment...

This brings to mind, the words of a dear soul friend who at Christmas affirmed that we are always one in God's Heart who is the source of all Love...

This musically gifted soul reminds me again today, that her intention is to strive daily to dedicate everything to God. Each note, every word, and all steps gently taken, on this earth."

Everything is practice. Everything life offers is practice, and practice engages every aspect of life...

Sally Kempton wisely observes that "when another heart cell - not even from the same heart - is placed near it, the dying cell comes back to life. And once that bond between the two cells is established, they go on supporting one another over distance..."

Again, this serves as a gentle reminder, that life is practice, and practice is life - for at the heart of practice, that's what we do - we engender life - thus giving life to all whom we encounter, every soul in need...

*And in the early evening, after meditation, or perhaps
before, I can no longer remember when it happened, I
quietly pen these words in silent practice...*

Life as Practice

*Life is practice.
And practice is life.*

*When we are aware,
Conscious, and awake,
Life is practice.*

*When we reach out,
And serve those in need,
Life is practice.*

*When we are present
To the moment,
And whatever it brings,
Life is practice.*

*When we reflect
The Divine,
In our words
And our actions,
Life is practice.*

*When we step
Off the mat,
And go into the world--
We do so knowing,
Life is practice
And practice is life.*

(Wednesday, March 2, 2011)



Day Sixty-Five

Choose Love

Love is why we are here...

Love is the rhyme, and it is the reason - behind every season...

Love is what makes a difference, and every spiritual tradition at its essence, teaches love...

A Course in Miracles divinely exhorts us, to:

"Teach only love, for that is what you are..."

We are the very embodiment of love...

*A dear soul, who is an internationally known **Anusara yoga** teacher wrote to me yesterday, saying to me: "You are the embodiment of love..." But I, could only think to myself, that no - it is not me - but it she who is the embodiment of love, for she selflessly and humbly shines her light, all over the planet!*

St. Francis de Sales taught:

"All through love, and nothing through constraint."

Paramahansa Yogananda wrote of devotion, as the manifestation of love, and reminded his devotees, to love God:

"Love Him, talk to Him every second of your life, in activity and in silence, with deep prayer..."

*I sit in meditation, under the gaze of **Hanuman**, who exemplifies devotion, and loyalty, and who tore open his heart to reveal the very Presence of the Divine within...*

*Can I live like that? Let me try - in every way, and moment, for the fruit of every practice is love. It is what **Mother Teresa of Calcutta** taught - that God is love -*

and faith and action - and practice is love...

In the dark of night, I review the events of my day, scrutinizing each thought and action, and word - trying to ascertain if I came close to my goal of exemplifying and embodying love on this day, and at least one day this week, I feel I have come as close to my goal as any day...I seek to make those days more the norm, than the exception...

I meditate, I chant, I teach - and each practice and moment offers me the opportunity to embody love...

*I come home in the late evening after teaching, excited to hold in my hand, **Exquisite Love**, the new translation and commentary of the **Narada Bhakti Sutras** by **William K. Mahoney**, having had the privilege of receiving a preview of them a year ago, at the **Anusara Yoga Teacher's Certified Gathering...***

I open to page 256, after having sought to choose and embody love all day, and read this:

"We are born of God's love, we are sustained by God's love throughout our lives, and we remain in God's love at our deaths...Love stands within us as our true nature. To live in love is therefore our completion; it is our wholeness and our perfection..."

I am a Bhakti yogini at heart - the way of devotion has always been mine, and now, in the twilight of my years, I am driven by a sense of urgency, that there is much more love yet to embody, and not as much time before me, as there is behind...

I drive home, from teaching a class today, where I felt every moment was the embodiment of love and prayer - every moment a student embodied a pose was truly a holy moment - every outward manifestation of a pose merely revealed it's inner beauty. With strength and power in their legs, as we worked on leg principles, everyone present connected to their essence as love, and sent forth blessings and prayers to Japan, and the

nuclear reactors, joining millions around the world, doing the same today...

*We are made to embody love, and prayer...I share with the students, this beautiful quote by **Barbara Brown Taylor**, since they were working strongly in their legs:*

"Sometimes we do not know what we know until it comes through the soles of our feet, or the embrace of a tender lover or the kindness of a stranger. Touching the truth with our minds is not enough. We are made to touch it with our bodies."

*I prepare to sit in meditation as the day winds, down, listening to this prayer by **Beth Nielsen Chapman**, from her beautiful collection of prayers from the world, **Prism**. This song, is titled, so appropriately, "Choose Love..."*

*Years cannot age you
Fear cannot scare you
Pain cannot hurt you
Death cannot kill you
Choose love, Choose love*

*War cannot harm you
Hunger can't starve you
Sin cannot shame you
Guilt cannot blame you
Choose love, Choose love*

*When you're doubting your direction
And you feel like giving up
Choose love...*

(Thursday, March 31, 2011)



Day Sixty-Six

Let God Hold You

Last night, I curled in bed with the book I am currently reading - **An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith**, by **Barbara Brown Taylor**, a former parish priest, who currently teaches spirituality.

This book is delicious in every way - not one to be raced through - but one to be savored, and so I "tasted" the chapter "The Practice of Saying No." It begins by explaining the historical, cultural, and religious differences between keeping the Sabbath and the Christian practice of observing Sunday - and then explores the value of having one day a week where we say no to doing, and simply enjoy being.

Taylor begins the chapter with this quote from **Meister Eckhart**:

"God is not found in the soul by adding anything but by subtracting."

A couple of pages into the chapter, she quotes the Swiss theologian **Karl Barth**:

"A being is free only when it can determine and limit its activity."

Later, she refers to **Abraham Heschel**:

"The first holy thing in all creation was not a people or place but a day. God made everything in creation and called it good, but when God rested on the seventh day, God called it holy."

Still, this is not an easy thing for most of us. Here are some wonderful insights in the author's own words...

"Sabbath is the great equalizer, the great reminder that we do not live on this earth but in it, and that everything we do under the warming tent of this planet's

atmosphere affects all who are woven into this web with us...

In the eyes of the world, there is no payoff for sitting on the porch...In the eyes of the true God, the porch is imperative...

According to the rabbis, those who observe the Sabbath observe all the other commandments. Practicing it over and over again they become accomplished at saying no, which is how they gradually become able to resist the cultures killing rhythms of drivenness and depletion...

If a whole day of life-giving freedom is too much for you to imagine, then start however you can. Decide that you will get up an hour before everyone else in the house and dedicate that time to doing nothing but being in the divine presence...

At least one day in every seven...stay home not because you are sick but because you are well. Talk someone you love into being well with you...Even if you spent one day being good for nothing you would still be precious in God's sight - and when you get anxious because you are convinced that this is not so, remember that your own conviction is not required. This is a commandment...

...there is no saying yes to God without saying no to God's rivals...

When you live in God, your day begins when you open your eyes...and take your first breath...your day begins when you let God hold you because you do not have the slightest idea how to hold yourself...When you live in God, your day begins when you lose yourself long enough for God to find you, and when God finds you, to lose yourself again in praise."

This month, let God hold you. Say no to anything that interferes with his embrace and keeping one day holy. Find the time to be alone with the Alone, and become so drunk with the wine of sweet Love Divine, that nothing else matters! (Friday, April 1, 2011)

Day Sixty-Seven

Practicing the Presence of God

How does one practice the presence of God?

In everything one does, thinks, and says...

I have been knee deep in spring cleaning the last couple of days - currently in between yoga sessions - so I have taken this time to launder the winter bedding and put it away, and break out all the spring sheets, quilts, and clothes. I've also taken the opportunity to gather up clothes and household items for donation as well...

Yesterday afternoon, after a full day of cleaning, washing, and organizing, I met a dear friend to walk the labyrinth. It's kind of "our thing" - something we've done over the years - and it gave us the opportunity to walk it and meditate together, and reflect on the Stations of the Cross, which were featured through an number of beautiful displays along the way as well.

Later in the evening, when I went to pick up dinner, on the warmest day we've had in so many months (85 degrees!), I stepped out of my car and into the night and thought to myself, "God is everywhere!" In a split second, my heart swelled and filled with incredible bliss, arriving as an unexpected gift!

Yes, God is everywhere - in the laundering, in the spring cleaning, in the little bit of weeding I did in the morning after the weekend rains. God was present when I met my dear friend and shared the walking of the labyrinth with her, and later in the evening, when another friend requested needed prayers...

I curled in bed once again, with **Barbara Brown Taylor's, An Altar in the World**, and nearly finished it. I particularly hung on every paragraph, word and sentence in the chapter, "The Practice of Being Present in God."

This chapter is about prayer - but perhaps not prayer in the traditional sense, of saying prayers. It is an exposition on the practice of prayer as presence.

Hundreds of years ago, a lowly monk, who swept and tended a kitchen, wrote a book, that was never meant for publication. It came to be known as, **The Practice of the Presence of God**, and in time it became a spiritual classic. This simple tome notes how one practices God's presence in very simple ways - by dedicating every moment and action to God.

For each of us, such a practice takes on a different flavor, for it is individually "seasoned" by our vocations, our work, our family situations, and everything that is unique about us and our lives. Each opportunity and circumstance offers us the chance to practice this presence in varying ways.

The chapter I read last night began with this quote, which really says and sums it all up:

"The best preparation for a life of prayer is to become more intensely human."

That is all we can do: live as fully and as mindfully as possible - and then see God's presence in everything - everyone - and every experience!

(Tuesday, April 5, 2011)



Day Sixty-Eight

The Practice of Blessing

To offer a blessing, is a spiritual practice. It is perhaps, one of the highest...

The **Talmud** says, *"It is forbidden to taste of the pleasures of this world without a blessing."*

While some traditions teach that only certain persons can offer blessings, the truth is, everyone can offer one. And when we do, everything becomes a blessing...

I thought of this, as I drove around, and saw a man suspended up high, doing pole utility maintenance. This work is dangerous - and it is a service this man renders to us to make our lives more comfortable. I spontaneously offered him a blessing, and asked that he be kept safe - that he be returned to his loved ones.

I also thought of this, when my breath was taken away as a driver cut me off on the beltway this afternoon, as I was returning home from the most delicious class in restorative yoga. I restrained my first reaction, and offered a blessing instead, thus choosing to remain in the beautiful energy of my class, where my teacher invited us to become intimate with the Divine...

I found myself blessing all the animals I walked by, and even the people on the news. Truly, everyone needs a blessing...

When we meditate, pray, practice yoga, or offer our services - we can enrich these practices and bring more meaning to them, if we wrap them in our blessings...

For those of the Jewish faith, a blessing prayer is called a *"brakha."* Observant Jews offer a blessing for everything under the sun, and I thought to myself, what a beautiful world this would be - if we all did this...

I have a dear friend who offers blessings all the time.

She once shared with me, that her mother goes out into her garden and blesses her plants and flowers every day.

When we bless others, we are as much transformed by the blessing - if not more - than our recipients are. Blessings have the power to shift our consciousness profoundly.

The last chapter of the book, **An Altar in the World**, by **Barbara Brown Taylor**, was appropriately titled, "The Practice of Pronouncing Blessings." This world needs our blessings, but so do we - because we are as much enriched by them as anyone else is.

We should bless beginnings and bless endings, and that which is animate and inanimate. We should bless the living and the dead. We should bless our teachers, our friends, and our family - those we love - but most especially those who challenge in us in so many ways - for they bring us blessings wrapped up and disguised as needed lessons.

The more we practice, the more we realize everything is connected - and the more we become aware, as I taught many students recently, that *"life is practice, and practice is life."*

Barbara Brown Taylor ends her book in this way:

"...I hope you can think of at least...many more ways to celebrate your own priesthood, practiced at the altar of your own life. As the love poet of all time [Rumi] reminds us both,

*Today like every other day we wake up empty
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the
ground."*

Love and blessings to you! (Thursday, April 7, 2011)

Palm Sunday

Meditating for Love

Last night I finished reading **Sally Kempton's** wonderful gem of a book, **Meditation for the Love of It**. She acknowledges the reason we meditate is simply because "we are ultimately in it for love."

I thoroughly enjoyed this work, but found the last few chapters particularly helpful because they accurately addressed many of my current experiences. I felt blanketed in the comfort of what Kempton keenly observes and affirms, and the needed insights supplied, that will fortify me on this continual path toward deepening meditation...

For example, Kempton wisely observes and echoes great meditation masters in affirming that:

"The most important signs of spiritual progress are revealed in our character, our ability to maintain equanimity, our power to keep the mind clear and still, our compassion and kindness, our clarity, and our capacity to hold our center."

And truly, what else is there in this journey we call life?

Kempton reminds her readers over and over again, that the practice of meditation does not proceed in a linear fashion. Sometimes it involves taking a step backward, for every one we take forward. Sometimes physical or emotional pain are signs of inward purification. We sit and we seek union with the Divine, whom **Kabir** recognized, was simply, *"the breath within the breath..."*

Meditation is not easy. Sometimes it will unearth and dig out strongly held "*samkaras*," memories, and tendencies we work a whole lifetime to release and eradicate. But if we stick to our work and our commitment to this practice - which is an intense labor of love - we will experience its richly rewarding fruits. However, this may take years, and in many, if not most instances, at least a decade of

dedicated practice, morning and evening, without fail...

Hidden within us, behind our thoughts, is always, the Light of Pure Awareness. We merge with this Awareness, the Divine, whatever we choose to call it - and let go of all notions of separation and duality. We enter sometimes unexpectedly, into this Fourth State, or "*Turiya*" state that the yogic sages described, aware that we simply are one with the Divine, as our heartbeats chime the mantra, "*I am. I am. I am,*" deeply and silently within our hearts...

All of this ultimately is an act of grace. The yoga I practice, **Anusara Yoga**, begins with a simple dictate, an invitation to surrender, all that I know, and think, and am - and simply, "open to grace," in acknowledgment that no change, and transformation can begin without my participation and receptivity.

I was also comforted in knowing, as Kempton reminds her readers,

"People who meditate can be just as subject to ups and downs as anyone else. The major differences lie in their attitude toward their mood and tendencies, and in the resources they have to deal with them. They know a core part of them is untouched by the emotional weather..."

Of course, she also observes:

"Living from your own center takes effort...When you see life as an ongoing spiritual training you live inside a view that lends significance to even the most ordinary interactions. You don't think so much in terms of winning or losing...instead there is...the consistent effort to come back to the love and lucidity you carry inside, and to bring the values of your inner world into your outer actions..."

Furthermore, the practice reveals and reminds us of the great Truth, which is simply "the Truth of oneness."

Kempton continues her exquisite and brilliant mapping of a life lived in meditation, by instructing:

"Much of the work of meditation takes place underground, and much of it is imperceptible. That is one reason we measure our progress in meditation...by the subtle ways in which a regular meditation practice changes our feelings about ourselves and the world."

I would add, this happens almost unexpectedly at times, often manifesting itself in very nuanced ways...Meditation finds our stuff, holds up the mirror to where we need to do the work, and then invites us to walk through all the needed doors and even blazing fires. In time, we will discern a greater clarity, and lightness in all things. And wonderfully, the **Bhagavad Gita** reminds us:

*"In this practice, no effort is ever lost.
Even a little of this practice
protects one from great fear."*

As Kempton notes, over the course of time, perhaps in a decade or more - we "ripen" like the fruit of the trees or the vine - we are fashioned into something purely delectable. We let go - and the fruits come into maturity and are revealed, in their own time...

What or whom do we seek in meditation? We seek our Beloved, our true Self, our Awareness, the Truth, and we discover universes within universes, continually unfolding, as we are transmuted, experience by experience until there is nothing left but the very incarnation of Divine Love in our ever willing and receptive hearts...

I think of this, on this **Palm Sunday**, falling on a full moon and signaling the beginning of **Holy Week** for Christians, and the observance of **Passover** by our Jewish brothers and sisters.

For me, the Incarnation is simply a constant reminder, that Love is all there is... And meditation as a spiritual

practice, allows all of us - Christian and Jew, Hindu and Buddhist, Muslim and Sufi, and the rest of us - to drink and be nourished from this font of Divine Love...

Dear Lord,

As we enter this sacred season of penitence, inviting forgiveness – let me never forget your selflessness. Let me dedicate myself anew to all those practices that remind me of your constant presence and fidelity, and of my oneness with all things and all souls.

Grant that I always dedicate, at least one hour of every twenty-four to your love and devotion. Grant also, that through my practice I may be fashioned anew, like clay, in the potter's hands – in your sacred hands.

(Sunday, April 17, 2011)



Tenebrae – Wednesday of Holy Week

Grace is Sufficient

Sometimes, messages come to you in the most unexpected ways...

Sometimes, you ignore the message the first time, and it keeps coming back to you again and again - a second, and a third, and maybe a fourth time...

Yesterday was one of those days filled with unacknowledged or partially understood messages, and this morning seemed merely a continuation and extension of those lessons...

Yesterday, as I waited in the doctor's office for a routine check up, I read a sermon written by **Barbara Brown Taylor**, from her book, **Home by Another Way**. Since we are partly into **Holy Week**, nearing the conclusion of **Lent**, I am choosing to read material that is relevant to the liturgical season, or is, at very least, spiritual in nature.

The section I read in Taylor's book was based on a passage from **St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians**, where he described a particularly challenging experience in his life, without actually identifying what it was. He describes it as "a thorn in the flesh," a source of deep torment to him, which I would add, could be just as equally experienced in the soul...

When Paul appeals to God, he is simply told:

*"My grace is sufficient for you,
for power is made perfect in weakness."*

I glossed over all of this, as I was awaiting my appointment, and did not give it another thought...

When I returned home, an intuitive friend spontaneously called and invited me out to lunch, and during the course of the meal, she addressed an area of my life and a

significant relationship which is both the source of my greatest joy, my deepest lessons, and my greatest sadness...

Ironically, in my own meditations, I have been asking to be released of the pain that still runs deep concerning events long past, and slights perceived in the present. But my friend suggested that I consider looking deeply into matters in my heart and soul, and not deny the importance and significance of the deep connection that exists on a higher plane. She told me I should not deny my own insights, or discount what I intuit and "know" on another level.

After I came home, I wondered why this had come up - so unexpectedly. It seemed to churn things inside for me. So I gave intent to receive whatever insights or messages I still needed to know, in my midnight meditation before retiring...

This morning, one of my dearest students and treasured friends, brought up the same exact passage from **Corinthians** in the course of our yoga practice, while we worked on creating a greater opening by releasing the piriformis muscle. As soon as she brought up this verse, I perked up, and realized I needed to go back to this passage once again, and re-read it. I knew there would be answers for me there...

A little while later in the morning, I sat down to write and I come across this quote by **Rumi**:

*"Give up to Grace.
The ocean takes care of each wave
Until it returns to the shore."*

Had I received the message I needed to hear yet? Well apparently not...

Then, moments later, as I was browsing **Facebook**, I read an entry, titled, "My Journey into Grace," on the blog , "The Awakened Life", and I was momentarily paralyzed. It was a description of a life-altering

experience, occurring in 2007, that mirrored my own in so many ways. The author credits **Anusara Yoga** with helping her awaken, for it is a practice that begins from the vantage point of opening to grace...

In spite of challenges, deep-seated grief, and of obstacles that may seem insurmountable, grace is sufficient. We are never alone, grace provides and takes care of us - and the source of our greatest pain is often the doorway to our embodiment of ultimate freedom.

Grace is everywhere, and I am in awe because the answers sought in my meditation came several times, until I was ready to listen. Thanks to all who came bearing gifts by pointing me in the right direction, for truly,

Grace alone is sufficient...

Dear Lord,

Let me always remember that you are the source of all grace, and that grace alone is sufficient. You are all that I need – in every moment – and in every circumstance. Let me recognize that grace is everywhere, and grant that I may always love you with an everlasting love.

Let me always be yours – and may you always be mine – in every act, and word, and intention – now, and forever!

(Wednesday, April 20, 2011)



Holy Thursday

The Garden of Gethsemane

On this Holy Thursday, after a long meditation and yoga practice, I surrender into Savasana – the Pose of the Corpse, and unexpectedly find my thoughts turning to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

What loneliness was felt by Jesus, in that Garden! I imagined facing a situation he could not – or at least – would not pass up. He knew he had to go through the eye of that needle, and live out his life mission – a mission that was not fully understood by any of his friends. In a few short hours he would be denied and betrayed by so called friends.

We all feel denied and betrayed by others – even by deeply loved ones at times. It seems to be the nature of human beings. At times, we simply fail ourselves, and others.

Holy Thursday signifies the beginning of the **Triduum** – commemorating the Paschal Mystery – the passion, death, of Jesus, culminating in his resurrection.

The Gospel stories are filled with intrigue and intense human drama. Our lives too, can be filled with so much drama and messiness.

The events of Holy Thursday – the celebration of the Last Supper, the washing of feet, remind me of the love, loyalty, and devotion Jesus had for his disciples – those who were closest to him, and who followed him and witnessed the events of his ministry. They also remind me to examine my own conscience and reflect on the ways that I have failed those closest to me, and have neglected giving them the attention and love they deserve, due to self-absorption on my part.

This time invites introspection, and penitence. We are given the opportunity to let go of behaviors and ways that do not serve and that stand in the way of us

embodying and reflecting Divine Love and Light to others.

Dear Lord,

I can fail others and myself – sometimes even miserably. I know I fail you as well, unknowingly, but sometimes consciously as well. Still, you welcome me to your table, over and over again. Your love is constant – everlasting – and comforting. You reminded your disciples that you would be with them always, until the end of time...

Let me never forget that! Let me live each moment ever mindful of your presence, and may I always forgive those who hurt me and betray me, for truly, they know not what they do!

Let me always remember that you are everything, and always enough!



Good Friday

Give Up to Grace - And Die to Old Ways

*"Give up to Grace.
The ocean takes care of each wave
until it returns to the shore."*

So wrote **Rumi**, and so I noted, in my last entry...

Today is **Good Friday**. While many in the Christian tradition will focus exclusively on the passion and death of Jesus, I choose to consider this day from a much broader perspective. It is a time to die to old ways, so that we can rise to new ones...It is a time for deep interior work, cleansing our hearts and our souls, like our Jewish brothers and sisters, who so meticulously clean their homes in preparation for **Passover**...

This week, which was the beginning of a new yoga session, I told my students, that if they truly say: "Yes! - and open to grace" - they must entertain the possibility they are opening the door to transformation they may have not even begun to envision. If we give up to grace, not only will we be taken care of, as **Rumi** reminds us, but things may change beyond our wildest dreams or expectations. We may most especially be pulled out of our comfort zone.

"Opening to Grace" is often referred to as "First Principle" in **Anusara Yoga** - for it is the first of five of **Anusara Yoga's Universal Principles of Alignment**, and as **John Friend**, the founder of this system is fond of saying, everything is contained in the "First Principle."

Yesterday, after my morning meditation, and conclusion of my practice, while I released in Savasana, I thought of Jesus, meditating in the Garden of Gethsemane, and how he was abandoned and betrayed by his friends. I have thought a lot of what true friendship means this week. I was able to enter into the experience in that

garden, and intuit and feel a real sense of sadness and loneliness.

So what is a true friend? One who holds up the mirror to where we need to do the work...

Everyday in meditation, I ask to receive what I most need that day. And so it happened...

Later in the afternoon, a friend and colleague pointed out a bad habit of mine. She told me she was doing this for me, out of our friendship. After an initial moment of shock, I thanked her for pointing out the behavior in question, for it would make me more aware of this tendency in my relation to others.

"Let me receive what I most need today, and let me give up to grace..."

I sat for my afternoon meditation after this discussion, and after its conclusion, picked up a booklet of Lenten reflections I have been reading. It focused on the events of **Holy Thursday** and the betrayals of Jesus by both Peter and Judas.

This booklet noted, that neither Peter nor Judas were bad persons...

Excuse me? Judas?

Yes - Judas! He did do a bad thing, but he despaired - and when he expressed remorse and regret, he did it to the wrong persons - who did not care. Peter went back to the apostles and expressed his sorrow there.

Good people do bad things. We all know that.

Then, I read these words:

"A good friend is someone who loves you even if you do something wrong. A good friend is someone who has the nerve to tell you that what you did was wrong. Sin has to be received mercifully and honestly. It can happen with

the help of the Lord and the help of good friends."

What is sin? The Greek word for sin is "*hamartia*." It means - to miss the mark - as in an arrow missing its target, not the interpretations we most commonly ascribe to the word sin.

We all miss the mark. Hopefully, we have friends to help us along the way, and see the error of our ways.

This morning I read these quotations, that shed further light into matters for me:

"..conflict is the primary engine of creativity and innovation.

*People don't learn by staring into a mirror.
People learn by encountering difference,"
~ Ronald Heifetz*

"Homogeneity makes for healthy milk but anemic friendships.

*We need relationships that cross culturally imposed lines
to enlarge our hearts and expand our vistas."
~ Dan Schmidt*

And finally, this poem by **Antonio Machado**:

*"I love Jesus who said to us:
heaven and earth will pass away.
When heaven and earth have passed away,
my word will still remain.
What was your word Jesus?
Love? Forgiveness? Affection?
All your words were
one word: Wake up.*

Give up to grace. Die to old ways, so you can wake up - and give birth to new ones. That is my message for this day.

Dear Lord,

You are near to all who call on you – you are slow to anger and full of compassion. As I reflect on this sacred season, may I always remember that at my essence, I am good, because I am your child, even though at times, I miss the mark.

Forgive me when I fail, and always point me in the right direction. Always let me remember that you alone are the source of all love and that there is nothing that cannot be forgiven.

Thank you for your constant presence, your healing touch, and for all the graces you have showered me with. Grant that I live my life always surrendering to grace, that I may always die to old ways, and rise to new ones in you!

(Friday, April 22, 2011)



Holy Saturday

The Seven Last Words

In a few short hours, we will transition out of the **Triduum** and into the **Easter Season**...

In a few short hours, fires will be lit, and the Easter Candle will also be lit from this fire and brought into churches all over the world.

In a few short hours, cantors will intone, The **Exultet**, the Easter Proclamation, such a beautiful and ancient chant...

Traditionally, on **Good Friday**, the faithful may be invited to reflect on the Seven Last Words of Christ. But, they are actually sentences. They signify the last few words uttered by Christ on the cross:

1. *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*
2. *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they are doing.*
3. *Today you will be with me in Paradise.*
4. *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.*
5. *Woman, here is your son.*
6. *I am thirsty.*
7. *It is finished.*

The journey from darkness into light is a bittersweet and lonely one...

But, in a few short hours, as the evening winds its way into the dark of night, fires will be lit, and the **Exultet** will be chanted, as it has, for many centuries. For decades, my soul has been warmed, and something deep in me continues to stir, every time I hear it:

*Rejoice, heavenly powers! Sing, choirs of angels!
Exult, all creation around God's throne!
Jesus Christ, our King, is risen!
Sound the trumpet of salvation!*

Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor,

*radiant in the brightness of your King!
Christ has conquered! Glory fills you!
Darkness vanishes for ever!*

*Rejoice, O Mother Church! Exult in glory!
The risen Savior shines upon you!
Let this place resound with joy,
echoing the mighty song of all God's people!*

*My dearest friends,
standing with me in this holy light,
join me in asking God for mercy,*

*that he may give his unworthy minister
grace to sing his Easter praises.*

Deacon: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Deacon: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Deacon: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give him thanks and praise.

*It is truly right
that with full hearts and minds and voices
we should praise the unseen God, the all-powerful
Father,
and his only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*For Christ has ransomed us with his blood,
and paid for us the price of Adam's sin to our eternal
Father!*

*This is our Passover feast,
when Christ, the true Lamb, is slain,
whose blood consecrates the homes of all believers.*

*This is the night
when first you saved our fathers:
you freed the people of Israel from their slavery
and led them dry-shod through the sea.*

This is the night

when the pillar of fire destroyed the darkness of sin!

*This is the night
when Christians everywhere,
washed clean of sin and freed from all defilement,
are restored to grace and grow together in holiness.*

*This is the night
when Jesus Christ broke the chains of death
and rose triumphant from the grave.*

*What good would life have been to us,
had Christ not come as our Redeemer?
Father, how wonderful your care for us!
How boundless your merciful love!
To ransom a slave you gave away your Son.*

*O happy fault,
O necessary sin of Adam,
which gained for us so great a Redeemer!*

*Most blessed of all nights,
chosen by God to see Christ rising from the dead!*

*Of this night scripture says:
"The night will be as clear as day:
it will become my light, my joy."*

*The power of this holy night dispels all evil,
washes guilt away, restores lost innocence,
brings mourners joy;
it casts out hatred, brings us peace,
and humbles earthly pride.*

*Night truly blessed when heaven is wedded to earth
and man is reconciled with God!*

*Therefore, heavenly Father,
in the joy of this night,
receive our evening sacrifice of praise,
your Church's solemn offering.*

Accept this Easter candle,

*a flame divided but undimmed,
a pillar of fire that glows to the honor of God.*

*(For it is fed by the melting wax,
which the mother bee brought forth
to make this precious candle.)*

*Let it mingle with the lights of heaven
and continue bravely burning
to dispel the darkness of this night!*

*May the Morning Star which never sets
find this flame still burning:
Christ, that Morning Star,
who came back from the dead,
and shed his peaceful light on all mankind,
your Son, who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Yes, this is the night...

*Dear Lord,
Let me die tonight,
to old ways—
to ancient ways!*

*Let me rise
with the dawn,
cleansed of all that holds me captive
and separated from you.*

*Let me stand with you,
and wait for you, during this Sacred Vigil.
Welcome me into your kingdom!
And let me bask in your Light!
Forever, Amen!*

(April 23, 2011)



Easter Season

Grace Has Your Back - So Rise to New Ways

Easter morning was magnificent, as I crossed the **Potomac River**, on my way to teach a friend's yoga classes, hours before I would meet my family for Easter Sunday Mass. The sky was a beautiful blue, but a slight carpet of foggy mist hovered over verdant fields, though it was thicker where it hung over the river.

Halfway into my trip, something told me to flip on the radio, and I caught the **Krista Tippett** interview with **Vigen Guroian**, an Armenian priest and college professor, who writes about the joys of gardening in his book, **The Fragrance of God**. He says that it reveals the grandeur of God to him, more than anything else, for nowhere is the union of God with the whole cosmos made more evident than in a garden.

In fact, Guroian affirms, that for him, gardening is nearer to godliness than theology. And having been a theologian for more than half of my life, that gave me pause for thought!

During my drive, I was captivated by the many different variety of trees in bloom - especially white and pink dogwoods everywhere. I realized, that for some, the verdant greening of valleys and meadows, and explosion of blossoms and leaves unfurling everywhere, was about as real as God gets to be experienced.

I was especially taken with Guroian's observation that the sense of smell is the most mystical of all the senses. It has a way of connecting us deeply to memories and drawing us in. I made a mental note to myself to explore the ways in which the different senses are mystical.

After teaching two wonderful classes, I made my way across town to **Holy Trinity Church** in **Georgetown**, and got there early enough to save some seats for my guys.

While I waited, I read the bulletin and was touched by one particular essay, that referenced the book, **Inner Compass**, by Margaret Silf, a Protestant, who is asked by a retreat master to meditate on the risen Jesus appearing to his mother after the Resurrection, which of course is not described in the scriptures. Still, **St. Ignatius of Loyola**, the founder of the **Jesuits**, believed that Jesus would have most certainly appeared to his mother.

Silf balks at this suggestion and resists it, but eventually she makes her way into a garden and finds herself spontaneously connecting to Mary in a meditation.

In her meditation, Silf could sense the pain and sadness of this mother who lost her son in such a horrific way, and wondered what the point of everything was. But, at some point, Silf notices a change in Mary. Her face literally lights up as if she has seen her risen son.

And now I excerpt from the passage where Silf writes:

"Mary,' I whispered, 'Is he there?'

'My child,' she told me, her voice breathless with joy, 'he is standing behind you. You are leaning into him.'

I didn't need to turn around. I could feel the power of his holding. But she had met him in her reaching out to me. 'Go and do the same,' she told me, 'and you will meet him risen and alive, standing always behind those who reach out to you in their need.'"

Wow! I was moved beyond belief!

This reminded me of how in **Anusara Yoga**, we emphasize coming into the back body. When we do, we connect to something greater than ourselves, to the Universal, to the Divine, which always has our backs. I remember watching **John Friend** once, assist a reluctant yogini into Scorpion Pose, instructing her to trust that the Divine was behind her, holding her. Only

when she surrendered to that realization, was she able to do the pose beautifully.

Yes, Grace always has our backs. The Divine always supports us - and when we tap into that - in our practices, we can serve others...

In this one moment, a confluence of two streams that feed my soul merged within me, and I was able to deeply appreciate the oneness and beauty of all spiritual practices and traditions...

Later in the evening, I enjoyed watching "60 Minutes" do a lengthy segment on the monks, monasteries, and fabled icons at **Mount Athos**, a remote place that has fascinated me for decades. But, it is not a place where women are allowed to visit, and nothing has changed there in centuries. But I was captivated by how the monks pray unceasingly, even while engaged in their active duties, or even during an interview. This is simply made possible by linking the **Jesus Prayer**, "*Lord Jesus, have mercy,*" to every breath taken...

And so my day ended, with the presence of the Divine shining forth in beauty of a morning drive, as I marveled at the surrounding landscape, when I taught wonderful students, attended Mass, and finally as I watched TV in the evening.

God's presence is everywhere, if we are willing to see and notice it. It supports us - and thus, during this wonderful **Easter Season** - imparts a most important message: to rise always, to new ways of being...

(Monday, April 25, 2011)



About the Author

Who am I? I see myself primarily as a mystic and semi-contemplative. My upbringing was rich and diverse, and I had the opportunity to travel as a daughter and granddaughter of diplomats, growing up and living in many wonderful places.

Towards the end of my career teaching theology and spirituality, which spanned nearly 25 years, I became both a certified Yoga instructor and Reiki practitioner and teacher in the Northern Virginia area. I have a doctoral degree in spirituality and education, and these areas remain a great passion of mine, in addition to teaching both yoga and Reiki.

During my professional career, I worked in campus ministry and taught religious studies in a number of institutions including St. Louis University, Washington University, and as Chair of the Religion Department at Convent of the Visitation School in Minnesota in the eighties, and then at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School, in Washington, DC, during the nineties.

I am currently engaged in introducing and igniting a passion for meditation in others as part of a broader project, **Meditation Pure and Simple**, which not only includes this book – but a website, a **Facebook** page, and **YouTube** channel – all bearing the same title!

Take a break and visit **Meditation Pure and Simple** on **Facebook** and **YouTube** for 90 second meditations and affirmations posted daily. Share them with others!

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facebook.com/meditationpureandsimple

I can be reached at:

meditationsimple4u@gmail.com

For more information on me and my work:

www.meditationsimple.com

www.dwellinyourheart.com

Visit my Blog:

www.aligningwithgrace.blogspot.com