

Entering the Kingdom

A Fresh Look at Prayer

Developed by Reverend Jane Beach

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Entering the Kingdom

A Fresh Look at Prayer

Dear Friend,

It is my great pleasure to join you as we look at the concept of prayer with a new perspective, one which is centered on a deepening consciousness of Spirit. Turning toward the God of your understanding instead of the “need” or “problem” brings about an awakening and deepening of your own spiritual nature. At the same time, the expansion of your faith makes way for God’s unlimited power to do God’s work. In our textbook Jim Rosemergy reminds us that as we continue to turn to God, “God becomes real for us, and then this consciousness allows us to see what we have not seen before, a way through.”

Step-by-step, your willingness to trust brings you to an ever-deepening *experience* of the presence of a God that cherishes you. Just imagine *knowing* how loved you are ...

With the *experience* of the Presence in mind, this course is an introduction to Jim Rosemergy’s 9-step prayer practice in *The Gathering ~ A 40-Day Guide to the Power of Group and Personal Prayer*. There is strength in the collective consciousness of a group gathered together in spiritual study. In exploration of the nine steps outlined in *The Gathering*, a deeper understanding of each step will be reached, as well as the commitment to the growing faith unfolding within each participant.

It is my hope that once this class is completed, and if you are interested, you consider taking the natural next step to meet as a group to practice *The Gathering* process on a regular basis. I can’t think of a better way to spend time together!

With gratitude and love,

Jane

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A Fresh Look at Prayer

Course Overview

- Week 1 Turning to God
- Week 2 Step 1 ~ Human Needs
- Week 3 Step 2 ~ Human Condition
- Week 4 Step 3 ~ Release
- Week 5 Step 4 ~ Forgiveness of Others
- Week 6 Step 5 ~ Forgiveness of Self
- Week 7 Step 6 ~ Consciousness of God
- Week 8 Step 7 ~ A Time Beyond Time
- Week 9 Step 8 ~ Contentment
- Week 10 Step 9 ~ The Kingdom

Textbook:

The Gathering ~ A 40-Day Guide to the Power of Group and Personal Prayer by Jim Rosemergy

Student Agreements

Attendance and Active Participation

Your willingness to dedicate yourself to a spiritual breakthrough has brought you to this class. Therefore, attendance and active participation are the foundation of the journey, crucial for the experience that lies ahead.

Assignments

This is your journey to the deepening of your relationship with the God of your understanding. The path is fluid, with no ending of one week of course activities and beginning of another. It is set up so for logistical purposes only. It is recommended that you start on the next week's lessons as soon as you complete the previous class, as the reading and exercises are meant to take you deeper into your journey. Thus, doing a little each day and giving yourself time for reflection will make your experiences richer.

Writing

There is a good amount of writing to be done in the class, both in the workbook and in the 40-Day Guide. It is expected that you will spend time actually writing down your thoughts and feelings about each article read or question posed. Not only does this deepen your personal spiritual experience, it also helps you express your perspective during class dialog.

You will get as much out of this class as you put into it, so bring yourself wholly into the experience.

Final Project Thought Paper: “My Experience of God”

Your final project is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “My Experience of God.” Using *specific, real-life examples* answer **one** of the following three questions:

1. How do I know that God is real?
2. How has my relationship with God deepened?
3. How has my relationship with myself deepened?

Your Thought Paper will last between 4-5 minutes and will be presented on the last night of class. You can read your paper or talk about it. Optional: You may also include drawings, photos, poems or any other visual representation of your experience of the Divine.

The Importance of Sharing

You will find that sharing your insights and experiences and learning from others is an important part of the class. The purpose of sharing is multifaceted. It provides an opportunity to share from your own experience, as well as develop the ability to listen and really hear other people, and to benefit from their sharing.

Guidelines for Sharing

Confidentiality

- What is said in class stays in class.
- What is said in the small break-out groups stays within that group. When you share with the whole group, share your insights only instead of the revelation of someone else in the small group.

Sharing with respect

- Speak about your own feelings and experiences and not about what someone else has shared as their feelings or experiences.
- Actively listen while another person is sharing and then refrain from commenting or giving advice (no “fixing”).
- Once a person has shared, the response of the others in the group is, “Thank you,” and then the next person shares. This helps keep the tendency to comment (pulling the attention back to the person speaking) and “fixing” at bay.
- Respect the rights of others and share one time only in each sharing opportunity. If you later remember something wonderful you intended to share wait until everyone else has had a turn to share.
- Be sensitive to the amount of class time you spend in sharing. If sharing is easy for you hold back in order to allow time for others. If sharing is more difficult for you, learn to speak up and share yourself.

There is a magnificent turning point in all that Spirit reveals which is unconditional love, mercy, and a call to rise up and step fully into the Light, beginning with acceptance for all that is, seeing the good in all that is, and placing trust, complete trust in the presence of the beloved one.

- John Morton

Week 1

Turning to God

This Week

This week we set our intention to become willing to turn to God. It is a big step! We commit to trusting that which we cannot see but is everywhere. We embrace the truth that we are noticed, valued and loved by a divine Presence that responds to us in every moment, with every thought. This week we consciously seek the Love that quietly awaits our attention.

We come to God by love and not by navigation.

- Saint Augustine

Is not prayer a study of truth, a sally of the soul into the unfound infinite? No man ever prayed heartily without learning something.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Open your hearts to the love God instills . . .
God loves you tenderly.*

- Mother Teresa

God's Will for you is perfect happiness.

- Course in Miracles

A Morning Prayer in a Little Church

From *This I Believe*

By Helen Hayes, As Featured in the 1950s Series,
Edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman

Once, years ago, I got into a dogfight. I was wheeling a baby carriage, my pet cocker spaniel trotting beside me, and without warning, three dogs – an Afghan, a St. Bernard, and a Dalmatian – pounced on the cocker and started tearing him to pieces. I shrieked for help. Two men in a car stopped, looked, and drove on.

When I saw this, I was so infuriated that I waded in and stopped the fight myself. My theatrical training never stood me in better stead. My shouts were so authoritative, my gestures so arresting, that I commanded the situation like a lion-tamer, and the dogs finally slunk away.

Looking back, I think I acted less in anger than from a realization that I was on my own, that if anybody was going to help me at that moment, it had to be myself.

Life seems to be a series of crises that have to be faced. In summoning strength to face them, though, I once fooled myself into an exaggerated regard for my own importance. I felt very independent. I was only distantly aware of other people. I worked hard and was “successful.” In the theater, I was brought up in the tradition of service. The audience pays its money and you are expected to give your best performance – both on and off the stage. So I served on committees, and made speeches, and backed causes. But somehow the *meaning* of those things escaped me.

When my daughter died of polio, everybody stretched out a hand to help me, but at first I couldn't seem to bear the touch of anything, even the love of friends; no support seemed strong enough.

While Mary was still sick, I used to go early in the morning to a little church near the hospital to pray. There the working people came quietly to worship. I had been careless with my religion. I had rather cut God out of my life, and I didn't have the nerve at the time to ask Him to make my daughter well – I only asked Him to help me understand, to let me come in and reach him, and I kept looking for a revelation, and nothing happened.

And then, much later, I discovered that it *had* happened, right there in the church. I could recall, vividly, one by one, the people I had seen there – the solemn laborers with tired looks, the old women with gnarled hands. Life had knocked them around, but for a brief

moment they were being refreshed by an ennobling experience. It seems that as they prayed their worn faces lighted up and they became the very vessels of God. Here was my revelation. Suddenly I realized I was one of them. In my need I had gained strength from the knowledge that they too had needs, and I felt an interdependence with them. I was learning the meaning of “Love thy neighbor ...”

Truths as old and simple as this began to light up for me like the faces of the men and women in the little church. When I read the Bible now, I take the teachings of men like Jesus and David and St. Paul as the helpful advice of trusted friends about how to live. They understand that life is full of complications, and often heavy blows, and they are showing me the wisest way through it. I must help myself, yes, but I am not such a self-contained unit that I can live aloof, unto myself. That was the meaning that had been missing before: the realization that I was a living part of God’s world of people.



My Thoughts

God is the Rock

From *A Return to Love*

By Marianne Williamson

There is no time, no place, no state where God is absent.

There have been times in my life – and they still happen today, though they’re more the exception now than the rule – when I have felt as though sadness would overwhelm me. Something didn’t turn out the way I wanted it to, or I was in conflict with someone, or I was afraid of what might or might not happen in the future. Life in those moments can be difficult to bear, and the mind begins an endless search for its escape from pain.

What I learned from *A Course in Miracles* is that the change we’re really looking for is inside our heads. Events are always in flux. One day people love you; the next day you’re their target. One day a situation is running smoothly; the next day chaos reigns. One day you feel like you’re an okay person; the next day you feel like you’re an utter failure. These changes in life are always going to happen; they’re part of the human experience. What we can change, however, is how we perceive them. And that shift in our perception is a miracle.

There’s a biblical story where Jesus says we can build our house on sand or we can build it on rock. Our house is our emotional stability. When it is built on sand, then the winds and rain can tear it down. One disappointing phone call and we crumble; one storm and the house falls down.

When our house is built on rock, then it is sturdy and strong and the storms can’t destroy it. We are not so vulnerable to life’s passing dramas. Our stability rests on something more enduring than the current weather, something permanent and strong. We’re depending on God.

I had never realized that depending on God meant depending on love. I had heard it said that God was love, but it had never kicked in for me exactly what that meant.

As I began to study *A Course in Miracles*, I discovered the following things:

God is the love within us.

Whether we “follow Him,” or think with love, is entirely up to us.

When we choose to love, or allow our minds to be one with God, then life is peaceful. When we turn away from love, the pain sets in.

And whether we love, or close our hearts to love, is a mental choice we make, every moment of every day.

 **My Thoughts**

Surrender

By Jalaluddin Rumi

Translated by Andrew Harvey

Surrender yourself,
and if you cannot be welcomed by the Friend,
know that you are rebelling inwardly like a thread
that doesn't want to go through the needle's eye!

The awakened heart is a lamp; protect it by the hem of your robe!
Hurry and get out of this wind, for the weather is bad.

And when you've left this storm, you will come to a fountain;
you'll find a Friend there who will always nourish your soul.

And with your soul always green, you'll grow into a tall tree
flowering always with sweet light-fruit,
whose growth is interior.

Home Study for Week 2

READING

- The Gathering*** Read:
 - Forward pp. ix-xi
 - Step 1 “I Release My Human Need” pp. 1-10
- Workbook**
 - Week 1 pp. 7-13 and Week 2 pp. 15-22

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation. Include Step 1: *I release my human need*, in your practice.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Instead adopt the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide*** Step 1, Days 1-7, pp. 94-107
- Workbook for Week 1:** If there was not enough time in class to read and respond in writing to “God is the Rock” by Marianne Williamson on workbook pp. 10-11, please complete it as part of your Home Study.
- Workbook for Week 2:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Surrendering a Problem” by Kathy Cordova on workbook pp. 16-17, “Faith-filled and Fear-free” by Iyanla Vanzant on workbook p. 18 and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 20.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations from all your writings in class.

*We have what we seek, it is there all the time,
and if we give it time, it will make itself known
to us.*

- Thomas Merton

Week 2

Human Needs

*The antidote to frustration is a calm faith, not
in your own cleverness, or in hard toil, but in
God's guidance.*

- Norman Vincent Peale

This Week

This week we recognize that our human needs serve an important purpose. They catch our attention, making us uncomfortable enough to remember to turn to God. Once we make a conscious decision to release our need to God, we are *experiencing* that Divine Presence, and nothing is more powerful, more love-filled and more life changing than that!

*Faith isn't the ability to believe long and far
into the misty future. It's simply taking God at
His Word and taking the next step.*

- Joni Erickson Tada

*Teach yourself freedom with the same zeal that
the world has taught you limits.*

- Alan Cohen

*You do not know the weight of this self you are
carrying until you put it down.*

- Zen Proverb

Surrendering a Problem

From *Let Go, Let Miracles Happen: The Art of Spiritual Surrender*

By Kathy Cordova

Trouble and perplexity drive us to prayer, and prayer driveth away trouble and perplexity.

- Phillip Melancthon

Surrendering a problem is simply giving our troubles to God/a Higher Power/the Universe. Even though it's often a surrender of last resort, for most people it's the easiest type of surrender; it's got the most obvious upside. It's the kind of surrender that most of us have experienced sometime in our lives, especially when we were desperate.

After we've already done everything we can think of to figure out a solution, then we usually feel okay about giving it to God. After all, if we're out of options or we've bottomed out and we just don't have the will to fight any longer, what have we got to lose if we give the whole mess to God?

People in twelve-step programs know the awesome power of this type of surrender. The third step is "to turn our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power." The eleventh step is to seek "through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power, praying only for knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us and the power to carry that out." Millions of people around the world have been released from their addictions by learning to Let Go and Let God.

The power in surrendering our problems to God comes from merely releasing the problem, not from asking for a specific solution. We need to just pray (or meditate, or whatever form of asking for help we choose), let go of the problem, continue to act, and listen for the answer – which may or may not be what we envision.

Martin Luther King Jr. gives a wonderful example of this in his book, *Strength to Love*. When Dr. King was leading the bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, they set up a carpool to help people get around. The carpool operated without problems for eleven months, but then, the mayor of Montgomery had had enough. He instructed the city's leading department to file proceedings making the carpool – or any other mode of transportation in support of the boycott – illegal. A hearing was set to decide the matter.

Dr. King writes how he dreaded telling supporters the news that the carpools would probably be closed down. This meant that they had only two choices: either they would all have to walk to work, or take the buses again and admit that the boycott had failed.

“When the evening (before the hearing) came,” writes Dr. King, “I mustered sufficient courage to tell them the truth. I tried, however, to conclude on a note of hope. ‘We have moved all of these months,’ I said, ‘in the daring faith that God is with us in our struggle. The many experiences of days gone by have vindicated that faith in a marvelous way. Tonight we must believe that *a way will be made out of no way.*’”

The next day, the hearing did not go well, and it looked like Dr. King and his supporters would lose, and the carpool would be outlawed. All seemed hopeless. Then, an amazing thing happened. At a brief recess, there was a commotion in the courtroom, and a reporter handed Dr. King the news, “The United States Supreme Court today unanimously ruled bus segregation unconstitutional in Montgomery, Alabama.” Someone shouted from the back of the courtroom, “God Almighty has spoken from Washington!”

It’s a good thing that Dr. King didn’t pray to keep the carpool. God had a much better way of solving his problem.

 **My Thoughts**

Faith-filled and Fear-free

From *Until Today!*

By Iyanla Vanzant

I am faith-filled and fear-free because I know what to do
without doing anything at all!

Here's a news flash that will make your day. You don't have to *do* anything to get your good in life! You must, however, be open to receive it. For some of us *receiving* is much more difficult than *doing*, because we think we know what is required to earn our good. Earning puts you in control! Your *doing* is motivated by the belief that *the more you are able to do*, the more you will *get*. Need we mention the countless numbers out there who are *doing* all that they can and still do not get what they need, deserve or desire? Remember those who *do* very little and get more than they could ever need? The difference between those who do and those who receive is *willingness*. You must be willing to receive.

Receiving means trusting that God is aware of what you need, desire and deserve. Deserving, according to God's formula *is a function of being!* Being open! Being clear! Being grateful! Being focused! Being committed! Being faithful, and being willing to receive. *Being* is a state of consciousness developed through unwavering faith and trust. You trust that you will always have what you need, and that is the foundation of your faith. When you are open to receive what God is able to do for you, you stop doing. You learn how to "*Be still and know!*" You know that your good is on the way, according to God's nature and willingness to give. You also put your faith in the fact that God is always on time.

Until today, you may have embraced the doing/getting model of living. Just for today, allow people to compliment you. Allow someone to do something for you without feeling obligated to do anything in return. Give yourself permission to ask God for everything you desire, faithfully believing that once you ask, you are in a *divinely timed receiving line*.

*Today I am devoted to opening myself to receive the
Grace and goodness of God!*

 **My Thoughts**

Taking the Step

Step 1: *I release my human need.*

Sometimes it is good to be specific about the need you are releasing. For instance, *I release my human need for employment* or *I release my human need to be healed*. This surrender may be difficult, but I encourage you to do it. Remember, humanity has brought needs to God for thousands of years with little success. It is time to try something new.

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

In All Things

From *Love Poems from God*

By Saint Francis of Assisi,
Compiled by Daniel Ladinsky

It was easy to love God in all that
was beautiful.

The lessons of deeper knowledge, though,
instructed me
to embrace God in all
things.

Home Study for Week 3

READING

- The Gathering*** Step 2 “I Accept My Human Condition So I Can Express My Spiritual Nature” pp. 11-22
- Workbook**
 - Week 3 pp. 23-32.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation. Include Step 2: *I accept my human condition so I can express my spiritual nature*, in your practice.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Actively adopt the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide*** Step 2, Days 8-13, pp. 108-119
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Awakening from the Trance” by Tara Brach on workbook pp. 24-25 , “Grief as a Blessing” by Wayne Dyer on workbook pp. 26-27 , “Between the Tiger and the Dragon” by Mark Nepo on workbook pp. 28-29 , and “Taking the Step” on workbook p.30.
 - Feel free to use the “Notes” paper as journal pages if more room is needed in your workbook.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

Week 3

Human Condition

This Week

This week we become willing to accept life as it is, without resistance. As spiritual beings having a human experience, every un-resisted thought, feeling and situation becomes an avenue for expression of our spiritual nature. God accepts us just as we are; this week we practice loving acceptance of ourselves and others the same way.

See if you can catch yourself complaining in either speech or thought, about a situation you find yourself in, what other people do or say, your surroundings, your life situation, even the weather. To complain is always nonacceptance of what is. It invariably carries an unconscious negative charge. When you complain, you make yourself a victim. Leave the situation or accept it. All else is madness.

- Eckhart Tolle

Ego could be defined as whatever covers up basic goodness. From an experiential point of view, what is ego covering up? It's covering up our experience of just being here, just fully being where we are, so that we can relate with the immediacy of our experience.

- Pema Chodron

Whatever you are doing, love yourself for doing it. Whatever you are feeling, love yourself for feeling it.

- Thaddeus Golas

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life believing that it is stupid.

- Albert Einstein

Awakening from the Trance

From *Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha*

By Tara Brach

*Last night, as I was sleeping,
I dreamt – marvelous error! –
that I had a beehive
here inside my heart.
And the golden bees
were making white combs
and sweet honey
from my old failures.*

- Antonio Machado, translated by Robert Bly

The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.

- Carl Rogers

Mohini was a regal white tiger who lived for many years at the Washington, D. C. National Zoo. For most of those years her home was in the old lion house – a typical twelve-by-twelve foot cage with iron bars and a cement floor. Mohini spent her days pacing restlessly back and forth in her cramped quarters. Eventually, biologists and staff worked together to create a natural habitat for her. Covering several acres, it had hills, trees, a pond and a variety of vegetation. With excitement and anticipation they released Mohini into her new and expansive environment. But it was too late. The tiger immediately sought refuge in a corner of the compound, where she lived for the remainder of her life. Mohini paced and paced in that corner until an area twelve by twelve feet was worn bare of grass.

Perhaps the biggest tragedy in our lives is that freedom is possible, yet we can pass our years trapped in the same old patterns. Entangled in the trance of unworthiness, we grow accustomed to caging ourselves in with self-judgment and anxiety, with restlessness and dissatisfaction. Like Mohini, we grow incapable of accessing the freedom and peace that are our birthright. We may want to love other people without holding back, to feel authentic, to breathe in the beauty around us, to dance and sing. Yet each day we listen to inner voices that keep our life small. Even if we were to win millions of dollars in the lottery or marry the perfect person, as long as we feel not good enough, we won't be able to enjoy the possibilities before us. Unlike Mohini, however, we can learn to recognize when we are

keeping ourselves trapped by our own beliefs and fears. We can see how we are wasting our precious lives.

The way out of our cage begins with *accepting absolutely everything* about ourselves and our lives, by embracing with wakefulness and care our moment-to-moment experience. By accepting absolutely everything, what I mean is that we are aware of what is happening within our body and mind in any given moment, without trying to control or judge or pull away. I do not mean that we are putting up with harmful behavior – our own or another’s. *This is an inner process of accepting our actual, present-moment experience.* It means feeling sorrow and pain without resisting. It means feeling desire or dislike for someone or something without judging ourselves for the feeling or being driven to act on it.

Clearly recognizing what is happening inside us, and regarding what we see with an open, kind and loving heart, is what I call Radical Acceptance. If we are holding back from any part of our experience, if our heart shuts out any part of who we are and what we feel, we are fueling the fears and feelings of separation that sustain the trance of unworthiness. Radical Acceptance directly dismantles the very foundations of this trance.



My Thoughts

Grief As A Blessing

From *Wisdom of the Ages*

By Wayne Dyer

I saw grief drinking a cup of sorrow and called out, “It tastes sweet, does it not?”
“You’ve caught me,” grief answered, “and you’ve ruined my business,
how can I sell sorrow when you know it’s a blessing?”

- Jalaluddin Rumi
(1207-1273)

Persian mystical poet and Sufi saint Jalaluddin Rumi writes about the pure love we can achieve, beyond ego, in the soul’s divine longing and ecstasy of union with God...

For most of us, grieving is how we react to a loss or a tragic event, and it seems to be a natural way of reacting to the experience of pain in our lives. But if we knew the wisdom of Rumi’s words, we might be able to shift right in the middle of this grieving process and turn our sorrow into something sweet-tasting.

One of the great teachings of my life came from my exploration of the *Kabbalah*, a mystical text of Judaism that goes back many centuries, as do Rumi’s teachings. The simple lesson for me was “The falls of our life provide us with the energy to propel ourselves to a higher level.” I read and reread this ancient wisdom. As I allowed it to soothe the sharp anguish of life’s painful moments, I began to incorporate this wisdom during times of sadness and grief. I discovered the truth of this idea that every fall provides us the opportunity to generate the necessary energy to move to higher consciousness. Every sinking into despair has within it an energy to move us higher.

How many times in your life have dark times of despair, such as some kind of an accident, an illness, a financial disaster, a breakup in a relationship, a fire or flood, a loss of property, or a death, propelled you into the stages of anguish, anger, denial, and then grief? Like most of us, you sink into sorrow and feel the need to tell everyone about your misfortune. Ultimately, after a long period of time, you begin to rise above it and reach the state of acceptance.

Now suppose you knew that what had taken place in your life which you termed a loss or a fall was exactly what was supposed to happen? Suppose you knew instantly that you *had* to experience the event that triggered your grief and sorrow? Then suppose you could choose to act in accordance with this new awareness? Undoubtedly this “supposing” conflicts with all you have been taught about how you’re supposed to react to catastrophe and death. I am not suggesting you *not* respect your genuine feelings. I am suggesting that the truth of

Rumi's observations offer you another way of responding to these kinds of circumstances. I am also encouraging you to open to the gift or sweetness that is *also* in the sorrow.

This is an intelligent system that we are all an inseparable part of, and there are no accidents. There is something to learn right here, right now in the middle of sorrow. You can take this lesson and taste the sweet certainty in the mystery. You do not have to pretend to like the tragedy, only to vow to use it to generate the energy to move to a higher place in your life. You could call out to your sorrow just as Rumi did over eight hundred years ago and say to yourself, "It tastes sweet, does it not?" That is, there is something to learn right here, right now in the middle of this sweet sorrow, and I am going to drink it in this manner, and ruin the business of the grief peddlers.

In what we refer to as primitive societies death is an occasion for celebration. There is a basic knowing, even in times of grief and mourning, that does not question the divine timing of each person's arrival here on earth, or the divine timing of one's departure either. It is all in order! Perhaps the comfort is the sweetness of seeing that it is all part of the perfection of our universe, which has an invisible organizing intelligence flowing through every cell of creation, including the many painful experiences over a lifetime – then celebrating it all.



My Thoughts

Between the Tiger and the Dragon

From *Finding Inner Courage*

By Mark Nepo

As coal under great pressure turns into a diamond, our spirit under great pressure has the chance to turn into the jewel that it is. This has always been known.

There is an old Sufi story that has a man leaving one life for another, and far enough into the desert that he has no sense of where he has been or where he is going, he senses a wild tiger chasing him. He has nowhere to go. Frantically, he runs and runs and comes upon a well. As the tiger approaches, he has no choice but to jump into the dark well. As he falls, he can see the tiger growling above him. As he falls, he can suddenly see that a dragon is hissing and waiting for him at the bottom of the well. Just then, he sees a branch growing out of a stone in the well. He grabs it. Amazingly, it holds his weight. As he strains to hold on, with the tiger above and the dragon below, a single ray of light falls on the one leaf on the one branch that holds his life. And on that leaf, in the light, is a single drop of honey. With the hissing of the dragon and the growling of the tiger in his ears, the man, en route to a new life, savors the single drop of honey while the tiger and the dragon wait.

The power of this ancient story is that it affirms that spirit and crisis work with each other in the world, and that the Divine Source is at the heart of every moment, even in the midst of danger. Mysteriously, the way that pressure makes the diamond hidden in a piece of coal visible, the press of the tiger and the dragon makes the essence in the moment visible. It makes the essence of who we are visible. Again and again, we are shown, though it is hard to accept, that life is a jewel waiting in each moment to be broken open. Whatever the tiger, whatever the dragon, the drop of lighted honey, once seen and tasted, can bless us. And licking that drop of lighted honey is what life is all about. It may not save us from suffering or even death, but it will let the spirit become the jewel that it is. It will let us experience radiance.

For me, one drastic meeting of the tiger and the dragon was during my cancer experience, when I was caught between the tiger of cancer and the dragon of chemo. I was afraid of cancer chasing me and terrified to continue with the treatment. There, like the Sufi wanderer, I was forced to jump into the dark well, and the single branch appeared. Briefly, I could feel the safety of that simple, eternal moment holding me up. While everything was coming apart, this moment was not the suffering in pursuit of me nor the fear of where the treatment might lead. Ever so briefly, I held onto the branch, and yes, it was lighted from somewhere beyond me – that is, its light was not dependent on me.

It was then that I saw clearly. As I gambled on the future, I knew that the lighted moment with all its promise was intact. It was not up for grabs. I knew that this lighted branch of a moment, for which I'd lived all others, for which I'd withstood the breakage of all I know repeatedly, this moment was germ-free and not on trial. And so I summoned all my strength to say to my doctors, "You are welcome here by permission only and the alarm you cast will only snag my want for tomorrow, only hook what I do not have." I said with unexpected calm, "I know you mean to help, and I cannot deny a bridge I have to cross. But where I live cannot be staged or stained or seen as gross evidence. Where I live, where I've arrived is impervious to histology. It is the one site in the city that will not burn. And if you guide me to tomorrow, I'll show you, as you shake your head, how I still glow in the unbreachable clearing that I carry with me like a honeyed leaf lighted by the sun."

Blessed to still be here, I am only concerned with carrying that lighted moment everywhere I go, and when I lose it or drop it, my only concern is to find it between the tiger and the dragon, no matter what form they take today. And a strange truth has risen from all this: that when we are one with our gift, in that moment we are protected, not from suffering, but from the terror of life without honey or light. Thus, as the writer Lewis Hyde says, "It is your task to set free your gift." Not just to move goodness further into the world, but as a way to find the branch that holds the honey in the well between the tiger and the dragon.

This requires courage. It requires standing by one's core in the face of danger and the press of life. Specifically, this requires the courage to look through our fear. For while running from a tiger, while falling down a well, ever closer to the dragon at the bottom, our fear, understandably, blinds our ability to see. Yet the branch is always there, often unnoticed within the storm of our fear. There's no blame in this. It's just a fact of emotional physics. This is why all the meditative practices prepare us to find the still point in the storm. For seeing from there is our way to the next moment.



My Thoughts

Taking the Step

Step 2: *I accept my human condition so that I can express my spiritual nature.*

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

The Fullness of Suffering

By Hafiz

Don't surrender your loneliness
so quickly.

Let it cut more deep.

Let it ferment and season you
as few human
or even divine ingredients can.

Something missing in my heart tonight
has made my eyes so soft,
my voice so tender,

my need of God
absolutely clear.

Home Study for Week 4

READING

- The Gathering*** Step 3 “I Willingly Release Any Part of My Human Self That Is a Barrier to God” pp. 23-30
- Workbook**
 - Week 4 pp. 33-42.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation. Include Step 3: *I willingly release any part of my human self that is a barrier to God*, in your practice.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Continue to know the truth of the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide*** Step 3, Days 14-18, pp. 120-129
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Open Your Present” by Melody Beattie on workbook pp. 34-36 , “Breaking Patterns” by Mark Nepo on workbook pp. 38-39 and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 40.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

The first step toward finding God, Who is Truth, is to discover the truth about myself: and if I have been in error, this first step to truth is the discovery of my error.

- Thomas Merton

Week 4 Release

This Week

This week we ask, “What am I willing to release that has become a barrier to God? What old thoughts, beliefs, and patterns of behavior need to go? God shines its light through me, as me, and yet sometimes I don’t feel the connection. What am I willing to release so that I can fully experience my divine connection with who I truly am?” This week is about our willingness to shine!

Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice.

- William Jennings Bryan

Not only do you have the right to do whatever you want, you have the right to change your mind.

- Oprah Winfrey

By bringing about a change in our outlook toward things and events, all phenomena can become sources of happiness.

- Dalai Lama

Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

- Albert Einstein

Open Your Present

From *Choices*

By Melody Beattie

“When you figure out the secret to absolute control in every situation while maintaining mental wholeness, I would love to know,” a woman said to me one day. That’s what this book is about: how to take control of our lives without going subtly or profoundly insane.

“My friend is twenty-four; engaged to be married. Her boyfriend went skiing this weekend and was killed. Why did he have to die? Why does she have to go through this?”

“I dated a man for three months. Fell in love for the first time in years. Then he dumped me. It was the first time I’d opened my heart since my divorce. Why did that happen to me?”

Why did my husband cheat on me and ruin our marriage? Why is my new car a lemon? Why did such a saintly woman have to spend the last seven years of her life paralyzed and confined to bed? Why has my child turned on me? Why won’t my last boyfriend let go of me? Why can’t I let go – really let go – of him? Why are my parents insane?

It’s easy to suggest *Get a grip, don’t be a victim. There’s a reason things happen* when the problem happens to someone else. Harder when we’re the one feeling afraid, guilty, angry, hurt, bewildered, staring our loss and emotions in the face.

What are the situations that cause us to feel like we’re out of control? When we try to do something we can’t. When things don’t go as we hoped or planned.

Whenever we can’t see the game of cause and effect at play we feel confused, frustrated, and vulnerable to forces we don’t comprehend. *Is it random chaos?* we wonder. *Or is there really some sort of Plan?* Or, like C. S. Lewis in *A Grief Observed*, we may believe clearly in God and the Plan. “The conclusion I dread is not ‘So there’s no God after all.’” Lewis wrote, “but ‘So this is what God’s really like.’”

Is everything predetermined, or do we actually have free will? Both ideas are true. We can’t choose what’s on television, but we can choose what channel to watch or whether to watch television at all. This process of discerning what we can choose – what we do have control over – and what we can’t is the heart of mental health and the heart of the spiritual path.

A lot of things will happen to us over which we have no control. That includes other people, their use of free will (or not), and acts of God and life. We do have control over something, and that is our own behavior and our power of choice. We can’t control what happens to us, but yes, we can choose.

Do our choices really matter? Do we really have any, other than what we're going to eat for breakfast and lunch? What about when things happen that we can't control? The person we love most goes away – either he or she dies, leaves, or we break up with him or her to save our own lives. Our best friend lies to us, betrays us. Or a parent or best friend gets sick.

What choices do we have now?

Or we find ourselves alone, raising two young children with no child support and a low-paying job. Or we're forty-eight years old and still living alone without a shred of hope left about meeting Mr. or Ms. Right. Maybe our business goes broke and our hopes crumble. Or that project we've put our whole life into just won't materialize. We try and try but can't get our dream off the ground.

We might have choices, but we can't see what they are.

A friend of my daughter's sat in my kitchen with me one day about three months after my son, Shane, died. I was trying to keep moving. It was tough. My daily goal was just to get out of bed. She touched my shoulder, looked into my eyes.

We had to write an essay about courage in English class today," she said. "So I wrote about you."

Her words touched my heart; they also frustrated me.

I wasn't brave. Life hadn't given me a choice.

Or maybe I just didn't like the options I had: *keep going or quit*.

Sometimes we feel that we don't have any choice – at least none that we can see yet. Or we think we have to act the way we feel. Sometimes our only options are choices we don't like – neither one is preferred, but one is unacceptable – a situation known as a *hard call*. Other times we see so many options, indecision paralyzes our mind.

We don't choose – which is making a choice.

Or we'd rather have someone else choose for us; then we don't have to take responsibility for the results. Well, we do – we have to take responsibility for the choices we've allowed someone to make on our behalf.

Not all choices are black and white. Some are gray. Emotions and extenuating circumstances may be involved. And our challenges – the ones requiring hard or tough calls – usually happen at the place we would least prefer that they occurred. Our weakest link. Some of the choices we label mistakes turn out to be the best things we could have done. Other times our noblest gestures backfire, hurting others and racking up more consequences for them and us.

Gaining control of our lives takes awareness and focused intention, like climbing a flight of steep steps. How much power do we have? Less than many of us hoped for, but more than we think. By using our free will, we can take part in shaping our lives no matter what life throws our way.

Consciously or not, we've been doing it all along.

It's not what recovering alcoholics call an *easier softer road* or *self-will run riot*, this business of focusing our will and climbing up steep steps. Using our free will to make enlightened choices often means making the truly hard calls such as letting go of cherished ideas, trusting God, and having faith even when doing so hurts and flies in the face of what we can see with our eyes. Other times it means doing some work ourselves. Usually it's a combination of both.

The great irony of control is this: usually when we're out of control, we don't see it. We just see that others are spinning around. In an odd way, when we're in control of ourselves, even the bizarre seems to be part of a plan.

Most of us have had moments when everything falls into place. We've been willing to let go, trust, surrender – even though we don't know what the outcome will be. Then something magical and wonderful happens, confirming our faith. We feel like we've discovered fire, and like we've discovered it for the first time.

Gee, I really can trust God, we think. And we think that not because we get what we want, because as most of us know that can be an illusion. We think that because for that moment we feel the order, the aliveness, the connectedness. The Reason behind things happening shows its face ...


Sometimes life feels like a mushy swamp of horrific incidents that we're wandering through wearing concrete boots. Some of us have learned coping devices along the way. We make choices that keep us numb, help us deal with extraordinarily painful situations, create a lot of drama – but don't really get us what we want and where we want to go in our lives.

Sometimes we get confused. Our emotions block our ability to clearly think things through. Just a small wake-up call is all that's often needed to remind us how powerful our choices are and what a difference the small choices we make each day can make in the course and the quality of our lives.

Wake up. The alarm clock just went off. Whether we can use it or not, we've been given a gift. We can duck it and dodge it, blame our behaviors on our parents or on God's will. But it sets us apart from angels, this ability we've been given to choose.

It's like having a wonderful birthday present wrapped, sitting in the corner of the room, then forgetting it's there. Go ahead. Unwrap it. Take it out and use it.

The gift of free will is for you.

 **My Thoughts**

Breaking Patterns

From *Finding Inner Courage*

By Mark Nepo

We go into change rehearsing the history that brought us to this point.

- Parker Palmer

Often we have to rehearse the truth until we find the courage to live in it. In this, repetition is not failure, but the heart's way to learn how to be in the world. Yet like everything else of significance, this process has an attractive yet false counterpart waiting nearby to distract us. We can describe the repeating that is unnecessary as the reliving of scripts, or *unconscious repeating*, and the repeating that is necessary as the rehearsing of truth, or *conscious repeating*. And we could say that the near enemy of rehearsing the truth is being trapped in reliving scripts. Though the difference between these is hard to keep in view – especially when in the throes of either.

Nevertheless, in the same way an actress rehearses the situations she is given until her character is one with the character she is playing, the drama of life demands that we put in the effort to consciously work with what we're given until we practice our way into honest living. Without such effort, we lapse into unconscious entanglements, like a dog that incessantly tangles itself in its leash. And as such a dog will push its ball out of reach and whine and pout, we can nudge the truth of who we are beyond the reach of our self-created limitations and whine and pout and grow sad. In this way, when we repeat our reactions to living and not our attempts to live, we find ourselves trapped...

When feeling the press of the patterns that govern our lives these distinctions are muddy. Often, it is a slow and unclear process to move from unconscious repeating to conscious rehearsing. But this slow clarifying is part of self-transformation. The process is powerfully distilled by Portia Nelson in her poem, "Autobiography in Five Short Chapters".

*I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.*

*I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.*

*I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.*

*I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it's a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.*

*I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.*

I walk down another street.

So breaking patterns involves repeating. There is no getting around it, though we are always pressed to discern whether we are reliving what doesn't work or peeling away of what is false.



My Thoughts

Taking the Step

Step 3: *I willingly release any part of my human self that is a barrier to God.*

It is suggested that you pause and listen to Spirit speaking to you, as if it were asking, “What are you willing to release? What do you need to sacrifice, so you can move forward in your spiritual journey? What burden do you need to let go of before you can soar?” Take the step and listen as answers come from within you, for there is a part of you that knows the answers to the questions above.

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

The Silk Worm

From *Love Poems from God*

By Rumi, Compiled by Daniel Ladinsky

I stood before a silk worm one day.
And that night my heart said to me,

“I can do things like that, I can spin skies,
I can be woven into love that can bring warmth to people;
I can be soft against a crying face,
I can be wings that lift, and I can travel on my thousand feet
throughout the earth,
my sacks filled with the sacred.”

And I replied to my heart,

“Dear, can you really do all those things?”

And it just nodded “Yes”
in silence.

So we began and will never
cease.

Home Study for Week 5

READING

- The Gathering*** Step 4 “I Willingly Forgive Others” pp. 31-38
- Workbook**
 - Week 5 pp. 43-54.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation. Include Step 4: *I willingly forgive others*, in your practice.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Continue to honor the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide*** Step 4, Days 19-21, pp. 130-135
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “What is Forgiveness?” by Gerald Jampolsky on workbook pp. 44-45, “Reconciliation” by Linda Biehl on workbook pp. 46-48, “Boundless Kindness” by Rick Hanson on workbook pp. 49-51 and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 52.
- The Gathering*** Begin the three-step process of releasing the love within you on pp. 35-37.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

FINAL THOUGHT PAPER

- Begin thinking about your Final Thought Paper, to be presented in the final class. See workbook p. 5.

If her past were your past, her pain your pain, her level of consciousness your level of consciousness, you would think and act exactly as she does. With this realization comes forgiveness, compassion and peace.

- Eckhart Tolle

Week 5

Forgiveness of Others

This Week

This week we challenge ourselves to forgive those who we believe have hurt us. We say “Enough!” to the painful memories and resentments that have held us hostage. In our willingness to forgive, we let go of the barrier that has kept us from experiencing the divine love that is always available to us. It is time to begin to love ourselves enough to let go of our pain.

Here is a mental treatment guaranteed to cure every ill that flesh is heir to: sit for half an hour every night and mentally forgive everyone against whom you have any ill will or antipathy.

- Charles Fillmore

True forgiveness is saying with gratitude: Thank you for giving me that experience so that I could learn from it.

- Michael Beckwith

Nonviolence does not mean non-action. Nonviolence means we act with love and compassion.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

You will know that forgiveness has begun when you recall those who hurt you and feel the power to wish them well.

- Lewis B. Smedes

What Is Forgiveness?

From *Forgiveness: The Greatest Healer of All*

By Gerald Jampolsky

*We will truly have more peaceful relationships
when we stop telling others how to live and
start practicing love and forgiveness.*

From the perspective of Love and Spirit, forgiveness is the willingness to let go of the hurtful past. It is the decision to no longer suffer, to heal your heart and soul. It is the choice to no longer find value in hatred or anger. And it is letting go of the desire to hurt others or ourselves because of something that is already in the past. It is the willingness to open our eyes to the light in other people rather than to judge or condemn them.

To forgive is to feel the compassion, gentleness, tenderness, and caring that is always within our hearts, no matter how the world may seem at the moment. Forgiveness is the way to a place of inner peace and happiness, the way to our soul. That place of peace is always available to us, always ready to welcome us in. If, for the moment, we don't see the welcome sign, it is because it is hidden by our own attachment to anger.

Somehow, there is a part of us that believes we can get the peace of mind we seek by holding on to hatred, or anger, or pain. There's a part which says that we must protect ourselves and that we can achieve happiness and peace of mind by being attached to hatred and seeking revenge. There's a part of us that says we must withdraw and withhold our love and our joy because we have been hurt in the past.

We can look upon forgiveness as a journey across an imaginary bridge from a world where we are always recycling our anger to a place of peace. That journey takes us into our own spiritual essence and the heart of God. It takes us into a new world of expanding, unconditional love.

Through forgiveness, we receive all that our hearts could ever want. We are released from our fear, anger, and pain to experience oneness with each other and our spiritual Source.

Forgiveness is the way out of darkness and into the light. It is our function here on earth, allowing us to recognize ourselves as the light of the world. It allows us to escape the shadow of the past, whether that shadow is our own or another person's.

Forgiveness can free us from the imprisonment of fear and anger that we have imposed on our minds. It releases us from our need and hope to change the past. When we forgive, our wounds of past grievances are cleansed and healed. Suddenly we experience the reality of

God's love. In that reality, there is only love, nothing else. In that reality, there is never anything to forgive.

In *A Course in Miracles*, there is a beautiful passage about forgiveness. I quote it here because it describes the benefits that can be ours through forgiveness:

Forgiveness offers everything that I want.

What could you want that forgiveness cannot give? Do you want peace? Forgiveness offers it. Do you want happiness, a quiet mind, a certainty of purpose, and a sense of worth and beauty that transcends the world? Do you want care and safety, and the warmth of pure protection always? Do you want a quietness that cannot be disturbed, a gentleness that never can be hurt, a deep abiding comfort, and a rest so perfect it can never be upset?

All this forgiveness offers you, and more. It sparkles in your eyes as you awake, and gives you joy with which to meet the day. It soothes your forehead while you sleep, and rests upon your eyelids so you see no dreams of fear and evil, malice and attack. And when you wake again, it offers you another day of happiness and peace. All this forgiveness offers you, and more.



My Thoughts

Reconciliation

From *Epiphany*

By Linda Biehl, Compiled by Elise Ballard

*Forgiveness is the first step toward true peace and healing.
But it's with reconciliation – actively restoring peace and
harmony – that you can make the biggest difference.*

- Linda Biehl

Linda Biehl is the co-founder and director of the Amy Biehl Foundation in the United States and the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust in South Africa, a nonprofit organization promoting justice, peace, reconciliation, and equal rights for education, employment, and health. Linda's work is grounded in the life and death of her daughter Amy, a dynamic twenty-six-year-old Stanford graduate and esteemed human rights activist who in 1993 was awarded a Fulbright fellowship to study the role of women and gender rights during South Africa's transition from the apartheid regime to a multiracial democracy. Just days before she was due home, Amy was killed in an act of political violence by a group of young black South Africans who were fighting to end apartheid and saw all whites as their oppressors. Four young men were convicted of Amy's death, and in 1994 they were sentenced to eighteen years in prison.

In 1997 the four men applied for amnesty to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), set up by then President Nelson Mandela, who appointed Desmond Tutu to be chairman to help their country heal after the violence and human rights abuses under apartheid. Linda and her late husband, Peter, were strongly motivated by Amy's belief in the TRC to achieve restorative justice rather than retributive justice for those who confessed to politically motivated crimes; thus they did not oppose the men's application for amnesty. They testified at the amnesty hearing of their daughter's killers and offered their support, inviting the young men to join them in continuing Amy's work. Linda embraced restorative justice by building a relationship with two of the youths responsible for the death of her daughter. Today those two young men have become tremendous social activists in their community, working for the Amy Biehl Foundation Trust with Linda and even speaking alongside Linda at public events all over the world...

The Interview

I read about Linda Biehl in an interview with Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the July 2007 issue of *Vanity Fair*. In the interview, Tutu discusses the African idea of *ubuntu*, which he calls "The essence of being human ... You can't be human in isolation. You are human only in relationships. We are interconnected." He goes on to say, "The greatest good in the

concept of *ubuntu* is communal harmony. Anger, revenge are subversive of this great good.” As an example, he tells the story of Amy Biehl and her parents and what they have done with the Amy Biehl Foundation. Tutu related how the Biehls learned who had killed their daughter from South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and in response, not only did the Biehls support the TRC’s process and the decision of amnesty for the young men, but they invited the men to work with them on behalf of their foundation.

I was absolutely stunned by this story of true forgiveness and reconciliation. It compelled me to ask myself: if we could all follow the Biehl’s example, if we could all actually forgive like they have, what kind of world would this be?

Linda’s Epiphany

My epiphany is more like an accumulation of knowledge. Life is always a learning process – it’s about paying attention, gaining knowledge, and then utilizing it to the best of your ability. It’s a never-ending quest to constantly learn and grow. I was taught to make decisions and come to my own conclusions and ideas, so that’s what I’ve done my entire life and that’s what I’ve tried to teach my children.

From the moment that Peter, my husband, and I heard about Amy’s death, we thought, “How do we honor Amy?” She was involved and cared deeply about peace and freedom in South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission concept was negotiated prior to the elections in South Africa after apartheid was abolished and was created by an act of Parliament. We were sent the legislation by the Minister of Justice under Mandela, Dullah Omar, whom Amy worked with when they were both at the University of the Western Cape before the elections. Dullah faxed us the legislation right after it was passed, so we thought about that process for several years before the guys applied for amnesty. Archbishop Tutu helped us determine how to participate. We spoke on the phone after the July 1997 date was set for the hearing, and we confirmed that we would come to the hearing and support the process rather than oppose it by bringing lawyers, et cetera. Tutu’s advice was simple: “Come, talk about Amy and speak from your heart,” which we did, and in the end we decided to honor Amy by carrying on her work in South Africa.

After the trial ended, we started spending time there, supporting the South African process, and advancing peace in the region. People would ask me, “How can you take your family over there? How can you do that?” But for us it was never a question. We thought, “How can we *not* do that?” We reflected on what Amy was about, what she would want, and we worked from there.

We didn’t start out with the idea of the foundation. We were eventually asked by South Africans to start it. And it made sense to us. It was the logical culmination, which we came to step by step. The Amy Biehl Foundation – whose aim is reconciliation, violence prevention, and alleviating social and economic despair – came out of an accumulation of experience and, really, intellectual curiosity.

One of the greatest realizations for me has come from dealing with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Forgiveness is extremely important, of course, and is the first

step toward true peace and healing. But it's with *reconciliation* – actively restoring peace and harmony – that I think you can make the biggest difference. I've realized that what is needed is deeper and more involved than just forgiveness: reconciliation and negotiation are necessary. We need to focus on learning from our mistakes, and we need to work on trust and respect and listening. Nelson Mandela is a great example of this. He is one of our greatest world leaders because he realized that it wouldn't serve his people or country to stay angry or demand revenge. He personifies forgiveness, reconciliation, and negotiation – and is, at the same time, a very strong leader and man.

It's been really gratifying for me to speak about reconciliation and work with kids and people like Nelson Mandela. I'd like to leave something behind to help the world move forward rather than backward. I like this project you're doing because it's about allowing people to tell their stories. We learn from each other this way. We're never really going to have all the answers ... and maybe that's what this is all about anyway. Maybe we're always on this journey of learning and growing and striving to understand each other and the world around us. I think that's the exciting thing about being human. You'll find traits that are similar and traits that are the novelties that don't fit anywhere. If we can just work together and strive for our best in behavior and thinking, instead of settling for our lowest common denominator, there's hope that things will get better.



My Thoughts

Boundless Kindness

From *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love & Wisdom*

By Rick Hanson, PH.D with Richard Mendius, MD

[Science is now revealing how the flow of thoughts actually sculpts the brain. By combining breakthroughs in neuroscience with insights from thousands of years of contemplative practice, you, too, can use your mind to shape your brain for greater happiness, love, and wisdom.]

- Rick Hanson

*All joy in this world comes from wanting others
to be happy, and all suffering in this world comes
from wanting only oneself to be happy.*

- Shantideva

If compassion is the wish that beings not suffer, kindness is the wish that they be happy. Compassion responds primarily to suffering, but kindness comes into play all of the time, even when others are doing fine. Kindness is expressed mainly in small, everyday ways, such as leaving a big tip, reading one more story to a child even though you're tired, or waving another driver to move ahead of you in traffic.

Kindness has a loving quality, thus the term *loving-kindness*. Loving-kindness ranges from the casual helpfulness of strangers to the profound love one has for a child or mate. The words "kind" and "kin," share the same root; kindness brings people into the circle of "us" and feeds the wolf of love.

Kindness depends on prefrontal intentions and principles, limbic-based emotions and rewards, neurochemicals such as oxytocin and endorphins, and brain stem arousal. These factors offer you a variety of ways to nurture your kindness, which we'll explore in this chapter.

Wishing Others Well

I often work with children and have spent a lot of time in schools. I really like these guidelines I once saw posted in a kindergarten: *Be nice. Share your toys.* These are excellent intentions to be kind – and you don't need much more than them to steer your life!

Every morning, establish the intention to be kind and loving that day. Imagine the good feelings that will come from treating people with kindness; take in these feelings as rewards that will naturally draw your mind and brain toward kindness. The results could ripple far and wide.

One way to focus and express kind intentions is through these traditional wishes, which you can think, write down, or even sing:

May you be safe.

May you be healthy.

May you be happy.

May you live with ease.

You can modify these if you like, using whatever words evoke strong feelings of kindness and love in you. For example:

May you be safe from inner and outer harm.

May your body be strong and vital.

May you truly be at peace.

May you and everyone prosper.

May you be safe, healthy, happy, and at ease.

You can also be very specific:

May you get that job you want.

Susan, may your mother treat you well.

May you get a hit at Little League today, Carlo.

May I be at peace with my daughter.

Loving-kindness practice is like compassion practice in several ways. It involves both wishes and feelings; in your brain, loving-kindness mobilizes prefrontal language and intention networks as well as limbic emotion and reward networks. It calls on equanimity to keep the heart open, especially in the face of great pain or provocation. Kindness is for everyone –

“omitting none,” in the traditional phrase – with all beings held as “us” in your heart. There are five types of people you can offer kindness to: benefactors, friends, neutral people, difficult people, and yourself. When you are kind to someone else, you also benefit yourself; it feels good to be kind, and it encourages others to treat you well in turn.



My Thoughts

Taking the Step

Step 4: *I willingly forgive others.*

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace

By Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred let me sow love,
Where there is injury let me sow pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, hope,
Where there is darkness, light,
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not seek so much to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.

For it is in the giving that we receive,
It is in forgiving that we are forgiven,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Home Study for Week 6

READING

- The Gathering** Step 5 “I Willingly Forgive Myself. I Am Precious to God.” pp. 39-50
- Workbook**
 - Week 6 pp. 55-63.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation. Include Step 5: *I willingly forgive myself. I am precious to God*, in your practice.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Continue to hold and honor the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide** Step 5, Days 22-27, pp. 136-147
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Thy Prayer of Entry” by Carolyn Myss on workbook p. 56, “Compassionate Letting Go” by Jack Kornfield on workbook p. 57, “I Will Know Love” by Iyanla Vanzant on workbook p. 59 and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 61.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

Forgiveness ... is the finishing of old business that allows us to experience the present, free of contamination from the past.

- Joan Borysenko

Week 6

Forgiveness of Self

The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise.

- Alden Nowlan

This Week

This week we pick up the call to become willing to forgive ourselves, with the reminder that we are precious to God. Once we believe self-forgiveness is possible, we become open and receptive to knowing we are worthy of love. Even on those days when we have said and done things we regret, the Beloved thinks we are nothing short of magnificent! As our relationship with God deepens, we begin to believe it.

Today, I say yes to forgiving. I commit to being for-giving love and for-giving compassion in all areas of my life.

- Sheri Rosenthal

To be born again is to let the past go, and look without condemnation upon the present.

- A Course in Miracles

Nobody can bring you peace but yourself.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Prayer of Entry

From *Entering the Castle*

By Carolyn Myss

I cross the bridge into the silent bliss of my interior Castle. I close the drawbridge and forbid all outside influences from entry into this holy place that is my soul. Here in my Castle, I am alone with God. Under God's light and companionship I discover the depth and beauty of my soul. I embrace the power of prayer. I open myself to divine guidance. I surrender myself to become a channel for grace, healing and service, as God directs my life.

Here I embrace my devotion to the divine. And here I pause in this silence to animate my soul's dignity. I feel my interior self calling me. I resonate deeply to my own divinity. I am prepared now to encounter, to become, to dialogue with my own divinity, that which is God within me...

I trust that all that is in my life is as it should be. I release the need to know why events happen as they do, whether painful or glorious. I release the need to let others know they have harmed me. I release my fear of being abandoned on this Earth and left to face my life alone. I release my fear of becoming infirm. I surrender in trust that I am on this Earth with purpose. I am guarded, I am cared for, every prayer is heard, and every prayer is answered. I am a channel for grace and delight in the silent bliss that surrounds me in the sacred center of my Castle, in the intimate presence of God. In this silence, the only voice I hear is God's.



My Thoughts

Compassionate Letting Go

From *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*

By Jack Kornfield

Our process of forgiveness may include speaking out and seeking justice, but in the end it is also a compassionate letting go, for our own sake as much as for others. It is like the meeting of two former prisoners of war: When one asked, “Have you forgiven your captors?” the other replied, “No, never.” The first ex-prisoner looked with kindness at his friend and said, “Well, then they still have you in prison, don’t they?”

The initiation of mature spiritual teachers has always required forgiveness – for others, for themselves, for life itself. Without the wise heart of forgiveness we carry the burdens of the past our whole life.

One nurse, a senior practitioner who works in labor and delivery, tells this story:

Even though they’re painful, most labors go well and there is tremendous joy once the parents can hold the baby. But I noticed that when there is a tragedy, and a baby is stillborn or dies, the other nurses call me. I think it’s because of what I have been through. When I was eight years old I was left in charge of my younger sister and my three-month old baby brother for the day. That day he died a crib death. For years I felt responsible and had incredible pain about it. My mother never told me it was my fault, but she never told me it wasn’t, and she never allowed any grief. I was a big girl and big girls don’t cry.

When I went to nursing school I still carried that guilt. I worked at night in a cancer center, with people on respirators. Sometimes they would beg me to let them die. What was outside reflected what was inside me. I was tremendously hard. Then I went to my first meditation retreat. In the silence it all came up. So many scenes – my brother’s death, the hospitals, waves of grief and sorrow from the past – and I realized that in all these years I had never forgiven my mother or myself. For days in silence I just sat with all the pain, as if I was in labor. I wept, and then came that forgiveness that I had been looking for all my life. I felt a grace. My heart opened to loving myself and forgiving my mother, letting go of all that got in the way of being alive and loving.

I have been meditating now almost twenty years. And somehow I have found the ability to be with anguish and pain, without having to control it or change it, so that now the doctors and nurses call me in. Sometimes I sit with the parents and we just hold hands and cry together in their vulnerability, holding a damaged fetus, and facing the terrible decisions they have to make. It’s only forgiveness that makes this life workable.



My Thoughts

I Will Know Love

From *Until Today!*

By Iyanla Vanzant

I will know love when I realize ...
there is nothing in my heart that God doesn't know,
love and understand.

When it *feels like* there is no one that you can turn to, no one that you can trust, remember there is always God. There is nowhere you can go, no state of mind in which you can dwell that is beyond the reach of God. God knows your heart. God gave it to you, remember? God knows all about those things that you have buried so deeply you may have forgotten they exist. God never forgets.

God knows your shame. God knows the things that have angered you, frightened you and caused you to doubt the power and purity of love. God knows *all* about *all* of the things that you are so ashamed of you dare not speak them aloud. God *knows* and is still there with you; because shame is not in God's vocabulary. *Forgiveness is!*

God knows your fear. God knows all about those things you have done when you were afraid of losing or afraid of being left. God knows what you have done to be accepted. God knows all of the things you could not do because you were afraid to do them wrong. God even knows about the things you want to do but are afraid to do because you fear you don't really deserve them. God knows what you deserve. God also knows what you have left undone because of anger, hurt, fear and shame. You, like God, know that those are the things that make you feel guilty and, in response, you have closed your heart. God knows every nook and cranny of your heart. What you may not know is, if you are willing to open your heart to God, God will take the old, hurtful, shameful, guilt-ridden things out and put some new, good things in.

Until today, you may have allowed shame, guilt, fear or anger to close your heart. Just for today, find one thing that you are willing to cleanse from your heart. Give it to God in word, thought or writing.

Today I am devoted to opening my heart to God!



My Thoughts

Taking the Step

Step 5: *I willingly forgive myself. I am precious to God.*

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

The Time Has Come

By Bapuji

My beloved child,
break your heart no longer.
Each time you judge yourself you break your own heart.
You stop feeding on the love
which is the wellspring of your vitality.

The time has come, your time
to live, to celebrate and to see the goodness that you are...

Let no one, no thing, no idea or ideal obstruct you.
If one comes, even in the name of "Truth,"
forgive it for its unknowing.

Do not fight.

Let go.

And breathe – into the goodness that you are.

Home Study for Week 7

READING

- The Gathering** Step 6 “I Acknowledge That a Consciousness of God Is the Answer...That Life Is a Consciousness of God.” pp. 51-59
- Workbook**
 - Week 7 pp. 65-74.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation. Include Step 6: *I acknowledge that a consciousness of God is the answer...that life is a consciousness of God*, in your practice.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Continue to hold and honor the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide** Step 6, Days 28-31, pp. 148-155
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Transcending the Tyranny of Trends ” by Michael Beckwith on workbook pp. 66-67 , “The Turn of Events” by Gregg Levoy on workbook pp. 68-70, “And a Meadowlark Sang” by Ravindra Kumar Karnani on workbook pp. 71 and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 72.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

FINAL THOUGHT PAPER

- Continue to contemplate the three questions from which to choose for your Final Thought Paper, to be presented in Week 10. See workbook p. 5.

It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

- The Gospel of Luke

Week 7

Consciousness of God

This Week

This week we intentionally choose the consciousness of God over our habitual pattern of focusing on our problems. In fact, we find that our needs become the *reason* we turn to God. That first feeling of peace lets us know we have entered the kingdom, and the gentle movement of God within us guides us to tangible next steps, each bringing us closer to the solution to the problem.

A consciousness of God releases the greatest power of all.

- Ernest Holmes

You can start with nothing. And out of nothing, and out of no way, a way will be made.

- Michael Beckwith

When you live in surrender, something comes through you into the world of duality that is not of this world.

- Eckhart Tolle

If in thirst you drink water from a cup, you see God in it. Those who are not in love with God will see only their own faces in it.

- Rumi

Transcending the Tyranny of Trends

From *Spiritual Liberation*

By Michael Bernard Beckwith

*When you're born of the Spirit
You're made so brand new
And all the time you wasted
Is given back to you.*

There is a cosmic magnet drawing each of us into an intimate exploration of the dimensions of our being. And yet, few of us have responded to this magnetic pull and intimately communed with our deepest Self. The word *intimacy* comes from the Latin root *intimum* and refers to our innermost core. When we give our consent to this mystical adventure, we open ourselves to the wonders of existence, which are so exquisite we are metaphorically brought to our knees.

What I'm describing here is not some spiritually romantic notion. A profound inner search is an adventure for the spiritually courageous, for the spiritual warrior. It is an inner trek that takes us down roads of self-discovery we have not walked before. It is where nothing is avoided – the ecstatic and the profane – everything is faced. This is how we embrace the fullness of who we are and come into genuine self-acceptance. We break through the filters through which we view and live life. Those filters include our past fears, our hopes for the future, all the ego's cherished opinions, beliefs, and concepts that we use to hold our life together. Our "yes" to participating in this journey is our entrance into a consciousness of beholding.

The Non-Dual Practice of Beholding

Beholding is a state of consciousness in which we experience clear seeing. The ego recedes and our inner view of the outer world is as though we were tasting Reality for the first time. We come face-to-face with *what is* with no need to alter or filter it.

Imagine what you might experience if you applied the Buddhist koan, "Show me the face I had before my parents were born." As you invite the universe to mirror your original face, you are in substance saying, "Show me the glory that has been mine since the beginning of existence." Leaving behind any preconceived notions of what that would look like, as your inner vision comes into focus, you will shake off the illusory dust and grit of the outer journey and begin a most excellent beholding from within. You behold that you are in league with excellence, that there is a sacred pact, a covenant with the qualities encoded in

your spirit such as love, beauty, order, harmony, peace, wisdom, compassion, creativity, nobility, joy – all the non-dual qualities which are your spiritual birthright.

We have been given this precious human incarnation in which each and every one of us is a candidate for enlightenment. The beauty of the human experience is that we may consciously behold the Self of us. But in order to arrive at this awakened state, you must want it like a drowning man craves breath. Consider this: doesn't an inquiry into the purpose of existence deserve your time and attention? Within the twenty-four hours of each day, one-twenty-fourth can surely be devoted to becoming acquainted with the inner Self.



My Thoughts

The Turn of Events

From *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*

By Gregg Levoy

One of the shining qualities that heroes possess is the willingness to be educated by all things. They learn from the most impressive variety of people and experiences: the wise and the foolish; the obvious and the inconceivable; the living and the dead; the things they love and the things they hate; children and animals and the voluble energetics of nature; all the thumpings and all the bounties they earn from the world. “*Everything* nourished him,” Henry Miller once said of Goethe.

Heroic people also understand that calls are not just inner experiences – passions, dreams, symptoms – but also outer. These come to us from the world and from the events of our lives, and whether they fling themselves at us like fastballs or follow us around and rub up against us like stray cats, they, too, require a response.

We, too, act heroically if we attempt to see the morals in the stories, the bones through the flesh. The events themselves, which may appear so ordinary, can take on the contours of signs if we give them meaning, and we do so when we pay attention to them. We look at what direction they’re coming from and going in, who is caught up in them along with us, and how they’re timed. We look for subtitles, listen for voice-overs, notice if insights detonate in our heads and if we ignore them. Chances are sooner or later we’ll be brought back to remembering that we ignored them. Too often we travel on cruise control, and the events of our lives flick by like white lines on the freeway, their lesson lost on us.

The things that happen to us are a kind of feedback, and interpreting the feedback is critical to knowing how to proceed. While working at a former job, I was so eager for feedback that I once made the following proposal to my boss, one I was certain he would accept: I was willing to take a \$1,000-a-year *cut* in pay if he would agree to give me a fifteen-minute feedback session every two weeks. To my astonishment, and later my disgust, he declined, even after I presented him with studies showing that employees perform better with regular feedback. It was one in a long line of indignities that propelled me to leave that job and taught me a few things about the failures of leadership and imagination.

“Enter each day,” Sam Keen instructs in *Hymns to an Unknown God*, “with the expectation that happenings of the day may contain a clandestine message addressed to you personally. Expect omens, epiphanies, casual blessings, and teachers who unknowingly speak to your condition.” Expect that through the right lens, all our encounters will appear full of

thunderbolts and instruction; every bush will be a burning bush. Such encounters might include:

- ❖ An offer to collaborate with someone on a project that draws you in an entirely new direction.
- ❖ A sudden crisis that calls on powers you don't realize you possess but whose time has come. When a Japanese monk visited writer Gretel Ehrlich after she had been struck by lightning, he said to her, "You have always been so strong. Now it is time for you to learn about being weak."
- ❖ The loss of a job that pushes you over the edge you've been peering at for years.
- ❖ An accident or illness that reminds you of what really matters ...
- ❖ Something you witness that changes what you believe in or how you live.
- ❖ A tragedy that gives you your life's work and determines what it is you have to say to the world from that day on. Scores of organizations and support groups are started in just this way: Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, Parents of Murdered Children, Widow to Widow, Living with Cancer.
- ❖ One of the gross multitude of sufferings crying out to you from the world reaches out and touches your life in a personal way, and you find yourself responding.
- ❖ Any family reunion. However exalted we imagine ourselves to be in spiritual and emotional matters, we have only to spend a few days around our families to see how far we still have to go and what in particular we need to work on...

In whatever form the signal events come to us, they often seem to indicate a conspiracy, a "breathing together," a way in which events on the outside and the inside work together and match each other. The event and our state of mind at the time become like the two eyepieces of a binocular microscope; they are both looking at the same subject, the same truth. If there's no match, there's probably no meaning and no call.

Or maybe the soul, like a shipwrecked sailor, uses every resource at hand to speak to us, shaking the world like a fruit tree in order to drop seeds into our lives. Sometimes they take and sometimes they don't. The events may reveal to us a bigger plan or they may just undo the plans we've already made...

An affinity between a drama taking place inside us and a drama occurring on the outside indicates the presence of an imminent meaning. Movement is not far behind, *if* we are willing to be moved by our encounters, to be guided and persuaded and changed by them, and to ask of them, "What are you here to teach me?" Our experiences will then seem less like mere events and more like replies to the unspoken questions we put to the world just by

living our lives. They will begin to seem as though they're happening not just *to* us, but *for* us, and the world will no longer seem so anonymous and random. It will be personal and purposeful.



My Thoughts

And a Meadowlark Sang

By Ravindra Kumar Karnani

"The child whispered, 'God, speak to me'
And a meadow lark sang.
The child did not hear.

So the child yelled, 'God, speak to me!'
And the thunder rolled across the sky
But the child did not listen.

The child looked around and said,
'God let me see you' and a star shone brightly
But the child did not notice.

And the child shouted,
'God show me a miracle!'
And a life was born but the child did not know.

So the child cried out in despair,
'Touch me God, and let me know you are here!'
Whereupon God reached down
And touched the child.

But the child brushed the butterfly away
And walked away unknowingly."



My Thoughts

Taking the Step

Step 6: *I acknowledge that a consciousness of God is the answer ... that life is a consciousness of God.*

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

The Path

By Mahatma Gandhi

I know the path; it is straight and narrow.

It is like the edge of a sword.

I rejoice to walk on it.

I weep when I slip.

God's word is:

“He who strives never perishes.”

I have implicit faith in that promise.

Though, therefore, from my weakness

I fail a thousand times,

I shall not lose faith.

Home Study for Week 8

READING

- The Gathering*** Step 7 “A Time Beyond Time” pp. 61-70
- Workbook**
 - Week 8 pp. 75-84.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation with the intention of conscious union and oneness with the One, becoming willing to transcend your practice, learning to wait with humility, compassion, nonresistance, patience, acceptance and self-love.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Continue to hold and honor the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide*** Step 7, Days 32-34, pp. 156-161
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Life Changes” by Jim Rosemergy on workbook p. 76, “As Without, So Within” by Eckhart Tolle on workbook pp. 78-79, “How Big is my God?” by Wendy Craig-Purcell on workbook p.80 and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 82.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

FINAL THOUGHT PAPER

- Now is a good time to choose one of the three questions for your Final Thought Paper and begin working on it, to be presented in Week 10. See workbook p. 5.

God loves each of us as if there were only one of us.

- St. Augustine

Week 8

A Time Beyond Time

This Week

This week we become clear that the purpose of our study – including our personal spiritual practice – is to be in conscious union and oneness with the Presence. This intention helps us transcend our spiritual practice and we learn to wait. In the waiting we are the watcher, becoming centered with loving acceptance on what is moving within us.

Before me, even as behind, God is, and all is well.

- John Greenleaf Whittier

"What do you think of God?" the teacher asked. After a pause, the young pupil replied, "He's not a think, he's a feel."

- Paul Frost

The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too.

- St. Teresa of Avila

"I was six when I saw that everything was God, and my hair stood up, and all," Teddy said. "It was on a Sunday, I remember. My sister was a tiny child then, and she was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I saw that she was God and the milk was God. I mean, all she was doing was pouring God into God, if you know what I mean."

- J.D. Salinger

Life Changes

From *A Closer Walk With God*

By Jim Rosemergy

When my spiritual awakening began, it was my feeling nature that opened first. I cried and cried at what I considered to be the most inopportune times. At first, I did not like what was happening to me, but the floodgates had opened and could not be closed. However, acceptance of the feelings and continued commitment to prayer have helped me attain a greater sensitivity to people and to Spirit. I am no longer embarrassed to cry in public. If I am overwhelmed, I am overwhelmed.


Through the years, I have witnessed and heard many examples of answered prayer and miracles. Healings have taken place, friendships restored, needs met, and job opportunities realized. From the human viewpoint, these are grand happenings, but prayer yields subtle changes, too. For instance, there was a man who was distraught and crying driving home from work. He had to pull over and stop. While he rested his head on the wheel, he heard an inner voice say, “Stop struggling.” With the voice came peace and the realization all would be well.

On another occasion I was finishing a counseling session with a man. We sat in silent prayer for an extended period of time. The next week when the man returned for another appointment, he told me of walking out of the door of the church and having an image from his past flash before him. It was an unresolved hurt which he knew had to be healed. This insight was a gift from Spirit.

The point is Spirit can be a continuous part of our lives. In a subtle way, we can be guided and experience “small miracles” that transform us.

Several years ago I received a letter from a woman who told me she was part of a support group. During the time the people were together, they assisted one another in “getting what they wanted.” It was not working well, she said, until she and others began to seek the kingdom, an awareness of God. Since that time, there has been transformation. Many positive things have happened, but nothing more meaningful than the deepening relationship with Spirit.

Dear friend, you are destined for a closer walk with God. I believe it is what you want above all else. With this closer walk come the mysteries of God, a simplified life of purpose, and the added things Jesus said would be ours if we would seek the kingdom. Not only will there be answers to questions, but a continuous stream of guidance. There will be healings, but also a greater awareness of your innate wholeness. Your needs will be met, but you will know God is your shepherd. My friend, you are a spiritual being. Let your prayers be an expression of this truth. This is the walk that never ends.

 **My Thoughts**

As Without, So Within

From *A New Earth*

By Eckhart Tolle

When you look up at the clear sky at night, you may easily realize a truth at once utterly simple and extraordinarily profound. What is it that you see? The moon, planets, stars, the luminous band of the Milky Way, perhaps a comet or even the neighboring Andromeda Galaxy two million light years away. Yes, but if you simplify even more, what do you see? Objects floating in space. So what does the universe consist of? Objects and space.

If you don't become speechless when looking out into space on a clear night, you are not really looking, not aware of the totality of what is there. You are probably only looking at the objects and perhaps seeking to name them. If you have ever experienced a sense of awe when looking into space, perhaps even felt a deep reverence in the face of this incomprehensible mystery, it means you must have relinquished for a moment your desire to explain and label and have become aware not only of the objects in space but of the infinite depth of space itself. You must have become still enough inside to notice the vastness in which these countless worlds exist. The feeling of awe is not derived from the fact that there are billions of worlds out there, but the depth that contains them all.

You cannot see space, of course, nor can you hear, touch, taste, or smell it, so how do you even know it exists? This logical-sounding question already contains a fundamental error. The essence of space is no-thingness, so it doesn't "exist" in the normal sense of the word. Only things – forms – exist. Even calling it space can be misleading because by naming it, you make it into an object.

Let us put it like this: There is something within you that has an affinity with space; that is why you can be aware of it. Aware of it? That's not totally true either because how can you be aware of space if there is nothing there to be aware of?

The answer is both simple and profound. When you are aware of space, you are not really aware of anything, except awareness itself – the entire inner space of consciousness. Through you, the universe is becoming aware of itself!

When the eye finds nothing to see, that no-thingness is perceived as space. When the ear finds nothing to hear, that no-thingness is perceived as stillness. When the senses, which are designed to perceive form, meet an absence of form, the formless consciousness that lies behind perception and makes all perception, all experience, possible, is no longer obscured by form. When you contemplate the unfathomable depth of space or listen to the silence in the early hours before sunrise, something within you resonated with it as if in recognition. You then sense the vast depth of space as your own depth, and you know that precious

stillness that has no form to be more deeply who you are than any of the things that make up the content of your life.



My Thoughts

How Big is my God?

From *Ask Yourself This*

By Wendy Craig-Purcell

Some people like to tell God how big their problems are; others tell their problems how big their God is! The intent behind the question “How big is my God?” is to deepen and expand our belief in what’s possible. It invites us to become more aware of the wonder and miracle of the universe in which we live.

In a fascinating article called “Science Finds God,” Sharon Begley writes:

The more deeply scientists see into the secrets of the universe, you’d expect, the more God would fade away from their hearts and minds. But that’s not how it went for Allan Sandage. He has spent a professional lifetime coaxing secrets out of the stars, peering through telescopes in the hope of spying nothing less than the origins and destiny of the universe. He has actually figured out how fast the universe is expanding and how old it is (15 billion years or so) through his observations of distant stars. But through it all, he who says he was “almost a practicing atheist as a boy,” was nagged by the mysteries whose answers were not to be found in the glittering panoply of supernovas. Among them: Why is there something rather than nothing? He began to despair of answering such questions through reason alone, and so at 50, he willed himself to accept God. “It was my science that drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science. It is only through the supernatural that I can understand the mystery of existence.”


Whether it’s through examining more deeply the mysteries of the universe, personally meditating on “why there is something rather than nothing” or being inspired by true stories of the miraculous and unexplainable, every one of us can catapult our spiritual growth by reexamining and expanding our concept of God.

I find it quite improbable that such order came out of chaos. There has to be some organizing principle. God to me is a mystery but is the explanation for the miracle of existence, why there is something instead of nothing.

- Allan Sandage
Winner of the Crawford prize in astronomy

The exquisite order displayed by our scientific understanding of the physical world calls for the divine.

- Vera Kistiakowsky, MIT physicist

 **My Thoughts**

Taking the Step

Step 7: If you are using the steps of *The Gathering* personally, you need only clarify that your purpose is to experience God's presence and then engage in your prayer practice or meditation method. After a time, cease the practice and wait without condemnation or judgment. Become the watcher and note what is moving within you. It is all self-knowledge. Wait, listen, trust, and when the mind wanders, gently bring it home again by using your practice or method once more ... and then wait again. Grace is coming. The unseen wind is rising.

If Step 7 is taken as a group, your leader probably determines the prayer practice or meditation method, but the true work remains the same – the waiting. Trust, listen, and let God be God.

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

Wakefully Letting Go

By Lama Gendun Rinpoche

Happiness cannot be found through great effort and will power,
But it is already there, in relaxation and letting-go.
Don't strain yourself, there is nothing to do ...
Only our search for happiness prevents us from seeing it ...
Don't believe in the reality of good and bad experiences;
They are like rainbows.

Wanting to grasp the ungraspable, you exhaust yourself in vain.
As soon as you relax this grasping, space is there –
open, inviting, and comfortable.

So, make use of it. All is yours already.
Don't search any further ...
Nothing to do,
Nothing to force,
Nothing to want,
and everything happens by itself.

Home Study for Week 9

READING

- The Gathering* Step 8 “Contentment” pp. 71-81
- Workbook**
 - Week 9 pp. 85-95.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation with the intention of conscious union and oneness with the One, becoming willing to transcend your practice, learning to wait with humility, compassion, nonresistance, patience, acceptance and self-love.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Continue to hold and honor the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide* Step 8, Days 35-39, pp. 162-171
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Hidden Splendor” by Alan Cohen on workbook pp. 86-87 , “Instrument of Peace” by Kent Nerburn on workbook pp. 88-89, “Courting the Infinite” by Michael Beckwith on workbook p. 90 and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 92.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

FINAL THOUGHT PAPER

- Continue writing your Final Thought Paper, to be presented in Week 10. See workbook p. 5.

The soul can split the sky in two and let the face of God shine through.

- Edna St. Vincent Millay

Week 9

Contentment

This Week

This week we consider our choice to either ask for the manifestation of things or to desire a consciousness of God – to know God is real and to know who we truly are. It sets our intention to delve into the mystery of life, letting loose our need to control it and instead live in contentment with what is. The phrase, “God is enough,” becomes the truth for us.

To a mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders.

- Lao Tzu

Instead of asking, What do I want from life? a more powerful question is, What does life want from me?

- Eckhart Tolle

Something amazing happens when we surrender and just love. We melt into another world, a realm of power already within us. The world changes when we change.

- Marianne Williamson

There is no journey, but only an awakening.

- Course in Miracles

Hidden Splendor

From *Wisdom of the Heart*

By Alan Cohen

I am your friend and my love for you goes deep. There is nothing I can give you which you have not got; but there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take.

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in today. Take heaven! No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see – and to see we have only to look. I beseech you to look.

Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by the covering, cast them away as ugly or heavy or hard. Remove the covering and you will find beneath it a living splendor, woven of love, by wisdom, with power.

Welcome it, grasp it, and you touch the angel's hand that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, a sorrow, or a duty, believe me, that angel's hand is there; the gift is there, and the wonder of an overshadowing presence. Our joys, too, be not content with them as joys. They too conceal divine gifts.

Life is so full of meaning and purpose, so full of beauty – beneath its covering – that you will find earth but cloaks your heaven.

Courage, then, to claim it; that is all; but courage you have, and the knowledge that we are pilgrims together, wending through unknown country home.

And so, at this time, I greet you. Not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem and with the prayer that for you now and forever, the day breaks, and the shadows flee away.

- Brother Giovanni, 1513

This stirring letter, written by a monk nearly 500 years ago, is still compelling today. All the comfort you seek is offered within it, so consider it a love letter that a dear friend has written to you.

Whenever you feel trapped in fear or confusion, you're responding to appearances. Brother Giovanni reminds us to look deeper – find the message or gift behind the storyline, and the challenge will transform to become your friend.

The thought that a situation is a problem is an interpretation, not a fact. In Arabic, the word for *problem* is translated as “another view.” When you're faced with a problem, you're being

invited to find another perspective from which to regard it. As you reframe it in your favor, you'll discover that it hasn't come to hurt you, but to help you. As author Richard Bach noted: "There is no such thing as a problem without a gift for you in its hands." When you discover and appreciate the gift, the problem will disappear.

Every word, thought, or action you generate is affirming either your problem or your solution. Many people argue for their limitations as if they offered them security, but they only end up keeping themselves trapped in a small and painful world. Become an advocate for your possibilities, not your limits. Never speak disparagingly of yourself or of an experience. Hold firm to the vision of your intentions, and you'll have them. And when you're tempted to name something a "problem," call it a "project," "invitation," or "opportunity" instead. Then you'll be on course for the solution.

You're doing better than you think you are. Great love surrounds, enfolds, and fills you. You do not walk alone. Step forward with your head held high, and life will affirm all that you were born to be and do.



My Thoughts

Instrument of Peace

From *Make Me an Instrument of Your Peace: Living in the Spirit of the Prayer of Saint Francis*

By Kent Nerburn

When Francis asks to be made an instrument of God's peace, he is bowing down before God's skill as maker, as musician, as composer of our days, and offering himself up to be shaped into a form through which the voice of God can be heard.

When we give ourselves to his prayer, we are asking the same.

I once had a conversation with a woman while I was on a train traveling across Canada. She was a musician – a violinist – who, as a child, had performed with major symphonies in America and Europe. She had been a prodigy, one of those rare individuals who seems to have a talent that comes from somewhere far beyond the realm of normal human affairs.

In her twenties she had suddenly abandoned the violin in favor of the viola, the deeper-throated, less-celebrated cousin of the instrument on which she had already achieved such stunning success. It seemed an odd decision to me. She had established a promising career as a violinist; the repertoire for the solo viola is limited; and the part assigned to the viola in most musical composition is far less significant and complex than that created for the violin.

Why, I asked her, would you turn away from an instrument of such color and vibrancy, so favored by composer and revered in the orchestra, and turn to so quiet, recessive, and generally overlooked and underappreciated an instrument as the viola?

Her answer was simple and direct.

"I like its voice," she said. "It's more me."

Like the bird singing out its solitary song in greeting of the morning, this woman was happy just to play her part, then recede as the music was taken over by the more dramatic, more flamboyant instruments in the orchestra. She knew that it was more important to play from the fullness of her being than to seek fame and favor for something that did not come from her heart.

This is the truth that Francis would have us learn.

Most of us do not live special lives. We are seldom called upon to make great pronouncements or to perform heroic deeds. We fall in love, raise children, have heartbreaks, help those in need when we can. We go to our beds at night uncertain whether our actions have had any effect.

But when Francis calls us to pray to be instruments of God's peace, he is reminding us to honor our own part in the music of creation, no matter how humble or great. He is reminding us that what we are asked to do may be no more than to offer a trill to the coming dawn or to play soft pure notes beneath the bright music of the violin. But if we humbly accept our part as a gift and play it well, we will have done our small part to help create the symphony of God's voice.

Soon enough this beautiful prayer will ask us to turn our eyes toward our responsibilities as stewards of this earth. We will be called upon to become sowers – of love, of goodness, of consolation, of hope. But for this brief moment, Francis reminds us that we are the reed through which the breath of God is blown, the strings on which the music of God is played.

For this brief moment, he reminds us, our lives are music in the heart of God.



My Thoughts

Courting the Infinite

From *40 Day Mind Fast Soul Feast*

By Michael Bernard Beckwith

The supreme awareness, the intimately felt
Presence brings with it a rapture beyond joy,
a knowledge beyond reason, a sensation
more intense than that of life itself.

- Radhakrishnan

There is a longing within you, a mystical ache to express your intrinsic spiritual Self. This inner impulsion lovingly urges you forward until you catch the thought God had at the precise moment it projected you into existence. It is touching to realize that when God thought “you” it thought of nothing else but you. You held its whole attention, love and awareness.

When through prayer and meditation you awaken your soul’s memory of God’s original thought of you, you co-create with the Spirit its unique face appearing as yourself. You are an original work of beauty, light, love, joy and bliss. You have your own personal and intimate relationship with God. It loves you as though you were the only one in the world, because there is only the One. As you consciously cultivate this relationship, as you devotedly court the Presence within you, you are simultaneously cultivating the original expression of Spirit that you are. Conducting this romance with the Infinite satisfies and thrills the soul as nothing else can.

To court the Infinite you must first cultivate a desire to do so. Then, just as in any relationship, you invest your love, energy, time and attention. Today, use the little gaps of time to practice the presence of God. And when you can, incrementally increase the amount of time you devote to meditation and prayer. The results will astound you.

Affirmation

Today I consciously commune with the divine substance of love. I am enfolded in its presence and consumed by its beauty.



My Thoughts

Taking the Step

Step 8: *I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content. God is enough.*

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

A Strange Passion

By Jalaluddin Rumi

A strange passion is moving in my head.

My heart has become a bird
which searches in the sky.

Every part of me goes in different directions.

Is it really so
that the one I love is everywhere?

Home Study for Week 10

READING

- The Gathering* Step 9 “The Three Reminders” pp. 83-90
- Workbook**
 - Week 10 pp. 97-102.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time daily in prayer and meditation with the intention of conscious union and oneness with the One, becoming willing to transcend your practice, learning to wait with humility, compassion, nonresistance, patience, acceptance and self-love.
- What happens in your interior world during the times of prayer/meditation/silence will not be discussed in class. Continue to hold and honor the phrase, “All is well.”

WRITING

- The Gathering Forty Day Guide* Step 9, Day 40, pp. 172-173
- Workbook:** Read and respond in writing to the articles “Messages from the Divine” by Carolyn Myss on workbook p. 98, “Self-Surrender” by Mahatma Gandhi on workbook p. 100, and “Taking the Step” on workbook p. 101.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

FINAL THOUGHT PAPER “My Experience of God”

Your final project will be presented next week. It is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “My Experience of God.” Using specific, real-life examples answer **one** of the following three questions:

1. How do I know that God is real?
2. How has my relationship with God deepened?
3. How has my relationship with myself deepened?

Your Thought Paper will last between 4-5 minutes. You can read your paper or talk about it. Optional: You may also include drawings, photos, poems or any other visual representation of your experience of the Divine.

DESSERT

Feel free to bring a light dessert to enjoy during the break, if you'd like.

*In the garden of gentle sanity may you be
bombarded by coconuts of wakefulness.*

- Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche

Week 10

The Kingdom

This Week

This week we rejoice in our awareness that God is enough. There is gentle power in staying in the present moment, listening to our inner wisdom – our authentic Self. As we develop a consciousness of God, our spiritual nature becomes real for us. It turns us toward love instead of fear, peace instead of confusion, acceptance instead of judgment. This week we celebrate our spiritual awakening!

*To God there is nothing small. The moment we
have given it to God, it becomes infinite.*

- Mother Teresa

*One cannot help but be in awe when he
contemplates the mysteries of eternity; of life; of
the marvelous structure of reality.*

- Albert Einstein

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and
rightdoing there is a field. I'll meet you
there. When the soul lies down in that grass the
world is too full to talk about.*

- Rumi

Be still and know that I am God.

- Psalm 46:10

Messages from the Divine

From *Entering the Castle*

By Carolyn Myss

You are more accustomed to talking to God than to listening and hearing him. You are more accustomed to putting your five senses on alert for responses than you are to receiving simple messages. Therefore, you are likely to anticipate receiving guidance or instructions.

One woman reported, “I had this feeling as if I were suddenly wrapped in a blanket of stars while I was praying one evening. All of a sudden I felt lifted out of my body and had this cosmic sensation of hovering way above the Earth, wrapped in this illuminated blanket of stars. I felt suspended in eternity, completely bathed in a sense of divine love, as if God knew exactly who I was, where I lived, and even how much I owed on my water bill. I felt ridiculously, outrageously intimate with God. I wanted to stay up there and float forever, but just as suddenly as I was taken into that celestial wonderland, I was returned to Earth and into this dense, painfully overweight, middle-aged body of mine. Immediately, I began wondering, What am I supposed to do with this experience? I kept talking about it to my friends, trying to figure out what I was supposed to *do* with it. Then I started to wonder why none of my problems had been resolved as a result of that experience. I mean, there I was hovering above Earth, but, like, so what? I was still overweight and still in a lot of pain – so what good did that do me? Finally – *finally* – I realized that I had received a most profound, mystical message from God, who let me know that I was being watched over. I was intimately known to this divine being who drew me off the Earth one evening to let me know my prayers were heard – that *was* the answer to my prayers, but I didn’t want to see it at the time because that wasn’t the answer I wanted. That answer wasn’t good enough for me. I didn’t want a mystical experience; I wanted a practical solution. I wanted God to suddenly make my body thin so that I would not have to work at losing weight. In fact, what I really wanted was to be able to continue to eat anything I wanted and wake up thin. I wanted a custom-designed miracle, which is why it took me quite a while to realize I actually had received a miracle. I was not yet able to receive mystical gifts of grace. I still wanted my goodies from God to come in earthly packages. Luckily for me, I caught up with myself and finally saw the gift.”



My Thoughts

Self-Surrender

From God Makes the Rivers to Flow

By Mahatma Gandhi, Selected by Eknath Easwaran

Our existence as embodied beings is purely momentary; what are a hundred years in eternity? But if we shatter the chains of egotism, and melt into the ocean of humanity, we share its dignity. To feel that we are something is to set up a barrier between God and ourselves; to cease feeling that we are something is to become one with God. A drop in the ocean partakes of the greatness of its parent, although it is unconscious of it. But it is dried up as soon as it enters upon an existence independent of the ocean ...

As soon as we become one with the ocean in the shape of God, there is no more rest for us, nor indeed do we need to rest any longer. Our very sleep is action. For we sleep with the thought of God in our hearts. This restlessness constitutes true rest. This never-ceasing agitation holds the key to peace ineffable. This supreme state of total surrender is difficult to describe, but not beyond the bounds of human experience. It has been attained by many dedicated souls, and may be attained by ourselves as well.



My Thoughts

Taking the Step

The Three Reminders:

1. *There is to be no discussion of what happened in our interior world during the time of prayer and meditation.*
2. *We are not to grade ourselves on how well we are doing in our prayer life. “All is well” is a phrase we like to use.*
3. *What is important is that we have gathered in God’s name, and we will gather again.*

Step 9: It is important that each person understand why the three reminders are a part of The Gathering.

- Jim Rosemergy



My Thoughts

Silence

By The Ortha Nan Gaidheal

I weave a silence onto my lips.

I weave a silence into my mind.

I weave a silence within my heart.

I close my ears to distractions.

I close my eyes to attractions.

I close my heart to temptations.

Calm me, O Lord, as you stilled the storm.

Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm.

Let all tumult within me cease.

Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.