

# Shining Our Light

**Developed by Reverend Jane Beach**

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# Shining Our Light

Dear Friend,

This class is an invitation to embrace every life circumstance, accepting it just as it is. It is based on the textbook *A Lamp in the Darkness* by Jack Kornfield, in which we are invited to shine the light of our soul on every challenge, learning to love ourselves by growing in acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion.

The light of our soul – our inner wisdom – is our divine legacy. It is our constant guide, our place of calm amidst the storm. As our lamp in the darkness, it sees the big picture of our lives when we are whirling in the midst of the moment's confusion, pain and fear. This course opens us up to a place of willingness and courage in which we grow through difficult life circumstances instead of feel defeated by them. Stepping into the illuminating wisdom of our soul helps us to accept what is, face our pain and then embrace the truth and healing wisdom our pain offers.

In this course we can anticipate a deepening relationship with our soul, so that it becomes *real* to us. It is the *experience* of our soul that changes our life. In this class we will move into the experience together.

With gratitude and love,

Jane

Rev. Jane Beach

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# Shining Our Light

## Course Overview

- |          |                      |
|----------|----------------------|
| ➔ Week 1 | Choosing Wisdom      |
| ➔ Week 2 | Choosing Compassion  |
| ➔ Week 3 | Choosing Awakening   |
| ➔ Week 4 | Choosing Forgiveness |
| ➔ Week 5 | Choosing Healing     |
| ➔ Week 6 | Choosing Peace       |
| ➔ Week 7 | Choosing Mindfulness |
| ➔ Week 8 | Choosing Joy         |

### **Textbook:**

*A Lamp in the Darkness: Illuminating the Path Through Difficult Times* by Jack Kornfield

# Student Agreements

## **Attendance and Active Participation**

Your willingness to embrace your challenges instead of run from them has brought you to this class. Together, we will take a step-by-step journey of accepting what is, using each life circumstance to shine the light of our own inner wisdom. Therefore, attendance and active participation are the foundation of the journey, crucial for the experience that lies ahead.

## **Assignments**

This journey is personal to you. The path is fluid, with no ending of one week of course activities and beginning of another. The weekly assignments are 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.

## **Workbook Writing**

It is expected that you will spend quality time writing down your thoughts and feelings about each article in the workbook. Write out your thoughts and feelings in full sentences instead of bullet points. Not only does this deepen your personal unfolding experience, it also helps you express your perspective during class dialog and small groups, which in turn helps make it real for you.

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

## **Final Project Thought Paper: “Acceptance”**

Your final project is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “Acceptance.” Using *specific, real-life examples*, answer the question: *How am I learning to accept more fully the way things are, shining a wise and compassionate light on the circumstances of my life?*

Your Thought Paper will last 5-7 minutes and will be presented in Week 7 or Week 8. You can read your paper or talk about it. Optional: You may also include drawings, photos, poems or any other visual representation of your personal experience.

## **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.

### **Respectful Sharing**

- 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.
- 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 speak.
- 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 open up to others.

*Faith goes up the stairs that love has built and looks out the window which hope has opened.*

- Charles Spurgeon

## Week 1

# Choosing Wisdom

### **This Week**

This week we begin to consciously embrace all of our life, not just the happy times. The entirety of our life is exquisitely perfect, each moment an invitation to look toward the God of our understanding. As we connect with our own Inner Light, we learn to grow through acceptance, forgiveness and compassion for ourselves and others.

*The best day of your life is the one on which you decide your life is your own. No apologies or excuses, no one to lean on, rely on or blame. The gift is yours – it is an amazing journey – and you alone are responsible for the quality of it. This is the day your life really begins.*

- Bob Moawad

*I know that the answer to what we need to do next is in our own hearts. All we have to do is listen to that quiet voice, then take that one step further and trust what we hear. We will be taught what we need to learn.*

- Melody Beattie

*Some of the best lessons we ever learn we learn from our mistakes and failures. The error of the past is the wisdom of the future.*

- Tryon Edwards

*You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.*

- Christopher Robin

# Remembering All the Boys

From *This I Believe*

By Elvia Bautista, Edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman

Elvia Bautista, *twenty-two, lives in Santa Rosa, California, where she works as a caregiver for the elderly and mentally handicapped. Bautista stayed after her brother's murder even though the rest of her family moved away. A high school drop-out, Bautista now speaks to young people about the dangers of gang life.*

I believe that everyone deserves flowers on their grave.

When I go to the cemetery to visit my brother, it makes me sad to see graves – just the cold stones – and no flowers on them.

They look lonely, like nobody loves them. I believe this is the worst thing in the world – that loneliness. No one to visit you and brush off the dust from your name and cover you with color. A grave without any flowers looks like the person has been forgotten. And then what was the point of even living – to be forgotten?

Almost every day my brother's grave has something new on it: flowers from me, or candles from the Dollar Store, or an image of the Virgin Maria, or shot glasses. There's even some little Homies, these little toys that look like gangsters.

Once my brother's homies even put a bunch of marijuana on there for him – I think my mother took it away. I think she also took away the blue rag someone put there for him one day.

Sometimes, when I bring flowers, I fix the flowers on the graves around my brother's grave. Some of the headstones have birthdates near my brother's; they are young, too. But many of them, if they have any little toys or things on them, those are red.

All around my brother are boys who grew up to like red, making them the enemies of my brother. My brother was sixteen when he was shot by someone who liked red, who killed him because he liked blue. And when I go to the cemetery, I put flowers on the graves of the boys who liked red, too.

Sometimes I go to the cemetery with one of my best friends, who had a crush on a boy who liked red who was killed at eighteen by someone who liked blue. And we will go together and bring a bunch of flowers, enough for both of these boys whose families are actually even from the same state in Mexico.



There is no one but me and a few of my friends who go to both graves. Some people think it's a bad idea, some people think it's heroic.

I think they're both being silly. I don't go to try to disrespect some special rules or stop any kind of war. I go because I believe that no matter where you came from or what you believed in, when you die, you want flowers on your grave and people who visit you and remember you that way.

I'm not any kind of traitor or any kind of hero. I am the sister of Rogelio Bautista, and I say his name so you will hear it and be one more person who remembers him. I want everyone to remember all the boys, red and blue, in my cemetery. When we remember, we put flowers on their graves.

**We learn from each other. We all matter to someone. Who matters to you? What have you learned from him/her?**

**To whom do you matter? What have they learned from you?**

# The Mountain Disappears

From *This I Believe*

By Leonard Bernstein, as featured in the 1950's Series,  
Edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman

*Composer, conductor, pianist and educator, Leonard Bernstein was longtime music director of the New York Philharmonic, where he led the highly successful Young People's Concerts series. Bernstein forged a new relationship between classical and popular music with his compositions: West Side Story, On the Town, Candide, and others.*

I believe in people. I feel, love, need, and respect people above all else, including the arts, natural scenery, organized piety, or nationalistic superstructures. One human figure on the slope of a mountain can make the whole mountain disappear for me. One person fighting for the truth can disqualify for me the platitudes of centuries. And one human being who meets with injustice can render invalid the entire system which has dispensed it.

I believe that man's noblest endowment is his capacity to change. Armed with reason, he can see two sides and choose: He can be divinely wrong. I believe in man's right to be wrong. Out of this right he has built, laboriously and lovingly, something we reverently call democracy. He has done it the hard way and continues to do it the hard way – by reason, by choosing, by error and rectification, by the difficult, slow method in which the dignity of A is acknowledged by B, without impairing the dignity of C. Man cannot have dignity without loving the dignity of his fellow.

I believe in the potential of people. I cannot rest passively with those who give up in the name of "human nature." Human nature is only animal nature if it is obliged to remain static. Without growth, without metamorphosis, there is no godhead. If we believe that man can never achieve a society without wars, then we are condemned to wars forever. This is the easy way. But the laborious, loving way, the way of dignity and divinity, presupposes a belief in people and in their capacity to change, grow, communicate and love.

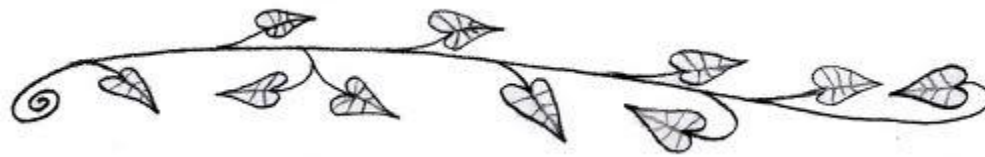
I believe in man's unconscious mind, the deep spring from which comes his power to communicate and to love. For me, all art is a combination of these powers; for if love is the way we have of communicating personally in the deepest way, then what art can do is to extend this communication, magnify it, and carry it to vastly greater numbers of people. Therefore art is valid for the warmth and love it carries within it, even if it be the lightest entertainment, or the bittersweet satire, or the most shattering tragedy.

I believe that my country is the place where all these things I have been speaking of are happening in the most manifest way. America is at the beginning of her greatest period in

history – a period of leadership in science, art, and human progress toward the democratic ideal. I believe that she is at a critical point in this moment and that she needs us to believe more strongly than ever before in her and in one another, in our ability to grow and change, in our mutual dignity, in our democratic method. We must respect privacy. We must observe taste by not exploiting our sorrows, successes, or passions. We must learn to know ourselves better through art. We must rely more on the unconscious, inspirational side of man. We must not enslave ourselves to dogma. We must believe in the attainability of good. We must believe, without fear, in people.

**Think back to the last few years. How has your “belief in people and in their capacity to change, grow, communicate and love” changed?**

**How has your belief in your own “capacity to change, grow, communicate and love” changed?**



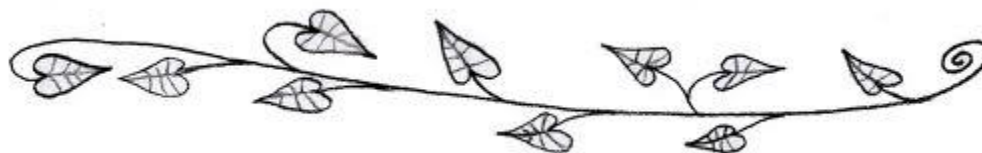
# Learning to Love

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

By Anne Hillman, Edited by Maggie Oman

We look with uncertainty  
Beyond the old choices for  
Clear-cut answers  
To a softer, more permeable aliveness  
Which is every moment  
At the brink of death;  
For something new is being born in us  
If we but let it.

We stand at a new doorway,  
Awaiting that which comes ...  
Daring to be human creatures.  
Vulnerable to the beauty of existence.  
Learning to love.



# Home Study for Week 2

## READING

- A Lamp in the Darkness* Read:
  - Introduction: An Invitation to Awaken pp. 1-2
  - Chapter 1 “The Wisdom of Our Difficulties” pp. 3-11
  - Chapter 2 “The Earth is My Witness” pp. 13-19
  - Chapter 3 “Shared Compassion” pp. 21-28
  
- Workbook** Week 1 pp. 3-13 and Week 2 pp. 15-24

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time with the meditations “The Earth is My Witness” and “Shared Compassion,” using the CD in the back of your textbook.

## WRITING

- Workbook for Week 1:** If there was not time to finish responding to any of this week’s articles, please complete them as part of your Home Study.
  
- Workbook for Week 2:** Read and respond *in writing* to each of the articles. Allow plenty of time to answer thoughtfully and completely.
  
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.



## Week 2

# Choosing Compassion

### This Week

This week we accept the worthiness of being loved. Jack Kornfield reminds us, “Self-compassion and self-forgiveness are not weaknesses, but the roots of our courage and magnanimity.” Because compassion and forgiveness are part of our true nature, choosing them carries the lamp of love in our darkest hours.

*I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no hurt, but only more love.*

- Mother Teresa

*Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing so gentle as real strength.*

- Saint Francis de Sales

*Release from guilt as you would be released. There is no other way to look within and see the light of love.*

- A Course in Miracles

*I am cognizant of the gift of free will, to know that choices are available, and corrections are a matter of choosing differently rather than a means for demonstrating my errors.*

- Joy Cardyn

*Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err.*

- Gandhi

# Generations

From *Let Go, Let Miracles Happen*

By Kathy Cordova

*Who understands much, forgives much.*

- Madame De Stael

*I am a daughter.* I am in kindergarten. My grandmother is asleep on the couch, wrapped in the crocheted coverlet that is her cocoon. She is always resting on the couch, except when she sits up to tell us to wear our sweaters on hot summer days.

My grandmother was once vibrant and beautiful – an artist and French teacher who studied one summer at the Sorbonne. At the age of forty, she married my grandfather, a charming Irishman, and soon gave birth to my mother.

Then, three years later, when she was giving birth to my uncle, something went wrong. She developed a problem with her pituitary artery, causing adrenal deficiencies and hypothyroidism. From that point on, she was sluggish and spent most days in bed. When my mother was three, her childhood was over; she found herself responsible for her little brother and often for her mother as well.

Now my grandmother lives with us. My mother is always mad at her for complaining about her sore feet and refusing to go shopping for new shoes. My grandmother says her feet hurt too much to go out. My mother thinks she is exaggerating the pain and keeps bringing home new black-laced shoes for my grandmother to try on. None are good enough.

*I am a daughter taking on the role of mother. I am fourteen.* I am sitting by the living room window on a stormy night; it is three in the morning, and I am waiting for my parents to come home. They have been at a party, and I know they have been drinking heavily. Every time a car passes by, I startle. I don't know how to make sense of the mix of fear and rage that I feel. If they die, will I be left to raise my younger brother and sisters?

This is such a change from my earlier childhood, when my mother and father took such good care of us. I remember Mom taking us to the park or hiding our lunches for treasure hunts, and Dad playing football with all the neighborhood kids.

Things are so different now, as my mother and father struggle with depression and alcoholism. As the oldest child, I feel a great weight of responsibility. I hate being the bad mother, the one who yells at them when I discover that they've been drinking. When I come



home after school and find my mother passed out on the bed, or when my dad calls and says he won't be home until very late, I get so angry. But mostly I'm scared, and I don't understand.

*I am a mother. I am twenty-five.* As I bring my firstborn son home from the hospital, I realize that the Lamaze classes prepared me for birth, but not for life after birth. Carrying him out of the hospital, I cannot believe they're going to let me take him home. I don't know what I'm doing. When is the real mom going to show up?

When I nurse him, the pain is excruciating. No one told me about this. Determined to nurse, I sit and cry, my nipples bleeding and my uterus cramping. I lock myself in my room with him, crying, nursing, and rocking. I am in love with him, and I am more exhausted than I ever thought possible. I want a mother.

In the midst of my deepest joy, I begin to grieve. More than any other time in my life, I want a mother who can come and tell me about all this, who can teach me how to be a mother myself, who can reassure me that I'm doing a good job.

But my mother is still in the difficult years. She and my father are still struggling with depression and still drinking. They're on the verge of separating and have little energy for anything else but their own problems, so my mother is not here.

I grow and I learn, and I discover, day by day, that I am the real mom.

*I am a mother. I am a daughter. I am forty-five.* I never thought that I would be the one to get a divorce, but life doesn't always turn out the way you plan. For eleven years my ex-husband and I have shared custody of our three sons. I have learned much about myself in this process and have also worked hard to calm any of the boys' fears that they might be abandoned. Now I am happily remarried, my sons are young men, and my youngest child – my daughter – is in kindergarten.

I am on my way to see my mother and to help her organize her apartment.

My mother's body is falling apart. Heart problems, breast cancer, and osteoporosis have all taken their toll. The bones in her right foot are deteriorating, and her hipbones are so thin that the doctors cannot take any bone from them to rebuild her foot. She complains about the pain and is always searching for shoes that will help.

I pick up a box stuffed with receipts, dollar bills, medicine bottles, and old photos, and ask her where I should begin. She looks at me, her eyes filling up with tears.

"I'm so overwhelmed." Her voice breaks. "I remember going through my mother's things and throwing away so much against her will." Now she is sobbing.

"I have so much guilt about my mother," she stammers. I have a hard time making out her words because she is crying so hard. "I was so mean to her about her shoes. I didn't understand."

My heart opens, and for the first time in a long while I feel no need to defend against her. I put down the box and go over to her, putting my arms around her shrinking body. She feels so fragile and vulnerable. I clasp her head against my shoulder. “It’s okay, Mom. It’s all okay.”

I give her a long hug. My mother and I have both suffered, we’ve both made mistakes, but we’ve both loved, too. I remember that we are all making it up as we go along, doing the best we can with whatever we’ve got.

In that moment, I understand. I am grateful to be standing here with her, both of us tearful, holding each other tight – aware of a grace that has always been with us, weaving through it all.

- Denise Roy

**Look back at your life – your own story – with compassion. What do you see, feel and understand?**

# To Know Myself

From *How, Then, Shall We Live?*

By Wayne Muller

Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is within you.” The original Greek – *entos hymon* – can be correctly translated as either “within you” or “among you.” So perhaps there is a deliberate and allowable – even desirable – ambiguity about the sense of “I” and the location of the inner kingdom. We are inside and outside. The gospel of Thomas states this even more succinctly, when Jesus proclaims, “The kingdom is within you and without you.” As Meister Eckhart reminds us, there is a constant dialogue between the kingdom we hold within us and the spirit that flourishes in the world around us. Our spirit is not separate, but intertwined: “The eye with which we see God is the same eye with which God sees us.”

How do we come to feel this larger sense of self, this divine “I” that moves “within us and without us”? This spring Bill, who was dying of AIDS, told me he was asked to be the godfather of Alex, the newborn son of a close friend. He asked me if I would officiate at the baptism, and I readily assented. He spoke of his deep love for baby Alex, whom he had already come to cherish. He also shared his poignant concern that he would not live very long and might not be able to provide the necessary care and guidance required of a godfather. He suggested that perhaps the child’s parents should ask someone else to be the godfather – someone who would live long enough to help the child grow into a man.

When I called Patricia, the baby’s mother, to arrange the details of the baptism, I shared part of the conversation I had had with Bill. I knew she was aware of Bill’s medical condition. Was she sure of her choice of Bill as godfather for her son? Her reply was quiet and thoughtful. “I thought about it a lot,” she began. “I know Bill may not live much longer. But he so loves Alex, and Bill just seemed so right.” There was a pause, and then she continued, “I also believe there is some kind of life after this one. I don’t really know what it is like exactly, but I believe that when people die, they can watch over and care for those of us who remain behind. I want Bill to do that. I asked him if he would always pray for Alex and help him any way he can, sending him love and protection from wherever he is. Bill said he would do that. That is all I needed.”

Clearly Patricia, Alex, and Bill are honoring a deeper connection. They are courageously affirming a rich communion that is alive now and will continue to live across all boundaries of identity and time.

The Navajo have a chant that names this place of connection at the center point, intricately entwined in the community of the earth:

*The mountains, I become part of it ...  
The herbs, the fir tree, I become part of it.*

*The morning mists, the clouds, the gathering waters,  
I become part of it.  
The wilderness, the dew drops, the pollen ...  
I become part of it.*

If we are to make a significant contribution to the creation of peace and healing in the world, we cannot remain enmeshed in the smallness of our family story. We must allow our story to become larger – we must take our place in the rich expanse of our true nature, in deep kinship with all creation.

**We are much more than our story. In what ways have you moved past your story to show up as compassion, peace, joy, and love in the world today?**

# Accepting Our Best

From *The Language of Letting Go*

By Melody Beattie

We don't have to do it any better than we can – ever.

Do our best for the moment, then let it go. If we have to redo it, we can do our best in another moment, later.

We can never do more or better than we are able to do at the moment. We punish ourselves and make ourselves feel crazy by expecting more than our reasonable best for now.

Striving for excellence is a positive quality.

Striving for perfection is self-defeating.

Did someone tell us or expect us to do or give or be *more*? Did someone always withhold approval?

There comes a time when we feel we have done our best. When that time comes, let it go.

There are days when our best is less than we hoped for. Let those times go too. Start over tomorrow. Work things through, until our best becomes better.

There is a time for constructive criticism, but if that's all we give ourselves, we'll give up.

Empowering and complimenting ourselves will not make us lazy. It will nurture us and enables us to give, do, and be our best.

*Today, I will do my best, then let it go. God, help me stop criticizing myself so I can start appreciating how far I've come.*

**List at least a dozen ways you appreciate yourself.**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

11.

12.

**And most of all, I appreciate that I \_\_\_\_\_.**



# Listen and Love

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

By Gerald Jampolsky, Edited by Maggie Oman

Help me be still

    help me listen and love.

Awaken me to the truth of Your Presence

    being only in the now of this moment.

Lift me up into Your Arms and remind me that I am Your Creation,

    and that I am the Perfection of Love.

Help me to acknowledge that I am Your Messenger of Love,

    and free me to shine Your Light everywhere.

Let me feel Your Freedom within me, and

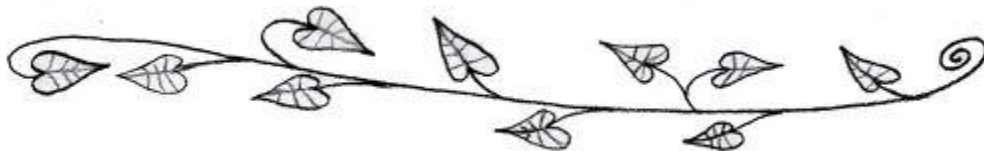
    let me laugh at the illusions that my ego

    once made me feel were so real.

Let me be the Light: let me be joy, let me know

    that I am the reflection of You wherever I am,

    and wherever I go.



# Home Study for Week 3

## READING

- A Lamp in the Darkness* Read:
  - Chapter 4 “Awakening the Buddha of Wisdom in Difficulties” pp. 29-34
- Workbook** Week 3 pp. 25-36

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time with the meditation “Buddha in Difficulties” using the CD in the back of your textbook.

## WRITING

- Workbook for Week 3:** Read and respond in writing to each of the articles. Allow plenty of time to answer thoughtfully and completely.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.



*All I have seen teaches me to trust the creator  
for all I have not seen.*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Ultimately, the only way to know about God  
is by letting your being merge into The Being,  
and then seeing what happens to you.*

- Michael Singer

## Week 3

# Choosing Awakening

### **This Week**

This week we deepen our commitment to revealing the consciousness that lies deep within us – our soul – our inner wisdom. As we let the light of our own light shine, a way through each challenge becomes clear. In the process our faith grows, and we deepen our relationship with the God of our understanding.

*Every time you are tempted to react in the  
same old way, ask if you want to be a prisoner  
of the past or a pioneer of the future. The past  
is closed and limited; the future is open and  
free.*

- Deepak Chopra

*When you learn to say yes to yourself, you will  
be able to say no to others, with love. Your  
truth serves.*

- Alan Cohen

*Have patience with all things, but, first of all  
with yourself.*

- Saint Francis de Sales

# The Awakening

By Sonny Carroll

A time comes in your life when you finally get it...when, in the midst of all your fears and insanity, you stop dead in your tracks and somewhere the voice inside your head cries out...ENOUGH!

Enough fighting and crying and blaming and struggling to hold on. Then, like a child quieting down after a tantrum, you blink back your tears and begin to look at the world through new eyes.

This is your awakening.

You realize it's time to stop hoping and waiting for something to change, or for happiness, safety and security to magically appear over the next horizon. You realize that in the real world there aren't always fairy tale endings, and that any guarantee of "happily ever after" must begin with you... and in the process a sense of serenity is born of acceptance.

You awaken to the fact that you are not perfect and that not everyone will always love, appreciate or approve of who or what you are... and that's OK. They are entitled to their own views and opinions.

You learn the importance of loving and championing yourself... and in the process a sense of new found confidence is born of self-approval. You stop complaining and blaming other people for the things they did to you - or didn't do for you - and you learn that the only thing you can really count on is the unexpected.

You learn that people don't always say what they mean or mean what they say and that not everyone will always be there for you and that everything isn't always about you.

So, you learn to stand on your own and to take care of yourself... and in the process a sense of safety and security is born of self-reliance.

You stop judging and pointing fingers and you begin to accept people as they are and to overlook their shortcomings and human frailties... and in the process a sense of peace and contentment is born of forgiveness.

You learn to open up to new worlds and different points of view. You begin reassessing and redefining who you are and what you really stand for.

You learn the difference between wanting and needing and you begin to discard the doctrines and values you've outgrown, or should never have bought into to begin with.

You learn that there is power and glory in creating and contributing and you stop maneuvering through life merely as a "consumer" looking for your next fix.

You learn that principles such as honesty and integrity are not the outdated ideals of a bygone era, but the mortar that holds together the foundation upon which you must build a life.

You learn that you don't know everything, it's not your job to save the world and that you can't teach a pig to sing. You learn that the only cross to bear is the one you choose to carry and that martyrs get burned at the stake.

Then you learn about love. You learn to look at relationships as they really are and not as you would have them be. You learn that alone does not mean lonely.

You stop trying to control people, situations and outcomes. You learn to distinguish between guilt and responsibility and the importance of setting boundaries and learning to say NO.

You also stop working so hard at putting your feelings aside, smoothing things over and ignoring your needs.

You learn that your body really is your temple. You begin to care for it and treat it with respect. You begin to eat a balanced diet, drink more water, and take more time to exercise.

You learn that being tired fuels doubt, fear, and uncertainty and so you take more time to rest. And, just as food fuels the body, laughter fuels our soul. So you take more time to laugh and to play.

You learn that, for the most part, you get in life what you believe you deserve, and that much of life truly is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

You learn that anything worth achieving is worth working for and that wishing for something to happen is different than working toward making it happen.

More importantly, you learn that in order to achieve success you need direction, discipline and perseverance. You also learn that no one can do it all alone, and that it's OK to risk asking for help.

You learn the only thing you must truly fear is fear itself. You learn to step right into and through your fears because you know that whatever happens you can handle it and to give in to fear is to give away the right to live life on your own terms.

You learn to fight for your life and not to squander it living under a cloud of impending doom.

You learn that life isn't always fair, you don't always get what you think you deserve and that sometimes bad things happen to unsuspecting, good people ... and you learn not to always take it personally.

You learn that nobody's punishing you and everything isn't always somebody's fault. It's just life happening. You learn to admit when you are wrong and to build bridges instead of walls.

You learn that negative feelings such as anger, envy and resentment must be understood and redirected or they will suffocate the life out of you and poison the universe that surrounds you.

You learn to be thankful and to take comfort in many of the simple things we take for granted, things that millions of people upon the earth can only dream about: a full refrigerator, clean running water, a soft warm bed, a long hot shower.

Then, you begin to take responsibility for yourself by yourself and you make yourself a promise to never betray yourself and to never, ever settle for less than your heart's desire.

You make it a point to keep smiling, to keep trusting, and to stay open to every wonderful possibility.

You hang a wind chime outside your window so you can listen to the wind.

Finally, with courage in your heart, you take a stand, you take a deep breath, and you begin to design the life you want to live as best you can.

**In your own awakening, what have you learned?**

**How are you living the best life you can today?**

# Now You See It, Now You Don't

From *The Book of Awakening*

By Mark Nepo

It doesn't take very long for each of us to accumulate an emotional history. A child burns her hand on a stove and a fear of fire begins; in a tender moment, a hand is slapped and a fear of love begins. Our emotional associations and reflexes run deep. Often, the heart breathes beneath all our associations like a soft, sandy bottom waiting underwater.

Thus, to see ourselves clearly, we must try to still our associations till we are as transparent as a calm lake. When still enough and clear enough, others can also see through to our bottom. It makes love possible again. But paradoxically, when someone is moved to reach for us, their fingers stir things up, sending ripples everywhere, and we and they can often lose sight of what matters.

All this affirms the need to stay with our feelings long enough for the emotional associations – the ripples – to settle. No one can escape this. No matter how young or old you may be, no matter how innocent or experienced you are, if you've been awake and alive and in any kind of relationship that has in any way been real, your waters will stir, your emotions will ripple. It seems the only way we can truly know our own depth is to wait for our associations and reflexes to subside, till we are clear as a lake again. Only when what gets stirred up settles can we see ourselves and each other clearly.

- *Breathe slowly, and allow your agitations of heart to come and go with each breath.*
- *Breathe steadily, and try to outwait your reflexes to be angry or anxious or envious or resentful.*
- *Breathe evenly, and with each exhalation try to feel the depth of heart that waits below.*

**Practice the above exercise when your buttons get pushed this week, rippling your emotions. Write about your experience. Did it lead you to the calm depth of your heart, or are you still in the process?**

**Working at staying with the rippling emotions exercise, continued.**

# Desmond Tutu's Epiphany

From *Epiphany*

By Desmond Tutu, Compiled by Elise Ballard

*God loves us all, no matter what.*

- Desmond Tutu

Desmond Tutu was the first black South African Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, and is currently Archbishop Emeritus. He became known worldwide during the 1980s as a key opponent of apartheid and was the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, promoting restorative and reconciliatory rather than retributive justice for human rights violations perpetuated during the apartheid era and in the violence following its abolition. In 1984 Tutu became the second South African awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He has also been awarded the Albert Schweitzer Prize for Humanitarianism, the Gandhi Peace Prize in 2005, and the American Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009...

I've had quite a few moments in my life that I would consider an epiphany – an opening, or a revelation that enables you for a moment to glimpse the glory of God, or the glory that *is* God. My greatest is the realization that *God loves us, no matter what.*

I was teaching at Emory University from 1998 to 2000. At the end of my teaching stint, the students decided they were going to give me a plaque, and they used a play on words. Instead of “Nobel” they called it a “Noble” Prize, and on this plaque it read: “A Noble Prize for preaching (even if it is the same sermon).”

It was funny, and they did this because it was my teaching; I was constantly reminding them that I believe the epiphany that you really want to have in life is: *God loves you, first up, no matter what.* I would say my epiphany about this has been truly an extended epiphany. My awareness of the free, gracious love of God has been cumulative over many years as I've pondered and deepened my understanding of the magnitude, significance, and truth of this.

I learned and heard about God's love for us, beginning as a child, of course, but several instances and parables in the Bible have struck me more deeply throughout the years to help me grow and reinforce and understand this Divine Love. In the Old Testament, I came to realize that God loves and chooses the Israelites as his Chosen People and takes them out of Egypt. But they had not done anything to deserve being chosen. When He gave them the Ten Commandments, He gives them *after* the Exodus from Egypt. You know? So it's not



“Keep my laws *so* that I will love you,” but it’s “Keep my laws *because* I love you – my law is to enable you to express your gratitude...”

Later, I began to understand the parables better, such as the one of the lost sheep where the Good Shepherd leaves ninety-nine perfectly well-behaved sheep to go and look for the lone troublesome one. Often we spoil this lesson in most of our churches because we show Jesus carrying a fluffy little lamb, and fluffy little lambs don’t stray from their mommies. It’s the obstreperous old ram that strayed, and that’s the one that the Good Shepherd invests *all* of those resources in to try to win back.

Again, you see, God loves us no matter what – this kind of Divine Love is incredible. Having this knowledge and understanding of this love is something that just goes through any walls you might have or perceive. You truly know that God has *no enemies*. Even the worst of us in our communities is a beloved of God, and that has taught me to remember that there is *no one* in this world who is a lost cause. There is no one that I can or you can or *anyone* can declare firmly, “You are going to hell.”

An epiphany is God seeking to draw us to God. St. Augustine said, “Thou hast made us for Thyself. And our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” If we want true, extraordinary fulfillment, our fulfillment comes only from God, the Infinite. Divine Love is incredible. It’s just mind-blowing.

**Have you ever had an experience of Divine Love – a time when you felt/experienced the Presence – leaving you knowing you were not alone? Explain.**

**Because God is infinite, God/the Beloved One/Higher Power will be to you whatever you want it to be! List at least five qualities of the God of *your* understanding and why you know they are true and real for you.**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



# The Light of God

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

By James Dillet Freeman, Edited by Maggie Oman

The light of God surrounds me;

The love of God enfolds me;

The power of God protects me;

The presence of God watches over me.

Wherever I am, God is.



# Home Study for Week 4

## READING

- A Lamp in the Darkness* Read:
  - Chapter 5 “The Practice of Forgiveness ” pp. 35-42
- Workbook** Week 4 pp. 37-46

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time with the meditation “The Practice of Forgiveness” using the CD in the back of your textbook.

## WRITING

- Workbook for Week 4:** Read and respond in writing to each of the articles. Allow plenty of time to answer thoughtfully and completely.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

## Final Project Thought Paper: “Acceptance”

Begin to contemplate your final project, which is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “Acceptance.” Using *specific, real-life examples*, answer the question: *How am I learning to accept more fully the way things are, shining a wise and compassionate light on the circumstances of my life?*

Your Thought Paper will last 5-7 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 personal experience.

In Week 5 you will sign up to present your “Acceptance” thoughts in Week 7 or in Week 8.

## Week 4 Choosing Forgiveness

### This Week

This week we remember that our old patterns of unforgiveness trap us in the past, carrying yesterday's pain into today. When we are quiet and listen, we hear the whisperings of our own inner light, urging us to be fully present for that which is in front of us this very moment. This is where love resides. Ultimately, forgiveness is for ourselves ... an act of self-love.

*Be not ashamed of mistakes and thus make them crimes.*

- Confucius

*You can never be free from bitterness as long as you continue to think unforgiving thoughts. No matter what your reasons are for having bitter, unforgiving feelings, you can go beyond them. You have a choice.*

- Louise Hay

*As we grow in wisdom, we pardon more freely.*

- Madame de Stael

*Only my condemnation injures me. Only my own forgiveness sets me free.*

- A Course in Miracles

*Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.*

- Mark Twain

# Teachers of God

From *A Return to Love: Reflections on a Course in Miracles*

By Marianne Williamson

The Course tells us of God’s plan for the salvation of the world, called ‘the plan of the teachers of God.’ The plan calls for God’s teachers to heal the world through the power of love. This teaching has very little to do with verbal communication, and everything to do with a quality of human energy. “To teach is to demonstrate.” A teacher of God is anyone who chooses to be one. “They come from all over the world. They come from all religions and from no religion. They are the ones who have answered.” The adage that “many are called but few are chosen” means that ‘everyone is called, but few care to listen.’ God’s call is universal, going out to every mind in every moment. Not everyone, however, chooses to heed the call of his own heart. As all of us are only too aware, the loud and frantic voices of the outer world easily drown out the small still loving voice within.

Our job as a teacher of God, should we choose to accept it, is to constantly seek a greater capacity for love and forgiveness within ourselves. We do this through a “selective remembering,” a conscious decision to remember only loving thoughts and let go of any fearful ones. This is the meaning of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a major cornerstone of *A Course in Miracles* philosophy. Like many of the traditional terms used in the Course, it is used in a very nontraditional way.

Traditionally, we think of forgiveness as something we are to do when we see guilt in someone. In the Course, however, we’re taught that it’s our function to remember that there *is* no guilt in anyone, because only love is real. It is our function to see through the illusion of guilt, to the innocence that lies beyond. “To forgive is merely to remember only the loving thoughts you gave in the past, and those that were given to you. All the rest must be forgotten.” We are asked to extend our perception beyond the errors that our physical perceptions reveal to us – what someone did, what someone said – to the holiness within them that only our heart reveals. Actually, then, there is nothing to forgive. The traditional notion of forgiveness – what *The Song of Prayer* calls “forgiveness-to-destroy” – is then an act of judgment. It is the arrogance of someone who sees themselves as better than someone else, or perhaps equally as sinful, which is still a misperception and the arrogance of the ego.

Since all minds are connected, then the correction of anyone’s perception is on some level a healing of the entire racial mind. The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world. Angry people cannot create a peaceful planet. It amuses me to think how angry I used to get when people wouldn’t sign my peace petitions.

Forgiveness is a full time job, and sometimes very difficult. Few of us always succeed, yet making the effort is our most noble calling. It is the world's only real chance to begin again. A radical forgiveness is a complete letting go of the past, in any personal relationship, as well as in any collective drama.

*“When your forgiveness is complete you will have total gratitude.”*

- A Course in Miracles

**In what areas of your life do you have gratitude because of the process of forgiving?  
Explain.**

# Forgive Yourself

*From just one thing: developing a buddha brain one simple practice at a time*

By Ric Hanson

*Everyone messes up.* Me, you, the neighbors, everybody. It's important to acknowledge mistakes, learn from them so they don't happen again, and feel appropriate remorse. But most people keep beating themselves up way past the point of usefulness: they're unfairly self-critical.

Inside the mind are many subpersonalities. For example, one part of me sets the alarm clock for 6 a. m. to get up and exercise ... and then when it goes off, another part of me grumbles: *Who set the darn clock?!* More broadly, there are an inner critic and an inner protector inside each of us. For most people, that inner critic is continually yammering away, looking for something, anything, to find fault with. It magnifies small failings into big ones, punishes you over and over for things long past, ignores the larger context, and doesn't credit you for your efforts to make amends.

That's why you need your inner protector to stick up for you: to put your weaknesses and misdeeds in perspective, to highlight your many good qualities surrounding your lapses, to encourage you to return to the high road even if you've gone down the low one, and – frankly – to tell that inner critic to Hush Up Now.

## How

Start by picking something relatively small that you're still being hard on yourself about, and try the methods below. Then work up to more significant issues.

Here we go:

- Start by getting in touch with the feeling of being cared about by someone in your life today or from your past. Get a sense that this person's caring for you, and perhaps other aspects of him or her, have been taken into your own mind as parts of your inner protector. Do this with other beings who care about you, and open to a growing sense of your inner protector.
- Staying with feeling cared about, bring to mind some of your many good qualities. You could ask the protector what it knows about you. These are facts, not flattery, and you don't need a halo to have good qualities like patience, determination, fairness, or kindness.



- This step and the one above it will help you face whatever needs forgiving, and actually forgive yourself.
- If you yelled at a child, lied at work, partied too hard, let a friend down, cheated on a partner, or were secretly glad about someone's downfall – *whatever* it was – acknowledge the facts: what happened, what was in your mind at the time, the relevant context and history, and the results for yourself and others.
- Notice any facts that are hard to face – like the look in a child's eyes when you yelled at her – and be especially open to them; they're the ones that are keeping you stuck. It is always the truth that sets us free.
- Sort what happened into three piles: moral faults, unskillfulness, and everything else. Moral faults deserve *proportionate* guilt, remorse, or shame, but unskillfulness calls for correction, no more. (This point is *very* important.)

You could ask others – including people you may have wronged – what they think about this sorting (and about other points below), but you alone get to decide what's right. For example, if you gossiped about someone and embellished a mistake he made, you might decide that the lie in your exaggeration is a moral fault deserving a wince of remorse, but that casual gossip (which most of us do at one time or another) is simply unskillful and should be corrected. (i.e. not done again) without self-flagellation.

- In an honest way, take responsibility for your moral fault(s) and unskillfulness. Say in your mind or out loud (or write): *I am responsible for \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.* Let yourself *feel* it.

Then add to yourself: *But I am NOT responsible for \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.* For example, you are not responsible for the misinterpretations or overreactions of others. Let the relief of what you are NOT responsible for sink in.

- Acknowledge what you have already done to learn from this experience, and to repair things and make amends. Let this sink in. Appreciate yourself.

Next decide what, if anything, remains to be done – inside our own heart or out there in the world – and then do it. Let it sink in that you're doing it, and appreciate yourself for this, too.

Now check in with your inner protector: is there anything else you should face or do? Listen to the still, quiet voice of conscience, so different from the pounding scorn of the critic. If you truly know that something remains, then take care of it. But otherwise, know in your heart that what needed learning has been learned, and that what needed doing has been done.

- And now actively forgive yourself. Say in your mind, out loud, in writing, or perhaps to others statements like *I forgive myself for \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.* *I have taken responsibility and done what I could to make things better.* You could also ask the inner protector to forgive you, or others out in the world, such as the person you wronged.
- You may need to go through one or more of the steps above again and again to truly forgive yourself, and that's alright. Allow the experience of being forgiven – in this case, by yourself – to take some time to sink in. Help it sink in by opening up to it in your body and heart, and by reflecting on how it will help others if you stop beating yourself up.

May you be at peace.

**What does your inner protector look like, sound like, feel like?**

**How do you differentiate the voice of your inner protector from your inner critic?**

**Choose something for which you desire self-forgiveness. Practice the steps in this article and write about your experience.**



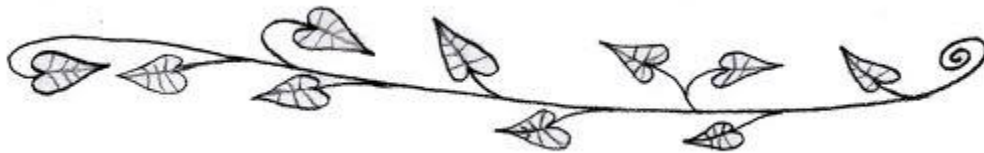
## Stay Up Till Dawn

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

By Rumi, Translated by John Moyne and Coleman Barks, Edited by Maggie Oman

Some nights, stay up till dawn,  
as the moon sometimes does for the sun.  
Be a full bucket pulled up the dark way  
of a well, then lifted out into light.

Something opens our wings.  
Something makes boredom and hurt disappear.  
Someone fills the cup in front of us.  
We taste only sacredness.



# Home Study for Week 5

## READING

- A Lamp in the Darkness* Read:
  - Chapter 6 “The Temple of Healing” pp. 43-47
  - Chapter 7 “The Zen of an Aching Heart” pp. 49-53
- Workbook** Week 5 pp. 47-56

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time with the meditation “The Temple of Healing” using the CD in the back of your textbook.

## WRITING

- Workbook for Week 5:** Read and respond in writing to each of the articles. Allow plenty of time to answer thoughtfully and completely.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

## Final Project Thought Paper: “Acceptance”

Begin to contemplate and formulate your final project, which is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “Acceptance.” Using *specific, real-life examples*, answer the question: *How am I learning to accept more fully the way things are, shining a wise and compassionate light on the circumstances of my life?*

Your Thought Paper will last 5-7 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 personal experience.

Next week you will sign up to present your “Acceptance” thoughts in Week 7 or in Week 8.

*We must be willing to get rid of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us. The old skin has to be shed before the new one can come.*

- Joseph Campbell

## Week 5

# Choosing Healing

*Not everything that is faced can be changed.  
But nothing can be changed until it is faced.*

- James Baldwin

### **This Week**

This week we consciously set our intention to bring gentle, healing energy to the parts of us that are hurting, broken, fearful or lost. We often grow the most during our greatest periods of pain; today's intention is to lean into the growth process. Once we dedicate ourselves to our own healing, we automatically become a healing force for others.

*The best chance to be whole is to love whatever gets in the way, until it ceases to be an obstacle.*

- Mark Nepo

*The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the greatest intention.*

- Khalil Gibran

*I have always held firmly to the thought that each one of us can do a little to bring some portion of misery to an end.*

- Albert Schweitzer

# I'm From Earth, But My Father's From Pluto

From *Your Soul's Assignment*

By Rev. Chris Michaels

My mother tells me that when I was about five years old I looked at my father straight in the eyes one day and said: “Whatever I do in this life and whatever I become, I don’t want to be like you!” So that kind of tells you about my relationship with my father.

Try as we might, we just couldn’t understand each other! And it seems like it started the day I was born. We had absolutely nothing in common, except a shared biology. And the older I got, the more resentful I became that he wasn’t the father I thought he should be.

He was a simple, country boy – not the urban intellectual I aspired to be. He was a fearful man. I never once heard him talk about a dream, much less finding the courage to pursue it. And like many men of his generation he was emotionally absent – unable to express his feelings because of decades of social programming that told him it’s not what men do!

I, on the other hand, was passionate and expressive, courageous and adventurous! We were millions of miles apart on everything politically, socially – and certainly when it came to religion.

He and his wife are members of a very rigid, Christian denomination. And to this day neither of them has ever attended a single lecture, or read a word of anything I’ve written – and never expressed any desire to do so.

We never understood each other, ever! And for years I thought that meant we couldn’t *love* each other either.

Like a lot of people, I thought understanding was a prerequisite to love. I thought you had to get inside someone’s head and figure out *why* they do the things they do before you could love them. And God knows I tried with my father! We talked. We argued. We tried to reach some kind of consensus or agreement. But we could never find any common ground. So, the final strategy was to spend many years just trying to ignore each other.

And then one day, after many unsuccessful attempts at finding love in my own life, I attended a workshop. The facilitator, Dr. Kennedy Shultz, said two things that have stuck with me to this day. The first thing he said was: “*Until you heal the relationship you have with your parents, you’re not really a candidate for loving anyone else.*” And I thought to myself: “Oh



great, now I'm really screwed! So that's why I haven't been able to attract anyone decent in my life!"

But then I was relieved to hear him say the second thing. He said: "*Understanding has never been a prerequisite for loving. You don't have to understand someone before you love them!*"

So I was making the same mistake everyone else makes with love – they try to put understanding *first*. But actually it works the other way around. If you love them first, you'll grow to understand them later. Love opens the way to understanding!

Ironically, the one thing I spent years, maybe even decades, trying to get from my father was his love and acceptance. I wanted him to accept me just as I am! And yet that's the one thing I wouldn't give him. I couldn't accept his politics or religion, or his emotional inabilities. I rejected everything he believed in because I just couldn't *understand* how he could be the way he was! The one thing I was trying to get from him – unconditional love and acceptance – was the very thing I was denying him – love without understanding.

And when I realized that, I stopped trying to understand him and just started *loving* him!

And today we have a well-healed relationship. Mind you, we still don't understand each other. And there are subjects we just don't go near! But there's a healthy respect for our differences and a genuine feeling of love in our hearts.

I share this success story with you because I think that all of the stories of our lives are really about finding our way to love. If God is love – and we are created in God's image and likeness – then all of our attempts to know ourselves and understand God, we are really learning how to love! Love is the soul's only assignment! Everything else is secondary and mostly irrelevant.

From God's perspective it doesn't really matter what kind of car you drive, or how big a house you live in. All of the things we think are important really aren't. They're just trivialities that are supposed to keep us amused while we learn to love. All of the pretty, shiny objects, the new cars and new clothes – and all the things we see in store windows and think we've just got to have, aren't the real priorities in life. Love is! In the end, the only thing that matters is: How much did you love? Did you grow in love? Did you learn something about love?

**Chris Michaels' father became one of his greatest teachers. Who has been one of your greatest teachers? Why?**

**Greatest teachers, continued.**

# Living in Love

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

By Tara Brach

The Christian mystic Thomas Merton says, “Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent and the divine is shining through it all the time. This is not just a nice story or fable. This is true.” To me, the divine is the loving awareness that is our source and essence. When we pay careful attention, we see every person as an expression of the love and goodness we cherish. Every being becomes the Beloved. Merton describes a profound moment when he realized this transfiguring truth:

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depth of their hearts where neither sin nor knowledge could reach, the core of reality, the person that each one is in the eyes of the divine. If only they could see themselves as they really are, if only we could see each other that way all the time, there would be no more need for war, for hatred, for greed, for cruelty. I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.

When we see the secret beauty of anyone, including ourselves, we see past our judgment and fear into the core of who we truly are – not an entrapped self but the radiance of goodness.

As our trust in our basic goodness deepens, we are able to express our love and creativity more fully in the world. Rather than second-guessing ourselves, rather than being paralyzed by self-doubt, we can honor and respond to the promptings that arise from that goodness. In a similar way, when we trust the goodness in others, we become a mirror to help them trust themselves. The actions we take that arise out of loving-kindness are part of our path as a bodhisattva\*. When we are not consumed by blaming and turning on ourselves or others, we are free to cultivate our talents and gifts together, to contribute them to the world in service. We are free to love each other, and the whole world of life, without holding back.

\* **Buddhist deity:** in Buddhism, a deity or being who has attained enlightenment worthy of nirvana but who remains in the human world to help others

**How do you live in love today with yourself?**

**How do you live in love today with others?**

# Giving Our Gift

From *How, Then, Shall We Live?*

By Wayne Muller

Sometimes our gift is pulled from within us by circumstance – often in ways we would never have imagined.

In 1989 Al Wooten Jr., a thirty-five-year-old security guard trainee, was killed in a drive-by shooting in Los Angeles. His mother, Faye, in the face of such random, senseless violence, vowed that her son would not die in vain. She sold her two-bedroom home in south central Los Angeles to raise money to open an after-school learning refuge for children ages seven to eighteen. She gathered a corps of mostly black college students and professionals to donate their time teaching courses in spelling, math, entrepreneurship, black history, and community and family responsibility.

Faye had always wanted to be a teacher, but as the eighth of nine children born to a minister father and a home-maker mother in Chisolm, Texas, she had to drop out of school in the ninth grade when she could not afford the bus fare to get to the segregated black high school. Instead, she washed glasses in a restaurant. Now, years later, with the tragic death of her son, came the moment for Faye to offer her luminous gift of teaching to a community torn by violence, poverty, and despair.

Helen is a nurse in the emergency room at a local hospital. She told me that whenever there was a “code” in the ER – when a patient needed emergency treatment to be resuscitated, to save their life – the doctors and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) would often make jokes or exchange nervous wisecracks to ease the tension. At that moment, everyone involved was frightened. A human being could die if things were not done perfectly. The cynical joking would mask the pain and anxiety.

And yet Helen knew many of these doctors to be fundamentally caring, committed healers. They would not intentionally be hurtful or unkind. So Helen suggested a new practice: Whenever there was a code in the ER, she would invite family members of the patient to gather around as the patient was being resuscitated. Working in the presence of the family members, the doctors and EMTs were suddenly softer, more concerned, more present. They were more aware of the personhood of the patient and the impact this particular human being had on the immediate lives of others. With this simple shift in procedure the atmosphere was dramatically enriched; what had been a time of discomfort and joking now became a moment of mindful, careful attention to the body, heart, and spirit of the patient and loved ones. The very difficulty of the situation actually gave birth to Helen’s gift...

A few years ago Sidney Poitier was given the Lifetime Achievement Award by the American Film Institute. Afterward he was asked what advice he would give to young black

filmmakers just beginning their careers. Poitier – well aware of both the opportunities and responsibilities that confronted his audience and his profession – said simply, “Be true to yourselves.” And then he added, “And be useful to the journey.”

**In what ways have you been true to yourself?**

**How have you been useful – giving your gifts – to the journey of your life?**



# Healing

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

From *A Course in Miracles*, Edited by Maggie Oman

If you wish only to be healed, you will heal.  
Your single purpose makes this possible.  
But if you are afraid of healing, then it cannot come through you.  
The only thing that is required for a healing is lack of fear.  
The fearful are not healed, and cannot heal.  
This does not mean the conflict must be gone forever from your mind to heal.  
For if it were, there would be no need for healing then.  
But it does mean, if only for an instant, you love without attack.  
An instant is sufficient.  
Miracles wait not on time



# Home Study for Week 6

## READING

- A Lamp in the Darkness* Read:
  - Chapter 8 “Equanimity and Peace” pp. 55-62
  - Chapter 9 “Your Highest Intention” pp. 63-68
- Workbook** Week 6 pp. 57-67

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Spend time with the meditation “Equanimity and Peace” using the CD in the back of your textbook.

## WRITING

- Workbook for Week 6:** Read and respond in writing to each of the articles. Allow plenty of time to answer thoughtfully and completely.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

## Final Project Thought Paper: “Acceptance”

Continue to work on your final project, which is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “Acceptance.” Using *specific, real-life examples*, answer the question: *How am I learning to accept more fully the way things are, shining a wise and compassionate light on the circumstances of my life?*

Your Thought Paper will last 5-7 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 personal experience.

If you have not done so, please sign up to present your “Acceptance” thoughts in Week 7 or in Week 8.



*Judgment and love are opposites. From one comes all the sorrows of the world. But from the other comes the peace of God.*

- A Course in Miracles

## Week 6

# Choosing Peace

*We experience God's peace and harmony to the extent to which we love, forgive, and focus on the good in others and in ourselves.*

- Marianne Williamson

### **This Week**

This week we embrace the inner stillness that holds us in peace as we move through the uncertainties of our very human world. Because we know that what we believe becomes true for us, this week we investigate our personal beliefs with wisdom, self-acceptance and love.

*If you want to be happy, you have to let go of the part of you that wants to create melodrama.*

- Michael Singer

*You walk in the atmosphere of your own believing.*

- Rev. Willard Fuller

*If we could see the miracle of a single flower clearly, our whole life would change.*

- Buddha

# The Wise Heart

From *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*

By Jack Kornfield

The wise heart brings compassion to imperfection itself. A study of “wounded healers” was done at Stanford University comparing those psychologists who worked in a detached way, not revealing anything about themselves, with those who shared some of their own difficulties and woundedness. The wounded healers fostered the greatest healing in their patients.

The wise heart is at peace with the way things are. No longer struggling against the world or lost in it, we rest. The holy qualities of understanding, humility, and a patient caring are our gifts. Our body, speech, and mind become like the Tao, “content with the changing of the seasons.” We become the love we have sought. And in this love we are also returned to ourselves.

Zen teacher Edward Espe Brown is the author of many Zen-inspired cookbooks, beginning with *The Tassajara Bread Book*. Through describing his kitchen practice, he writes of the truths of the heart.

When I first started cooking at Tassajara, I had a problem. I couldn’t get my biscuits to come out the way they were supposed to. I’d follow a recipe and try variations, but nothing worked. These biscuits just didn’t measure up.

Growing up I had made two kinds of biscuits. One was from Bisquick and the other from Pillsbury. For the Bisquick you added milk in the mix and then blobbed the dough into spoonfuls onto the pan – you didn’t even need to roll them out. The biscuits from Pillsbury came in kind of a cardboard can. You rapped the can on the corner of the counter and it popped open. Then you twisted the can open more, put the premade biscuits on a pan, and baked them. I really liked those Pillsbury biscuits. Isn’t that what biscuits should taste like? Mine weren’t coming out right.

It’s wonderful and amazing the ideas we get about what biscuits should taste like, or what a life should look like. Compared to what? Canned biscuits from Pillsbury? *Leave It to Beaver*? People who ate my biscuits would extoll their virtues, eating one after another, but to me these perfectly good biscuits just weren’t right.

Finally one day came a shifting-into-place, and awakening. “Not right” compared to what? Oh my word, I’d been trying to make canned Pillsbury biscuits! Then came an exquisite moment of actually tasting my biscuits without comparing them to some

previously hidden standard. They were wheaty, flaky, buttery, sunny, earthy, real. They were incomparably alive – in fact, much more satisfying than any memory. These occasions can be so stunning, so liberating, these moments when you realize your life is just fine as it is, thank you. Only the insidious comparison to a beautifully prepared, beautifully packaged product made it seem insufficient. Trying to produce a biscuit – a life – with no dirty bowls, no messy feelings, no depression, no anger, was so frustrating. Then savoring, actually tasting the present moment of experience – how much more complex and multifaceted. How unfathomable.

As Zen students we spent years trying to make it look right, trying to cover the faults, conceal the messes. We knew what the Bisquick Zen student looked like: calm, buoyant, cheerful, energetic, deep, profound. Our motto, as one of my friends said, was, “looking good.” We’ve all done it, trying to look good as a husband, a wife or parent. Trying to attain perfection. Trying to make Pillsbury biscuits.

Well, to heck with it, I say. Wake up and smell the coffee. How about some good old home cooking, the biscuits of today.

**Think of a time you tried to meet a standard of appearance, career or relationship expectation, or anything else used to measure your self-worth. Describe the situation and what you learned from it.**

# If You Believe It

From *You Can Heal Your Life*

By Louis Hay

## **If You Believe It, It Seems True**

How often have we said, “That’s the way I am,” or “That’s the way it is”? Those specific words are really saying that that’s what we *believe* to be true for us. Usually, what we believe is only someone else’s opinion we have incorporated into our belief systems. No doubt it fits right in with all the other things we believe.

Are you one of the many people who will get up in the morning, see that it’s raining, and say, “Oh, what a lousy day!”?

It is *not* a lousy day. It is only a wet day. If we wear the appropriate clothing and change our attitude, we can have a lot of rainy day fun. If it is really our belief that rainy days are lousy days, then we will always greet rain with a sinking heart. We will fight the day rather than flow with what is happening in the moment.

If we want a joyous life, we must think joyous thoughts. If we want a prosperous life, we must think prosperous thoughts. If we want a loving life, we must think loving thoughts. *Whatever we send out mentally or verbally will come back to us in like form.*

## **Each Moment Is a New Beginning**

I repeat, *The Point of Power is always in the present moment.* You are *never* stuck. This is where the changes take place, right here and right now *in our own minds!* It doesn’t matter how long we’ve had a negative pattern or an illness or a poor relationship or lack of finances or self-hatred. We can begin to make a shift today!

Your problem no longer needs to be the truth for you. It can now fade back into the nothingness from whence it came. You can do it.

Remember: *you are the only person who thinks in your mind!* You are the power and authority in your world!

Your thoughts and beliefs of the past have created this moment, and all the moments up to this moment. What you are now choosing to believe and think and say will create the next moment and the next day and the next month and the next year.

Yes, you, darling! I can give you the most marvelous advice, coming from my years of experience, yet you can continue to choose to think the same old thoughts, you can refuse to change and keep all your problems.

*You are the power in the world! You get to have whatever you choose to think!*

This moment begins the new process. Each moment is a new beginning, and this moment is a new beginning for you right here and right now! Isn't that great to know! This moment is the *Point of Power!* This moment is where the change begins!

### **Is It True?**

Stop for a moment and catch your thought. What are you thinking right now? If it is true that your thoughts shape your life, would you want what you were just thinking right now to become true for you? If it's a thought of worry or anger or hurt or revenge or fear, how do you think this thought will come back to you?

It is not always easy to catch our thoughts because they move so swiftly. However, we can begin right now to watch and listen to what we say. If you hear yourself expressing negative words of any sort, stop in mid-sentence. Either rephrase the sentence or just drop it. You could even say to it, "Out!"

Imagine yourself at a cafeteria, or perhaps at a buffet in a luxurious hotel, where instead of dishes of food, there are dishes of thoughts. You get to choose any and all the thoughts you wish. These thoughts will create your future experiences.

Now, if you choose thoughts that will create problems and pain, that's rather foolish. It's like choosing food that always makes you ill. We may do this once or twice, but as soon as we learn which foods upset our bodies, we stay away from them. It's the same with thoughts. *Let us stay away from thoughts that create problems and pain.*

One of my early teachers, Dr. Raymond Charles Barker, would repeatedly say, "When there is a problem, there is not something to do, there is something to know."

Our minds create our future. When we have something in our present that is undesirable, then we must use our minds to change the situation. And we can begin to change it this very second ...

*In the infinity of life where I am,*

*all is perfect, whole and complete.*

*I am always Divinely protected and guided.*

*It is safe for me to look within myself.*

*It is safe for me to look into the past.*

*It is safe for me to enlarge my viewpoint of life.*

*I am far more than my personality –*

*past, present, or future.*

*I now choose to rise above*

*my personality problems to recognize*

*the magnificence of my being.*

*I am totally willing to learn to love myself.*

*All is well in my world.*

**Name 5 things you believe to be true about life in general:** (economy, relationships, aging, health, world situations, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**Name 5 things you believe to be true about you:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**Name 5 things you believe to be true about the God of your understanding:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**Name 5 things you believe to be true about your relationship with the God of your understanding:**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

**Today I am grateful for ...**

# Bronze Buddha for Sale

From *A Life of Being, Having, and Doing Enough*

By Wayne Muller

*I almost bought a Buddha.*

*Green cast bronze  
suggestive, abstract  
lumping shape of earth  
sat so long so  
still  
all elements over how many years time  
fused as one.*

*I thought it would look good in my house,  
effuse some deeply missing spiritual  
fragrance I missed or  
suddenly knew I so desperately  
needed.*

*I wondered how much it would cost.  
I looked at the price list,  
no red dot,  
can afford it,  
I thought,  
but,  
but.*

*Then.*

*There.*

*I stopped.*

*Knowing at once  
it was the quiet  
I wanted,*

*the stillness inside, the not moving  
for so long  
what had been inside this Buddha*

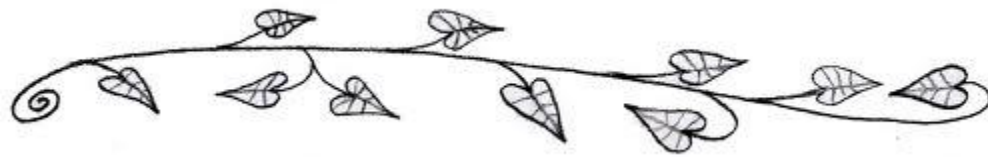


*had become one with  
everything good and soft,  
everything sharp and aching,  
some impossible alchemy of time and  
needing no thing  
peace  
had rendered all life  
still.*

*No movement was required;  
nothing need move anywhere  
ever, again.*

*How much,  
I wondered,  
would that cost?*

**I am filled with peace when ...**

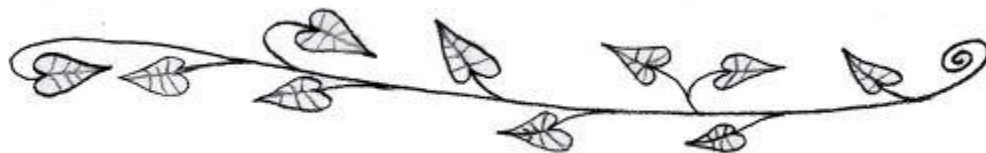


# Silence

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

By Thomas Merton, Edited by Maggie Oman

The reality that is present to us and in us:  
call it Being ... Silence.  
And the simple fact that by being attentive,  
by learning to listen  
(or recovering the natural capacity to listen)  
we can find ourself engulfed in such happiness  
that it cannot be explained:  
the happiness of being at one with everything  
in that hidden ground of Love  
for which there can be no explanations ...  
May we all grow in grace and peace,  
and not neglect the silence that is printed  
in the center of our being.  
It will not fail us.



# Home Study for Week 7

## READING

- A Lamp in the Darkness* Read:
  - Chapter 10 “The Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Healing Journey” pp. 69-93
- Workbook** Week 7 pp. 69-78

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Each day, choose one of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness: your body, feelings, mind or Dharma to take into meditative silence.

## WRITING

- Workbook for Week 7:** Read and respond in writing to each of the articles. Allow plenty of time to answer thoughtfully and completely.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

## Final Project Thought Paper: “Acceptance”

Continue to work on your final project, which is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “Acceptance.” Using *specific, real-life examples*, answer the question: *How am I learning to accept more fully the way things are, shining a wise and compassionate light on the circumstances of my life?*

Your Thought Paper will last 5-7 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 personal experience.

**Please be ready to present your paper next week if you signed up for Week 7.**



## Week 7

# Choosing Mindfulness

### **This Week**

This week we consider the benefits of mindfulness – a balanced, nonjudgmental attention, from which we see through the eyes of acceptance and respond accordingly. The four foundations of mindfulness are attention to the body, feelings, mind and Dharma – seeing truth in the way things are.

*The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it.*

- Thich Nhat Hanh

*In this moment, there is plenty of time. In this moment, you are precisely as you should be. In this moment, there is infinite possibility.*

- Victoria Moran

*The most fundamental aggression to ourselves, the most fundamental harm we can do to ourselves, is to remain ignorant by not having the courage and the respect to look at ourselves honestly and gently.*

- Pema Chodran

*Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening right now without wishing it were different; enjoying the pleasant without holding on when it changes (which it will); being with the unpleasant without fearing it will always be this way (which it won't).*

- James Baraz

*Each place is the right place – the place where I now am can be a sacred space.*

- Ravi Ravindra

# Be Mindful

*From just one thing: developing a buddha brain one simple practice at a time*

By Rick Hanson

The movements of information through your nervous system – which is what I mean by “mental activity,” most of which is unconscious – can create lasting changes in brain structure: “neurons that fire together, wire together.” In particular, this rewiring is accelerated for what’s in the field of focused attention. In effect, attention is like a combination spotlight and vacuum cleaner: it illuminates what it rests upon and then sucks it into your brain.

Since attention is largely under volitional control – you can direct it with conscious effort – you have an extraordinary tool at your disposal all day long to gradually sculpt your brain in positive ways. Unfortunately, most people do not have very good control of their attention: it’s hard for them to rest it where they want and keep it there – such as an important but boring meeting, or the sensations of one breath after another – and hard to pull it away from things that aren’t helpful, like senseless worry, self-critical rumination, or too much TV. The reasons include temperament (for example, anxious, spirited), personal history (for example, losses or traumas that keep them on edge), and our hyper-stimulating, ADD-ish culture.

Happily, attention is very trainable. You really can develop better control of your spotlight/vacuum cleaner. This is where mindfulness comes in – which simply means being steadily aware of something. As you practice being mindful, you will gain more control over your attention.

You could be mindful of what’s around you – perhaps key details at work, the deeper wants of your partner, flowers blooming and children smiling, or where you left the car keys. You could also be mindful of your inner world, such as soft feelings of hurt underneath brittle anger, your good intentions and basic decency, or unrealistic expectations that set you up for disappointment.

Mindfulness has lots of benefits. It brings important information about what’s happening around you and inside you. It helps you witness your experience without being swept away by it, and to hold it in a larger context; as your mindful awareness increases, negative experiences have less impact on you. And the duration and intensity of what you are paying attention to tends to increase its traces in your brain. Consequently, mindfulness really helps you take in positive experiences.

To some extent, mindfulness has become associated with Buddhism, but all the world’s religious and moral traditions value being mindful – rather than mindless! Additionally,

mindfulness is increasingly taught in secular settings such as hospitals, corporations, classrooms, professional sports, and military training.

Studies have shown that regular practices of mindfulness:

- Thicken cortical layers in regions of the brain that control attention (so you get better at attention itself) (Lazar et al. 2005)
- Add neural connection to the uncus, a part of the brain that supports both self-awareness and empathy for the emotions of others (Lazar et al. 2005)
- Increase the relative activation of the left prefrontal cortex (behind the left side of your forehead), which helps control and reduce negative emotions (Davidson 2004)
- Strengthen your immune system (Davidson et al. 2003)
- Reduce the impact of pain and accelerate post-surgical recovery (Kabat-Zinn 2003; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, and Burney 1985)

Pretty great for a simple method – mindfulness – that you can use, privately and effectively, anywhere you go.

## How

Mindfulness is natural. You are already mindful of many things each day. The problem is that most of us remain mindful for only a few seconds at a time. The trick is to have more “episodes” of mindfulness, and to lengthen and deepen them.

So, set aside a minute or more every day to be deliberately mindful – focusing on a specific object of attention (e.g., the sensations of breathing) or opening wide to whatever moves through awareness. You could extend these moments of mindfulness into a longer period of meditation, letting your mind become increasingly clear and peaceful.

Then, throughout the day, add some additional times of mindfulness when you remain stably present with whatever is happening around you and inside you. If you like, use recurring events such as meals, a telephone ringing, or walking through a doorway as reminders to be mindful.

It will support and deepen your mindfulness to bring an attitude of curiosity, openness, non-judgmental acceptance, and even a kind of friendliness to the things you’re aware of. Also try to develop a background awareness of how mindful you are being; in effect, you are paying attention ... to attention, in order to get better at it.

These practices will gradually train your brain to be more mindful, which will bring you many rewards. For as William James – the first major American psychologist – wrote over a century ago (1890) “The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over

and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will ... An education which should improve this faculty would be *the education par excellence.*”

**Practice being mindful this week. Write about your experience here.**



# Travel Guide

From *Climbing the Blue Mountain*

By Eknath Easwaran

Like any good travel guide, it is only after I have roused your interest in seeing the sights that I sit down with you to discuss terms. First of all, there is a limit on the amount of luggage you can bring with you. If airlines did not have a forty-pound limit, people would want to bring along their motorcycles to save on gas, a small library to keep them occupied while they get a tan, a few favorite plants, and some gymnasium equipment to work off that rich restaurant fare. So the Civil Aeronautics Board has laid down certain restrictions, meant not to discriminate against anyone but to ensure that the plane will be able to get off the ground.

It is the same story with the tour within. Please do not pack your selfish attachments or resentments; there is no room. And if you do not leave your favorite carry-on cravings behind you at the ticket counter, your plane will never get airborne. Everything has to be reduced to the size of two medium suitcases, which for most people is a long, painful process. But if you want to reach what Jesus calls the kingdom of heaven within, you will find you can get along much better without encumbrances.

This is one reason why I find interior travel so satisfying; you actually *can* “get away from it all.” If Princess Cruises could offer this, I might be working for them instead of touring for the spiritual life. But that is just the problem: wherever we go to get away from it all, we take along everything we want to get away from.

Recently my wife and I saw an Indian movie in which the happy couple goes off to Malaysia. While they enjoy the sights, they sing an interminable song about “joyful Singapore.” It might indeed be joyful, except that there at the airport to meet your plane will be a color guard of all your old problems, with a song guaranteed to spoil your fun: “Welcome, welcome! What would we do without you, and what were you planning to get away with that did not include us?”

Not so when you know how to travel the world within. When you meditate deeply, it is like taking off in a plane to which your resentments, cravings, and problems have no tickets. As you taxi down the runway, you can see them clustered at the airport window, waving and calling you back: “Wait! Come back! You’ll be sorry!” but you are intent on reaching your destination, and with determination you set your eyes on the sky and take off.

When you return, the scene is much different. Most of the resentments have given you up and gone home. The cravings are quiet and friendly and healthy again: “Who needs a cigarette? Let’s have a nice run in the park?” And best of all, as you walk down the ramp,

your arms are loaded with forgiveness and compassion, and your suitcases are packed with patience and creativity.

This is, as far as I know, the only way to get a real vacation. Worrying about your problems all the time makes for misery with a capital M. For getting away from misery, I recommend the “economy plan,” to which I refer throughout this book: do not feed your problems, your ego, with your attention. If you do not feed them, they will slowly lose weight. It makes sense. When we feed them, constantly begging them to have one more helping of attention even when they are gorged, we acquire obese problems that hug us tightly and weigh us down.

So if you really want a vacation, do not think about yourself or brood on your troubles. Do not let yourself get jealous or say uncharitable things about anyone. In other words, do not give the ego breakfast in bed, do not pack it a bag lunch, do not fix its dinner, do not give it pocket money for buying snacks, do not even give it a glass of water. Slowly, surely, the ego will lose weight, until one fine day it will be nothing but a phantom of its former selfish self. You will be able to see right through it.

**This week practice traveling lightly; leave behind habitual feelings and patterns of behavior that don’t serve you today. Instead, stay mindful to the beauty of the life that is around you and within you. Write about your experiences.**

# The Lesson of the Leaf

From *Let Go, Let Miracles Happen*

By Kathy Cordova

*As you release, so will you be released.*

- A Course in Miracles

Some years ago I was spending a month primarily by myself on a retreat in Australia. I was immersed in nature; I didn't read, listen to television, or talk on the telephone. I had no communication with my wife or friends. My communication was only with God.

One day I was walking by a stream and decided to sit on a large rock that looked over the stream. After about twenty minutes I happened to look up at a branch of a nearby tree to see a leaf fall from it.

The wind took hold of the leaf and blew it in a gentle circle. To my utter surprise, it landed right next to me on the rock. Immediately I felt that there was some kind of special message to be given to me by my new friend, the leaf. I focused all my attention on the leaf, beseeching it to reveal its meaning.

A few minutes later the wind came up and took the leaf high above my head. Slowly it landed in the stream and floated gently away until it disappeared.

I learned a lesson from the leaf that day. When you have total trust and faith in God, you can let go of whatever you are holding onto that makes you feel secure. I learned not to be fearful but to flow gently with the wind and the stream of life.

For me it was a powerful lesson of surrendering to God, surrendering to love, and letting go of the things I was holding to that kept me separate from God.

There are no words to describe the joy and bliss that I felt that day. Later I came across a beautiful waterfall. I jumped into the pool below, feeling the cold water cascade over my head. It felt like God was blessing me – baptizing me into a new life of freedom, trust, and faith. I felt the sacredness of that moment when I surrendered myself to God and love.

- Jerry Jampolsky

The things of the world that we cling to so tightly – money, prestige, the need to be the best – often keep us separated from God and other people. When we release our attachment to

those things that we are most afraid of losing, we find the freedom to flow with life as God intends – gently, peacefully, like a leaf on an autumn day.

**As I turn toward the God of my understanding, I release ...**

**As I turn toward the God of my understanding, I embrace ...**

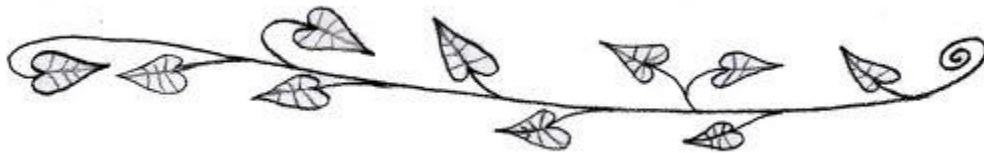


# Our True Home

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

By Thich Nhat Hanh, Edited by Maggie Oman

Our true home is in the present moment.  
To live in the present moment is a miracle.  
The miracle is not to walk on water.  
The miracle is to walk on the green Earth in the present moment,  
to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now.  
Peace is all around us –  
in the world and in nature –  
and within us –  
in our bodies and our spirits.  
Once we learn to touch this peace,  
we will be healed and transformed.  
It is not a matter of faith;  
it is a matter of practice.



# Home Study for Week 8

## READING

- A Lamp in the Darkness* Read:
  - Afterward: “The Return of Joy” pp. 95-98
- Workbook** Week 8 pp. 79-85

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Take the words of the Buddha on page 97 into the silence this week, beginning: *Live in joy ...*

## WRITING

- Workbook for Week 8:** Read and respond in writing to each of the articles. Allow plenty of time to answer thoughtfully and completely.
- Please be ready to share your thoughts, ideas and revelations for all your writings in class.

## Final Project Thought Paper: “Acceptance”

Complete your final project, which is an oral presentation of a thought paper entitled, “Acceptance.” Using *specific, real-life examples*, answer the question: *How am I learning to accept more fully the way things are, shining a wise and compassionate light on the circumstances of my life?*

Your Thought Paper will last 5-7 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 personal experience.

**Please be ready to present your paper next week if you signed up for Week 8.**

## Week 8

# Choosing Joy

### This Week

This week Jack Kornfield reminds us that, “When you learn to navigate your difficulties with compassion and grace, you will also discover that joy will return.” In every moment the God of our understanding is tugging at the shirt sleeves of our consciousness, awaiting our attention, holding us with comfort, strength, wisdom and love. When we choose God, we choose the return to joy.

*If you awake every morning with the thought that something wonderful will happen in your life today, you'll often find that you are right.*

- Nancy Sathre-Vogel

*Spirit has a good outcome for any situation, if you can open yourself to it.*

- Deepak Chopra

*God loves us all, no matter what.*

- Desmond Tutu

*To open deeply, as genuine spiritual life requires, we need tremendous courage and strength, a kind of warrior spirit. But the place for this warrior strength is in the heart.*

- Jack Kornfield

*One of the shining qualities that heroes possess is the willingness to be educated by all things.*

- Gregg Levoy

# Surrender to Surprise

From *The Seven Whispers*

By Christina Baldwin

*My boat strikes something deep.  
At first sounds of silence, waves.  
Nothing has happened;  
Or perhaps everything has happened  
And I am sitting in my new life.*

- Rumi

Surprise is a chance to open something new. We can hardly resist shaking the unopened box, guessing at the contents, peeking under just a tiny corner of the wrapping. Life's surprises are sometimes delightful, sometimes painful. Life's surprises introduce unexpected elements and experiences we might not have the courage to choose. But eventually curiosity gets the best of us so that even an initially painful or bewildering surprise becomes a gift we are willing to open. Surprise encourages us to relate to experience with a sense of wonder. Surprise challenges us to be startled awake, and sometimes shocked to our core.

When we set intention and claim purpose, we often step forward with great certainty. But a gap always opens between what we think will happen, and what actually does happen. This gap is surprise. We may be maintaining peace of mind, moving at the pace of guidance, and practicing certainty of purpose, but that does not mean we know how we're going to reach a goal, or who and what is coming along to help and hinder us in the journey...

Becoming aware of how surprise supports us is a spiritual skill. To live life consciously, we need to prepare for wonderful and horrible things to happen to us that we don't expect. Every day we need to notice when and how spirit is trying to get through our little fantasies of self-determination with some other message. Chart the day and look for the unexpected. Chart life with a spirit of openness.

I had an aunt who used to respond to any family crisis with the assurance, "When God shuts a door, He opens a window." She was reminding us to look differently at surprise. Right now in some churches you'll hear the refrain: "If God is good, then God is good all the time." This invites us to trust spirit as it works in our lives, even when surprise is not to our liking.

Surrendering to surprise allows us to practice the resilience we need to respond to whatever life offers. As we practice surrendering to smaller surprises, we build up the resilience required when larger surprises come along. A person who can miss all the green lights on



the way to work and find a way to see it as a blessing is far better able to handle a layoff or missed promotion and figure out the blessing in that event as well.

There are three responses to surprise that help us practice spiritual surrender:

1. Notice what is really happening.
2. Work with what is really happening.
3. Accept what is really happening...

In the closing paragraph of her book describing the autism of her daughter, Clara Claiborne Park writes:

This experience we did not choose, which we would have given anything to avoid, has made us different, has made us better. Through it we have learned the lesson that no one studies willingly, the hard, slow lesson of Sophocles and Shakespeare – that one grows by suffering ... I write now what fifteen years past I would still not have thought possible to write: that if today I were given the choice to accept the experience, with everything that it entails, or to refuse the bitter largesse, I would have to stretch out my hands because out of it has come, for all of us, an unimagined life. And I will not change the last word of the story. It is still love.

**Think back on a time when you surrendered into a challenging situation. How did you grow through it?**

# Honey of My Failures

From *The Book of Awakening*

By Mark Nepo

*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 Mahado

It seems impossible, but every humbled life has cried it is so: The sweetness of living comes to us when the very humanness we regret and try to hide, our seeming flaws and shameful secrets, are worked by time and nature into a honey all their own. Ultimately, it is where we are *not* perfect, where we are broken and cracked, where the wind whistles through – that is the stuff of transformation.

Like other people, many of the things I've wanted to be have crumbled over time into cinders that have sparked the very next dream. And the hurtful things I've never meant to say have thickened my tongue over time into a kindness I didn't think possible. And each time I've failed at being what someone else needed or wanted or hoped for, each time I've failed at being what *I* needed or wanted or hoped for – each failure at love has solidified into unexpected learnings. The painful shavings of one love have become the spices of joy in the next.

They say that Cupid's shafts, when not landing in the heart, were ordinary arrows that wounded the innocent. Like Cupid, we try so hard, but missing, hurt those along the way until we landed squarely in the heart. And, when we miss, we are wounded as much as those we wound.

None of this lessens the pain of our journey, but it gives me comfort that our failures – our unexpected stumblings – are the very human paste from which we are made sweet.

Just know, when everything is falling apart, that you are preparing the ground of you for something ripe that can't yet be seen, but which, in time, will be tasted.

**We all stumble; it is part of our human-ness. Today what steps can you take to hold yourself in compassion and let the light of your own wisdom move you forward?**

# Receiving

From *The Language of Letting Go*

By Melody Beattie

Here is an exercise:

Today, let someone give to you. Let someone do something nice for you. Let someone give you a compliment or tell you something good about yourself. Let someone help you.

Then, stand there and take it. Take it in. Feel it. Do not say, “You shouldn’t have.” Do not feel guilty, afraid, ashamed, and panicky. Do not immediately try to give something back.

Just say, “Thank you.”

*Today, I will let myself receive one thing from someone else,  
and I will let myself be comfortable with that.*

**Believing that you are worthwhile and deserving of a beautiful life, this week practice receiving. Write about your experiences.**



# Take Heaven!

From *Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World*

By Fra Giovanni, Edited by Maggie Oman

There is nothing I can give you  
which you do have not;  
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 instant. Take peace!

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

