

Early Spring Reflections: Recognizing Our Blessings

Rev. Flossie Erzen

Introduction

Lent and early Spring are often viewed as a time to go within and consider more deeply our core beliefs. I am inviting anyone who would like to join me in five weeks of exploring our blessings. I will be calling on the wisdom of Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. I will include insights from her book: *My Grandfather's Blessings – Stories of Strength, Refuge and Belonging*. Each of these reflections will arrive in your inbox early in the week. Please let me know if you wish to receive them.

Reflection One: Could It Be a Blessing?

My life has been graced with remarkable and gifted spiritual teachers. Among them I find Gene Sorensen, Bonita Steele, Viktor Frankl, Paul Welter, and my beloved One Spirit teachers especially Diane Berke, David Wallace, and Rabbi David Ingber.

I know that my spiritual questions have changed over the years, and they continue to change. I suspect that your questions are evolving as well. I have been considering lately more ways to enter the deeper mysteries of my soul. If you have been on a spiritual path for a long time, I know that you have been engaged in reading and study and spiritual practice. Another of my long-time teachers, Roy Eugene Davis, encourages us to find practices that strengthen our “soul force.”

I have turned for guidance to Rachel Naomi Remen's work because she is deeply connected to her soul. She is a physician who is devoted to expressing the depth of soul in her human encounters. She has been both physician and patient. She has had Crohn's disease most of her life and other serious health issues related to her vision.

I find her refreshing. I hope that you may also enjoy revisiting her work. She shares this thought: “perhaps the secret of living well is not having all the answers but in pursuing unanswerable questions in good company.” So, please join with me for a time of questions and contemplation.

One of the key teachers in Dr. Remen's life was her grandfather. He was a Rabbi and a scholar of the Kabbalah, the mystical teachings of Judaism. Although he died when Rachel was seven, his lessons continue to echo throughout her life.

When she was just four years old, he gave her a little paper cup filled with dirt. He picked up a teapot from a doll's tea set and he filled it with water. He showed her how to water the dirt. He then told her that she must give it a little water every day. This was very difficult for a little child to remember, but she did it because she loved her grandfather very much. Each week, when he came to visit, she protested that it was too much to remember. And then one morning, there were two tiny green leaves that had not been there before. She was astonished. When her grandfather came to visit, he told her that "life is everywhere, hidden in the most ordinary and unlikely places." Rachel was of course delighted. She asked then, "and all it needs is water?" He replied, "all it needs is your faithfulness." As she grew in understanding she felt that his message was to remember to bless the life around us and the life within us.

According to the Kabbalah, at some point in the beginning of things, the Holy was broken into countless sparks, which were scattered throughout the universe. There is a god spark in everyone and everything, a sort of diaspora of goodness. This immanent presence is encountered daily in the most simple, humble, and ordinary ways. The Kabbalah teaches that the Holy may speak to us in many hidden places at any time. We may hear a whisper in our ear or in our heart. It is most important to watch and listen for the messages meant for us. As Rachel's grandfather would remind us, we must be faithful to listening within us and to the messages all around us.

A few years ago, Phil and I took a class with Rabbi David Ingber, and he spoke of blessing everything. He intended to share one hundred blessings each day. He leads a vibrant spiritual community in New York City. I often pictured him on the subway sharing silent blessings with people riding the subway with him. Blessings bring us into the present moment; it is a moment of mindfulness and holiness as we move through our day.

When Rachel was born, she was very small and frail. She was premature and her mother brought her own father to look at her through the viewing window at the hospital. He stood there quietly for a very long time. He was whispering

something under his breath. Her mother asked him what he was saying. He turned to her and said in Hebrew, “Blessed are Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has kept us and sustained us, who has brought us whole to this moment.” It is a blessing of gratitude for the gift of life. I find this very moving because I have had a similar blessing on my desk for several months now. This is what it says: “Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Eternal Creative Presence, who keeps us in life always, who supports the unfolding of our uniqueness, and who brings us to this very moment for blessing. I am held in life always. I am supported always. I am here on purpose.” I find I say this often.

Perhaps blessings are a way that we can be of service to each other. Many simple, ordinary things we do affect those around us in a profound way; for example, the unexpected call, the brief touch, the willingness to listen generously, the warm smile or nod of recognition. We can bless strangers, and we are often blessed by them.

If you attend yoga classes, you may use the greeting “Namaste.” It is a tender reminder of our connection with one another. It is often translated as “the divine presence within me greets the divine presence within you.” I remember hearing Martha Creek saying that she first heard it in a training she attended, and she kept hearing it in her heart as “no mistake.” I often think of Martha’s insight when I share in this greeting. “Namaste.” There is “no mistake.” We are each whole and perfect as we are.

We can be fooled by someone’s appearance, their age, or illness or meanness, and fail to recognize that in everyone there is a place of goodness and integrity, no matter how deeply buried. Dr. Remen, says that “when we recognize that spark of God in others, we blow on it with our attention and strengthen it, no matter how deeply it has been buried or for how long. When we bless someone, we touch the unborn goodness in them and wish them well.”

In many ways a blessing isn’t something we give, it is a moment of meeting, in which we both remember our true worth and we strengthen it in each other. Many of us have found this profound blessing when we share in spiritual community. We are serving the wholeness in each other. We are strengthened when we serve. We do this in our friendships and our place of work. We do it through kindness, and compassion, generosity, and acceptance. We do it through

our philanthropy, our examples of service, our active participation, our encouragement of others. No matter how we do this, our service will bless us and the life around us.

The Kabbalah speaks of the Tikkun Olam, which means we are called to restore and sustain the world. This is why we are here. In this season, we are opening our hearts and souls to being a blessing and receiving blessings. We see that this requires faithfulness; it requires listening at depth. It requires acknowledging the wholeness within us and within each other. It must be infused with compassion. It results in loving, self-forgetting service.

Thank you for joining with me on this sacred walk.

May your life abound with blessings.