

Early Spring Reflections

Reflection Four

Befriending Life

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As we continue our Blessing Journey, I hope that you are opening your heart and mind to a deeper awareness of the blessings around you and the blessing that you are. A few weeks ago, we invited some lines from a song by Sue Riley and Melinda Wood Allen, “I made room for grace, I just stepped aside and opened up a space.” This is what our time together is all about, pausing to open a space and see what gifts await us.

David Richo speaks of “Grace as an invisible numinous assistance that takes us a step beyond the limits of our intellect and will. Numinous means holy or filled with the sense of the divine. It is in us but has a life of its own, ruled by forces that we cannot comprehend and that we are not in charge of. We do not know how it is working, but it is always at work, and it moves us to follow the trajectory of our destiny toward wholeness.”

With this in mind, we continue our journey with Dr. Rachel Remen, and we sense that we are carried along with the energy of the holy in our lives. Dr. Remen certainly must feel this way. In her book she shares ideas she has culled from her years as a physician, a patient and in the teachings of her grandfather. She speaks of befriending life and cultivating an appreciation that there is a hidden seed of greater wholeness in everyone and everything. We serve life best when we water it and befriend it.

We are enjoying our time with Rachel and the insights she shares. I hope that you are more aware of your blessings and are receiving many more that are all around you. Do you believe that there is a hidden wholeness in everything?

Sometimes it helps to step back, get off the busy track of life and engage a different perspective. My husband Phil and I enjoy “walking

vacations.” A few years ago, we spent 5 days in the splendor of Zion National Park. It is a holy place. The Indians showed it to the Mormons, and they found a sense of safety there. We heard one ranger call it a “sanctuary for the soul.” In the metaphysical bible dictionary, Charles Fillmore says that the word Zion represents “love’s abode where high and holy thoughts and ideals abide.” We found ourselves during our time in Zion holding high and holy thoughts.

Along the trails we heard so many different languages spoken; people from all over the world, Europe, Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. They seemed for the most part to be very happy and at peace. With all the turmoil in the world, I wondered what would happen if we could all sit down along the Virgin River and look up at the cliffs. Could we agree that this is worth saving and protecting, could we agree to live peacefully together?

Parker Palmer says that when he is in the wilderness, he senses the wholeness hidden in all things. He says that when he returns to the human world that is so transient and riddled with disbelief, he has new eyes to recognize the wholeness hidden in himself and in those he meets, and he also has a new heart for loving even our imperfections.

Would you like to have new eyes to recognize your wholeness and the wholeness in others, and a new heart for loving even your imperfections?

As a physician, Rachel was trained to “fix” her patients. She says this: *I've spent many years learning how to fix life, only to discover at the end of the day that life is not broken. There is a hidden seed of greater wholeness in everyone and everything. We serve life best when we water it and befriend it. Everything is moving toward its place of wholeness. Befriending life requires that we listen for that potential which is trying to actualize itself over time. It will be there whether we are listening to a tree, a person, an organization, or a society. It is always struggling against the odds. Everything has a deep dream of itself and its fulfillment.*

- Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings*

Imagine learning to listen to life. What is the potential that wants to express? She speaks of listening to a tree, a person, an organization, or a society. A few years ago, our Monday evening study group read Thich Nhat Hanh's book, Silence. He shares an instruction about using a bell, like the bell we often use to begin the service in our spiritual community. He invites us to ring the bell, take 3 breaths in and out. The sound of the bell is a reminder to breathe, to quiet our mind, to come home to our body, and to take care of ourselves.

- Stop talking
- Stop thinking
- Come back to our breathing
- Listen with all our being

Thich Nhat Hanh even suggests that we cultivate a practice of recognizing if we are flying off in every direction with our family members, that the bell could be a signal. Go into the room where you keep the bell, give voice to the bell, and breathe. He speaks of it as a "reliable refuge."

Imagine what your life would be like if you cultivated this kind of deep listening and presence. Don't you think that we would be much more open to the insights that life is providing? We would have a deeper reverence and curiosity about life. We would be open to learn from the ant and the hawk, our enemy and our friend, our losses and our success, our joys and our sorrows. This kind of listening would allow us to really befriend life.

Perhaps if we slowed down and used these steps, we would be much more open to possibility for ourselves and for each other.

A few years ago, our son-in-law Rudy sent us a video recounting the story of Derek Paravicini from England.

Derek Paravicini was born extremely prematurely, at 25 weeks. His blindness was caused by oxygen therapy given during his time in a neonatal intensive care unit. This also affected his developing brain, resulting in his severe learning disability. He also has symptoms of autism.

He has absolute pitch and can play a piece of music after hearing it once. He began playing the piano by the age of two when his nanny gave him an old keyboard. His parents arranged for him to attend the Linden Lodge School for the Blind in London. On his introductory visit to the school, in the music room he broke free from his parents, then headed straight for a piano being played, and then pushed the player, Adam Ockelford, aside to take over. Ockelford encouraged him and arranged first weekly and then daily lessons. At age seven, Paravicini gave his first concert in Tooting Leisure Centre in South London.

Derek does not know his right hand from his left. He cannot button his own shirt and yet he is profoundly whole, and profoundly gifted.

How many times do we focus on what is wrong with us, what is wrong with our children, with our neighbors, our colleagues and fail to stop to breathe, stop thinking, stop talking and listen deeply for the hidden wholeness and how it is seeking to express?

Parker Palmer encourages us to get to know our own souls. He says this:

“All of us arrive on earth with souls in perfect form. But from the moment of birth onward, the soul or true self is assailed by deforming forces from without and within by racism, sexism, economic injustice, and other social cancers, by jealousy, resentment, self-doubt, fear, and other demons of the inner life. And yet the soul persistently calls us back to our birthright form, back to lives that are grounded, connected, and whole.

— Parker J. Palmer in *A Hidden Wholeness*

Parker says that some of the functions of the soul are:

- The soul wants to keep us rooted in the ground of our own being, resisting the tendency of other faculties, like the intellect and ego, to uproot us from who we are.
- The soul wants to keep us connected to the community in which we

find life, for it understands that relationships are necessary if we are to thrive.

• The soul wants to give us life and wants us to pass that gift along, to become life-givers in a world that deals too much death.

This for me then is how we befriend life. We become aware of our essential wholeness and the essential wholeness in others.

We cultivate this awareness by practicing the presence. We ring the bell of mindfulness. Breathe in and out three times and then.

- Stop talking**
- Stop thinking**
- Come back to our breathing**
- Listen with all our being**

Truly, we are befriending life. We are honoring our essential wholeness and the essential wholeness of one another. Our hearts will remain open to care for ourselves and one another. And as Mary Oliver says, “this will allow us to keep some room in our heart for the unimaginable.”

Blessings dear friends, thank you for sharing in this journey.