

Early Spring Reflections

Reflection Number Two

Receiving Blessings

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When Dr. Rachel Remen wrote the Book – My Grandfather's Blessings, she dedicated it in this way – “For everyone who has been given more blessings than they have received.” Let’s read that dedication again and then think about it for a moment. “For everyone who has been given more blessings than they have received.” Wouldn’t that be all of us? Our second reflection in our series will give us the opportunity to consider the many ways we can receive blessings.

Most of us have been given many more blessings than we have received. Often, we are just too busy to notice them. Abraham Heschel reminds us that “just to live is holy. Just to be is a blessing.” If Abraham Heschel is right, what keeps us from receiving life’s blessings? Sometimes, we are preoccupied. A blessing might be right in front of us, but we don’t notice. It is so easy to be obsessing about a past conversation or experience and completely miss what is right in the midst of the moment. There might even be times when we feel entitled to a blessing. Let’s cultivate an “eye for joy.”

I am an observer of vanity license plates. One afternoon I was on my way to the grocery store, and while stopped at a traffic light I saw this plate. “LOL alot,” Laugh out loud a lot. What do you suppose I did? Well, of course, I laughed out loud. I did receive that blessing.

Dr. Remen gives us this thought to contemplate; “Blessing life may be more about learning how to celebrate life than learning how to fix life.” It may require an appreciation of life as it is and an acceptance of much of life that we cannot understand.

For many years, Phil and I have been enjoying a daily reading from Hafiz. Hafiz was a Sufi mystic and poet in the 14th century, and he is a wild man. His poetry is astonishing, sometimes bold, sometimes tender. Hafiz sees blessings, sees God, who he calls the “Beloved” everywhere. We always look forward to this poem.

Beloved Everywhere: I Am So Glad

*Start seeing everything as God,
But keep it a secret.
Become like a man who is Awestruck
And Nourished
Listening to a Golden Nightingale
Sing in a beautiful foreign language
While God invisibly nests
Upon its tongue.
Hafiz,
Who can you tell in this world
That when a dog runs up to you
Wagging its ecstatic tail,
You lean down and whisper in its ear,
“Beloved,
I am so glad You are happy to see me.
Beloved,
I am so glad,
So very glad You have come.”
~ Hafiz*

Could we really experience blessings everywhere? Next time your neighbor’s dog runs up to greet you, perhaps you will laugh and see it as a blessing from the Beloved. How can we cultivate this deeper appreciation?

One of the stories Rachel shares in her book is one about the physical act of blessing. I always feel when I share in Reiki that I am exchanging a blessing. Rachel recalls how much she enjoyed sharing the Sabbath with her grandfather. “When Grandpa finished talking to God, he would turn to me and say, “Come, Neshumelle.” Then I would stand in front of him, and he would rest his hands lightly on the

top of my head. He would begin by thanking God for me and for making him my grandpa. He would specifically mention my struggles during the week and tell God something about me that was true. Each week I would wait to find out what that was. If I had made mistakes during the week, he would mention my honesty in telling the truth. If I had failed, he would appreciate how hard I had tried. If I had taken even a short nap without my nightlight, he would celebrate my bravery in sleeping in the dark. Then he would give me his blessing and ask the long-ago women I knew from his many stories – Sarah, Rachel, Rebekah, and Leah – to watch over me.

Rachel's grandfather died when she was seven years old. She shares this with us; "I had never lived in a world without him in it before, and it was hard for me. He had looked at me as no one else had and called me by a special name, "Neshume-le," which means "beloved little soul." Rachel says that eventually she learned to see herself through her grandpa's eyes. She came to understand "that once blessed, we are blessed forever." (pg. 22-23)

Is there someone that you could give a blessing to this week? Perhaps you could rest your hand on their head or on their shoulder and see them safely watched over and tenderly cared for. If they are not nearby, you could hold their photo in your hands or in your lap and imagine that they are right there with you. Let them know that they are enough, they are safe, they are loved. They are beloved souls.

Our second reflection is about seeing and receiving our blessings in everything, even in the disappointments. There is one Hebrew word that expresses this joy. It is L'chaim. Rachel loved how her grandfather used this word. He said it with great enthusiasm. She asked him "is it to a happy life, grandpa? He shook his head and said "no, it is just to life." She asked, "is it a prayer" and he said "no, we pray for things we do not have, and we already have life." She was suspicious then and she asked him if he made it up. He told her that he had not made it up, for thousands of years all over the world people have said this same word before drinking a little bit of wine together and that it was a Jewish tradition.

She asked, is it written in the bible grandpa? He replied, "no, Neshume-le, it is written in people's hearts." When he saw the confusion on her face, he told her,

“L’chaim meant that no matter what difficulty life brings, no matter how painful or unfair life is, life is holy and worthy of celebration. He said that even the wine is sweet to remind us that life itself is a blessing.”

Rachel shares that it has been over 65 years since she heard her grandfather share this toast, but she remembers the joy with which he toasted life and the twinkle in his eyes as he said L’chaim. Doesn’t it seem remarkable that such a toast could be offered for generations by a people for whom life has not been easy? But perhaps it can only be offered by such people, and only those who have lost and suffered can truly understand its power.

L’chaim is a way of living life. It is a way of choosing life. We choose life again and again, perhaps most of all in the midst of pain and suffering and difficulty. We choose to receive our blessings; we choose the joy and find the meaning in our lives especially during challenging times. We make room for joy; we make room for grace.

We recommit to seeing and receiving our daily blessings. We embrace the joy that Rachel experienced with her grandpa. L’chaim!

Sue Riley and Melinda Wood Allen’s have a special song, “I made room for grace.”

This is the chorus:

“I made room for grace.
I just stepped aside and opened up a space.
Now the blessings appear every day,
Since I made room for grace.”

I invite you to pause for a few moments and open up a space. Rest in the present moment and imagine the hand of a tender, loving guide resting on your head or shoulder. In their presence you experience complete acceptance and love. You are the beloved one. Rest in this place for as long as you like and return often.