

Early Spring Reflections: Recognizing Our Blessings

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Reflection Three: Becoming a Blessing

How is your blessing journey going? Have you had some experiences that brought a smile or a nod of appreciation? As we journey on this blessing way new understanding and wisdom appear in unexpected moments. We have spoken of blessings as a way to recognize the spark of divinity in others; when we blow on this spark with our attention, we strengthen it, no matter how deeply it has been buried or for how long. When we touch the unborn goodness in each other we wish it well. We serve the wholeness in each other. A blessing helps us to remember who we are.

Blessings come in all shapes and forms. Years ago, I heard a story about a little boy who had gone to a fancy restaurant with his parents. The waiter was very formal. He went around the table taking each person's order. When he came to the little boy, he bowed to him and said "and young man what would you like to order this evening?" The little boy told the waiter what he would like and when the waiter left to return to the kitchen, the little boy turned to his parents and said "wow, he treated me like I was real".

When we share respect and attention, when we treat people like they are real, it is experienced as a blessing. In our second reflection we noted that Dr. Remen dedicates her book to all of us who have been given more blessings than they have received. I hope that you are feeling more aware of the blessings in your life.

In our last reflection, we shared the Hafiz poem, "When a dog runs up." A few days after I wrote that reflection, I was out looking at storm damage in the neighborhood. Our neighbor's dog, Lulu, came running up to see me, ecstatically wagging her tail, I was beside myself with laughter. Ok, Beloved one, I see you, thank you for blessing me in this moment. I smile at every remembrance of this greeting from Lulu.

In this reflection, we are considering how we can become a blessing. So, we may start by asking a very existential question “why am I here?” When I was young, I had an answer right out of the Baltimore Catechism. Something about being here to know, love and serve God. Perhaps that is still why I am here. Perhaps I am here to recognize, love and serve the wholeness in myself and in others. Perhaps that is what becoming a blessing is all about. Many folks who return from near-death experiences report that we are here to grow in wisdom and learn how to love better. We each do this in our own way. We slowly become a blessing to those around us, and we brighten our light in the world.

Sometimes we may believe we are serving others in one way, while actually we’re serving impeccably in quite another. Rachel Remen shares a story about an internist who told her about his experience as a Fellow in a large inner-city AIDS ward. This was before the current drug therapies were available. All the patients who were admitted to this ward died. These patients were all young men about the same age as the doctor. He became overwhelmed with a sense of futility about his work there. This young doctor was a Buddhist, and it had always been his practice to pray for his patients. When a patient died, he would light a candle for them on his home altar and keep it burning for a month. As he reflected on his time in this ward, he came to appreciate that he was not there to cure these young men. He was there to pray with them, and to share in their onward journey. There are times when we may wonder why we are in a particular situation. Perhaps it is to be a blessing in whatever way it unfolds, even if it is very different than how we expected.

I have listened to recordings of Rachel Remen, and I have noticed she often speaks of looking at life with new eyes. She quotes Marcel Proust who says the “real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new vistas but in having new eyes.” What would it mean to not change anything about our life or our job but to look upon it with new eyes? Can you think of some ways we could do this?

Over the years Rachel has counseled many physicians who came to her discouraged. She asks them to look back over their day and ask themselves three questions and write their answers in a journal. These are the questions.

What surprised me today?

What moved me or touched me today?

What inspired me today?

She relates a story about a doctor who began to embrace these questions at the end of the day. At first, his response to each question was nothing, nothing, and nothing. But he stayed with the practice. Gradually, he began to see his patients as more than a diagnosis. He saw them in their wholeness. He started asking questions that he had not been taught to ask in medical school. He asked questions like, “What has sustained you through this illness?” He asked, “Where do you find your strength?” He found that people with the same disease had very different things to say. What they shared with him contributed to strengthening him as well.

Rachel shares this insight: “most of us lead far more meaningful lives than we know. Often finding meaning is not about doing things differently; it is about seeing familiar things in new ways. When we find new eyes, the unexpected blessings in work we have done for many years may take us completely by surprise. We can see life in many ways: with the eye, with the mind, with intuition. But perhaps it is only by those who speak the language of meaning, who have remembered how to see with the heart, that life is ever deeply known or served.” (Page 119)

These thoughts brought to mind a quote from Maya Angelou. “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

And so, we ask the questions – what surprised you today, what moved or touched you today, what inspired you today? We look at our life with new eyes. We take the time to observe and record the answers and see what happens. I suspect you will find that you are a blessing, more than you know.

As we close our time together today, I invite you to sit with these thoughts from our beloved Thich Nhat Hanh. I suggest that you repeat these words slowly and let them drop into your heart.

Centering Thoughts:

Breathing in, I know I'm breathing in.

Breathing out, I know I'm breathing out.

(In. Out.)

Breathing in, my breath grows deep.

Breathing out, my breath grows slow.

(Deep. Slow.)

Breathing in, I'm aware of my body.

Breathing out, I calm my body.

(Aware of body. Calming.)

Breathing in, I smile.

Breathing out, I release.

(Smile. Release.)

Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment.

Breathing out, I enjoy the present moment.

(Present moment. I Enjoy.)