



*The Blessing Journey -  
Five Reflections  
by  
Rev. Flossie Erzen*

## 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.

## Early Spring Reflections

### Reflection Number Two

#### Receiving Blessings

Rev. Flossie Erzen

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 14<sup>th</sup> 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.

## 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.)**

## **Early Spring Reflections**

### **Reflection Four**

#### **Befriending Life**

**Rev. Flossie Erzen**

**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.**

## Early Spring Reflections

### Reflection Five

#### The Web of Blessings

Rev. Flossie Erzen

With our fifth reflection, we draw to a close our time with Dr. Rachel Remen and her beautiful book, My Grandfather's Blessings. These blessings continue to echo through Rachel's life even though her grandfather died when she was very young. In one section of her book, she speaks of the web of blessings. She says that "many people do not know that they can strengthen or diminish the life around them. There is a web of relationships that connect us. We all have the power to affect others. We may affect those that we hardly know and those we do not know at all."

I enjoy being out on a walk and noticing the complexity of spiders' webs. Sometimes they glisten in the sunlight. I often wonder how in the world they know how to do this amazing feat.

When we have hiked in Costa Rica and on St. John in the USVI we have seen the webs of the golden orb spider. Their silk is five times stronger than steel and more elastic than nylon. It is waterproof and can be stretched. Ancient people wove cloth out of this silk and recently some new cloth was woven. Apparently, it feels like you are wearing an invisibility cloak, it is weightless.

So, what about the web of relationships in our life? How are we connected and how do we influence the web? A few years ago, when we were visiting Ireland, we drove out the Dingle Peninsula. We stopped in at a very small museum and on the wall, I noticed this quote: "Every one of us...has been warmed by fires we did not build. Every one of us has drunk from wells we did not dig. We can do no less for those who come after us, and together we can do much more." Mark Sheilds

Just consider for a moment, the fires that have warmed you that you did not build, the water that has quenched your thirst from wells that you did not dig.

This is all part of the web of life, how do we choose to add blessings and goodness for those who come after us? The American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner describes it this way.

“Humanity is like an enormous spider web, so that if you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling... As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked together. No one is an island.”

Rachel tells a compelling story in her book about her early life. She did not speak until she was 3 years old, not a word. She had been born very premature, and long before there were good medical treatments for premature babies. The doctors told her parents not to expect much from her, and that perhaps she was handicapped. Her grandfather would say to the rest of the family “look into her eyes, she is there.” To everyone’s relief and surprise she spoke at Thanksgiving dinner when halfway through the dinner she asked for the salt.

But these were not her first words, her grandfather had been teaching her Hebrew. He had taught her the Shema Israel. This is a holy prayer, when translated into English it is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord God is One. This is a prayer that is said many times a day. It is also said at times of great danger and at the moment of death. These Hebrew lessons were one of the secrets she shared with her grandfather. When she was five or six, she asked him what the Shema really meant. He said “Neshume – le, to me these words have always meant that despite suffering, loss, and disappointment, life can be trusted.”

This sweet story made me think of one that Dr. Viktor Frankl shares. When he arrived at the concentration camp with his young wife and his parents,

he was still carrying his manuscript for his book. This was like a precious child to him. He had it hidden inside his coat. Of course, everything was taken from him. His pregnant wife, his parents, his life's work, his own clothes. He was given a coat from a man who had been sent to the gas chambers. I cannot imagine the despair and heart break he must have experienced in that moment. Eventually he reached deeply into the pocket of this ratty coat he had been given and there on a tiny scrap of paper he found this prayer, the Shema Israel. "Hear O Israel, the Lord God is One." This challenged him to live with meaning in spite of everything, and he found sustenance in this holy prayer.

Truly, there is a web of blessings. Rachel says that "real teachers are everywhere. The life in us will be blessed by others over and over again until finally we have remembered how to bless it in ourselves."

Phil and I had a unique experience a few years ago that reminded me of the blessing of the ancestors and their wishes for us. My cousin Bill Ivory who lives in Maryland organized a gathering of the Ivorys (his father's people) and the Dorans (his mother's people.) Bill invited us to lead the music. This gathering took place at Holy Trinity Church in Corktown in Detroit. This is an historic church that was founded in another location in 1834. Soon after it was organized a cholera epidemic broke out and it was turned into a hospital, the only hospital in the Northwest Territory. The Doran side of Bill's family lived in Corktown, his ancestors were baptized and married there. The priest who said the mass was a delightful Irishman from County Cork; he had been a missionary in many places in Africa. He shared some thoughts that really touched my heart. He spoke of the famine in Ireland in the 1840's and 50's. In 6 years one million Irish people died of starvation or disease. 2 million emigrated. Many came to America. So, on a Thursday morning, we gathered where our ancestors gathered when they first came to Detroit. We could feel their presence. When our ancestors arrived, they were afraid, lonely, and uncertain about their future and the future of their descendants. Perhaps you have gone to a church and sat with your hopes, fears and dreams and prayed; I know that I have. Think about the families today fleeing so many distressing places in the world. What do you think their prayers are like? I am sure they are praying for

themselves and their descendants. They pray that they will be safe, that they will have hope and happiness. During our visit, Father Noel O'Connor said, look around this room; your ancestors' prayers have been answered. You are the answer to your ancestors' prayers.

They could not have known how their prayers might be answered, but I am sure they prayed them, just like we pray for those who come after us.

We are designed to be instruments of peace, compassion, encouragement and light. We may not see the outcome, but we all have more capacity to affect life than we know. It is up to us to recognize our real value and power. We can strengthen or diminish life wherever we are. It is a choice and Viktor Frankl would say it is a responsibility. When we serve the goodness in life, we recognize it as holy.

In conclusion let me share one more beautiful quote from Dr. Remen. "A single act of kindness may have a long trajectory and touch those we will never meet or see. Something that we casually offer may move through a web of connection far beyond ourselves to have effects that we may have never imagined. And so, each of us may have left far more behind us than we may ever know."

Thank you for sharing this blessing journey with those you meet along life's path. Your intentional kindness and compassion echoes across the web of life.

In closing, I will share some lyrics from "This is What I Know," a song by Jan Garrett.

"This is what I know: That we are all connected,  
The universe reflected in each shining part.  
And everywhere I go I recognize the faces,  
All of my relations in this one heart."

May you find strength, delight, and courage on your blessing journey.

Shalom, Shanti, Peace, Salaam.