

Daily Spiritual Tools

by Sherry Woodcock

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DEDICATION

For my husband Mike, my partner in creating so much more than survival, we've done it! I look forward to many more excellent adventures in this lifetime and lifetimes to come.

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I would like to express my deep love and pride for my three children, Mara, Brittany, and Eric. They have been the most treasured teachers in my life.

I would also like to thank the kindred spirits around this beautiful planet who have been followers of my blog, Daily Spiritual Tools. It was encouragement from many of them that prompted me to write this book.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the light in all of us that calls us to seek the truth.

Introduction

Daily Spiritual Tools celebrates the existence of the divine in all human experience. Throughout my life I have been struck by the idea that my humble life, and everything in it, is an expression of God.

It seems that humanity has found God in many wonderful places – within churches, synagogues and other houses of worship, or in miraculous events. In these places we have always expected to find God.

But what if we are able to know God within ourselves, and as ourselves, in the midst of the day-to-day events of our lives, work, parenting, paying bills, doing our best and our not-so-best, striving to understand others, and getting stuck as all people do?

Daily Spiritual Tools is a compilation of meditations and simple practices that open our awareness to perfect and divine order within all things. As humankind moves from a truth of spirituality “out there” to one of God expressing as each of us and in all things, the tools contained herein help us accept that truth and know it as our own. In doing so we help elevate others and our world.

The tools found in this book are gathered from a number of sources including many books whose authors have been helpful to me on my path. References to BPI indicate my time spent studying and teaching at the Berkeley Psychic

Institute located in Sacramento, California. Another source of inspiration and information mentioned in the book is Aesclepion, or the Aesclepion Healing Institute in San Rafael, California. And then there's my much-loved Unity of the Valley Spiritual Center in Vacaville, California. I am deeply grateful to all of my life's teachers in all of their varied forms.

There is no particular order to the daily spiritual tools highlighted here. I suggest you let your spirit be your guide and read what you are drawn to and what appeals to you in the moment. Divine consciousness will guide you to the perfect words.

It has been a great joy for me to write Daily Spiritual Tools. May you know the deep truth of God within you as you read it.

Part one ~ Spring

Today I Will Act As If ...

I went to bed last night feeling very grateful for remembering a tool I hadn't used in a long time. The wonderful gift of it was that it allowed me to consciously create my day. A few years ago I read a book called The Creative Life by Eric Butterworth with a book study group. One of the exercises in the book is "Today I will act as if. . ."

I've been off work for two weeks for the holidays, and went back yesterday. When I woke up at 5:00 am to do some writing and get to work by 7:30am, I was already starting to feel pushed and lacking enough time to do all of the things I want to do. During vacation, I really enjoyed all of the extra time I had, and was starting to feel stressed about fitting in all of the things I want to do every day: meditate, write, exercise, cook a simple, healthy dinner, spend time with my husband. It's never easy to balance all of it on top of working all day, for most people. I was starting to feel pretty out-of-sorts about it.

Thankfully, I remembered that I create my reality not by what is happening to me, but by how I am thinking about it. The limits exist only in my thinking. And what I believe dictates how my experience will unfold.

So I wrote in my journal "Today I will act as if I have all of the time and money I need to do all of the things that bring

me joy." Just that. I am always awed by how consistently and perfectly conscious choice manifests in my life. Remembering to choose consciously is a prayer, and always answered when asked as all prayers are. The important part is being aware of what our thoughts are praying for.

I love the saying that "worry is praying for something you don't want." And as the Buddha said, "As the fletcher whittles and makes straight his arrows, so the master directs his straying thoughts."

Yesterday, I denied the limits of my own making, and chose instead abundant time and resources and joy, by choosing to "act as if." And I watched with gratitude as my day unfolded, catching up with two weeks' worth of referrals, emails and phone calls with ease, doing one thing at a time in perfect order, and enjoying the contribution I make in my little corner of the world. And I had time, at lunch, to do my meditation, and after work to write, and walk with my dear husband and share the day, and a simple, healthy dinner.

I acted as if I had all of the time and money I need to do all of the things that bring me joy, and it was so.

Let There Be . . .

My life works best when I step back from all of my trying and worrying, and rest in the truth that it will evolve just as I envision, gently, beautifully and perfectly.

In the graceful, quiet days when everything around me is in peace, I joyfully affirm that divine order is at work in my life and in the world. In the hectic, questioning days when I'm feeling like I'll never get it right, my memories of infinite peace and trust in the process seem very far away indeed. Creating a conscious life feels like a pretty big undertaking, like it should somehow require a great deal of thought, or study, or . . . something.

By this time I've learned some tricks and tools for navigating my life's course with intention. I've practiced meditation for many years, enjoyed creating treasure maps and doing affirmations. I love all of the many wonderful tools we have for experiencing truth. They are all great, proactive things in creating a life with purpose.

But how amazingly powerful that space is where we can allow the God within to express fully through us, where we can simply let there be, and it is done. In just allowing something, there is no effort, no trying, no need even for being proactive. Just an acknowledgement that all we need do is choose, and our experience reflects our decision.

There's an amount of faith and trust needed in creating this way. When I remember that I don't need to try at all, but can simply allow whatever I need or want to be, my body calms down. There is more space for me to be present in my body and in my experience. I can express more of who I want to be because I'm not struggling against anything.

It's a peaceful place, in those moments. But inevitably I'll move on in my day, and some other detail will capture my attention, and I'll forget about whatever I had decided to just allow to be.

It's all part of the process. Once I turn it over to the God within, it is done. It may take some time for me to realize it, but my prayer has been answered. I just need to have faith in the process. Situations may arise that cause me to doubt that what I have allowed into being is real, but that is part of the process, too. Faith really can move mountains.

Tonight, in my quiet writing space, I choose to let there be perfect expression of the song in my heart. And it is done.

Peace

We all want peace, between nations, between strangers, and in our close relationships. We want peace within ourselves especially. It often seems that if only circumstances outside of us were different, our lives would finally be different, and we could get some peace. If my family members were all doing well, if the economy weren't such a mess, if there were different politicians running the country, if my kids were grown and out of the house, if my boss (or my spouse) weren't such a lunk-head, if drivers weren't so rude (the list is endless), then I might find a tranquil moment in my life.

But the world we experience is an ongoing reflection of what is taking place within us. The amount of peace that

we are able to find is directly proportional to the nature of our thoughts and beliefs. Awareness of this truth really can set us free.

If I accept that all I see in the world is mirroring my beliefs, then I can challenge my thoughts and change my experience. I exercise my power in designing my reality when I choose to live in peace. Every less-than-peaceful person or situation I encounter is a perfect teacher, once I get past the resisting and fussing over how the world is not behaving according to my expectations, for me to choose how I want to show up. At some point, hopefully sooner rather than later, I remember to stop and ask myself, have I done or am I doing something similar? And I try to work on that. Our interactions with others provide a mirror in which to see the still-learning places in ourselves that we would not necessarily see otherwise.

It is said, as within, so without. I'm learning that it's never about the other person. It's always about me, and what I have yet to remember about choosing my best and highest expression of the God within. I try to be grateful for the events in my life that seem to rob me of my peace, because they provide such perfect opportunities for me to remember that I can at any moment choose the peace that is the truth of me. I may have been waiting many years, or many lifetimes, to come to just this moment, where I can stand in opposition to another's choices or expression, and then choose instead to forgive us both. Even when we are expressing less than our highest, we are all heroes. Our

armor may at times get dented and rusty, but it never stops reflecting the light.

Peace stems from the decisions that I make every day about how I label my experiences in the world. As those decisions nurture peace in my heart, they promote peace in the world as well. Let there be peace in my heart.

Releasing

There are many ways to release what we are holding on to that does not serve us. I learned the technique of grounding many years ago and it has been a foundation of my spiritual practice ever since.

Some of the energy that we hold on to contains our own truth, and some of it does not, because we have picked it up from places outside of us. We can release what is not our own truth using a grounding cord. A grounding cord is a connection that you create from your first chakra, at the base of your spine, down into the center of the planet. It can be anything you choose, a waterfall, a tree, a rope; anything in your imagination works. What we imagine manifests. Think of it as another way to choose the unfolding of your experience.

After you have created in your imagination a line of energy between your first chakra and the center of the planet, allow your body to release anything that does not serve you down the grounding cord, where the energy will be recycled. No effort is needed here, just a gentle intention to have it be so.

What would you like to release? Maybe some worry about the future or a specific person, or some self-limiting belief that is not really true about you or your ability to create without limits? This morning, in my meditation, I noticed that I was feeling a bit anxious, not about anything in particular but just feeling unsettled. I realized that I was holding onto worry about my family, my daughter and son-in-law moving to Northern California, my son and his girlfriend having to drive back to the Bay Area in the wind and rain, life issues my parents and siblings are facing.

A grounding cord is a wonderful tool for releasing unfounded worry. I sent that worry for my family down my grounding cord, in my minds' eye, and remembered again that I can trust the Christ within each of my loved ones to be safe and happy. The Christ within has all of the answers they will ever need.

I remember when I learned about grounding at the Berkeley Psychic Institute, an instructor talked about our being able to ground discomfort or disease from the body. I had a headache and decided to try it on that, in that wonderful spirit of a beginner where there is doubt because it's new to our experience, but also excitement about what if this is actually possible? So I created a grounding cord and let my headache dissolve down my spine and out the grounding cord. And it worked! It was one of many moments in my training there that caused my awareness of who we are to bust wide open.

When I am able to release and let go, I create the space for a much higher consciousness to work.

Solving Problems from a Higher Level

One of my favorite universal truths is that we can't solve a problem from the energy of the problem. It has helped me countless times manifest a higher outcome by getting out of my own way, and allowing divine intelligence to work its magic.

Solving a problem from a higher place means first acknowledging, and then trusting, that within us resides the perfect solution to any issue that reflects less than our perfect good. It helps to remember that we are created of the same vast consciousness that created all perfect answers, every loving act, and every moment of inspiration or guidance. Vast and unlimited awareness of good is not only something we can access in moments of need, it is who we are, at our core, when the veil of human forgetting is gently swept aside. We are never separate from divine intelligence; it lives as us.

Deciding to manage a problem from a higher vibration can take a good deal of faith, and perseverance, because sometimes it can be very difficult to surrender our worry about a problem. Every bit of human programming we have tells us that we need to stew, and fuss, and worry, until we solve the situation. In some cases, a great deal of fear can be involved, which makes turning over the problem to divine intelligence within us even harder to do.

When we are in a lot of fear, we identify with that, rather than divine intelligence from which we are created.

When we turn the details of a problem over and over in our minds, we are stuck in the energy of the problem.

When we continue to relive a conversation or situation in our thinking, expecting that we will somehow get a handle on it, what happens instead is that it just grabs more of our attention. More and more of our awareness is sucked into a problem vibration. This is not helpful.

What *is* helpful is remembering, when the what-ifs and oh-my-God's that fear speaks are getting me nowhere but upset, that I always have a choice in what truth I will serve. Even when the voice of fear is loud, I choose to serve the truth of God's infinite good, living as me.

And as my heart fills with the grace of remembering, I am connected with all that I need to create my own highest good. My decisions are aligned with a rightness that I not only sense but feel in my heart, and right down to my bones. My burden is light, and I am blessed beyond measure.

May your burden be light, and your blessings many.

Joy

At a meeting last week, some coworkers and I were talking about something one of them had read recently, which I thought was wonderful. It was, simply, "What are the 10 things that bring you the most joy? Why aren't you doing

them?" For me this is a very worthy question, and gets right to the heart of the matter of creating the life we're meant to live.

We are here to fulfill every dream for ourselves that we can conceive, and in this way honor God within us, as limitless creators in our own right. But what is commonly accepted is that we will move through our days mostly doing what is expected of us, and not give nearly enough thought to choosing to do what brings the most joy.

Watching my son, who is now in college and juggling work, school, rehearsals, and a growing number of responsibilities, it occurs to me how early in life this happens. I'm grateful that he loves what he does. We work hard today for rewards to be had later, hopefully, when school is finished or we've found a good job, or it's time for vacation from work or retirement. I like to think that in most cases those rewards do come to pass, but what about now? I believe that we can strive to accomplish those things that are important to us, but not get so lost in the striving that we miss knowing joy in today.

I tried it this morning, writing a list of 10 things that bring me the most joy. And what I found is that it contained simple things like dancing and backpacking, listening to God within me and nurturing my body, the beloved expression of my soul.

I'm finding that joy is a very moment-to-moment thing. There have been many big things that I've worked hard and planned for in my life, and they were unforgettable, but the conscious decisions that I've made to find joy in the small daily events are what have brought the most peace and happiness.

When the big things come up that I want to do, I find a way to do them with relish and remember them always - one noteworthy example is skydiving. I've done it a few times and it's always amazing like nothing else I've experienced. It's huge fun, but I can't say that having done it brings joy to my life. As great as the big things are, they don't add as much depth and meaning and love to my days as the simple things on my list.

Others will likely find a completely different focus in considering what 10 things bring the most joy, but the important question remains, if there are things on your list that you are not doing, what better time to begin than now?

Compassion

Compassion is an immensely powerful spiritual tool. I believe we could change the world with more attention on choosing compassion. Developing an understanding of what compassion really means has been a very personal journey for me. I remember a teacher at the Aesclepiion Healing Institute telling me that I have more than my share of compassion. It's been one of my life's most valuable

learning experiences, because in the family I grew up in, being sensitive and compassionate was seen as weakness, and was not validated. I always felt very wrong and out of place. It provided me with a very challenging but ultimately perfect opportunity to look deep within myself and choose exactly who I want to be.

As the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn, wrote: "If you think that compassion is passive, weak, or cowardly, then you don't know what real compassion or understanding is. If you think that compassionate people do not resist and challenge injustice, you are wrong. They are warriors, heroes, and heroines who have gained many victories. When you act with compassion, with nonviolence. . . you have to be very strong. You no longer act out of anger, you do not punish or blame. Compassion grows constantly inside of you, and you can succeed in your fight against injustice. Mahatma Gandhi was just one person. He did not have any bombs, any guns, or any political party. He acted simply on the. . . strength of compassion. . ."

Deciding on compassion toward another allows healing to happen. It allows ruffled feathers to settle, stirred-up emotions to quiet, and understanding and communication to begin. Compassion can right many wrongs. Certainly things happen in life that we are justified in feeling anger or resentment about, and we need to feel those things. We need to look closely at those situations in order to learn and grow.

At some point, though, we need to get to that place that acknowledges God expressing as each of us. We are all on a path of remembering. We all have bad days, and we all wear blinders around certain situations. The truth is, everyone is doing the best they can with what they have in any given moment. It does no good for us personally or for our human evolution to hold on to judgment.

I learned awhile back that the things I dislike most in others are the things I most resist acknowledging in myself; a bitter pill to swallow, indeed. That other person is a perfect book to read, to learn about myself, if I choose to put that energy of judgment to its best use. I think it's well said in John 8:7, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

When I am in judgment of others, and I hold on instead of feeling it and then letting it go, I open the door for that energy to grow in my life. Peace and balance become elusive, as I find more to judge in myself as well as in others. Like forgiveness, compassion is not something we do only for the other person, but very much for ourselves as well.

We cannot solve a problem by being in the same energy that created the problem. We have to take a step up. Raising our vibration to one of compassion in a situation allows divine order to design a perfect resolution that benefits everyone.

A friend this morning told me about a quote that she uses from her 12-step program, which I plan to use often. It's simple, and a great way to remember the power of compassion: "Bless them, change me."

Being in the Center of Your Head

There is a spiritual space in the center of your head from which we are better able to filter out much of the noise of the world, and more easily focus on consciously creating our experience. Over the years, I've found the center of my head to be a very peaceful and enlightening place. It is at once quiet and filled with all the colors of existence.

Being in the center of my head is a much different space from being in my heart, which I perceive as communion with God in his many faces, and all being right with the world. Communion with God also exists in the center of my head, but it is a more personal communion in which I find the steps of my own unique path in this lifetime. It is where I go to be alone with my truth.

Because our attention is most often focused outside of us, on whatever situation we find ourselves in the middle of, we do not often go to the center of our heads. It usually takes a conscious decision to do so. The center of your head is located behind your eyes, and between your ears.

The center of the head is also where the sixth chakra sits, and so our clairvoyance. It is where we can "see" in the form of colors or pictures. In bringing our attention up into the center of our heads, we detach from the survival of the

first chakra, or the struggles of the third chakra, to a more neutral place that to me often feels like a respite from the rest of the vibrational input of being alive. In the center of my head, I can just be, and watch as all of creation is opened to me.

Following is a simple meditation on being in the center of your head:

1. Sit quietly for a few minutes, breathing deeply and comfortably, and allowing yourself to relax.
2. Bring your attention first back to yourself, and then to the center of your head. To help direct my attention to this place, I sometimes place my finger on my forehead, and then allow my attention to come first to that spot on my forehead, and then from that spot further in to the very center of my head.
3. Just breathe, and be, and notice what you notice.

Being in the center of one's head is much like sitting in an airplane's cockpit. It's a spiritual space where we are able to see not only where we are, but where we've been. It can also help us see a clearer path to where we're going.

Happiness

I came across a wonderful quote today by a man named Denis Waitley that started me thinking about cultivating happiness: "Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual

experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude. " How true.

Many people use benchmarks outside of themselves to decide whether they can claim happiness. Is my partner meeting my needs, is my job validating my abilities, do I have what my peers have, or more? These markers for happiness are fleeting and don't fulfill us on a deep level.

That's not to say that we need to adopt a life of poverty and isolation to be happy. It seems that many believe that creating material things is shallow and meaningless, or in some way against our spiritual nature. Material things don't provide lasting happiness, but provide myriad ways for us to express ourselves as divine creators. Expressing my birthright as a creator in God's image does make me happy! I believe that God wishes for us all of the good things that will help us relish a complete and full life.

Although material things can't create lasting happiness, they are not contrary to expressing the highest in ourselves. The difference is our intention. Are we working to buy a bigger home because it's expected, or because it would be a healthy and peaceful place for our growing family? Are we working nights to get through school because someone expects us to do something more with our lives, or because we are drawn to a new career as a way of expressing more of our true talents in the world? Are we saving money for a special vacation because we're trying to keep up with someone else, or as a way to connect lovingly with our partner, experience joy and more

of the wonderful places and people on this planet? We are meant to experience all that we want to do, be and have as expressions of the highest within us.

If material things can't provide lasting happiness, what does? Can we cultivate happiness, consciously, as a practice? I believe we can. The beautiful quote above provides good insight. Happiness is a spiritual experience wherein we are present in our moments with these three things: love, grace and gratitude. Having our moments in love is allowing others their path as we walk our own, and remembering that each of us is uniquely expressing the God within. Having our moments in grace is having an awareness of ourselves and others as being worthy of God's highest favor. Having our moments in gratitude means simply acknowledging the tremendous gift in all of it. As complicated as life gets, these three things we can do.

True and lasting happiness comes when we accept the truth of who we are, and are glad of it. When we know ourselves, God rejoices!

That's Not True of Me!

I'm grateful to our Unity Minister, Rev. Ken, for his wonderful and enlightened perspectives. Something that he mentions often is his tendency to say to himself "that's not true of me" when he encounters a situation in which he is feeling limited.

There are many reasons why we hold on to thoughts or beliefs about ourselves that do not acknowledge our best

and highest. Most of them come from our parents, who were doing their best but likely weren't taught themselves that they were good enough just as they are. We get messages from our families, teachers, friends and colleagues, the media, pretty much everywhere, that cause us to compare ourselves to some ideal.

Many of those ideals, being extrinsic or coming from outside of ourselves, are not even what we hold most true for ourselves. We buy into them anyway because we become accustomed to looking to others for validation and answers. There's a noble purpose to this dynamic in that it allows us to forget, and then remember, who we are. Forgetting for a time allows us the delicious moments of remembering.

Who we are, and how we show up in the world, are reflected in what we believe about ourselves. I heard a story once about a young girl who spent a lot of time singing and enjoying her voice. One night her mom came home from work really tired, and not in the mood for any noise, even her daughter's singing. So she snapped at her daughter, telling her to stop making noise. The girl stopped singing, and as an adult believed her voice was terrible and never sang again. This is how we buy in to ideas that are not true of us.

So I ask you today to think about the limits you believe to be true about yourself. Sometimes those beliefs are deeply held and we're not even aware of them, but they color our experience. If you have ever thought that you're not smart

or talented enough to have the job you've always wanted, or you don't have enough time to do something you've always wanted to do, or that you have back luck and nothing good ever happens, or that you're alone or that no one really loves you, it's a thought going by. It's not true of you.

When we're caught up in self-limiting thoughts, we tend to remember only those instances that make us right. We search our past experience for things that prove that we're less than we should be. We get stuck in justifying how inadequate we are, because that's what we've heard. We develop amnesia about all of the things that are perfect about who we are and what we're doing.

I'm learning not to get too stuck on wanting things to be different. Some of those old programs are very ingrained, and they do take over at times. Resisting doesn't help. But what I can do is remember that I always have dominion over what my thoughts bring to bear. And I am reborn every time I own the highest in myself, and deny that which is not true of me.

It's Just Energy

Choosing to remember that it's just energy has saved my biscuit countless times. Every single thing that happens in life is at its core an energy vibration that is moving through our personal space. The choices that we make about which of those energies we attend to, and which we release, very much create our life experience.

One important way that I use the tool of "it's just energy" is in my relationship with my husband. There are times in our very harmonious partnership when we get really annoyed at each other. Thank Goodness for experience, that most effective teacher, from which we have both learned that when we are fighting, it's rarely about us. When we are in conflict, it doesn't reflect at all the amount of love, commitment or happiness we experience together. It's a reflection of how much we're being caught up in the energies around us.

We have learned over time that when one of us can remember that simple truth, and then remind the other, we can step back, take a deep breath, and wait for the flurry to pass. It's not about us. We may be stressed over something that happened at work, or stirred up by something unresolved from the past, or many other things, making us more grouchy or sensitive. But grouchy and sensitive are temporary states of affairs. They are vibrations passing by, and not the truth of us. We have agreed to believe in the face of whatever is passing by that our relationship is sacred, and our belief makes it so.

Someone once told me that it's all energy mechanics, and I'm starting to understand the truth of that. In seeing a situation as the fleeting and mutable vibration that it is, rather than a solid thing that we are forced to endure for as long as it chooses to stick around, we are able to choose to be proactive rather than reactive in our response to it. We can manage it rather than let it control our experience.

How do we manage the energies that we encounter in our lives, and turn them to our good? Meditation is one way, but there are many others. Prayer, affirmations, turning it over to the God within us, or choosing to see God within another; probably all of the tools discussed in this blog and elsewhere help us change the energy. Anything that helps us take a step up from the problem, and connect with our higher truth, allows us to remember that we are unlimited creators of our life's divine melody.

Optimism

“Believe that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact.” This quote, which we discuss in the stress management class that I teach, is to me a great argument in favor of optimism. Our beliefs are the raw ingredients that simmer up into the smorgasbord that is life as we know it. Whether we find the meal disappointing, or a feast of delicious flavors that get better with every bite, wholly depends on what thoughts we dump into the stew. The tricky part with this analogy is that while in actually cooking a meal we are conscious (hopefully) of the ingredients that we are adding, we are not as conscious of our thought patterns, and so ingredients can end up in the stew that don't taste very good.

Negative thinking is insidious. It stems from fear, which is pervasive in human nature. And while I do honor the gift that fear provides us in our human evolution, I believe that

we are here to learn the truth of how very unnecessary it is.

When I get caught up in fear, and so negative thinking, I hardly notice it at first. It builds over a few days, and then suddenly I become aware that I am more distracted, and worrying about things that haven't even happened yet. As our Rev. Ken at Unity says, I get caught up in "awfulizing." Instead of being easy my life becomes a series of issues that I need to power through, and it's just no fun.

Optimism is a simple and effective tool for counteracting negative thinking. Rather than standing by and letting the unproductive thoughts feed on themselves and grow stronger, optimism shifts our focus to make room for our good. It helps redirect our attention to the truth that is always waiting for us to embrace, that what we expect we always find, without exception.

Count your blessings. Journal five things that you are grateful for every day. Laugh. Some of these tools for increasing our optimism can seem fluffy and unhelpful, but to me they are the very crux of creating the life of our dreams. In counting my blessings my eyes open to see that all things are possible. With my attention strongly on all that is worthy of my gratitude, the universe cannot help but respond in kind with even more expressions of grace. And in laughing my body finds its ever-present vibration of joy.

May you laugh often and be grateful for your blessings.

Getting Behind the Mind's Chatter

I saw a sign many years ago at the Aesclepiion Healing Center in San Rafael that said, "Don't believe everything you think." At the time I thought it was funny, and also knew that it must be profound, because I didn't quite get it. I imagined an existence where we have all types of random thoughts and live as if they are true, but most of them are not. It would be rather like being actors in a play, pretending. At the time I couldn't get my mind around that.

I've seen since that life really is like that. We pretend that what our minds tell us is true, so that we can pretend, for a time, to be less than God. Because of this, we are provided with our most holy of gifts, that of remembering our Godselfes. It *is* funny, in an existential kind of way. And I'm still trying to get it.

The thing is, I'll never "get it" with my head, because we can't intellectualize spirit. Truth doesn't happen in the mind, but in the heart.

The ego-driven mind's purpose is to maintain the illusion that we are separate, and that there is need to fear. And so my thoughts can take me on a very convoluted path that becomes a slippery slope to a really unhelpful perspective.

The more I stop to notice where my mind is taking me, the more I realize just how frequently my thoughts turn to worry, and that worry sets the emotional tone of my experience.

When we decide not to believe everything we think, we can consciously choose which thoughts to attend to. The rest we can notice and release without any concern about them at all. And that is the tricky part, the letting go without concern, when the thoughts would have us believe they are hugely important in the moment. How do we trust that the sky won't fall, finally, as everyone's been threatening, if we refuse to entertain the voice of fear that our thoughts can be?

I've found that first I must stop. I must stop and acknowledge that my thoughts are running loose, and that I can choose which thoughts I want to nurture. I then focus on my breathing, and watch in my mind's eye as I breathe into, and out through, my heart. In doing so I reconnect with the truth that resides there. And I remember then to turn it all over to Father/Mother God, as I've been encouraged to do over and over, and in countless ways. God is there, always there, just behind the mind's chatter.

Filling Up With a Gold Sun

Filling up with a gold sun is a simple tool that I use often to reset my body's vibration to my own truth. It is yet another way to take advantage of the connection between the mind and the body, and also of the effect that our intention has on our life experience.

In the middle of just about anything, I can stop and fill up with a gold sun. For me, gold represents the vibration of God's love expressing in all things. In filling myself with

golden light I am making a conscious choice to align my body with what is highest within me.

What we think, our bodies respond to as if it is real. This happens on a moment-to-moment basis, and is the reason why our thoughts have such a dramatic effect on our physical well-being. So as I picture in my mind the color gold infusing every cell in my body, my body responds by relaxing into an awareness of peace, remembering that all is well and there is nothing my body needs to work against.

Also, because what we expect tends to show up in how our lives play out, our clear intention to align our bodies with awareness of God consciousness at work in all things allows that to be what we ultimately call to ourselves, and experience in our lives.

To fill up with a gold sun:

1. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and quiet your thoughts as much as possible.
2. In your mind's eye, picture a large, bright, shining gold sun up above your head.
3. Acknowledge your intention that the color gold represents the truth of God consciousness in all things.
4. Watch in your mind's eye as the gold sun comes in through the top of your head and cascades down through your body, bringing every cell of your body to gold.

This simple and powerful tool helps us remember that there really is no limit to what we can create as unbounded spirit having a divine in-the-body experience!

Being Willing

My husband and I are in the middle of Unity's yearly fall book study program, spending treasured time once a week with a group of spiritual seekers and kindred spirits. While willingness isn't a specific topic in the book we're studying, the idea of being willing came up last week, and I was grateful for the reminder about this important spiritual tool.

All forms of unforeseen assistance result from a decision to, if nothing else, just be willing. In life we face many different situations in which we are unsure how to proceed, or are not sure that we know how to accomplish what is expected of us, or what we hope ourselves to be capable of. There are times when what we envision is so very different from what we've known ourselves or the world to be that our seemingly lofty hopes can seem like pipe dreams. In all of these times, being willing opens our hearts and our minds to divine intelligence that will find a way for good regardless of how things appear on the surface.

The limitless creative potential that exists in each of us is quickened by our willingness. In those rough times when we feel stuck or lost and can think of no appropriate course of action, being willing to just consider the possibility that

there is a perfect answer to our need can allow the universe to work its magic on our behalf.

Being willing to suspend our judgment and preconceived notions for just a moment makes room for the seeds of a higher reality to take hold. An example might be feeling deeply unable to forgive someone, even though we might want to. A decision in that moment to just try to be willing to forgive creates a subtle but vast shift in what we are capable of, and who we know ourselves to be. We can change the world by just being willing.

In making a decision to be willing, we don't have to be perfect. We don't even have to trust that we will be able to do what we're hoping to do. We can be ever so gentle with ourselves, and honor our humanity, by acknowledging that even when things seem the most fraught with limitation, we can stop fighting and surrender to our willingness.

Seeing Ourselves in Others

I believe that many problems between people could be averted in remembering that others mirror back to us those qualities that we ourselves possess. We are not able to recognize a favorable attribute in another if it is something that we do not already own ourselves. This can be a very empowering realization - acknowledging that those people who seem to manifest great things with ease are part of the same creative consciousness that we all embody.

Anything that we admire in another lives in us as well, whether it be the ability to create happiness, peace, joy, healthy relationships, a good job or a shiny new car! Not only the people we encounter every day, but Jesus, the Buddha, the Dalai Lama, and all of the greatest teachers of the world share with us the very same intelligence that brought our collective existence into being.

That we possess the same attributes we witness in others also helps us locate the parts of ourselves that are still in darkness. I remember a teacher at the Aesclepion Healing Institute saying that the people we have the most difficulty with are our biggest teachers. That was really helpful information at the time, because it caused me to begin searching in my own life to see if it was true. And I found that it was.

It's difficult to accept, in the middle of being very upset with someone else, that they are here to help me learn something valuable about myself that I may have been avoiding. But if I choose to be completely honest with myself, I realize that what I resist in others is usually something I am resisting acknowledging in myself.

It might be that we have been needing to practice compassion or forgiveness, or to be less reactive. Maybe we exhibit the same behavior but haven't been aware of it. Or it might be that we've been involved in a relationship that we've needed to walk away from, but out of fear have stayed longer than is healthy.

In the perfect and divine order in which we exist, everyone is our teacher - those we might not see as worthy of that honor, and also those who seem so far beyond us that we could never hope to be where they are. There is no need to hold on to judgment, or envy, because all that we see in others we already possess. Instead, we are provided with the opportunity to choose what we want to do with the information.

I am always grateful for the teachers who come into my life in countless different ways. Some I have welcomed, and some have presented lessons that left me kicking and screaming. But all continue to help me choose how to be the best and highest me.

Prayer

My husband was dedicated today as a chaplain at our Unity church. It got me thinking about the many different ways that we pray. For years I was uncomfortable with the idea of prayer, because whatever special connection people I knew who prayed had with God, I didn't seem to have it. It seemed to me at the time that prayer was all about someone asking God for something, and then having it materialize. But the people I saw never seemed to be getting anywhere in the things they prayed for. When they didn't get what they had asked of God, they explained it as "God's will," and left me wondering why people prayed in the first place. I wasn't sure what talent or skill a person needed to have God not only hear them, but also answer.

Whatever it was, I knew I didn't have it. It didn't seem like the people around me had it either.

As I've moved along on my own path, I've come to see prayer much differently. I see now that because God lives in all things, she expresses not only through me but as me. There is no separation between the God who hears my prayers and, well, me. And so it is for us all.

Prayer for me now is ever-closer communication with the God within. When I pray to the God outside of myself, I am praying to myself as well, to that all-knowing, ever-perfect and light-filled part of me that is God. God and I are co-creators in this game called life, so I am in constant connection with divine order, perfect intelligence, and love that knows no bounds. All that I choose to be, I am. Prayer is saying hello to that.

I have always resonated with the way it is described in Neale Walsch's Conversations With God: "The correct prayer is therefore never a prayer of supplication but a prayer of gratitude. When you thank God in advance for that which you choose to experience in your reality, you, in effect, acknowledge that it is there . . .

Thankfulness is thus the most powerful statement to God; an affirmation that even before you ask, I have answered. Therefore never supplicate. Appreciate."

I recognize now that it is not about a God outside of me who answers prayers, sometimes. We are part of a much more flawless reality. There was a quote in the service at

Unity today whose author I don't remember, but it went something like, "When God sees me in prayer, he sees me through the same eyes that I see him with." The kingdom of heaven is within.

My husband has learned to pray with people, helping create a space where the truth of their own heaven within can come to light. I still get down on my knees, sometimes, when I most need the comfort of feeling held by a power greater than myself, although I recognize that I exist as that power, too. We can pray out loud, or in our heads. A favorite form of prayer for me is writing letters to God, which I've described in previous posts. I love writing, and for me the act of grounding my thoughts on paper, and then waiting for my hand to know what to write in response, is very clear and direct.

Prayer can be out loud, or silent. It is not only speaking to God, but listening also. Sometimes that's all I do, just sit and listen. In truth, every thought we have is a prayer.

May you be grateful for prayers answered.

Empathy

Everyone we meet is doing the best they can in any given moment. Their best, and ours, varies depending on many things. Some days we're rested and happy, and full of enthusiasm for our day and well wishes for the world. Other days we forget that we have the power to create every moment of our experience, and we're unconscious and reactive.

It can be very difficult to be empathetic toward someone who is stuck in forgetting. When people act in ways that are contrary to our best interest, or are hurtful to us or others, it's easy to become angry and judgmental toward them. But the truth is that we all get stuck in forgetting. All of us put our worst foot forward at times, often without meaning or wanting to, when old belief systems or unconscious habits take over.

We can never solve a problem in the same energy as the problem itself. Meeting anger with anger makes it grow; meeting competition with more competition only succeeds in creating invalidation and shutting down communication. We need to take an energetic step up to move out of the negative cycles that can happen between people. It's not easy, especially when we're feeling attacked in some way, to take the higher road, but it is ultimately healthier for us and more productive for all involved.

If someone is angry at or jealous of someone else, but the other person meets it with understanding or empathy, or even love, there is nowhere for the anger or jealousy to go. It does not become bigger and more powerful by moving from person to person. When we meet difficult situations in this way the buck really does stop with us. Not only are we consciously choosing how we experience our world, we are leaving the energy with the other person to manage in a way that will work best for him. And this is as it should be.

Human beings are an incredibly complex and dynamic mass of shifting energies that can be at times clear and centered and at other times lost and grasping. People do small-minded things sometimes, and those same people also do very noble things. I've realized how easy it is to label someone based on one action, but that really isn't the entire picture of who they are. Ultimately, what others do has nothing at all to do with us, but everything to do with how much of the truth of their own greatness they are recognizing in the moment.

My grandmother was full of sayings, and one was to turn the other cheek. That's not to say that I think we should allow others to treat us unfairly or inappropriately. But turning the other cheek, with empathy, and striving to understand that there is more to someone than what they might be expressing, is a step toward living in the light of truth. Even though someone may not be loveable in this moment, they remain the embodiment of love, just temporarily stuck in forgetting who they are.

May we all be met with empathy in our forgetting.

Amazing Grace

". . . how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I was once lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see." There are many versions of this beautiful hymn, which is known around the world by people of many different faiths.

I've heard the hymn countless times in my life, but today I heard it differently, and that brought a touch of grace to me. I attended a very moving funeral for a coworker's husband, at the beautiful Catholic church they belong to. He died suddenly last Monday at the much-too-young age of 52. They were married for 33 years and had the good fortune of being best friends through all of them.

I've never been a traditionally-religious person, but I deeply honor all paths to God. And I realized today that on my path, I'd never had the opportunity to really hear this hymn beyond the first couple of lines. But as often happens, my answers come at times and in ways I don't expect, and that hymn had something I needed to hear today.

It's a simple explanation, really, for the big struggles my heart faces at times, with remembering what is mine to do, and what is not. In this time of accelerating growth and change, I have a hard time watching people struggling, hurting, and in fear, and staying in trust myself. I become fearful about others' fears. It doesn't help matters, and doesn't serve my truth. Sometimes it's hard to just remember my own truth in the middle of everything.

The hymn reminded me, in the part I'd never really heard before, that "'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear, and Grace, my fears relieved." Of course! At times I feel like bonking myself on the forehead; yes, I know this. Thankfully, I get to hear the truth countless times in myriad different ways, through an infinity of life experience, to remember.

Grace (from the dictionary), that "influence or spirit of God operating in humans to regenerate them," provides the gifts of struggle, hurt and fear, so that in overcoming them we discover, or more accurately remember, the truth of who we really are. Fear is the forgetting, and in each and every instance of remembering we are reborn into our Godselfes.

Both fear, and love, which can be thought of as fear's absence, are weighty dichotomies indeed. Both are brought to us in love, through God's grace. All are held in divine consciousness. Not a new concept, certainly, but I'm grateful for it being brought to me today, in the perfect way.

May you know the amazing grace of your highest self, and that of others, no matter how it may look in the moment.

Part Two ~ Summer

Getting Unstuck

Sometimes my old, habitual thought patterns hit me like a ton of bricks and take my breath away. I intend to let them go; I even believe I have moved past them, only to have them jump out of the shadows when I least expect it. I'm not talking about the small stuff. I'm talking about those really huge fears that our intellect tells us can't possibly be true, but in that deeper, unconscious part of us where a seed of doubt has been planted, roots struggle to take hold. It is that place of "but what if" all that I know in my heart to be true about existence really isn't?

My knowing, and spiritual practice, usually keep this voice in perspective, but then some event suddenly triggers old, fearful thinking, and I am lost in it.

The Berkeley Psychic Institute calls these "core pictures," the ideas we've accepted from outside of us that take us farthest from our truth, and seem the hardest to gain seniority over. I know that these stuck places are what make us human, and provide moments of immeasurable grace when we re-claim the truth. But when I'm in the middle of it, I'm just stuck. And it makes me wonder, what do we do when we're in the middle of a big fat lie, but it really feels like the truth? In that moment, what can we do to remember?

When I am stuck in a core picture, my first instinct is to fight it. In an effort to not be uncomfortable, I try to convince myself that I am not stuck, and I end up making excuses, or competing, or trying to control the outcome. Admitting to myself that I am stuck, in pain or in fear, is the most important part of getting unstuck. It is a way to see the light in the darkness. Once I acknowledge that I am lost, healing pours to me from countless sources, an unexpected hug, remembering to use a certain tool, or to slow down and be in tune with that my body needs in the moment.

It is important in those moments to stop in order to let my answer come to me. That means acknowledging that I am hurting and afraid, and that is not always easy to do. But trying to override it doesn't help; what we try to avoid tends to pursue us with greater vigor. As God said, through Neale Walsh in *Conversations With God*, "You can't hear my truth until you stop trying to tell me yours."

What I can do now, in my grace-filled moment of remembering, is be grateful that every time I have stopped and faced the monster that was chasing me, I have not been overcome, but held in love, restored to peace, and graced yet again with knowing a truth so sweet that I can't understand how I could ever have doubted it.

I know that I will find myself again in doubt, on my perfect path of forgetting and remembering. And I give thanks in advance for the gift of getting stuck in darkness, and then finding my way to the light.

Honoring Your Humanness

Maybe it's just my own perception, but it seems to me that spiritual philosophy is moving away from placing more importance on acknowledging our spiritual nature, to honoring our human nature. I used to hear more of traditions that sought to overcome the baser aspects of being human, in favor of being continually connected to ourselves as perfect spirit, and above petty human stuff.

From the perspective of spirit, we are of course holy and perfect in all that we create, but what about the perspective of mind and body? Can we honor those as completely as we honor spirit within us?

In our bodies, we are vulnerable. We experience emotions that bowl us over in their intensity. We feel anger and shame and grief, more than we can handle sometimes. We get really sick and feel terrible. We age, and try to adapt as our bodies feel foreign to us in their increasing fragility. We worry and try and then try some more, to find happiness and meaning, and somehow get our lives right. Sometimes, life is just plain messy.

Who wouldn't want to transcend this human condition and live in awareness of themselves as pure spirit, as much of the time as is humanly possible?

I wouldn't. The older I get, the more I'm learning to settle in to the intensity of being human, riding the peaks and valleys of my experience not without fear, but with as

much grace as I can muster. Some days that works better than others.

I'm finding that the intensity is what being human is all about. In truth, I live for the petty human stuff. I could spend all of my waking hours in quiet contemplation of my spiritual nature, but I know myself well enough to know that divine intelligence would still find big ways to challenge me.

I am here, in this vulnerable body and with this mind that sometimes gets confused or overwhelmed, having a glorious human experience. As my husband says when we're backpacking, when his knee hurts, "I have a knee," and he is grateful. I have a knee, and therefore, I am. It's like that with every part of being human.

I embrace my mind that forgets things a little more than it used to. I have a mind, therefore, I am. I embrace my ankles that take a moment in the morning to lose their stiffness. I have ankles, therefore, I am. And I walk, and am grateful. I embrace every part of this delightful, turbulent, scary, exhilarating, confusing and enlightening ride that is being human. In doing so, I experience as completely as possible, the gift of being me.

Thank you, God, for such a gift.

Being Your Best Self

I'm learning that doing my best does not happen passively, but is a very deliberate act. All my life I've assumed that I

had always been doing my best. I guess I had been, based on my awareness at the time.

Something changes when I approach as many of my moments as possible with a very conscious decision to do my best. It's difficult to describe it adequately. I end up much happier at the end of the day no matter what happens, because my focus has shifted from reacting to listening to myself and choosing who I want to be. It doesn't matter what happens in the world around me; what matters is that I am creating my world.

I've noticed that when I'm intentionally choosing to just be my best self in the middle of whatever I encounter, it really doesn't matter how well I do or how much I accomplish. What I'm aware of is that I designed the moment in the highest energy I was capable of, and that is more than enough; it is a joyful act of creation.

When I'm choosing to be my best self, I am naturally more patient. I am less rushed and more peaceful. I am very present in the moment, and there is ease in what I'm doing. I am happy to be here, in my body, contributing my own unique light to the situation.

I believe that my best changes on different days, depending on many variables. But that doesn't really matter either. When I consciously choose to do and be my best in any moment, whatever that may be at the time, I am embracing my life's purpose, as I help elevate the energy around me, and create a world of my own making.

Treasure Mapping

Treasure mapping is a way to clear our connection with the creative power of the universe, in which we are all active participants. They pave the way for us to see our steps in manifesting our desires. Treasure maps are also called vision boards or mock-up boards. I learned about this tool years ago, and have enjoyed creating many treasure maps in that time.

Start with a big poster board, glue sticks, scissors, and magazines that pertain to the things that you want to have in your life. Most adults don't often get an opportunity to play with glue and scissors, so this is fun! The idea is to cut out as many examples of the things that you want as possible. Cut out picture and words expressing the spirit of your goals.

The treasure map can focus on a single thing, a certain category or a number of different things. Sometimes when I make a treasure map for the new year, I include goals around my health, my work, my leisure activities, and other things that are important to me. Other times, I focus the treasure map on just one thing, and the specific details around that. Make sure it has a clear theme. The more specific you can be about what you put on the map, the better. The clearer you are with your intention, the more likely it is to come to fruition.

The next step is arranging the ideas that you've cut out and gluing them to the poster board, much like a collage. Some

people like to add a picture of themselves on the treasure map. I have at times put the date in large letters in the center of the map, as a way of emphasizing that in creation.

I like treasure mapping because as I'm sifting through magazines, considering which pictures and words best reflect what I want to have or be or do, I am sending very specific instructions to the universe, and that creative spark within me, that it will be so. It is very spiritual work, but also a very fun process.

I have quite a few treasure maps from years past up on a shelf in my closet, and also a few more current ones down where I can look at them often. It's always very validating when I occasionally take all of them down from my closet and am delighted by how much I have brought into being with my intention. It's a great reminder that all we have to do is put the picture out there, and then let it come to pass.

Setting the Body's Energy

Everything we experience in this world is vibration. Our thoughts and words, our interactions with others, and the interactions between groups of people all produce a certain vibration. Our bodies, too, experience vibrations of energy, and are very sensitive to the energy happening around us.

An example would be answering the phone, and after hanging up noticing that you feel very different than you did before the conversation. You may feel down and tired, or you may feel energized and uplifted, depending on the energy of the conversation, and of the person you were speaking with.

There are many tools we can use to influence the energy we experience within our bodies. All begin with first choosing what you want to create, in your present experience. It's not difficult to do in practice; probably the hardest part is remembering that we can choose how we want to experience our moments.

The other day I wanted to change the energy I was experiencing, to a higher level. I wanted my body to match the vibration of my highest good. At the Berkeley Psychic Institute, they sometimes use a technique called "bringing yourself up to gold." Gold is often seen as the color or vibration of God, or truth, or our highest. It is the color of clarity. So I decided to use that tool to set the energy in my body.

A great thing about BPI is that they really focus on keeping spiritual growth like being in kindergarten, so many of the techniques are simple, and profoundly powerful in their simplicity.

The other day I practiced it in this silly way, in the energy of kindergarten:

1. Get comfortable and close your eyes
2. Breathe deeply and focus on yourself
3. Affirm to yourself that the color gold embodies the vibration of your highest good
4. In your imagination, see the color of one cell in your body (I used the tip of my nose) change to gold
5. Watch as the adjacent cells in your body match the gold one, and the gold vibration of your highest good spreads from cell to cell down and through your entire body
6. Feel yourself as gold, and expressing the truth of your highest good

You can use this technique to bring into your body any specific energy you'd like, such as peace, or enthusiasm or self-acceptance.

If you choose to try this, remember that it works best when we don't try too hard, so just have fun with it. Our intention to have it be so is enough. As we watch this manifest in our mind's eye, we enhance the strength of bringing it forward as our truth.

All is Well

My husband and I had a sailboat for a few years; we didn't take it out much and never got very good at sailing, but we enjoyed having a little cabin on the water. I wanted to

rename it All Is Well. He thought we should rename it All is Swell. He's clever like that!

I believe that some of the best spiritual tools are the simplest ones. Reminding ourselves that all is well, in the middle of whatever temporary setback is occurring, can help put things back into proper perspective.

Circumstances affect us to the degree that we accept them as truth. We are infinitely powerful in creating any outcome we choose, by what we believe. If we remembered that, what a different world it would be!

I think our dear Rev. Ken at Unity illustrates this beautifully when he says that yes, there is a recession, but I choose not to participate! He is affirming that all is well in his world, specifically with his financial resources. I love the affirmation, "The light of God surrounds us, the love of God enfolds us, the power of God protects us, and the presence of God watches over us. Wherever we are, God is, and all is well."

I had a conversation with my daughter recently and we were talking about the health of the planet, global warming, and issues with availability and safety of the food supply. At first glance, these and so many other topics in our world seem almost insurmountable. At times we can believe it is too late to turn things around.

It is never too late. We can turn things around in an inkling, with a conscious intention that all is well. Fear has no real power over us, except to the degree that we decide

it is warranted. My part in our conversation was to remind myself, and her, that things do appear in many ways to be heading in a direction we can't turn back from, but as limitless creators made in God's image, we have within us every answer we need.

I acknowledged that day that my perspective probably sounds like I am a Pollyanna. I choose very consciously to be just that! To change this world, we have to believe that there are answers and resources available to us that we haven't even considered yet, and that all we need is provided to us by simply asking, and believing that it will come to pass. We hear this, and want to believe it, but often can't. Ask, and we are answered. Knock, and all is opened to us.

In the face of our current challenging circumstances, I can imagine perfection unfolding and it is done. The destination is never in question, but how we arrive is our playground. Maybe today I'll sail, on a boat named All Is Well.

The Spiritual Law of Attraction

The spiritual law of attraction states that we attract into our lives that which we put our energy and attention on. I believe this is the most important of the explanations of how spirit creates through a physical body. Consider the ramifications of this! If we remembered this truth a little more often, how much more deliberate we would be in what we focus on. This law manifests minute-to-minute, in

everything we do. It is in effect when we are being conscious about our thoughts, in prayer or meditation, or when we are sitting at a stoplight worrying, when our thoughts stream by without our even noticing them.

When "Monkey Mind" is active in our thoughts, we attract those thoughts. Monkey Mind is a term used for automatic, negative thinking, or the frequent amount of time we spend with our thoughts spinning off in some direction that may have no connection to our best or serve the highest good in that moment.

Monkey Mind often contains the messages we received as children, or lies that we have accepted as truth. It is the voice of fear. The voice of Monkey Mind is the perfect vehicle for our forgetting who we are, because the things we fear we usually find, and the lie is then reinforced until we can find a way to stop the cycle.

We quiet Monkey Mind through practice. Many people practice mindfulness and meditation techniques to help quiet the racing quality of the mind and cultivate more dominion over deciding which thoughts are worthy of our attention, and which we want to release. Simple deep breathing techniques also help with this. Many use affirmations to reprogram automatic negative thinking to more productive thoughts. What we hold in mind manifests in kind. The really magical part of all of this is, we can always change our mind!

Worry about not having enough money or resources is common, for example. The chatter would be "there is never enough money (or time, or love, or . . .) to meet my needs (or make me happy, or keep me safe)." When we catch ourselves creating this reality in our lives, we can affirm, in the present tense, "I have an abundant supply of all I need," or "God is my source." In doing this, especially over time, we reprogram the subconscious.

Many wonderful resources exist about learning to use the law of attraction more fully in our lives. There are entire websites dedicated to this idea. Life coaches teach it. One author whose books focus on the idea is Florence Scovel Shinn. I just purchased another copy of her book [The Game of Life and How to Play It](#) on amazon.com for \$5.49.

The spiritual law of attraction is what makes the world our playground. It is what we use to design the masterpieces of our lives. In any moment we can choose to remember that there is no reality in lack of any kind. In all things, we can affirm that abundance is here and now manifesting.

Spiritual Hands on Healing

I spent five years studying at an exceptional place called the Aesclepiion Healing Institute, where I learned spiritual hands-on healing. At Aesclepiion, we spent many hours practicing on others. I've found that hands-on healing is also a wonderful way to heal myself.

There are many different methods for doing hands-on energy healing. They are all intended to heal the spirit in

the body, with the idea that physical or emotional dis-ease begins on a spiritual level. When we are holding on to something that is not our truth, it can be seen as color, and directed to release. At Aesclepiion, we moved our hands over a person's body, and sometimes directly onto a portion of the body, in order to help the release to occur, and to help the person get their own healthy, vibrant spiritual energy flowing through their body.

An important part of Aesclepiion's teaching is that we do not use our own energy to heal others. We don't need to do this, and it actually gets in the way of another's healing. They, and the God within them, know the best course for healing. We do not need for our intention to get in the way of it. Instead we let go and allow the healing energy to come through our hands. Most of us have had the experience of giving too much of our own life force energy away to someone else in an effort to help them, and being depleted by it. This is not helpful or necessary.

When I have a knowing about where energy is being held that needs to be released, and I place my hands just above that area of the body, the light of God is brought to that part of the body. A place that had been out of awareness is brought into light. That is how we heal.

When I was in my early 20s, I had abdominal surgery, and spent a few weeks recovering. I remember spending a lot of time with my hands on my belly, directing healing energy to the area. At the time I hadn't yet studied hands-on healing, so it was more instinctive. Even so, it worked

beautifully! It helped me trust my body and get out of worry, and I was healed and back to my daily activities much more quickly than would have been expected. Intention is infinitely powerful!

I don't have the opportunity to do as much hands-on healing work as I did before, and I miss it. It is one of the most gratifying things I've ever done, and I look forward to doing more in the future.

Recently I decided to give myself another hands-on healing. I placed my hands over the area of the body to be healed, took some deep breaths and quieted my mind, and allowed God consciousness to come through my hands. When my mind wandered, I gently brought it back to what was happening. Intention is the important part of this process. When my mind wanders, healing is still happening. As I intend for divine consciousness to heal me, it is done, with more perfection than my ego or will could create. At any point in time there is perfect healing on a spirit's path, and God consciousness will manifest it. As I had my attention on the process, I noticed slight resistance at times, places where the healing energy had to remain a bit longer, then an awareness of lightness, and release. All we need to do is allow it to happen.

I believe we are meant to glorify our existence in joy, abundant health, and prosperity in any way that has meaning for us. Thank you, God, for my healthy body, through which I experience all gifts, large and small!

Loving the Body

I realized in beginning to write about validating the amazing miracle of our bodies, that one post wouldn't be nearly enough! I'll begin with some thoughts today, and add more at a later time.

These wonderful vehicles that our souls have created to have their human experience are worthy beyond measure. Our society is so body conscious, but in a way that actually harms the relationship that the soul has with the body. We are taught to focus on the body as a way to conform to the norm, and to judge our value based on its size and shape. We all know that the incredible expectation for our bodies to fit within a narrow range of appearance is unrealistic and unhealthy, but most of us are driven to conform to that expectation nevertheless. It's amazing how powerful that influence is on us.

When we are trying to fit a mold, communication between spirit and body is diminished. Spirit becomes much less able to hear the messages that the body is sending out, and the body becomes unable to hear the soul's validation of its creation. I believe that learning to listen to the body is a lifelong process, and not something that we always do easily. We need to be present to hear our body's gentle messages. With our thoughts in the past or in the future, we will not be aware of our bodies at all. When our minds are very busy, we usually take our bodies for granted.

There are many downsides to taking the body for granted. One very big disadvantage is that when we are not present and choosing to sense and feel what is happening in the body, we miss so much of the delicious experience of living. Some of those feelings are wonderful beyond words, and some are very difficult, but they all create the depth and texture of our experience.

We are not present when we are caught up in thought. I really believe that thinking is overrated! We think too much. We could accomplish just as much, probably more, if we consciously chose to review data, make decisions, and then put thinking aside and experience! There are for me no moments in my life more exquisite than the ones spent squarely in the present, using my senses, feeling my emotions, aware of my body's being.

We are also much better able to care for ourselves when we pay attention to our body's needs. In our performance-driven world, it becomes easy to focus on completing tasks and completely ignore our bodies' gentle urgings. If we do that for too long, our bodies may need a more forceful way to communicate, which sometimes happens through illness. Our bodies always let us know what they need; we have only to listen.

If we take the time to allow the gentle communion between body and spirit to take place, we find truth. In hearing the soul's infinite regard, the body knows its own sacred nature and is healed. Without that space, our

bodies are disconnected from the truth and we feel invalidated.

Creating a space for body and spirit to connect can happen in many different ways. It can be something we choose to do quickly, or a practice that we dedicated more time to. A really simple way to find connection with the body is to breathe, consciously and into the body. Breathing grounds our awareness into the body.

Another thing I will practice is to consciously pull all of my energy into my body, so that none of my awareness is spilling out, and I am aware of the physical space that I occupy.

Another thing I have done, when I notice that I am caught up in some judgment of my body, is to just quiet my mind for a moment and ask my spirit its opinion. This is a great tool! There is no media-driven demand for thinness strong enough to budge my spirit's infinite love for my body, just as it is, in all of its perfect ability to walk me through the days of my life, as a light-filled expression of God.

When you find yourself having a hard time appreciating your body, remember that the opinion does not originate with you, and then let your body listen to the eloquent wisdom of your soul. Love is there.

Walking the Labyrinth

My husband, Mike, my son, Eric, and I walked a labyrinth on New Year's Eve, as we've done for the past few years. Bless Eric, that he was willing to get up early and drive for an hour to do it, because it was important to his parents.

I love walking into that circle and having the strong awareness of myself as eternal spirit, at the very same time I hear the traffic going by, see workmen moving around and the cracks in the sidewalk, all of the countless small details of inhabiting a body. I love knowing myself as eternal spirit as my path passes by Mike's or Eric's on the labyrinth and I am aware of sharing space with them for a moment, then moving on our own paths, but each of us always contained by that bigger circle which contains all perfect paths.

While walking the labyrinth, no matter what direction I'm heading or how many twists and turns I take along the way, I'm always moving toward the center, where I know in the center of myself, in my heart, that I am God in expression. In the middle of all of the twists and turns of the labyrinth, the center stands.

Each experience I've had in the labyrinth has been different. I've been guided each time to remember just what was important for me at that time. This last time, I was reminded that All Is Well. In the middle of all of the big issues facing humanity in general and all of us individually, I can be glad for all of it because there is a mighty purpose

behind it. All paths lead to an awareness of ourselves as God, without exception.

I remembered that pain is part of the dichotomy that we live in, and aids us in knowing joy. We can never really grasp and own for ourselves one side of a dichotomy until we have fully known the other.

Best of all, for me, was remembering yet again that there is nothing I need to do, no burden I need to carry to fix things. We are all the light of God. We can be nothing else. Everything we experience is contained by and part of that light of God, just as the circle of the labyrinth contains all paths leading to our knowledge of ourselves as God, and light.

What that means for me practically, in this new year, is that I don't have to suffer over what is. What is, is, and it serves a mighty purpose, one that I can trust. It's not easy to see the light in the middle of the darkness, but this year I choose to look for the good in all of it. I am grateful for the light that contains it all.

The Mock-Up-Bubble

Using a mock-up bubble is another tool that I learned at the Berkeley Psychic Institute, and one that over the years has become second nature to me in manifesting my intentions. A mock-up is a model, or prototype, of something that we want to create. This techniques involves visualizing, in your mind's eye, a bubble out in front of you that contains what you desire to bring about. It's probably

easier to start with your eyes closed. Remember, what we think has great creative power, and when we visualize our intention it becomes even more powerful.

Pretend that you are waving a giant bubble wand and have just made a very big, clear bubble. See it out in front of you. It can be as large as you'd like. In your bubble, begin to create a picture of what you want to have happen. It really is as simple as that. Be sure to take time to add to your vision as many details as possible of what you desire. The clearer we are about what we want, the more likely we are to get it!

When you have filled in as many details as you want, the next step is to let it go. As we let it go, we release our limited ideas of how things need to happen, and allow God, the universe, our own higher selves to do the work in creating our heart's desires. One way to release your mock-up and allow it to manifest is to simply watch the bubble float up until it's out of sight, to come to fruition in the perfect way. Or you could watch in your mind's eye as it pops, or anything else that occurs to you. Have fun with it!

One thing I like to do before I let go of my mock-up bubble is to show it to God, and ask that anything standing between me and its creation be released. In that way, I acknowledge the ability of the God within to create my life without limits. I affirm the truth.

I use mock-up bubbles frequently, often for the big things in my life, but also for the small ones. If I'm walking into a

meeting that I'm nervous about, I'll see in a bubble how I want it to turn out, show it to God and then release it to come into being. If I need a chunk of money for something, I'll visualize it in a mock-up bubble and then turn it over to the limitless creative energy that we are all part of.

This is fun stuff! And the hardest thing about it is believing that we can, and then remembering to do it. As we ask, we are answered. A mock-up bubble, as a tool for manifesting our intention, is a prayer.

Playing

A dear friend of mine suggested to me yesterday that I write a post on play. We've known each other a long time, and she knows that playing is definitely one of my favorite topics. Friendship would be another wonderful topic today, as I am aware of the amazing gift that my friends are in my life, spiritually and otherwise. But I think I'll save the very worthy topic of friendship for another day, and today celebrate the importance of play as a spiritual tool.

One of the things that I recommend to people who need to reduce their level of stress is to find a way every single day to play. It's a pastime that we tend to do much less of when we become all grown up, and start taking our lives more seriously than is probably good for us. I know that's pretty true of me.

Still, I do make it a point to find ways to include the energy of play in my life as much as possible. Engaging in pleasurable activities, things that just make us happy for

their own sake and delight us in their spontaneity, are good for body and soul. The cells of the body heal when we are happy, laughing, or just thinking positive thoughts. And when we engage wholeheartedly in some act of rebellion against our adult deference to responsibility, propriety, and keeping our clothes clean, spirit within giggles and says, "more, more!" In all types of play, and in life in general, a good rule is the more childish the better.

When was the last time you jumped on the bed? I can't tell you how many times my husband has in fun scolded that I was going to break ours. Even jumping up and down on my knees in bed is enough to bounce him around, and that definitely tickles me.

He and I take swing dance lessons, and even though we have a lot yet to learn, we have a whole lot of fun doing it. And I have to say, attempting those anchor steps and underhand turns standing up in bed is a hoot. I always feel like we're living dangerously because I'm afraid that any minute an overly-enthusiastic rock-step is going to land us on the floor.

Have you looked lately at a rain puddle as the amazing opportunity that it is? Why not indulge the child within you and go ahead and jump in it? Kids really do know a lot about what's important in life. I can tell you from first-hand experience that the splash is so worth having to dry out your shoes.

How about trying a bout of last one up the stairs is a rotten egg? Or to the car, or that fence, or . . . ? When we play like this we are so caught up in the moment that we are able to fully enjoy being alive.

There is no end to the ways that we can play. There are child-like ways and grown-up but still hugely fun ways. Sing at the top of your lungs driving in the car (that's the only time I'll do it). Play solitaire instead of loading the dishwasher, or Twister instead of doing the budget. Dance alone in your living room. Try your hand at juggling using the fruit in your kitchen. Blow a raspberry, or blow some bubbles! Who says that freeze-tag won't get your heart rate up as much as the treadmill?

(Shhh...My husband is napping. I think this would be a good time to get in some serious spiritual practice using a tried-and-true tool mentioned above. . .)

May you cultivate many playful moments.

Prosperity

In these challenging economic times, it can be tough to stay centered in the truth that we can live in prosperity. I've noticed how easy it is for me to get caught up in the fear of the day, and I start wondering how bad things will get, or if our financial future is secure.

It helps to remember that prosperity, like all other possible experiences in this life, is a creative choice. It is, at its core, a vibration of energy. We attract things to ourselves based

on what we believe to be true about us. We can “vibrate” at prosperity, or at a lack of prosperity. Interestingly, what we believe we can have, do or be often comes from parents, teachers, our community, or other people we’ve encountered along the way, and is not our own deepest truth about ourselves.

As with all things, our thoughts and beliefs about prosperity form what transpires in our experience of it. When we acknowledge the truth of ourselves as empowered to create our heart’s desires, always connected to the flow of divine intelligence, it is made manifest in our lives.

We can live abundantly in many ways. We can enjoy good health, joy, wisdom, or wealth, among other things. Financial prosperity and abundance have long been seen as non-spiritual, and not in alignment with expressing our Godselfes.

We are meant to experience ourselves as unlimited creators manifesting all of the good that we can envision for ourselves and our world. We glorify God when we live in alignment with that ideal, doing our best, creating our highest, and then blessing it as good. We bless it as good with our gratitude.

I was reminded of the power of gratitude in a recent article on a website called the DailyOM (www.dailyom.com). It spoke of a practice that I intend to start in my own life, when I do that seemingly-mundane activity of paying my

bills. Paying bills can feel like a chore, and can also lead us to feel less-than-prosperous if we have a bit too much month at the end of the money. The DailyOM article provided a great way to look at it:

“We may not always recognize simply paying a bill as prosperity in action, but it is. We can make it a spiritual practice and align ourselves with the energy of giving and receiving when we give thanks for having the ability to pay for it. We can then extend our view far beyond the horizons of our own lives to imagine all the employees whose paychecks are paid from our resources. We can imagine all the bills they can pay and how they support their families and share with their friends.

This exercise gives us an idea of how far our financial energy reaches out into the world. When you can envision every financial transaction as a grateful act of generosity today and every day, you cannot help but attract more abundance into your life.”

Riding With No Hands

I remember hearing someone say many years ago that sometimes on the rollercoaster of life you just have to put your hands up in the air, open your eyes, and go for it. It stuck with me because at that time, I didn't feel at all brave, but wanted to be, on roller coasters and in life in general.

Actually, my experience on roller coasters had been a lot like my other experiences up to that point - willing to try

them after a bit of coaxing, anxious but hopeful of a good outcome.

Fourteen years ago, when my son was six, we took the kids to Disneyland. Later, when my son talked about what the inside of Space Mountain looked like, I had to admit that my eyes were squeezed shut the whole time. He thought that was pretty wimpy, and I did, too. (For those of you who haven't yet been to Disneyland, Space Mountain is an indoor roller coaster that is very dark inside, making it look like you are in deep space hurtling past stars and planets and ... other deep-space stuff.) I realized that keeping my eyes shut tight in fear the entire time kept me from really having the experience, and it was a symbol of how I approached other things in my life as well. I told my son then that next time I would leave my eyes open.

I finally had the chance last year, when we again took our now-adult children to Disneyland. It was a great time, running between the rides, all of us acting like kids again. I made a conscious decision that I would live up to my promise to myself. My husband and my kids were indulgent with me, listening with smiles on their faces but somehow not laughing, when I said proudly that I was going to keep my eyes open on the ride.

The first one was the new roller coaster in California Adventure. I felt a big rush of excitement as I buckled in, and I have to say it was great as I watched upside down as we barrel-rolled our way down the track. As we climbed a hill I went for it, first time ever, and put my hands in the air

as we crested the hill and came tearing back down. I waited 51 years to have that experience, and I'm glad I finally did it.

Later we hit the Hollywood Hotel ride that is open to the outside, supposedly in an elevator that falls a number of stories before stopping abruptly. We rode that one twice, and I'm happy to report that I did it eyes open!

One of the last ones we rode was Space Mountain, and I have a picture on my refrigerator of all of us - one of those that the ride takes at an especially scary part and then lets you buy the picture at the end if you want to. There I am sitting in the front of the car, screaming and clearly having a great time, and my eyes look like bug eyes, but they are open.

Being with my kids for that weekend was tremendous fun, and the fact that I conquered my fear made it all the more so. I'm still proud of that Space Mountain picture. The great thing is, I've been learning to fear less and trust more for a long time, and I think that trip really did help me realize that I am brave, in many ways. Every time we stand tall in our own truth, we are being brave.

Each time I deny a belief that anything but good is at work in my life, I am brave. And each and every time I choose a reality of my own making, affirming that I exist as an expression of loving and limitless creation, I know my own unbounded power.

May you live with your eyes wide open.

Approaching Your Feelings

A wise person reminded me recently of the importance of not overriding my feelings. In my focus on maintaining my thoughts in a healthy and productive place, I often try to think through the emotional issues that I'm facing, rather than really, truly feel them.

Feeling feelings can be inconvenient. It can be painful. In the short run it can stir things up and make us less comfortable than if we had just chosen to let them go. It can also feel very unproductive, especially around situations that are past, or that we cannot change.

I deeply believe that choosing how I think about the ongoing events of my life, expecting good, and trusting God's divine hand in all of it, mold my experience in a way that reflects my expectations, and my trust.

I'm finding, though, that some things have an emotional life of their own. My good intentions and positive thoughts help to a very large degree, but the only way through emotions is through them. And that means being fully present not with my thoughts, or how I want things to be, but with my honest feelings, messy as they might be in the moment.

When I approach my feelings rather than think them away, my body is healthier, and I am more at ease. There is a big sigh of relief when I touch on what is really going on, deep within me. Sometimes just acknowledging the depth of my

feelings is all I need. That makes sense to me, because I always find that touching truth is a healing.

There is a technique called C.O.A.L., in which we approach a situation that is having an emotional impact on us by being curious, open, accepting and loving. With it we are not judging the fact that we are having an emotional reaction, but being ever so gentle with ourselves as we seek to understand and honor our feelings about it. I am finding it helpful.

I am, as always, grateful for the many tools that I've learned to help me embrace the miracle that is my life. And today, I remember to approach and honor my feelings.

Cultivating Humor

My husband told me last night that he'd love for me to do a stand-up comedy routine, just for him. Just picturing it made him chuckle. It made me chuckle, too. I can see us in our living room, him sitting at a make-shift round table with a glass of wine, and me standing with a wrench or some other pretend microphone, saying "Did you hear the one about. . ." We've done sillier things. We tend to laugh a lot.

I'm a true believer in humor for healing all types of ills. In the stress management class that I teach at work, one of the things that I discuss with people is the idea of actively cultivating humor. I enjoy watching people who have come into the class very burdened by the demands in their lives light up at the thought that maybe something as simple

and uplifting as laughter could help ease those burdens. Research has proven that laughter lowers blood pressure and stress hormones, and increases immune function and the release of endorphins. It really is good medicine.

Humor unites people, because laughter is the universal language. Sharing a private joke or a moment of happiness with another creates a bond of good-feeling and lifts the heart. I remember when my son was about 18 months old, he would pick up his play telephone, hold it up to his ear, and laugh and laugh. I realized early on that he was imitating what he thought a person did on a telephone. I looked like that, talking on the phone with my sister. I am pleased to say we still do that.

Many times, when my husband or I, or both of us, have had a tough day at work, we decide to do something funny. We've gone to the park to swing and slide, which is very humorous, especially to the kids watching us. We've batted the wiffle ball at the park in heavy wind. We've worn big wax gummy lips to the dinner table. We've eaten cake with my son, not using utensils, and then taken pictures. Not too long ago, while paying bills, my husband donned his slippers that look like rainbow trout, and I wore a bow tie. Recounting these times, and remembering so many more, makes me smile. Humor is even great years later, with the remembering.

There is no limit to the ways we can create humor for ourselves. Rent a funny movie or choose to read a silly book. I have a couple of sites bookmarked on my

computer at work that I can go to for a quick joke in the middle of a hectic day. Make a mental note of something that really tickled your funny bone, and then remember it when you need to smile. Most importantly, choose to find amusement in the little things as you go through your day. To quote that very articulate author, Dr. Seuss, "From there to here, and here to there, funny things are everywhere."

Celebrate your sense of funny. Each of us has our own brand of humor and our own way of expressing it. Mine is definitely more understated, which makes the whole stand-up idea all the more comical. I'll let you know when my routine is finished.

Humor, and laughter, bring us into step with our highest joy, and open us to fully celebrate being alive. Here's to laughing loud and often!

Sitting With Discomfort

It is human nature to try to avoid discomfort in all forms. We learn early on in life to be careful with our physical selves, keeping our hands away from fire, or walking carefully down stairs so we don't fall down. A little later on, we learn to minimize emotional pain by perhaps not speaking up when we should so we don't feel rejected, or maybe agreeing with something that is not our truth in order to feel accepted.

While it makes sense to want to minimize pain, we can do this to a point where we end up shutting ourselves off from

our deepest feelings, and also our greatest opportunities for growth.

It isn't easy to sit with confusion or disagreement or disappointment, let them exist, and just experience our reactions to them. I know I always want to jump in and fix the issue as quickly as possible so I'm not uncomfortable anymore. But I'm learning that many of the things that cause me discomfort are due to things beyond my control, and I need to let them be. In my striving to change the energy of a situation, all I end up doing is getting myself off center.

One way we shut ourselves off from fully processing our experiences and receiving their gifts is by placing our focus outside of ourselves. When I am spinning about circumstances around me, who said this or did that, I cannot be sitting with my own experience. Sometimes it's more comfortable to focus my thinking on what others are doing. While it may be frustrating and painful, thinking and spinning about what others are doing is often less frustrating and painful than actually deeply feeling my *own* feelings about what is taking place.

If I try to think my way through something uncomfortable, I may stew for a while and then feel as if it's over, but really I've just pushed it under the surface. Over a lifetime we can build up so much unacknowledged emotional pain that we begin to see everything through its lens.

I really like the idea that the only way through something is through it. Avoidance doesn't help, and as they say, resistance is futile. When we start shutting off our uncomfortable experiences, we shut down our ability to feel *all* emotions, the painful stuff and the joyful stuff. Uncomfortable things will always happen, and the experience of them provides the impetus we need to open our hearts to the profound miracle in all of life's ups and downs.

An interesting example of this that I heard about recently involves a group of people who were studied regarding their response to the discomfort of holding a hand in extremely cold water. One group was instructed to focus their attention on what they were feeling in their hand. The other group was asked to focus their attention on something pleasant, such as a warm beach in Hawaii. The group that stayed with the pain they felt actually processed it more quickly and easily.

If I sit with my discomfort and give it the space it needs to be fully experienced, I can eventually let it go. In the meantime, while I am in that process of integrating what I need to learn from the discomfort, I validate it as part of what it means to be human. And I remember the hand of God in all of it.

Taking Good Care of Yourself

As a spiritual tool, consciously choosing to take good care of ourselves is crucial. It's easy to forget to do it in the

middle of our busy lives. We tend to think of giving to others as being the more spiritual act, but taking really good care of ourselves is the best way of honoring these precious lives that we've been given.

Our sensitive, unique and wonderful bodies really are miracles, these magnificent temples of the soul. They allow God to not only know but also experience herself, through us. Our bodies deserve our utmost care.

As I write this, I'm sitting with my feet up, looking out the window at the green grass, beautiful tall trees and the long rays of light from the setting sun. The low light sparkles on the leaves that dance in the breeze. Stopping to really notice scenes like this is one of the ways that I take good care of myself.

There are many ways, individual to each of us. If we listen, we will hear what our bodies and our spirits need. One tool I use often is to simply ask myself, "What do I need to do right now to take care of myself?" Stopping for a moment to ask the question shifts our attention from details and busyness to remembering the truth of our own innate value and importance in the world.

Focusing on doing what we need to do to take good care of ourselves helps relieve stress, and makes us more effective in our roles and in our lives. When we are good to ourselves, the world can dish out what it will, and we remain our own best advocates. No matter what, we can find deep joy in nurturing our own heart's desire.

I believe that the more often we choose to act in a way that honors our own needs, the healthier we can be physically and emotionally. Our bodies and minds relax as they become accustomed to being treated with care. We learn to trust ourselves.

Self-care may come in the form of spending time in nature, or practicing a creative hobby. It may be found in getting more regular physical activity or eating foods that nurture our bodies and feel right for us. Taking good care of ourselves may mean saying no, even when someone else is disappointed or angry, or making sure that we honor our need to spend time alone.

Splurging a little on the perfect pair of shoes or on some article of clothing that we feel great in could be a way to cherish ourselves. Or it might be in planning a schedule for our days that includes time for our spiritual practice, or for other kinds of self-care.

We glorify God, and our blessed existence, when we remember to consider what we need to do to take good care of ourselves, and then do it.

May you find many joyful ways to cherish yourself.

Come as a Child

I think I've mentioned, maybe a time or two, that I find myself too busy at times. It's a tendency I learned in childhood, taking on too much responsibility for things to try to keep my world safe. I'm not complaining; I'm

definitely not the only person in the world who believes at times that she can hold it up single-handedly. That particular part of my personality has provided me with a good deal of compassion, and a desire to make things better in my own small way, among other things. I am grateful for the opportunity to learn what I learn from it, and continue looking for balance in my life.

Last night I came home from work feeling stressed, and really looking forward to my meditation time. I was aware that I needed to stop for a while, but more than that I also felt that I needed some help with all of it. I was too burdened, in that moment, to even know what kind of help I was seeking. I was eager to just sit and rest, and let the answers come.

As I closed my eyes and grounded my body, the voice of God within me reminded me clearly to keep it simple, and come as a child. I felt instantly eased as my body caught up with the fact that I could be very gentle in my attention to myself, because there was nothing else to be concerned about. As I sat in communication with the God of my heart, I was able to be the center of my own universe, knowing that all existed for my good, much like a child involved in some kind of wonderful, creative play. In my simple meditation, I watched as my own electric blue life force energy coursed through my body, aware at the same time of Father/Mother God standing over my shoulder, watching over me, shielding me, and orchestrating everything for good.

I know myself as a child of God, made in her image, creator without limit of my own sacred life. But I don't think I'd ever perceived myself as God's *child*, beloved, precious and safe, seeing myself as God does, without the need to do anything to earn my place here. I sometimes think that all human worry stems from the very common but flawed thinking that if we could just fulfill some role a little better we just might be allowed to stay.

There's a part in Neale Walsch's Conversations With God in which God says, "You can't hear my truth until you stop telling me yours." I believe that's what happened last night in my meditation. When I finally released my own agenda, stopped trying to control the outcome of everything in my thinking, and just sat quietly waiting for the truth I sought, the voice of my knowing reminded me that we are, all of us, held in the benevolent hands of infinite good.

I know in my head that I am safe, and that divine intelligence is at work. But I really appreciate those times when I know it in my heart, and my body, as well. It's balm for the soul of the scared child that exists as a part of me, and for the fairly capable grown-up who sometimes needs a very solid reminder that she, and the rest of this planet, are safe in the perfect design of ongoing creation.

Part Three ~ Fall

Blooming Where You're Planted

Bloom where you're planted is another very wisdom-filled saying of my grandmother's. We are here. We can waste a lot of energy and miss a lot of life wishing we were somewhere else, doing something else, but that only accomplishes stealing our moments.

My husband's elderly aunt died this morning, and he said it makes him remember that he doesn't want to wait to live. It's much too easy to live in the future, waiting to find the real enjoyment of our lives when the kids are grown or we're retired or we find the perfect job or partner. He and I catch ourselves doing that now, fantasizing about how things will be when we retire. We're both very clear about not wanting to live in the future, but get caught up in that thinking sometimes.

When that future comes, there will be another future, and something new to look forward to. In the meantime, life is lived now. It seems such an obvious notion, but I find that I need to remind myself often, in many different ways, to stay in present time. When my thoughts are in the future, or the past, I miss all of the delicious possibilities that are here to experience now. I don't think there's anything more important than at the end of our days, having fully experienced being here.

When we bloom where we're planted, right here in the present moment, we are exercising that most holy of all God-given human attributes, the ability to choose who we will be in the middle of all of it. Right now, I am here, having an effect on this world as my own unique expression of God.

The Berkeley Psychic Institute teaches that it doesn't matter what we're doing; what matters is the energy that we're in when we're doing it. We can be miserable in the world's most glamorous and high-paying job, and happy as a clam in the lowliest job, depending on how we choose to experience it. We can express God within us in the middle of anything.

This takes a great deal of pressure off of making perfect decisions in life, because they are all perfect. In the present moment, we can bloom, resting in the knowledge that who we are is enough. Being present in each moment as our own bright light is all that is expected of us. The only variable is how we choose to feel about it. When we choose to know ourselves as God, we bloom.

Life's path will take its twists and turns, and we may end up in some places that we didn't expect, but the destination is never in question. How we get there is sometimes a mystery and always a mighty adventure, so we might as well bloom along the way.

Dancing

Dancing as a spiritual tool? You betcha! My husband and I have taken swing dance lessons on and off for years. We're not very good, but it's one of the things we do that brings a huge amount of joy. Something absolutely, positively magical happens when I start to dance. It doesn't matter what's been going on previously in the day. When my husband starts spinning me around, and I'm trying to anticipate where he's going to lead me next, before I know it I'm grinning ear-to-ear like a nut! It's exhilarating, and fun, and well, funny! It's not uncommon for us to laugh out loud when we're dancing. Not very dignified, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. We're starting swing lessons again next month, and I can't wait.

My husband teases me sometimes about unexpectedly breaking into dance. It's a wonderful way to move my body, and be spontaneous, and express happiness in being alive. And as much as I love dancing with my husband, I don't always need a partner. I have been known to turn on some fun music and dance in the car on long trips (seated, of course).

More often than I should probably admit, I've put some funk on the radio driving home after work, and car-danced my way down the freeway (after making an agreement with myself that I'm not going to worry about what the people driving near me think!) Turning on some music and dancing after I get home from work is a great way to

release any stress I'm holding onto. And dancing my way through a day of housework makes the job a whole lot more fun.

Dancing can be a spiritual tool, because it takes me out of my head and squarely into that delicious space of just enjoying expressing through my physical form. When I dance, my spirit dances, too!

Getting Out of Resistance

Resistance is an interesting teacher. The Buddhists believe that resisting what is creates much suffering. I believe this to be true. There is, however, an awful lot to resist, at least for me. It would be great if I responded to everything that came my way with equanimity, unmovable in my internal balance. Maybe in some lifetime!

Today, I'm resisting changes in my job. I like my job the way it is. I've been there a long time; I'm happy there, and I don't want it to change. The thing is, whether I want it to or not, it is changing. Driving home tonight, there were many things I could have had my attention on. The weather is spring-like, warm, and beautiful. I could have been grateful for countless things. But I felt that closed down feeling in my chest that accompanies my thoughts of "I don't want this."

I can label a situation in any way I choose, and create an outcome of my own making. First, though, I need to accept where I am with it. I need to feel my feelings, and be clear about what action, if any, is needed on my part. It's easy to

mistake acceptance with burying our feelings and moving on, trying to be positive. But we can't accept that which we haven't yet acknowledged. I needed to be honest with myself, first, in how I am being affected.

There is a saying that the only constant is change. I teach in my stress management class that stress is caused by demands on us to change. How we handle those demands for change can make the difference between resistance and discomfort, or enthusiasm and growth. The choice really is ours.

From the perspective of spirit, all is well. A year from now, I will have moved beyond my resistance to change, adapted and created a way to experience more of the truth of who I am and what I can do.

So for today, I will acknowledge my resistance and move on. And I will remember one of my favorite Unity prayers: "The light of God surrounds us; the love of God enfolds us; the power of God protects us; and the presence of God watches over us. Wherever we are, God is, and all is well!"

Forgiveness

Forgiving is something very simple in theory but difficult in practice. I understand that we're all finding our paths to the God within in our own unique, often stumbling ways. I know that we are all perfect in the process of remembering who we are. Much of the time, I can even consciously acknowledge the spirit of God within the people who I encounter.

I have a limitless ability to forgive, but that doesn't mean I always do it. Fear gets me stuck in needing to blame or to hold someone in a less than God-like view. I need them to be a certain way, because I fear that if they aren't, somehow I will lose, something will be taken from me or I will be hurt, or somehow less. I know in my heart this is not true, but in that reactive moment it feels true. It usually has nothing really to do with the situation at hand, but more with reminding me of something from my past that I haven't yet come to terms with. Those memories can have a lot of emotional charge.

Forgiving may not be easy much of the time, but it's an important part of our spiritual nature. When we condemn others in our thinking, even over little things, we perpetuate negativity in our awareness, and it can affect our outlook and physical health. It also robs us of our joy. Blaming takes a lot of life force that I'd like to use for other, more delightful things.

Edwene Gaines talks wonderfully about forgiveness in her book "The Four Spiritual Laws of Prosperity." In the chapter, The Mysterious Power of Forgiveness, she states that "harboring a grudge completely blocks our ability to have peace of mind. . . An unwillingness to forgive is like stabbing ourselves with a knife and expecting the person who did us wrong to feel the pain. Forgiveness is not something we do for the sake of another person. Forgiveness is something we do for ourselves." Before I

read her book, I hadn't considered the connection between prosperity and forgiveness.

I've enjoyed practicing one of Edwene's tools about forgiving, which is to try to spend an entire day without holding on to a single negative thought about anyone. It's harder than it sounds, and certainly makes it clear how often the mind rushes to judgment. I noticed in practicing this tool what a great space it is, choosing to instantly release each negative thought as it comes up and not dwell on it. In doing so, I create a world of my own making.

I learned another simple forgiveness tool from Roland at Unity. A group was discussing forgiveness, and he said "I just see them in the light." Wow. That means that in a twinkling we can see the truth of someone as the light of God, even if they have just done something that ticks us off. And the great thing is, it works!

I really love how the light of truth graces our humanness in so many simple, small ways.

Handling Problems From a Higher Vibration

It always amazes me how when I make a spiritual discovery, I often have to forget and then remember it countless times before it becomes ingrained as the truth that shapes my expression. I am reminded of a spiritual truth that I have known for many years, but tend to easily forget when it really counts, which is that "you can't solve a problem from the energy of the problem."

Our human tendency is to approach any type of problem in terms of the challenges that it's causing, and then respond with frustration, anger, resistance, or whatever seems warranted at the moment. It's difficult to think our way through to a solution, because in focusing on everything that's wrong, we actually breathe more life into the problem, and cause it to persist.

It is said that what we hold in mind manifests in kind. Managing a problem is a great example of how this plays out as we move through our experiences. As long as I am reliving in my mind the problem at hand, I am holding it in my awareness, and there is no space for resolution.

Part of our journey here in physical form is to forget that we are part of a divine intelligence that creates all that happens for our good. Our gifts come from the choices that we make about how we respond to what we are faced with. Our most holy gift is our ability to choose.

We can choose to repeatedly focus our energy on the details of an issue and what we need to do to make it better, or we can handle it from a higher vibration, by turning it over to the perfect intelligence of God within.

There is no issue, no worry, no problem large or small that we can't turn over to God within. In doing so, we get out of our own way and make room for the best and highest outcome in any situation.

When I am aligned with this truth, my moments are filled with a deep peace and life-affirming joy. I remember then

that all is as it should be, and there is nothing that I have to do. Just being here, and experiencing my moments, is all there is. I am aware that everything, absolutely everything, in my experience is happening for good.

May you raise your burdens to the truth of God's light within you.

Visualization

What we think, our bodies perceive as real. What we hold in mind affects the body very directly, on a moment-to-moment basis. We've moved beyond the spiritual awareness of a deep connection between mind and body to a point where science is able to confirm what we have known intuitively for some time.

Our thoughts create vibrations of energy within the body that the body immediately responds to. The energy of our thoughts then manifests from the inner universe of our bodies out into the greater physical world around us. In essence, we are what we think.

Consider sitting at home watching a very scary movie on TV. The things we watch on TV create thoughts that gear the body up into fight-or-flight mode, but we're not really threatened. We're sitting there safe and comfortable in the living room, where our thoughts alone are creating the dramatic change in our body chemistry, and causing the fearful response.

Our bodies react to our thoughts in this way throughout every moment of our lives. Worry or fear-based thoughts trigger a stress reaction in the body that can have long-lasting effects on our health and well-being. Over time these effects can become chronic.

In the same way, we can use our thoughts to trigger a relaxation response in the body. Our thoughts can actually be a vehicle for health and healing, and for enhancing our quality of life.

One very effective way to use our thoughts to positively affect our bodies is through visualization. When we make a conscious choice to hold in mind thoughts that are peaceful, grateful, joyful, or whatever we want to have in that moment, our bodies respond automatically. When we can add a picture in our imagination to our thinking, the effect on the body is enhanced.

A simple visualization technique is as follows:

1. Sit quietly with eyes closed and begin to focus on your breathing. Take a few minutes to allow your breathing to become comfortable, deep and regular.
2. In your mind's eye, begin to visualize yourself in a place that is very peaceful and relaxing. It can be a place that you have been before, or some place that you would like to visit someday.
3. See this place in your mind's eye as if you are there, filling in all of the details that would make it even

more relaxing and enjoyable. Notice what is under your feet and above your head, and all around you.

4. Allow your senses to take part, noticing any sounds or smells that are there, or the feel of the wind blowing across your skin if you are outside.

5. Stay there in your mind's eye for as long as is comfortable, and then open your eyes feeling at peace.

I teach this much-used technique in the stress management class that I lead at work, and also use it myself. Yesterday, as I sat for a time visualizing myself sitting on the shore of a small mountain lake where we backpack in the summer, I found my body responding with the incredibly peaceful feelings I have when we go there.

We are what we think, and we can use the powerful connection between mind and body to create peace in any moment.

Seeing Things From a Distance

In the middle of the trees, it's hard to see the forest. And oftentimes while in the midst of our life's circumstances it's hard to see the bigger picture playing out.

Getting caught up in the details that are apparent on the surface is part of being human, and sacred because it allows us to fully experience our humanness. It provides the opportunity for us to struggle with challenges, and learn from them.

Through our humanness we are graced with forgetting, and then blessed with remembering that all is for our good.

Still, sometimes it feels like we struggle more than we need to, and we long to find a way to access the awareness of perfection at work in our human experience.

Lately, when I've been caught up in circumstances, I have chosen to step back, and view them from a distance. And just as if I had been able to take a glass elevator up from the forest floor to a space high above, my limited view opens up to take in a broader perspective.

We can do this on a spiritual level any time we want to step out of a situation and view it from a more neutral place. All that it requires is to be aware of pulling your energy back from it, and then watching what unfolds.

One technique I learned many years ago during my years with the Berkeley Psychic Institute is to "go to the corner of the room." Start by spending a few minutes in relaxation with your eyes closed. Then allow your energy (or whatever you would like to call it - your spirit, the observer, God within you) to move up to a corner of the room. From this perspective, look down at yourself, and let spirit within you see from a higher vantage point.

From this distance, you may want to notice what thoughts and emotions are moving through your body. Because you are not in that moment caught up in the situation, you are able to see it more completely. As the observer you are able to be more neutral and less reactive.

As moving our attention to this observer's perspective becomes more comfortable, we are able to shift to it in an instant, eyes open, by pulling our energy out of a situation just enough that we are for a time not part of it, but watching it without judgment.

We can use this tool any time we want to approach something from a less reactive and limiting outlook. In any moment that we choose to become the observer of our experience rather than caught up in unconscious reaction, we are brought directly into present time. And from our perspective as fully-present in this moment, we connect with the truth of our being. We align with what is. For that moment we are timeless, and we live in the miracle of ongoing creation.

Replenishing Your Energy

It's helpful to have a tool for calling our energy back into ourselves. Energy is very fluid, and is constantly being exchanged between people. When we encounter someone who is frustrated, for example, we may end up feeling out of sorts without really understanding why. When we are trying very hard to talk a friend through a difficult time, we may walk away feeling depleted and sad. In this situation the energy transfer may have been in both directions, giving away our vitality and taking on another's sadness.

The Berkeley Psychic Institute teaches a simple way to replenish our energy, called a golden sun. What we think, we create. What we visualize, our bodies perceive as real.

We could use any image to represent our life force, but a golden sun is a great healing. To me, it represents the energy of the Supreme Being within me, which contains all of the truth of who I am.

Begin by visualizing a very large, bright golden sun above your head. Allow that golden sun to begin to collect any of your own energy that you may have left behind or given away. You don't necessarily have to see what's coming back to your golden sun, just allow it to happen.

It's important to call our energy back to ourselves because while our energy works for us, it doesn't work for others. For others, it actually gets in the way. When we give our energy away to others in an effort to help them, we are not acknowledging their infinite ability to perfectly create for themselves. In the process we can begin to become uncomfortable, things can feel difficult, or we might lose our clarity and get caught up in things not of our own making.

When you feel ready, allow the golden sun to come down through the top of your head and into your body, filling every organ and bone, every cell in your body with the gold vibration of your own spiritual energy. That's all there is to it!

This is an easy tool to practice, and also easy to forget. But I teach, and write, to remember. So my tool for today is gold suns, lots and lots of them!

Sending Them On

I heard a quote the other day from Unity's Daily Word that touched me, but before I share it with you let me explain why I liked it so much. The day before, at work, I had facilitated a support group that I do regularly. It's a support group for people with diabetes, and I've been leading it for almost 10 years. It's grown a lot in that time. I've always loved watching as the participants grow comfortable enough to share their feelings, and how they inspire and learn from each other.

Leading that group is a joy and a challenge. There is a huge discrepancy in people's needs, perspectives and awareness. Creating an environment in which such a diverse group all feel welcome and accepted tests me, and at times wears me out.

Part of what I do leading groups is consciously set the energy. I set my own vibration at being open and accepting, and model that. I set the energy of the group at being inclusive, effective and positive. Mostly it works! It's a pretty successful group.

Even still, in all groups that have been together awhile, there are some participants who others resist. One particular man last week was annoying the others, interrupting, being negative, falling asleep and snoring loudly when others were speaking, which he does fairly often.

I noticed myself beginning to resist this man, as I got stuck in feeling like I had to control the situation, and him. I felt the familiar frustration that comes with resistance, and the invalidation that comes with feeling out of control. When I got home I still felt frustrated and invalidated.

And so I finally get to the point of the story: the quote, and how we leave people. The next morning, as I was getting ready to go to work with very little enthusiasm, divine intelligence provided my answer to me in a gentle and perfect way, as it always does. My husband often reads me the daily word in the morning, and it had a quote from the Bible, "You will do well to send them on in a manner worthy of God." (3 John 1:6)

I remembered then that when I fall into judgment or resistance, I can choose to be my best self. I can encounter people in my day in a manner befitting my Godself, by being the best I can be in the moment. I'll never be perfect, but I can choose to lead that group affirming that in that little corner of creation, there is ample space for God's love in all of its expressions.

I choose to send them on in a manner worthy of God. And in doing so, I am blessed beyond measure.

Being Open to Receive

I write this from the island of Kauai, where from our cottage in the middle of lush green foliage and tropical flowers we can see a volcano in the distance. The weather has been amazing, 85 degrees and humid, of course. My

skin soaks it up and my curly hair goes all frizzy, which is part of the total entertainment package.

Yesterday morning it rained, hard, that kind of tropical rain that I love. As it pounded down on the metal awning covering our lanai, it soaked everything in a few minutes, and then the sun broke through and the whole world sparkled. Thank you, God, for the opportunity to experience another tropical rainstorm. It really is a wonderful world.

I am reminded of a great spiritual tool that I learned a few years ago, at a Unity book study group. We were reading The Creative Life by Eric Butterworth, and discussing how in creating this life, we need to reconnect with the truth that we are expressions of divine mind, made in God's image to manifest all that we conceive as truth. We are the light of the world, and our lights shine brightly when we seize that most holy birthright and trust in who we are.

One way to help remind our subconscious that we are one with universal creative energy is with the affirmation, "I am *open* to receive all of life's riches." When I say this a few times, and let myself know the truth of it, I feel the subtle shift of energy in my body as I reconnect with the rightness of the moment. Doubts and details are replaced with trust that as a child of ongoing creation, my will is God's will, and our will is for good. I need only accept that as truth, or at least be open to the possibility of it. The really wonderful thing is, just being open to the possibility is enough. We don't have to know our Godselfes

completely, in every moment. A mustard seed of faith comes with just being open to the possibility that we could really be all that we imagine.

It was recommended in the study group that we repeat the affirmation, "I am open to receive all of life's riches" 100 times a day. I don't normally do affirmations as a regular part of my spiritual practice, but during those six weeks I tried it. The process was interesting. I noticed that at first it just felt boring and repetitive. Then it started to feel like maybe I was connecting with something bigger than how I usually think. At times I knew I was talking to God, and she to me. It became a mantra, and a prayer.

The energy of the affirmation changes depending on what word you emphasize in the sentence: "I am open to receive **all** of life's riches," "I am **open** to receive all of life's riches," "I am open to receive all of life's riches." All are parts of a larger whole, the truth that we can have, do or be all that we can imagine. We could never be any less, as children of God.

Mike, and I with big hair, are off to seize the good this day brings! . . . Aloha!

More Forgiveness

God answers my questions, often before I even know I have a question. So I wasn't surprised when an answer came to me through Rev. Ken's message on forgiveness this morning. I was grateful for his perspective. His definition

of forgiveness spoke to me: "Forgiveness is letting go of our belief in sin and guilt."

When we remember, and accept, that nothing exists outside of God consciousness, there is no sin, only expressions of that divine consciousness. There is nothing we need feel guilty for, and nothing we need to hold on to. Forgiveness itself becomes unnecessary.

I learned long ago that there are no villains, and no victims. Every challenging person or situation is a mirror we call to ourselves to reflect what remains hidden in darkness, so that we may heal, and grow. All is constructed for us to learn to live as light.

We have all at times been subjected to others who did not have our best interest at heart. We have also interacted with others in ways that didn't reflect our best. These interactions are opportunities to choose and choose again; they prompt us to think about who we are and who we want to be on our path toward expressing our highest light.

Forgiveness creates freedom. When we live without blame, or guilt, we trust the loving and divine intelligence that created this process of life. We don't dwell on the small stuff, and instinctively turn the big stuff over to our own never-ending good. We are free to use our life force in creating that good, and our joy sends ripples throughout humanity.

Forgiveness helps us heal ourselves, and our world. It allows us to be part of the solution. In each choice to forgive, we set ourselves, and our world, free.

Meditation

I'm fairly sure that meditation saved my life, or at least my life as I know it today. Meditation has for many years helped me discover that there is so much more to this existence than what I can see taking place in the world outside of me. It has revealed to me the sweet truth of where I fit within creation. I know that I will always seek, but my seeking is gentler now, without the frantic feel it had years ago, before meditation helped me find the quiet place within, where truth resides and the big questions are answered.

I learned to meditate at the Berkeley Psychic Institute, and have practiced its very helpful tools of grounding and running my own life force energy, among many others, every day since. I'm grateful that I listened to the urgings of my spirit and walked in the door that first day. I had been seeking answers in various places, just trying things out. BPI was very different from anything I had experienced, and the idea of just walking in was more than a little anxiety-producing.

I had been spending the day in a city about 45 minutes away from where I live, and was just about ready to head home. I was driving down a street and saw a sign, and on a whim stopped and went in. In looking back it feels like I

wasn't making conscious choices, but acting on a very strong impulse that I didn't understand. It just felt like I had to go in. I've since learned to trust that spirit leads me to the right doors; I just have to quiet my mind's nay-saying and cross the threshold, as scary as that can feel at times.

I have a quote on my desk at work that says, "If I don't go within, I go without." I'm not sure who wrote it, but for me that play-on-words pretty much sums up how meditation has been for me in my life. If I don't go within, on a fairly regular basis, I most definitely go without. I lose touch with the deeper truth of who I am, and the issues of the world become the biggest reality in my existence. In a sense, I become what I see outside of me.

When I go within, I am reconnected with awareness of myself as a spiritual being. I am reunited with the light of the God of my heart shining brightly within me. I am renewed in my appreciation of my body, and my soul is brought back into communion with its beloved temple. In going within, there is nothing I go without, for all that is good and true reflects in and through me.

I have heard it said that prayer is talking to God, and meditation is listening to God. In my own practice it seems that the two blend so that I don't know where talking ends, and listening begins. I'm often not sure if it's me talking and God listening, or the other way around. In my truth it is all happening simultaneously. It is all God, experiencing her Self.

Synchronicity

We live in a very synchronous universe. In an amount of time unfathomable to us, the sun will die out and our solar system will exist no longer. But now, within time as we are able to perceive it, the earth revolves around the sun on an amazingly regular schedule, tides ebb and flow, and we expect the predictable changes that come with one season following another.

Life is immensely interdependent. There are entire chains of lifecycles in nature that could not exist if one link in the chain for some reason didn't come into being. One simple example is bees. I don't think too much about bees, and shoo them away if they come too close. But they play a very important role in creating our food supply and maintaining biodiversity by pollinating many types of edible plants, trees and flowers. In many places bee populations are dwindling, and that puts our food supply at serious risk. There are countless examples of how components of our world work together in ways so perfect that they defy understanding.

Synchronicity is at work on an individual level as well. I love when I notice things coming together in ways that are so natural and seamless that I recognize the hand of something much larger than myself at work.

This happened the other day, as I was writing a post about grace. I knew that I wanted to write about grace, but wasn't sure what I wanted to say. Sometimes I have a very

clear picture about what I want to write; at other times I just sit down and start typing and see what I end up with. On the topic of grace, I just began to write. I remembered an idea that I had picked up from a book that I hadn't looked at in years. When I glanced up, there the book sat on the bookshelf above my computer! Examples came to me and connected themselves together in my mind as I let my fingers type. The absence of any single piece would have changed the result. And so it is with all things creative, and with life in general!

I've found that synchronicity happens when we get out of the way and let the details of our intentions work themselves out in our subconscious without effort, allowing the individual parts to blend into just the right whole. The more I notice and am grateful for those moments that somehow just "work," and the more I trust that I can step back and marvel at life's creative process moving unhindered by my thoughts and expectations, the more space I make for that very powerful force to express itself in my life.

Know Thyself

I think that knowing ourselves may be the most important spiritual tool. When we truly know ourselves, there can be no room for doubting our own precious value to the world. As unlimited creators made in the likeness and image of God, we could never be any less than perfect. And in fully accepting this truth, we cannot help but shine brighter in

the world, living in awareness of the grace, intelligence and love that we embody.

This existence provides much room for questioning the perfection of ourselves and our world, but that is as it should be, for we know something much more completely by first experiencing its absence. We are given anger so that we may know forgiveness, pain so that we may know peace, and fear so that we may know faith, and ultimately love. The dichotomies of our world give us divine experience in choosing a higher truth to live by. All is such that we may grow in forgiveness, peace, faith, and love for ourselves.

Know thyself doesn't mean complete awareness of our own goodness in every moment. I believe that it means knowing just as thoroughly those parts of ourselves that are disconnected from the truth. The less-than-perfect stuff is harder to get to know, because we tend to push it out of our awareness. But both the darkness and the light are God within, expressing perfection through the finite, physical form that is us.

God is there, in our resistance to the parts of ourselves that get stuck and forget. God is also there watching our resistance, and knowing its temporary nature, a wave rolling by atop the vast ocean of our eternal selves.

In making friends with both the darkness and the light in our thinking, we find the courage to let go of the small stuff that captures our attention and holds us back. In our

loving acceptance of ourselves, ripples of loving acceptance move out into the world, serving the highest good for all.

Don't Take Anything Personally

The second agreement in Don Miguel Ruiz' book, The Four Agreements, which I introduced in a post a few weeks ago, is to never take things personally. I found the ideas in this book to be simple, and I can very much see the value in them. None of them are easy to maintain, though.

It is important to remember that what people do really has nothing to do with us. People come to their encounters with others with a combination of assumptions, expectations and beliefs about the world that are theirs alone. Each of us interacts with the world and with each other based on the reality that we see, and for each of us it is different. That each of us holds a unique perspective is obvious, but I think it is sometimes easy to forget when we don't understand another's motivations. It's pretty natural to make assumptions based on what we hold true, but that may not be true for the other person at all.

In his book, Ruiz says that, "Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves. All people live in their own dream, in their own mind. . . Even when a situation seems so personal, even if others insult you directly, it has nothing to do with you. What they say, what they do, and the opinions they give are according to the agreements they have in their own minds. Their point of view comes from all the programming they received during

(their life)." I can imagine how much misunderstanding could be avoided if people could make this simple, but challenging, agreement with themselves.

He goes on to explain that it is best to not take personally even positive things that people say or do, because those are really not about us, either. "Whatever people do, feel, think, or say, don't take it personally. If they tell you how wonderful you are, they are not saying that because of you. You know you are wonderful."

This really is powerful stuff, couched in simple language. For me, it is another way to hear my own truth, and create my own outcome as I allow others to create theirs.

Finally, Ruiz says that, "As you make a habit of not taking anything personally, you won't need to place your trust in what others do or say. You will only need to trust yourself and make responsible choices. You are never responsible for the actions of others; you are only responsible for you."

For me, this is one of the most important truths. As unique expressions of God, each of us lives and breathes intelligence beyond measure. Each of us is choosing our steps along our own perfect path to remembering fully who we are. They are our steps. People won't always agree or understand, just as we won't always understand others. But there is a sacred place for all of life, in its infinitely varied expression, and for its own sake alone.

Even More Forgiving

I woke up from an interesting dream this morning. I dreamed that I was with a group of people and we were writing a story together. It was being recorded on paper, for some reason 14 lines per page. Someone suggested that the next thing in the story be to forgive. I didn't feel that forgiving should be written into the story at that point, without any context explaining it being there. People were talking amongst themselves, and I said something like, "In order to forgive, we need to have had someone do something that was not in our best interest, and then we need to remember that they are worthy of a place in our heart, and then we can create a space to forgive."

Everyone stopped talking and started taking notes, and I woke up.

I've written about forgiveness before. One of the things this dream reminded me of was to take note of the quiet truth of my heart, rather than the much louder promptings of my thinking. Another thing that the dream caused me to remember is that I call people into my life in order to experience forgiving, or anything else. Even those situations where people don't have my best interest at heart, are called forth by me, to create the opportunity for me to choose how I want to show up. I could never know myself as forgiving if I'd never had a reason to forgive. I could never really know peace if I'd never known chaos. And so it goes.

I also realized that there are layers of forgiving. I can decide to forgive, and feel like I have, but then suddenly feel hurt or angry over what I thought I'd forgiven. In order to really release something, I must first look directly at it, be honest with myself about why I am being so affected by it, and feel my feelings about it. It doesn't help to avoid the very situations I've called to myself in order to grow.

I am struck often by the grace that allows us the ability to choose what expressing ourselves as God actually looks like. Over and over throughout time, we decide. Every situation is an opportunity to choose who we are, and who we want to be. We are gifts to each other in our awakening.

I came away from that dream renewed by the peace that comes from knowing that the best interest of my soul could never be thwarted. And I am again grateful for the gifts I have been given, in their many and varied packages.

Creating and Destroying

We very often forget that destroying is a crucial part of the creative process. Sometimes when we have an intention to create something, there are other things in place in our lives that get in the way of it.

It would be hard to manifest a healthy and happy relationship if in our thinking we still label relationships based on past, unhealthy ones. It would be difficult to create a new, more creative job if we worry that we are too

unskilled to get one anyway. It's always hard to create new things in our lives when we are stuck in old thinking.

The most powerful tool I've learned about creating and destroying I learned at BPI. Its effectiveness comes from consciously destroying as part of the process. BPI uses the symbol of a rose in this tool, but any symbol will work. I like the idea of always using the same symbol when you practice this, because the subconscious makes a strong connection with the symbol and the creating/destroying process. The rose is useful because you can notice how open it is to indicate how far along in manifestation your goal is.

What we think, we create. What we "see," we create even more powerfully. Throughout our lives, we are not normally taught to trust what we see, but seeing is part of our birthright as creators made in God's image.

It's easy to "forget" that I have countless tools at my disposal for creating. It had been awhile since I'd created and destroyed roses, but I did today, and cleared my ability to manifest in my life the things I desire. There are different ways to go about this, so you can play with it and do what feels comfortable to you.

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. In your mind's eye, visualize a rose representing what it is that you want to manifest. Don't work too hard at it; just see what you see. That rose, its color, how open it is and what shape it's in all represent the energy around your idea in present time. You

may see a very definite rose, or you may get a more vague idea of a rose. Either way is fine. It is our intention here that is important. See it, don't judge what you see, then blow it up! Destroy it. You can use any visual you choose. I often set a firecracker into it, in my mind's eye, and watch as it blows up. This part of the process can be uncomfortable if you are not used to destroying. We are not usually taught that it is OK to destroy things. It's very powerful but also fun, because we are releasing limits and clearing our creative ability.

Create another rose in your mind's eye, representing the same idea. It may be a different color or look different. Blow it up, too. With this process we are destroying anything in the creating of our idea that is not part of our truth. After creating and destroying a few roses, you will sense that the one you are now "looking" at is clear and containing your truth. At this point I show the rose to God, and know that it is done; it will come to pass in the right and perfect way.

You can use this process in many ways. You can create and destroy roses to clear communication in relationships. You can create and destroy roses to clear your path to a goal you have. You can even create and destroy roses to help you release old programming and fear. I created and destroyed roses around a number of ideas today!

May you know yourself as the limitless creator that you are.

In Nothing Be Anxious

My mind lately has been tending toward worried thoughts, for reasons not fully known to me. I believe I'm matching the energy of fear that is so pervasive in the world today. It's amazing how quickly my thoughts can turn to concern if I let them race by unchecked.

As I began my meditation today, I was wondering about what tool I could use for the worry that creeps in for no apparent reason. I decided to pick up my copy of The Writings of Florence Scovel Shinn, and flipped to the back of the book looking for a table of contents. There wasn't one, but the very next thing I flipped to was the first page of a chapter called "In Nothing Be Anxious." Perfect! It caused a chortle, in my delight at yet another demonstration of the unfailing truth that we always find what we seek.

I was reminded that I just need to change my mind. For as many years as I've been practicing meditation, and learning about the truth of myself as the creator of my experience, my mind still runs amok at times. That is the nature of the mind, and I'm learning not to get too stuck on where it goes. Rather than resisting the unbidden thoughts, or even trying to understand them, it's much easier to acknowledge them and then just let them go. Holding on just gives them more control over my experience.

Scovel Shinn adds another important piece to this in her book when she says: "Infinite Intelligence will express

through (us) as success, happiness, abundance, health and perfect self-expression, unless fear and anxiety make a short circuit." She goes on to say that it is more than just a matter of visualizing, or making a mental picture of Infinite Intelligence expressing freely through us, but "it must be a spiritual realization, a feeling that you are already there; . . . in its vibration."

For me, this spiritual realization is faith in life, in myself and in the process, and in the God who made me. Faith creates within us the vibration of being open to our good. When we have our eyes open to the perfect creative intelligence that we're part of, we'll always find the right chapter, and exactly what we need on our own divine path.

Fear Not

I asked God what I should write about today, and She said, "Fear Not." I thought that a fitting topic, because while finding ourselves in fear has always been a necessary part of remembering who we are, there sure does seem to be a lot more of it banging around lately. It's not always easy in the middle of some fear-based reaction to stay calmly centered and tell ourselves that we're much bigger than it is. In the moment, all we see is the monster's big teeth and we know we're just seconds from being lost for good.

I remember, way back in my early 20's, reading a book that changed my life. It's called Emmanuel's Book, A Manual for Living Comfortably in the Cosmos, by Pat Rodegast and Judith Stanton. Pat Rodegast channels a being named

Emmanuel, and his teachings cover many topics. At that time in my life, before I had begun my search for truth, and before I had any tools for understanding the events of my childhood, Emmanuel's words were, quite literally, a balm for my soul. The words gave me hope where, looking back, hope was so lost that I didn't even know it was gone.

Emmanuel's Book sparked in me a sometimes difficult, but mostly joyous quest for truth that has lasted since. And the words that hooked me are, "You are safe, you are safe, you are safe." I read that and even though it took me many years to finally own that truth for myself, the words opened a possibility in me that grew stronger and stronger, gradually opening me to a truth that gets sweeter every year I live.

We are safe. If we could but remember that, God within would dance a lot more. When I remember that I am the creator of my experience, and that I have chosen fear as part of my path to knowing my own greatness, it is transformed to a gift I give myself. Fear is created by me, and through me, and for me.

Fear is a choice, and that is a powerful perspective. In any moment we can choose fear, or faith. Fear is just being temporarily stuck in a lie. Faith, and love, are truth. We say in Unity that fear has no power over me, and I know that is true because even though I get temporarily stuck, I created all of it as part of my divine path of forgetting and remembering. I can get unstuck! Even in the middle of the

most trying circumstances that life can dish out, we are safe, we are safe, we are safe.

I am, as always, profoundly grateful to the many teachers I've been blessed to encounter in my life. If in writing my truth I can give back even a bit of what I've been given, I am grateful beyond measure.

Part Four ~ Winter

Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is the energy that turns the moments of our lives into magic. Enthusiasm isn't something we must wait to feel; it is something we can cultivate as often as we remember. I am always amazed by the incredible creative power we have, in each instant, to choose what we will experience. In any moment, there are countless different things that could capture our attention. We tend to focus on what we expect, based on past experience or what we've been taught. In this way, experience can limit the flexibility with which we view things. We will always see what we expect, if we don't resist the temptation to believe everything we think. Much of that thinking is old, outdated, and never originated with us anyway!

In order to be as fully open as possible to the gifts of this life, we must claim our power in creating a world of our own making. We are not seeing the world as it is, we are making the world we see, based on our thoughts and beliefs about it. Experience is not hard-wired, it is infinitely variable depending on what we decide to accept into awareness.

Right now I am delighted by the possibilities. Am I struggling to find the right words, or am I writing with ease the thoughts that come from my heart? This moment is an

incredible gift in choosing my experience, and I send the vibration of that choice outward into ongoing creation.

How much importance and immediacy will I place on my awareness that my office is messy, and needs dusting? There is no judgment here, for me just a decision about whether to deal with that now, or not. Is needing to get ready for work soon an interruption in my enjoyment of the peace and warmth of the morning, or a valued opportunity for learning and growth, hearing the wonderful stories of my fellow travelers, and making my own contribution in the world?

In each moment there is the potential for any and all possibilities, but what I focus on dictates my experience. It also creates the habit by which I begin to experience similar situations in the future.

Life is a struggle when in our awareness we are always responding to unwelcome situations that are thrust upon us to deal with. When we choose to create our own experience instead of respond to the world according to a programmed set of expectations, it is so much easier to live in gratitude, enthusiasm, and ease.

So work awaits! I will take the warmth of the sun, and the peace, with me through my day. I will hold it in my awareness as I teach, and learn, and enjoy hearing the stories of the people I meet today. And I will thank God for the ability to find the right words to gracefully convey the truth that I hold in my heart.

Today is the day that the Lord has made; rejoice and be glad in it!

Guarding Your Mind

Unity is a big source of inspiration for me, as I'm sure you've noticed reading my posts. Rev. Ken mentioned today that "you need to guard your mind," and it jumped out at me as an important spiritual tool. As I took it, guarding my mind means being the sentry at the gate, protecting my mind from any thoughts that diminish me, or others, or the world. It is choosing to be that ever-vigilant, benevolent guardian that always serves the truth.

I am very aware of wanting to be the crafter of my own thoughts, and thereby bring my own dreams to light. But it is so very easy to get caught up in speaking or thinking in ways that I don't even really want any part of. I catch myself doing it all the time. It's an interesting place, that moment when I recognize that I am holding something as true that I certainly don't want to perpetuate into the future. But habit, or the old need to please others by not disagreeing with them, or some other form of unconscious, fear-based response kicks in and there I am again on auto-pilot.

I like the idea of being my own benevolent protector guarding my experience and serving truth. To do that, I realize that I need to be more committed to being watchful of the words and thoughts that I don't want to give life to,

and deny them, regardless of who might not agree, or understand.

As probably happens in many workplaces, among my coworkers the conversation lately turns fairly often to the economy, job losses, cities needing to eliminate emergency personnel, programs in public education being cut, the world going to hell in a hand basket. I have many times joined in with the tsk-tsking, and nodded my head in agreement. Surely, it is sad. It is scary. But that is not the reality I wish to seal our future with. I am no longer in agreement to acquiescing, not even to a nod of the head.

I spoke to my dad a few days ago, and he was worrying about my husband's job (he's a public school administrator), and talking about how bad things are getting, people wanting to carry guns, and other things that the fear-promoting media is so adept at focusing on.

I am happy to say I didn't buy into the fear of the moment. I told him that we trust the outcome and that the best will happen. I told him that we are choosing not to participate in the recession, and that we will continue to look for the gift in all of it, because this life is nothing if not an amazing, enriching and wonderful gift. At the end of the conversation my dad, who is an avid follower of the television news, said he was going to do something else with his time, and we both affirmed the perfection and divine order that we are part of, each in our own way.

That conversation could have gone a very different way, had I not been guarding my mind, and very consciously choosing the truth I wish to serve. It would have been easy to just agree. But in making a conscious decision to choose the reality I see and speak of that, his perspective was lifted, and mine, and the planet's.

I am grateful yet again for another tool in remembering the unlimited potential we have in creating the world we choose to see.

Hearing God

Early this morning I had a conversation with God in our room at the Howard Johnson's. I was really glad for that conversation, because I've had some important things to discuss. I've been busy for the past few days, traveling to Georgia to be with family for our grandson's third birthday, and so this morning was the first opportunity I've had to be still and listen.

I sat down and quieted my mind, asked my question of God, and then focused my attention on that space that is everything, where it feels like I can hear the hum of our collective being. In that place, I wait to hear God's voice from the air, from the glow of the streetlight, or the paint on the wall of the motel room. God's answers come to me from all of those places, and everywhere, all at once.

I sat and waited, and God's voice did not come. I continued to quiet my mind, and listened, but the familiar dialog didn't start. What came instead was a strong sense

that God was busy, and not available just then. For a moment I felt quite disheartened, until I realized that that was not possible. God is everywhere present, and in every moment of my life.

I recognized that it was I, not God, who was too busy. My mind had been too busy. I am never separated from the voice of God, but it felt like that was true, for a time this morning. I remembered that my experience of God is reflected in how I am experiencing myself. And with that remembering my dialog with God resumed; my questions were asked, and answered, and I was reconnected with my truth.

I have found that hearing God's voice is a matter of shifting my attention, from the details at hand, to a softer focus on being, where everything just is and the details are not important. The God whose voice I seek speaks to me from all that is, from outside of me but also from within. Because my experience out in the world reflects what is taking place in the universe within me, when I find peace in my thoughts, there is no end to the peace that I find in the world of my making.

This morning I remembered myself as God, choosing again to hear herself.

Patience

My husband tells me that I am impatient. I don't know where he gets that idea from. (I'm kidding about that.) When I get something in my head I can be pretty single-

minded until I've made it happen. That ability to focus has served me well many times, but it can also limit my ability to create good things if I get too intent on one single outcome.

The more years I spend on this earth, the more I realize the importance of letting go, to allow space for the as-yet-unseen possibilities that are part of perfect and divine order to come in to my life. I appreciate the value of being single-minded in envisioning that my life is created for good, but I can be more flexible about just how that good is going to come about. Surely I have some ideas about how I'd like to experience my life, but the quiet voice of the God within me whispers of truths that I just don't hear when I'm heaven-bent on trying to control my path.

I love the writings of Jon Kabat-Zinn on mindfulness. In his book, "Wherever You Go There You Are," in a chapter on patience, he says that "patience is remembering that things unfold in their own time. The seasons cannot be hurried. Spring comes, the grass grows by itself." The seasons of our lives will also come, and we will grow toward the light as we must.

Ultimately, I know that there is no need to hurry things. One of my favorite sayings to remember is that the outcome is never in question. We are going to end up where we need to be. I have found that whether I choose to spend my time striving and wanting, or in deciding and then letting it be, the outcome is the same either way. How I feel getting there is very different, though. I'd rather let

the “getting there” be done in an energy of peace, and in openness to the miracles that spirit can create when I get out of my own way.

I came upon Leaves of Grass by Walt Whitman, which was quoted in Kabat-Zinn’s book:

“I exist as I am, that is enough,
If no other in the world be aware I sit content,
And if each and all be aware I sit content.
One world is aware, and by far the largest to me, and
that is myself,
And whether I come to my own today
or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now,
or with equal cheerfulness,
I can wait.”

Eternity is a very long time. The divine intelligence that lives as us calls forth our best, at the perfect time and in the perfect way.

Saying Yes

Saying yes is that magical state where we accept what is happening in any given moment without resistance. Saying yes to the present moment is an even more vitalizing tool than acceptance, which is a very powerful tool in and of itself. But saying yes can elevate our experience from acceptance to enthusiasm.

It is inherent in the dualistic nature of our existence that in our minds we label our experiences as good or bad, or the

people we encounter as right or wrong; our thinking tends to be very black and white. This is part of divine intelligence at work, and serves us in our coming to know ourselves. But we tend to oppose the "bad" things, and the "wrong" things, and that opposition shuts down the joy of just being here, alive in this moment and open to all that is good and right.

Work has been very busy lately. Yesterday I counseled 15 patients, which is a lot for one day. By yesterday afternoon I was starting to feel like "enough, already." When I get into that kind of resistance, I'm just trying to get through, and not doing my best for myself or the patients. I'm definitely not enjoying my moments.

By God's grace I remembered to change my mind, and say yes. Yes, I am here in this moment. Yes, I'm doing my best, and that is good enough. Yes, this job that I have loved for many years makes me crazy sometimes. Yes, I am an ongoing contradiction of wants and fears and perfect knowing and peace. And yes, it is all here for me to express myself within.

I felt my body take a deep breath, expressing its own perfect knowing. And in that second I smiled, as I was filled with gratitude for all of it. I am repeatedly impressed by how instantaneously and completely changing my mind changes my experience. Changing my mind is a prayer answered.

The best part is that I finished my work day feeling a lot of enthusiasm about having the opportunity to be doing what I love, interacting with interesting people, and making a difference in my own way. It really is amazing what happens when I stop fighting what is.

I love how Eckhart Tolle puts it in his book, Stillness Speaks. "How often each day, if you were to verbalize your inner reality at that moment, would you have to say, 'I don't want to be where I am'? What does it feel like when you don't want to be where you are -- the traffic jam, your place of work, the airport lounge, the people you are with? . . . Acceptance of the unacceptable is the greatest source of grace in this world."

We can't change what comes to us; people will do what they do and situations will come up as they must. That really doesn't have anything to do with us. But we can bring ourselves fully to where we are, and know that within everything is a seed of grace.

Here's to being here, and all that comes with it: yes, yes, a thousand times yes!

Resting on the Bank

Life can feel at times like we're being pulled along by the raging waters of a mighty river, tossed about, sometimes easily floating above the water, sometimes underwater and struggling to breathe, always bumping into the many other things being carried in the surging current.

The immensely powerful forces that we encounter in this life are at times delightful and at other times terrifying, and everything in between. All of life's intensity is a gift, as all of it provides us with one opportunity after another to choose how we want to show up. Through all of it, times of struggle and of ease, fear and faith, isolation and connection, the pain of forgetting who we really are and the joy that's born of remembering, we are perfectly expressing God, knowing himself.

There's a saying out there on the internet about someone who, at the end of her life, wants to be worn out, used up, with a big smile on her face and saying, "Wow, what a ride!" What a fun and fearless sentiment! Life is nothing if not a wild ride! And as I've said, I'm getting better at not fearing what's coming my way but instead moving forward with eyes open. More often, thank you God, I'm able to say "bring it on."

Still, at times, I need a break when the waters rush too fast. When there's a lot coming at me at once, it's harder to stay grounded, and peaceful, and clear about my own priorities. In those times, it's helpful to step out of the river, and rest for a while on the bank.

Resting on the bank is something we can do in the middle of our activity. Like many spiritual tools, it's a state of being. In the middle of any situation, resting on the bank is a way to step out of some of life's tumultuous energies for a time. We can sit on the bank and watch them go by, without having to process them internally. We can notice

what's happening without having to do anything about any of it for a while.

I actually picture this, in my imagination: that I'm sitting on the shore, and everything I'm encountering at that time is moving by me in the rolling water. I am seeing it, and will be part of it again when I choose to be, but it is not me.

I have noticed what a tremendous healing it is for me to rest on the bank. When I take time out from managing all of the energies that I bump into in a day, demands, thoughts, emotions, both mine and others', and just let them roll on by, then when I do decide to jump back into the river and swim my own unique stroke, I am more calm, happy and connected to the voice of the God of my heart.

May you be inspired and rejuvenated on life's peaceful shore.

Love

I read a quote whose author I don't remember that said our reason for being here is to grow in love. I remembered the quote, at least in paraphrase, because it was so simple. There has been so much written over eons on the subject of loving - wonderful, insightful, inspirational things, some of which have provided me with raw material to mull over and see what feels true to me.

That we are here to grow in love has felt true to me for a good long time, but that truth came to me in a deeper way today. I hadn't talked with the God of my heart about the

"Why am I here?" question in quite awhile, and was feeling like I wanted a clear sense of it, in present time. I have done many of the things I've intended to do, and was feeling the need to consider a next step. It's pretty easy for me to get caught up in "OK, what next," which is not a bad thing entirely, because it allows me to focus on things that are important to me. Sometimes, though, I think the tendency sort of clouds the big picture.

I asked God why I chose to be me, now, in my current situation, with my unique perspective and particular life experience. And God answered in my heart, with eloquence and grace, as always:

"You wanted to learn about love, in the biggest sense of the word. For loving yourself unconditionally, you sought a difficult childhood. For knowing a mother's deep and profound love, you have your children. You have created a healthy and joyful marriage. You are learning about love by loving people at those times when they are less-than-lovable, and when they are at their best. And in your life you strive to see the love of God expressing in all things. Can you see how completely you are living your life's purpose?"

As I always am when I talk with the God of my heart, I was struck. The meaning of life became simple all over again, and for that I am filled with even more gratitude (if that is possible) for being here in the middle of the countless, amazing miracles that are part of my very ordinary life.

I would love to some day remember this truth in every moment. That probably won't happen. But as I've said, I write to remember. Writing is like taking a photograph of a breathtakingly beautiful scene I've witnessed and then having it to hold and go back to. When I look at one of those photographs I am brought right back to the truth of the beauty that we are part of. In writing I also feel as if I hold the beauty and grace of this life in my hands.

So the big question is answered, yet again. Tonight I'll be comfortable being just where I am, in the peace where love is enough.

Embracing This Life

We embrace this amazing existence not by doing more, but by focusing on what is truly important. We are probably more similar than dissimilar in the things that are most dear to us. We all want to be happy, and to have loving relationships that are mutually supportive and nurturing. We want to have strong, healthy bodies that can waltz (or boogie) us through our life's dance. And we all want to be seen, and known, openly and honestly, for all that it has meant to be our unique selves. I believe this is true for most of us.

Thank Goodness for the challenges, for they help us find those rather elusive answers about what has the greatest value to us. It's pretty easy to get caught up in the demands of the day, and end up spending long amounts of time separate from what is meaningful. At times, I

remember to ask myself, "At the end of my life, is this what I will remember?" There are things that fall quickly down the priority list when I view them in this way. Ultimately, a life spent involved in what provides meaning infuses our lives with joy.

It is said that happiness is not in having what we want, but in wanting what we have. It's tempting to focus on what is still lacking. But the life of our dreams comes from finding the good that is always present, standing right there next to the distractions and concerns. We embrace our lives, and our good, when we recognize the gifts we've been given. How sweet life is when we cultivate a joyous dance of unfettered gratitude, not only in our thoughts, but in our prayers and in our hearts as well.

So today, I embrace my life with an amount of gratitude that has no limits. I am here, in this healthy, strong body that is infinitely capable of walking me through all of the adventures of my making; in the middle of a glorious day filled with unlimited possibilities for me to experience wonders of all sizes, shapes and colors; and for as long as I am here this is my daily legacy, as a child of God. Today is the day that my heart beats, and I choose how I want to show up. Today I am.

May you embrace the gift of living another precious day as your unique and perfect self.

Stepping Off the Path of Least Resistance

My husband and I went backpacking last weekend, up into the high Sierras, to a little alpine lake that we love called Lake Sylvia. For us, it would be a pretty good hike even without the packs. With the packs, I can tell you that I was whining toward the end, and today my legs are as stiff as the pine trees I spent so much time admiring.

It occurred to me, as I was sitting up there at lake's edge, watching the fish jumping and taunting my husband the fisherman, and allowing myself to gently come back to present time and listen to whatever God had to say to me that morning, how very worth the effort the trek was. It is a beautiful hike in, beyond description really. I don't think I've ever seen as many wildflowers, or butterflies, anywhere. But for as amazing as the hike is, when I started getting tired, I kind of stopped seeing it. My attention shifted to putting one foot in front of the other and just getting there.

I can think of quite a few examples in my life that are like that, when I stepped off the path of least resistance and took the hard road. I didn't do it specifically because I wanted to take a hard road, because honestly I don't. I chose the hard road in those instances because I knew I needed to, that's all. It felt like the right thing to do. In truth, I couldn't not have taken it.

Stepping off the path of least resistance has brought me the biggest gifts in my life. Deciding that I wanted

something, and then sticking with it even though it kicked my rear-end, has given me the life experience that I'm most proud of, and that I'll remember at the end of my life as what has defined the best in me.

Working my way through college is one example. Another is the direction I've taken on my spiritual path. The path I chose has at various times ended friendships, had my family doubting my decision-making ability, and nearly cost me my marriage. I questioned myself plenty during those times when it was hardest, when it felt like what I believed, and where I was headed, had to be wrong because I was out on a limb all by myself, and no one else could see the rightness of it.

I can look back now and validate the good that has come from working my way down the hard road, prompted by a voice that only I could hear. The rewards have always been worthy of the effort, and have become the gifts that I've been happiest passing on to others. My heart smiles in thinking about it, because I get to know the grace of heeding the quiet voice of God within me, and I am grateful.

Greeting the Day

I woke this morning with a prayer of gratitude, as I do on most days. It is one of the ways that I say hello to the gift of another day. Greeting the day in whatever way feels right is a wonderful way to consciously set the energy for what awaits me.

It can take my breath away, and did this morning, acknowledging the bounty that is mine in each day, in the middle of living my very ordinary but utterly phenomenal life. In those moments there sometimes aren't adequate words, but I can feel my immense gratitude for being, and say "Thank you, God, thank you."

The awareness of gratitude changes our perception and our experience as we open to the light of God within us. Let us cultivate gratitude!

It doesn't matter if I'm tired or had an upsetting dream, or have a busy day ahead of me. Beginning the day by connecting with the profound truth of the perfection that I am born of puts things in perspective. I have another day on this earth, and I want to spend my day appreciating it.

There are many ways to welcome the day. My husband spends time in the early morning hours in our hot tub, doing his meditation and prayer as the sky lightens and the birds awaken with their song. Some people have specific rituals that validate being alive for the coming day, lighting a candle, or just sitting in the silence. Whatever you choose to do to greet the day, cultivate gratitude.

Being Ordinary

I believe it is human nature to want to excel, to know that there are things that we do especially well and that we are special in our own unique ways. But in our fast-paced, constantly-productive, competitive and ego-driven world,

it's easy to forget the grace that comes from being just plain us.

In remembering that we are expressions of divine creation and therefore innately special, there is nothing we need to do. Our birth into the human family is an automatic guarantee of greatness in this whole delicious scheme that is the miracle of ongoing creation.

In our greatness we are quite ordinary. For all of the seeming uniqueness of our experience, in the bigger picture all people move through life experiencing most of the same things that come along with being human. Like all others, we live and breathe, we love and hurt and struggle and rejoice. We remember our divinity, and we forget.

An awareness of being ordinary allows us to open our hearts to other people without judgment, because we recognize that we are all expressions of what is commonplace in people. We become less divided when we notice that our differences really are insignificant compared to the vast similarities that we share.

In being ordinary we can reduce the stress in our lives, because there is nothing to strive for. We don't create goals or make decisions based on comparing ourselves with others' goals or accomplishments. We can put our attention on the things that bring our own intrinsic joy.

Being unexceptional is a very nurturing state of awareness. It allows us to live more fully in the present, because there

is nothing additional we need to do. We are just us, and it is enough.

May you delight in being ordinary.

Sympathy vs. Empathy

I'm finding a lot of help lately in remembering to be more empathetic than sympathetic in my interactions with others. The subtle but important difference in the intent that these two words convey impacts how I feel, how much help I can be to others, and how centered in my own truth I am able to be. For me, responding with empathy is infinitely more healthy and productive.

A number of my family members and friends, like so many others in the world, are facing big challenges in their lives. I help them as much as I can, but there is only so much that I can do, and I feel sad about it. I have realized that my sadness doesn't help them, and it certainly doesn't help me. My husband reminded me yesterday about empathy rather than sympathy. Bless him.

Both sympathy and empathy express how we deal with the feelings of others, and there are numerous ways to define both words. I view sympathy as sharing the feelings of another, especially in sorrow or trouble. I have noticed that people can sympathize with another enough to actually take on their physical symptoms. Empathy, on the other hand, is more recognizing or understanding the feelings of another but not sharing in their suffering.

I can, and have, been brought to my knees by sympathy. My truth takes an automatic back seat to how badly I feel about what someone else is going through, and I suffer, and it doesn't help. My knee-jerk reaction is to forget my most basic truth, which is that God has it all. I can't always see how, but it's covered, end of story. I'm not sure where that deeply-heartfelt truth hides when I'm suffering for someone. I just know that I have to dig it out from behind some very old, pervasive fear.

I believe that all that happens is contained in a divine order so perfect that we can just barely imagine it. Only with faith can we even begin to accept into our hearts the love that designed our being, with all of its ups and downs.

Through all of their struggles and changing circumstances, my loved ones remain who they are, eternal expressions of perfect love. Temporary challenges create the dichotomies that allow us, by first experiencing darkness, to know ourselves as light.

When I choose empathy rather than sympathy, I am able to offer my support in a way that serves the truth of their highest selves, instead of validating perceived limitations. Rather than succumbing to the fear that their circumstances are bigger than they are, I can support them in recognizing their dominion over their own lives. In empathy I can let them know they are loved and not alone, and capable of more than they may be able to recognize in the moment.

May we all have people in our lives who understand what we're going through but also see the true power that we embody.

Letters to God

I am acquainted with a woman at Unity who explained at a book study group a few months ago that she used to write letters to God. She told us that she would get her notebook, and write "Dear God," and write her question, and then sign "Love, Jenny". When she finished, she would write "Dear Jenny," and write God's response, and sign "Love, God". The conversation moved on to other topics, and we didn't focus too much on Jenny's letters, but the idea stuck.

I've read Neal Walsh's "Conversations With God" a few times, and felt truth in the message. Some of God's explanations in that book remain part of how I explain my existence to this day. But it never occurred to me that it is something we can all do. I had tried asking questions of God in my head before, and never had a sense of a voice talking back to me. I was intrigued and decided to give it a try.

I had no idea what to expect, but in the interest of research, wrote my question, signed it, and then wrote "Dear Sherry". What came forth was a simple, very certain knowing and I started to write pretty much without thinking and without effort. When I felt any effort I stopped for a moment to listen, and started again when it

felt right. I wrote until I felt done, and then stopped to read it back. I was struck. The response was straightforward and eloquent, and I knew it came from outside of me but also from the highest within me.

I've been writing letters to God since, and have at different times felt tremendous awe, a deep sense of connection and order, and wonder. A few times I've laughed out loud.

Right now, it feels surreal writing about it. An hour ago the dog was dragging his butt across the carpet and I was thinking "I need to call the carpet cleaner". Then I sat down and wrote a letter to God (on a completely different subject, by the way) and was instantly connected to All-That-Is.

The ordinary but colorful life of a spiritual being having a human experience!

Being a Blessing

I was thinking the other day about living my life with purpose, and what the most important considerations are for me in choosing who I want to be in my life right now. It's interesting how the answer to that changes over time, as my priorities change with increasing experience.

My perspective as a middle-aged woman is certainly different from when I was younger, raising kids and working hard to make ends meet. All of those experiences helped shape my ideas of the world and my place in it; now it feels like I have time to really hear the quiet voice of

spirit within me, and design the remaining days of my life from my own deep purpose.

I recognize that the priorities I feel now will change in time, too, as I've had a chance to experience and assimilate the lessons I'm learning in present time. But I've noticed that the older I get the more important it becomes for my life to follow guideposts of my own conscious choosing.

One of my present-time guideposts is simply to be a blessing. In choosing to be a blessing, we automatically make our decisions from the part of ourselves that is connected with truth, and we are able to transcend judgment, resentment, or any other things that can come up when we're acting from a more fearful place. We are able to do, and be, our best.

By making a conscious decision to be a blessing, we affirm our good, and let our awareness of God expressing through us shine through. We validate what is true of us. And when we raise our own vibration to awareness of God at work within ourselves and in all things, we raise the vibration of the entire world and everyone in it.

Being a blessing is like a prayer. When we choose this day to be a blessing, as we ask, we are answered. We give our best to the world, and are provided for in kind. And as we live in the truth of our own divine nature, our own voice is God's voice in the world.

Seeing Light in the Darkness

I can't remember where I read about the idea of seeing light in the darkness. It was many years ago, and I've remembered it often. It is that choice we can make in the midst of any difficulty to change our minds, and see that point of light that reminds us that all is well. When we can see light in the middle of darkness, we are talking directly with God.

Sometimes just entertaining the possibility that all is well is an act of faith. We may have just a hint of willingness to consider that our perception is limited in the moment, and that the voices of fear and lack will quiet if we stop fighting them. Just being willing to consider that the fear is not as big as it seems opens our awareness to all kinds of new possibilities.

When those times in life happen that we feel most lost and confused, when we're doubting our path or our safety or our worthiness, we don't have to be anything other than where we are. We don't have to be standing tall or absolutely certain about anything. During those times, we can just be willing to consider that there is good at work, even if we can't yet see how. There's a tremendous amount of grace that comes from not fussing and fighting when we find ourselves again in the darkness. It is a clamorous but temporary state of affairs, and we can allow it to run its course.

My dear brother reminded me of seeing light in the darkness yesterday, when I asked him how he was. He told me about some big challenges he's facing, and then said, in effect, "but God has me, and it's all going to be fine." What I heard his spirit saying was "Bring it on; I and the God within me can handle way more than this!" It warmed my heart to hear the boasting between the lines. I could sense his pride. Challenges are opportunities we create for ourselves to rise above our limited ideas of what we can do, be and have. They are steps in knowing the truth, and serve a mighty purpose.

Light in the middle of darkness is that space wherein we step aside from pain or confusion just enough to view it from outside of ourselves. In that space, we are the observer, observing ourselves. We are spirit, watching how we're affected but knowing that there's a much greater dynamic at work. That light we see is the God within, shining in the midst of it all.

May you always see light in the darkness.

Believing in Miracles

I was thinking about miracles this morning, out walking my dog. I am a big, BIG believer in miracles. Miracles can be described as extraordinary events bringing good outcomes that could only be possible with God's intervention. I expect miracles to the point that I sometimes take their occurrence for granted.

It's a helpful thing, trusting good enough to expect that it's just the way things are meant to be. And while I do expect good, I always want to validate and nurture its limitless power in my life. The following miracle story is, to me, worthy of sharing.

Last July I was delighted when my daughter and grandson came from Georgia for a visit. I hadn't seen them for a while, and my grandson, Oliver, got very heavy when I wasn't looking! One evening I bent down and scooped up all 45 pounds of him, to show him something he wasn't tall enough to see. I didn't bend my knees or consider my back at all, because I'd never had to before. By the next morning, I knew that had been a big mistake.

It took a chiropractor, a number of physical therapy visits and six months for my back to get better. I'm much more careful now about how I move, but it got tremendously better. About three weeks ago, my symptoms started returning and worsening. The most distressing part of it was noticing my left leg weakening, especially since I enjoy backpacking and dancing and other active hobbies. I stopped my activities, even walking, was icing it and being extra careful, but it seemed to be getting worse. I was scared.

My favorite tool lately, when I'm scared or discouraged or feeling most in need of help, is to write a letter to God, and a few nights ago that's what I did. I told God that I knew there was a way to fix my back, but I didn't know what it

was. I asked how I could think about the issue in the healthiest way.

I believe that there is always a spiritual cause behind illness or dis-ease, and God helped me remember the spiritual basis for the mechanical issue with my spine. God responded in loving and simple language, in part, as follows:

"Responsibility is affecting your back. Every time you begin to worry about someone's circumstances, remember your truth, and release it immediately into my hands. Visualize a healing color coursing up your spine and through your entire body (today that color is light green). Visualize your spine as perfectly aligned and cushioned, straight and whole and able to support you easily throughout your long, healthy life. And then give thanks that it is done. That is all you need to do, sweet one. And you can do it. I'm in your corner, cheering you on. Love, God."

Tears come to my eyes in typing this, for the grace and love and simplicity of God's response to me. It really is that simple. All are perfectly held in their own life's creation, and we manifest what we envision, always. We are infinitely and lovingly supported in this. Thank you, God.

You can probably predict the outcome of my miracle story. I did the simple things that God asked of me. None of them was new to me, but in my increasing concern I forgot to do the things that I already know: to ask and allow myself to be answered, to picture my intention and to turn

over to God all that is not mine to handle. The next morning (which was yesterday), I woke up with all of my back symptoms gone, and they've been gone since.

Some might say that it was just coincidental timing, but I know differently. The physical healing was dramatic, yes, but also, I just know. These types of miracles happen all the time, coming to us with our challenges, and in many different ways. The situation with my back reminded me yet again of who I am, what I am capable of, and the profound benevolent goodness that directs our existence.

I See the Christ in You

Christ consciousness is the awareness of that most basic truth, one that Jesus lived and taught, that we are limitless creators, bringing into being all that we imagine. Christ consciousness, living in each of us, reminds us of our infinite power expressing through our finite human form.

Although we are limitless beings, we are on a path of remembering. In forgetting the truth, we are provided with the holy opportunity of remembering, and then owning our birthright as God in expression. We live in forgetfulness, remember, and then forget again.

Rev. Ken, our Unity minister, talks of something he does to help him in his dealings with people - that is to say, "I see the Christ in you." This doesn't need to be said out loud; other people do not even need to know you are acknowledging it about them. When someone you encounter is most stuck, when they act in a way much less

than loving, saying to yourself that you see the Christ in them breaks the cycle of fear by affirming truth. They, and we, are free. The pull of fear and judgment is released as threads of truth are woven through our ongoing creation for all to experience.

We can choose to see the Christ in anyone at any time. It is a wonderful way to acknowledge the divine truth of all those with whom we share this planet, regardless of circumstances.

I sat on a warm Friday evening last summer in a park with hundreds of other people, listening to a concert. There were families picnicking and couples dancing. All different types of people were gathered together in a small grassy corner of the world. I chose in that moment to shift my awareness to acknowledge Christ consciousness within each of them, all at once. I was filled with awe and joy as I saw God's eternal spirit expressing in so many unique and perfect ways.

We lift up the vibration of all of humanity when we see the truth of each other, unlimited creators, all-together expressing the light of God.

Forgetting and Remembering

I woke up this morning feeling out of sorts after a conversation I had with a loved one last night. She has an ongoing situation within her family that she is having a very hard time navigating. There is nothing I can do but

listen, and it makes me sad to hear how negatively she is being affected by it.

As I often do when I am having difficulty seeing my way out of troubled thinking, I decided to write a letter to God. In that letter, I explained to God (as if she didn't already know!) that it is difficult for me to stay centered in my knowing that all is for good, especially when around me is so much fear. I asked how I remember the truth in the face of job uncertainties in my own family, the pain and struggle that so many of my dear ones are experiencing, the loss of so many lives in natural disasters and other causes. How do I remember, in the midst of it, that it all serves a divine purpose?

God responded simply and eloquently, and the words washed away my forgetting and brought me peace. He reminded me that my path is to see the lie within the fear. The situations in this life make up a glorious but very brief part of eternity, and there is a much bigger process unfolding in the issues that people are facing. In the middle of immense suffering, they are safe. I was reminded that when I can appreciate the confusion and pain and fear as a very necessary part of our path to the truth, that is seeing light in the darkness. I need to be grateful for the challenges that my loves ones and all people experience; it is through our humanness that we get to chose, over and over again throughout eternity, how to express our inner light.

The act of turning my attention from my loud, fearful thoughts to the quieter voice of God reconnected me to my truth, and I was healed. I was able to relax and breathe easier. I am so grateful for that small but ever-present voice that is the light in the darkness.

Humanity is going through a difficult but important time. All of us are experiencing and watching others experience incredible trials. The process of human evolution is accelerating, and that change by necessity creates new levels of chaos. But in those challenges is our opportunity to choose, and choose again, the path that we know in our hearts is there, to the best and highest in all of us. We are all longing to know ourselves, individually and collectively, in our true splendor.

We can't let temporary conditions convince us that it is too late; eternity is much larger than that. We are part of the creative consciousness that imagined every good thing you have ever seen or heard of in this world. The consciousness that created every life-saving medication, every language, every culture, the technology that connects us all, all acts of beauty and works of art, we are created from. It lives in and expresses as each of us. All we need do is remember, and choose that truth, for ourselves and our world.

This morning I stopped to listen to the gentle truth within me, and remembered, again. I acknowledged in my loved one her perfection, and her power as part of divine creative consciousness, moving without error to the light.

Knowing Your Power

I read recently that "Our personal power is a direct reflection of our own sense of compassion and inner voice." This very much describes power as I've experienced it in my own life, but I don't think it's commonly thought of in this way.

Power is found in our connection with what is highest within ourselves. It is that place that allows us to respond with compassion to all that we encounter, because we know that nothing can diminish the truth of infinite good within us. When someone treats us less than kindly, we can respond with power in our compassionate and honest communication back to them. When bad things happen or when circumstances cause us to feel vulnerable, we can respond with power in affirming that we are calling to ourselves an opportunity to know fully the loving and divine order that steers all of life.

People often perceive power as the ability to override others and by sheer will get our own way. We wrongly believe that in most situations someone wins and someone loses, and so power comes from exerting enough force to win. But the truth is, power is not born of competition but of communication. Only in communication can we understand and cooperate, and thereby raise the energy of our interactions with others to one that serves the best and highest for all. In doing so, we express God within us,

and that is true power. Living as our Godself is the highest power there is.

We are often taught that power comes from living with a good offense as our best defense, remaining ever-vigilant and always ready to respond to another's jab with an even stronger punch. Within this dynamic, the overriding lie that controls communication and prevents any type of harmony is that we are not safe, therefore we have to spend a good deal of energy warding off what other people might do to us. We end up creating, through our own false belief, our own victimization.

Power has nothing to do with how others perceive us, but with how we stop to hear the quiet voice of spirit within us. It is not a reaction to what we fear will be invalidated in us, but rather a decision we make again and again to share the truth of who we are, and all that we have to give.

I am reminded of a prayer from Unity: "There is only one presence and one power in the universe and in my life, God the Good." That, to me, is what power is all about, in our ability to know the truth of our own limitless good.

Rewriting Your Story

We all have a personal history. We've encountered countless situations, and have labeled ourselves and our lives based on who we were in those situations. How we've labeled our experiences has created our personal stories, which are basically who we believe we are and what we believe our lives are all about.

Having a story gives us a place, a way to belong in this life and know ourselves as unique and truly here. But in some cases our stories, based as they are on events that are often long past, don't serve us in creating our highest vision for ourselves. If a part of my story is that I'll never have enough money, that belief will play out. If I believe that I'm not worthy of loving relationships, that, too, will find a way to become my experience. And so it is with creating a life.

What we believe is what we manifest. This is a simple spiritual truth with tremendous power. What if we are holding on to a story that we have outgrown? What if we are capable of expressing a higher vision of ourselves than we'd ever imagined?

I don't mean to say that we should deny the events of our lives, and the effect that they may have had. Some of life's circumstances may have been painful, or tragic. But we can have the courage to rewrite those stories, too, and find the pearl of wisdom, or compassion, or light that has come from having walked through the experience and come out the other side. Our wisdom, compassion and light are important parts of the new story.

If we need to have a personal story at all (and of course we do), then why not make it a best-seller? Why not craft a story about the things that we do especially well, or how amazing and perfect our bodies are for allowing us to experience the large and small miracles of a lifetime? Why not tell the world a story about the love we've given, and

received? Why not be, in our own story about ourselves, blessed and lucky?

It's our story. We're the authors of our lives, and we're making it up as we go along. Holding on to old concepts is no more the truth than boldly claiming all that we have learned and done to become the masterpieces that we are, in this moment.

That's my story, and I'm sticking to it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sherry is a spiritual teacher, healer and author living near San Francisco in Northern California. Like many, Sherry is a seeker, looking to more fully express the glory and grace of this existence. She is always on a quest for a deeper and more meaningful, or practical, relationship with the Supreme Being.

Along the way she has met many great teachers, studied with others who are like-minded, and picked up some very practical tools to help her communicate with and express the God within.

To read more by Sherry visit Daily Spiritual Tools, the blog, <http://dailyspiritualtools.blogspot.com>.