

THE PULSE OF SPIRIT



EMISSARIES
OF DIVINE LIGHT

BEGIN AGAIN

2 JANUARY 2012

(Bill Grindle played the Native American flute. Bill, along with Keith Hancock and Steve Lange, extemporaneously played djembe drums.)

It is a pleasure for me to greet all of you with love, from the bottom of my heart. And it's beautiful to begin this time with the rhythm of the drumming, with the rhythm of our own hearts.

This is a new beginning, a fresh start, a new cycle. And I think that it's very auspicious for us to be together, connected in this way, on this first day of the year 2012. I'm grateful for the technology that allows us to get together in this way. I want to acknowledge the different places and locations that are connected in this very moment. It feels like all of us surrounding our beautiful planet with our hands, with our arms extended in a blessing to all the people connected to us and to the places and the countries from where we are calling. Regardless of our location, we are in the here and now in this amazing, precious and magnificent present moment.

I am aware that some of you are experiencing the evening of the day, and here in California we are experiencing almost the beginning of the day, the morning—a beautiful morning filled with sunshine and warmth. It's hard to believe that we are in winter in the northern hemisphere because it feels more like a spring day.

But I like to come back to the reference of evening and day, because this is a beautiful place where these two aspects meet together. I am reminded of some words by the poet Rumi that speak about the place where the joining of day and night happens:

*The breeze at dawn
Has secrets to tell you
Don't go back to sleep
You must ask
For what you really want
Don't go back to sleep
People are going back and forth
Across the doorsill
Where the two worlds touch
The door is round and open
Don't go back to sleep*

“The door is round and open” for us to connect at a deeper level, for us to connect in a more authentic way, for us to connect our creative fires so that we can create a beautiful world that works for everybody. This is a great opportunity today, in this new cycle, to walk through the open door. It is a door of new possibilities. It is a door that invites us to reconciliation and forgiveness, to integrity and truth-telling, to a world where the principles of respect and honor have priority in our lives. It is a door open in heaven that is always available to us; it is available now in this very moment, wherever we find ourselves.

I am sure that all of us want to create a world where peace and light and harmony and forgiveness and reconciliation are available to all of us. And yet, with the demands and busyness of our personal and professional lives, our spiritual practice and nourishment might get pushed back without our even being aware of it. Something else always seems to cry for our attention, energy and time—one more thing, one more call, one more e-mail, one more response to a knock at the door—and before we know it, we find ourselves feeling disconnected, depleted, and we burn out.

The power of spiritual practice is paramount in our lives. The purpose of spiritual practice is to realign our consciousness with what is highest and deepest and truest in ourselves—to remember what really matters, to remember who we really are, to remember and reconnect to the source of our Being and to recognize that same source in everyone and everything. The poet Hafiz said this in this way:

*Again
The work starts
As soon as you open your eyes in the
Morning.*

*Hopefully you got
Some good rest last night.*

*Why go into the city or the fields
Without first kissing
The Friend*

*Who always stands at your door?
It takes only a second.*

*Habits are human nature
Why not create some that will mint
Gold?*

(from The Subject Tonight Is Love - Daniel Ladinsky, translator)

I think that Hafiz is very clear about how to begin our work before we go into the city, before we spring out of bed. It is imperative that we connect with the place within ourselves where the serenity and peace of our Creator dwells. There is nothing more important than that. We believe that not doing this saves us time to do the rest of the things that we think are so much more important. And yet, if we don't "kiss the Friend" first, then nothing that we do in the world is going to bring the peace that is so needed at this time of confusion, of intensity, of wars.

Some of us will say, "I don't have time to do that. I cannot afford to do that." And the biggest question will be: Can we afford not to do this? How much do we care? How important is our own spiritual well-being and the well-being of the world?

Many years ago, when I was learning how to meditate in a formal way, I attended a seven-day silent retreat. We were asked to sit for eight to nine hours a day, with small breaks in between, and we had interviews with the master every day for five minutes. So on the first day I went and was complaining about all the things that were painful in my body. And the master was laughing really loud and said, "Go back to your cushion." The next time I had an interview, I was complaining about all these imaginary voices and dialogues that I had in my mind. He laughed again and sent me back to my cushion.

The third time I went to see him I said, "You know, it doesn't matter anymore the pains that I'm feeling in my body and the dialogues that I have in my mind. But what is really challenging at this moment is that I tend to fall asleep in the afternoon. It's very difficult for me to keep my eyes open." And he said, "I know that demon myself. It took me seven years to conquer it. I will give you a shortcut." I said, "If you were able to conquer this demon in seven years, then I'm going to be able to do that also; because if somebody does something, then all of us can do it too."

So he said, “Do you have somebody you love?” I said, “Yes, I do have somebody I love very much.” And he said, “How much do you care?” I said, “I care a lot—a lot.” And he, as a good Zen and warrior master, said, “Just imagine that you are holding with one arm the person you love, and the person is falling into a precipice. Do you think you will go to sleep? Do you think your eyes will close?” That was enough for me to stay awake. I didn’t go to sleep anymore!

But my question today would be: How much do you care to connect with that serenity and with that beauty and with that peace within yourself? Because we *have* to care. We have to care if we would like to have a world where there is peace and joy.

The author Laurie Beth Jones, in her book *Jesus, CEO*, wrote: “At Callaway Gardens, I was amazed to learn that butterflies have to spread their wings in the morning sunshine, because the scales on their wings are actually solar cells. Without that source of energy, they cannot fly.” In the ancient Greek language, the word for *butterfly* was the same as the word for *soul*; and, just like the butterflies, our souls need time to be fed and recharged by the light of Spirit if we are to be able to fly. We need to spread our own wings in the sunshine of our Creator.

When we take time and commit to spiritual practices, we develop wisdom, faith, equanimity, kindness, deep honesty and self-acceptance. We cultivate our ability to let go, our capacity to forgive, our capacity to be present in this moment. We learn to deeply listen and to open ourselves to grace.

So may we commit to a spiritual practice every day, in whatever way resonates with us. If it’s meditation, prayer, singing, music, drumming, silence—let’s commit together. Let’s recommit and begin the new and magnificent cycle of this new year of 2012, so that each one of us can bring a healing presence into whatever we are doing and wherever we go.

I’d like to end my time with a poem by Rumi, inviting us to do the same:

Be courageous and discipline yourself...

Work. Keep digging your well.

Don’t think about getting off from work.

Water is there somewhere.

Submit to a daily practice.

Your loyalty to that

is a ring on the door.

*Keep knocking, and the joy inside
will eventually open a window
and look out to see who's there.
(from The Essential Rumi, by Coleman Barks)*

“And look out to see who’s there”—it’s what Hafiz called “the Friend,” but we can also call it The Great Mystery, the Lord, Allah. Whatever we want to call *It*, let’s connect with *That* every day, and I am sure that we can create a beautiful world together.

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