



Window in the Great Mosque of Isfahan

CHAPTER THREE

THOUGHTS ON THE LIFE OF BLESSING

*may your heart be a window
through which endless blessings
pour into the world*

In the spring of 1975 the life of blessing opened to me. I would like to tell you the story of how it happened.

So many events in my life have been paradoxical, and this was, too. Obstacles turn into treasures. Treasures turn into obstacles.

I was a religious studies student at the time, and taking a class on religion and science at the University of California at Santa Barbara. We were assigned to read one of the most obscure but hopeful books of the twentieth century: *The Phenomenon of Man*, by the Jesuit paleontologist, philosopher and mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. It is also one of the most ambitious books ever written, in that Teilhard hoped to

explain the evolution and destiny of *the entire universe*, ourselves included.

And to handle this giant theme, Teilhard invented an entire vocabulary of giant words, words like noogenesis (the birth of mind), orthogenesis, cosmogenesis and Christogenesis, that rang with the feeling of deep meaning even if we didn't quite know what they meant. I plunged into the book and was quickly in way over my head. The weeks raced by. A test loomed. I spent more and more hours in intense concentration, trying to see the pattern of meaning hidden behind these truly cosmic words. My life became like a monastic retreat, a sleepless Zen ordeal in which I wrestled continuously with an unanswerable riddle. The giant words began to divide in my mind and recombine in new variants. Things were getting out of control. I tried harder.

I never did understand Teilhard that well, but something wonderful happened. After weeks of effort, I gave up. And in the quiet that followed giving up, a simple picture took shape in my mind. The picture included a big tuning fork (a u-shaped piece of metal that rings with a specific tone when you strike it), and a little tuning fork. The diagram, which you could have drawn on a matchbook cover, was an answer, not to the question about the destiny of life on Earth, but instead, an answer to my personal questions about the spiritual life. (The little diagram may say something about the destiny of life on Earth, but that is another story.) In a moment, an entire series of linked thoughts flashed across my mind.

The big tuning fork represented God, the small tuning fork represented me. If you strike the big one to make a tone, a middle C, for example, and the little one is tuned to a multiple of the same frequency, the little one will hum along. This is what gives pianos their rich sound. Many strings hum along in a complex chord of resonance. Energy transfers from the large strings to the small ones. I had the feeling that I was on to something.

What would it mean for me to tune my life to God's life? If you thought of the Divine Presence as some sort of extraordinarily beautiful music, what would I need to do to enter into a "resonant" relationship with It. The answer seemed very straightforward: I should try to do in a small way whatever I believed most deeply that God is doing in a big way.

And what did I believe that God was doing in a big way? I thought of a mother holding a newborn child and the answer came: God is pouring out a stream of blessings, like a mother, or like the sunlight. God is pouring out His/Her being into our being the way the Sun pours out its substance as light upon the grasses and the trees. If God is loving and blessing all of us into existence, then "getting in tune" with God would mean to love and bless everyone around me. (These are all ancient themes. They somehow all came alive in me in a single moment. Tibetans sometimes speak of how a single flash of lightning can allow you to see where everything is in a darkened room.)



Vision of Divine Energy
Fractal painting by Bourbaki

I was very drawn to the blessing part. The sunlight calls forth the plant hidden in the seed, parents' love calls forth the person-to-be hidden in the baby. In blessing there is often a calling forth of something hidden, something not yet accomplished. You are ill and I hold you in my mind as capable of becoming completely well again. You are out of a job, and I bless you to find a job that is right for you, which is to say, I give voice to what is not yet, I hold my mind open to new possibilities in your life during the times when it is difficult for you to imagine them. I give thanks for you, even when you are having difficult time giving thanks for your own life. It does not have to be all pastel. I bless many people I meet to find new meaning in the terrible events that have shaped their lives. We seem to serve others best when we both share their sorrows and bear gentle witness to the hope and joy that the sorrow has temporarily eclipsed. I say gentle witness because the purpose of blessing is not to hurry others through their troubles. I see the purpose of blessing as this: to be a deeply accepting bridge between what is now and what could be, to stand in the now and make a gentle, inviting space for the new. These are some of the understandings that have, in the last two decades, grown around the original impulse to bless and the analogy of the tuning forks.

Beyond the crises and sorrows of everyday life, this calling forth of the plant hidden within the seed repeats at many levels. In the months and years after my awakening to blessing, I began to practice prayers of blessing every day.

For it is as though we are on an infinite stairway, and however far we may have traveled, there is still more love, beauty, awareness, creativity, and so on, waiting to be brought forth. The point is not, if I may be allowed to disagree with the Apostle Paul, that we have all fallen short of the glory of God. From a religious evolutionary perspective, the point is that the glory of God is open-ended. It is our reaching toward it, rather than our failure to reach it, that is important.

These prayers of blessing took on a life of their own in my mind and heart. In the early 1980s, perhaps in response to some science fiction novels I had been reading, my spontaneous prayers became galactic. “May love and wisdom blossom forth on a trillion, trillion worlds” came again and again into my heart. What do I imagine God is up to, holding all the galaxies in Her Infinite Lap? How is it that something as improbable as maternal love has emerged on so many branches of the tree of life? The Prayer of St. Francis begins by saying, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.” How would I cooperate with that process?

In more recent years my blessings have become more down-to-earth. “May every heart be filled with infinite kindness.” And they have become more personal: “May every heart be filled with infinite kindness, including mine.”

I have come to feel that blessings should be expressed in language that is culturally familiar. To some of my friends I say, “I am visualizing you surrounded by healing angels.” Others are not particularly fond of angel imagery. To them I say “I am visualizing you surrounded by healing sparkles.” One issue here is that our vocabulary for describing what is does not adequately express what is coming, what is being born, or the directions in which something might unfold. We need both vocabularies, but it seems to me that in today’s world we are suffering from the inability to articulate new possibilities. Blessing is like watering seeds that are hidden under the ground. A person who had never seen a garden might say, “What a silly fellow. Why is he pouring water on the barren ground?”

And as you go deeper into the life of blessing, you begin to feel how it is that the love that comes through you also comes to you. On the surface, the waves look separate; in the depths, there is just one ocean. (I have learned, in the years since 1975, that earnestly wishing the infinite well being of all sentient beings is at the heart of Tibetan spiritual life.)

Another example comes to mind. Your body and mind may be capable of many extraordinary things, but if you think of them as robots, you will never find out what those extraordinary things might be. Blessing is a way of making friends with the universe, near and far. I bless each of your sixty trillion cells to be full of light, I bless each one to cooperate with all the others, for the highest good of you and everyone. Can you imagine that??? If you can't imagine that, I appeal to you take the leap, to take the next step. In the short run, thoughts like this may seem to make no difference at all. In the long run, they may make all the difference. The practice of blessing is a gentle and happy yoga of the heartmind.

In blessing we try to cooperate with the flows of energy that have come together to give us life. Although some of my blessings may sound outlandish, there is an element of deep humility in them. It is a humility that says, "The creative processes of Life / God / the Buddhamind / the Universe, are not finished with you and they are not finished with me. I open myself to cooperate with them anew, no matter how foolish I may look or sound along the way."

We see how, in the many branches of the tree of life, loving attention nurtures human babies and wolf cubs and (for a few crucial moments) even crocodile hatchlings. Something is going on out there, amid the chaos of conflict and competition. In blessing, we reach to say it out loud. We reach to say the word of endless kindness that is saying us into existence, that we might say others into existence. And in works of blessing, in every act of mercy and reconciliation, we incarnate (and surrender to) a love evolving in the marrow of life.

I invite you to explore the life of blessing, and to find the blessing within you that is deeply yours to bestow upon the people and animals and plants around you. I bless and invite you to see yourself as a large, open window through which

more blessings can pour into the world. In my theology of the two tuning forks, the universe wants to sing its song of infinite blessing through every heart, through every mind, and through every pair of hands, at work in works of lovingkindness, yours and mine included.



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