

Blessings  
of

*Mind*

*Heart*

and

*Creation*

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*(co-authored with Lar Short)*

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MARTIN LOWENTHAL

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## DEDICATION

This humble effort is dedicated to my students  
and all people seeking to grow in  
wisdom, love, and meaningful action.  
May these blessings support the growth,  
happiness and freedom of all beings.

## Prelude

**A**s human beings we have the ability to make our lives sacred. The sacred is not a thing, rather it is a way of seeing, listening, and knowing that is beyond the surface of impressions and experience. While not definable, we can say that sacredness evokes a sense of value, takes us beyond ourselves, and encompasses the deeper nature of life.

Since introducing the Dedication Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation to my students, they have become a regular recitation in our meditation sessions and the subject of many teachings, by me and others. As I rise each morning to a new day and my heart opens to opportunities and possibilities in this fresh unknown space of what will unfold, I know that there are others opening their hearts with me. We form a community prepared to embrace and dance with the offerings that the day puts on our plate and to creatively fashion blessings from the experiences we are called to digest and metabolize.

What follows is based on teachings I gave regarding these blessings in the fall of 2013 and the winter and spring of 2014. This is not a transcription of the presentations and conversations from those meetings of our community, but it conveys the essential points that were explored and elaborated. I have included a number of the questions that arose and the answers that were given.

It is my hope that this presentation of the blessings will be a part of an ongoing dynamic of exploration and conversation as well as being part of the practice of those drawn to integrate these blessings into their lives. I invite you to read what follows as a meditation and opportunity for reflection. Create your own experiential tapestry as you work with each blessing and integrate mind, heart, and creation in your own life.

## **Dedication**

**I**n our community, these blessings are known as “Dedication Blessings.” They are generally recited at the beginning of meditation practice and at the beginning of gatherings that involve community practice and teachings.

Dedication is about the shape we give our vitality. Dedication honors the gift of life. It recognizes the sacred dimensions of life beyond the surface of appearances and everyday reactive feelings. Dedication is a part of a spiritual path.

This path is concerned with how to engage the greater unknown, how to live a life of meaning, and how to create perceptual frames that enrich life. A spiritual path is intended to develop our best nature, to generate states of happiness, equanimity, and love, to build our capacity to mediate the known with the greater unknown, to mature us into a wise and compassionate human being, and to contribute to the evolution of a wise and compassionate community culture.

In our dedication practice we make our efforts on behalf of others, reflecting a commitment to a sacred course of action. We aim to free ourselves and others from reactive habits of mind, feelings, and conduct so that we all can celebrate life as a dynamic loving, radiant presence.

Dedication places our efforts in the context of the larger story of life and humanity and, as an offering, extends the benefits of our work through the value created for others that they in turn can pass on.

## **The Sacred**

**T**he sacred, in the way we are using the word here, does not have a separate and distinct existence



from life but is a dimension of it that is self-surpassing, all encompassing, interpenetrating unity and presence, and is beyond, yet immanent, in all being, life, and forms.

The sacred integrates all that is, all contradictions, and all possibilities. The way into the sacred is not by escaping human existence but by going further and further into life, into the mystery, into experience, into awareness, into love, into creating each moment personally and communally.

While the particular experiences we have in sacred moments will be unique and vary from person to person and from time to time, the effect of these experiences is common. These experiences tend to take us deeper into our felt sense of the sacred, give us a sense of greater connection and belonging beyond ourselves, and enhance our sense of purpose in life.

## Blessing

*Blessing is the theological word for goodness...*

✠ Matthew Fox

A blessing is an invitation and a reminder about how we want to be all the time. It directs our attention in ways that are beneficial and encouraging. Blessing intensifies and sanctifies life by accessing our gratitude for the past, increasing our engagement in the present and planting seeds of a beneficial future.

In our richly endowed and faceted world, full of variation and unknown, blessings are found everywhere if only we have a mindset and heartspace of sanctification as well as the willingness to give them form and share them. Becoming a conscious creator in life is a way of sacralizing and being sacralized, blessing and being

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

blessed, working and being worked. This grows out of being gifted and passing it on by giving.

Living these blessings, we are charged with leading an ordinary life extraordinarily well. We live, transcend and transform the intimate, immediate, and eternal moment as we go about dedicating our work, being at home in our relationships, and creating benefits through all the ways we serve our families, our communities and the world.

### **Threefold Nature of Life**

**T**hese dedication blessings reflect the threefold nature of a fully realized life that expresses the triune nature of reality. Found in most religious traditions, these can be expressed generically as space, relationship, and activity. Namely that everything that exists, exists in space, is in relationship to everything else, and is dynamic as an energetic process that changes over time.

We know these natures in terms of our capacities for consciousness that encompasses life in our awareness (space), intimacy in our connection to others (relationship), and creation in our growth and contributions to the world (activity). The mature or developed forms of these abilities are wisdom, love, and beauty.

In Tibetan Buddhism, the qualities of a Buddha are often depicted in terms of three enlightened beings—Manjushri manifesting wisdom, Avalokiteshvara manifesting all-encompassing love and compassion, and Vajrapani manifesting the all-accomplishing power to create benefit. These three symbolize the triune principles of the Buddha's nature as they can be cultivated and applied in our lives.

Similar triune principles are found in other traditions as well. For example in Hinduism, the triunity of goddesses include Sarasvati representing wisdom, Lakshmi representing love, and Parvati representing the energy

of creation that includes the dynamics of generation, sustaining, and dissolution. We find similar trinitarian perspectives in other traditions, including Christianity and Islam.

These blessings as vehicles for an awakened, loving, and fully engaged life can be thought of as the triple cultivation of mind, heart and creation.

The recognition and realization of the ever present, open, and inclusive dimension of being is the basis of sacred wisdom. The heartfelt experience of caring, sharing, and belonging and the realization of the interbeing and interconnectedness of everything and everyone is the basis of sacred love and compassion. The cultivation of the spiritual qualities and energies of life and maturing into a blessing-bestowing being is the basis of sacred character and beauty.

## Reactive Habit Body

**T**o build sacred character, requires that we penetrate the world of appearances and the reactive habits of mind, body and heart that keep us preoccupied with the façade of superficiality. This includes not only our limiting thoughts and beliefs about ourselves and the world but also all our habitual fears, anxieties, longings, and ways of feeling overwhelmed. Our reactive habit body also includes the unbidden recurring memories of pain, woundedness, and regret. This body of reactions maintains old patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that inhibit our growth, damage our relationships and restrict the ways we can be a beneficial presence in the world.

Our reactive habit body manifests in our ways of thinking, in our emotional responses in relationships, in our identities of who we present in public, of who we are afraid we are, and of who we wished we could become,

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

and in our world view and our attitudes that make up our heart posture.

### **Heart Posture**

**O**ur heart posture is our sense of the nature of reality as we have come to know it and experience it. It includes our attitudes about ourselves and the world and determines much of our perceptions, ways of relating and blueprints for action. A heart posture is a felt way of understanding our experience and the world we inhabit. Our imagination sets up a heart posture and populates the world we encounter with extensions of our heart postures.

If our heart posture is governed by fear, we will feel vulnerable and see the world is a dangerous place, looking for threats and behaving defensively. If our heart posture is governed by love, we see ourselves as a lover of life, seeking opportunities for relationships and engaging intimately in the world with all of its challenges.

Our heart posture is not simply a repository of fixed concepts and memories but rather a perspective from which life is apprehended as well as comprehended. Whenever we feel imprisoned in a limiting and isolating heart posture, one of the most difficult tasks we face in breaking out of our confinement is having to realize how much of what we think we know about ourselves, life, human nature, emotions, love, and creativity “isn’t necessarily so.” All of us come face to face with the realization that what we thought we understood is fundamentally colored by our reactive feelings of fear, anger, sadness and hope.

What we experience is very much determined by what we attend to and what heart postures we bring to each situation and relationship. If we hold the heart posture of being able to grow throughout our life and attend to learning and cultivating our intellectual, emotional and spiritual

capacities, we will experience a more wholehearted and richly textured life. On the other hand, if we operate from a belief that we are too damaged to learn and grow, we will attend to our fears and will pass through life as if “doing time” in a prison of numbness and pain and will simply add evidence to prove our own inadequacy.

It is the function of practices, rituals, inspiring stories, and teachings to supply the experiences and meaningful symbols that can carry us forward in our development and counteract the constant pull of old reactive habits and fantasies that tend to hold us back and even regress us. Without these personal and community supports, we will tend toward not only narcissism but also addiction to superficial substitutes for authentic, living, spiritual fulfillment.

When we reactively misuse mind, heart and creation because of fear, desire, or overwhelm, we get caught in the web of superficial thoughts, immature emotions, and habitual actions. When we pause from our reactions, we can use them for reflection and pathways to wisdom, love, and blessings. In this sense, we use our reactive habit body as an opportunity to cultivate wisdom.

When we take on a new heart posture, it is like living in a different culture with its own codification of reality, its own guidelines for maturity, and its own possibilities for transformation. A new heart posture takes work and is based on opening to the direct experience of reality as it is. It requires that our relationship with life become fresh, allowing our deeper nature to emerge.

Knowing how to work skillfully with mind, heart and creation means that we always have the opportunity, even in the midst of confusion and reactivity, to access our potential for wisdom, love, and blessings. To attune to the triune nature of life is to engage the fundamental capacity we have to awaken, to love, and to create

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

blessings, benefit and beauty.

These blessings move our attention to these potentials in our triune nature. As we recite them, as we sit with them, as we reflect on them, and as we work to integrate them in our lives, we take steps on a sacred path of transcending and transforming our reactive habit self. We train ourselves to live beyond our limiting beliefs, self-images, and attitudes. By transcending insistent self-concern, we enter the realm of a freer aliveness and a larger caring.

### **Working with the Blessings**

**T**his book presents the Dedication Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation line by line. The text that follows each line is a meditation and commentary on the line as an explanation, an elaboration, an exploration, and an invitation to make it your own. Together, you, the reader, and I, the author, are creating a dynamic and evolving process of spiritual conversation. You are an integral part of this unfolding and enriching sacred activity.

I am suggesting that as you play with various meanings and interpretations as I do in this book, you will join me in this endeavor of shaping the text. Play with the text by reciting it aloud, by turning it into a song, by chanting it, and by giving shape to the meanings in the form of movements as a kind of dance. As you participate in this enterprise, fill your practice with love and a desire to grow, to be a wise and beneficial presence, and to make your contribution.

We can think of this text as sacred nutrition. We spiritually eat and digest the sounds, meanings, resonances, and associations we experience with the text. We metabolize the content of a text by chewing on it and releasing its rich flavor.

The text of the blessings is like a vineyard. The lines

on the page are the threads of a trellis that supports the vines. Harvest these lines as one who picks berries and ripe fruit. Along the trellis of the vineyard, each word catches hold of one or several other words that become linked together in rich associations. These verbal echoes excite our imagination and spontaneously evoke other sacred associations. Savor the text as one who savors the fruit of the vine.

A useful way of working with these blessings involves a four step practice. These four steps are recite, meditate, comment, and envision.

RECITE—recite the line, verse and entire set of blessings aloud. Listen to the sound of the words, the rhythm of the blessing, and the silences between the words, the lines and the blessings.

MEDITATE—meditate with what you recite. Treat the passage as a companion that is present with you and open to what hidden treasures it may have for you.

COMMENT—comment on and give personal expression to the passage through writing (using the words as a prompt for your own articulation and contribution), song (working musically with the passages using your voice and instruments), drawing (giving visual form to the images and sensations that arise), and movement such as dance that gives nonverbal expression, interpretation, and responses.

ENVISION—envision, with a sense of gratitude, the ways you will integrate the blessings into your life and how they can accompany you as intimate friends and guides.

Take the blessings to heart. This means not only learning them “by heart.” It suggests that we cultivate the heart postures that incorporate the teachings of these blessings. Rest in the text, breath the text, and make it your own.

Meditating with the blessings and commenting

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

on them will almost inevitably lead to associations and digressions. These do not need to be distracting. Feel free to wander and play in the vineyard of the blessings, to harvest its fruits and to let the blessings intoxicate your imagination. Here we are talking about a trained imagination that is active, creative and always relevant.

Surrender to the evocative power of the language. Let strong impressions and rich allusions populate your meditations. Return over and over again as if for the first time to keep it always fresh and yet become very familiar with it while having the sense of never exhausting its meaning.

As you work with a word, a line or an entire verse, listen for the burning question that you are called to explore. Look for ways that the blessing challenges you and breaks you open to new possibilities. In the step of commentary, write, draw, dance and/or sit with the response to your question. Find your own voice, image and movement in relation to the question being posed to you. Give yourself to your commentary, then let it give itself to you. Allow yourself to be changed, transformed and transfigured.

Just as I have done in this book, pause and meditate with each word, ruminate on the meaning of the word in the context of the blessing, digest each meaning, and explore the rich possibilities that may be evoked. Each blessing is offering you a world to consider, cultivate and, if you choose, inhabit. The words are a community that bring their individual histories of meaning and usage and they show up in this community of other words in particular ways and with particular roles. Enter the blessings as if entering a foreign community and culture with its own language, values, stories, history, sensibilities, tastes, and heart postures.

This can be challenging. Your present horizon of understanding and ground of sensibility is meant to be



provoked, tested and transformed by the blessings. As you bring your attention, your intelligence, and your difficult questions to the text, weave your own voice into the blessings.

As part of your practice of commentary, writing can be a powerful way of exploring the aspects of the blessings that are meant for you. Use the lines of the blessings as a prompt for writing meditations creating a spiritual bouquet of your impressions, reflections, insights, and deep understanding.

What you write can be seen as the text that was hidden in the original that only you can reveal. When you are willing to make the blessings your companion, you are always reading and writing your own version and commentary at the same time.

When dancing your expression and commentary, begin in a relaxed, comfortable position with your eyes closed. Sense the passage working inside you and follow whatever impulses arise to move and/or make a sound. Continue your exploration through movement until it feels complete and then settle once again into a relaxed and comfortable position and be present with stillness and silence.

Read your work aloud. Listen to how it sounds. If you made a drawing, look at your picture from a variety of angles. Dance in front of a mirror and see how your movements give shape to the verses. Make your form of commentary an ongoing process and play with forms that you do not usually engage in.

Both the blessing and your response to the blessings are regarded as sacred. As we recite and write, we take responsibility for the words and for the community of words to which each word and we ourselves belong.

Close each session with your envisioning of carrying the blessings into your life along with your own blessing

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

of gratitude. Offer your contribution to the sacred and, if appropriate, to your community. Then move on.

A teacher had two students who she loved. She gave each of them an equal amount of wheat and a bundle of cotton and then left on a journey.

What did the wise student do? He took the cotton and spun cloth and made a mantle. He made flour from the wheat and baked bread. He placed the bread on a table and covered it with the beautiful mantle that he had made.

The other student did nothing at all.

When the teacher returned, she asked her students, "What have you done with the gifts I have entrusted to you?" When she saw the mantle and the bread, she praised the work and said to the other student, "I gave you teachings to make something special with what you have been given. It is now up to you to create something that can benefit us all.

## *Dedication Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

### *Mind*

Resting in the nature of mind,  
We continuously attend now, boundlessly open here,  
Host all that arises,  
And cultivate the qualities of wisdom.

### *Heart*

Embracing all of life in the nature of heart,  
We intimately connect with love,  
Share caring, grief, and pain with compassion,  
And are peacefully at home in the world  
with gratitude and joy.

### *Creation*

Radiantly manifesting the nature of creation,  
By fully presencing, generously contributing  
and resiliently growing,  
We conduct ourselves as the environment  
that others experience,  
And generate an endless stream of blessings  
from what is.



# *Mind*

Resting in the Nature of Mind,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

**I**n my experience there are many dimensions to the mind and many corresponding modes of awareness. These dimensions are not a hierarchy or progression in the sense that any are necessarily more important than others or come into being in some sequence. They are all simultaneously present and each is inseparable from the others.

The awarenesses that make up the mind are not necessarily conscious. Awareness is the sensing, knowing or apprehension of something. We obviously have an awareness of the content of our thoughts. A less obvious body awareness is constantly making physical adjustments to temperature, light, sounds, and the textures and contours of the world around us. These operate whether we notice them or not.

We also have mental and emotional awarenesses that impact us that we may or may not attend to. Still others are more subtle and less accessible without training our attention, but they are always there. These include energetic dimensions, witness awareness and various wisdom awarenesses. Pure awareness itself pervades all the other awarenesses yet is neither comprehended nor apprehended by any one of them. Together, these make up the dimensions of the mind. Each has its own way of knowing, its own internal structure, and its own relationship to us personally, to life, and to sacred realization.

When we are talking about the nature of mind in this context, we are not addressing what Tibetan Buddhism means by the “ultimate nature of mind.” In Tibetan Buddhist Dzogchen, the “Nature of Mind” is described in terms of essence and the inseparable unity of awareness and openness, of clarity and consciousness. From this point of view, the teachings of the Buddha are directed toward realizing our ultimate nature, an enlightened consciousness that is so universal and primordial that it transcends all

limits, all concepts, and yet is pervasive. Here we refer to this as awareness itself or pure awareness.

The way I am using the term “mind,” mind integrates the various dimensions of awareness. Mind contains multiplicity, as well as non-duality and unity. It can thrive on holding paradox and the energy of full presence and engagement with all of life. The term *dharma* is derived from the Sanskrit *dhri* (to hold) and is used to refer to teachings, phenomena, a spiritual path, and life itself.

In this approach, we are not privileging mind more than heart or more than creation. We are also not reducing heart and creation to aspects of mind. When we embrace all the paths of mind, heart, and creation, we recognize that they are not simply different paths to the same one thing. Rather they are paths that we take to realize the varied and rich aspects of life.

In working with the mind, we attend to the various dimensions of awareness, from physical, mental and emotional to dimensions beyond the personal such as shared communal awarenesses and those that not only witness but host everything. In this view, a hosting, pure awareness is an essential nature of mind but not the complete nature. Attention, opening, and qualities of wisdom are also aspects of the nature of mind. It is in the nature of mind to attend. It is in the nature of mind to open. It is in the nature of mind to develop and manifest wisdom qualities such as equanimity, witnessing, and compassion.

When we have developed enough capacity for multiple attention in more than one dimension of awareness, we can host all that arises even as we experience emotions or work in the mental dimension. To “rest in the nature of mind” in our work suggests that some of our attention hosts all that arises from the dimension of pure awareness while we also attend to other dimensions and are present

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

in each moment, open to what is here and to what is becoming, and can consciously cultivate our capacity for wisdom qualities.

In each context of our lives, we integrate these dimensions in different and appropriate ways. Conversations, working out, and doing sitting meditation are all different contexts. Apparent contradictions and conflicts between dimensions are all held. Our hosting awareness holds it all.

In these blessings, we are expressing our aspiration to realize the nature of mind. To realize means more than having glimpses and insights about the mind. Here, we “realize” by making real, by incorporating, embodying and manifesting the nature of mind.



We Continuously Attend Now,  
Boundlessly Open Here,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

**T**he blessings employ the word “we.” The use of “we” sets the frame that the blessings apply to me personally, as well as the larger community of human beings, particularly those on a sacred path. “We” suggests that the situation and moment we are in is always shared even as it has many very personal qualities.

(I will use the words “community” and “communal” more than “collective” because collective suggests collection of individuals whereas “communal” suggests community of sharing.)

In addition, since we share the same design as others as well as the fact of being alive, we share the same potential for participating in and cultivating the sacred dimensions of our being.

Life is not a solo act, it’s a community activity. All life is an interdependent, interconnected web of activities and we are participants in and contributors to that dynamic web.

“Attend” refers to the act of directing the mind. Attention is the lens that brings all things into view. To attend to something suggests an element of consciousness aligned with intention that brings our self-sense into the present moment. In this blessing, this conscious alignment is continuous. The word “continuously” points to the possibility of an ongoing and uninterrupted consciousness.

Unlike our everyday tendency to have our attention scattered and distracted by various thoughts, sensations, and reactions, here we are dedicating ourselves to attending to the present and to include in our awareness and thus our experience what is arising now, which can be one or more sensations, thoughts, feelings, and phenomena.

The blessings call us to enter the “now” and attend to the conversation of this moment. They speak to our

## We Continuously Attend Now, Boundlessly Open Here

souls that long to authentically and unreservedly show up and manifest the aliveness that we have been gifted. Every encounter is a calling to be present and respond. Each situation issues a distinctive challenge for a fresh response. Each summons us to wake up, be present, and to participate.

The blessings open us to another way of relating to time, one that is not a limited commodity or scarce resource but is open, eternal, and unceasingly present. The blessings offer an inner structure for living consciously and responsively with dedication as we encounter the flow of each day.

There many types of “now” and we work with a number of them. Among the ways we use the word “now” are “now” as time period, urgent “now,” “now” as the womb of the future, contextual “now,” “now” as continuous, the eternal “now”—beyond time—and “now” as a call that challenges us and wants our response at this moment.

A moment is not a unit of time but rather an experience of consciousness. In this experience we are transported beyond time. Paradoxically, we transcend chronological time by being fully present in the moment.

At times we may experience a kind of ecstasy. Ecstasy originally meant to stand outside yourself. Here we are both outside and fully inside simultaneously. T. S. Eliot describes this as “the moment in and out of time.”

These lines direct us to go beyond and to include. Being here takes us beyond space and still includes it. This applies not just when we meditate. It points to showing up in this way all the time, integrating the ordinary within the extra-ordinary.



Host All That Arises,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

**H**ost *all that arises* incorporates and combines the first two phrases of the blessing. Host has the sense of space and arising is continuous “now.”

In hosting *all that arises*, we do not get to pick what shows up.

Hosting moves us beyond our reactive feelings, judgmental commentaries, and habitual labeling. Our hosting awareness is a magic cup that holds what arises, a cup that holds constantly flowing water. It is a space that holds whatever arises within it and is not confined to the contents that are arising.

Hosting is a framework for the heart posture of inclusion, of acceptance, of appreciation, of graciousness, of generosity, and embracing all life and all life experiences. We personally welcome life in all its various aspects, manifestations, challenges, and dimensions.

In the text of this blessing, *we* continuously attend, boundlessly open, and host. *We* means each individual as part of a community and the community as a whole. This suggests there is a consciousness that is greater than you, than me, than any and each of us personally—a common consciousness.

This also means that I host what arises and I am being hosted by what is arising. We can hold both meanings here. In one sense I am personally hosting and I am being hosted. The universe, life, reality hosts anything and everything. Hosting is always occurring. We align with what is already, always happening.

We are working with the sense that who we are personally and communally is larger than whatever is going on. The practice is to move our attention into that and to *rest* in that. Hosting itself does not require effort. In fact, we relax into hosting rather than work to create it.

**QUESTION:** Some teachings appear to say that we should be focused and others seem to emphasize openness and presence. Where does this fit?

**ANSWER:** Concentration develops focus and stability of attention. With stability, we can maintain the openness and presence of hosting. The practices of concentration train our mind and body to attend without distraction. Decentration opens our attention. In multiple attention, our attention rests simultaneously in both hosting awareness and concentrated awareness. We effort and rest at the same time.

**We** host our effort. We are designed as humans to be able to do this multiple attention.

**QUESTION:** What do we do with our dislike and even anger about what is arising? This seems difficult. There are things that come up that I don't want to let them be there.

**ANSWER:** In terms of hosting what arises, everything simply is. Hosting is simple but not easy. The desire that it be different can be seen as a desire to transform it. That is just another thing that arises. When we put a desire in opposition to what is, we set ourselves up for a struggle. In hosting we acknowledge the truth of both. We host something difficult and we host our desire to change it. The "and" means we can be with both. For example: "I'm having a reaction of frustration, AND I'd like to have equanimity" instead of "but."

**QUESTION:** What about wanting to take action?

**ANSWER:** Then we might decide on some action to respond to the situation. When we decide to take action, we are present with the paradoxical nature of hosting; we are including without judgment, even as we are judging, we are cultivating the quality of effortless equanimity even as we are efforting. We are complete

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

with the way things are even as we are taking action to change the situation. Hosting does not mean agreement or passive resignation. It means we are present, open and intimately relating to, and engaged in, what is arising.

**COMMENT:** Perhaps we can think about our disturbances as arising because we are not awake, not fully conscious. In this case, each disturbance can be a reminder of the hosting state and that the disturbance is not worth holding onto.

**RESPONSE:** That's true. Anything can be used as a reminder of a more open, attentive, hosting state. Eventually, as we develop in our capacity for resting in hosting awareness and a fullness of presence now, the neural networks in our brain are changed from our reactive habitual pathways. This has been demonstrated in the studies of monks who have extensive meditation experience.

**N**euro-imaging studies of Buddhist monks and lay people show that the capacity to sustain attention depends upon how much people have engaged in training their minds over time. Practice makes a big difference. The monks in the original studies were Olympic-level meditators. They could maintain states of equanimity for extended periods, even when presented with disturbing images and confrontational conversations. They could also maintain an openness to variations in patterns and be able to notice very fleeting and minor exceptions to those patterns. These capacities were also reflected in the physical structure and relative sizes of various areas of their brains.

Researchers then explored the question: can training of attention in meditation with people who had no previous experience of these practices raise their baseline measures after eight weeks, three months, or longer?

They were also interested in how this kind of training affects the patterns and capacities of different kinds of people such as people with emotional issues. They found



very positive impacts on all these groups.

The monks also demonstrated high brain frequencies, particularly gamma frequencies that are not only very high but can include other brainwave frequencies. They realized that advanced meditators can include other states while maintaining their meditative state. The assumption previously was that meditating meant no thinking and little brain activity going on. That's true in certain stages, but not at advanced stages. Thinking doesn't disturb the basic meditative state.

The blessing is designed to set a frame of where we're headed, not simply describing the nature of what's going on for us right now. The blessings can serve to open our meditation by reminding us of a heart posture we would like to adopt while meditating. It is also important to understand that working with the blessings is a perfection free zone. The realization of the blessings is as much about the way we make the effort and not how precisely we match some ideal.

In this hosting we include in an open, welcoming way, the entire range of our thoughts, feelings, and impulses. We gradually acquire the sense that there is room for everything and no need to get caught up in one thing. The urgency of fears, hopes, frustrations, pains, comparisons, and distressing feelings diminishes, and our limiting identities attached to those feelings begins to dissolve. In hosting all that arises, the chaos of our thoughts and feelings and the fragmented aspects of our lives settle down energetically, and we feel a sense of calm. Our hosting and witnessing gives rise to well-being, belonging and ease.

When we host everything in the space of our awareness, we experience a sense of home, a kind of resting in our fundamental nature. We may also sense an intimacy with life. Our experience is direct and there is no

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

separation between the experience, what is experienced and the hosting self.

As we learn to abide in this nature with wonder and gratitude, the unknown, remote and seemingly threatening aspects of life reveal their hidden vitality and affinity with us. Hosting welcomes, includes and supports everything as being home.

And Cultivate the Qualities of Wisdom.



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

**I**n the context of these blessings, *cultivate the qualities of wisdom* refers to profound wisdom and not the conventional wisdom of accumulated experience. It is not about expertise.

In Sanskrit, one of the meanings of the word for meditate is to cultivate. Another word for meditate is the Tibetan word *sgom* (pronounced “gom”) which means “to make familiar, to make like family and to form an intimate relationship with practice.” Cultivate also conveys the sense of growing and maturing in life.

The fundamental wisdom nature is the light of conscious attention. As it passes through the jewel of the mind, different qualities arise like different colors. Some of these qualities are love (as a wisdom quality), compassion, equanimity, clarity, and joy. While these qualities naturally arise, our capacity to manifest them in our lives depends upon cultivation.

### **Types of Profound Wisdom**

**Sacred Wisdom/TRANSCENDENT WISDOM**—clarity and the realization and embodiment of sacred ways of being, including pure being, awareness, love, and creation and the ability to participate in and with non-physical forces and qualities.

In the course of developing sacred wisdom, there is often a quality of insight. The insight we are referring to here is not simply a mental “ah-ha” but a deep kind of knowing that simply arises in our being. Insight Meditation emphasizes this non-mental and embodied knowing. This kind of insight allows us to perceive in a more open, clear, present way. This clarity sees beyond what appears, beyond the surface. In this clarity we experience being present with what is actually here, now.

In sacred wisdom we also move our attention into

## And Cultivate the Qualities of Wisdom

an open awareness that hosts everything that arises. This awareness is free of judgments, attitudes, and commentary about what arises within it.

This transcendent wisdom is able to rest in pure awareness even while engaged with the energies and dynamics of all the other dimensions of our being. It is inclusive. It is both beyond and immanent in all dimensions of being.

Sacred wisdom involves how we relate to what is arising and not so much to what we have accomplished. We are present with whatever arises with equanimity and a lightness of heart. As I experienced while walking the Camino de Santiago in northern Spain, every step on the way was the journey.

**ALCHEMICAL WISDOM/TRANSFORMING WISDOM**—seeing everything as an opportunity to cultivate wisdom and having the confidence, capacity, and consciousness to turn all experiences into insight, value, and blessings (turning the lead of everyday experiences and crises into the gold of wisdom, love, and creative activity).

**COMMON SENSE WISDOM**—sensing and knowing the shared qualities of all life and the understanding of our shared unity and multiplicity. Common sense wisdom involves a deeply rooted sense of inter-being and inter-connectedness. As a part of the larger context of interdependent life, we sense a greater good, not only for humans but all life. In common sense wisdom, we know our basic relationship with all life and embrace the sacred as all-inclusive, as the many and the One. In the heart of this wisdom there is no unbridgeable division between me and you, here and there, time and eternity, and the human and the divine. Everywhere is home.

Compassion arises from and is based in common sense wisdom. Indeed, the mind of compassion sees clearly the suffering of others and understands their

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

suffering. At the same time, compassion is not simply the ability to see other's pain and have a wish on behalf of others but a form of knowing other people's wisdom nature. We don't simply see another person as a unit of pain. We see them as a whole being that includes their own wisdom-nature that is part of the same wisdom-nature that we all have. It is not that I have wisdom nature and you don't and I wish you did. We all have it and we want everyone to realize the wisdom nature that we all share.

**VIRTUOUS AND ETHICAL WISDOM**—insight, realization, and embodiment of good conduct, developing and having good character, knowing how to cultivate a virtuous habit body. This wisdom supports us in living according to the nature of every stage of life. Virtue helps us adapt as conditions change.

**DISCRIMINATING/PHILOSOPHICAL WISDOM**—understanding the nature of life, of knowing and not knowing, of the nature of society along with a vision of good relationships among people, including a capacity for discernment. In Buddhism, the flaming sword of wisdom represents discriminating wisdom. This wisdom not only makes distinctions but unites what is distinguished. It is beyond including/excluding. When we make a distinction in this way, the distinction reveals an underlying relationship about the things that we're distinguishing.

In discriminating wisdom, we discipline our senses so that we can develop our capacity to experience every dimension of life with full sensitivity. When our senses are alert and tuned, every pulse is full of energy, every drink of water is full of flavor, the smell of evening is full of fragrance, and the sound of each moment is full of variation and silence.

**PARADOXICAL WISDOM**—being able to hold contradiction, ambiguity and complexity, to recognize contexts, and, with a sense of ease, grow from this holding and recognition. In

## And Cultivate the Qualities of Wisdom

paradoxical wisdom we can affirm two or more realities that don't appear to belong together. One core paradox of human spirituality is the haunting sense of separateness that comes with having a distinct body and a personal identity even as we know that we are intimately connected to, dependent upon, and always contributing to a larger social, physical and spiritual ecology.

**MATURING WISDOM**—knowing how to participate, contribute, learn, and grow as a blessing-bestowing being and engage fully in all the stages of life, including the life stages of development, decline, and death. In maturing wisdom we use death to sharpen the sense of presence in the moment. We make meaning of death to inform life, seeing death as a dynamic of life and of the evolution of our communities through time.

**QUESTION:** What are the goals of cultivating all the various forms of wisdom?

**ANSWER:** To list some of them—happiness (satisfaction and completeness), dignity, confidence, home (belonging), love (unconditional connection and kinship), beauty, perpetual blessing-bestowing conduct (virtue and excellence), equanimity and inclusive harmony, joyful wonder, flow in life.

**QUESTION:** Some of these wisdom qualities seem like they belong more in the heart blessing or the creation blessing. What is the difference?

**ANSWER:** The qualities of wisdom are not completely distinct from heart or creation. What we come to know here is the wisdom-aspect of those natures. These wisdom qualities support the developed and mature aspects of heart and creation.

*Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

*Four Step Blessings Practice*

RECITE

*Mind*

Resting in the nature of mind,  
We continuously attend now, boundlessly open here,  
Host all that arises,  
And cultivate the qualities of wisdom.

MEDITATE

COMMENT



And Cultivate the Qualities of Wisdom

ENVISION



*Heart*

Embracing All of Life in the Nature of  
Heart,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

Whereas we rest in the nature of mind, in the nature of heart we embrace and hold life close, not in a clinging way but a welcoming heart posture. We reach out beyond the walls of apparent separation to include and connect to other people, to life, and to the world. The nature of heart takes us out of our personal selves even as it resonates in the core of our very sense of being.

Embedded in the idea of embrace is the notion that we don't just embrace life, but we are also embraced by life in every moment. We are both embracing and embraced. This mutual embrace is like a hug or kiss where we are giving and receiving simultaneously.

The relation between the sacred and life is like a snail whose shell-home is part of its own being. No matter where we are, we are always within a sacred embrace. No matter what we do, we are still embraced. No matter what we may think and feel, our very being is always embraced by sacred reality and we need only become aware and live in a sacred heart posture.

This embrace by life is mirrored in us by the nature of our heart. We can embrace life. No matter what is arising in life, we can make sacred meaning and hold what arises within our sacred posture of the heart. This open, loving nature is always there whether we are talking with a friend, arguing with our spouse, playing with our children, making plans, planting a magnolia tree, napping, or watching a sunset. Each moment is an opportunity to experience the always-fresh recognition of open, inseparable loving presence.

In the nature of heart we are not indicating a totally distinct or separate nature. In this blessing, we are setting the frame of connection and that the nature of heart can embrace all life and everyone. From a spiritual point of view, just as the nature of mind includes all phenomena

## Embracing All of Life in the Nature of Heart

of consciousness, all dimensions of awareness, so the heart includes the interconnectedness and interbeing of everything and everyone.

Just as everything has Buddha nature, so every relationship has heart nature. This is emphasized by some spiritual traditions that say the nature of God is love. In our attempts to express and manifest this sacred nature, we aspire to connect with love, with loving-kindness or *metta*. We want to cultivate the warmth of this way of loving.

This blessing also calls on us to see each moment as an opportunity for embrace and welcoming. The teachings in all the great spiritual traditions suggest that the way we perceive is a choice. There is a sacred way of perceiving and a profane/ordinary way of perceiving. Reactive patterns lead to profane ways of thinking, encouraging drama between good and evil. The spiritual point of view steps out of the frame of drama and opposition forces. We want to move into a frame of oneness, interconnectedness and the qualities that create benefit.

Because the world is as it is, our opportunity is to make a choice in every moment about how to relate to it and embrace it. There's denial on the one hand, or embracing it in a way that leads to action.

This also points to the third blessing of creation where we start from what is. We are making a distinction between the relating and the acting itself. By relating intimately, we are in a position to create blessings from what is. Our action stems from our relating.

When we embrace life, we can then proceed with a sense of engagement. When we engage events and people from a heart posture of love, rather than from a heart posture of reaction, we can choose compassion over anger, hate, and fear. We come from a perspective

*Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

of inclusiveness. All of this is in the heart nature of life.

We Intimately Connect with Love,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

Our aliveness seeks connection to everything that occurs in our lives. We want to understand. We want to establish a relationship with the people and things that surround us in the world. This is a kind of love. As we build on these connections, this is called learning. Loving and learning is the nature of our human aliveness. Each of us is a loving and learning being.

The process of turning experience into meaning and of assigning value to some things more than others is a fundamental alchemical cognitive phenomenon. The world simply presents itself to us and we transform some parts of it into a personal abode with our beams of meaning, windows of selective perception, inhabitants of relationships, and the treasures of values.

We give form to the chaos of life through our structure of meanings and understandings, create gods to be followed and worshipped through our values, and generate bonds through our caring, affections, and ties to other people. We are the mothers of meaning, the invisible yet vital substance upon which our mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being depends.

It is our soul that invests the world and our lives with meaning and each time we make meaning we are connecting to what we make meaning of. That drive to connect is the vitalizing impulse of love that places us in the world and the world in us. The soul is a lover.

Intimacy is what happens when we affirm and connect to life in the moment. Meeting life with the sense of presence, openness and love makes us joyfully, painfully, erotically, curiously, and knowingly intimate. Intimacy is direct, subtle, simple, complex, desirable, frightening, explicit, unspoken, the everyday and sacred.

The word “intimate” derives from the Latin word “*intimare*,” *to make familiar with—to make known* and “*intimus*,” *innermost*. In our experience, it arises when



## We Intimately Connect with Love

we sense a kind of communion, a sense of knowing and possibly being known, and a feeling that a deep and sacred part of our being is engaged. Through intimacy the core of our being is touched or affected in some way.

When we are intimate in all domains of our lives, every activity becomes a way of making love—working, driving, walking, reading, writing, making music, drawing, arranging flowers, teaching, learning, engaging in sex, conversing with friends, worshipping, meditating, praying, doing service, taking political action, eating, and simply listening to birds singing. In the freshness of each moment we learn the secret of falling in love over and over again with life itself.

Love is the connection of intimacy; when we appreciate something like a leaf or something someone says, we bring it inside ourselves so it's both interior and exterior. In one sense, the way this blessing is stated is redundant. The connection itself is a kind of love. The reason I put "with love" in this line of the blessing is so that we recognize the connection as a form of love.

Many spiritual traditions speak about how everything is God and that God is love. Everything that is is an aspect or expression of the divine and that divine expression is love. We aspire to radiate this love and to connect with that loving nature of reality, what is.

The sacred heart posture of connection is a way of practicing and realizing intimacy with what the Western mystical traditions call the Beloved. When we speak about the Beloved, we are really including the fact that the Sacred is love, lover and Beloved. All love is sacred. All acts of love are expressions of the Divine lover. All experiences of being loved are the Beloved receiving its sacred expression through us. Divine love is the infinite background to finite love. It is the supreme matrix within which all meaning, love and connection arise, are

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

sustained, and eventually dissolve. Just as the eternal is experienced in the full presence of each moment, so eternal love can be known in the experience of particular love now.

Our soul is a lover of life as a way of embracing engagement with all reality, a lover of being as a way of opening to Essential intimacy, a lover of becoming, manifesting, creating beauty and having an impact as a way of expressing creative intimacy, and a lover of learning as a way of consciously knowing, growing and integrating all forms of intimacy into inclusive wisdom. When we embody the sense of love as a way of being, we experience happiness and freedom through that unreserved, unconditional love.

I invite you to recall times when you experienced the excitement and beauty of being in love. All of us desire to be at home in life and feel the aliveness that arises from being in love. The experience of romantic love in its ecstatic blush models a much deeper lesson on the spiritual path—namely the profound sense of connection, the vividness of perception where everything looks more colorful and rich, and the fullness of aliveness.

Love is the sense of connection. Connection is the manifestation of love. Love is the expression of radiance. Radiance is the appearance of love. Love is the embrace of openness. Openness is the freedom of love.

Living within a sacred view, we meet life and are met in the core of our being, experiencing a fullness of presence, intimate connectedness, dynamic aliveness, and profound belonging. Life freshly opens to each moment, revealing the often hidden radiance of the world. Oneness and the beauty of diversity arise simultaneously. We know a deep intimacy with each other and life.

When we cultivate the heart posture of love and intimacy, we see with the eyes of beauty, transforming

## We Intimately Connect with Love

ordinary perception into a vision of the sacred. Living in the heart posture of love, we perceive the Beloved in everything.

**QUESTION:** How does antagonistic connection fit in?

**ANSWER:** You recognize it as a form of connection, a way of being involved with each other. If we examine what is actually happening in these situations, antagonists stay attuned to each other in key ways. They are making meaning of each other. We can often see this in families and particularly between siblings at certain stages of life. This will not manifest as emotional love (although it can in certain relationships), but there is a definite sense of connection and you are acknowledging their presence. This may be one aspect of the meaning of “loving your enemy” that has been part of the religious traditions for thousands of years.

**COMMENT:** You’re bringing a new light to a question of my life which is my parents’ awful relationship. Were they addicted to each other?

**ANSWER:** I am not suggesting that antagonism is a good way to manifest love, but I am indicating a bond there. In this, we recognize that from a spiritual point of view the whole world is inter-connected. When teachings tell you that you live in a world of love, it doesn’t mean that we “really like this” or are fine with the way things are. Rather, we recognize the bonding that connects even adversaries. We are also pointing out that we do not want to reduce anyone to a particular set of actions that we may or may not like. We all act in much of our lives from reaction and confusion about our basic natures. While we may take positions and actions to oppose the destructive activities of others, we do not condemn them as people. Rather we recognize that they are in basic ways like us. We recognize that what they do is the result of not only their thoughts and feelings, but of the actions that other people have taken against them or in support of them. We see ourselves in

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

them and them in ourselves. We sense as members of the human community, we are them. We want to get in touch with the humanness of all people. All the traditions call upon us to see beyond the surface of actions.

**QUESTION:** What do I do with all the feelings of disgust and hate in a situation where someone is violent with another person?

**ANSWER:** We want to be wary of conflating the heart with feelings, the mind with mental activity, and creation with behavior. Part of what I am getting at is that just as we talk in relation to mind as everything having Buddha-nature, or Buddha-mind; we say that everything and everyone has heart-nature. We are all connected and, from a spiritual point of view, the heart can embrace everyone and everything.

One of the purposes of the blessings is to direct us. They are not a description of how we experience things so much as a description of the possibilities and the potential for a sacred and profound way of being, even with the destructive things that people do. This blessing directs us toward relating with loving-kindness.

**O**ne challenge of this practice is to extend our compassion to everyone in a situation. For example, when a situation of bullying happens, our challenge is be compassionate not only with the victim but with the perpetrator as well.

Share Caring, Grief, and Pain with Compassion,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

Sharing is another critical element of this blessing and this sharing plays a role in creating the sense of home. Our sharing with people includes communications, activities, feelings, challenges, and desires.

When we share in community, we are also sharing as a community. Each individual act of sharing is an act of the movement of the community. Each sharing is an act in behalf of the community. We are sharing as the community in the sense that we are all not simply members of the community but also features of the community. We have a sense that what happens to people as individuals, also happens to us as part of the community.

For example, in 12-step meetings, participants generate witnessing, sharing, and connecting that is extraordinary. Many people experience an incredible feeling of gratitude. In the 12-step programs, we find a very sophisticated model for working on oneself in community.

In program, by working on yourself in public, in community, and witnessing others doing their work in community, there is a sense that this is not just your personal work. Doing work on yourself in this way does the work of the community. You can't participate realistically without doing your own work. If you're unwilling to do your work, you can't effectively get through the door into the real community that is happening.

It may seem a little paradoxical because people start the program out of self-concern and initially only think about themselves. People like that they are instructed to do their own work, since it is not too difficult to focus on themselves. The interesting dynamic is that by focusing on themselves in the context of others and looking for inspiration, clues, and possibilities from others, the meetings and the steps takes them outside themselves.

## Share Caring, Grief and Pain with Compassion

It moves people beyond self-preoccupation. It instructs you to turn yourself over to higher power, acknowledging that you can't do it alone.

It helps, in terms of motivation, to begin and sustain this kind of work to sense living on the edge of our lives. People have different kinds of edges. Part of the purpose of sharing in our community is about finding our current edge. Where we need to move beyond our pretensions, our fears, our reactions, addictions and longings in order to show up in the world in a better way.

One of the keys to this intimate connection involves being open to giving and receiving. In sharing caring, grief and pain, we treat each of these as a gift—a gift that we present to others with what we say and do and a gift that we get when they are willing to receive what we shared. When someone can receive what we have to give, it becomes a gift to us, even when we are sharing pain. One element in the gift of receiving is the connection that is experienced by both the receiver and the giver.

As lovers in the world, we are inclined toward caring. We are incurable romantics of life in our work for a better life for others, in our desire to live in alignment not only with the planet but with the heritage of the past and the great possibilities of the future. We want to contribute our portion to a collective environment of love and peace. This intended union of the personal and communal worlds reveals that we are participating in larger stories of a greater community.

Often when we experience love of all kinds, we will also experience a feeling of vulnerability. Vulnerability can open us to connection to others. This is not the only way to connect, but one of the ways. It can seem paradoxical that an important strength is the willingness to be vulnerable with others. Vulnerability is not the same thing as weakness. We can have the sense of

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

vulnerability while also feeling dignity, strong, loving, connected and joyful.

We live in a culture in which these qualities are not those normally associated with vulnerability. Our fear of vulnerability comes from a surface reaction both for ourselves and to other people. However, if we really pay attention and inquire more deeply, we can often discover the strength, the joy, the love and the beauty that are possible in vulnerability.

One of the most important forms of sharing has to do with grief. When we invite others to participate in grieving with us around a real loss—a loved one, a relationship, a job, a home—we are drawing the attention of others to what has been of value to what was lost and we connect with them around the common experience and feelings associated with loss. Shared grief is a loving act of praise in which we become a chorus that collectivizes our individual voices and feelings into a community.

Authentic grief holds the heart posture of praise as we connect to the value of what we have lost. Our pain honors this caring and value. In grief over the death of loved ones, we are brought down by our sadness and uplifted by the praise for those who have passed and by the sense that it is now up to us to carry on whatever good they brought to the world.

Grieving provides an opportunity for a sense of intimacy. In the process of grieving, we extract the essential value of a person's life and presence and take into our freshly opened heart that essence. This remembering leaves an imprint on our soul as we carry on aspects of their contributions in our own lives, integrating these with our own unique gifts to the world.

We realize that this is more than a personal process. It is a communal one as well. We can recall the extraordinary fellowship that people experience during abnormal times



## Share Caring, Grief and Pain with Compassion

of crisis. Crisis challenges us to live in light of what is truly important. We sense that others are called in similar ways. Crisis, grief and celebration reveal our need for each other—our fundamental interdependence. We sense the bond we have to what is beyond the ordinary, to the sacred and to each other. We know how vital it is that we play our part and make our particular contributions.

Grief is an important part of the process of human community and maturing. The death of someone requires the community and family of relationships to regularly reweave the fabric of the community, to revive itself, and to develop the capacity for social as well as personal resilience.

Our heart extends to others by sharing our mutual pain. Heart to heart we share memories. Hand in hand we maintain an atmosphere of sorrow around our loss, of celebration for their life, and of gratitude for life itself and the support of each other. Shoulder to shoulder we work to create a loving memorial through creating benefit on behalf of those who have passed and for our children and our children's children.

As we make our way through the challenges in our lives, the wise support of others can provide a critical energy of connection and concentration of effort as we work our way through our pain. Eventually we are able to incorporate the wisdom of our experience for the benefit of all.

In realizing the promise of the Heart Blessing, there are many vehicles such as sharing, feeling love, and experiencing belonging. One of the most important is the experience of connection through the body, through touch and physical contact. Sacred work and spiritual realization must include the body. This means not only embodying the qualities of wisdom but also embodied connection with others. For many Christians, particularly

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

Christian mystics, a critical feature of the gospels is that Jesus was embodied; Jesus was the Divine in a human body and experienced the loves, pains, and feelings of a human. He touched others and was touched by them. Jesus often healed through his touch and made connections through touching.

Our language conveys the importance of touch. When we listen to something that moves us, we talk about being “touched.” We have an experience in our body. We can touch each other in many ways through seeing and hearing as well as physical touch. We are touched by beauty, by pain, by witnessing dignity, and by so many shared human experiences. The heart blessing suggests that we need to be embodied and that the point of spiritual work is not the achievement of some disembodied state but rather a fully embodied presence.

The mutual process of sharing is informed by and also cultivates a sense of compassion. Compassion, as a form of loving intimacy, is a significant element in releasing the grip of self-concern to teach us the language and ways of the heart. The domain of an open, loving heart has an infinite capacity to reach out and connect, to radiate love through that connection, to color that radiance with compassion and to guide that radiant connection with wisdom.

Compassion involves the feeling of being together as kin. This sense of togetherness opens us to rejoicing at another’s joy and grieving at their sorrow. In compassion we let go of separation, of problems, of vanity, of self-concern, and of control in remembering our common bonds and our heartfelt desire to bring about happiness. Compassion as a heart posture perceives others as family that we celebrate, care for, and want to support in dealing with the challenges of suffering. Compassion is our kinship with each other and with the universe; it is the

action we take because of that kinship.

Compassion and love, informed by wisdom, open our hearts and bond us to life and each other. They profoundly engage the emotional in the service of the sacred. They have the capacity to override and retrain the body of habits or at least interrupt the reactive response. They affirm our interconnectedness, our interdependence, and our interbeing. They can lead to an intensity of being and the cultivation of collective as well as individual energy and beauty.

A spiritual mystic once said, “Of what use is an open eye, if the heart is blind?”

Compassion is a way of life—a way of being, a way of being conscious, a way of relating, a way of acting, a way of living from the base of interconnection, interbeing, and sharing. Compassion is not a “should,” a rule, a commandment, for it is a way of living, a way of treating all there is in life—ourselves, our bodies, our imaginations and dreams, neighbors, enemies, the air, water, the earth, animals, death, space and time. Compassion is a heart posture as if creation matters, treating all beings and things as sacred and as divine.

Compassion is more than conceptual knowing about the suffering and pain of others. It somehow involves an entering into, a sharing, and a tasting of the life of another, in so far as that is possible. This requires both imagination and the ability to move our attention into dimensions of awareness that transcend the personal. We allow our heart to be touched and present our love in ways that touch the hearts of others. Compassion implies passion, pathos, deep caring, gut feelings, heart connections and bonding and at the same time a profound understanding of these connections, of pain, of life, of the nature of being and of the workings of the heart.

The practice of compassion puts our own pain in

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

perspective. We see it as a part of life that is not simply personal but also communal and that it is noble to work with it in both interior and exterior ways. Building our capacity for compassion for others enhances our ability to live in the world without reservation. In compassion we affirm life and other beings, making everyone and everything matter. We invest the world with significance, realizing that, while nothing has inherent value, in the relative dimension of life, such investments experientially and socially matter in both personal maturity into wisdom and communal development of supportive relationships.

Compassion is the natural and spontaneous response of an open heart. In addition, we are more resourceful and insightful when helping others than when we are concerned solely with ourselves. Compassion as the concern for the well-being and happiness of others and the sharing of our suffering can lead us out of our separate worlds of pain to a mutual sense of connection and understanding.

When we are compassionate, we must be careful to notice traces of separation and condescension in our thoughts such as traces of pity. Compassion does not hold another as weak or inferior or inadequate. Compassion sees the shared nature of pain and suffering and the strength that flows from the sense of connection.

We need to take care not to confine our compassionate and loving connection to pain. We do not want to develop a taste for pain, as if this is the most real and intense part of feeling alive, and become attracted to suffering. This is not a matter of “poor me/poor you/poor us.” At root, compassion is a celebration of all life and we share that joyful possibility with others. There is a German proverb that states: “A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved; joy shared is a joy doubled.”

To work with compassion means not only to imagine,

## Share Caring, Grief and Pain with Compassion

to feel, and to generate a loving presence, it means to engage in acts of service, an extra reaching out. Acts of compassion are not favors but flow from the obligation we feel for supporting the integrity of mutuality, of community, and of kinship.

These acts include everything from making a stranger welcome to works of peace-making that seek to harmonize the discord among people. In Matthew (25.34-46) Jesus says that what we do for the least among us, “the least of these brothers of mine,” you do for me. We are to love God, to love life, to love all being, through the caring and care of others.

**QUESTION:** What is the difference between having compassion for all suffering and practicing compassion?

**ANSWER:** Often when we are bombarded with images of suffering in other parts of the world, our hearts go out to them. We may feel compassion and conjure feelings for the people involved using our imagination. This evokes a caring about the pain of others that is based on an abstraction. We relate only to their pain but know little of their full humanity.

We do not know what the lives of people in war zones, in neighborhoods of poverty, or in refugee camps is really like. We do not know what makes their lives meaningful, what brings them joy, what the connections are that they feel for each other, what they celebrate, and how they experience dignity. In our minds we have reduced them to an abstraction based on one aspect, albeit extremely important, of their lives that has been broadcast to evoke a surface response. Our sense of their dignity comes not from their real lives and their stories as from a conceptual generalization that we make about all people. This kind of compassionate caring is important and is not the only kind.

Compassion in relation to people we know includes their fullness. We recognize their own caring hearts, their qualities of wisdom, and their dignity in the midst of and beyond their

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

suffering. We connect to them as real human beings and not simply in terms of examples of pain and need. There is a sense of two way gifting that is not tinged with elements of paternalism and superiority. Our compassion is simply between two living beings.

From this point of view, we do not see people and situations as simply problems to be solved. We look at what is growing and evolving that may include problems but is not limited to them.

**T**he nature of the heart is that it connects in all ways. We are touched by the pain, the beauty, the dignity, and the magnificence of others. We are humbly present and gratefully connected without any hidden “save the world” mentality working in the background. Seeing the magnificence of others and of life can remind us to both give and receive the richness of what we all offer.

In the history of the word “passion,” in the early Christian era, it was associated with suffering, particularly the suffering of Christ. As it has come to mean intense feeling about something, it is related to our aliveness. When there is a passion there is a fullness of feeling and aliveness. Compassion is to connect with and be with this fullness of feeling with others. We do it together.

These blessings are not a way of solving and ending the problems in the world but are a way of moving forward, of living fully and meaningfully and beneficially in the world as it is. We generate an endless stream of blessings from what is, no matter how it got that way.

And Are Peacefully at Home in the World  
with Gratitude and Joy.



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

This line speaks at one level of acceptance instead of our ideal idea of how things should be. It involves being one with what is real. It also conveys the sense of belonging with the world.

The key to the sense of peace is how we relate to what's happening. Peace is a form of relationship. It is not the lack of conflict but the hosting of all things. Harmony in this context does not have to do with the resolution of conflicts but inclusiveness. The conflicts are included rather than excluded or resolved.

Peace is sold in our consumer culture as being comfortable. Comfort is sold as a kind of pseudo-peace. We want to be able to live with the dynamic nature of life without simply settling into a sense of comfort. We are at peace with the fact that change is a feature of life. And this includes death.

The words "at home in the world" point to our being part of a much larger community of people and of life.

We can distinguish two levels of at-homeness. There is an immediate sense of it as we show up as who we are in the moment with other people and in this situation. Then there is the at-homeness that we come to know through the dimension of hosting in which we're always at home whether we realize it or not.

Looking at this idea from another point of view, we can realize that we are always hosted by life, always included. We want to work with the idea that life is a gift, and we want to make ourselves a gift to life. Part of what we have to contribute is that we can show up simply as who we are, without pretensions. Pretentiousness is the exact opposite of being at home, it's needing to be armored. Pretense suggests that we are "becoming tense ahead of time." We share our humanity as a means of connecting to others.

The primary barrier that keeps us from home and



## And Are Peacefully at Home in the World with Gratitude and Joy

peacefulness is fear. When we can be at home with others in a profound way, fear melts away and leads to a sense of gratitude and joy.

The word *good* has the same root—*gê*—as the words *gather* and *together*. One meaning of goodness concerns the sense of *fit* in terms of feeling part of a more inclusive and embracing whole. The experience of connectedness and home that is part of the sacred nature of intimacy derives from a vision of relationships that sees both self and other as somehow fitting into a larger whole, linked to a larger dynamic of life itself.

Fundamental to our nature is the sense of connectedness. Even when we feel that the sense of connection has been lost or wounded, the yearning for union with others and larger realities is itself an expression of this nature.

The longing to feel and be an intimate part of some whole, to experience belonging, is a desire to be simply who we are, without reservation and condition. This sense of belonging is often called home. Relaxing into the sacred nature of our own being, into the flow of life unfolding, and into the embrace of intimate, communal relationships brings us home. We sense being at home, not only in ourselves but in the world in a profoundly spiritual way. This is not a personal abode but a shared home that encompasses both inner and outer worlds in a beautiful landscape that nourishes us and that we, in turn, support through our loving participation and contributions.

In the experience of home, we dwell in the felt environment of belonging. Belonging brings together two fundamental qualities of human experience: being and longing. When we realize our essential belonging, we sense the living, passionate presence of our soul. Belonging is at the heart of connection and provides

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

the warmth of intimacy. Belonging is the glue that binds each of us to the sacred, to life, to each other, and as a community.

**QUESTION:** What does being peacefully at home in the world mean when you are ill?

**ANSWER:** As a personal experience, this evening raised this kind of situation. I have a cold. I don't want to share it with you in a physical way. I was presented with the challenge of how do I show up as a runny nose, sniffing, sneezing Buddha. There is a part of me that is caught up in public appearance, how I am seen as a teacher. I could see these thoughts arising. My process for deciding to teach involved settling into my own being at peace and at home in this situation even while I am being physically challenged. I knew I could remain relaxed and comfortable with being ill in front of you. Once I get concerned with what you are going to think about me, and take that as an issue, I've created a sense of separation and am not at home.

**COMMENT:** Difficulties can put us in touch with the sense of peace because they challenge us. We do not think of peace when we are having fun and feeling happy. The challenges get me to move my attention to a more peaceful way of being.

**COMMENT:** When we listen in our meditation to the silence in which sounds arise, we are connecting to a dimension of the world that is inclusive, that hosts and holds everything, that is beyond conflict and struggle.

Part of the teaching is that this peace can be realized in each moment and situation. The challenging moments are the ones that really press our ability to be at home. This line is directing our attention to this possibility.

In Buddhism great emphasis is placed on the cultivation of gratitude—gratitude for this precious life, for

## And Are Peacefully at Home in the World with Gratitude and Joy

the opportunities afforded in life, for wisdom teachings, for the multitude of ways that life is supported, for the blessings of spiritual teachers and masters, and for the possibility of being a beneficial presence and making contributions in the world. Gratitude takes us beyond ourselves into the world of connection and support.

Gratitude is not simply some warm and fuzzy feeling that passes quickly. It is a heart posture that allows us to see and experience how gifted we each are by the blessings of life and even its painful challenges. In the heart posture of gratitude, we relate to everything as a blessing. Rather than wait for some final satisfaction in order to feel grateful, we hold the sense of being blessed by all the little things we are given. We feel spiritually alive in the satisfaction of the moment. In this way our gratitude generates fulfillment and fills the universe with the blessing of our love.

Gratitude opens our heart to not only the sense of connection but the impulse to give ourselves. We want to give something in return to those who gave us life and who support us. This gratitude begins with particular people and situations and grows to cosmic proportions as we realize the splendor of life itself. We want our freedom and joy to be experienced by others and we seek to pass on all our blessings.

Gratitude:

turns what we have into enough, a meal into a feast,  
a house into a home, a stranger into a friend  
transforms our relationship to our past, warms the  
heart today, and opens possibilities for tomorrow  
cultivates love, expanded awareness, and dedication  
to passing benefits on  
creates bonds between giver and thanksgiver

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

affirms belonging

Appreciation rides alongside gratitude as a way of feeling at home in the world. When we cultivate the attitude of appreciation we develop what I call “appreciative fluency.”

Think of all the ways we use the word appreciate. In appreciative fluency we are referring to all meanings of the word:

awareness (the inclusion of the elements in a situation)

responsiveness (to the nature of a situation)

recognition of quality and significance (seeing value)

gratitude (having a loving feeling about what is of value),

and

increasing in value.

In joy we glory in the pure delight of being alive and at home in the world. We experience the sense that life is complete in this moment and our heart is open and radiant.

And Are Peacefully at Home in the World with Gratitude and Joy

## *Four Step Blessings Practice*

RECITE

### *Heart*

Embracing all of life in the nature of heart,  
We intimately connect with love,  
Share caring, grief, and pain with compassion,  
And are peacefully at home in the world with  
gratitude and joy,

MEDITATE

COMMENT

*Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

ENVISION

# *Creation*

Radiantly Manifesting the Nature of  
Creation,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

**T**he creative aspect of sacred work denotes:  
not an idea of goodness, but a living caring;  
not an abstract example, but an ongoing challenge  
to live from a sacred sensibility;  
not mere feeling or affection, but a heart posture  
composed of mature spiritual elements;  
not a detached survey of the state of the world, but  
a passionate summons to engage with equanimity, love,  
and compassion.

In other words, we aspire to become a shining example  
of the dynamic human design in the way we show up, in  
what we do, and in what we dedicate our lives to.

We share with all things that exist, not a common  
design but the fact that we have a design. This design  
is not set but always in process, always dynamic, always  
changing as a manifestation of the nature of creation.

This shared aliveness can be referred to as *common sense*, a knowing of what we share in common with  
all the living world, “with the whole of creation” as  
Brother David Steindl-Rast puts it. This common sense  
leads us to realize that we share the reality of dynamic  
design with everyone and everything we encounter. This  
communion is the sacred dimension of being beyond the  
superficial appearance of separation. Being conscious in  
our contribution means we conduct ourselves from that  
foundation of belonging and connection. We are all part  
of what Gary Snyder calls our shared “earth household.”

The blessing of creation conveys that everything  
is an ongoing process, in perpetual motion. There is  
no ending, end time, final state. We are embedded in  
creation as a process through which life, all things, and  
all experiences come into being. Every act in the present  
gives rise to the conditions of the future. Everything that  
is born also grows, disintegrates and disappears, making  
space for new arisings.



By Fully Presencing, Generously  
Contributing and Resiliently Growing,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

The way to radiantly manifest creation is to be completely and whole-heartedly present. We show up for whatever is going on now, in each moment. Our aliveness relates intimately to the current situation and we sense that our entire being attends to and engages with life.

Out of our wholehearted aliveness now flows the natural process of giving. Contribute means both to give in common with others for a common purpose and to act with the purpose of having an effect. In other words, when we are fully present, we possess a common sense of what we share with all life and this leads to contributing to the well-being of our community.

Generous has the same root as generate, to give rise to. In this way *generously contributing* conveys a double emphasis on giving. The word also suggests both a sense of nobility and abundance.

The phrase *resiliently growing* has many facets of meaning. We will explore a number of them here. Resilient suggests that life presents us with challenges and often wounds and failures.

The hero's journey is a mythological representation of how to meet the challenges we face in ways that reveal how to transcend, grow, and live a sacred life. Heroes encounter life-changing traumatic events and rather than crumble they awaken and find new strength and wisdom. They remake their identities, lives and missions to reflect their new circumstances as they pursue the treasures that will benefit their communities.

In this frame we treat everything that arises as a training opportunity on our path of spiritual growth, we transform our usual sense of powerlessness and burden in the face of difficulties into workout tools in building our spiritual capacity. Life is a gym for our growth and maturity.

Working with sacred consciousness, love and blessing creation for a greater communal purpose is a process of growing from a personal soul into a sacred soul. Creation is a critical part of this work. The Indo-European root of the word “create” (*ker-2*) also means “to grow.”

As we encounter the challenges of maturing from a personal soul that is more self-concerned into a sacred soul that embodies sacred qualities and places them in service to a greater purpose, we inevitably experience pain, wounding, and periods of despair. All of this is part of the curriculum of life to make us stronger, more intimately related to the challenges that others face, and more confident in our capacity to meet more challenges.

In the biblical struggle between Jacob and the angel, Jacob would not cease his wrestling until the angel blessed him. “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” As dawn breaks, the angel blesses him and also wounds him in the thigh. This suggests both that great blessings also bring with them a kind of woundedness and that the wounds we receive in our lives can be accompanied by blessings when we turn our struggles into sacred encounters.

Our willingness to engage life in all its wonderful and terrifying aspects forms a foundation for ongoing spiritual development.

There are three kinds of growth. There are the conditions of our lives that we grow from, the possibilities and potentials that we grow into, and the realization of those potentials that we grow toward. Spiritual work involves growing from our lives and growing into a new identity and then growing from there. We grow beyond our reactive habit body and open to a new identity, a new way of being, a new sense of ourselves.

Our new identity is not fixed. Rather it is flexible in that we now contain the possibility of a number of

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

identities. We live with possibilities and this becomes a freedom to choose when we are no longer confined to our reactive habit body.

**QUESTION:** What does it mean to spiritually grow and mature?

**ANSWER:** During childhood and adolescence we physically, mentally and emotionally grew. The changes we experienced were centered primarily around body capacities, mental skills and interests, and emotional preferences and connections. Growth in these domains as adults is more of a process of elaboration, refinement, retraining and aging.

In terms of the spiritual, our attention moves beyond the physical, mental and emotional, to other dimensions of our being, to the sacred dimensions. We seek fulfillment, meaning and connection in ways that are not governed by the appearance and limitations of the body, or the tentativeness and blandness of understanding, or likes and dislikes. We mature by opening to the sacred nature of our own being and that of all life. We may initially think that we need to improve our body, perfect our mind, and balance our emotions in order to be spiritual.

These goals are worthy and useful but miss the point of what it means to spiritually mature. It does not matter whether we are ill and crippled. Being able to solve complex problems does not help and can in fact mislead us into treating spiritual development as a problem to be solved. Feeling anger, love, sadness, fear, and desire does not result in any particular spiritual realization as such and can tempt us to mistake intensity for authenticity and depth.

**S**piritual work cultivates our attention and consciousness beyond the superficial appearances and feelings of life. It embraces the sacred depth that is hidden within the conditions of our physical, mental,

and emotional life. It frees us from having our attention entirely hijacked by reactions, so that we can encompass the wider picture in each living moment, can experience the depth of connection, and creatively act because we are fully present, open, clear, loving, and dedicated. We move from moment to moment by openly relaxing into the flow of life, constantly becoming, even as we continue to act responsibly in creating beauty and benefit in the world.

Spiritual maturity is not about personal fulfillment, emotional well-being or even spiritual achievement. It is not about living a well-adjusted life. None of these is excluded but they often support narcissistic agendas rather than a larger sacred purpose. To spiritually mature we work not only to embody sacred qualities; we also serve others and contribute to their growth and freedom.

**QUESTION:** I find myself wanting to be good in all kinds of ways and yet not acting on my intentions. How do we follow through?

**ANSWER:** In trying to live a dedicated life, we must reconcile our basic desire to be “good” with the recurring reality that for most of human history, if not all of it, outrageous behaviors occur and people behave badly, including ourselves. This reconciliation requires the practice of virtue.

**T**he purpose of virtue is to release, reveal, and grow the soul in wisdom, love and conduct. Virtue trains us to live beyond our self-preoccupations into sacred and communal centeredness, a heart posture that is both self-surpassing and all encompassing.

The first step is to refrain from habitually reacting in ways that diminish ourselves, others or our environment. We don’t dump our uncomfortable feelings inappropriately. We resist speaking ill of others and of life except when it

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

clearly serves a beneficial purpose. We avoid meaningless gossip, habitual criticism, trivial talk and disconnecting communication. Basically we examine our motivations and actions in order to move beyond those that derive from reactive fears, insatiable neediness and insensitivity.

Virtue supports the development of our character and a heart posture of basic dignity. Our dignity is our intrinsic nobility of character as a manifestation of sacredness. Character is the body of qualities that are our habits of the heart. It is the core way we personally and communally live. Building sacred character as a dedicated person means turning everything into an opportunity to create value.

This is easy to say and difficult to do. Along the way we have to live with the pull of reactive habits and the desire to grow into something we value beyond the reactive. We need to hold both.

Buddhism teaches us to live with paradox, namely to live with what appears contradictory and contrary to expectations. We hold two, three and even more apparently incompatible truths simultaneously. Buddhist teachings speak of emptiness is form and form is emptiness, and of light is darkness and darkness is light and how to live not-one and not-two simultaneously. The point in living with paradox is to embrace all aspects of ourselves, our community, and life.

One of the sacred principles of spiritual growth is that we work in order to be worked. We trust that as we work to develop spiritual capacity the processes of sacred consciousness will have their own dynamics, will carry us along, and will accelerate our growth. It is similar to an experienced runner who moves into the zone of the flow of running or to a cyclist who pedals to ascend an incline and then uses mostly momentum and gravity to descend on the other side.

*Every step of the journey is the journey.*

✧ Zen Proverb

**QUESTION:** I have been in therapy for more than a decade working on the traumas in my early life and in my adult life, everything from insensitive parents to a devastating divorce. Don't I need to heal all these wounds so that I can grow from a good place?

**ANSWER:** William James said over a century ago that "Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune."

In our practice, we recognize that adversity is a fact of life, that our heart has been or will be broken, and that the very process of growing is a kind of resilience. In this work, growth directs our practice and healing can be a part of the process as well as a positive side effect of spiritual development. Healing itself can be a kind of growth. The essential point is that we are not basically flawed, wounded, unworthy, insufficient or ugly. Our nature thirsts for growth, for opportunity, for having a positive impact in some way in the world. We are fundamentally designed to grow and evolve. Illness and wounding does not change this impulse and requirement of life.

**T**rauma is not the necessary outcome of challenges, pain, adversity, or vulnerability. Trauma is not an illness to be cured and a person who has experienced trauma and its after-effects is not disordered.

There is a great deal, not all, of trauma therapy that traps distressed people in a culture of vulnerability, fragility, and restimulation of difficult experiences. From a developmental point of view, our task is much more a matter of metabolizing painful experiences and using the energies and learnings for ongoing growth.

We use these "traumatic" experiences to rededicate

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

our lives and step into a fresh worldview that does not involve denial, fragmentation, and disowning any part of ourselves. Rather we extract what is useful, beautiful and of value. It sometimes looks like the theory of the shattered vase. A treasured vase is accidentally or intentionally smashed and there is not enough left intact to provide the basis for any good reconstruction. Yet, we take the shards and treat them as beautiful colored pieces from which we make something new, something magnificent such as a stunningly original mosaic.

This is the basis for the approach of positive psychology toward trauma. In this field practitioners call this “posttraumatic growth.” This refers to positive psychological change experienced by working with extremely adverse life circumstances that stretch our adaptive resources and pose significant challenges to our understanding of the world and our place in it. Posttraumatic growth may or may not return us to some form of baseline. Over time, it results in an experience of a more relevant and important life that takes us beyond where we have been before and opens us to a fresher, more significant sense of our future and our role in life.

Posttraumatic growth can take a number of forms. In some cases people facing a major life crisis develop a sense of fresh opportunities emerging from the struggle. In other situations, a crisis may be the occasion for closer relationships and more intimate sharing. Confidence can also flow from having lived through an extreme challenge. In many cases, there is a deeper appreciation of life and the precious time we have on this earth. For some people there is a deepening of their spiritual lives and often a revision of previous beliefs about the world and what’s important.

This does not mean that we are immune to distress and pain when confronting very difficult situations, such



as a divorce or a death of someone we love. We still experience pain, loss, and fear. Only now we recognize the process and can channel our attention and energies into the cultivation of deeper levels of insight, more inclusive compassion, and the willingness to take on, even the welcoming of, all kinds of life challenges. We undergo a maturing process of the psyche as it abandons naïve certainties and fear-based efforts to control experience. We gradually open to the richness and dynamism of the world as it is. We even incorporate a multidimensional way of knowing and seeing.

On a sacred level, the meaning of an eye for an eye means transferring the eye of wisdom to replace the eye of confusion, the eye that connects and is intimate for the eye of alienation, separation, and dehumanization, the eye that sees the sacred for the eye that sees superficially, and the eye that creates in the sacred imagination for the eye that destroys out of reactive fear, addiction, or confusion.

In deep spiritual work we visualize ourselves not as a collection of reactive self-concerned habits but as a wisdom being. As a wisdom being we are alive, alert, open, warm, loving, harmonious, creative and hosting. The world that is hosted is not our old perceptual and conceptual ideas about the world, but a world that radiates the qualities and energy of wisdom.

Our sacred imagination can paint a landscape of how things could be better and how we can be of benefit in the world. Without imagination, we cannot take true responsibility, the creating of benefit from what is. This intention to create benefit is useless without the ability to envision the situations and the possibilities of benefit that will guide our efforts to actually create something of value. It is imagination that makes it possible to know what other people's lives are like. It is imagination that

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

creates memory. It is imagination that is the basis for learning and being able to build a body of knowledge and insight.

There are sacred dimensions of being that are readily recognized when we attend to them and others that can only be recognized after disciplined cultivation of sacred imagination. These include deeper levels of compassion, sacred love, and the paradise of challenge. The cultivation of creative imagination that can perceive the sacred nature of life opens us to the mysteries beyond the usual structures of the rational mind.

We Conduct Ourselves as the Environment  
that Others Experience,



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

Life as a gift is also a trust in which we are the stewards of not only our own lives but of our relationships, our possessions, our communities, the earth, and of the sacred potential that is in us and in others. Everything and every moment is entrusted to us personally and communally. The attitude that all life, the world, and everything is sacred supports the heart posture of real responsibility.

As the environment that other people experience, we seek to become conscious of the qualities of our presence and the nature of our contributions. What do others see, feel, and hear and how are they impacted by our presence? What would a social and spiritual environmental impact study of us reveal? Are we ready to step up and be consciously responsible in the ways we show up, the communications we make, the actions we take, and the multiple ways we interactively touch the lives of others?

The idea of etiquette has as its central concern the environment that is created by our words, dress, and deeds. At minimum, etiquette creates mechanisms for the smooth interaction between people. At best, it becomes a vehicle within which people can reliably engage each other and meet in deeper ways that are authentic and wholehearted.

The life of dedication is concerned with the common acts of life. We are talking about the way we show up, our body language, the ways a caring heart posture manifests, not simply good deeds. At a basic level, we give our presence and receive the presence of the world. In our daily lives, giving and receiving attention with other people creates an environment of caring, presence, and connection. The dedicated person, even before embodying great qualities of wisdom, love and beauty, generates a beneficial atmosphere through their

## We Conduct Ourselves as the Environment that Others Experience

example of conscious and caring conduct.

**QUESTION:** What is the difference between conduct and behavior?

**ANSWER:** Conduct and behavior are both ways of describing action. In our culture and in psychological literature, behavior usually refers to action taken by individuals in relation to their personal thinking, emotions, and habits. Behavior is more self-referential. Conduct is individual action with the assumption of the presence of others. Conduct means to lead through our actions. It directs attention to how actions have impacts on the people around us.

**QUESTION:** What about authenticity?

**ANSWER:** Being authentic involves knowing ourselves beyond the surface reactions, knowing our fundamental natures and having that be the source of our actions. The words “authentic” and “author” have the same root and they mean being the source.

**A**uthenticity is not simply sourced from within oneself. When we are in a social situation, authenticity arises from the context of being a part of a group. Here the context authors the actions. Each context creates a particular social self and a contextual identity for each person in the group. In this way actions in a social context are conduct.

In developing multiple identities that we can draw from and use for the benefit of others, we are also moving beyond the kind of thinking that reduces everything to the “One.” This is a characteristic of monotheistic thinking—there is one god, one truth, one right way, one self, one reality, one correct action. This is habit of our Western traditions. Here, we are suggesting that there are many truths, many selves, many situations, many possibilities, many ways of conducting ourselves beneficially. This

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

framework does not deny unity but simply says there is one and there are many. It is inclusive rather than reductive.

**QUESTION:** How are virtue and conduct related?

**ANSWER:** Our conduct becomes virtuous when it arises from this sense of living together, of being in communion. Virtuous action is how we lead others in creating an environment of mutual belonging, of shared home.

**W**ithin the topic of conduct, let's examine three domains of our lives: our speech, our actions in the world, and our work.

Conductive speech brings attention to what is said, both verbally and non-verbally. What we say matters. Our communications are intended to direct the attention of others and, along with our presence, actions and work, create the environment for others. Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition, teaches that what we say creates angels that go out into the world and have a life of their own. It is impossible to re-call an angel, so it is incumbent on us to be very conscious in what we say, for what we say is always contributing to the environment that we all live in.

Conductive speech requires that you notice how you show up in your communications. These are some of the questions you can ask yourself as you ponder on conductive speech:

Is this the environment you want to be making?

Does what you say and the way you say it really reflect the world you want to live in and share with others?

Does your communication contribute to the wisdom, caring, beauty, and better working of the world?

Does it feed the sacred?

Are you being conscious or simply reactive?

Does your speech embody and carry a basic caring

## We Conduct Ourselves as the Environment that Others Experience

within which all other virtues of speech such as honesty, fidelity, love, and gentleness must operate?

Are you usually the subject?

Do you call attention to yourself or to others?

Do your stories focus attention on you or do they carry the listener to worlds of wonder, wisdom, and growth?

Conductive speech includes conscious listening. When we speak, we are closing our attention around the words we want to say. When we listen, we open to the unknown of what is coming in. Conductive conversation is a dance of opening and receiving through listening and closing and sending through speaking as we articulate what we want to share. In time it is possible to train ourselves to remain open as we are speaking and to transmit even as we are listening.

Conscious listening involves not only the brain but our entire being. We listen with all our channels of awareness, not only to words and meanings but also to the silence out of which the words arise.

Conductive action not only transcends reaction, it cultivates beauty and benefit for others. It creates harmony and promotes creativity. Conductive action makes a difference in ways that are aligned with our deepest purposes and our sense of what is needed.

Generosity is one of the great action virtues emphasized in all spiritual traditions. The most important gifts we can give are our attention, our caring, our time and our energy.

Conductive action is always informed by clarity and intention. As an active, creative participant in life, we are always making a contribution and our contributions can be guided by our conscious intentions.

Our work includes all the forms of work that we do as part of our society, whether in a job, raising

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

children, caring for the ill, or maintaining a household. The operating principles for conducive livelihood are 1) not causing harm and 2) helping others with our minds, our hands, and our hearts. Conducive livelihood merges the practical contributions of work with the sacred heart posture of love and compassion. The opposite of conducive work is not play but not investing ourselves in anything of value.

When we grow beyond our self-concerns, the suffering in the world moves us to grow ever higher, wider and deeper. We eventually realize that no matter whether this world improves or it degenerates, we remain dedicated to being a loving presence and creating benefit and beauty. No matter if we are loved or hated, if humans are simply a passing breeze in the trees in the life of the earth, if all our efforts at service are lost in the immensity of world machinations, or if we are appreciated or denied, the only way to live is to be lovingly engaged with what is and to act from that loving engagement.



**And Generate an Endless Stream of  
Blessings from What Is.**



## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

*Peace is not God's creation, it is our gift to each other.*

✧ Eli Weisel

“Responsibility” can mean many things ranging from blame, to control, to an attitude of creation. From the point of view of spiritual maturity, responsibility involves creating benefit from what is. It does not matter how things got the way they are, whether by our hands or those of others. The fact is that right now, all that we can do to take on responsibility is to work to create benefit now and in the future. This is not to suggest that we have control, only that our efforts and skills must be mobilized in the direction of improvement, love, beauty, justice, growth, and wisdom.

Taking responsibility means that we work with whatever is happening to make it better or to generate something of value out of the situation. The heart postures of blame, regret, guilt and shame all keep us stuck in past patterns of self-preoccupation, victimhood, and control. The heart posture of responsibility actively moves us and others into larger perspectives, current possibilities, and greater futures.

We create benefit by acknowledging and owning the consequences of the past, by grieving what is lost, by celebrating what is here now, by opening to being worked by the experience, and by dedicating ourselves to acting in ways that are beneficial.

Our intention is to make everything we do be a blessing. In this way we sacralize life in our imagination, in our growing toward spiritual maturity, and in generating community blessings in the form of benefit and beauty. Creating blessings intensifies life by increasing our engagement in the present.

## And Generate an Endless Stream of Blessings from What Is

Simply breathing can also be a blessing practice. In this practice each breath that flows in is a blessing we receive and each breath that flows out is a blessing we radiate.

If we are doing spiritual work to feel good, we are missing the point that spiritual work is about transforming who we are for something greater than ourselves. In acts of service, we do not sacrifice ourselves; we sanctify these acts with our dedication and whole-heartedness. Each of us is an agent of the sacred. We all live with the powerful seeds of love, connection, growth, and regeneration within and have the lifelong task of planting those seeds in the garden of our experience and feeding them, shaping them as they grow, and exposing them to the warmth and light of conscious attention.

To create beauty, whether through service, art, or simple acts of love, means surrendering ourselves to what is greater than the personal, offering our egoic sense of privilege, and transcending and transforming our reactive body of habits.

The task of freeing and benefiting all of us and supporting our growth and happiness is part of the task of the modern hero. Each of us is called to be the hero that seeks and lives with sacred presence and to become a force that challenges our society to move beyond its superficiality, narcissism, pride, fear, rationalized greed, and reductive, righteous misunderstanding.

Everything we do also creates destruction, a kind of death, a tear or hole in the fabric of life that calls to be repaired. This is the destruction of *what is* to create *what is becoming*. This is not a violation but a natural process of life that carries with it responsibility—to create benefit and beauty from what has been destroyed in the process of creating something new.

We can imagine being part of a sacred stream of

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

energy that is dedicated to creating benefit and beauty and is supported by a lineage of sacred masters of the past and present. The challenge is to make the modern world spiritually meaningful, to create the conditions in which each of us can grow to full maturity within the conditions of contemporary life.

**QUESTION:** Isn't it futile to try to change the world given the enormity of the problems, the magnitude of the forces keeping inequality and conflict in place, and the small number of people who are both conscious and committed to change?

**ANSWER:** To respond to injustice, the spread of exploitation and marginalization, fragmentation, narcissism, and cultural shallowness with despair and nihilism, as if nothing matters, is to miss the point. That too, is a symptom of narcissism. All great spiritual traditions point out that nothing is secure or promised in life except the sacred, that death is inevitable, that pain, loss, grief as well as joy, connection and beauty are part of life. Cultivating heart postures that lead to affirming action is based on neither optimism nor pessimism. Life has both. Our task is to consciously, lovingly, intimately, openly be present and dance on the fierce edge of the unknown and create benefit from the challenges we are given and work together in these efforts as we all surrender and celebrate forces greater than us.

**H**ere we are challenged to participate in life entirely beyond self-preoccupation even as we intentionally use ourselves to create conditions of blessing for others in our immediate environment. There are nearly an infinite number of ways we can conduct ourselves to create a welcoming, beneficial environment. And hopefully this will spread.

When we conductively serve a larger purpose with a

## And Generate an Endless Stream of Blessings from What Is

sense of presence and the intention to create benefit, we are engaged in “affirming action.” Affirming actions include simple, individual acts of generosity, support, healing, teachings, and celebration, as well as organized service, work on a job, community development and political activity that leads toward justice, a more compassionate society and a peaceful world.

Justice, from the standpoint of spiritual work, combines compassion with the impulse for fairness. Just as compassion is built into our human design, so fairness is wired into the brain. We have a basic need to be treated fairly and to have a sense of fairness for those we feel connected to.

Taken together, these blessings promote a vision of justice that recognizes and cultivates our wisdom nature so that we can conduct ourselves in ways that create a virtue directed community. This community supports conscious growth, loving and compassionate relationships, and conducive leadership by everyone for the evolving benefit and beauty of life. Justice is about virtue directed social relations and conduct that supports the participation and contributions of all people.

In a just community the social relations are fundamentally based in common sense, communion, compassion, love, equality, and the sacred dignity of each person. The conducive organization of community interactions and institutions supports the full opportunity of everyone to participate, to contribute and to cultivate the potential for spontaneous, skillful and virtue directed conduct.

A sacred culture of social action requires that we consecrate all activities with dedication, wisdom, equanimity and discernment. Such consecration avoids the pitfalls of reactivity, reductive righteousness and dehumanizing characterizations. Reactive approaches to

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

justice undermine the fabric of community and the sense of belonging. In a sacred view, we host the people and dynamics of our community with a compassionate heart and an open mind.

A sacred practice of liberation enables a just community to emerge by also directing attention to the colonization of consciousness in all forms. The colonization of consciousness includes:

- what we are required to pay attention to by external powers and circumstances,
- what we are habituated to as ways of thinking by our consumer culture, our schools, and our media,
- how our identities are constructed to produce reactive habits of perception and conduct, and
- what seduces our attention and energy.

As we reflect on the components of justice that relate to our desire for a free society, the distinction between “freedom from” and “freedom to” becomes clearer. For example, in our society freedom from would include:

- suffering
- oppression and exploitation
- unfair and non-virtuous conduct and laws
- dehumanization and victimization
- exclusion and prejudicial discrimination
- capricious application of laws and distribution of goods and services
- prejudicial restrictions and traditions

Freedom to would include:

- live and die with dignity
- become conscious
- participate equally
- contribute in meaningful ways

## And Generate an Endless Stream of Blessings from What Is

learn, personally and communally, over time  
grow in virtue—cultivating wisdom, love, and blessings  
take responsibility by creating blessings, benefit and  
beauty  
be skillfully spontaneous, personally and communally  
facilitate virtuous conduct, personally and communally  
belong as members of a community  
create a welcoming, supportive home as a community  
pursue common good  
impartially enforce legal behavior  
communally support ethical practices as a basis for  
conduct  
repair tears in the fabric of social relations caused by  
conflicts  
develop mutually loving and supportive relationships  
enter into mutually beneficial agreements and contracts  
surrender to contexts and forces greater than the  
personal  
encourage multiple forms of consecration and spiritual  
growth  
value and sanctify all life  
be dedicated to the happiness, growth and freedom of  
all beings

The outer work of justice flows from the inner work of wisdom, communion, and preparation for action that creates blessings. Issuing from such inner work emerges virtues such as openness, discernment, equanimity, patience, sacred dedication and generous contribution.

Justice guided by a compassionate heart involves the constant reweaving of the fabric of community. Justice holds the vision of the well-being of the whole community and its maturation as well as the maturation and well-being of its members.

Affirming action requires that we walk our talk, placing ourselves in an intimate relationship with the rest of humanity

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

and life in all its forms. By enacting our deeper wisdom nature, we train ourselves to manifest a core of love. Our collective actions, hand in hand, create an environment of caring, love and service. Our collective work, shoulder to shoulder, is dedicated to improving life and creating beauty. We invite all who share our sacred, affirming vision to join us in building an intimate society and a healthy world.

In affirming action we host all life, welcoming everyone and everything into the circle of our consciousness, caring, and love. We give them a home in our heart and express this through our actions on their behalf. We dedicate ourselves to improving the conditions of all life. We serve and affirm our heart connection to the sacred through acts of celebration.

A stellar example of this is represented by a couple in Northern California. Frank and Doris were in profound grief after their daughter was struck and killed by a young drunk driver. They attended the trial of the young man and spoke with him at length. He asked for their forgiveness and said he wished that he could make up for the loss he had caused. Frank and Doris kept in touch with him while he did time in prison. When he was released, he helped them with a small business they had created and the bond between them grew. Eventually they hosted his wedding at their house and have remained close friends with him, his wife, and his young children.

The materials from which we create beauty in life are extracted from the loves, joys, griefs, pains, and wounds that we experience. We are challenged to transform these into a sacred landscape. Often our pains, “mistakes,” and wounds define the edges and lines from which we make something of value.

Service and spiritual work are sacred paths of the *bodhisattva*, a Buddhist ideal of becoming awake and



## And Generate an Endless Stream of Blessings from What Is

being dedicated to the awakened happiness, growth and freedom of all sentient beings. The word *bodhisattva* can be translated as “one who embodies wisdom.” The essential wisdom that characterizes this path includes the qualities of self-transcendence, loving-kindness, compassion, profound understanding of the nature of the mind, the deep sense of the interdependence and interconnectedness of all beings, and the dedication to creating benefit and beauty for everyone. The bodhisattva contributes to the awakened evolution of the community into becoming an embodiment of the Sacred.

The *bodhisattva* principle includes not only manifesting wisdom and compassion but also our creative nature. The world calls us to become active servants of peace, clothed in the mantle of perseverance, dedicated to a vision of making life wiser, more loving, and more mutually supportive for everyone.

Compassionate affirming action trains the heart for service, resilience, beauty, benefit, intimacy, growth, transcendence, and groundedness. It integrates the above with the below. It integrates the personal, communal and universal. It integrates “here” and “now” with the unfolding of the temporal and the eternal.

By working on behalf of others, we feel at home and sense a larger calling to our life. The happy and flourishing life—what the Greeks called *eudaimonia*—is the life that aligns a sense of a greater good with what the Greeks called *arete*, virtue and excellence. Not only does this larger calling bless us and ennoble us, but we bless and ennoble it with our dedication.

## *Blessings of Mind, Heart and Creation*

### *Four Step Blessings Practice*

#### RECITE

##### *Creation*

Radiantly manifesting the nature of creation,

By fully presencing, generously contributing and  
resiliently growing,

We conduct ourselves as the environment that  
others experience,

And generate an endless stream of blessings from  
what is.

#### MEDITATE

#### COMMENT

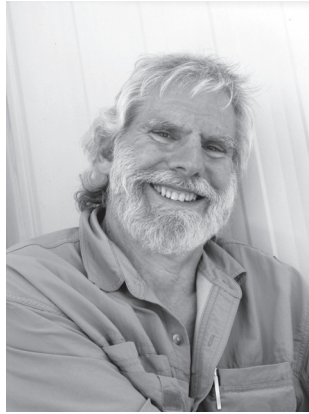
And Generate an Endless Stream of Blessings from What Is

ENVISION



**The Dedicated Life Institute (DLI)** supports spiritual exploration and growth and is dedicated to making the essence teachings of many traditions accessible in a Western idiom. Incorporating the principles of the mystic way, we promote both recovery of our wisdom ground of being and development of our capacity to use our daily conditions as a means of growth and the opportunity to manifest our true wisdom, loving and creative nature. Our dedication to living as an expression of wisdom and love serves to encourage both personal and communal transformation. The Institute offers meditation groups, retreats, workshops, and a home study program. For more information please visit our website at [www.dli.org](http://www.dli.org).





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In addition to creating and teaching trainings, workshops and retreats internationally, he serves as pastoral counselor, consultant, and writer. He has been on the faculty of Boston College and Harvard University Extension and has studied with Buddhist and Taoist masters for more than forty-five years.

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