

---

## CHAPTER 11 - WILLING TRANSFORMATION

### TENDERLY (for Gail Syren)

Tenderly our God touches us,  
blissfully our God calls to us,  
saying in our soul: let all be thy love,  
my dear worthy child.

Tenderly our God touches us,  
blissfully our God calls to us,  
turn thee to me. I am enough for thee,  
my dear worthy child.

Tenderly our God touches us,  
blissfully our God calls to us,  
saying in our soul: Let my joy fill thee,  
my dear worthy child.

Come to me with your sorrow.  
Come to me with your grief and tears.  
Come to me with all your mistakes,  
my beloved worthy child.

I will never shame you.  
I will never shame you.  
I will never shame you,  
my beloved worthy child

Come to me with your bloody hands.  
Come to me with your tender touch.  
Come me with all that you are,  
my beloved worthy child.

I will never shame you.  
I will never shame you.  
I will never shame you,  
my beloved worthy child.

He wills that we love Him sweetly,  
trust in Him meekly and mightily.  
In nature the child does not despair  
of the mother's love.

Tenderly our God touches us,  
Blissfully our God calls to us,  
saying in our soul - let my joy fill thee,  
my dear worthy child.

~ lyrics adapted from Julian of Norwich

## **MAKING HIS WAY JUST LIKE THE REST OF US**

There was a certain man who was just making his way in life like the rest of us, using the things of creation as if they had little value but money. He lived many years alone like this, and thought to himself that he was just doing what he had to do to take care of himself; others did the same. One day he caught a great number of doves and was taking them to the market to sell. He would sell them to anyone and did not care what happened to them. On the road he met Francis, who always felt great love for these gentle birds. Ignoring all the practical realities, he said to the man, "Please, give me those harmless birds, symbols of peace, humble souls. Don't let them fall into cruel hands that would put them to death."

This practical man in the presence of Francis felt a strange sense filling his heart. He could even feel it in his body. Suddenly he was tired of his life. What he felt now was so alive. If you have ever just been living your life, and unexpectedly found yourself in divine territory, you will understand what this man did. Despite himself, his self-absorbed ways, he immediately gave those birds to Francis.

To the man's surprise Francis took the birds and spoke to each of them, "O my little sister dove, so simple, so innocent, why did you allow yourself to be caught? I save you from death, so you can make your nest, that you may increase and multiply, according to the command of God." Then Francis like a child at play actually gathered with the doves pieces of bark and broken straw for the nests on which they began to lay their eggs. They brought joy and laughter for they were as familiar and as tame with Francis and the companions as if they were hens brought up among them.

Francis said to the man who had given the doves to him, and who was still filled with this strange new feeling, "My son, you will be a companion in this order; and will serve most fervently the holy lord's way of peace." And so it came to pass, for the man became a friar, and lived in the order in great peace and wholeness for in Francis' exchange with the doves he had found the meaning of relationship. Each and every soul he met, he bowed to saying, "Thou".<sup>1</sup>

## **WILLING TRANSFORMATION**

We find compassion and acceptance when we dare to hold the paradoxes, to journey through our own human hearts denying nothing, embracing everything. We are people on the path, not because we are good, or hold certain beliefs and religious affiliations. We are companions of the path because we hold this paradox: we are broken open by our suffering, yet we find in this breaking the experience of joy, the mystery of compassion.

To say it another way, in that fierce embrace of myself and others I find a new way of being. In my frailty the schemes to save my life are gone or seen as simply schemes. The defenses to prop up the ego are there, but appear pitiful. The house is empty and devastated. No one is home. Yet somebody is lighting the fire. My life, as I believed it should be, is destroyed. So who in me is dancing? Sweet Essence!

## **TWO GROUNDS OF BEING: BEING AND NON-BEING**

There are two grounds of being. The first ground of being is divine life at play in the world. The second ground of being is that ultimate stillpoint, non-being, the abyss of great mystery. From this abyss all arises and to it all returns. When we hold in our awareness these two grounds of being we receive the revelation that is compassion. Each one of us can be in the place from which arises the experience that is compassion, that I love myself, I forgive myself, I come from a source, I am of that source.

To receive revelation is to go into the desert of both grounds of being, denying nothing. Then we become value-making animals. A prisoner of war experiences evil and can name that evil. When he remains in the ground of being and non-being, he experiences a deeper reality of compassion. No separation. I come from a source. I am of that source and so are you.

In need of grace, close to the gods of life and death, in a beautiful and terrifying world, one by one we enter this great tavern of ruin where egos are dropped like old clothing and we stand naked in the naked mystery of God, and God is naked within us.

Francis and Clare had this empowerment through the dialectic of being and non-being. They experienced obedience in its root and fundamental meaning of 'listening' to the good news revealed within us and throughout this world. Right relationship involves a horizontal and vertical embrace of being and non-being.

## **FOUR FORMS OF SUFFERING AND WILLING TRANSFORMATION**

As we reflect on the difficult areas of right relationship, suffering and transformation we bring the practices of willing transformation to our understanding of four forms of suffering.

Struggle and suffering are as universal and natural as change, producing creative growth. Within the cycle of growth we also find the cycle of diminishment. The suffering of holy wisdom leads us to our true self, and develops our character through the rightful passages of life from birth to death. These passages through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elder status challenge us through change, grief, responsibility and service, empowering our spirit, enlarging our understanding and perfecting us in wisdom.

To these challenges we bring a willingness to engage wisdom in our daily lives and to nourish ourselves with the scriptures and wisdom stories of our cultural and spiritual traditions.

The second form of suffering is the disunity and separation caused by our own actions, beliefs, attachments, and aversions. Paradoxically this can lead to spiritual awakening. A drunk bottoms out. An addict has his moment of truth. A bitter person sees the effects of a sharp tongue, a cynical attitude; a crusader for a cause wakes to an awareness that his very passion for the good has blotted out the capacity for love. It's a moment of grace, a moment to get back on the path.

To these challenges we bring a receptivity to grace cultivated by the practice and awareness of our states of being.

The third form of suffering caused by human injustice burdens the individual and community in a way that can crush the spirit. Aggression or deprivation of needed resources speak the lie, "You are not worthy of life, love or respect." Whether individual or collective, abuse injures the other on a profound level. Power over, domination;

verbal, mental, physical, emotional, sexual abuses; economic, racial, sexual and religious prejudices; war and violence inculcate fear and injure the spiritual capacity for trust, especially in children.

To these challenges we bring the presence cultivated in our practices, the ability to bear witness, the compassion and relationship revealed by holding paradox, and the creativity of the troubadour in our response.

The fourth form is redemptive suffering, the condition of being at one with each other and all beings in both joy and suffering. This is the fulfillment of holy wisdom and the embodiment of egoless compassion, the reality of our true relationship. May we all enter this sanctuary.

## **THE MINDFUL GIFT OF DETACHMENT**

In the practices of willing transformation we till the ground of transformation by praying for the gift of detachment from our aversions and attachments; practicing the discipline of awareness of these; refusing to repress; living in our vulnerabilities; honoring the cycles of creation and destruction; the faculties of light, dark and shadow; and cultivating our identity in unity with the silent uncreated source and as brothers and sisters in the community of creation.

When the silent abyss of our nothingness becomes the abyss from which all things are born, when we let go of perceived identity into our true identity, vulnerable in the blessed here and now, in trust or distrust, awaiting the unveiling of what has always been present in the silence, we become available to the spontaneous action of right relationship. This requires no effort and cannot be attained by addition but only through subtraction. To say it another way, it is a free gift. It costs only everything, everything of the false self.

## **AS WE GROW IN UNION**

Most of us find we need to return to right relationship over and over again. To the extent we have participated in the cause of suffering, we do the penance of willing transformation. We, whenever possible, make amends. We also pray for all other beings that are like us and all beings whose lives have been affected adversely by our actions or the actions of others like us.

Personal and collective transformation is not a forced venture of the ego(s). It springs from something deeper. The ego simply recreates the old pattern in the name of the good. Transformation comes from the willingness to be in the great Silence. This kind of Silence fills the body with its presence, communicates and leads us into deep listening. From here right relationship is revealed and renews itself many times daily.

As we grow in union with the Eternal, we bear in our bodies and in our hearts the joy and sufferings of all beings. We are united in loving compassion and prayer for others. We are united in loving kindness and compassionate action. In both the suffering and joy there is the gratefulness that we are connected to the world and to our brothers and sisters.

## **COMING INTO SILENCE**

Being with the Silence creates the space of transformation. Action that emerges from the place of Silence leads us into a right relationship that we could never have defined by reason alone. The entire creation can be an invitation to silence, a doorway. Soften your eyes and look with your heart at the world's invitation to sacred Silence in your life today. Practice responding to the invitations, going through the doorway into Silence, if only for a few brief moments everyday.

## **SOUND**

Throughout the day continue with humming or the spontaneous repetition of a sacred phrase from your tradition. This time center the sound in the heart of your longing for integrity.

## **CONTEMPLATIONS**

### **Kinship**

Because of our kinship in suffering, our channels of contact have always been charged with the language of the heart."<sup>ii</sup> ~ Bill Wilson

### **Awaken Yourself**

Do not avoid suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering, including personal contact, visits, images and sounds. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need."<sup>iii</sup> ~ Thich Nhat Hanh

### **Be Careful**

We become what we participate in. We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful what we pretend to be. You are allowed to ask God to help you. That is the prayer within the prayer. To do nothing in the face of injustice is to affirm evil. ~ Richard Blanchfield

### **Basic Requirement**

This is what the Lord requires of you. To act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God. ~ Micah 6:8

### **Responsibility**

...even here, on the ground of Auschwitz, we cannot allow death to have the last word. From the remains of the victims, like grains of wheat, a new life must rise up. Auschwitz must become a place that reminds the world of the dignity of man and that makes each of us responsible for world peace. As then men (and women and children) arrived here from all over Europe to die, so now from here the proclamation of human dignity must be taken to the whole world. As then many people were at the service of death, so now we are all called to stand for peace, forgiveness, solidarity."<sup>iv</sup> ~ Roshi Bernie Glassman

### **We Must Give Peace**

"We must give peace to our brothers and sisters in each circumstance, no matter what path they go on. We must give them peace, so that difficulty does not come to them. Whether they go there, here, here or anywhere, we must only give them peace. Love must be our only form. Love is our path towards our brothers and sisters. Compassion must be our point of unity. This is our union. This is union with God. Our union is compassionate union on the path to God. We have come through the ages together; that is union."<sup>v</sup> - Bawa Muhaiyaddeen

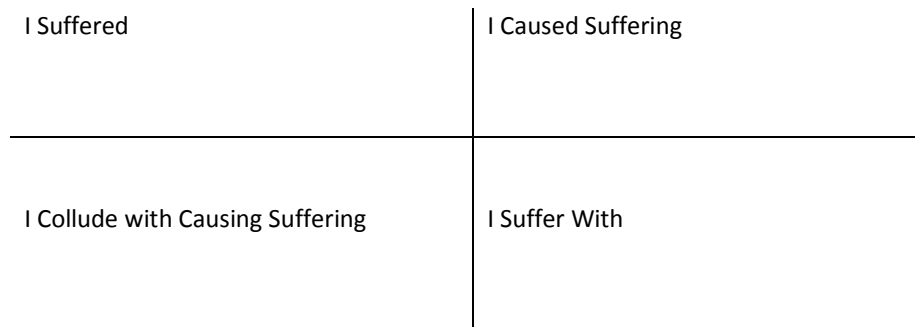
## Prayer

For as long as space endures,  
And for as long as sentient beings remain,  
Until then may I, too, abide  
To dispel the misery of the world. -Shantideva - 11th century – translator unknown.

## STORY AND REFLECTIONS

Before we can detach from our suffering, before our suffering can be transformed in the cauldron of compassion we must be willing to practice the discipline of awareness which requires that we allow our memories of suffering into our discerning hearts and minds. When we live into our vulnerabilities sharing our discoveries with our community, we then honor our own personal cycles of creation and destruction and those cycles in others. The invitation is always to be gentle with ourselves and others, to practice compassionate presence, to be trusting and trustworthy with the stories we share.

Draw a horizontal and an intersecting vertical line in your journal to form a +. In the top left hand quadrant draw a picture of a time/place when you suffered. In the top right hand quadrant draw a picture of a time/place when you caused others to suffer. In the bottom left hand quadrant draw a picture of suffering caused by your culture, nation, community. In the bottom right hand quadrant draw a picture of a time/place when you suffer with others.



## Blessing

May all beings including myself be free of suffering.  
May all beings from the most recently born to the most ancient of days abide in deep peace.  
May all beings including myself be filled with joy.

---

<sup>i</sup> Flaherty, Barbara. Contemporary adaptation from *The Little Flowers of Francis* by Fra Ugolino da Santa Maria, 14<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>ii</sup> AA Services, *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.; 4 edition. New York 2002.

<sup>iii</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh. *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism*. Parallax Press, 3 Sub edition. Berkeley 1987.

<sup>iv</sup> Glassman, Bernie, *Bearing Witness: A Zen Master's Lessons in Making Peace*. Harmony/Bell Tower. New York 1998.

<sup>v</sup> Muhaiyaddeen, M. R. Bawa, Suratur-Rahmah: *The Form of Compassion*. Fellowship Press. Philadelphia 2008.