

Pandemic Awakenings Week 4

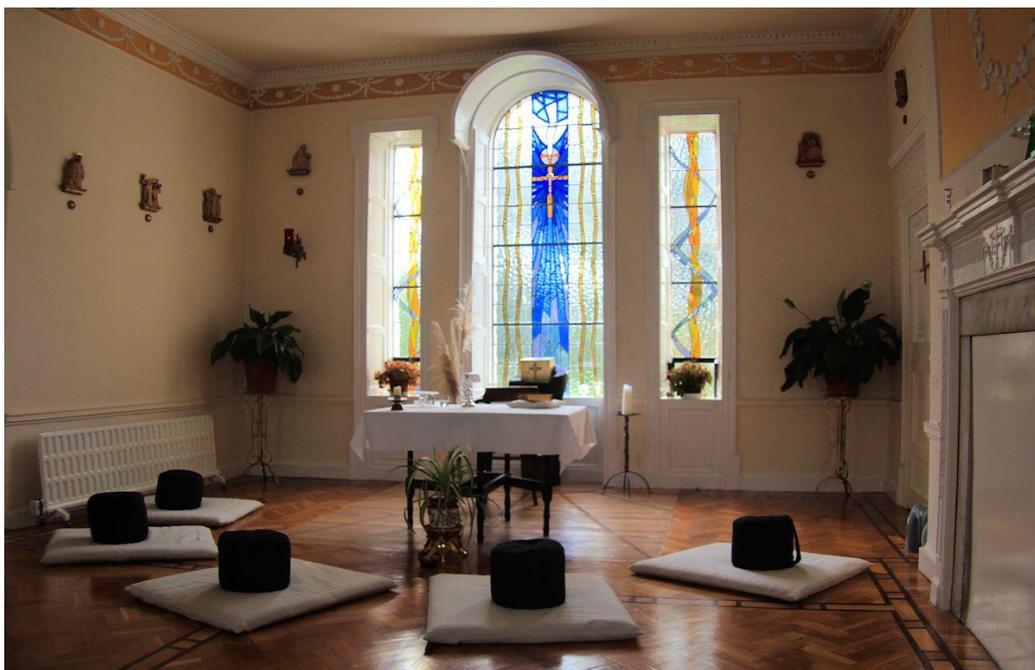
Life without Labels - Day 1



Society tends to value labels more than it values people. The more prestigious the label the more respect is afforded to the bearer. Instead of labels being attached to persons the reverse has happened and persons came attached to their label. This created the hierarchical society with which we were so familiar. We so bought into it that we learned to value ourselves more in terms of what we did than who we were. We allowed our labels to define us as persons.

Many have managed to see through this fallacy and begun to find their identity more in terms of who they were, rather than what they happened to be doing. To engage in this kind of process, while quite painful, is also most rewarding. This coming home to myself is the essence of the spiritual journey. For those who defined themselves until now, only in terms of roles, this current time when labels are worthless can be excruciating. If I am not what I do, then who am I? As difficult as this question may be, it can be the beginning of an inner journey. It may even completely change the direction of our lives from an outer pursuit to an inner quest.

In the Light of the Pandemic - Day 2



The Pandemic:

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Centre down.

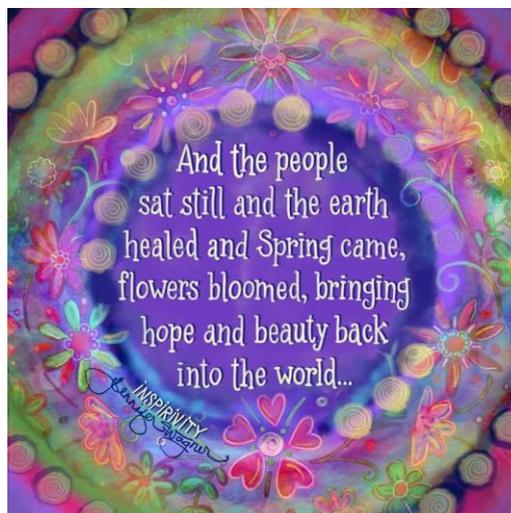
And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)

—[Lynn Ungar](#) (Lynn has a wonderful collection
of poems titled [Bread and Other Miracles](#))

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNBFcv-LrEg&list=PLYDgmt6r2HovE-Iz16bN4PV64nQp_hXM4&index=8 (Velma Frye:
Seven Sacred pauses)

Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)
Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.



Praise Song for the Pandemic - Day 3

Praise be the nurses and doctors, every medical staff bent over flesh to offer care, for lives saved and lives lost, for showing up either way,
Praise for the farmers, tilling soil, planting seeds so food can grow, an act of hope if ever there was,

Praise be the janitors and garbage collectors, the grocery store clerks, and the truck drivers barrelling through long quiet nights,
Give thanks for bus drivers, delivery persons, postal workers, and all those keeping an eye on water, gas, and electricity,

Blessings on our leaders, making hard choices for the common good,
offering words of assurance,

Celebrate the scientists, working away to understand the thing that plagues us, to find an antidote, all the medicine makers, praise be the journalists keeping us informed,

Praise be the teachers, finding new ways to educate children from afar, and blessings on parents holding it together for them,

Blessed are the elderly and those with weakened immune systems, all those who worry for their health, praise for those who stay at home to protect them,

Blessed are the domestic violence victims, on lock down with abusers, the homeless and refugees,

Praise for the poets and artists, the singers and storytellers, all those who nourish with words and sound and colour,

Blessed are the ministers and therapists of every kind, bringing words of comfort,
Blessed are the ones whose jobs are lost, who have no savings, who feel fear of the unknown gnawing,

Blessed are those in grief, especially who mourn alone, blessed are those who have passed into the Great Night,

Praise for police and firefighters, paramedics, and all who work to keep us safe, praise for all the workers and caregivers of every kind,

Praise for the sound of notifications, messages from friends reaching across the distance, give thanks for laughter and kindness,

Praise be our four-footed companions, with no forethought or anxiety, responding only in love,

Praise for the seas and rivers, forests and stones who teach us to endure,

Give thanks for your ancestors, for the wars and plagues they endured and survived, their resilience is in your bones, your blood,

Blessed is the water that flows over our hands and the soap that helps keep them clean, each time a baptism,

Praise every moment of stillness and silence, so new voices can be heard, praise the chance at slowness,

Praise be the birds who continue to sing the sky awake each day, praise for the primrose poking yellow petals from dark earth, blessed is the air clearing overhead so one day we can breathe deeply again,

And when this has passed may we say that love spread more quickly than any virus ever could, may we say this was not just an ending but also a place to begin.

(by Christine Valters Paintner, Abbey of the Arts)





Cross Found in a Tree from 1798 Battlefield.

Just how do we deal with suffering when it lands on our doorstep? To say rather glibly that God makes the shoulder to bear the burden seems far too simplistic in the face of the many who have more suffering than a thousand lifetimes should bring. I met a lady some time ago who could say in all truth that in fifty years she had only known two days of happiness, the day of her wedding and the day her first child was born. Suffering can, and often does, destroy our potential and our capacity to be human. The poet WB Yeats once said that too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart’.

Suffering also has the capacity to help us overcome indifference to the needs of others, and make us more compassionate and caring. It can also deepen our sense of faith. It depends entirely on us, and what we do with it; since it can either make us or break us. There’s an oriental piece of wisdom that says: When fate throws a dagger at you there are only two ways to catch it: either by the blade or by the handle. If you catch it by the blade it will injure you severely. If you can catch it by the handle you can use it to fight your way through to the other side.

Like diamonds that are mined from the deepest earth we often find gems of wisdom when at our lowest. In a strange way going through a time of darkness we often see things more clearly than in the light. It’s like the stars, we would never see them if it were continuous daylight. Suffering does have the potential to stop us dead in our tracks and force us to question what is important, what are our core values and what do we really believe in. Sometimes compassion is not learned or even awakened without suffering. It is also true that while we are suffering we are most open to truth. So a gift of the Corona virus is to give humankind one of its most teachable moments in history.

- Without **acceptance** we remain stuck with a sense of victimhood and injustice.
- Without **forgiveness** we get stuck in bitterness and resentment.
- Without **consideration** for the pain of others as much as our own we can get stuck in self-pity.
- It is all too easy to **blame** God (or others) for our suffering - because we have a false image of God, or are harsh and judgmental towards ourselves, or do not see that suffering is an essential ingredient in the entire evolutionary process.

The many obstacles that come our way in life can be CHALLENGES through which we GROW and are taken to new places of ACHIEVEMENT.

To Lighten the Journey!: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rhryZzdpME>

Discovering My Self Identity – Day 5



The 'Stay at Home' restriction provides a rich opportunity for us to take stock, to allow time for self-reflection. We could fill our time with technology and find we have as little time for ourselves as ever OR we can assess our priorities – what have I discovered is really important in life? – AND look at the question 'Who am I?' to grow in self-awareness.

The path of self-awareness is a series of crippling humiliations where it becomes apparent that the person we thought we are is not who we really are. As we grew up we may not have been allowed to be who we were and so became someone else and adopted ways of behaving in order to gain approval and acceptance. Later as adults we took on many roles that determined our level of acceptance and place in the world. Yet, much as we may have relished these personas and roles, and identified with them, none defined who we really are. As we get older crises tend to happen where these get stripped away and we can either cling to what was, in desperation, or let go gracefully and in doing so discover the wonder of our True Self. However, now we don't have to wait until we are older. We can discover the wonder of our True Self during the Covid 19 crisis!

I am not what I do. But I may do what I am as a way of self-expression.

I am not what I have. To have more does not mean to be more.

I am not my education or lack of it. I cannot get there by degrees.

I am not my body. I only live in it and it deserves my care and respect.

I am not what others think of me. Opinions can change drastically.

I am not my age or appearance. Both of these are continually changing.

I am not someone's carer. Another's need does not determine who I am.

I am not someone's mother or father. These are just temporary roles.

I am not someone's partner. The other is never my source of identity.

I am not my failures or my successes but am more than them all.

If I am not any of the above then, 'Who am I?'

While we can name all that we're not, our true identity is always shrouded in mystery and defies definition. **It is our divine essence.** In the end it simply is and remains the most real thing that there is. Discovering our true identity is to be amazed at the wonder of our own magnificence.

All Living Things - Day 6



What follows is an excerpt from *Prayers to an Evolutionary God* (William Cleary):

A well-designed car can be genuinely awesome. In its elegance we detect – and pay for – the cleverness and wisdom of its designer. Yet, the car is not alive; it cannot reproduce itself or evolve into a more ‘adaptable’ model. To achieve that level of artistry would require a greater wisdom in its designer.

That’s why we are so in awe of living things and their innate ‘wisdom’ which we call ‘life’. Their elegance is many times greater than that of any self-moving machine or contrivance for flying. Plain ‘life’ is the holiest, most awesome and elegant thing we will ever encounter. Diarmuid O’Murchu writes, ‘In contemplation . . . we become receptive . . . and begin to comprehend the wisdom that is innate to all living things’ (*Evolutionary Faith*). Einstein felt the same way: ‘There are only two ways to live you life’, he said, ‘One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is’.

Seeking Enlightenment:

Creative Presence, we would be, with your help, wiser than we are.

We would observe always what we glimpse occasionally:

The wisdom incarnate in all living things,

The harmonies and dissonances within cosmic symphony.

The moving, breathing world of creatures

Alive and living around us

Is full of astonishing feats of intelligence,

Wonderful patterns and structures of cells and organs

That speak continually of your limitless divine life

And confidence in us,

Confidence we will find the way toward living perceptively.

Guide us on the way of faith – and wisdom. May it be so.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMXD4h5w8D8>

Pandemic Awakenings, Day 7 - Conscious Appreciation

In "LAUDATO SI' Pope Francis reminds us that the earth, our common home 'is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us'. 'This sister', he writes, 'now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her'.

The harm we have caused to our common home is the result of our disconnection with it. Perhaps these days of restricted movement has given rise to a greater sense of connection with the earth, a new appreciation of its beauty and of the wealth that she provides, as well as a sense of just how dependent we are on it for our well-being. We have learned that in a very short time the earth's skies and its rivers are already recovering from the huge industrial and traffic pollution - greatly reduced now that so many are forced to work from home.

A Prayer of Environmental Appreciation

This Universe, O Holiest One, is the garb of your spirit.
You flared forth in all directions,
Birthing and blessing space and time
With fireworks beyond compare.
You clothed yourself in spiral galaxies
And set the neutron stars in your crown of diamonds.

You are the longing within the atoms for communion,
The urge within each molecule for self-expression,
The knowing within each cell of its dignity.

Your being and beauty flows freely into and through
All of creation and this great procession of life
Which we wish to celebrate:



We give thanks for Mother Earth
Your spirit enfleshed,
Giving birth from her oceans,
Carrying nutrients by her rivers,
Inspiring us through the forests,
Feeding us from her soil,
And delighting us with beauty.

We join with the finned ones and the winged ones,
The four legged ones and ones that crawl on the earth,
The mountains and trees, clapping for joy,
Singing together a canticle of the cosmos.
(If Darwin Prayed, Bruce Sanguin)

To conclude, a quotation from the end of 'Laudato Si':
God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, **the Lord of life**, who loves us so much, **is always present**. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. *Praise be to him!*