

Make of yourself a light, the Buddha said, while lying beneath the sala tree, on the day of his death, the poet imagines in her poem. His beloved disciples gathered round, looking at him, longing still, we might imagine, for his wisdom and guidance, for his reassurance, too, expressions of fear still painted across their brows.

Make of yourself a light, he said, though he might have said anything, knowing it was to be his final hour. How, I wonder these many years later—how in that moment, on that day, at that hour—how must this instruction, this last lesson in right living have baffled, and perplexed, even unsettled some of those gathered by his side?

There are times I think I can almost imagine his voice, hear aloud in my own head what the Buddha's thoughts might have been that day...

Knowing that you love me, (he might have said), knowing, too, that you are frightened and grieving, some of you wishing, in your heart of hearts, that it would or it could be otherwise, remember this, my beloved disciples, sit with this idea, let the wisdom of its instruction grow inside you, let it take root in your mind & heart, even, if in the fullness of this moment, it makes no sense and seems all but impossible to do...

Make of yourself a light...

Though you are grieving; though your heart is breaking and broken, *make of yourself a light...*

On page 88 of what is now my all-time favorite, journal, slash calendar, slash notebook that our beloved Evelyn Foster gave me earlier this year, I have taped down a hand written note, folded in half on the page and held in place by a small, red, heart sticker that I put there... This note is a list of reminders & instructions in right living tailored just for me, though I suspect they'd work and serve their purposes for any number of you, too. It's a list my friend, Ruth Sullivan, who knows me so well, wrote one evening, some months ago when I was sitting at her kitchen table, clearly at least a little bit distraught and overwhelmed in that moment, as I sometimes can be.

Written in a thick, spruce green marker, titled at the top of the page in big, bold print, ***Ruth's Reminders & Love Notes***, her list to me reads like this:

1. Your health & happiness is way more important than a perfect sermon. (“way” is underlined for effect... did I mention that she knows me well?!)
2. You can say, No... (and “no” is underlined for effect.)
3. You do not have to prove anything, to anyone.

4. Doing a little can be, and sometimes *must* be, enough.

5. In the end, doing less means you have more to give.

And, # 6, the last one on the list: You, Sara Huisjen, have a light inside you that bathes us all in love.

It still gets me when I read that last little bit of her note...

Who here among us—longtime church member, friend, or visitor for the first time in this gathered body—who here among us has not, at some point, or many points in our life and living so far, not needed to hear, or wanted to believe this kind of message...a message that is nothing more or less than a kind of life line, offered up to another with love and confidence, with trust and hope enough for both people to begin to be able to believe, that at least some part of what was said, might actually be true?

There is a light inside you that bathes us all in love...

For as long as people have inhabited this earth, there have been stories, and teachings, myths and beliefs held dearly by many about the idea of love and this light inside of us. For untold centuries, countless instructions and insights have been given that point to, or hint at the possibility of there being a kind of Presence, a spark of creation and the Creator within all living things; what some people might be inclined to describe as a felt-sense reality too difficult to describe in words, that must be experienced to be believed; a sense of wholeness, of Ruach, or Holy breath, or animating wind, or spirit, that lives and thrives within us; that weaves us together within all of creation; a nurturing presence rooted in a love greater than oneself alone; a life force, or soul, or Goddess within that enlivens us, and in doing so, enables us to experience & feel ourselves alive in this world.

Even before the sun itself, hangs, disattached, in the blue air, the poet writes, I am touched everywhere by its ocean of yellow waves... I feel myself turning into something of inexplicable value.

What is the melding of this light within and without, this place in our being, known through our experience that we sometimes, in some moments feel blessed, even graced to know in our bones and bodies as real; moments in our lives where the boundaries between us and another, between us and the warmth of the sun, or the kindness of a friend, reveals to us, the true nature and power of our connections, of our relatedness, of the unitive embrace that is alive, and aglow, and at work in us.

In some rare versions of Islamic Art that allow depictions of the body, great prophets such as Muhammad and his close followers are shown engulfed in flames that empower, yet do not consume them; like the flame of the burning bush that confronts Moses with instructions. Such

deities and prophets are said to have glowed, knowing as they did, to let their light out, and into the world.

In the Quaker tradition, people often speak of “the Light within; that which is part of the primordial light.” Many of the Quakers I know say they believe the Inner Light they feel and listen for, is God, informing each person, guiding them, and revealing God's love to them.

In India, where many people practice & observe the Hindu religion, it's customary for people to say Namaste to each other, meaning, “that which is of God in me, greets that which is of God in you.”

Or, as another translation has put it, Namaste, “I honor the place of you in which the entire Universe dwells; I honor the place in you which is of Love, of Integrity, of Wisdom and Peace. From that same place in me, I see that we are One.”

In the Kabbalah, the ancient mystical teachings of Judaism, there's a story told about the beginnings of the world. In this story, it's said, at some time, in the beginning of things, the Holy was broken into countless sparks which were scattered throughout the universe. This scattering of these Holy sparks created a kind of diaspora of goodness; and that goodness is why, or how God's immanent presence among us can be, and is encountered daily in the most simple and ordinary ways.

The Kaballah teaches that the Holy may speak to any of us from any of its many hidden places, at any time; that the spark of God, or Light, or Love as we might call it, that is always there, however hidden, may, at any time, quietly whisper in our hearts and in doing so, wake us up...

Like the little bird in the story who tried those many years to reach that man who searched his whole life for treasure, but never listened, or paid any attention, or honored what was there, beside and within him, all along, of life's real treasures...

Like the spark of the Holy inside a friend who writes you a note of encouragement when you are tired and cranky, overwhelmed and too busy, offering her own simple, straight forward reminder, that you might believe in that moment, that there is a light inside you, that bathes us all in love...

Like some of the moments you may know in the garden, or while kayaking on the lake, or while sitting on the porch, watching the sun rise in front of you, its colors and beauty calling you back to a deeper place of gratitude, of humility and love.

Like the evening you stood in a half circle of people at the foot of the bed of someone dying, who is also, still, very much alive; standing there, and breathing, smiling and singing the lyrics to the song that goes, “How could anyone ever tell you, you are anything less than beautiful?”

Will we know to pay attention to these moments? Will we be able, and practiced enough to sense them, to feel, and trust, and recognize our own experience of the Holy hidden in the people, and creatures and landscapes we meet? With what measure of awe, and humility and gratitude will we dare to respond, again and again?

In her book *My Grandfather's Blessings*, author and physician Rachel Naomi Remen tells a story about her grandfather, who was a loving, attentive and embracing presence in her home in during much of her childhood.

An Orthodox Rabbi from the old country and a scholar of the Kabbalah, too, Rachel's grandfather is the one who first teaches her the story about the scattering of the Holy throughout all of creation. He encouraged her to believe it, and to know and see that it is her job, as it is everyone else's job, too, whenever and wherever they encounter the Holy, to say a blessing; to do this, knowing it makes real, the possibility of a moment of awakening, a time in our lives when the holy nature of the world is felt, or sensed, and remembered.

Many years later, while working and serving as a physician, Dr. Remen would write these words, echoing her Grandfather's teaching and wisdom: A blessing is not something that one person gives to another, it is [instead] a moment of meeting, a certain kind of relating and relationship in which both people involved remember and acknowledge their true nature and worth, and strengthen what is whole in each other. [By doing this, she goes to explain,] by making a place for wholeness in our relationships, we offer others the opportunity to be whole and genuine without shame... [We] become a place of refuge... We enable people to remember [again] who they are, [to believe again, or for the first time, that their life matters, that there is something in them, worthy of blessing...]

Hearing these words, I'm reminded of Alice Herz-Sommer, a woman I was recently introduced to through a YouTube video on the internet. To date, Alice is the oldest, living survivor of the Holocaust, and she is a pianist, too.

In the concentration camp, she tells us, the Nazis forced her to play, even as all the others around her were dying; they filmed her, and other artists, as part of a propaganda campaign to show the world the happy prisoners. Alice played to save her life, and to ease their dying, and because in her heart, she knew the music she and the others played brought subversive beauty to that place of evil.

Alice turned 107 years old in November of last year, and she still practices piano three hours a day. She says reporters often come to see her, to hear her story. They come from all over the world, and if they are from Germany, they always stand outside her door. They ask, “Are we allowed to enter? Are we permitted in your room? We can stand out here. We understand why you must hate us.”

Alice ushers them in. She has no hate, she says, she has no time for hate, she has never had time for it. Life is too short. She wants to give all her time, she says, to laughter and gratitude and beauty, and here in the video she stops laughing, and talks about beauty. About Beethoven, Schubert, Mozart, Schumann, Bach. “There can be no hatred,” she says, with absolute solemnity, “when we have known such beauty.” The German reporters sit on her sofa and she plays for them, pieces she's been playing for a hundred years, many of them written by Germans.

Our call in this religious community is to make room to hear about each other's unique and varied understandings of the Holy; and to listen to the languages and metaphors we might use to express such things, as we attempt to name for ourselves that which grounds, and nurtures us.

It is our sacred work, too, to build a community here that seeks to strengthen and at times, even to hold for one another, and for the person we do not yet know who walks through those doors, that of us that is deeply alive, joyful and hopefully alive.

Of our lives, Albert Schweitzer said these words, that were spoken at CJ & Wayne's wedding celebration just yesterday: “At times, our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.”

Make of Yourself a Light...

While Matt turns on a CD that will play a song by Emma's Revolution several times through, I invite you, as you are willing and comfortable, to take a candle from one of the baskets that will now be passed around, and in sections of this circle, to come forward and to light that candle, and place it in one of these bowls, that we might see before us, a display of the diversity, of the light and beauty and life within, that we might bring into this world.

Amen & Blessed Be.