August 7, 2026

The Threads I Learned to See

The Story Behind the Brenda Blend: My Spiritual Way of Seeing

I've never found a single religious or spiritual tradition that completely describes the way I understand life, the Divine, or my place within it.

Instead, my spiritual perspective has evolved over a lifetime—shaped by teachings and teachers, contemplation and curiosity, places I've lived and traveled, people and cultures I've encountered, and the experiences life itself has placed in my path.

Only recently have I found a name for the particular combination of spiritual threads that seems to have woven itself through my life:

The Brenda Blend.

At its heart, it draws most clearly from **Jesus's teachings on love, the presence and impermanence of Zen Buddhism, the natural flow of Taoism, and the love, mysticism, and mystery found within Sufi teachings.**

I don't experience these as competing belief systems. Nor do I feel a need to reconcile every theological or philosophical difference among them. I experience them more like **different windows through which I've glimpsed something larger than myself**—and different companions that have helped me learn how to move through this life.

Perhaps the simplest way I can describe what each has given me is this:

Jesus gives me the heart.
Zen gives me the presence.
Taoism gives me the movement.
Sufism gives me the mysticism and mystery.

Together, they have become less a set of beliefs for me than a way of living—a spiritual orientation that continues to deepen and evolve as I observe, experience, question, and learn.

And when I look back across my life, I can see that none of this happened according to some carefully designed spiritual plan.

I didn't assemble the Brenda Blend. In many ways, it assembled itself.

The different threads entered my life at different times, through different doors. Only much later did I begin to recognize the pattern they had formed.

Jesus: The Heart

I grew up in a Christian environment, so Jesus was naturally my earliest and most prominent spiritual influence.

While religious doctrine and dogma never particularly resonated with me, the teachings of Jesus did—especially his teachings on love. The simplicity and depth of his two greatest commandments—to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves—spoke to me far more deeply than the layers of religious doctrine that accumulated around them.

Over time, my relationship with Jesus became less about religion and much more personal. I came to think of him almost as an **older, wiser brother**—someone whose example and teachings I could return to while still being free to question, explore, and find my own way.

His message of love remained the part that mattered most.

Opening the Door

As I began exploring spirituality more intentionally, **Marianne Williamson's *A Return to Love*, based on the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*, became a turning point for me.** Its emphasis on love opened another window through which I could understand spirituality and my relationship with the world around me. That exploration eventually led me to the **Celebrate Your Life conferences**, where, along with Marianne Williamson, I encountered other teachers and thinkers who would influence me deeply, including **Wayne Dyer, Gregg Braden, and many others**. Each introduced new ideas and perspectives that expanded my exploration of spirituality, consciousness, and the deeper connections running through life.

Zen: The Presence

Zen Buddhism entered my life naturally sometime around my thirties, during a period when much of my spiritual exploration involved looking inward.

Its emphasis on presence, awareness, non-attachment, and impermanence resonated deeply with me. I became particularly fascinated by the intricate sand mandalas created by Buddhist monks over many painstaking hours, only to be deliberately swept away.

There was something extraordinarily beautiful to me about that practice: creating something with enormous attention and care while knowing from the beginning that it was never meant to remain.

The creation mattered. The experience mattered. Permanence wasn't required for either to have meaning.

Impermanence became one of the Buddhist teachings that stayed with me. I even wrote about it a few years ago—although, with a certain amount of cosmic irony, that writing itself has since been lost.

Today, after experiencing the loss of so much of the physical life I had spent decades building, impermanence carries a depth of meaning for me that I could not have fully understood when I first encountered it.

The teaching didn't change.

My experience of it did.

Taoism: The Movement

As my exploration of spirituality broadened, **Taoism** became another important thread.

Wayne Dyer's teachings in particular brought the Tao more fully into my awareness, although I don't think I appreciated at the time just how deeply its principles were taking root.

For much of my life, my spiritual exploration had been primarily inward. Over time, however, something began to shift.

I started looking outward.

I became increasingly interested in observing life itself—watching what happens, noticing patterns and relationships, making connections, and becoming curious about the conditions that allow life to thrive.

Today, I would say that I largely **view and experience the world through a Taoist lens.**

I notice how life organizes itself. I pay attention to timing and natural rhythms. I'm fascinated by what emerges when we create the right conditions rather than trying to control precisely how something must unfold.

The Taoist principle of *wu wei*—often described as non-forcing—particularly resonates with me.

Choose flow over force.

It is a remarkably simple idea, yet I continue to discover just how much it can teach me.

And perhaps that is one reason Taoism feels so natural to me now. It doesn't require me to stop observing the world in order to find the sacred.

The observing itself can become part of the practice.

Sufism: The Mysticism and Mystery

Another spiritual thread became clearer during the years I worked in **Kuwait**.

Each day, the drive from apartment toward Camp Arifjan carried me farther out into the desert. Along the way, I would sometimes see shepherds tending their sheep against that ancient landscape.

Those scenes invariably made me think of Jesus.

There was something deeply moving about seeing an image I had known since childhood through biblical stories existing before me as ordinary, present-day life—a shepherd, sheep, and an expanse of desert stretching toward the horizon.

In an unexpected way, living in a predominantly Muslim country sometimes brought the world of Jesus **closer** to me.

At the same time, Kuwait gave me my first sustained experience of life within an Islamic culture.

The **call to prayer sounded five times each day**, becoming part of the rhythm of life around me. Islam was no longer something I encountered through books, news, or from a distance. I was living and working among people for whom faith was woven naturally into everyday life.

Somewhere within that broader chapter, **Rumi and the mystical tradition of Sufism found their way into my life.**

Rumi became a favorite. His words spoke to something in me that didn't require explanation—something about love, longing, connection, the Divine, and the mystery beyond what we can neatly put into words.

I didn't know then where that thread would lead.

Istanbul

In 2008, while working in Kuwait, I traveled to **Istanbul**.

Of all the places I've been fortunate enough to experience around the world, Istanbul remains one of my favorites.

I stayed in the heart of the historic district, where centuries of history were quite literally just outside my door. I explored extraordinary historic sites, wandered among outdoor cafés and shops, and took in the colors, scents, and wonderful sensory experience of the Spice Bazaar.

There was something about Istanbul that captivated me—the extraordinary layering of history, cultures, faiths, food, and everyday life.

I also took a boat to **Büyükada**, the largest of the Princes' Islands, where motor vehicles weren't allowed at the time. I remember having lunch there and simply enjoying the slower pace and the experience of being somewhere that felt worlds away from the energy of Istanbul, yet was only a boat ride away.

And then there were the **cats**.

They seemed to be everywhere—living outdoors, yet very much belonging to the community and seemingly well cared for by the people around them.

One of my favorite memories is discovering a cat sitting quite comfortably inside the Hagia Sophia, looking for all the world as though *it* owned the place and the rest of us were merely visitors.

I took a photograph of that cat that I treasured for years.

The photograph has since been lost.

Thankfully, the memory hasn't.

The Whirling Dervishes

One evening in Istanbul, I had the opportunity to see a performance of the **Whirling Dervishes**.

At the time, I simply knew that I was witnessing something beautiful, spiritual, and unlike anything I had experienced before.

Movement. Music. Devotion. Mysticism. Mystery.

I couldn't have known that nearly two decades later I would look back on that evening and recognize it differently.

Today, as I reflect upon the Brenda Blend, I can see Sufism as another thread that had been quietly weaving itself into my spiritual life all along.

Perhaps that is why reconnecting with Sufism now feels less like discovering something new and more like **remembering something I already knew.**

Seeing the Pattern

That is what strikes me most as I look back across all of this.

I didn't choose four traditions and decide to combine them.

They entered my life organically across decades—through childhood and contemplation, teachers and books, work and travel, different cultures, nature, lived experience, and my own continuing curiosity.

Only in looking back can I see how naturally some of the strongest threads came together:

Jesus gives me the heart.
Zen gives me the presence.
Taoism gives me the movement.
Sufism gives me the mysticism and mystery.

But I don't imagine these are the only spiritual traditions that have touched my life—or will.

I've lived in and traveled through different cultures, encountered many ways of understanding the sacred, and absorbed ideas whose origins I may not even consciously recognize. There may be wisdom from other traditions already woven into the way I see the world, simply waiting for me to notice the connection. And there are undoubtedly perspectives I haven't encountered yet.

That possibility excites me.

The Brenda Blend isn't intended to be a finished recipe or a new belief system. It doesn't need boundaries around it.

It is alive and evolving, shaped by experience, curiosity, observation, and whatever wisdom resonates as I continue along the way. I don't need every insight to fit neatly into a label or belong exclusively to one tradition.

I can simply remain open.

Pay attention.

And allow new connections to reveal themselves in their own time.

Perhaps the Brenda Blend isn't something I created at all.

Perhaps it's simply the name I've given to a pattern I finally learned to see.

And perhaps there are still threads in that pattern I haven't learned to see yet.

I hope so. 💙

Distilled Into Practice

As I look across these different threads and the ways they have woven themselves into my life, what matters most to me is how they translate into the way I actually move through the world.

The Brenda Blend has become less a collection of spiritual ideas and more a **living practice**—one that continues to deepen and evolve as I observe, experience, question, and learn.

Love wholeheartedly.
Honor the rhythms of life.
Move through life with compassion and kindness.
Embrace impermanence.
Choose flow over force.
Create conditions where life can thrive.
Remain curious and open to new discoveries.
Observe. Notice. Connect.
Allow space for the mysterious and mystical.

Why This Matters to Blueprint HOPE

Blueprint HOPE emerged through a lifetime of **observing, questioning, exploring, learning, and making connections.** As its founder, I naturally bring the lens through which I experience the world to the work—the questions I ask, the patterns I notice, the possibilities I see, and the principles I choose to carry forward.

Many of the threads reflected in the Brenda Blend can also be felt within Blueprint HOPE:

- **Love and compassion** shape how I think about people and our relationships with one another.
- **Honoring the rhythms of life** reminds me that timing, cycles, rest, change, and emergence all have a place.
- **Impermanence** reminds me that change is part of life and creates space for something new to emerge.
- **Flow over force** encourages movement with what is unfolding while remaining responsive to what life reveals.
- **Observation and curiosity** help me notice patterns, ask questions, and make connections across seemingly unrelated things.
- **Creating conditions where life can thrive** lies at the heart of stewardship—shaping environments that support life rather than trying to control the outcome.
- **Mystery and the mystical** leave room for what we have yet to understand, discover, or even imagine.

Together, these threads help shape a way of seeing that **looks beyond traditional boundaries, welcomes wisdom from many sources, and recognizes that our**

understanding can continue to deepen as we encounter new perspectives and experiences.

At its heart, Blueprint HOPE invites us to **look widely, listen deeply, remain curious, make connections, and create the conditions where life can thrive.** The Brenda Blend is one part of the personal journey that helped shape that lens—and, like Blueprint HOPE itself, it remains open to discovery, learning, and whatever may yet emerge.

With love and hope,

Brenda

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🎶 **Beautiful World by Michael Bolton**