

Now I Become Myself 8-27-13



Awakenings was the theme for August's gathering. We had many requests for the inspiring poem Jerry Bonanno shared. Author, Leza Lowitz is also an expat, but she lives in Japan, writes & teaches yoga... You can find the full poem and learn more about her [here](#):

From Jerry Bonanno at our August Gathering on Awakenings

NOW I BECOME MYSELF:

WAITING

Leza Lowitz



You keep waiting for something to happen,
the thing that lifts you out of yourself,
catapults you into doing all the things you've put off
the great things you're meant to do in your life,
but somehow never quite get to.
You keep waiting for the planets to shift
the new moon to bring news,
the universe to align, something to give.
Meanwhile, the piles of papers, the laundry, the
dishes, the job –
it all stacks up while you keep hoping
for some miracle to blast down upon you,

scattering the piles to the winds.

Sometimes you lie in bed, terrified of your life.

Sometimes you laugh at the privilege of waking.

But all the while, life goes on in its messy way.

And then you turn forty. Or fifty. Or sixty...

and some part of you realizes you are not alone
and you find signs of this in the animal kingdom –

when a snake sheds its skin its eyes glaze over,
it slinks under a rock, not wanting to be touched,
and when caterpillar turns to butterfly

if the pupa is brushed, it will die –

and when the bird taps its beak hungrily against the egg

it's because the thing is too small, too small,

and it needs to break out.

And midlife walks you into that wisdom
that this is what transformation looks like –
the mess of it, the tapping at the walls of your life,
the yearning and writhing and pushing, until one day, one day
you emerge from the wreck
embracing both the immense dawn
and the dusk of the body,
glistening, beautiful
just as you are.

March 8, 2015

Lead

by Mary Oliver

Here is a story
to break your heart.
Are you willing?
This winter
the loons came to our harbor
and died, one by one,
of nothing we could see.
A friend told me
of one on the shore
that lifted its head and opened
the elegant beak and cried out
in the long, sweet savoring of its life
which, if you have heard it,
you know is a sacred thing.,
and for which, if you have not heard it,
you had better hurry to where
they still sing.
And, believe me, tell no one
just where that is.
The next morning
this loon, speckled
and iridescent and with a plan
to fly home
to some hidden lake,
was dead on the shore.
I tell you this
to break your heart,
by which I mean only
that it break open and never close again
to the rest of the world.

Kathy's Quotes
November 9, 2014

God gives but doesn't share. ~Haitian proverb

God gives us humans everything we need to flourish, but he is not the one who is supposed to divvy it up, that charge is laid upon us. ~Translation (Dr. Paul Farmer)

The idea that some lives matter less is the root of all that is wrong with the world. ~Paul Farmer, MD, Partners in Health

We must never stop dreaming. Dreams provide nourishment for the soul, just as a meal does for the body.

~Paulo Coelho

Your destiny is to develop the courage to flesh out the great dreams, to dare to love, to dare to care, to dare to want to be significant and to admit it, not by the things you own or the positions you hold, but by the lives you live.

~Maya Angelou

1985 commencement speech

“Because living into the questions means opening to a quality of living presence flowing through you, through the moments of your days. So you become the questions, unfolding and ever new, revealing the possibilities of this human life.”

Sherry Ruth Anderson

The Journey

by Mary Oliver

Shared by Marilyn September 14, 2014

One day you finally knew
what you had to do, and began,
though the voices around you
kept shouting
their bad advice—
though the whole house
began to tremble
and you felt the old tug
at your ankles.
“Mend my life!”

each voice cried.
But you didn't stop.
You knew what you had to do,
though the wind pried
with its stiff fingers
at the very foundations,
though their melancholy
was terrible.
It was already late
enough, and a wild night,
and the road full of fallen
branches and stones.
But little by little,
as you left their voices behind,
the stars began to burn
through the sheets of clouds,
and there was a new voice
which you slowly
recognized as your own,
that kept you company
as you strode deeper and deeper
into the world,
determined to do
the only thing you could do—
determined to save
the only life you could save.

Anna's Not Church meditation, December 8, 2013

A Gift Resides in Every Moment
(adapted from Deepak Chopra)

When everything is flowing according to our idea of how things should be, it's easy to feel that we're living in harmony with the rhythms of the universe. But when there is a clear gap between what we want and how our life is unfolding we are more likely to feel stress and doubt. We may judge a situation as wrong or unfair, or judge ourselves for what we see as our shortcomings or failures. When our mind is full of resistance and painful thoughts, it's difficult to access our innate state of wisdom, clarity and creativity. We get caught up in our thoughts and begin to think that we are our thoughts. In the inner quiet of meditation, our mind settles and we are able to witness our thoughts and limiting stories as a detached observer. As our awareness expands, we begin to see the hidden gifts and possibilities in whatever challenge we are facing. With a shift of perception we realize what appears to be a devastating setback has actually cleared the way for our rebirth and transformation. The life cycle of the sequoia tree offers a beautiful example of nature's cycles of clearing and renewal. The giant sequoias are some of the world's most ancient trees, the oldest is estimated to be about 3,500 years old. What is

the secret of the sequoias incredible longevity? The elemental power of fire. Periodic forest fires clear away everything that threatens the trees' survival while insuring their growth and regeneration. Without the fire's heat, the sequoia cones couldn't open and release their seeds.

In your own life you can probably think of examples of events that felt like a dream going up in flames, but which ended up being the start of something more wonderful than you could ever have imagined. For instance, being laid off from a job may have lead you to take action on a long held dream of opening your own business, or going back to school to train in a different field.

Today, as we meditate, remember that from the soul's perspective, there is no such thing as success or failure; there is only the present moment which is filled with infinite possibilities. As we prepare to meditate, let's set the intention to gently acknowledge and release all thoughts and feelings about our perceived challenges and adversities that do not serve us. Let's fill that newly cleared space with infinite love, light, and joy, as we step into this acceptance and find our resilience, and we open to our own infinite potential.

Now consider this centering thought, "A gift resides in every moment." A gift resides in every moment.

Compassion – September 8, 2013

Mother Teresa, Namaste, Maimonides, Inspirations from Molly & Arthur

KATHY HIGGINS

Mother Teresa

God has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which God's compassion for the world is to look out,

Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good,

And yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.

Namaste

I honor the place in you in which the entire universe dwells.

I honor the place in you which is of love, of integrity, of wisdom and of peace.

When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are on

RON DE JONG

Maimonides' Eight Levels of Charity (highest to lowest)

1. He who helps a fellowman to support himself by a gift, or a loan, or by finding employment for him, thus helping him to become self-supporting.
2. He who gives without knowing to whom he gives, neither does the recipient know from whom he receives.
3. He who gives without making his identity known.
4. He who gives without knowing to whom he gives, although the recipient knows the identity of the donor.
5. He who gives before he is asked.
6. He who gives what he should, but only after he is asked.
7. He who gives less than he should, but gives graciously.
8. He who gives grudgingly, reluctantly, or with regret.

Maimonides' Oath

"The eternal providence has appointed me to watch over the life and health of Thy creatures. May the love for my art actuate me at all time; may neither avarice nor miserliness, nor thirst for glory or for a great reputation engage my mind; for the enemies of truth and philanthropy could easily deceive me and make me forgetful of my lofty aim of doing good to Thy children.

May I never see in the patient anything but a fellow creature in pain.

Grant me the strength, time and opportunity always to correct what I have acquired, always to extend its domain; for knowledge is immense and the spirit of man can extend indefinitely to enrich itself daily with new requirements. Today he can discover his errors of yesterday and tomorrow he can obtain a new light on what he thinks himself sure of today.

Oh, God, Thou has appointed me to watch over the life and death of Thy creatures; here am I ready for my vocation and now I turn unto my calling."

TEENA CALDERONI

"Wild Geese" ~ Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.

You do not have to walk on your knees

For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.

You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.

Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.

Meanwhile the world goes on.

Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,

over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting —
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.

MOLLY POST

When It's Too Big

Erin asked me if I would do a reading called

When it's too big (a reflection on Syria)

It was a piece describing the frustration, despair and helplessness many feel about the situation in Syria. The conclusion was: All that's left is prayer and fasting. Interspersed with numerous "Lord have Mercys".

When I read it, I reacted with a torrent of emotions. And the decision that I couldn't read that. But here's what I can read.

When it's too big (a reflection on Syria)????

Too big? ??? On the contrary . . . Worrying about Syria is too small.

We need to be looking at — why is our country bombing people all over the world? Why is it legal for anyone, anywhere in the world to bomb and kill others?

Why isn't war illegal? Why do we think killing people solves anything?

We have this big myth that killing "bad guys" solves problems.

But do you know anybody who ever killed that bad guy and lived happily ever after?

It only happens in the movies and stories, as my husband, Arthur ,so often points out.

In the real world, killing "bad guys" just leads to retaliation and more killing. Violence never solves anything. Never! Yes, we need a way to stop people who do bad things in the world – but killing them and everyone in their vicinity isn't the answer.

Have we, in our media-generated frenzy of fear, lost all of our creativity? Lost our ability to be inventive and to do so much good in the world? It used to be that everyone wanted to emulate us, now we've become the enemy?

When Jesus said "love your enemies" he wasn't preaching submission. He was preaching the most powerful force in the world. LOVE.

We humans are a loving and ingenious species. We need to put our love and our creative ingenuity into coming up with solutions to eliminate the dysfunctional systems that create enemies and instead build new systems that lead to a world of peace and prosperity.

We need a new system that's not based on the idea that whoever dies with the most toys wins. We need a new system that's not based on greed and using up every resource on our planet until it implodes. We need a new system that releases and mobilizes the tremendous power of love that is in every individual — so we can build a world in which whoever does the most good wins!

Now that's BIG . . . is it too big? I hope not!

ARTHUR KANEGIS

When images of bombed disfigured children creep into your dreams,

When you want to love your enemies but don't know who or how,

When you feel foolish for the smallness of your efforts,

When you doubt your government, doubt your news media, and...

Doubt that you can do anything to change the matter,

When your utter helplessness follows you around like a dark presence and laughs at all the empty things you say,

All that's left is to sit in quiet and go within

Letting the whirl of thoughts settle in stillness

To give some space for that still small voice inside,

That inner core of peace and wisdom

That connects to the ocean of oneness,

The "God Particle" of creation

In which all things are possible

All good is done

So be it,

Now and forevermore.

Parable of the Gem in the Robe



A poor man came to visit a wealthy friend. Late into the night, the two friends ate, drank, and talked. When the poor man went to bed, he fell into a deep sleep.

In the middle of the night, a messenger came to inform the rich man that he must go immediately to a distant land far away. Before he left, he wanted to do something for his poor friend to show how much he cared for him. But he did not want to wake his friend from such a deep sleep.

So the wealthy friend sewed a beautiful colored gem inside the hem of his poor friend's robe. This jewel had the power to satisfy all of one's desires.

The next morning, the poor man awoke to find himself alone in his wealthy friend's house. Totally unaware of anything that had taken place while he was sleeping, he wandered off.

The poor man traveled from place to place, looking for work. All the while, he was completely unaware that he possessed a priceless gem in the hem of his robe.

A long time passed until one day, by chance, the wealthy friend came upon the poor man in the street.

Seeing the man's impoverished condition, the wealthy friend asked him:

"Why have you allowed yourself to become so poor? You could have used the jewel that I gave you to live your life in comfort. You must still have it, yet you are living so miserably. Why don't you use the gem to get what you need? You can have anything you want!"

Bewildered, the poor man fumbled through the inside of his robe and, with the help of his friend, found the gem. Ashamed of his ignorance yet overcome with joy, he realized for the first time the depth of his friend's compassion. From then on, the poor man was able to live comfortably and happily.

Salutation to the Dawn

Kalidasa (2500 BC Sanskrit) – From Easter Celebration, March 31, 2013



Look to this day!
For it is life, the very life of life,
In its brief course
Lie all the verities and realities of your existence:

The bliss of growth,
The glory of action,
The splendor of beauty,
For yesterday is but a dream
And tomorrow only a vision,
But today well lived makes every yesterday
a dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day!
Such is the salutation of the dawn.

A few quotes from an autumn investigation on purpose and the meaning of life

Nadine de Jong, October 14, 2012

The meaning of life is experienced when we are in touch with our unique essence, sometimes called the divine spark within. This spark has no beginning and no end. It cannot be measured in terms of time or space. It is both individual and universal. It is like one light that shines within everything, and yet maintains a distinctive essence within each of us. When we are fully aware of this unique inner radiance, we feel what is to be utterly alive. We experience unconditional love. We sense complete safety because that spark also connects us to the universal divinity within all things. We feel that all life, within ourselves and others, is precious. We respect, delight in and affirm one another's differences. The more we affirm one another in this way, the more we are capable of greatness.

In this particular lifetime, in this particular period of history, each of us has the opportunity to express our essence through a wholly unique body and personality. The joyous areas of our lives are the areas where this divine spark shines through cleanly, clearly and directly. The areas of pain, confusion and negative emotion are the areas where we are still seeking to express our inner divinity.

The purpose of life, then, is to lovingly accept ourselves and each other, without bias or prejudice, as we learn to unveil the divine spark within. Barbara Brennan, a space scientist, therapist, and author

Do our little lives have meaning or are we an accidental skin disease on the face of an unfortunate planet? Are we here for a purpose or is it all nonsense? The only certainty is that we are here, in this moment, in this now. It's up to us: to live fully, experiencing each moment, aware, alert and attentive.

We are here, each one of us, to write our own story—and what fascinating stories we make!” Madeleine L’Engle, author

It is perhaps more difficult to answer the question “Why are we here?” than it is to answer “What ought we to do, now that we are here?” But here we are. Not one of us asked to be here or had very much to do with his arrival. With our finite minds we cannot presume to know if there is a Purpose. We sense, however, the presence of something greater than we can comprehend, a force as yet unknown to us—perhaps ever to be unknown. So we accept our situation, learn from it, and do the best we can, resting on faith, despair or cynicism, depending on the individual. Overriding all this must be an obligation—self-imposed or externally impressed—to do the best one can for others, to relieve suffering and to exercise compassion. We are all in this together, for life is a common, not an individual, endeavor.
Justice Harry Blackmun

We’ve all had moments when the heart swells and we feel wordlessly connected to a larger source of loving-kindness and compassion: the times when we surrender to the majesty of a sunset, the caress of a breeze, the laughter of a child, the eyes of a loved one, and we know that life is complete just as it is.

Through the ages people have sought to extend these moments into a lasting state of happiness through practices as diverse as fasting, prayer, meditation, selfless service, psychotherapy, drink and drugs, exercise and laughter. But the core prescription for happiness and meaning haded down through all the world’s spiritual teachings is unchanging: Remember the source with gratitude, and love one another. In this way the meaning of life as an interconnected web of love and compassion becomes manifest in even the most seemingly mundane moments. Joan Borysenko, cell biologist

“purpose of life is to be happy...Compassion is your road to purpose and happiness.

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.”

Dalai Lama

The significance of our lives and our fragile realm derives from our own wisdom and courage. We are the custodians of life’s meaning. We would prefer it to be otherwise, of course, but there is no compelling evidence for a cosmic Parent who will care for us and save us from ourselves. It is up to us.”
Carl Sagan

And in trying to figure out what life is all about, we ultimately come down to expressions of compassion and love, helping the rest of the life force, caring about others without any conditions or expectations, without expecting to get anything in return....” George Lucas

“Jesus said it best: “I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly.” How?” Love God with your whole heart, your whole mind and with all of your soul...and love your neighbor as yourself. Do this and you shall live.” ...”There are these three: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.” Theodore Hesburgh, Catholic theologian, pres. Emeritus of University of Notre Dame (From I Corinthians 13: “So faith, hope, love abide, these three: but the greatest of these is love.”)

Our purpose is to consciously, deliberately evolve toward a wiser, more liberated and luminous state of being...Deep down, all of us are probably aware that some kind of mystical evolution is our true task. Yet we suppress the notion with considerable force because to admit it is to admit that most of our political gyrations, religious dogmas, social ambitions and financial ploys are not merely counterproductive but trivial. Our mission is to jettison those pointless preoccupations and take on once again the primordial cargo of inexhaustible ecstasy. Tom Robbins, author “Even Cowgirls Get The Blues”

“Life has no meaning. Each of us has meaning and we bring it to life. It is a waste to be asking the question when you are the answer.”

“Regrets are illuminations come too late.”

“Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths.” Joseph Campbell

Why are we here? To take “Life 101,” a curriculum of life experiences through which we can awaken into the fullness of our being. ...learning how to acknowledge and contain within ourselves the polarities: separateness and unity, life and death, good and evil, activity and passivity, pleasure and pain, and suffering and joy.

Through this process we come to manifest, in our own unique manner, our heart’s love and compassion for others, and our mind’s clarity and equanimity and power. Thus is Spirit once again manifest truly in form. Ram Dass

The meaning of life has something to do with realizing that our essence is perfect love, then going on to live our lives upon that truth, experiencing each day as a miracle and every act as sacred. Kenneth Ring, social psychologist/near death

A story from a Russian mother: When Leo Tolstoy was an old man he was planting little apple trees. His neighbor laughed at him and called him a silly old man, because when the apples finally grew he wouldn’t be around to eat them. Tolstoy told him “Yes, but other people will eat them and they will

think of me.” ...that’s what we’re supposed to do: Leave more than we’ve found, give more than we’ve received, love more than we’ve been loved.” Yakov Smirnoff

Meditation by Anna Zimmerman Sunday, June 10, 2012

Each week we’ve been doing a little meditation, and today we’re going to do it a little bit differently. Please participate if you’d like to, follow along or do whatever feels right for you. We’ve also been doing a Not Prayer, and today we’re going to combine the two. During this meditation there’ll be a time when we’ll be in our hearts and you’ll have a chance to bring in anyone or anything or to send love anywhere you’d like.

To me, the purpose in Not Church is to come together as the community we are and celebrate our inner selves, experience whatever spirit is for us, without the rules and other things that can be limiting about traditional religions. You know there’s a web site, not-church.org, where you can share your ideas about these services and make comments about what you like and what you don’t like about the services.

One of the purposes of meditation is to get quiet so we can feel our connection to all of life, and so we can listen to and hear our own inner wisdom and any universal wisdom that’s floating around and available to us. It’s so common these days it’s even part of physical therapy in hospitals!

A meditation practice can cultivate our inner quiet, and a practice can be as infrequent as only doing it at Not Church, or it can be every day or several times a day. Once you identify what that connection feels like, you can go there any time. If you are mindful of connecting to your inner quiet while you’re doing simple things like walking or washing dishes, that can be meditative.

Living here in this wonderful place of quiet with all of nature makes this easier, doesn’t it?

Meditation is an ancient practice and you can do it any way you like. I thought I made this one up, but then someone said, “That’s the ancient Celtic ‘Marriage of Heaven and Earth!’”

Here, now you may wish to close your eyes. We’re going to imagine a particular kind of scene. There’s no right way or wrong way to do it. However it comes up for you, or doesn’t come up, is just fine. Another reason to meditate is to practice relaxation and it becomes automatic. Just relax. Breathing deeply in and out through your nose helps you relax.

Get as comfortable as you can where you sit, and have both feet flat on the floor. We are going to use some images that seem to be outside of us, but know that all of life is contained inside of you. The images will just help us create sensations, like daydreams.

Okay, if you'd like to, close your eyes now. Take a few slow, very deep breaths. Allow breath to come up from deep, deep inside and as you exhale notice how any tensions you've been holding, any doubts or hesitations about doing this, pass lightly out with your breath and dissipate easily and completely.

Breathing in and out, notice where your feet are resting and begin to feel a current of energy running down from your feet, through your shoes, through the floor, down through the ground underneath us, all the way to the center of the earth.

Picture the molten center of the earth. If you've been to Hawaii or if you've seen photos of lava, as it glows bright orange, so powerful and hotter than anything we can imagine, picture that core deep under us and feel the flow of power rising up through all of the layers of the earth and flowing, still warm, through the floor and right into you. Feel the warmth, or whatever sensation it is for you, flow up through your feet and your legs, flowing right up into your heart and filling your heart with an orange glow of warmth and deep love.

Now, turn your imagination upward. With your eyes still closed and continuing to breathe deeply and slowly, remember what the sky looks like at dawn or at sunset when the light is so magnificent you can hardly believe it. Feel that feeling of wonder and experience the vastness of that light. Where does it come from? Where does it go? Identify a particularly exquisite beam of light and follow it down through the atmosphere, all the way straight to you. Coming down through the roof, entering the crown of your head, coming through your upper torso and gently but very powerfully right into your heart.

See this beyond bright, white light mingling with the orange from the center of the earth to create a particular, unique color. Feel it circulating within your heart, warming and uplifting it and then circulating throughout your entire body, all of your being. Feel it flow directly from your heart out through your arms and see yourself extending your arms with this amazing glow out to each other, encircling this room, and from there flowing out to other friends and family, and then all around the world.

As you bring your focus back to yourself and back into this room, notice how cleansed and uplifted, how much lighter, you feel having opened yourself and having shared yourself so freely. As you open your eyes, remember that you can go back to this feeling, to this place, any time. It is all right inside you always.



Celtic Knotwork, from xnvx.com JD 172

SEVEN UNDERLYING THEMES OF RICHARD ROHR'S TEACHINGS

Fourth Theme:

Everything belongs and no one needs to be scapegoated or excluded. Evil and illusion only need to be named and exposed truthfully, and they die in exposure to the light (ECUMENICAL).

We now know from cultural studies and historical experience that groups define themselves and even hold themselves together largely negatively—by who they are not, what they are against, and what they do not do. We need a problem or an enemy to gather our energies. We usually define ourselves through various “purity codes” to separate ourselves from the “impure” and unworthy. Pure worship (&what we are for,& or in support of, and what we love) is much harder to sustain. Thus most reformations and revolutions need someone else to be wrong much more than they need any discovery of a higher level of consciousness themselves. This is an absolutely core problem.

Thus Jesus never affirmed opposition or contrariness, because he knew that it was merely a same-level or lower-level response to the problem (even when empowered by some new and good ideas). The new group was infected by the same hubris and oppositional energy, and would soon engender the same kind of &reformation.& Thus the endless progressive-conservative pendulum continues to swing and yet we do not move forward spiritually.

‘Emerging Christianity& is trying not to make this mistake, and hopes to be an inclusive notion of religion that is not against this or that. Evil and sin do need to be named and exposed (not directly fought!), however, and this is the prophetic role of religion. Without prophecy, religion is uncritical of itself and ends up being largely self-serving. Jesus’ starting point was never sin, but human suffering.

John's Prayer from our February 12th gathering

WE BELIEVE
THAT DESPITE ALL OF OUR DIFFERENCES
BENEATH ALL OF OUR DIVERSITY
THERE IS A FORCE THAT BINDS US
FOREVER TOGETHER
IN SPITE OF TIME
AND DEATH
AND THE SPACE BETWEEN THE STARS

May love be with us in all that we do
Amen, Shalom, AHO

Maya Angelou Prayer

Father, Mother, God,
Thank you for your presence
during the hard and mean days.
For then we have you to lean upon.
Thank you for your presence
during the bright and sunny days,
for then we can share that which we have
with those who have less.
And thank you for your presence
during the Holy Days, for then we are able
to celebrate you and our families
and our friends.
For those who have no voice,
we ask you to speak.
For those who feel unworthy,
we ask you to pour your love out
in waterfalls of tenderness.
For those who live in pain,
we ask you to bathe them
in the river of your healing.
For those who are lonely, we ask
you to keep them company.
For those who are depressed,
we ask you to shower upon them
the light of hope.
Dear Creator, You, the borderless
sea of substance, we ask you to give to all the
world that which we need most—Peace.

prayer – maya angelou

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www.worldprayers.org

Not Church Not Prayer – Anna Zimmerman, January 15, 2012

Prayer is another one of those words, one of those ideas that sort of put me off traditional religious ways, like God being vengeful and our needing to ask Jesus to save us. The idea that we have to beg and beseech some guy to give us what we want stops me in my tracks.

So what I do, rather than praying for someone, is send them love. And rather than asking for stuff or for any specific experience, even in the case of asking for something universally embraced, like asking for good health, I just ask for love. Sometimes I enjoy imagining what it would be like to have this or that happen, but I hold my dreams lightly and look for balance between what I think I would like and what comes to me. I love the expression “come into cooperation with life.” I trust that what occurs is for the highest good of all of us, no matter what. I am grateful for and look for the blessings in everything, even, um, tooth aches.

Just as I have translated the word God as the ultimate power that is the light of life inside me and inside all of us combined, I have translated the word prayer, so I can use it comfortably, and so I can relax, enjoy and be open and receive what there is for me in the more traditional services.

I’m going to lead us in prayer, and first let’s say where we would like us as a group, joining the power each of us has inside us, to send and receive love. Is there someone you’d like to send love to, or is there some way that you’d like to receive love this morning? I’ll start by asking that we send love to all in our community who are not with us here today.

Having a prayerful attitude can be comforting. Bowing our heads to a power that is greater than we are individually can bring peace and fulfillment. Closing our eyes helps us focus our attention.

Beloved God, we come together today to celebrate and more fully experience the light of life that is in each of us and that creates and uplifts all of us. Please hear our hearts, because we are more grateful than we can express in words for this wonderful life, for our community that enriches us and brings such joy, for the proximity to nature that inspires and humbles us. We know that you are love; the combined love of all of us, and we send that love everywhere there is a place that will particularly benefit from it this morning. We send it to all that has been spoken of and to all that we are unaware of. To every aspect of our lovely lives: to our neighbors and friends, to our families, to all sentient beings, especially all the wonderful animals, and to the greater family of the world, to the whole earth and all that is beyond it. We send our combined love especially to all who are struggling and suffering, and to all who are leading us toward peace and loving acceptance, however that arises, and toward ever deepening compassion and understanding.

We acknowledge and appreciate that only what is for our highest good will prevail, so be it, amen.