

## Christmas Sermon – Expectancy and Truth

If each day falls  
Inside each night,  
There exists a well  
Where clarity is imprisoned.

We need to sit on the rim  
Of the well of darkness  
And fish for fallen light  
With patience.

Pablo Neruda

The words for this morning are Expectancy and Truth.

Truth, like the word Love or God, cannot be spoken, cannot be described. To do so immediately enters one into the world of either symbol and metaphor or exclusion, duality and relativity. As the Indian sage Tagor says, The small truth has words that are clear; The great Truth has great silence. If we can be still, quiet our minds and wait patiently, like a serene and peaceful, pregnant mother, then we can expect eventually that we will clear the lens of perception enough to enter into the great Truth, the great Silence of our Being.

There is no Truth without Love and there is no Love without Truth. Truth, that is, Consciousness itself, is like the light of the Sun, and Love is like the warmth of the Sun. Integrated, together they create a radiance that emanates forth and brings life and beauty to everything upon which it shines.

We do not have a word for an integrated heart and mind in English. In Japanese there is one word for mind and heart, Kokoro. The Japanese ideogram for mindfulness depicts the heart and mind enfolded – in that symbol the heart and mind are brought together for a moment. In Chinese the word is Shing and means heart-mind-now. In Tibetan Buddhism this space is known as “The Heart Essence of the “Great Expanse.”

Absolute Truth is the great living changeless power that holds all of life together, that creates, dissolves and recreates... the source and mystery informing all of life. And this same changeless, power – Consciousness - the unity of all relative truths – the Great Truth itself - informs, and is at the core, and is the source of your own existence.

Wisdom – in the Judeo-Christian mythology, is represented symbolically by the archetype of the soul, Sophia or, the Purified Soul, Mary. Wisdom attempts, like a finger pointing to the moon, to express the ineffable, inexpressable in metaphor, image, symbol, poetry, song and paradoxical thought.

The aspect of mind that is furthest from the truth is the thinking of the rational mind that judges from a place of unconscious fear and shame. This is the place of darkness, rather than the light of Truth. All judgment is a very small, constricted and relative truth. This does not mean that we should not discern difference. Judgment is that which comes from a closed and fearful heart, a heart that has not yet cracked open with compassion and wisdom. A heart tightly encased in an armor of good, right and perfect, that cannot take a chance, cannot be authentic, submissive, humble, accepting. In judgment we stay on the surface with the most superficial of observations and limited of understandings of ourselves and others, with the firm conviction that we are right. Judgment is the realm, in consciousness, of hell, because it damns you and others to a place of shame and fear. It is the place of dogma, rigid belief systems, certainty and morality.

And yet, when you were born your mind was clear, wide open consciousness without fear and without judgment. When you die your consciousness can be clear, wide open and aware - unsullied by fear and judgment and yes, it does take a life time of work. The work of cleaning up the inner environment of mind. And this takes intention and attention.

The truth is, you are already the light of Truth and the warmth of Love in the world.... The Heart Essence of the Great Expanse. Whether you realize it, know it and have done all the hard work of shedding the illusions that distract you from the light is another matter altogether. Dying to our illusions is very difficult to do. However each and every one of us is called, expectant, pregnant with this Blazing Star of Love and Truth – it is your divine imperative, inclination and destiny to move through the dark and into the light, from illusion to Truth, from fear to Love. The expectation, the hope of the world, is that you DO come to realize this and shine forth in radiance. And what if 7 billion star suns were to shine forth... what if everyone came to realize their true nature and became the living radiance of Truth and Love? Surely then there would be heaven on earth and all suffering would cease, all darkness would be dispelled. No hatred, judgment or fear could withstand the light emanation that is You.

Meister Eckhardt says it in this way:

Christ's birth is always happening,  
And yet,  
If it doesn't happen to me,  
How can it help me?  
Everything depends on that.  
There is only one birth –  
And this birth takes place in the being  
And in the ground  
And core of your soul...  
The fruitful person gives birth  
Out of the very same foundation  
From which the Creator begets the eternal Word.  
It is from this core that one becomes fruitfully pregnant.

This metaphor is perhaps easier for women to understand in a bodily sense. You know perfectly well that once you are pregnant, you might have anxiety about the birth but you also know you are in it now, and there is no escaping the inevitable. There is only the choice of whether to co-operate with the process and prepare well for the birth or not. And so it is with life. The infant of Wisdom and Compassion, or Truth and Love, are within – you are pregnant, you are expecting. Each one of you, male or female, is the midwife and you are the mother and you are the infant. And this does not happen once as a historical fact to someone else - it is an ongoing and cyclical process of going into the dark, the foundation of the ego, and finding, birthing, Truth. At any moment you are either conceiving, pregnant, birthing or nurturing the infant that is You.

And yet, how hard it is to live from the core of our own souls, or “birth” our own True Selves. Our attention is so distracted by unconscious fears and pain related to the needs of physical life – to survive, to be loved, to get attention, to belong, to be valued and these fears and needs are the master that the rational egoic intellect serves. The intellect is not concerned with Love and Truth. It serves and functions only in relativity and judgment. The unmet needs and fears of childhood are relegated to the unconscious by the intellect.

It finds clever ways to control and manipulate the external environment in a vain attempt to get the inner needs met and the hurting heart healed – food, alcohol, high achievement and perfectionism, fame and acclaim, shopping, giving to get, busy-ness, baubles, glitter and artificial lights. The more successful the intellect is in seemingly getting unconscious needs met and fears temporarily soothed by these means, the harder it becomes to let go of the thoughts and ideas that serve our survival, instead of allowing our attention to follow the guidance of the inner star of Truth.

Only the wise do so. If we follow the guidance of the inner star it will bring us to the fearful, instinctual and unconscious place, represented by the animals, the ox, the donkey, the camels and the sheep, in the dark, the stable, the cave, the womb and we will find that it is here that the light of Truth is hidden and born. Truth

lies deep within ourselves, not without and we need to sit on the rim of the well of darkness and fish for fallen light with patience. We have to travel into the dark and deep inner recesses of our lives with the courage of compassion and acceptance, wisdom and humility, reverence and awe, for the miracle of ourselves. Learning to love the dark, be comfortable with the dark is probably one of the hardest tasks on the spiritual journey – to enter the dark with gracious acceptance instead of judgment is indeed the mark of a wise soul who can just Let it Be, without judgment. I love the words, Let it Be, rather than Let it go. The one implies acceptance of all that is unconscious, all that is painful and ugly and has created suffering. Letting go implies splitting and division which is antithetical to the idea of unity. Oneness includes everything, and everything that is seen, accepted and included into the light of awareness is transformed into something lovely.

To truly love ourselves, means to accept the broken, ugly, hurting, shameful, judgmental, unkind parts of ourselves with a desire for deep understanding and never ending compassion towards ourselves.

The path to Truth is found only through the heart broken open to its inner secrets of compassion and love. It is not found in our strivings to be good, right and perfect. As Leonard Cohen says, forget your perfect offerings – it is through the cracks of our defenses that the light shines through.

The great labor of love to heal our broken hearts and integrate heart and mind requires not only a willingness to go into the dark, it also requires hard work and co-operation with the birthing process. Both the feminine and the masculine energies are required. And while birthing is a good metaphor for bringing forth the infant of Truth, the story says nothing of the process of hard work and co-operation with the actual labor. Joseph is so conspicuously a non-event in the story unless one really gives it some thought. And yet without the masculine energies, the job doesn't get done. The feminine energy wants to hold within, the masculine energy wants to bring forth. As I was thinking about this I remembered a different metaphor.

Thomas Merton talks about "the brilliant radiance of the truth of the soul as a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven" and I flashed back to the diamond mines of Kimberly.

My father grew up in the desert town of Kimberly.... his grandfather was a swashbuckling Spanish count with a large red beard – a young renegade who set out for high adventure to the colonies of Spain. First he was a cowboy in Argentina but when diamonds were discovered in 1866 in the small desert town of Kimberly he left to seek his fortune in South Africa.

The first diamond of 21.25 carats was discovered by a teenage boy on his father's farm on the banks of the Orange River. The area is inhospitable, thorn scrub, and when the wind blows the desert sand forms dust devils and the tumbleweed dances across the bleak flatlands. In 1866 there were only a few brave, outback subsistence farmers, struggling against the elements with their hardy sheep, goats and donkeys. And yet deep under the earth in round cores of hard rock called Kimberlite are found some of the world's most beautiful diamonds. Kimberlite was formed from underground volcanoes of molten rock (magma). Diamonds are formed deep down in dark black Mother earth through immense pressure and incredible heat.

The surface of the planet does not reveal her secrets easily. And we are no different.

The outer presentation of our lives tells us nothing of the suffering, the heat, the pressure, the long process of formation and cooling and the decades when we lived with our finest qualities lying unfound in the darkness.

The process of extracting diamonds is a long and tedious one. To discover them, you have to enter deserted and desolate areas. Then the rock is mined ~ a treacherous and dangerous process. In Kimberly – the round core of kimberlite was dug out leaving a huge hole 42 acres big, filled with water at the bottom. Wires and ropes crisscrossed the walls of this massive well as men dug into the sides, risking their lives to extract millions of tons of rock to find the precious diamonds. The rock that is brought to the surface is crushed, sifted, sorted and the diamonds extracted. Then they have to be cut, and polished. The final product is a gem of great beauty with many facets that glow and and sparkle with light, reflecting little rainbows in the sun.... a worthy symbol of the light of Truth and Love.

The left over rock and impurities become sand and return to the desert. It is no longer distinguishable from the rest of the earth. The diamond however is indestructible.

Our diamond nature too is indestructible but hidden at the core of our earthly selves. It is not always visible on the surface of our lives, even to ourselves. The process of extraction is long, tedious and hard. It requires discipline, faith and desire. We can avoid the work in many ways and stay on the surface by making excuses, judging, rationalizing, intellectualizing and living a lie. To not know and embrace the truth of who you are and what you are – an incarnation of Truth and Love, is to live a lie. It is beneath the coarse surface of dry desert dust strewn with tumble weed that the radiance of the diamonds lies hidden.

Given the stories of my colorful great-grandfather, I think it unlikely that he ever discovered that the real treasure and truth of himself lay **within** – not **without** in the temporary relief of wine, women and song, distraction, adventure, wealth, acquisition, family name, titles and status. He was willing to do intense labor, risk great odds and raise hell in how he lived. And yet the greatest adventure is the one I am not sure he took – the labor of Love that gives birth to our Truth. For it is only great love, acceptance and compassion that gives us the courage to go deep, down into the dark and search for the fallen light of truth. And it is only through the dark that we reach the light of Truth.. We must enter deeply into the pain of our unconscious – the old wounds of the heart hidden behind the armor of the intellect. We must sit on the rim of the well of darkness and fish for fallen light. If we could just give birth to wisdom and compassion without the labor! If only we could hold the new born infant without the agony of contractions. The thing is, you can't. There is no spiritual bypass. It is those people that are willing to humble themselves by admitting and owning the illusions they live by, the shame and pain that they mask, the issues that they cover up and hide that are closest to discovering the truth about themselves. Just like you cannot find the diamonds unless you dig.

Last week Ellen sent a thought provoking email saying that the 5 top regrets of dying people are: they did not have the courage to be true to themselves, that they worked too hard, did not have the courage to express their feelings, didn't stay in touch with friends, or let themselves be happy.

I have watched my grandparents die and parents die and for all of them the unspoken grief of their lives was that they were not true to themselves, did not find the inner truth of who they were, worked too hard in the service of fear, did not express the truth of their feelings and needs, lost connections to people and were unhappy. Can we learn from the precious lives of those who went before us and redeem them by learning to examine ourselves deeply and live differently?

May we all in this season of winter and short days, remember to accept the dark emotions, sit patiently, work diligently, dig deeply, embrace silence and stillness, be present to ourselves with tenderness and nurture and follow the star of our longing.

Truth is in the Heart and if we dedicate our practice to going into the dark emotions, the veils of illusion will fall away, the door will open a crack, and the Light of Truth will shine forth and the radiance of Love shine on all who are lucky enough to encounter your illuminated presence and you can one day die knowing you no longer need to search for Truth and Love – you are the treasure you were seeking.