

Gratitude: Entering Sacred Relationship

~ a talk given by Tara Brach on November 27, 2019 in Bethesda, MD

(audio and video available at: tarabrach.com/gratitude-entering-sacred-relationship/)

Namaste and welcome.

I'd like to start off by recounting a story told by a great American historian, journalist, and author, James Agee. He recounts an experience during the Great Depression that struck me. He found an impoverished, elderly woman in the hollows of Appalachia and she was living in this tiny shack with dirt floors and no heat and no plumbing. So, he asked her, "What would you do if someone came along and gave you some money to help you out?" She was rocking in her chair and shook her head and she said, "Well, I guess I'd give it to the poor."

And what struck me so much about this is that it has within it one of the greatest spiritual teachings—the teachings of awakening—for true happiness. It's not about what's happening, but how we are relating to it. So, we can be in any state but whether or not we are happy, whether or not we are feeling our hearts are open, it's going to depend on how we are relating to what's happening.

And I was reflecting on us here entering the holiday season—the season of the holy days—and how, through history, they have been a time of pausing so that we humans could reconnect with something that was cherished and sacred, and live in a more awake way with each other—relating through creativity and song and dance and prayer to really be living in a way that reflected the divine.

So here we are and that's the invitation: Can we reclaim that even if it hasn't been so alive for us or for others around us and have this be a time of really living from love and gratitude and huge amount of acceptance?

Anatole France said, "It's difficult to be a saint in the midst of your family." And don't we know it? I mean, isn't it the truth? It's poignant to even use the language of holiday and holy day at a time when we have also such a sense of shadow hanging around us—I'm sure I'm not the only one having that thought—really a time where there is so much societal anger and agitation and dividedness. It's really, for many, a time of a lot of agitation, a lot of fear, a lot of distress. And then, for many, being alone during the holy days—living alone, not having a lot of extended family—just accentuates the sense of "I am by myself." It also gets really amplified by some of the cultural traditions that are so here and now for us, one of which is huge materialism. I saw on my screen today: *The big question: Is it better to shop*

on *Black Friday* or *Cyber Monday*? I don't know. But it's amazing. It's like shop, shop, shop. And, of course, we know that it's a time, for many, of over-consuming. And what most registers for me is the enormous cruelty of how turkeys are bred and slaughtered—true for all animals used for meat—but that's just considered to be part of the cheer of a holiday when, if we look behind the lines, what's really happening is pretty painful.

So I wanted to reflect tonight on how we can, in a sense, reclaim the essence of holy days, and all days, as an opportunity to really deepen our attention to the sacred, to connecting.

And I'd like to start tonight's reflection by honoring the indigenous peoples. I am very often aware of this land here in Bethesda. If you go back in history, it was the home of two primary groups of indigenous peoples. One is the Nacotchtank, also known as the Anacostans—that might be a more familiar name. And the other one was the Piscataway peoples—they were the ones that kind of inhabited this particular area. And within forty years of initial contact with the white Europeans in 1608, seventy-eight percent of them were gone, killed by the aggression of the white Europeans...killed by disease... The Piscataway's were forcibly removed. The Anacostans don't exist anymore, no descendants at all. Zero. No lineage.

So just to take a moment. And we can... if you'd like to close your eyes for a moment and just sense that these grounds have been sacred grounds to people who really loved and tended the earth... people who suffered the fate of being what I sometimes describe as *unreal others*—inferior others—to a more dominant, aggressive population. Just to open our awareness into what comes before and to just feel the poignancy of that. So that was about four hundred years ago. And taking a few full breaths...if you'd like to open your eyes...

We then look ahead a bit and sense: What's our trajectory? Will we wake up beyond kind of toxic biases and sense of hierarchy that leads to domination and subjugation? Will we really embrace others that have felt so different as part of our heart, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender-identity? Can our hearts wake up in that way? Then we think ahead, and here is a big one. The word the Oxford dictionary has identified as its word of the year, it's actually two words: *climate emergency*. One of the most prominent phrases of the year. It's in our nervous system. We know it. We know the great dis-ease of this earth, so when will we learn this pathway to sacred relationship and act as we need to act? We don't know the answer to that. But these are the questions that come up when we think of holy days and sacred relationship.

We create our future in how we live today, really how we live this moment. This is where the hope is. And we can let these holy days—and all days—matter and very consciously

cultivate our hearts. Tonight I want to explore a key entry to that, the entry of gratitude...gratitude and honoring and appreciating.

And I'll start off with a quote from a great Bodhisattva, fairly contemporary, Fred Rogers, who is becoming more and more central for many.

Here is what he says:

I believe that appreciation is a holy thing, that when we look for what's best in the person we happen to be with at the moment, we are doing what God does. So in loving and appreciating our neighbor, we are participating in something truly sacred.

In appreciating our neighbor, in appreciating each other, in appreciating nature, when we are feeling gratitude, we are participating in something sacred. I think that's just such a beautiful way to say it. How many of you have seen *A Beautiful Day In The Neighborhood*?

Anybody? A few. It's just out. The more I read about Fred Rogers, the more he truly is quite a model of presence with whoever he's with, truly respecting and showing up with his heart. The reviews of the movie are interesting to me. One reviewer said: "People took to it immediately as if applying a band aid to a wounded psyche." I was thinking about that, and what seems so important about the movie is that we love goodness. We really love goodness, and we are hurting—and I'd say we are grieving—because right now, our society feels so far from the values that matter to us. What we are kind of riveted on as a society is far from the care and the presence and the respect that matters to our hearts, so there is grieving.

The response is: Can we open up our own hearts?

And let's just look at gratitude as an example. It's really helpful to begin to notice in our own lives: *What stops us from feeling grateful?* You know, if you ask yourself today, what stops you from that attitude of appreciation—of appreciating who you are with at work or family or friends or the natural world around you? What stopped you?

And I know, for many of us, it's that we are on our way somewhere else and we are not really present to take in what's right here. How many of you could say that for yourself today, that you were on your way somewhere else? I know I was.

So, okay. Three construction workers with signs are standing in a row next to traffic. The first carries a big stop sign. The second carries a sign that says "Stop and smell the flowers" and she has a bunch of flowers in her hand. And the third sign says "Okay, resume tearing through your life like a maniac."

And we get it. It's like we're on our way somewhere else. And the somewhere else is often that, in some, way we're trying to get something we want—you know, often it's to get things done, but we also want to get things. Rita Rudner says, "Someday I want to be rich. Some people get so rich they lose all respect for humanity. That's how rich I want to get." But it's not that extreme. It's not like most of us are thinking like on that level, but we're moving through in some way trying to get the next cup of coffee or the next kind of approval from somebody or trying to get something. Julia Childs says, "At department stores, people often get unnecessary kitchen equipment when they were only going for men's underwear." And we know how it is. And it happens online all the time. You think you are going to one thing and you just go down rabbit hole after rabbit hole. Chasing.

There was a research study in 1981 and some people were asked to complete the sentence: *I am glad I am not a...* And other people were asked to complete the sentence: *I wish I were a...* And the people that completed the first sentence—*I am glad I am not*—were five times more satisfied with their life than the ones that completed *I wish I was, I wish I could have, I want*—which kind of makes sense. You know, when we realize, *Phew! I am not...*, there is something in us that relaxes. It's described as a "downward comparison" and it's actually a real upper versus thinking we need to have something else. I just thought that was an interesting bit of research. So the deep habit is grasping after what we don't have, and that keeps us from gratitude.

Mullah Nasruddin, is a kind of Sufi saint and fool also, he has got some good humor to him. Well, at one point he had lost his wife's bracelet and he is panicking and he says, "God, help me! If you help me find this I'll do anything. I'll donate half my weeks salary!" Then he sees the bracelet behind a cushion, "Never mind, God. I have already found it!" You know, it's that kind of thing, it's holding on tight.

So more about research. There is really interesting research showing the relationship between the vagal nerve—it's the longest coiling of nerves in our body—and how it's related to our pro-social behavior and experience. And when it gets activated we're more inclined of oxytocin and warm feelings and gratitude and open-heartedness. Well, research shows that after a certain amount of wealth, it cuts off activity to our vagal nerve. In other words: more wealth—more seeking after money—makes us less prosocial. We get more individual and less "we." People that are poorer are actually more generous. How many of you would have thought that? People that are poor are more generous? So, it's something we know about, we can kind of feel, there is more community, there is more "we," the richer, the more isolated in a vacuum. The wealthy people are not talking to each other, helping with each others kids, loaning things, the lower income people are doing that; the wealthy

are more in a vacuum. So there is something to look at in our society, that as more and more wealth gets concentrated, that wealth also does not get shared.

Another block to gratitude is when there is a message that something is wrong, and that there is even something wrong with feeling pleasure. Butch Hancock remembers life in his small town, he says this, “Life there taught me two things: One is that God loves you and you are going to burn in hell and the other is that sex is the most awful, filthy thing on earth and you should save it for someone you love.” Now that shuts down joy and gratitude.

So a story...

This is a story about James Whistler. In the early 1950's the American painter James Whistler spent a brief and academically unsuccessful time at West Point, the US military Academy. The story goes, he was assigned to draw a bridge. So he draws a very romantic stone bridge, complete with grassy banks and these two small children fishing from it. And then his instructor says, “Get those children off that bridge! This is an engineering exercise!” So Whistler got the kids off the bridge. He drew them fishing from the bank of the river and re-submitted the drawing. The angry instructor yells, “I told you to remove those children! Get them completely out of the picture!” The creative urge was so strong in Whistler. So the next version had the children completely out of the picture, indeed. They were buried under two small tombstones on the riverbank. He didn't make it through West Point.

But I share this, and the take away is that gratitude is an essential part of living. It's an essential part of living and when it's removed, we don't feel fully alive.

So there is all this amazing research now on what it does for us when we consciously cultivate gratitude. And the research on depression is some of the best—that people with really strong depression, doing just a simple exercise of writing, I think, three things “I am grateful for” a day and sending it to somebody get very clinically demonstrable relief. Interesting. The body, the immune system, seems to improve. And gratitude is correlated with the parts of the brain that have to do with every other positive emotion of happiness and contentedness and joy. So there is a reward circuitry that evolution built into us that gratitude really is valuable.

And you see it in all sorts of spiritual writings too of course. This is one of my favorites. And this is Alice Walker:

Listen: God love everything you love and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else God love admiration.”

Are you saying 'God vain?' I ask.

*'No,' she says, 'not vain. Just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple and don't notice it.'*¹

I love that. *It pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.* We are designed to notice and take pleasure and appreciate.

This weekend I was up in New York and on my way back I visited a being I consider one of my dearest friends, Dan Gottlieb. Dan is a psychologist and he was, for many years, a very popular radio host in Philadelphia. And for the last thirty years he has been paraplegic. He was in a really bad accident.

And so I am visiting him and, honestly, the most clear and remarkable thing is that anything you talk about with him, he is just filled with a sense of appreciation—appreciating me for being there, appreciating the tree he can see out of his study and a picture on his wall, and his partner who is there, and his work. And, from what I gather, anyone he is with, he just appreciates. And he talks about his life and the loss and how hard things are, but it's with this big frame of: *Oh my gosh, it put me on the fast track of loving and letting in love.*

So, I'll just share with you what happened right after the accident. So there he is, in the ICU, and near fatal, paralyzed from the chest down, and he didn't want to live. So one of the night nurses came in and she knew he was a psychologist, and she just started talking about the pain in her life. And she was suicidal. And she tells him all about it and he says, "I felt her inside me because I knew how it was." There was a lot of love and presence there. She left after a good stretch, and she felt better. And I think it was the next day, she told him that something had opened in her, she really felt better. Then, after she left the room he closed his eyes and said to himself, "I can live. I can live. I know I can help. I can live." And he just felt this gratitude for being able to be in relationship like, "If I can be in loving relationship, I can live."

Gratitude saves us. As animals, it's part of our prosocial capacity. You know, primates show gratitude. Monkeys show gratitude through grooming; they do each other favors and show appreciation through grooming. It deepens our bonds. It's part of sacred relatedness.

So we are going to spend the rest of our time on how to cultivate gratitude. In the Buddhist tradition it's part of the whole domain of meditations that have to do with gladdening the mind. So, there are meditations that have to do with direct presence—how do we be here and be in this very moment—and then there are meditations that recognize we've got a

¹ Walker, A. (2003). *The color purple*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

negativity-bias; we tend, rather than appreciating, to be dashing through the day like a maniac. How do we gladden our mind? How do we open up that capacity for appreciating?

There are a number of different ways. One of the most basic is when you sit down to mediate or in some way get quiet, to intentionally reflect on where the goodness is in your life. It sounds straightforward just to remember the good. There is a second part to it, though, which is: Let's say you remember *okay, I really love my child* or *I really love being in nature* or whatever it is—when you remember it, you have to really let yourself feel the gratitude and then stay with that feeling. Why? Our minds remember...our implicit memory takes in stuff that's difficult and negative and remembers it for a really long time, but the positive feelings aren't as sticky. So, in order to remember gratitude and have it become a trait—something that's really a part of us—when you feel grateful, stay with the feeling for fifteen to thirty seconds. And neuroscience is showing this now. Stay with it. My friend Rick Hanson calls it *installing the trait*. Stay with it.

So, by way of example, last week I had a very long list of to-dos and I was going out for my early morning walk and aware that I was really grumpy in anticipating what I had on the list to get back to. So I decided, "Okay, it's time to do a gratitude practice." I was walking along and I mechanically just started saying, "Okay, I am grateful for this, I am grateful for that." At first, it was mechanical and it wasn't sinking in, but then it started entertaining me a little because I was just doing something that was...you know, I was just kind of talking to myself.

And then my puppy, kd, was running in front of me. And so, I am walking along and I kind of yelled out, "kd, I am grateful for you!" And she stopped, she turned around, she ran back to me and with these fervent eyes, tail wagging, looking at me, and I said, "I really am grateful for you! Oh, I am grateful for you!" And then I started feeling it. Then I'd, you know, say, "I am grateful for this beautiful tree right here." And then I got to the river and, "I am grateful for the sound of the geese." There were seagulls and geese at the same time, two different levels of sound that were kind of—so I got really grateful. But I kept installing. I kept feeling it and letting it be there until I didn't have to do anything more, I was reconnected. So that's one approach—to very intentionally remember. And you can remember it. You can have a gratitude buddy—that's what a lot of people find helpful—and just send an email at the end of each day with the three things you are grateful for. You don't have to write anything else and you don't have to respond to your buddy. It's powerful. Even just a little bit of remembering can shift us. And if you take the time to install it it's really beautiful.

The second way to develop the trait of gratitude—and I'm differentiating between the state which arises now and then and a more ongoing capacity for appreciation—is that whenever you're moving through the day and you have a spontaneous experience of something is pleasant, something you are appreciating, some bit of beauty, something that brings up a bit of awe or wonder or, you know, good humor or care, just to pause and go, "Oh this! Grateful for this!" So you get in the habit of pausing and savoring, okay? That's the second way. Again you have to install it to make it really work.

The third thing I want to mention is to say it out loud when you are grateful. Meister Eckhart said, "If the only prayer you ever say is 'thank you' it will be enough." Say what you appreciate out loud. Write it. Say it. Because the expressing brings it through your body and really creates a more full experience.

Maurice Sendak tells a story about a little boy who sent him a charming card with a little drawing and he said he loved it. He answered all his children's letters... So he answered this one. He said: "This one I lingered over. I sent him a card and I drew a picture of a wild thing on it. I wrote, 'Dear Jim, I loved your card.' When I got the letter back from his mother and she said, 'Jim loved your card so much he ate it.' To me that was one of the highest compliments I had ever received. He didn't care that it was an original Maurice Sendak drawing or anything. He saw it, he loved it, he ate it." So, to express your gratitude.

One of the tricks that some people find helpful, in terms of when spontaneously having an experience and you want to really let it sink in and experience it fully, is five or ten breaths—that you actually stop and breathe with the experience for five breaths or, if you have the time, ten breaths. So, you notice anything that brings pleasure or sweetness and, if you take those breaths, if you let the fifteen to thirty seconds happen with appreciation, it creates new neural pathways.

Finally, what if you are just in a bad mood, like really a bad mood? Or it's really a hard time—you really feel sick, and you just don't feel grateful? It's like the body chemistry of what you are feeling is different from the body chemistry of gratitude. Then what?

I have been in many guided meditations where I would have a teacher tell me to bring to mind something I feel grateful for when I'm just not in the mood, and I know how much I kind of resent it. So, I want to say that you don't ever have to force gratitude. I mentioned there are two ways of practicing—and one is that pure presence with what is here. And then you can bring compassion to it. The other is to gladden the mind. If you are in a really bad mood, just bring presence to it. A kind presence. It's a bit of a trick, because if you are really present with what's going on—with the fear or the hurt or the sorrow—if you are really present, what happens is that presence unfolds itself, and you start feeling a sense of

appreciation for having become intimate with what is real. In that intimacy there is actually more space and more ease. And so, the very pathway of presence will connect you with the gratitude of the heart.

By way of example, Rachel Naomi Remen—who is one of my favorite kind of mentors, wise woman, teacher, if you haven't read her *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, it's wonderful—she tells a story in that book of a young man who was an athlete and popular and so on, and he got diagnosed with cancer. To save his life, the doctors had to remove his leg. So, he woke up from surgery a different person. He went from being this really good-natured guy to being really angry and resentful and bitter. He thought his life was over and fell into a depression. So that's when Rachel started meeting with him. She worked with him for quite a while, bringing the kind of things we are talking about—like really bringing presence and compassion—and she had him draw some pictures. And at one point she asked him to draw a picture of his body and he angrily scribbled a vase with a large crack in it, then tore the paper as he finished the drawing. But he continued seeing her and they continued to work...being with that presence and being real with it.

And he started getting interested in other people who were also living with amputation, other kids. So as he came out of his anger, he started actually, at her recommendation, volunteering and visiting young amputees like himself. So, one day, he meets a twenty-one year old woman recovering from a double mastectomy because of a horrible history of breast cancer. And she'd barely look up from her hospital bed. After several attempts to cheer her up and so on, he looked down his leg and he took off his prosthetic device, dramatically dropped it and started hopping around till finally he heard the woman start laughing. And she looked up and said, "Fellow, if you can dance, maybe I can sing." It turns out, just because it's a fun ending to a story, years later they did get married.

During his last meeting with Rachel, he was beaming—he was in a good place. And she pulls out the drawing of the cracked vase that Jeff had drawn nearly two years earlier. He studied it and he said, "You know, it's not really done." And he took a yellow highlighter from Doctor Remen's desk and drew a vibrant yellow line extending out of the crack in the vase. And he said to her, "This is where the light comes from. This is where the light comes from. The crack, the fissures, the imperfections, the hard knocks, the hard truths."

So we are talking about a different level of being able to appreciate our lives, that we appreciate the pleasures—we appreciate the look in the fall of the silhouette of the trees against the sky and the sounds of birds and the gleam in a child's eye—and we also appreciate that, wherever we are in our life, that's the entry place. Wherever we are, no matter how difficult, if we can bring our mindfulness and our kindness to that place, there is

something that wakes up and we discover a deeper kind of compassion and wisdom—and there is appreciation for that.

A poem by Raymond Carver:

*No other word will do. For that's what it was.
Gravy.
Gravy, these past ten years.
Alive, sober, working, loving, and
being loved by a good woman. Eleven years
ago he was told he had six months to live
at the rate he was going. And he was going
nowhere but down. So he changed his ways
somehow. He quit drinking! And the rest?
After that it was all gravy, every minute
of it, up to and including when he was told about,
well, some things that were breaking down and
building up inside his head. "Don't weep for me,"
he said to his friends. "I'm a lucky man.
I've had ten years longer than I or anyone
expected. Pure Gravy. And don't forget it."²*

So, we are going to practice a little bit. I have a practice in mind tonight that is sweet that I think you'll enjoy. I invite you to just adjust however you are sitting so you can practice in this way. Our lights are going to dim magically as I say that... you're going to notice it not too long from now, all the lights in here are going to dim, including the lights that are beaming on me, please. We actually need a little more light in the hall because we're going to have some mics come around at one point so... Thank you. We are going to do an inner meditation and then I'm going to invite whoever is in the mood to just say a word or sentence about what you are grateful for.

We begin by closing our eyes and taking a few moments to bring your attention fully into your body. And it helps to relax your shoulders, to soften a little, let your hands be soft, loosening the belly...and letting this next breath be received in a softening belly—this breath, and now this one, and again—feeling the aliveness in your body. Softening the face, let the eyes smile a little, the brow be smooth, and a slight smile at your mouth. And feeling the movement of the breath at the heart...aware of the state of your heart right now.

² Carver, R. (1988, August 29). Gravy. *The New Yorker*, 28.

I'd like to invite you to begin to scan your life and become aware of what you are grateful for. We do this in a simple way, just to fill in the blank. *I am grateful for...* and then just let whatever arises come and, when you have something, pause with it and then the next. *I am grateful for...*

And you might find it interesting to practice this whispering. And don't worry that other people are whispering. They're not going to be listening to you, they're contemplating their own gratitude. But we can just be together—here in Bethesda on these sacred grounds, and all the sacred grounds around this planet, wherever you are—sensing what you are grateful for and whispering it out loud.

Please begin... The people, the experiences, the goodness in your life. *I am grateful for...* Feeling the sincerity and the tenderness in your heart. *I am grateful for...*

And now bring to mind one thing that you have touched on that has a lot of light to it, a lot of aliveness...something you are grateful for. And sense what about it makes you so grateful. What is it that really brings alive the gratitude? And let yourself feel that gratitude. Feel the warmth and brightness of it. Just bringing your full attention to it. Let it fill your body. You may invite it to be as big as it wants to be—the feeling of love or appreciation or gratitude. And include all your senses, whatever you might be seeing or hearing that goes along with it. Now your body is experiencing it—touch, temperature, energy, movement—just let it fill you. Intend that the experience sink into your cells the way light fills the room or water soaks into a sponge. Sense that you are letting in the felt experience. Surrendering to it. Grateful, grateful, grateful.

The invitation now is that we hear from maybe eight or ten people, if you're interested in sharing, just naming out loud what you're grateful for so we can kind of hear like a poem or a mandala in the room—just the different currents of gratitude. So if you're interested in just speaking what you are grateful for, raise your hand. There will be a few mics around and we're going to have just a very soft background of music as we are doing this. So again just a sentence: *I am grateful for...*

I am grateful that I have a choir that I can sing with and that we all smile at each other as we sing. It's a small jazz choir and we appreciate the music there that we are able to create together.

I am grateful to have had wonderful grandparents.

I am grateful to be living in an area that is packed with racial diversity.

I am grateful for an old friend who calls me up late at night from California and tells me her troubles.

I am grateful for my parents and my family for supporting me financially and emotionally through college.

I am grateful to be here but I am also very grateful for the peace and love that restored my family just in time for the holiday.

I am grateful for having a very loving and successful son and daughter, happily married, and one granddaughter.

I am grateful to be here too, every time I come and hear Tara I become a little wiser and lighter and happier and more intelligent and just being here is a real gift.

I am grateful that my pain, my biggest pain, can be transformed as my biggest tool to help others.

I am grateful for my body being healthy.

I am grateful for the teachings on mindfulness and Buddhism and the path of awakening because it helps me to lead my life from a place of love and authenticity.

I am grateful for the gift of knowing and feeling unconditional love given to me by my grandmother.

I am grateful for my partner for being always with me and helping me.

I am grateful for being able to keep faith during time of difficulties and I am grateful that Tara Brach knows me in person now.

I am grateful for the magic of DNA technology and the kindness of strangers that helped me find my sister last year.

I think we are going to stop and unless it's in someone's hands. Thank you. Beautiful.

Take a moment, if you will, to close your eyes now.

A Blessing for Beauty by John O'Donohue:

May the beauty of your life become more visible to you, that you may glimpse your wild divinity.

May the wonders of the earth call you forth from all your small, secret prisons and set your feet free in the pastures of possibilities.

May the light of dawn anoint your eyes that you may behold what a miracle a day is.

May the liturgy of twilight shelter all your fears and darkness within the circle of ease.

May the angel of memory surprise you in bleak times with new gifts from the harvest of your vanished days.

May you allow no dark hand to quench the candle of hope in your heart.

May you discover a new generosity towards yourself, and encourage yourself to engage your life as a great adventure.

May the outside voices of fear and despair find no echo in you.

May you always trust the urgency and wisdom of your own spirit.

May the shelter and nourishment of all the good you have done, the love you have shown, the suffering you have carried, awaken around you to bless your life a thousand times.

And when love hides the path to your door may you open like the earth to the dawn, and trust your every hidden color towards its nourishment of light.

May you find enough stillness and silence to savor the kiss of God on your soul and delight in the eternity that shaped you, that holds you and calls you.

And may you come to see your life as a quiet sacrament of service, which awakens around you a rhythm where doubt gives way to the grace of wonder, where what is awkward and strained can find elegance, and where crippled hope can find wings, and torment enter at last unto the grace of serenity.

May Divine Beauty bless you.³

Namaste and thank you.

³ O'Donohue, J. (2004). *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.