

The background is a vibrant blue gradient. On the left, a grid of thin white lines curves away into the distance. On the right, a bright, glowing spiral of concentric lines forms a vortex-like shape, radiating light. The overall effect is dynamic and ethereal.

With Spirit

Vicki Vanderhorst

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WithSpirit Publishing

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ISBN: 978-0-9947799-1-5

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Published by WithSpirit Publishing,
Courtenay, British Columbia, Canada

First paperback edition printed in 2015

Printed in Canada

Enquiries to publisher can be directed to
www.withspirit.ca



Acknowledgments

For over twenty years, you and hundreds of others have listened to my talks, attended my workshops and freely shared your thoughts and experiences with me. You have challenged me to delve deeper into the Great Mystery of life. I thank each and every one of you!

You would not be reading this if not for the loving persistence of my life partner who helped me believe that what I was sharing through ministry would have value and meaning for others as a book. He encouraged me when I thought I couldn't continue, coached me when I was feeling lost, and supported me with his imperturbable joyful presence when I needed it the most.

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Dear Friends

Many people have had the opportunity to hear me speak on a regular basis at services and ceremonies. Others sat with me in quiet consultation while we worked to find life solutions centered in Spirit.

I wanted an opportunity for more people to experience the message of Spirit and was led to gather from my collection of lessons, those that would be a good starting point, privately or as a group.

The style of the lessons is light and speaks directly to daily life experiences we all encounter. I want to ask and help you answer one question.

How do we live a life where our spiritual nature is more visible than our human nature? My hope is that through reading these stories and reflections you will be filled with enthusiasm and a spirit of adventure for walking the path of an awake being.

At the end of this book you will find a section called *Making It Real*. For each chapter there are questions and statements for your consideration and reflection. These can also be used as guidelines for group study.

~ Vicki Vanderhorst



Growing Up in Spirit

One of the papers I had to write in my ministerial program was a history of my beliefs. How did I think about God – if at all – when I was little. How my thinking has changed over the years – what caused it to change. I am not by nature a self-contemplative kind of person. It took considerable time and effort to look back over my life and follow the development of my beliefs.

I remembered that as a family we attended church every Sunday. The minister was a friendly person; his daughter was in my class at school.

I remember that at the front of the sanctuary was a huge mural in three panels. In the center was Jesus, dressed in a handwoven robe, standing on rocky ground, arms open and smiling. In the background was a picture-perfect blue sky with puffy white clouds and at his feet were some lambs. I felt him to be a kind and caring person.

God. I was not really sure what that was about but I did pick up the thought that God had his eye on me. That he was watching how I behaved, what I said – if I was being a nice person. I wasn't really sure what would happen if I wasn't. I wasn't taught about hell. I remember the first time I heard about hell from a girl in kindergarten. I just laughed. I knew that was impossible. Even though I didn't

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understand much about God I was pretty sure he would never want to hurt anybody.

I was taught to pray when I needed something from God. What kind of prayers are those? *Please God, if you get me out of this predicament I promise I will _____*. I used that one a lot because I was often in what could be called dangerous situations. Working in ghettos, hitchhiking all over the world, living in countries that were considered unsafe. So that prayer, *Get me out of this* was one of my favorites.

But we have other prayers... *If you get me this job... If you heal my friend ...*

Where does that model put God? Out there. Where does that leave us? Powerless. We have no role to play, just hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

Those kinds of prayers match a certain picture and understanding of God. A dispenser of favours. A power that needs to be worshipped. Or someone you could bargain with. If you think that God holds the power over your happiness and your life, then of course you would want to stay on the good side of him!

But what happens when these prayers are not answered? We asked... we made a deal and God ignored us, we didn't get the job, our friend died.

We see a God like that as unjust, cruel, uncaring. So of course we would stop praying! In my time as a minister I have had lots of opportunities to talk to people about God and that is probably the main reason they have given up on religion. *God did not answer my prayers. God let me*

suffer. God ignored me. If he is supposed to be so loving – where was he when I needed him? Its heart-breaking.

If I believed in a God like that, I would have nothing to do with it either. Why would we continue to put ourselves in that position?

God is not a faraway person that we need to pull on their coat sleeves or shout at to get their attention. God does not give favors out to some and not to others. Protect some and not others.

Are you still talking to your childhood God or has your understanding developed into spiritual self-sufficiency?

The idea of Spirit being a principle demands that we shift a whole lot of thinking about how we are in relationship to it. If Spirit is everywhere present, do we need to draw its attention to ourselves or a situation? If Spirit is *all knowing*, do we need to tell it anything?

If prayer is not about asking for something or drawing Spirit's attention to something or bargaining for something – then what is the purpose of prayer?

To remember what Spirit is.

To immerse ourselves in it.

To know that we are spiritually self-sufficient.

To claim our spiritual identity, to embody our spiritual nature.

To keep our words congruent with our spiritual principles.

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We forget all the time. The physical world in which we live is so real to us, that we think that is all there is. We forget that we are divine love, infinite mind, abundant life.

Say we feel like we are getting a cold. All our senses tell us that we are going to get sick. We can feel ourselves feeling increasingly drained with every thought. We are forgetting our spiritual identity. We can remain in that state or we can remember our true spiritual nature through affirmative statements like this:

I am more than my body.

Abundant life circulates through every part of my being.

There is nothing in the universe more powerful than divine life.

I am the breath of divine life.

Divine energy flows freely throughout my entire being.

Let's leave the limited beliefs behind and grow up into the spiritual magnificence that we really are!



Small Blessings, Great Joy

We are so incredibly blessed – more than we know, more than we can imagine. How often do you remember that you are an expression of infinite love and divine mind? That you are created by the same infinite energy that created the entire universe. I would call that a blessing!

There are two principles that create the foundation for everything else: there is only one presence, one power and it is good, and we are creations which spring from this source of all good. The implications of these two principles are huge.

Here's the question: if something is all good – can it create something that is less than good? Or something that is mixed good and not so good? Take a jar of peanut butter. If the jar says it contains 100% peanuts can we scoop out anything other than peanuts? No, it can't happen. If we take an orange and squeeze it – what will you get? Orange juice. Not tomato juice or spinach juice.

In the same way, since we are created from the infinite source of all good – including joy, love, compassion, faith, peace – is it possible for us to *not* have these same divine qualities within us? No.

If our divine nature includes all these things, then the question is – why am I not experiencing all aspects of my

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divinity all the time? Why can't I just dip in and pull out *faith* any time I want? What is blocking my abundance from just spilling out of me? Why am I not 100% peaceful all the time?

In addition to our spiritual nature, which we have just identified as only good, we are also blessed with our human nature. Our human nature consists of our limited perspective of the world, our personal experiences, our thoughts, our fears, our dreams, our disappointments, and our expectations.

How does our day look when we are living solely from our human nature? We are driven by the circumstances around us. We are hostage to the opinions or the actions of others and dependent on something in the physical realm to make us feel happy or safe.

You may know people who live entirely in this realm. Up and down. Victim – blame. You yourself may live in this realm from time to time. We all do – because we are human.

How many times during the day do we remember that we are an expression of *all good*? Do we live our lives as a *conscious* expression of the divine or as an *unconscious* expression of our humanity?

The first step in enjoying this amazing blessing – the gift of our divine nature - is remembering! How do we know when we have forgotten? It usually is brought to our attention through feelings of distress, struggle, anxiety, withdrawal, impatience, defensiveness or resignation.

Living fully in our divinity is not going to happen as long as we think we have life figured out and that we can bend the world to our wishes.

Everything changes once we extend an invitation to Spirit to live through us. Once we create an opening. Once we surrender to what is. Spirit is not going to force itself on us. Spirit, divine presence, is as close as our breath – in fact it is our breath. It is circulating through every molecule of our bodies as divine life. It is in every meal we eat, it is in the ground we walk on, it is in the air we breathe.

I am going to use an analogy but before I do I want to preface it with this statement. Whenever we try to compare something on the physical plane with a spiritual concept it is inevitable that at some point the analogy will fall apart...but let's play with this idea anyway.

When we talk about the everywhere presence of Spirit we could compare it to air. We are surrounded by air – we are surrounded by Spirit. Spirit has no visible form – neither does air. Air is circulating throughout our entire being – so is Spirit. Air does not thrust itself on us. It is not pushing against us saying, *Take me in, take me in*. Spirit does not – cannot - force itself on us. Force is not part of the nature of Spirit. Even Spirit cannot make us do something that we don't want to. We are not puppets.

When we take a breath, we are making room for air to enter our bodies. In the same way we can make room for Spirit and all the good that is Spirit. It is lying in pure potential – all good – waiting for *us* to invite it in. Into ourselves, into the situation we are facing, into our everyday activities.

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What happens when we meet with a difficult situation? Remember, being consciously on the spiritual path does not mean we will not face difficulties. Being on the spiritual path does not mean our lives, and everyone and everything in them, will always be the way we want. We are all going to run into something – probably on a daily basis – that catches us off guard. That we are not happy about – that we want to be different.

What is our usual response? Fix it! We try this and that. And if it is not resolved, what do we do next? Try harder! Toss in some criticism toward ourselves - we should be smarter, faster, more disciplined, we shouldn't have, we should have. Or criticize the other person for not being smarter, faster, more disciplined, they shouldn't have, they should have.

Don't take the first step of even the smallest task until you have checked in with Spirit.

What does checking in do? It causes us to access our spiritual nature first and then we can't help but engage in the situation differently. By taking a moment to consciously align ourselves with Spirit we are creating an opening. We are pressing the 'play' button for divine life, wisdom, guidance, abundance, joy, peace, harmony. Now that we are aligned with and consciously connected to all of that, we can begin the task. And not just big projects, but in everything! When we wake up in the morning, throughout the day, before we go to sleep at night.

Spirit is everywhere present. In the midst of everything is Spirit and wherever Spirit is, good is.



Our Evolving Selves

Let's take a look at the following affirmation.

I affirm I have a divine purpose. With faith, I surrender to divine love trusting that this purpose is being revealed to me now. I open myself now to expressing a brand new magnificence!

That is a lot to affirm and that is one of the reasons to give ourselves time with these words. It's interesting to notice what happens when we read and say powerful affirmative statements over and again. We hear the voice that does not believe a word of it!

All we need to do is state something really magnificent like, *I am one with an abundant universe* and what pops up? Right, that's why you can't pay off your credit card. How about the holiday you want to take that never comes? You don't have time to do what you really enjoy...ad infinitum.

This voice, which we might be tempted to disregard, serves a very important purpose. It is not a bad thing – we don't want to squelch it. We don't want to ignore it or pretend we didn't hear it. Most of all we don't want to criticize ourselves for thinking, *If I were more spiritual I wouldn't have those kinds of thoughts!*

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It is the voice that reveals to us the underlying beliefs we have that are not aligned with the statements we are affirming. It is telling us something about our core beliefs that we need to know. It is bringing to our attention the parts of us that are *out* of alignment with our true self. Like when we say one thing and really deep down inside, believe something else.

That is one of the purposes of doing this kind of affirmation – to listen and be alert to what comes up. Because as long as we are not aware of this interior talk, it will run us. It is like a backseat driver – we never see them, but they are always directing us, telling us what to do or what we did wrong.

Affirming this kind of prayer every day is an invitation, not only to be willing to experience more in our lives – but also to ask that back seat driver to move up to the front. Where we can look it right in the eye.

Let's look at the very last statement of the affirmation, *I open myself now to expressing a brand new magnificence!*

I wonder if that brought up any beliefs about what you can be. Was there a part of you that said, *Everything is OK now, why do I have to do anything differently? Why can't I just stay the way I am?*

We all have ways of doing things that we have outgrown and yet, from habit or inattention we just keep doing them. We keep doing the same things, even though they have lost their meaning or usefulness.

Picture the canary that does not leave its cage when the door is opened. Change can be perceived as worse than imprisonment.

When we change what we are doing there is always an ending. And... there is always a beginning. There are *always* going to be beginnings and endings. This is natural. And if we have not seen or experienced any changes lately – it may be because we have become too comfortable in our present circumstances.

Have you ever *tried* to hang on to something when it was slipping away? Or pushed away something new that was trying to come into existence? It could be anything – an idea, a friendship, a belief.

When we recognize and accept that things need to change in order to grow, we can stop trying to make the world stop. We can work *with* the natural cycles of our universe and we will find this is effortless. Trying to keep things the same is what really requires hard work. Instead of trying to hold on to what is, we can cooperate with the rhythms of life and development and growth.

We often think that change means giving something up or losing something. That is not always the case. Change can add more meaning, more enjoyment, and more success in our lives. We need to ask ourselves the following questions: Are we willing to step out of our comfort zone? Are we willing to let go of something old to make room for something new? Are we willing to keep learning and have an open and curious mind?

The world around us is evolving and changing. *We* are evolving and changing. The natural world is renewed and

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vitalized by its changing nature. When we cooperate with the natural rhythm and harmony of life, we too are renewed and rejuvenated. Life does not have to be hard or a struggle, it can be effortless!



Snap-Crackle-Pop

Do you consider yourself a creative person?

When I ask that question to a group of people, some will nod their heads and say – yes I am pretty creative. Others will shake their heads and say nope – not a creative bone in my body!

We can easily see the results of the creativity of others all around us. When we visit art galleries, art shows, look at craft magazines, and peruse hardware stores we can see and appreciate the incredible things people create. I have so much admiration for people who can produce art, music, crafting, weaving, buildings, gardens ... the list is endless.

I appreciate the arts and yet I don't give myself time to learn or improve my artistic endeavors. My natural process is not to research and study an art form. My nature is to jump in and see what happens.

Every year we create Ukrainian Easter eggs with our family and friends. When we first started, we would invite some of my children's friends over so they could learn the process. I could see them admiring the eggs we had collected over the years in the big glass bowl on the table. I would take time to remind everyone that each person's egg would look different and that it takes some practice to get the results you will be happy with.

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I noticed that each person at the table had a different approach. The first thing my daughter did was spend a few minutes, looking at each egg in the carton, examining the shapes and sizes until she found one that she was satisfied with. Then she would sit quietly looking at the egg and I could see that she was in the process of imaging what she was going to create. Her results were always beautiful, imaginative, and colorful. She spent hours with a single egg.

I love to knit – I find it relaxing and meditative. I knit fairly simple things and am happy with the results. When I visit a knitting store and see the sweaters, tapestries and other things people have knitted, it takes my breath away. And I know that I am not creative in that way.

Have you ever seen small children draw or finger-paint? They don't have any hesitation – give them some crayons and let them go! They cover paper after paper and we display them on our fridges and praise them. But somewhere we lose that unrestrained joy. Perhaps we had experiences in our early years creating something that either did not look the way we wanted, or that others made fun of, or we were not happy with.

At some point in our lives we may decide we were not the creative type and we put that thought or idea aside. The truth is, true creativity is not something we can put aside.

The fact is that we are *all* creative beings. We cannot give up or put aside our creativity. It's part of our divine nature. We are all creating all the time. Every moment of the day. The scary part is, most of the time we are unaware that we are doing this. So our creations are unconscious, haphazard or made by default.

Right now, in this moment and every day, we are living and experiencing the results of the creations of our pasts, because we create not only with our hands and bodies, we create with our thoughts.

The power of our thought cannot be overestimated. It is through our thoughts that we create our experience of the world. Thoughts and feelings are a mighty tool to change our experience of the world and to manifest what we want.

We affect our environment all the time with our thoughts. So don't you think it would be a good thing to acknowledge this? Since we are creating all the time we might want to be more conscious of what we are doing, certainly more careful with the power that we wield every moment of the day.

This creative power, that each one of us has, can be used consciously or unconsciously. When we drive a car we are careful and paying close attention to our decisions and movements. Think of what would happen if we drove without that attention – disaster! We want to use our creative power in the same way - constructively and consciously, not absent mindedly or carelessly.

There are no limits to our creativity. A hundred years ago it was impossible to predict or imagine what was possible in the future and it still is. Why is that? Because there is no limit on what a human being can think of and bring into reality. There is no limit because our minds are integrated with Spirit. Infinite Spirit!

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How do things come into manifestation? How is it that there is nothing and then there is something? Sometimes things seem so complex and intricate, we forget that everything that comes into being – whether it is a dog house or a garden bed or a new kind of software – follows a creative process.

We can create on our own, using the *'my way'* method, which I did for many years. What I noticed when I used that method is that my creations fell apart, didn't last long or didn't produce the result I wanted. That's the *human doing* way to create.

And then there is the divine process of creation that is laid out for us. I call it snap, crackle, pop.

The first step in creation is consciously connecting with Spirit. It is the *let there be light* step. Light represents a flash of illumination. Snap!

Whether it is to discover a cure for arthritis or design a new garden bed, we can start with Spirit. After we have tapped in then the 'crackle' begins. That's our part. Everything that comes into being comes *through* us. We are the eyes, ears, feet and hands of Spirit. It is our job to take this divine idea and *see* it, imagine it, visualize it. When we can see it, then we will know what to do next. And again, this can be for anything - creating a flower arrangement, a floor plan for a new home or a new relationship.

Then we take the next step and start the *doing*. Pop! We are bringing it into manifestation, from the realm of the invisible to the visible. Now the idea has a form that we can see, touch and experience. What started in Spirit has

worked through us and is now expressing out into our world.

Let's be conscious about our creative power. Let's pay attention to what we are bringing into manifestation. Right now we are creating our future so let's take care that we consciously follow a Spirit led, Spirit fed creation process.

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Activate the Good

Not long ago I was preparing for a Sunday service which was to be followed by a potluck meal. In my attempt to be efficient, I decided to make a dish in a crock-pot and leave it at home to cook while I was at church. Before I left the house I prepared the ingredients, put them in the crock-pot, and turned it on. Later I came home and opened the door expecting to be greeted by the smell of a great meal cooking. Nothing. I went to the pot and felt it – cold. Hmmm. I looked at the knob – it was turned on. What was going on? And then I noticed. The cord was just sitting on the counter – not plugged in.

Isn't that just like us sometimes? We have all the great ideas about what we want to do or create – and we forget to plug into the source, Spirit. We are so busy in the *doing* that we forget about the great power that will support all our efforts, and bring us even greater results.

That source is everywhere present, but it does not force itself upon us. We are not puppets in Spirit's hands. We have the capacity and ability to act and think and choose all by ourselves. And sometimes that is exactly where we trip. We rely solely upon our own efforts. We forget that we are *co-creators* with Spirit, and that we do not have to do everything ourselves.

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When we were two-year olds, our favorite statement was probably *me do it!* We wanted to do it ourselves, we didn't want any help. There is a time to mature from the proclamation of our independence from our physical parents to the realization that there is a power that can support us on the spiritual plane.

We may say, I want to co-create with Spirit but our actions illuminate our true feelings - we really want to do it *our way*. We ignore the inner guidance that is inviting us to see a direction in another way.

Turning our activities over to Spirit does not mean that we sit back and it will be done for us. Spirit only works *through* us. We still have a very active role to play.

Like trying to cook a meal in a crock-pot, we want to make sure we have all the ingredients *and* we are connected to the power source, Spirit.



Celebrate Every Step

As human *doings*, we can often race from one appointment to another, one task to the next, and be continuously adding more things to the *to do* list. We tick one thing off and add two more. The list never ends – it just goes on and on and on. As we make progress and things do get ticked off the *to do* list we sometimes forget a very important step. Celebration! We forget to stop and say, *Hey, I did a pretty good job there!* or *Whew – that was a big step!*

We rarely celebrate and sometimes we don't even pause! This pause and celebrate has been one of my biggest learnings, to stop and reflect for a moment on what I have just done. For instance, facilitating a Sunday service takes hours of preparation and thought. When I get home – instead of checking my email and looking at the next thing on my list I sit down with a cup of tea and give myself a moment to soak up the feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction. It is important, no matter how large or small the project, that we take time to acknowledge and celebrate.

Here is a little fun way that reminds me to celebrate or at least acknowledge that I have completed a step.

I have a pottery bowl filled with glass stones you can find at a craft shop. I also have a beautiful glass vase. Every

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time I accomplish something, for instance, answer all my emails, I take a stone from the bowl and drop it into the vase. For example, finished my report to the Board – drop a stone. Prepared a Sunday lesson – maybe that one is worth four stones!

Doing this makes me stop and consciously appreciate what I have just done. At the end of the day I am not wondering, where did it go? What did I do? I *know*.... I can see it right in front of me!

When the glass vase is full I treat myself to something that I find personally rewarding.

There is another aspect of celebration I would like to explore. As we go through our daily lives we sometimes encounter *bumps* – experiences that delay us, hinder us or are unexpected.

This could happen with an activity like building a bookshelf. We order special brackets, we go to the store to pick them up, and they are the wrong ones. Or perhaps we are taking a trip – the first plane is late and we miss our connection to the next one. Or we want to cook a special meal so we go to the store and they are out of a key ingredient.

Or it could be a person. Perhaps we join a group for fun and one person dominates the conversation or is always late. We go out to enjoy a walk and we notice someone did not pick up after their dog. These kinds of things happen all the time.

In reaction we might say – I'll never do that again (fly, join a group, build a bookshelf). Or we might re-arrange our

lives so that we don't ever encounter that person or situation again. When we make that decision we are missing a *huge* opportunity for spiritual unfolding.

Every person and situation is an opportunity for us to learn something – *if* we don't ignore it or run away from it. Some of the most annoying people in my life have been my greatest teachers – as soon as I was willing to see them in that light. I began to ask myself, how is this person being a teacher for me? What can I learn from them?

The best part is that I have learned so much and I didn't have to sign up for a course or attend a seminar. I didn't have to pay course fees to learn this amazing life-transforming lesson. I got my teacher – for free! No book to read, no studying – it was there, in front of me, all the time. We are surrounded by our teachers – look around at the people and situations in your life. And yes, celebrate that!

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Being Centered

As a child, our family would go camping on the coast of North Carolina during Easter break and some years that coincided with hurricane season. We had this fabulously designed tent that could withstand phenomenal wind and rain. It was bright red and white canvas, in the days when tents were only green and RVs were yet to come.

The morning after a tremendous storm we would unzip the opening, step out into the calm aftermath and, as we scanned the campground, we could see that ours was the only tent standing. Although my parents had a lot of faith in the integrity of that tent, I remember as a child I would often be scared - perhaps terrified is a better word - while the wind and rain was screaming around us.

A hurricane is a physical natural phenomenon related to storms, but we also experience storms in our minds, hearts and bodies as well as in our relationships, our workplaces, and families.

We can relate to the feelings associated with a storm, like powerlessness or fear. We have had the experience of being swept around by a situation or person often accompanied by a feeling of helplessness or hopelessness.

Even if we have never experienced an actual hurricane we have seen clips and photos of the damage they cause. You

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may also have seen photos of the eye of the storm, the place where there is no wind, only quiet. If you happen to be in the eye as it passes over, you would see blue sky, sunshine, and perfect calm. I have had that experience - it was eerie, so quiet and peaceful - even the birds began to sing again and the sun was shining.

If we take time to think about where we currently live and where we would like to live I think most of us would agree that we would prefer living in the eye of the storm and not in the storm itself. Living in the eye means being present to what is, being centered and calm. It is being in a receptive state to what is happening in the moment. When we live in that state of equilibrium, we experience clarity, perspective and possibilities. Storms happen to everyone and we have the choice to live in the eye or live in the chaos.

One of the ways we know we are living in the storm is that we feel that the world is conspiring against us. We feel like something or someone is thwarting our progress, standing in our way, or holding us back.

Ever been in a hurry and it seems like *every* light turns red just as we get to the intersection? If we have experienced disease - it could feel like our body is turning against us, or if we are laid off from our work we may feel like the economy is against us.

How do we not get caught up in the storm? How do we stay centered in the eye?

One way is to ask yourself how you can be an outlet for the divine. How can Spirit express through you in this moment? When we have aligned ourselves with that

position we have the ability to see clearly, to entertain possibilities, or to make a choice that is beneficial, useful or productive.

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If Love Led the Way

Just for fun I went on the internet and did a search for the word *love*. There were about 298 billion places with that word. I wondered how this compared to other topics, so I typed in other words, trying to get one as high as *love*. The second highest word I could find was *religion*, with *computers* following, but I couldn't find one other word with as much exposure on the internet as *love*.

There was a revolutionary who lived about 2,000 years ago who had some pretty amazing things to say about love. Jesus gave only one commandment – to love God and to love each other. Most of us are loving with our friends, with family members – the people we get along with, those who agree with us, who support us and who love us. That's not too hard. Did Jesus say we need to love those who love us? No, he actually wanted us to love our *enemies!*

The question then is - are we ready to love those who are hurting, who are sick, who come from a culture different from ours? Are we ready to love the person who just took our parking spot at the mall, the person who vandalized our home? Are we ready to love not just the children dying of AIDS in Africa, but the drug addict dying of AIDS in our own community? Those are the tough questions. The ones Jesus was asking us to consider.

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What we see by looking at Jesus' life is that he lived by those words and demonstrated them for us. We can see it when he sat with the lepers and prostitutes, when he talked to strangers and the destitute, when he healed the insane. Every day he lived what he preached. We see this love in his words and his deeds. What we know is that Jesus put his love into action everywhere he went. Everyone was treated as deserving of love. *Everyone.*

Do you see why Jesus was considered a revolutionary? How can he ask this of us? I am sure his disciples must have asked the same question.

Yet, after Jesus' death this is how the disciples began to live in community. This was a new kind of community – not based on location, family ties or anything in the outer world. A community based on only one thing – love. It was a way of life, not a church and certainly not a religion. This way of life set them apart, and brought suspicion and fear to those observing it.

When you became a follower of *the way* you gave up your ties to your family, your town and tribe. Barriers and restrictions were dropped. Strangers were brought together and the idea of *who is my neighbour* expanded to include *everyone*. People pooled their funds and brought food, medicine and clothing to support and help each other and the needy in their areas. This was a new idea. People had not lived like this before. Up to that time your ties, responsibilities and obligations were to your family first – definitely not to strangers, people who spoke another language or who were not from your region.

Jesus was reminding us to use this gift we call divine love. Jesus told us to put it into action. Divine love needs to

circulate and touch everyone and everything. It is possible to pour divine love out on everything we see and think about in the world – what looks wonderful and what doesn't. Divine love serves no one when it is unexpressed. Divine love is meant to be brushed off, shined up and used every day, in every possible moment and every opportunity.

We have this love but what good is it if we don't use it? Like good tools sitting unused in a tool box - this gift is waiting in pure potential to be demonstrated in the world.

Here are two small examples of this love in action.

Someone shared with me that every time she went out, her goal was to make someone's day brighter. This could happen with a smile or a brief conversation. She loved the idea that she didn't have a car because on the bus she had many opportunities and openings to engage in small, loving conversations with all kinds of people, and of all ages and backgrounds.

The second is a woman who saw a despondent looking man in the park and felt drawn to pass close by and see if she could be of some help. They struck up a conversation and she took this hungry, cold man into the café and bought him lunch.

These are not earth shaking events. They will not make the news, but what a difference it does make in someone's life. And like the ripples in a still pond – we do not know where they will stop or who else will be affected by these small acts of love. With our simple acts of divine love, we can experience where heaven meets earth.

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Our Spiritual Home

Our spiritual home is the infinite potential that lies within each one of us. The potential for abundance, for love, for everything good, and everything that is Spirit.

We can look at our divine nature as the realm of infinite possibilities. Everything good. It is where we can draw divine wisdom, divine energy, divine love – it is abundance in all its forms.

Since we are creations of infinite Spirit, we arrive on this earthly plane with infinite abundance built into us. It is only our limiting beliefs and our limited awareness that keep us from experiencing it fully.

If we are not experiencing and living from that state of abundance, then we want to know why. Why, if this good is within me, are we not living a 100% perfectly fulfilling life?

What we need to do is look within and discover and uncover the places where we are blocking our awareness of our divine home.

Please remember that this is not a search and destroy mission. We are beautiful, precious beings – we need to look inside delicately, with patience, with gentleness, and with compassion.

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Throughout the centuries scientists and others have attempted to explain what it is to be a human being in a mechanistic way. Perhaps you have heard that our lungs are like bellows, our hearts like pumps, and our joints are like levers. More recently the comparisons are with computers. We use expressions like – *searching for that file* – when we are trying to remember something, or *delete* when we no longer need some information.

The truth is we are so much more than anything mechanical or physical. When we continue to compare ourselves with machines or computers, we limit ourselves so much.

Even computers which seem so awesome and incredible are *nothing* compared to the mind, body and heart of a human being. Computers are great but what happens when you pull out the plug? Nothing!

When we look at ourselves as limited and mechanical it is easy to overlook how much power we do have – power to change our lives, our thinking, and our hearts. A car cannot change itself from a Toyota to a Mercedes Benz. A computer cannot expand its hard drive or memory by itself. We are not windup toys that run down and need to be wound up regularly.

We are unique that way - we have the power to change ourselves and our lives in dramatic and dynamic ways. I don't feel like I am the same person I was ten years ago – my life has been transforming all the time.

How do we make sure we are growing and evolving and transforming our lives? One way is by being aware of our beliefs. If we are not aware of our beliefs, we are letting

our beliefs run us. And they *will* run us, year after year throughout an entire lifetime.

Where do our beliefs come from? Our childhoods, our parents, our teachers, what we read in the newspaper, our life experiences. We are surrounded by information that we can turn into belief systems. Unless we take time to look inside and sift through, choose and be conscious of our beliefs, they will continue to operate in our lives.

We are so much more powerful and creative than we dare believe. If we remember a few simple truths, we can create a life that is so much more than what we are experiencing right now.

In India I would often be invited to people's homes for a meal or tea. The hosts would insist on seating me on the only chair or if we were all sitting on the floor, I sat on the only pillow. I knew that milk was precious, so when they offered milk for my tea, I would hesitate to accept – but they were insistent. They would remind me, *Having you in our home, is like having God as our guest. It brings us the greatest joy to give the best to you.*

They recognized that everything came from their God and so they were determined to give something back.

Spirit is the one and only source of our good. As our awareness of this grows our ability to connect with it and draw from it and rely on it increases. As we give more power and energy to this source – new channels will open up, and more good will be able to flow into our lives.

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New Year's Release

January is traditionally a time when we look into the new year with anticipation. However, when we only look forward we are missing an opportunity to reflect on what has been. It is important to take time to mindfully and lovingly look at what we may be holding on to from the past that is no longer serving us.

We all carry old beliefs, attitudes, thoughts and feelings from a long time ago. If we do not take the time to consciously let go of them, they can get fixed, stuck and hardened.

What can we do to release negative and limiting thoughts and beliefs that are no longer serving us, so that we *can* move ahead – into the new year – into life - with ease and freedom?

We can take time for the work of *consciousness cleansing*. Of creating a new slate for the new year. This is a time in which we can release the past so that we can open a clear place in our minds and hearts for the future.

I have noticed in my life that some of my baggage is pretty comfortable. Familiar. I hold onto it even though it is not really working *for* me any longer.

The first step in this cleansing process is to look inward for

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something we may wish to release. Often the first thing that comes to mind is a person or situation that we want to put behind us, to move past. The truth is, as much as we would like to release *some people* from our lives, sometimes - they are still there! At work, next door neighbors, family members. We cannot make a person go away. It is important to remember as we do this inner work - we are not releasing *people*. We are not releasing *conditions*. We are releasing the *energy* we have around them - letting go of the feelings or thoughts we have about them. We *can* release the disappointment, judgment and regret because these are things we do have control of. This release is something we have the ability and power to do.

Spend some time in quiet meditation and contemplation - creating a space in which Spirit may work. Gently bring to mind any thoughts or behavior patterns you wish to release. What *in you* is standing in the way of experiencing life fully and joyfully?

When you know what it is you would like to release, write a word or short phrase, meaningful only to you on a small piece of paper. Take your time.

Next you can take this paper and put it in a flame or burn it outside. You will see your words transformed by the flame, releasing the energy and power you have previously given that condition back to the potential for good from which it came. As the fire transforms the energy contained in the paper into heat energy, so you are releasing the seeming power this condition had in your life.

You may find this affirmation useful as you burn it, *This is no longer a part of my life. I set myself free.*

You have now cleared a place in your heart and mind for something new. Growing in consciousness is a two-step process - first clearing out what no longer serves us, then filling in with something new. Every time we clear something out - we want to mindfully choose what to replace it with.

I encourage you to take time to choose what it is you want more of in your life this year. It might be peace, or love or strength, or acceptance. Give it some thought and activate the good that is already within you!

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Unlimited Good

Have you ever caught yourself saying these very words, *I only have ... this is all I have...?*

Perhaps there was a time when you had a debt – some obligation – some expectation that you could not meet? A time when you were in a position where you felt like you had nothing and the world was demanding more from you? It could be something like money or possessions or it could even be your time or energy. A time when you looked around and saw only how little you had?

When I do that, I am focusing on what I don't have, what is missing, a time when I used to have more and now I don't. At that point I have forgotten that I am connected to the source of all good, to universal abundance, infinite supply and that there are a multitude of ways that good comes to me.

Don't stop with what you *seem* to have. Can you see how that shuts the door on receiving anything more?

Take our minds, for example. What have you said to yourself about your mind that is limiting? I know when I can't find my keys or can't remember someone's name or a date – I am pretty hard on myself. Now I make a choice to refocus my attention from *lack* to *possibility*. I remember all

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the people much older than me who are actively engaging their minds and contributing to our world.

What about our bodies? What lack thoughts do you have about your body? I only have... or I don't have... We can easily focus on lost capability, flexibility or strength.

Last year I took my eighty-eight year old mom to her eye appointment. When the doctor covered one eye and asked what she could see she said *nothing!* Imagine my surprise. Nothing? I found out that she had no sight in one eye. I said to her, *Mom, you don't have any sight in one of your eyes?* She said, *Every morning I wake up and thank God for my one good eye.*

Can you see the difference? Instead of saying I *only have* vision in one eye – she said – *I thank God for my one good eye.* Was she looking at what was lost? She never told anyone about her visual limitation. It was not part of her consciousness.

What about finances? Do you ever say, *I only have...*? This kind of thinking is so easy to slip into. We look at the balance in our bank account and it is very easy to say, *I only have ...* It looks like reality. It is one reality. There is another reality that is greater than anything we can see or measure or hold in our hands and that is that we are surrounded by wealth in a multitude of forms.

My invitation to you is to find the good. Pay attention to what is working. Look for it and you will find it. Look for the whole picture. Find what is working, what is succeeding, what is growing. Give thanks for it – praise it. Strengthen it – give it more energy. Not what's wrong – but all that's right.



The Gift of Death

Is there something good about death? I look around in nature and I can see the answer is *yes*. Leaves drop off the tree so that new leaves can have a place to grow in the spring. Kitchen scraps decay and new life is created from the compost.

There is incredible activity going on within our bodies every second. Cells are dying and cells are being created. It is a constant stream of activity. There is not a single cell in our bodies right now that was there eight years ago. Some cells had to die for the new ones to be born. Each night while we sleep billions and billions of cells die *and* billions and billions of cells have been created.

We are disintegrating and we are regenerating all the time. We cannot make it stop – which is a good thing. Life is constantly changing and evolving – that's what makes it life.

Death is *not* the opposite of life. Birth and death are two activities that are happening within us and all around us all the time. Letting go of the old and making way for the new is going on all the time.

We can accept that fact when we think about leaves and compost – why is it so hard for us to know that about ourselves?

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There is a part of us that says, *I don't want to be different tomorrow. I want everything to stay the same. If I am different every day, every hour - then who am I?*

We want to preserve our identity. We want to be certain that we are going to wake up tomorrow, in our bed, surrounded by familiar objects, talk to people we know, and go to the same places.

I recently spent four months in India. I experienced a culture and society that does not hide death. People get old and die, children get sick and die, earthquakes and floods occur and people die. Of course there is grief and sadness, tears and feelings of loss.

As a westerner living in India, I had many conversations about death when the local people found out that we were not afraid to talk about it. It was explored as a topic, like global warming or homelessness or the caste system. We did not talk about it all the time, but it was an acceptable topic and came around regularly.

Before I went to India, I would think, *Who wants to talk about death? It's such a depressing topic.* But something happened to me within forty-eight hours of being in India to change my mind.

I traveled on the bus from Delhi to MacLeod Ganj in the foothills of the Himalayas. A fifteen-hour life transforming, life altering experience. The driver was a very small man handling this very big overloaded bus with a steering wheel he could barely grasp, at the same time shifting and grinding through all the gears. In the fifteen-hour trip there was no change in drivers. He drove with only one stop,

through the night and into the early morning hours. What really was upsetting to me was that he, like all the other drivers on the road, seemed to be oblivious of the rules of the road and even cavalier about the fact that he had fifty or so lives in his hands.

He would pass on curves and he would pass on hills. The bus lumbered so slowly that it gave me lots of time to see the oncoming trucks in our lane and see the impending, inevitable crash. Somehow, each time, he would slide in between buses and trucks and the crash would be averted. This activity of seeing death coming and being miraculously saved happened about every 15 minutes. After eight or so hours of constant panic and terror I had to stop. I just couldn't keep it up – I was exhausted mentally, emotionally and physically.

At first my thoughts went something like this:

The driver is insane; he must have a death wish.

Who put us on this "deluxe" bus?

I will never see my grandchildren.

I will never see HH Dalai Lama or volunteer with the Tibetans.

Couldn't I die on the way back to Delhi?

And then as the hours passed:

I will never see my children again.

They will never find our bodies.

I know now that I have absolutely no control over my future.

And then:

I will never see another dawn.

I hope it doesn't hurt too much.

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Like erosion, the little kingdom I had built around me – my dreams, goals, expectations, assumptions, projections – little by little, fell away, until the only thing I was standing on was a little piece of *now*.

I prayed. I prayed to stay peaceful in this *now* moment. Over and over and over.

In complete surrender, I still saw the driver pull out to pass on a curve. I still felt the crumbling of the road as our tires came to the very edge of a thousand-foot drop. I still saw the driver sit on the back of his seat and steer with his knees as he stretched. I still heard the sound of the monks snoring in the seats around me.

We arrived just after dawn – hallelujah – one more dawn! I dropped into my bed utterly exhausted and utterly changed.

We are all experiencing birth and death all the time. That's a given – for there is no life, except through death. The truth is 120 years from now not one single person, of the billions of people on the planet right now, will be here. The question is: how are we going to live the moment we have right now?



Divine Wait

We are ready to bring something new into our lives. We go within for connection with the divine. We carefully choose and plant the ideas that we want to grow. Seeds of prosperity, hope, harmony, peace, or good health.

Then we wait. We wait for something to happen, something to change. We wait – expectantly - and sometimes we start thinking *Nothing is happening!*

Have you encountered this? We decide to make a change – do the work and then feel like nothing is changing? What happens then? We ask ourselves, *Do I wait – do I push ahead? How long will it take to see some results of my prayers? Is there something else I need to do? Did I do it wrong? Did I forget something?*

It's just like gardening. First we plant the seed and then there comes a time of...? Waiting. We can't see if anything is happening. We don't know if it is growing or not. We may even be tempted to dig around the seed a little and see if it is starting to do something.

It's fairly easy to wait when we *know* something is going to happen and what it will look like. As a child, or perhaps even as adults, we might have looked forward to Christmas or a birthday. We looked at the calendar and knew how long it was going to be before that day arrived. We ticked

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off each day – or in the case of Christmas, opened the little doors on the Advent calendar and then – the day arrives. No more waiting. It arrived just as we expected.

What about when we are waiting for something that we *don't* know when it will show up and often do not even know in what form it will show up?

There are a couple of things that we can consider while we are in this waiting period of the creative process. Because that is what we *are* doing – creating something. A new way of being, a new way of living, a new way of looking at life, a new perspective.

This time calls for us is to be more human *beings* and less human *doings*.

For those of us who tend to get active when we want something to happen, this can be quite a challenge. We wait and watch, we watch, we wait.

If it was really a physical seed we were growing, this would be the time waiting for that first little bit of green to break through the surface. We are looking for some evidence, some outward sign that something is going on. I suspect some of us are better at this than others.

There are ways we can approach this time that are helpful and empowering and there are ways that are not so enjoyable. Since we have probably all experienced the not so great ones: impatience, frustration, doubt, worry – let's explore the alternatives coming from an understanding of the divine.

We all have divine faith. Since it is part of our spiritual design we were born with it. The question is, how are we using our power of faith? Do we see the news about the environment, world conflicts, crime, and poverty and put our faith in those things? Do we add our emotions to them, and roll them over and over in our minds? Then that is where we are putting our faith.

We can use our faith like a flashlight. It will shine wherever we point it. What we point it to will become more real and stronger in our life experience.

As we spend time waiting, be aware how you are using your divine power of faith. Pay attention to what thoughts you are surrounding your new idea with. Thoughts of expectancy, of joy... or thoughts of doubt and worry. Be mindful about where you are pointing your faith. Use it wisely. Remember *we* direct our faith.

Another spiritual quality that comes into play during these times of waiting is divine order. It means the perfect outworking of any situation. It does not mean *our* idea of the perfect outworking of the situation. It is the perfect outworking of Spirit, of the highest good for *everyone* involved. Divine order is always at work in our lives.

The activity of the divine order is so powerful. It works for our highest good even without our being able to observe it. It is working away in the seed underground and it is working in us in ways we can observe and in ways we cannot.

Picture this... in the middle of a deep cold winter day you see a moth at the window, desperately trying to get outside. It is very clear to the moth that outside is where it

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wants to be! But what do we know as we stand aside and watch the scene? We know that if the moth were to have its desire and escape outside, it would perish immediately.

I suspect divine order is working in our lives in the same way. Protecting us until the time is right - even as we beat our wings against an inexplicable invisible barrier.

There is also a divine intelligence working within us that is wiser and more powerful than we can even imagine.

Every few years I sprout and plant an avocado pit. One year I pushed in the toothpicks, put it in a glass of water and left it, knowing it would take time to send up a sprout and some roots. Several months later I noticed something. I had placed the pit in the glass upside down. In a most determined way, the root that had come out of the top of the pit was making its way down into the water and the wise shoot that had sprouted under water was making its way up to the light and air.

Within the avocado is an inner intelligence that directs the roots and the shoots. They *know* which way to go - even when everything around them would tell them otherwise.

When experienced and successful gardeners plant seeds they know what to expect and when. I am quite sure they use that time of waiting – not in doubt and turmoil, but in the anticipation of the new crop. They picture the flowers, taste the juicy apples, and see the delicate lettuce sprouting.

I acknowledge that when we are planting a new idea it is not always as straight forward as planting lettuce. Things, people and ideas need time to grow. However, I do know that if we can spend this time with feelings of anticipation,

expectancy, seeing the good, feeling it, tasting it – we will be contributing to the results in a harmonious and joy filled way.

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The Freedom of Forgiveness

My daughter worked in a shipyard for many years and every season boats came in for repair and maintenance. Over the years she worked on many of the same boats - owners who knew the value of regular maintenance. Every once in awhile she would see a boat she knew had not been in for a long time. She could see the hundreds of barnacles attached to the bottom, the wood starting to rot and the integrity of the boat in jeopardy.

There is something in our lives that works in a similar way - holding onto the hurts, grudges and resentments of the past. Starting from a very early age, we collect hurts and over time, they have the same effect as barnacles on a boat. We slowly begin to sink, the weight slows us down and our movement through life is significantly compromised.

As children we were vulnerable and open and it was easy for us to absorb and believe everything around us. As we grew up and were in contact with more people, chances are we had things said to us that hurt our feelings, that felt unfair, or that we felt needed to be made right.

We carry all this stuff with us. I bet if we took a few moments, right now, we could easily come up with a few things that we still remember – unkind words or hurtful actions. Perhaps we even have a mental list of past wrongdoings that we could easily recite.

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When we think about these incidents as adults we might tell ourselves – it doesn't matter, it wasn't that bad, it was a long time ago. But the truth is, if we can bring them to mind – we haven't believed any of that. Those sentences have been an intellectual exercise and deep in our hearts, we are still holding on to those hurt and wounded places.

Yes, things happened in our pasts that were traumatic and painful, and today these very things are directing the choices we make every day. They have affected how much we trust people, how we interact with others, how often we take risks.

Those unresolved feelings stay with us and build up over time, like barnacles on a hull. Now, the good news. Unlike a boat, we don't need anyone else to take care of this for us. We have the power to scrape off those barnacles.

That's where the work of forgiveness comes in. It is our work and only ours. Even though those past hurts involved other people, *we* are the ones that need to do the work to be free of our past.

Forgiveness is a way of releasing those feelings and of letting go of the past. We can only act in the now – we cannot, as hard as we may try, create a different past. The only thing we can do now is take steps to create a different future.

Before we talk about what forgiveness *is*, let's take a minute to remember what forgiveness is *not*.

Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting. As we do our forgiveness work, we may in time, forget but the letting go comes first.

Forgiveness does not mean it didn't happen. It is a means of coming to terms with what happened and making a decision to release it and in so doing, free ourselves from the past.

Forgiveness is not reconciliation. Forgiveness does not require the presence or participation of another. It may be someone we never want to be in the presence of again. It may not be physically or emotionally safe to be around this person. Some of the people that are involved in our forgiveness process may not even be alive.

Forgiveness does not mean it was OK. It is not about letting the other person off the hook, it is about letting *ourselves* off the hook. It means that we are no longer going to let this event affect who we are and how we live our lives.

When we make the choice to forgive we are saying, what you have done to me is not going to direct my life. What you said to me no longer has power over me.

Forgiveness is taking care of ourselves. It helps us to live the fullest life possible, and not be encumbered by the weight of the past.

Forgiveness is a way of releasing energy from the past. When we forgive, we move that energy out of the way and in so doing, make room for greater possibilities.

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Forgiveness happens over time. We often find we need to do it over and over as we discover or uncover more wounds within us. It is like *uncluttering* our hearts – as we let go of some stuff, we find out there is more. It is a natural healing process so it can take time.

What is the first step we take in activating forgiveness? Willingness. Look deep into our hearts and see if we are truly willing to let go of the hurt. Sometimes we are not. We have become comfortable with it.

We have the power to cut the cord that binds us to this other person, the cord that is choking only us. We choose the time for this to happen. No one else can set us free. How about sooner than later? Give yourself the gift of forgiveness and start now!



Divine Purpose

Have you ever heard the statement that you have a divine purpose? Or there is a divine purpose for your life?

Years ago when I first heard the words, *You have a divine purpose*, it was not inspiring or exciting or something I couldn't wait to start doing. On the contrary – it felt like a burden, a BIG responsibility. Does that mean I have to be nice all the time? Does that mean I have to be perfect? Does that mean – worst of all – it is going to be work? Or this scary question - what if my purpose is something I don't want to do? It can't be fun to be spiritual all the time! These are the thoughts that ran through my mind. As you can imagine – it did not inspire me to jump right in and start living my divine purpose! If anything, I thought, well maybe someday – when I get older or wiser or have more time.

These thoughts kept me *away* from the idea of discovering or even thinking about what my divine purpose might be. If I didn't think about it then I wouldn't have to *do* it and it didn't really sound like much fun, so that was fine with me!

I can see now that I definitely had a few misconceptions. Since then I have learned a few things about divine purpose. And so now, every day, I wake up recommitting myself to my divine purpose. It brings me joy. I look

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forward with anticipation to how the day will provide opportunities for me to express it.

How did I make that switch? How did I move from dread to anticipation?

First of all - divine purpose is not about *doing* anything. What a relief! That eliminates all the questions like, *What if I don't do it right. What if it's not fun? What if I goof it up? What if it doesn't leave me time to do the things I really want to do?* Divine purpose is not about *doing* anything.

Secondly, a divine purpose is not a goal. Goals are finite, they have an ending. You may have goals that are an outlet for your divine purpose, but they are *not* your divine purpose. Goals can be completed whereas your divine purpose is never finished.

There is a reason why you are here right now – and it is not about what you are supposed to *do*, it is about your state of *being*. It is about *who* you are rather than what you do. Your divine purpose is about living with integrity and alignment with Spirit – with the divine. It is a way of living. It is a way of *being*. Our purpose is simply to be an expression of Spirit in our own unique way.

There are times when this can be fairly easy like when we are with those who agree with us, when life goes the way we want it to, when there are no unpleasant surprises. But what about the rest of the time?

You go outside in the morning to go to work and discover someone has broken into your car overnight. There is a multitude of ways you can respond and there are some things that you need *to do*. You can still stay on purpose

and ask yourself, *How can I be an expression of Spirit right here and now? What divine qualities can I bring to this situation?*

Can you see that your purpose is not about doing anything, but about *who* you are? The *who* you are, guides the *what* you do.

What aspect of the divine is trying to express through you? Here are three simple ways that may help you be more aware of how divine purpose expresses through you.

First, pay attention to the things you notice. Your purpose already lies within you and chances are you are already expressing it and living it. Throughout a day's activities notice which ones catch your attention. Listen to yourself for the clues. When someone asks you how your day was or what did you do today, pay attention to what comes to mind. What is it that you choose to talk about? It would be impossible to re-iterate all the day's activities or conversations. You will be selecting the ones you feel have importance or are worthy.

Did you notice how many people held open the doors for you as you went about your day? Did you catch someone's glance and detect the hopelessness in their eyes? Did an article in the paper about an animal rescue program draw your attention? Do you love to hear how people are designing zero impact homes? These are the clues that draw you closer to what your heart and soul longs to express.

When I heard about the Tibetan Buddhist refugees in India in the 1970s, I was drawn to their plight very strongly. I had a desire that never left me and took me twenty years

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to fulfill – that I would go to India and help somehow. Being a channel of compassion is one of my ways of *being*. It propels me and energizes me. It is never work. I don't *try* to be compassionate; I am compassion.

I allow infinite love and compassion to flow through me. When I reflect on the choices I made in my life I can see that they were all avenues where I could be an expression of compassion and hope.

Second, listen to what people say to you *about you*. So often we brush off compliments and hardly hear them. Be aware of your strengths, your gifts and the things that come naturally to you. Sometimes we do not acknowledge them or give ourselves credit for them because they come easily to us. Someone gives you a compliment - and you slough it off -- thinking *I don't really deserve any credit for that because it was not hard to do, it took no effort*.

Third, pay attention to what does *not* feel right. You will know when you are off track if you are paying attention. Sometimes it takes going *off* track to notice what is right and true for you.

I was only consciously aware of my spiritual journey for a few years when I attended a religious service at a local church. At some point in the service everyone joined in speaking together a statement of beliefs. Out of respect and without really thinking I joined them. Suddenly I realized what I was saying and stopped. I knew that I did not believe what I was repeating and I couldn't continue to say the words, so I quietly stopped. Even though the situation was a little uncomfortable, I understood two things. The first was that I acted on my beliefs and secondly, I actually *had* beliefs! If I couldn't clearly

articulate them at least I could recognize when I heard something that *wasn't* true for me. This was a huge ah-ha. By embracing and starting to live my beliefs, I had a way of measuring or holding up to the mirror, what I held as true and what I did not.

We are all individual manifestations of the divine – and guess what? That means we can each express who we are in a unique way. A way that no one else on the planet can.

With Spirit



Being Before Doing

Desire is the fuel that moves us to action. Desire is at work when we plant bulbs in the fall. It is our desire to experience beauty in the spring time. When a farmer plants tomatoes – he or she desires ...tomatoes.

You may have heard or read that we want to avoid desire, that it causes suffering. Desire itself is not the cause of suffering. Where we stumble is in our wanting to know *when* the tomatoes will appear, how many, and how big. When they do not appear in the shape, form or numbers that we want, we are disappointed or unhappy. The desire itself did not cause these feelings. The desire was an honest one – to grow food. Our attachment to the results and outcome is where we suffer.

Where does our desire end and our attachment begin? The answer lies within. Check in with your heart. Keep in touch with how you are feeling. Rarely does pure desire cause us unhappiness. Struggling or disappointment is a clue that we have ventured into the territory of attachment.

What do we do when we have a desire that is longing for expression? How do we bring it into manifestation? We are an action oriented culture. We hurry into projects, we run around, busily doing, doing, and doing. If we take time to reflect we will see that sometimes our actions brought us no

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lasting results and at other times they were productive and fulfilling.

Why the difference? What happens is we often skip a fundamental step. We think that the first step is to make a to do list. We get out some paper and start writing down our ideas and our questions. Perhaps we want to build a garden shed. Do we need a permit? How big will it be? What materials are we going to use? Who will build it? How much will it cost?

There is nothing wrong with a to do list – go ahead and make it. It does fulfill a purpose. The purpose is to empty the mind of all the stuff that's running around in there. An empty mind is perfect for the step that comes *before* we do any of the things on our 'to do' list.

Begin with the *being* instead of the *doing*. How is it we wish *to be* as we undertake this project? What is the inner guiding light that is going to shine on our path and show us the next step? What are the qualities we want to be holding in our hearts as we begin this journey? What state of *being* are we going to embody as we move through the *doing*?

Starting with the *being* is an invitation to divine wisdom to participate in the creation process. It is setting an inner intention that is going to be our compass and companion as we proceed.

It makes no difference if we are building a tool shed or starting a business. If we have our intention in place, we will always have a compass that will swing us around and point us in the direction of fulfillment. When we are in touch with our heart we will be able to easily discern the next step. We will know what to leave behind. When we

run into bumps along the way this foundation will hold us steady.

For success and fulfillment, empty your mind, get in touch with your heart-wisdom, set your intention and *then* take action.

With Spirit



Letting It Happen

Have you ever worked really hard to achieve something and not get it? Have you ever earnestly prayed for something and not received it? What is our part in the creative process? Where do we jump in and when do we step back?

I don't know about you but I spent a lot of time in my life keeping very busy *making* things happen. I am pretty sure this is something we all do. We learned it as children when we were encouraged to *do something*. People showed us how to get things done and we grew up thinking that if we kept working hard, we would get what we wanted.

When I took time for reflection on the things I had accomplished, I noticed that my satisfaction was not always linked to how hard I worked, and was not contingent upon how *much* I wanted something.

If things happened because we *wanted* them to happen – we would have already received everything we ever wanted.

If things happened because we worked hard and long – then everything we ever worked hard and long for we would have already received.

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But that has not been my experience. I have wanted things badly and did not get them. I have worked very hard for things that never came about. Working hard and trying does not always bring us the results we desire.

Yet there is a widespread belief that if we don't make it happen, it won't happen. We feel that if we don't keep pushing forward, everything will just come to a stop, or heaven forbid – start rolling backwards and unraveling.

We can be really busy, *or* the opposite - we sometimes can move through our lives like we are asleep. We know who is going to say what, we buy gas, take out the garbage, do the laundry, and watch our favorite TV program. We are on auto-pilot. At the end of the day we think – gosh – where did it go? At the end of the week we say the same thing. When we find ourselves in March, we say what happened to February? Perhaps there is something missing in our great efforts to achieve and accomplish things.

Maybe we can stop pushing and let things happen. Maybe we can just rest in the moment, and make room for the divine to work *through* us instead of us *doing* all the work. We may have never tried this. Our daily lives and the environment we live in don't always seem conducive to taking time for being centered and in the present moment, or for simply allowing.

What *would* happen if we stopped and woke up to the now moment? What if, instead of wanting things to be different or working hard to make things different, we just stopped and centered ourselves in the present moment? What would happen if instead of trying to plan and organize the future, we just took some time to experience this present moment?

One of the reasons I enjoyed India so much was because it was constantly forcing me to live in the now. Every day held a new experience. Where do I buy food? Is there a place for garbage? What day is the fruit market? Is this the place where you get toast with your egg, or do I need to order it separately?

Every day was new. I couldn't predict what would happen which meant I had to stay in the moment and pay attention. Receptive. Listening. Remaining in a state of not knowing.

I took on a mantra, not a Sanskrit word, and not given to me by a spiritual master. I figured it out all by myself. The mantra was, *I don't know*. Why does it take thirty minutes to get a chai in the afternoon and one minute in the morning? *I don't know*. Why did the bus drop us off at *this* path when we asked to go further? *I don't know*. Why is it every time I order masala chai it is different? Sometimes really sweet, sometimes no sugar, sometimes spicy, sometimes bland. What words do I use to get the type I really want? *I don't know*.

Because I didn't know what to expect I had to keep my eyes and ears open all the time. I had to pay attention to what was going on in every moment. I had to be awake.

For instance, one of the biggest challenges in India is walking in the streets because there is so much going on. You cannot take your eyes or your mind off *what is* for a second!

Several times I was just about to step out into the road to cross and a gentle touch on my arm would alert me to

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pause. In that second a car would come zipping right where I was going to step – but from the *wrong* way. I forgot to look right instead of left. My mind was on something else - like where to find the perfect cup of chai!

When we think we know – *that is the time* to stop and allow something else to enter our awareness. How do we feel about *allowing*? We might not be comfortable with this. We might ask ourselves, *Will we stop getting the goodies, the good things in life, if we stop and just let life happen?*

Someone asked me one time, *What should I do while I am letting it happen?* There is no doing!

Being in the present moment – even briefly – a few times a day – will completely change our experience of the day – the experience of our lives.

How do we remember to stop? There are a couple of times a day that have been very helpful for me to pause. These are events that happen every single day without exception, so I can use them as my *being present/allowing* time, and then I have the experience at least 3 times a day.

I used to leap out of bed in the morning and off I went. I ate a quick breakfast and then on to the activities of the day. I went full speed ahead until I dropped into bed at night. I was *making* it happen. Now I approach the beginning of the day differently. Rising in the morning is a holy moment. Not everyone on the planet wakes to see a new day. Open your eyes and spend a few moments in recognition that you are still here, that you are alive. Every morning I say, *Thank you for another day in paradise!* It's not about *where* I am living – it is that I *am* living! Find a

short expression that embraces gratitude for your life and the day. Taking time to touch base with the divine first thing in the morning changes the tone for your whole day.

You may have a daily prayer or meditation practice – great!

Another opportunity that comes up probably at least twice a day is when we eat. Did you ever stop to think how amazing it is that we can take something from the outer world that is going to nourish our complex physical bodies and we have so little understanding about how it happens?

A third opportunity when we can pause every day is before we go to sleep. It is so helpful to take time to let the day settle. Like when a stream in turmoil hits a quiet spot and all the sediment drops to the bottom and the water becomes crystal clear.

In this state of clarity and peace you can let the day come to an end. Allow the blessing of rest come to you; know that you are well in the highest sense of the word. That you are whole and holy.

Yes, we need to be active in the world and we also need to take time to come away, to let the dust settle, to allow Spirit to renew us – mind, body and soul.

With Spirit



Let There Be

How many of you, in the past, have made New Year's resolutions? How many times have you heard others tell you about their New Year's resolutions? Have you ever noticed that later in the year we rarely hear people exclaiming about how they fulfilled their resolutions or how making that resolution changed their lives?

Research shows that most resolutions last about six weeks. If we do continue past the average six weeks, it is often due to our forcing ourselves to continue even after our desire has disappeared. We press on even after we have no energy for it. We may get results but you may have noticed they are rarely lasting or satisfying. Forcing ourselves means we are overriding our natural inclination. We are ignoring how we are really feeling. This, over time, is counter-productive and even damaging. We train ourselves not to listen to or honour our feelings. If we do succeed, the victory is flat. There is little sense of accomplishment – only relief that it is finished.

You would think that we would just give up on New Year's resolutions and I think quite a few people have. This approach builds in us a sense of repeated failure, causes us to question our self-discipline, and creates an unwillingness to commit to anything. When those are the results, it would actually be better for us if we didn't engage in that kind of activity at all.

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Does this mean we don't have goals? Does this mean we give up and do nothing? Not at all. Of course we can look forward! We can desire to make changes in our lives but there are different approaches on how we enter into *change* that can make all the difference in the results.

Often our New Year's resolutions are looking at what is *wrong* in our lives and deciding how we are going to *fix* it. If we think we are alone too much we resolve to get out three times a week and see someone. If we think we are out of shape, we resolve to go to the gym and work out. If we think we need more income we resolve to go out and get a part-time job. All of these resolutions start with the idea that there is something missing or wrong. That something needs to be fixed. That there is a problem. *How did I get here? Who is to blame for this situation? Why does this always happen to me?*

These kinds of thoughts create a huge obstacle to overcome. First this energy has to be brought into a place of neutrality before it can be used to move us forward in a new direction. Like driving, first we have to shift into neutral before we can shift into first gear and go in the direction we wish.

Compare these two statements: *I don't have enough so I need to get more. I am grateful for the good I have and I invite more into my life.* There is a big difference in the *feeling* of those two statements, isn't there?

Picture our thoughts being like one of those big heavy gym balls. If you think the ball is going in the wrong direction and you want to turn it around and get it to roll in the opposite direction, it will take a lot of energy on your part.

However, if you picture the ball as rolling generally in the right direction and you are going to nudge it slightly to adjust its path, this makes it much easier to accomplish.

It's all how we look at it. Someone else in the exact same situation can ask these questions, *What can I give thanks for right now? What part of this situation is working well? What are the things that have helped me along the way? What is the next step to move forward?*

As human beings we can only focus on one thing at a time. We can be looking out a window but don't really see anything because our attention is elsewhere. Perhaps we are thinking about what we are going to have for dinner or about an argument with a friend. We don't really notice the trees and sky.

We cannot make a change in our lives when we are looking backwards. It's like walking down a path and looking behind us. We are looking at where we have been and guess what? Chances are we will trip and fall again and again.

Yes, we have learned from the past. We will not forget those experiences. We do not need to keep re-living them and fanning the flames of blame, judgment and criticism.

Have you ever told your story of being treated unfairly? The result is that we usually end up feeling bad all over again, even getting angry again, and blaming others for what they did. We have the ability to re-create that same situation and its feelings, over and over and over again. It doesn't matter if it happened twenty years ago, we can feel it all over again.

With Spirit

It's our choice. Is this how we want to live – re-living the disappointments or pain of the past – and in so doing bringing them back to life in this *now* moment? Or do we want to put our attention on something better and healthier for ourselves?

Instead of being a *fixer* – we could be a *creator*. We have a powerful example of how to be a creator,

Every step of creation story starts with *Let there be...* God didn't say, *Gosh it's awfully dark. I better make some Light.* Or, *hmmm there is a problem here. No land. I better put some land together.* Or, *there is no life. Better fix that.* Each step of creation starts with *let there be...*

And each step of creation finishes with the words, *And it was good.*

Real creation does not begin with what's wrong or missing. It is always starting with acknowledging the good and creating more good.



Tilling Spiritual Soil (Part One)

There are some great parallels between cultivating our gardens and cultivating our consciousness. The intention, desire and steps for preparing land for seed and preparing our consciousness for a new idea are similar.

What do you see when you look at a seed? It's small, sometimes really small. Can you see what will grow by looking at it? No. The mystery is hidden inside. Have you ever come across some seeds without packaging and sit there with them in your hand with a big question mark on your face? What are they?

What do we think of when we see a seed? New life. Possibilities. Potential. A seed holds all the information needed to reproduce itself. However, a seed sitting in a package... is only a seed sitting in a package. It may be able to grow into a tomato or a lilac bush or even a great cedar, but that's not going to happen unless its planted. That's the first step. Planting it – but not just anywhere. If we want it to grow we will choose and create the best environment we can for it to take root and flourish. An environment that will provide the maximum opportunity for growth. We play an active role in the planting, growth and development of a new plant.

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Perhaps you have heard the story about the man on the road admiring the fields ready for harvest. He said to the farmer, *It's wonderful what God has done.* The farmer looked at his fields and responded, *You should have seen what it looked like when only God was looking after it.*

For us, as growing spiritual beings, we are always planting new seeds in our minds, new ideas, new ways of being.

How do we prepare our minds and hearts – our land - for a new idea to take root and flourish? What can we do and what are we going to refrain from doing?

The first step is preparing the soil. If we were gardeners and were contemplating a new garden bed – what would we do first? We would have a look at what is already there. Determine if the land has been neglected and look for rocks and weeds. And these are the two essential pieces that we are going to look at first. Rocks and weeds.

First the rocks. If we maintain the analogy of the land being our minds or hearts – what do you think rocks might represent? Hard places, solidified stuff, protected places, closed off parts of us. Perhaps it is time to pick up those rocks and have a close look and see if they are still serving a purpose in our lives.

You may have noticed rock or stone walls surrounding plots of land or gardens. They are serving a purpose there. Rocks are not bad – we just don't want them in our growing space. We want to leave that space free for something else to grow. So when we come across a rock – something that is not helping us – we gently move it aside. Put it with the others, and give it a new purpose.

We can do this simply, and without condemnation. This is so, so important. Whenever we are making changes in our outlook, in our perceptions, in our attitudes – do it gently! Lovingly.

We don't expect children to walk the first time they try – we support them as they stumble and we encourage them to keep trying. Be that kind, loving and gentle to yourself!

Next we have weeds. Weeds can be quite amazing really. Rocks don't grow back from the place we have moved them, but weeds are different. They are often incredibly strong and hardy. They have an amazing capacity to recover and a very strong life force. Perhaps you have seen them growing and even blooming in the cracks in pavement or on rocks with no soil.

When I bought a home in Victoria I was looking around in the backyard and one of the things I noticed was this huge lump of green. It was about four feet wide, three feet high and about twelve feet long. Just a green mass of vegetation. When I looked closer I saw that it was bindweed heaped over and over - but there was something else growing underneath that was giving some shape to this mound. I dug through and discovered – raspberries!

This was a double row of raspberries completely taken over by bindweed. I am an avid lover of raspberries and I was so happy to have these in the yard. I started to clean out the bed – and this is what happened. I would grab a piece of bindweed stem and pull and pull. It would get caught up in the canes, I would continue to pull and snap! Out came the bindweed with the raspberry cane. This happened a few times and I realized that if I kept that up I would have no bindweed and I would have no raspberries!

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The only way to extricate the bindweed without harming the raspberry canes was to gently, easily and slowly ease off or unwind every single strand. This took constant, careful monitoring for years.

When we identify something in our minds, in our consciousness, that we see is not serving us any longer, we need to remove it. Just like the bindweed, if we pull it out roughly – what happens? It breaks off. And it leaves the root. And you know what happens when the root stays – it grows back again! We want to be gentle, loving, and careful as we wiggle those weeds out.

This weed, this behavior or attitude that has been a part of your life for a long time, may be quite strong and hardy. It may not let go without some time, attention and patience.

We also have an inner intelligence, an inner knowing that gently and easily directs us in the way of growth and transformation. Trust that there is a divine power at work in your life, a partner in your garden that is helping you see what you want to change and what is producing good results in your life.

When we remove something – what is always the next step? Put something different in its place! Otherwise what happens? More weeds!

As we prepare our minds for new ideas we want to remember to identify the rocks and weeds and remove or move them gently and with care. Now we have prepared the soil for something wonderful to develop.

Remember that we are co-creating with divine power. As we align ourselves with Spirit, with the good, with the best, that inner intelligence and guidance will help us make wise decisions.

With Spirit



Planting Care Fully (Part Two)

I am using the idea of preparing, planting and harvesting a garden as an outer analogy for the inner process that goes on as we prepare to make a change in our lives.

We have considered preparing our inner soil to get ready for planting what we want to experience, and how to create the very best environment for our new ideas, and for our new way of being to flourish.

We looked at the rocks and the weeds and what they represent in our consciousness. Now we come to the important step that comes after we clear the space for something new.

How do we choose what to plant?

If we were really talking about seeds what would we do – look at a seed catalogue! Look at all the beautiful pictures and make our choices.

However, we are talking about an inner process, so the process of selection is different. We are planting divine ideas. How do we do this in a way that will produce the results we are looking for?

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Let's look within for a moment. Most of us regularly reflect on our lives and notice what is working and what is not. Sometimes we spend more time in the *what is not working* category than the *what is*.

Any one of us can probably very quickly bring to mind something in our lives that is not really working the way we would like.

Perhaps we have a health challenge, our finances are not what we are comfortable with, or we are struggling with family members or friends. Have I hit on most of the situations that can challenge us? Health, finances, family, employment... Most of us are aware of some area in our lives that could be better.

When we look at what is not working we may decide to make a change. If we don't like our job, we look for a new job. If we don't like our home, we decide to move. If our health is not what we want to experience, we look for a new doctor or a different modality to bring about a change.

Our process often goes like this: we don't like something, we change *it* and then we wait for the happiness or relief we are seeking to arrive. This is working on things in our *outer* world to bring about a change in our *inner* world.

We can and do make changes using this process – we do it all the time. What often happens is that the change does not last and before we know it we are experiencing the same thing again. Maybe in a new form, maybe with a new face, but the same experience. We find a new job and guess what – they treat us the same way! We find new friends and next thing we know – we are having the same

problems with them. Then what do we do? Try harder. Do it longer. Get more serious. Or make an even bigger change in the outer things.

You have heard the definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.

The reason we are not experiencing what we are looking for – what we are trying so hard to accomplish, is because we are working against the natural creative process... in the opposite direction...swimming upriver instead of swimming *with* the natural flow.

There is another way. A way that creates positive lasting change. The creative or transformative process works from the *inside to the outside*. Until we make a change inside, we will not experience a lasting or satisfying change outside.

What kind of change are we looking at? How do we flow with the creative process and not work against it? What are the new seeds, the new ideas that we can plant to bring us the harvest we will enjoy?

First, always, we remember we are co-creators with Spirit. Our current experience is the result of our best thinking so far. If we want to experience something different, we will need to lift our thinking to a new level. How do we do that – Spirit first! As we align ourselves with Spirit, divine intelligence and guidance will help us make decisions.

The truth is we are planting *seeds* all the time. Every thought is a seed. We want to plant very carefully and consciously! Choose wisely. Pay attention to what we are putting in our minds and hearts.

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Talk about what we *do* want to grow. Talk about it, think about it and give thanks for it. Giving thanks brings us in alignment with feelings of gratitude, happiness, joy, anticipation, enjoyment and that's the fuel that propels the idea.

If we remember that we are starting from the inside and letting the creative process work outward, what might we want to plant? Not a new job, not a new home, not new friends.

What we are looking for are *inner* qualities that we want to experience more in our lives. How do we choose? A good way to discover what it is you want to plant is to ask yourself this question: If nothing changed in your life, what would you want to cultivate in order to fully enjoy it now?

This is a profound question: if nothing changed in your life, what qualities would you want to develop to live a happy life? What if your physical challenge never goes away? What qualities would you plant? Perhaps patience. Perhaps loving yourself just the way you are. Perhaps gratitude for the abilities you do have. What if your financial situation never improved? What qualities would you want to embody in order to live life happily and joyfully? Perhaps resourcefulness or being willing to ask for help. Perhaps releasing some of your ideas about what defines success.

These are the seeds we can plant – patience, compassion, understanding, willingness – whatever it is you want to experience more of in your life.

Remember, a seed stays a seed until it is planted and nourished. An idea is nothing more than an idea until it is planted in the rich soil of our consciousness and nourished with words of faith.

When we plant a seed, we take care of it. We allow it to germinate in its own time. Sometimes there is a waiting period as we watch for some sign of growth. What can we do during this time – when it looks like there is nothing happening? This time is spent resting in the assurance that Spirit is always at work in our lives and the universe and that the perfect outworking is taking place.

We take care of our new ideas the same way we take care of a new seedling. With our tending and nurturing, the new idea begins to take root and send out a shoot. We provide all it needs to flourish and grow.

With Spirit



Celebrating the Harvest (Part Three)

Let's review the first two steps. The first step was clearing our minds and hearts of the rocks and weeds that get in the way of living a totally fulfilling life.

Here's an example: Perhaps we were feeling too busy – pulled in many directions and wanted to *grow* time. We cleared our mind of the thoughts and feelings that were holding us back. Things like, *There's too much to do. There are not enough hours in the day. I never have time for myself.* Those are the weeds and rocks.

We released those thoughts whenever they popped up – gently and lovingly. We planted truth ideas – in our actions, in our words and in our thoughts. *There is always enough time for what I need to do. I am aligned with divine timing and all is well. I release those things that are not mine to do.* Using these affirmations our minds turn to how we want to experience life and not on what we *don't* want to experience.

As we embarked on this journey, we started to notice when our minds wandered into the *old territory* of lack and limitation. Each time this happened we noticed it more quickly and we brought it back to our new way of being – gently, like leading a child.

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I remember when my son was quite young he would wander away and get lost – just like that! We would be in the grocery store, he would be right next to me and the next moment I would hear an announcement, *Would the mother of David please come to the Customer Service desk?* Our minds can be like that – one minute we know what our thoughts are doing and the next minute they are wandering down some path we really do not want to be on.

When we know and are conscious of what we are wanting, we see what is not aligned with that more quickly. We notice when our words are replaying old tapes and we stop. We are aware of where our thoughts tend to drift – into the old way of thinking – and we gently bring ourselves back. Over time we work with these ideas, we take care of them – nurture them – surround them with faith and love and then we start seeing the results.

We have a harvest! Now what?

Two things come to mind, the first is celebration. I am learning to celebrate more and more - for the truth is we are so incredibly blessed and there is always cause for celebration. We often forget to celebrate even the simplest things. Finishing a project, preparing a family dinner, buying a piece of furniture or emptying out a closet and taking things to a thrift shop. Every one of these is cause for a moment of appreciation and acknowledgment. Often we are too busy rushing into the next project, the next appointment, fixing the next problem, that we forget to pause and give thanks for what we already have.

The second way to acknowledge the harvest is sharing. Ask yourself – what can I give? How can I contribute? We

have some great examples of generosity around us – young children. They are wonderful examples of sharing and giving with no thought of receiving.

When my daughter was about six or seven years old she had saved a pocketful of coins and it was our day to go spend it. She had a little purse and there were maybe 15 – 20 coins inside and every once in a while she would shake her purse and listen to the sound of those coins. We drove to our little market place on Quadra Island and went to the grocery store first. At the checkout stand there was a small poster with pictures of children and she asked me to tell her what it was. I explained that the poster was about helping children who had problems with their eyes and that for fifty cents, a child could receive an eye exam or that for two dollars they would receive a pair of glasses. You have probably seen these displays with a little box to drop in some coins. My daughter asked if she could put money in the box and I said sure, that would be great, how much do you want to give? She looked at me, a little perplexed at my question, and answered *all of it!*

She knew how to give – no *shoulds* about how much and what – she gave happily and generously – with no thought of herself.

We want to share our harvest with the same generosity and joy. What we know is that the thoughts we are holding now are already growing into what we will experience in the weeks and years to come. It is impossible to stop the natural impulse for growth that surrounds us. As we continue to turn our thoughts toward the light – toward what is whole – holy – we have already set the wheels in motion to bring in the harvest in the future.

With Spirit

Give what you have now. We always have something we can give. If what you have to share is time, give your time. Then you are living in the divine flow of gratitude and abundance. If you have skills that can be helpful to someone – share them. Volunteer somewhere. If you have money you can give, support organizations that are aligned with your values.

Keep in mind that we are moving through all the stages of creation all the time. In some areas of our lives we are planting, in others we are nurturing and protecting and in some, we are harvesting. Let's make sure we don't forget to celebrate the harvest and share it generously with those around us.



Sacred Play

Sacred? Play? Do these two words fit together? The word sacred denotes solemnity, earnestness, seriousness – sounds more like work! How could a word like *sacred* partner up with a word like *play*?

If we look at various world religions, we will see that the elements of play are in every single one. Zen masters, Hasidic storytellers, Muslim mystics are full of stories that are playful, humorous and also - valuable and respected. Why is play useful to the spiritual seeker? Playfulness lowers our analytical instincts and brings down our *life is serious* radar screen. Play opens us up to the unexpected. It often catches us off guard. We see that what we thought was silly is actually incredibly wise and profound.

The word *silly* derives from the Greek word *selig* meaning *blessed*. There is something sacred in being able to be silly. Many of the things that we thought were silly and only useful for play have much wisdom.

Notice what happens when we are engaged in play and focused on fun and silliness? The rest of our being has a chance to rest, revive itself, and take a break from the seriousness of life.

We play cards with our friends every few weeks. We spend hours laughing, joking, sharing quick little catch up stories

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and at the end of the night what have we accomplished? You could say not much, but how do we feel? Alive, enriched, happy, and connected.

Play is natural – people everywhere play – in all cultures, and in all part of the world. Archeologists have discovered games that were used thousands of years ago. Games are something everyone can do and often require nothing more than what you can find around you.

I lived a year in Kenya and many months in India. I saw children with nothing – literally nothing – playing. They found a string, or a rock or a branch and in no time created a play world. Play engages our imagination and it invokes our curiosity. Play encourages us not to take ourselves too seriously. It gives us permission to let go of roles, responsibilities, and the concerns of our everyday lives.

Play often elicits laughter and joy. Pure and simple. We all are aware of the benefits and healing aspects of laughter. It stimulates renewal in every part of our body. Laughter is a holy thing. It is as sacred as music and silence and solemnity, maybe even more so.

When we play, we forget everything else. When we immerse ourselves in the act of play we become blissfully and innocently free. Play is a vital part of an enriched and fulfilled life. It has an important role in our spiritual life.

Of course seriousness and earnestness and work do have a place in our lives. But take a quick review of the last week and notice how much time you were working and how much time were you playing. You can probably easily see that most of the time you were not playing. There may be an imbalance between seriousness and playfulness. Most of

us don't play enough. We think we are too busy, have too many important things to accomplish or too much work to do.

The best treatment for these conditions is play. As human beings, as spiritual beings, we need to be part of a balanced rhythm of work and play to keep us alive and healthy. Our play time is sacred. It is part of the divine order of the universe. Play helps us keep time with the rhythm of creation and brings us back to our true nature of wholeness.

Practice play by doing things on the spur of the moment. Take time out to experiment with something new. Laugh heartily at jokes, situations, and yourself! You will be surprised at how the other aspects of your life unfold much more easily and joyfully.

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Sacred Space

Sacred space is an interesting concept because – well, we are surrounded by space. Since you woke up this morning you have been in several spaces – your home, your car or a bus, a store or work. How do we know what is sacred and what is not? What makes a place sacred?

I have lived about eight months in India. I saw and experienced many sacred places. Some of them I knew about beforehand and travelled to see them, but most of them I discovered while I was already there. Every time I came into a new region, I met and talked to many people. Inevitably they would tell me what was so special about that area.

Hindu spirituality is imbedded in the land. So everywhere I went there was a holy place, a sacred mountain, a holy river, or a special valley. People would happily share their knowledge of this sacred place with me. This is where Krishna started his journey. This is where Hanuman fought the demons. This is where Buddha attained enlightenment. It got to be fun to see how long I was in a place before someone asked if I had been to the sacred _____ and tell me how special it was, what had happened there, and how blessed they were to live so close to this sacred spot.

I visited many of these places. They included magnificent and humble structures, incredible temples, natural features,

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mountain peaks, rocks and rivers. In Hindu spirituality it is believed that all rivers come from heaven. They are a direct connection from the spiritual world to the earthly world. And touching them is like touching heaven.

A day after I flew into Delhi I hopped on a train and headed north to Rishikesh to see the river Ganges. Indians call the river Ma Ganga, meaning the mother. Being on the banks of the Ganges is very special. It is the dream of every Hindu to bathe in her waters or die close by so their ashes could be put into the river. I wanted to experience the river first hand.

It was hard to choose which spot to view and visit the Ganges because every few mile is recognized as a sacred spot. Rishikesh is where the Ganges River first meets the plains of India after it comes bursting out of the mountains and the valleys. Fifteen miles downriver is where two other rivers join the Ganges and guess what? It is also considered a sacred spot.

While I was in Rishikesh I walked amongst thousands of pilgrims who had journeyed from all over India to be there. I walked on the beautiful soft sand and among the huge boulders that had tumbled down the river valley. There are hundreds of temples and shrines up and down the river bank and all day and all night I heard the temple bells ringing as people entered and left them. I joined hundreds of people who gathered each night at dusk to chant by the riverside and place little lighted floating candles in the water. I filled little bottles of water from the Ganges so that as I travelled, I could give a gift to my Indian friends.

I visited the river every day. It was clean, fresh, cold and beautiful – straight from the Himalaya mountains.

I didn't have to look very hard to find the sacred. What became very evident was that in India there is no separation between religion and life. Between the mundane and the sacred. They are beautifully interwoven.

Every person starts their day in prayer and acknowledging a god. If you enter a shopkeeper's tiny space you will see a little spot on a shelf, between the soap and rice, where there is a small carving or picture. You can see a small offering made that morning and you can smell the incense in the air. The shopkeeper did not open his shop until these things were in place.

There was a neighbourhood temple across from my homestay. Every morning before dawn I heard the temple bells chiming and if I looked out my window I would see everyone from that neighbourhood walking to the temple to say their prayers, make an offering and then go about their day. Children on their way to school, businessmen with their briefcases, women on their way to the river with their laundry - everyone.

You cannot walk a hundred feet without encountering some type of a small shrine. There would be a picture or statute of an aspect of a god with some flowers, candles and incense. People stop to pay their respects and make an offering. Imagine my surprise when, as I was walking on the road one day, I saw a shrine and stopped to acknowledge it. I peeped in and saw Mary and baby Jesus surrounded by candles, flowers and incense!

A part of each day is spent remembering and reconnecting with the sacred. Everywhere you look – you can see it. But what makes those places holy, sacred?

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We have a great teaching about holy ground in the book of Exodus. When Moses approached the burning bush he heard the voice of Yahweh tell him he was standing on holy ground.

Do you think Yahweh meant that only *that spot* was holy and that if Moses walked a few steps away he would be standing on ground that was not holy? No. No matter where we are, the ground on which we stand is holy. *If* we see it that way. And that is the challenge isn't it? To recognize the sacred in every place we are standing.

Millions of people travel to sacred spots all around the planet. You can read their inspiring stories and the miracles of healing they experienced. Lourdes, Uluru, Stonehenge, and Machu Picchu – these places are called sacred or holy. What makes them so? *We* do. Our being there and the way we think about them – the way we feel about them. Perhaps when we are in these places we open our eyes to the sacred that is around us, and allow the mystery to become visible.

I invite you to enter into your week and your world with the intention to create the sacred – everywhere you are. *You* are a walking, talking, living, breathing – sacred space!



Caring for a Divine Creation

The first time I had a place where I could have houseplants I was very excited and bought a lot of them. I bought all different kinds and I placed them all over my apartment. It took a while to learn how to take care of them - how much water they needed, how much light, what size pots. A lot of them died. Oftentimes I would notice, *Oh my gosh this plant is looking droopy. Maybe it is dry.* Then I would water it.

Or I would see the leaves were brown and burned from being too close to a hot window. So I would move it. Only when there was a *noticeable* problem would I remember to do something for them. I brought them back from the brink of death over and over again.

At some point I started becoming more attuned to them and noticed the subtle signs of needing a drink, or food or light. I would take steps to strengthen them and help them grow strong instead of waiting until they were on death's door.

I wonder sometimes if we do the same thing to ourselves. How many of us only notice our physical needs when we are hurting? When we are in pain or discomfort. Then we think, *Oh I should do something about this!* As soon as we

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feel all right again we totally ignore our physical needs. What about our emotional needs? Do we wait until we are experiencing emotional stress and only then reflect on what we might do to ease that pain?

We may be taking our bodies, minds and souls for granted - never giving them a thought until there is a problem. Until something draws our attention to what is missing or not working.

What if we were to shift our perspective and instead of reacting to the pain and discomfort, we became attuned and sensitive to our needs and did something pro-actively? We could nurture and feed ourselves on a regular basis instead of needing to take extreme measures to bring us back to health or wholeness. This life - this precious human life - is what we have right now. Do we really know and understand the value of it? If we did, would we treat it as we do?

Self-care is linked to self-worth. We don't care for things we do not value - including ourselves. We take care of what we really value. Perhaps we have some special belonging - a teacup from a dear friend, a painting of a special place, a gift that we have kept for many years because of the joy it brings us. We take care of these things. When we move, we pack them carefully to protect them.

I remember watching a little boy finger paint and I said, *Wow - you're doing a great job!* He looked at me with a big smile and said, *I know! And I am a good singer too!* How wonderful it was to see him reveling in his own goodness. What happened to that sense of self-worth we were born with?

There was a time in our lives when we did know that we were great. Somewhere along the way that self-concept of our greatness, of our worthiness, started to erode.

We picked up messages from our childhood environment, our culture, our churches, our schools, our families. We were taught to not think of ourselves - but to think of others first. We started looking at ourselves in a different light and concluded that our own needs were not important and that to think about ourselves was selfish.

Over time we noticed our shortcomings instead of our successes. We remembered all the mistakes - the times we goofed up. And we started to confuse what we did with who we were. We have experiences and we are not our experiences. The same way we have hands and feet. They belong to us but they are not who we are. Our experiences are important. The experiences that we see as mistakes or failures might be the very stuff that gives us the strength or compassion that we will use in the future.

In the confusion about *what we have done* and *who we are* we may lose touch with our sense of self-worth. We may lose that deep knowing that as a divine creation we are worthy of care and love and attention. We cannot be separate from our divine nature, from our wholeness. Everything that Spirit is - love, strength, wisdom, energy - is ours. Spirit does not dole it out. It does not wait until we are ready - we are ready right now – we have always been ready.

Let's care for what we have been given - this precious life and all its promise.

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The Gifts of Spiritual Community

A number of years ago I was finishing nine years of classes to become a licensed Unity teacher. When the classes have been successfully completed there is a week-long final exam. It is an intensive week of lengthy exams, giving talks and meditations in front of a panel of Unity ministers, and naturally, doing lots of inner spiritual work. I finished my classes one week and stayed over the weekend so that I could undergo the exams the following week.

During the weeks of classes, I discovered there were a few us who had also decided to do the same thing and we had an amazing experience over that weekend. We studied and tested each other with questions on the Bible, Metaphysics, New Thought and Unity history. We roomed in the same set of cottages and we spent day and night, reviewing our talks, using flash cards and study guides, reading and praying.

In that period of time we formed a little community. It was a community based on need and circumstance. We happened to be going through the same experience at the same time. That is one kind of community.

A community can also be based on common experiences or interests. You may get together with people who have been raised in the same kind of culture. My daughter went to the Ukrainian Centre where she learned dancing. In

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those years we ate lots of good Ukrainian food and met wonderful people who had formed a community based on their common culture and language.

And then there is something called spiritual community. Spiritual community calls the relationship to an entirely different level because it is not based on needs or common experiences or convenience. It is based on spiritual principles. It is not grounded in our human-ness, not in our individualities, but in the principle that we all share a spiritual nature.

People who seem to have nothing in common can form a very powerful spiritual community. Holding spiritual principles as a guiding light is more powerful than any interest or experience. When we are willing to be together in that way – incredible things happen. Each one of us is a *unique creation* of the divine. When we see each other in that light, and support each other in that truth, miracles happen.

Many of us can do things alone, but doing them in community really calls us to a higher level of commitment and intention. Community acts as a catalyst where transformation is possible. Something is being created together that cannot be brought into manifestation individually.

Often those drawn together in spiritual community are people who, under different circumstances, would not necessarily spend time with each other. But that is the beauty of the spiritual community - it is based in Spirit.

A spiritual community provides a space for us to be who we are without judgment. It is a place where others will

love you and appreciate you even when you are not feeling worthy of it. It is a place that allows us to experiment and try new things in the supportive environment of acceptance, love, and support. These are the gifts of a spiritual community.

Acceptance is knowing that we are safe with each other, that we do not need to place distance or armor around ourselves. Acceptance gives us the freedom to feel our feelings, say what's on our minds without being judged or criticized. With a relationship based on acceptance we don't have to pretend to be who we are not. There are no masks. Unconditional love – who wouldn't want to know that someone recognizes the inner beauty, joy and wisdom that we are and will love us and appreciate us even when we are not feeling worthy of it. A friend will listen, never forgetting that we are really so much more than what is showing at this moment.

Can most of us say that we would love to experience acceptance, love, and support?

What I have just described is what we *receive* from a spiritual community. How do we get it? How do we receive it? *By giving it.*

Uh-oh, can I be unconditionally loving all the time? Do I really accept everyone just the way they are? Speaking for myself – the answer is no. I am not a perfect expression of the divine all the time. But I am willing to learn and I am learning.

Guess what? We are *all* learning *all* the time. That's why it is called a spiritual *practice*. Perhaps in some areas we have had a lot of experience and we can act out of our spiritual

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principles most of the time. There may be other areas where we have not yet even tried. We need to be willing to do it imperfectly. Am I the only one who feels like they need to do it right – the first time – or every time? What an unrealistic burden that places on us!

Be loving with yourself and be loving with others as they are also learning these skills. One of the greatest gifts of your life is finding a place where people are going to support you in your spiritual practice. Find one now!



Making it Real

I invite you to use this area to reflect on the chapters as you read and to make note of your thoughts.

Be sure to return later to this journal section and read through your own revelations. You may discover you are wiser and even more of an amazing expression of Spirit than you even imagined.

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Growing Up in Spirit

Identify a belief you held as a child and discard it if it no longer reflects your current understanding of the divine.

Create a practice, whether it is meditation or prayer, that reflects your evolving understanding of Spirit.

Small Blessing, Great Joy

Identify the ways your body is telling you that you are not aligned with your true nature.

In every situation and conversation, did you ask yourself *In this moment how can my spiritual nature be more visible than my human nature?*

Our Evolving Selves

Notice the situations where you are resisting change.

Identify the differences between your *human* self voice and the one that is your unlimited, *divine* self.

Snap-Crackle-Pop

Start to look for and recognize all the ways you create your life and identify the old creations you would like to release.

Set an intention to be a conscious creator.

Activate the Good

Are you plugged into divine power?

Notice how you are using your divine power.

Celebrate Every Step

Create a fun way to acknowledge all the things you accomplish each and every day.

Expand your thinking – create new ways to celebrate.

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Being Centered

Identify a hurricane in your life and find a way to return to the center.

Practice sitting in the silence of the center so you can experience your true home.

If Love Led the Way

Practice putting love first and notice how everything shifts.

Throughout the day, notice all the ways you can be a quiet expression of divine love.

Our Spiritual Home

Watch your language! Are you using words in reference to yourself that are unworthy of the amazing expression of Spirit you are?

What are some ways you can invite more of your spiritual nature to express?

New Year's Release

What is an energy pattern you would like to release from your life?

Develop a simple ritual that symbolizes *release* for you.

Unlimited Good

Notice the circumstances when you say *I only have...*

Remember to ask yourself What is working here? What good can I take from this experience?

The Gift of Death

Create a daily practice of acknowledging the life you are experiencing right now.

If this was your last week, who would you call? What would you do?

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Divine Wait

Develop a *waiting* practice that is joyful and peaceful.

Practice seeing what is not yet visible.

The Freedom of Forgiveness

Write down a recent situation when you felt you were *wronged*.

Practice a forgiveness technique until you can see it with equanimity and peace.

Divine Purpose

What brings you joy and a smile on your face?

Identify the *beingness* you are expressing and discover how you can bring more of that quality into your life.

Being Before Doing

Set a quality of *being* before taking a new step. Set the intention for everything that follows.

Invite divine wisdom, infinite mind and abundant love to walk the path of creation with you.

Making It Happen, Letting It Happen

Notice what you are pushing and trying to make happen.

Develop a prayer practice that invites Spirit to participate.

Let There Be

Notice a thought you are holding concerning what is wrong with you.

Start every day with a statement of good.

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Tilling Spiritual Soil

What are the rocks in the soil of your consciousness?

What weeds are choking the life that is wanting to grow in you?

Planting Care Fully

You are the gardener of your life. Make a clear intention about what you are planting for the future.

Seeds of compassion, joy or peace can grow into a variety of outer expressions – don't limit yourself!

Celebrating the Harvest

Recognize the signs of harvest and give thanks for them.

Chose a way to share from the abundance of your harvest.

Sacred Play

Take note of the amount of *play* time in your life.

Take steps to incorporate more playfulness into your everyday life.

Sacred Space

Notice the sacredness *where* you are in this very moment.

Notice the sacredness in *who* you are in this very moment.

Caring for a Divine Creation

Observe yourself throughout the day and take note of the circumstances and ways you disregard your own well-being.

What one step can you take to nurture the most precious gift you have been given?

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The Gifts of Spiritual Community

What ways are you willing to practice your spiritual beliefs in community?

What are the unique gifts you bring to community?



About the Author

An adventuresome spirit is and has been an integral part of Vicki Vanderhorst's life since her very early years. Camping expeditions, canoeing, hiking, and travelling have always been a big part of her life. Her parents introduced her to churches, shrines, mosques, temples and outdoor sanctuaries. She was encouraged as a small child to find a home in the outdoors and to develop her skills of self-sufficiency and resourcefulness.

In her early twenties Vicki lived for a year in a small village in east Africa where she practiced community health and Swahili. Her heart missed the seasons of the northern hemisphere and while visiting an old friend in Canada, she discovered British Columbia.

She homesteaded on an island off the coast of Vancouver Island, building her first home from what had been tossed up on the beach. She married, built a real home with electricity and running water, opened a second hand store, helped found an alternative school and was richly blessed with two amazing children.

Her discovery of the Unity movement in her forties drew her to a path of spiritual exploration and personal study. She set an intention to engage fully in this path, becoming a licensed Unity teacher in 2001 and an ordained Unity minister in 2015.

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In her service to others through Unity she has served in the capacities of minister, spiritual counselor, mentor, coach, retreat facilitator and interfaith coordinator.

In the last twelve years Vicki has also realized a life-long dream of living in India, particularly volunteering in Dharamsala with the Tibetan Buddhist refugees. Three trips so far have resulted in twelve months of experiencing the challenges, beauty and discoveries of this country.

Vicki enjoys the mystery and wonder of life. She loves creating with her hands through her garden, crafts and music. Vicki enjoys life surrounded by the natural beauty and power of nature through close proximity to rivers, glaciers, mountains and the sea in the Comox Valley, Canada.



Vicki Vanderhorst is on the Web!

WithSpirit.ca



- Enjoy her **monthly blog** postings of new lessons
- Listen to **audio** recordings of talks she gave live at the Unity Victoria Sunday services over the past 5 years
- Watch **video** recordings of talks she gave over the past 15 years.

To order more copies of *WithSpirit*
contact: Vicki@WithSpirit.ca

Living a life where our spiritual nature is more visible than our human nature

As you join Vicki in pondering meaningful questions, you are likely to find yourself seeking answers within and plotting out a path of new discoveries for yourself. This collection of topics will take you deep, setting new intentions for your relationships, particularly with yourself. She invites you to join her in letting go and living with thoughtful intentions and freeing your authentic self.

~ B. Allaert, Singer

Vicki is divine grace in action. Through her sharing, she keeps the Light within us fueled and lit.

~ P. Clarkson, Educator

Vicki addresses spiritual topics with a simplicity that belies a deep understanding of their meanings and significance in everyday life. Her presentations are an open honest sharing from her life experiences and spiritual journey. This is a call to realize our own divinity and connection with the divine.

~ N. Thomas, xxxxxx

Many books recommend looking within for something. Vicki gives you a specific list of divine spiritual strengths to treasure-hunt for while you are inside looking, not just some warm fuzzies in your navel.

~ J. Kearney, Philanthropist



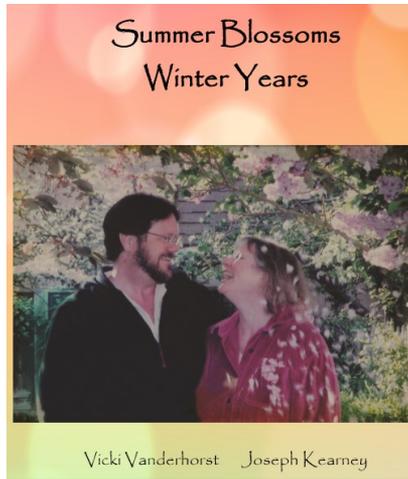
Vicki Vanderhorst is a Unity minister, speaker and spiritual counselor. She lives simply and fully in the arms of the Comox Valley, Canada surrounded by the natural beauty and power of nature.





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