

PRAYER EVOLVING

FIVE PERSONAL EXPLORATIONS
INTO THE FUTURE OF PRAYER

DENNIS RIVERS

PRAYERS WITHIN THE HEART OF GOD

STEPS TOWARD A THEOLOGY
OF CONTINUING INCARNATION

THOUGHTS ON THE LIFE OF BLESSING

AN ECOLOGY OF DEVOTION

DARSHAN IS TO BLESS WITH EYES AND HEART

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATIONS AND ILLUSTRATORS

A bow of deepest gratitude to Vicky Brago-Mitchell, who graciously allowed me to use her artwork in this book. All of the illustrations of hers that you find here are available as prints from her art gallery at Karuna Books: www.karunabooks.net/visionary-art/. Deep thanks also to the many other artists whose works illuminate this book. You can find links to many of their web sites at the link mentioned above. Over the many years of its writing, great effort has been made to secure permission to reproduce the artwork that appears in this non-profit book, but in some cases I was not able to locate the artist. If some artwork of yours appears in this book without your permission and you would like to arrange formal permission (or request that a particular item be removed), please contact me at rivers@newconversations.net.



CHAPTER ONE

PRAYERS WITHIN THE HEART OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of my lifetime, I have been moved by a kind of spiritual restlessness to press forward into the unknown territory of new forms of prayer. This book is record of my explorations.

For a period of about ten years, from 1963 to 1973, I engaged in intensive practice of rote forms of prayer, repeating many hours a day the words exactly as they had been taught to me. But at some point in that process I had a crisis of faith. What need had God of a living tape recorder, playing, as it were, on an endless loop? How much real love was there in my prayers? What was my relationship with the Ground of Being with whom I was trying to have a conversation? What creative processes might allow me to be more fully present in that conversation? This book is the record of my searching inside of myself to find answers to these kinds of questions.

In this first chapter on visual imagery and creativity in the life of prayer, I explore the theme of being *inside* of the being of God, sometimes expressed as the infinitely beautiful, infinitely

loving Heart of God and sometimes expressed as the infinitely luminous Mind of God.

Our usual way of thinking about God, as a separate being, often implies the very separation we hope to overcome. While I still sometimes pray to God as a separate being, I have also, over the past ten years, begun to explore acknowledging God as the source of my being, life of my life and breath of my breath, and the source of all my experience of self-giving love. (...and thus, for me, often too near to be addressed as a separate person.) Through these visual prayers I seek to live in a closer communion with the inner presence of God, understood as Infinite Love, Energy, Awareness and Understanding.

In searching for ways to open myself more deeply to this Presence, I have incorporated into my life of prayer the most vivid imagery I can possibly imagine. While some people might question the role of imagination in the life of prayer, I have become convinced over the course of years of meditation and prayer that imagination actually plays a crucial role in both spiritual and everyday life. If I “can’t imagine” something happening, I probably will not let it happen. It is by repeatedly imagining myself as an electrician or pilot or writer, that I mobilize my inner resources to become one. And, I believe, it is by repeatedly imagining my capacity to be filled with infinite love that I make a place for that beautiful energy to come into my heart. Imagination is not all that is required, just as one might say that the heart is not the only organ in the human body. But just as heart plays a central role in the functioning of the body, so I believe our capacity to imagine plays a central role in our spiritual lives. “Without a vision,” the Soul of the Universe proclaims in the Hebrew Bible, “my people perish.”

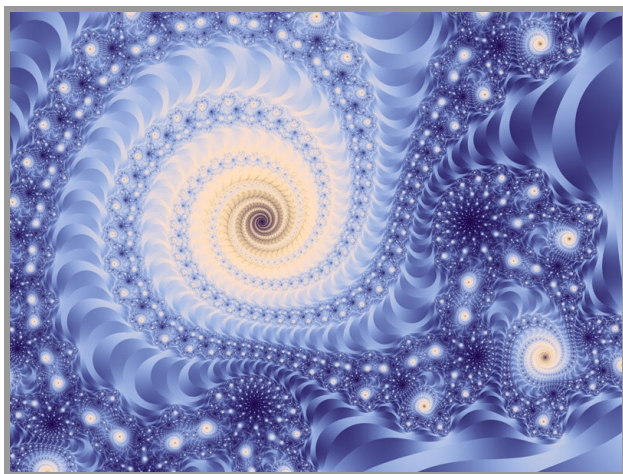
Having made this strong affirmation about imagery and imagination in the life of prayer, I would also like to affirm the place of silence, of quiet openness. I take the alternating of in-breath and out-breath, and the cycles of the tides and seasons, as models for everything in life. In fact, I think the effortful practices that I describe in these essays are most fruitful when

they are practiced in an alternating cycle with periods of deep, restful silence. When you plant a seed of something deep and beautiful in your mind, your mind needs time to grow a response to it.

I invite you to explore these four prayers and to adapt them to fit your own spiritual life and your own relationship to the Divine, be that through Jesus, Allah, Buddhamind, Krishna, YHWH, Mary, Milky Way, Infinite Mother, Spirits of the Grandfathers and Grandmothers, or through one of the many other “Windows of the Divine” (which, due to limits of space and the limits of my own knowledge, I do not list here). At the end of the four prayers listed below, you will find a brief essay describing in more detail how I got inspired to write them.

May infinite kindness shine forth in each of our lives. And may we each find the strength to work for a world full kindness, forgiveness and cooperation.

Dennis Rivers, 1993/2007



Starstorm

Fractal painting by Vicky Brago-Mitchell

1. INDWELLING

The seed of the Spiral:

*I am in the loving heart of God
wide as the morning sky
I am in the radiant heart of Being
fragrant as a flowering tree
I am in the loving heart of the Universe
shining with endless Light
I am in the infinite heart of God
Whose presence caresses me like a warm wind
I am in the loving heart of Being
which sings through me with angelic voices
I am in the endless heart of the Universe
who holds me like a sleeping child*

The Spiral deepens:

*I am in the loving heart of God
wide as the morning sky and full of golden light
that fills the entire horizon of my life.
As I walk deeper and deeper into that light
I become filled with a deep peace.*

I am in the radiant heart of Being
fragrant as a flowering tree.

I press my face into the blossoming branches
and my body fills up and overflows
with the perfume of compassion and delight.

I am in the loving heart of the Universe
shining with endless Light
I feel the warmth of this endless Light
washing through me with each breath

I am in the infinite heart of God
which caresses me like a warm wind
the hands of the wind are full of joyous electricity
which fills me to overflowing

I am in the loving heart of Being
full of angelic voices, singing,
I hear them, first far away,
then closer, then all around me,
then deep within me.
As their voices become clearer
I realize they are announcing
infinite forgiveness.
As their voices become clearer
I realize their voices are my own.

I am in the endless heart of the Universe
who holds me like a newborn child
and rocks me to sleep
on the front porch of eternity.
Every time I go to sleep
I go to sleep deep within
the endlessly loving,
endlessly beautiful heart of God.

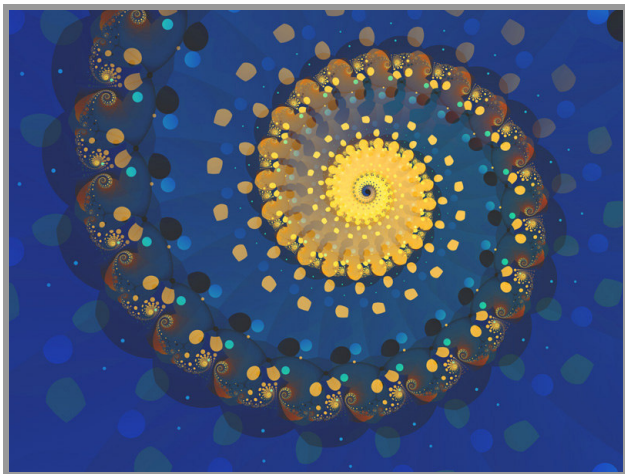
2. BECOMING THE LIGHT:
A MEDITATION WITHIN THE LUMINOUS MIND OF GOD

I am in the luminous Mind of God
which opens before me like endless fields of flowers
rippling gently in a fragrant wind
over rolling hills in waves of color
glowing in a sparkling light
that seems to come from everywhere.
I look down at my body and see
that I too am glowing with light.
Everything becomes clearer and clearer and clearer
and I experience all that is muddled in me
becoming clearer, too.



The loving light in the Mind of God
is shining in me and through me and
filling me with compassion for everyone,
myself included!
It is slowly filling me up
like a mysterious liquid light.
As it fills me more and more completely
I start to smile... it has reached my heart.
My hands begin to glow and now I feel as if
the light is filling up the space behind my eyes.
When the light has filled me up
to the top of my head
I feel it overflowing out of me
into the space around me.

I feel currents of endless forgiveness
flowing through me
filling me with enormous power.
I am radiant now,
shining like the Sun,
radiating light of compassion in every direction
and full of energy.
Everything and everyone
I may have feared or hated,
I can now face.
Everything and everyone
I may have feared or hated,
I can now see with the light of forgiveness.
Everything and everyone
I may have feared or hated,
I can now bless
to be transformed by that Light.



Fractal painting by Vicky Brago-Mitchell

3. BECOMING THE LIGHT TOGETHER:
A MEDITATION OF TWO OR MORE
WITHIN THE LUMINOUS MIND OF GOD

We stand together, facing one another
within the luminous Mind of God
which opens before us
like endless fields of flowers
rippling gently in a fragrant wind
over rolling hills in waves of color
glowing in a sparkling light
that seems to come from everywhere.
I look at your face and I realize
that we are both glowing with light.
Everything becomes clearer and clearer
and clearer,
our souls join hands,
and we experience all that was confused in us
becoming clearer, too.

The loving light in the Mind of God
is shining in us and through us and
filling us with compassion for everyone,
ourselves included.
It is slowly filling us up
like a mysterious liquid light
as it fills us more and more completely
we start to smile... it has reached our hearts.
Our hands begin to glow
and as we look into each other's eyes
our faces get brighter and brighter.

When the light
has filled us up to the top of our heads
we feel it overflowing out of us
into the space around us
we feel currents of endless forgiveness

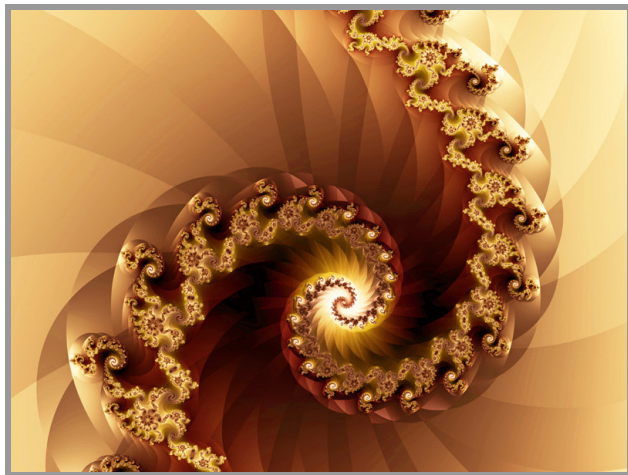
flowing through us
filling us with enormous power.

We are radiant now, shining like the Sun,
radiating light in every direction
and full of energy.

Everything and everyone
we may have feared or hated,
we can now face.

Everything and everyone
we may have feared or hated,
we can now see with the light of forgiveness.

Everything and everyone
we may have feared or hated,
we can now bless
to be transformed by that Light.



Fractal painting by Vicky Brago-Mitchell

4. TRANSFORMATION

I am in the loving Mind of the Milky Way
that sings through every cell of my body
with millions of angelic voices
and fills me with energy
to help with the healing
of all that is wounded
in the world around me.

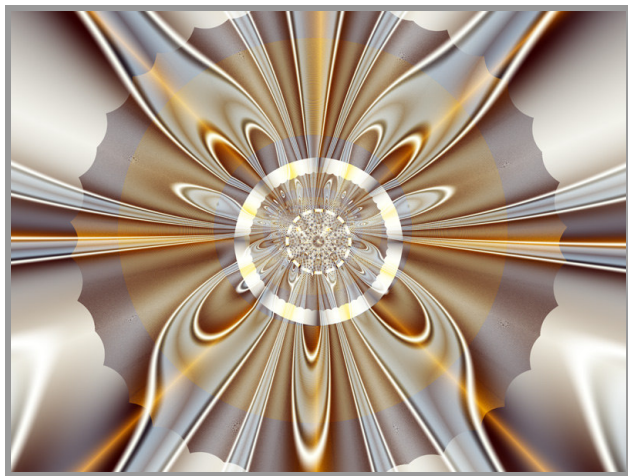
I am in the Beautiful Energy of God
which washes through me
with a trillion singing sparkles
washing away all my confusion
and filling me with light...
washing away all my grudges
and filling my heart
with the fragrance of flowers.

Anyone who may have wronged me, I release into the light of God.

Anyone who may have abused me, I release into the light of God.
Anyone who may have hated me, I release into the light of God
and bless them to be healed in all ways.

In my minds eye they grow smaller and smaller
as I let them go... let them go... let them go...
into the endless light of God's healing love.
The beautiful energy of God's healing love,
warm as a mother holding her newborn
is filling the space where I used to carry them.

A deep sense of gratitude
for all the blessings of today, the sun, the sky,
the earth beneath my feet,
for every act of kindness anywhere,
is filling the space where I used to carry my resentments
and I open myself to be a window
through which new blessings
can pour into the world



Transformation Fractal painting by Vicky Brago-Mitchell

As I open myself to be a window of blessing
the beautiful energy of God washes me
more and more deeply.
Everyone I have ever hated or resented
I release into the light of God,
asking for forgiveness
and opening myself to be forgiven.
Everyone I have ever injured or abused
I release into the light of God,
asking for forgiveness and
opening myself to be forgiven.
The light surrounds me
and I experience a forgiveness
that expands in all directions.
I forgive them, they forgive me,
and the infinitely beautiful heart of God
forgives us all, setting us free.

5. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ON *PRAYERS WITHIN THE HEART OF GOD* [1995]

INTRODUCTION

I first became interested in the spiritual life more than forty years ago when I was a teenager, and have been practicing one or another forms of prayer and meditation ever since. Some time around the year 1990 I experienced an abrupt change in my relationship to that larger, mysterious source of life to Whom we pray. It was a shift from feeling “outside” of the being of God to feeling “inside,” and it is the most important thing that has ever happened to me, although I can’t express the significance of the change nearly as well as I would like to.

Around the time of that change I happen to have been studying the new psychology of visualization, and so it occurred to me to try to express this new attitude in vivid imagery. In the pages that follow I would like to both share the history of my explorations with you and encourage you to explore vivid positive imagery in your own prayer life. These notes mix together autobiography and spiritual philosophy, confession and reflection, because that is just how these prayers came to be. They evolved out of the interplay of my meditation, my struggles toward love and awareness, and my efforts to understand what various saints, mystics and psychologists have thought and taught about the spiritual life.

It is important for me to state that I do not possess, so far as I know, any special spiritual gifts. Actually, I believe that love is the greatest spiritual gift of all, and we all possess the capacity to love in infinite measure, no matter how much or how little we have developed it. My experiments are the experiments of an ordinary human being, therefore I hope that any other human being will be able to perform similar experiments, if so inclined. We are all, as I see it, “authorized by the Universe” to be more creative, more compassionate and more understanding. Everything I write is written with “it

seems to me” in mind (only it gets tiresome to put that in each sentence) and I hope that you will explore what rings true for you and leave aside what does not.

My hope in sharing this part of my spiritual journey with you is not that you will agree with everything I say, but rather that you may be encouraged to enter more deeply and more enthusiastically into your own unique inner life. I hope this material will encourage you to express more fully the unique prayer that is hidden your own heart, and in doing so to find your own unique way of opening more fully to the Greater Life that breathes through us all.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born in 1941, the child of a Jewish mother and a Catholic father who had become a student of Tibetan Buddhism. The strongest memories of my childhood in Los Angeles are of my father’s many mysterious books, of going to various churches and temples, and of the weekly air raid drills at school in which my grammar school classmates and I prepared to (supposedly) live through an atom bomb blast.

I was a very introspective kid, inspired by my father’s search for an inner light and uncertain about my prospects in a world full of violence. As a child I discovered that there was no particular building where I belonged on Sunday mornings, and no particular set of prayers that were meant for me. By the time I was a teenager I knew that I would have to find my own spiritual way. By the time I was in my early twenties, I was exploring the life of continuous prayer and meditation as a disciple of a Sikh mystical teacher.

My years in the meditation community were followed by years in the Vietnam war, years living on mountain tops, years studying comparative religion and theology, years of protest, and years coping with the assassination of my heroes.

As I look back on my life I see that my entire life has been framed by the threat of violence on one side and the promise of an inner light on the other, an unsettling and

incomprehensible contrast. It is only recently that I have come to see that these are the two sides of the couplets in the Prayer of St. Francis: “Where there is injury, may I sow forgiveness, where there is hatred, may I sow love,” etc.

The Prayer of St. Francis suggests that we continually walk through life with troubles in one hand and love in the other. Our life assignment seems to be to bring the love into the middle of the troubles.

AGREEMENT ON THE QUALITIES OF GOD

Although religious people argue about God all the time, there is actually a wonderful agreement among most world religions that the Being of the Greater Life includes a kind of trinity. The first element of this trinity is infinite love, the second is infinite awareness, intelligence and understanding and the third is infinite, life-giving, life-sustaining and life-healing power or energy. From this “shared faith” perspective, it is these beautiful qualities of the Divine Life that are the deep common ground of our spiritual quests, not the labels and images people use to remind themselves about those qualities. Mystics of many faiths, including Navajo, Sufi, Hindu, and Christian, report the experience that all these qualities combine into a single overwhelming beauty.

Because we all have different temperaments and different backgrounds, we will almost certainly need to use different labels to remind ourselves to turn toward that beauty. My experience has also been that these labels and reminders will change over the course of a person’s lifetime. An important step in the deepening of my inner life was to begin searching for the unique images in my own life experience that actually reminded me of these qualities.

In these pages I use many different images of the Greater Life: the Heart of God, Mind of God, Energy of God, the Source, the Mother of the Universe, etc. As you read the prayer explorations please feel free to substitute any image that

reminds YOU of infinite love, wisdom and/or energy, either singly or all together.

Many spiritual traditions also agree that the goal of the spiritual life is to be a kind of window or channel through which these qualities of the Divine Life can pour into the world, transforming us and the world at the same time. The prayers presented here, which are all on the opening-to-the-infinite theme, express this understanding of the spiritual life.

*I am in the loving heart of God,
as bright as the Sun,
blazing with a million colors*

VISUALIZATION

My first introduction to the topic of visualization was a mimeographed manifesto, with pages of various colors, that I ordered around 1960 from an advertisement in the back pages of *Fate Magazine* (a source of information, at mid-century, about all things spiritual and paranormal). At that time the topic of visualization was on the fringes of American culture, loosely associated with mental healing. The author of the manifesto, Clarence Van Vredenberg, advocated visualizing with all one's senses, imagining smells and sounds and textures as well as scenes. This, he wrote, would carry one's positive suggestions much deeper into one's creative mind, and guide a person to success in all things.

The past four decades have moved the topics of visualization and mental healing out of the "fringe" and into the mainstream of psychology. Hundreds, if not thousands, of books and articles have been written on the topic of visualization, and the subject of inner imagery has become an important focus of attention in both psychology and medicine. This interest in visualization and inner imagery has given rise to exuberant new schools of thought: neuro-linguistic programming, psycho-neuro-immunology, and archetypal

psychology among them. There is a wide consensus among writers and researchers on the topic of visualization that multi-sensory ‘visualizations’ generally have deeper effects than the simple repetition of words (although even a single word can have a deep calming effect).

*I am in the infinitely beautiful heart of God
who holds me in her arms
like a mother holding her newborn child*

The “Prayers Within the Heart of God” experiment in prayer grew out of my effort to apply these ideas about vivid visualization to the deeper reaches of my inner life. Two kinds of experiences drew me in that direction.

EXPANDING THE GOAL OF VISUALIZATION

First, I was often frustrated by the narrow focus of the visualization exercises I studied. There were exercises for losing weight, to stop smoking, to feel better about oneself, etc. The focus of many exercises was the symptom of a problem. I kept on wondering: What about my whole life? My relationship to God, the Cosmos, the great Whatever-it-is in which we “live and move and have our being.” I wanted something that would address the totality of my life.

It is true that traditions of visual prayer exist in many of the world’s religions, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism included.

But traditional religions tend to have a one-size-fits-all approach. You stand in line and do what you are told. I was never very good at either of these. My previous efforts at blind obedience had ended in deep disappointment, and I didn’t see my former companions in blind obedience getting anywhere either. I had tried very sincerely, often for years at a time, to do spiritual exercises from distant lands and distant

times. It never worked all that well and left me feeling that I needed to pray with images that were closer to my own life.

*I am in the luminous Mind of the Universe
which fills me with endless creative energy*

LIVING WITH JOY AND SORROW

The second experience that drew me toward these experiments was a growing sense of my limits as a peace and ecology activist. The world I lived in was calling me to be a healing and reconciling influence.

It was and is a world full of extraordinary cruelty, greed and pain. Jesus said, “Whatsoever you do to the least of these, you do to me.” By which I understand him to be saying, among other things, that we can’t simultaneously open ourselves wide enough to let in a healing love and joy, and close ourselves off to the suffering of our sisters and brothers. But by the late 1980’s I found myself nearing what seemed to be the limit of the sorrow I could carry.

I was concerned about several issues: peace, ecology, and human rights, none of which were getting better. The peace organization I was working for went through a crisis and imploded with bad feelings. When the four Jesuit priests, their house-keeper and her daughter were murdered in El Salvador, the last of my hope left me. There was no limit, it seemed, to how ugly it could get out there, and no safe place for peace-makers, either. Spiritually, I had run out of gas.

Over the next several years I gradually became aware that the deeper the ugliness and pain I intended to face, both in the world and inside of myself, the deeper the love and beauty I needed to find, to know, to center myself in. I needed my own mental and emotional “love-in” that I could carry around with me. Otherwise, I was simply going to be swallowed up by the tide of bad news. In the 1960s I experienced these two themes

as irreconcilable opposites: facing pain of the world, on the one hand, and finding love and beauty, on the other. Now I see them deeply interwoven. The amount of suffering I am able to face now seems directly related to the quality of the love I have experienced, how joyous and self-giving it was and is. The amount of love I am able to experience, to let in, now seems to me to be directly related to a courageous openness that does not turn away from pain. Finally, to be a healing influence requires of me that I remember what it feels like to be happy, that I keep alive in myself a vision of mutual fulfillment and reconciliation. I am now convinced that my heart must somehow become large enough to hold both joy and sorrow. Only then, it seems to me, can my life be a bridge between the two.

*We live now and forever infinitely embraced
in the radiant heart of Mary, Mother of God,
who melts away all that is wounded in us.*

NEW IMAGES

The question of how one goes about opening oneself to the experience of a joyous and self-giving love is not a question to which any society has an easy answer. The same holds true for opening oneself to the experience of beauty, as a quick visit to most art galleries will attest. So in the beginning of my quest I was at a loss as to how to proceed, but the question itself filled me energy. How does one go about opening oneself to the experience of a joyous and self-giving love?

The literature on visualization suggests that our lives are deeply influenced by a set of images we carry around inside our heads. They come largely from our family history, our successes and failures, and from television, movies and advertising. This process of collecting one's set of inner images is often like throwing random ingredients into a pot

and hoping they will turn into a good tasting soup. The images we have collected don't always fit together well or sustain us through difficult times. The good news is that we can change them.

These images appear to stay active in our brains through a process of unconscious repetition. In that lies one possible key to change. If repetition is what keeps the old images alive, we can choose to repeat something new, just the way we learn a new song and hum the melody to ourselves.

Encouraged by this vision of new possibilities I set out to create a new set of life affirming mental images. I drew from everything I had ever learned about the spiritual life and the most positive experiences I had ever had. Although I didn't remember it at the time (1990), at some point during the previous decade I had seen a television special on Mother Teresa, in which she had taught a new member of her order to pray, "I am in the heart of Jesus and Jesus is in my heart." Much later (1996) I realized that my *Prayers Within the Heart of God* were and are an attempt to extend and universalize the spirit of that prayer.

INNER RESOURCES

Almost every human being has had some experiences of love, beauty and inner rightness that are beyond the boundaries of everyday life. Precisely because there is very little way to express these experiences in the ordinary story of a day's events, we lose touch with them. Unfortunately, we tend to remember our worst experiences quite vividly but lose track of our best moments(not completely forgotten, but rarely remembered). This sets the stage for us to repeat our worst experiences rather than our best. Once having developed a coherent story, people easily ignore events that are not consistent with it. The visual prayers became for me a way of cultivating a new story that has more openings for states of profound well being.

PRAYING AS-IF-ALREADY-RECEIVED

Among the teachings of Jesus there is one that I have always found both deeply inspiring and deeply puzzling. In The Gospel of Mark, Chapter 11, verse 24, Jesus tells his listeners “whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

To be respectful of this verse, it is important to note that it is part of a complex lesson about faith, prayer and forgiveness. I don’t think it can be understood without also remembering the “Thy will be done” emphasis in other parts of Jesus’ prayer teaching. While there are many unresolved questions in my mind about praying for material objects or effects, the situation is much clearer for me regarding what might be called the gifts of the spirit. We need not only food and shelter and protection from earthquakes, we also need love, awareness, forgiveness, wisdom and many other gifts of the spirit. These may be available in infinite supply from a source we don’t understand, if we will open ourselves to receive them in an infinite way. In relation to these inward gifts the “pray as if you have already received” principle may be as powerful as we are willing to let it be.

Perhaps one element at work here is this: if we can’t imagine ourselves receiving a particular blessing, we may not be able to let in the blessing even if it is continuously pounding on our door, begging to be let in. So part of my asking needs to include the willingness to let go of my old picture of myself as “lacking” and develop a new picture of myself as “receiving” and “worthy of having.” Since I grew up in a culture that is always in a hurry, it is tempting for me to want to change my image of myself from “lacking” to “receiving” in a single blazing moment. But my experience has been that the mind is like a garden and that a gentle gardening of the new images probably works better than a sudden revolution against the old ones.

I have very little to suggest concerning praying for healing or for material needs. If I were in a falling airplane, I

don't know what I would do or pray. I hope I would have the presence of mind to pray any prayer at all (perhaps to give thanks for having been alive and for having participated in the great mystery of love). But it seems to me that such extreme crisis situations, which come to mind so easily, are not a fruitful model for trying to understand how to open ourselves to more blessings in everyday life.

Perhaps if we open ourselves to more love, more understanding and more life-sustaining energy and beauty, we can work together better to make sure that our own and everyone else's material needs are met. Perhaps if the mechanics' (and airline owners') hearts had been more full of love, they would have done a more careful job of maintaining the airplane. Recent research in which prayer groups focused on hospital patients revealed that prayers on the open-ended theme of "Thy will be done" seemed to have more positive effect on the hospital patients than prayers for specific healing action.

I hope in time I will understand more of what is going on in such cases. For now I accept it as a wonderful mystery, what Joseph Chilton Pearce called a "crack in the cosmic egg," through which we glimpse a possibility that calls us to explore more deeply. For me, one possible implication of the teaching that "God is love" is that God's influence comes into the world primarily through love, rather than through the kind of mechanical force required to protect people from hail storms, keep sinking ships afloat, etc. It is not that I want to close the door on miracles. What I want is to open the door wider for the quiet miracle of love.

THE WAY OF INNER BLESSING

The deepest blessings I can imagine are also qualities of God: ever-expanding love, awareness, understanding and a healing, life-giving energy, all somehow woven together and each one enriching all the others.

Many mystics from religions as diverse as Hinduism and Catholicism would insist that rays of these qualities are raining down upon us (or yearning to be expressed from a source deep within us) at this very moment, and at every moment of every day! This is a recurring theme in the writings of many mystics, from Meister Eckhart to Ramakrishna. As I have struggled to understand these extraordinary assertions, I find that my emphasis in prayer has shifted away from asking God to give me these deeper blessings and shifted toward opening myself more fully to receive them.

There has been a progression in my prayers over the years, from “Oh God, please get me out of this painful mess,” to “Oh luminous Buddha-mind, please make me a kinder person,” to the prayers in this article, which arose spontaneously in my mind as prayers from within the being of God, rather than being outside and asking for something.

Looking back now on the emergence of these prayers in my consciousness, I recognize in them the quality of “praying as if I have already received,” about which I have been puzzling for a lifetime.

*I am in the loving Mind of the Milky Way
that sings through every cell of my body
with millions of angelic voices
and fills me with energy
to help with the healing
of all that is wounded
in the world around me*



Mother Universe

NASA Photograph

6. POSTSCRIPT -- JULY 1998:
JOURNAL NOTES ON LETTING IN MORE LOVE

This morning I was thinking
about these prayers of reassurance
and wondering to what degree
all of this is artificial,
smoke and mirrors in the hallways of my mind.
What is going on when I reassure myself
that I am continually in the light of God's love, etc?
Then it struck me the with force of a revelation
that a large part of the feeling of being loved
is always a creative re-enactment!
Exactly as in early childhood development
(according to various "object relations" theorists):
when mother leaves the room
the two-year-olds fight off the terror of abandonment
by vividly visualizing mommy
and vocalizing mommy
and reminding themselves of mommy's hugs
by hugging their teddy bears.

In ordinary life, I think we undervalue
the role that *imagination* plays
in the process of becoming a mature person.
Out of that heroic visualizing of mommy
when mommy is not there
comes our capacity to imagine kindness
even though we live in a world soaked with cruelty,
to imagine justice in a world of oppression,
to imagine buildings as yet unbuilt,
and to nurture ourselves
through times of great isolation
with the memory love
and the knowledge that love is possible.

Therefore,
 and this for me is an earth-shaking “therefore,”
the experience of being loved
can not be understood only in terms
of the objective facts about who actually loves us.

We have also to look
 at how skillfully and creatively
 we carry that love around with us.
 How is it that we know we are loved
 when the person who loves us
 walks out of the room?
 And as adults we know, at some level,
 that everyone will die
 and could die this very day in some sort of accident.
 How is it that we are not immobilized
 with the fear that those who love us and their love
 will be taken away?
 One possible answer, for me,
 is that love is something like a candle flame:
 it needs an external flame to get it going
 but once on fire
 it burns from its own inner fuel.
 As an African-American teenager said once
 of her inner-city mentor and friend,
 “Sister Monica loves us
 until we learn to love ourselves.”

We need other people to love us, and...
 we play a very large role
 in the receiving of that love,
 according to how we let the love in,
 symbolize it, honor it, celebrate it, give thanks for it,
 make it a permanent part of our life story,
 allow it to be transformed into a healthy self-esteem,
 and find ways of going back to it
 as an emotional starting place, when we get lost.

Perhaps you feel yourself
resisting these suggestions.
I certainly do resist them!
For much of my life I've thought of love
as if it were water:
it's over there and I want some.
My experience of love had, I thought,
everything to do with that woman over there
or God or Jesus or my beloved guru, Charan Singh,
and not much to do with any activity on my part.
As a country song intoned in the 1980s:
"Kick me through the goal posts of life, Sweet Jesus!"
What a jolt to realize
that I am part of the process.



Photo by Randy Wang

No familiar ideas guide me on this road
of inner opening
hence my *Prayers Within the Heart of God*
excursions into the uncharted territory of gratitude.

Love is deeply interwoven
with the experience of gratefulness,
and perhaps understanding gratitude
can be a doorway into understanding love.

Everyday the sun shines upon the corn fields
so that I might eventually eat some enchiladas.

How much am I willing to let myself
feel the miracle of this?

Everyday the Earth gives me life
in a thousand ways, but I could say
well, it's just an ordinary day,
nothing new, same as yesterday.
How is it that have I set
my threshold of gratitude so high
that it sometimes seems
nothing short of winning a galactic lottery,
the prize to be delivered by flaming chariots,
will delight me?

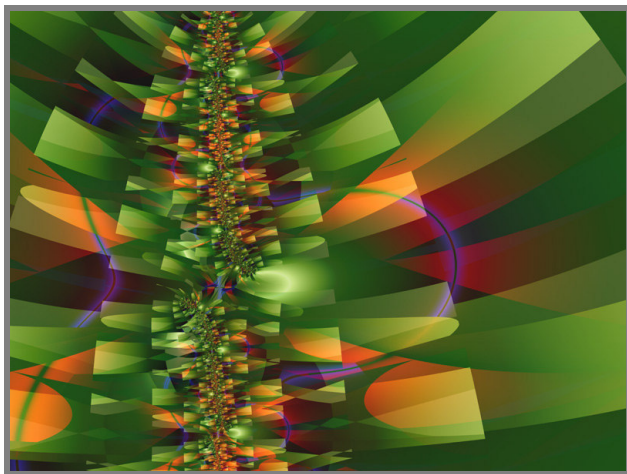
Somehow I have arranged to deny myself
a thousand daily moments of delight. Why?
The mystery deepens.

Love is personal, impersonal
and probably a lot more than that, too.

What about all the people
who have labored on my behalf
even though they did not know me personally?
Filled with self-giving love
some doctor gave himself malaria
so that I and others might be spared.

When you start to think about it
the world is full of countless good-hearted people
past and present, who have labored
to nurture our lives
without knowing us personally,
inventing, along the way,
human language, agriculture, medicine, music.
What sort of life would I have without them?
(I would not be here.)

What would I lose by opening myself
to feel grateful to them? What would I lose
by experiencing these gifts *as love*?!
It is a fact as solid as a brick
that without the Sun, the Earth,
myriad ancestors, my mixed up parents,
countless teachers, do-gooders and helpers,
including those who grow my food
and the truckers who haul it all over creation,
I would not have a life!



Green Cathedral

Fractal painting by Vicky Brago-Mitchell

(Ordinary facts are just plain true
but the fact that you and I are the recipients,
even in lives that include much pain,
of all this amazing grace
is a truth that becomes truer
as we open ourselves to embrace it.)

It's another one of those paradoxes:
imagination actually serves the cause of realism.
To the often-repeated truth that
the map is not the territory
we must a complementary truth:
the blueprint becomes the building.
There are many times and situations where
you can only *receive* as much as you can *conceive*.

In the prayers I am trying to imagine
what has already happened
but is beyond my grasp.

In the prayers I am visualizing
the most intense blessings I can imagine
partly to make room for all the amazing blessings
I have already received
partly to make room for new ones.
(Who knows how many blessings
are struggling this very moment
to make their way into my life
through the tiny opening I have made for them?!)

Every beautiful flower I have ever seen,
every wonderful sunset I have ever marveled at,
every act of kindness I have been lucky enough
to receive or perform,
every warm embrace I have ever experienced,
is alive inside of me somewhere.

How is it that I allow all these experiences
to be driven into the shadow of unknowing
by the daily parade of bad news?
Perhaps I could become
more of a source of good news in my world
rather than seeing myself only
as a recipient of bad news.

And perhaps after warming up in this way
I will be more able to accept
even the difficult challenges of my life
as blessings also... *the far edge of gratitude*

The hope in these new prayers
is to return to, to recreate
the feelings of being loved and cared for
so vividly and so intensely that we feel inspired
to nurture others with that same love and kindness,
to pass on the candle flame.
We have a deep part to play in how this happens.