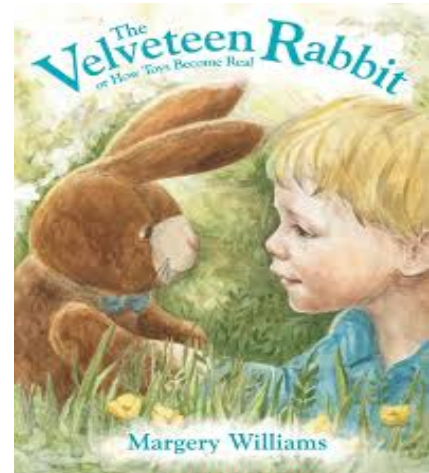


Contemplative Practice: How Love makes us REAL

Generally, by the time you are Real,
most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out
and you get loose in the joints and very shabby.

But these things don't matter at all,
because once you are Real
you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand.

—Margery Williams



As most grownups come to realize, the themes of really good children's books are aimed directly at the adults who read the books to their own children. Had Margery Williams written but one book, *The Velveteen Rabbit* would have secured her place among the very best writers of works for children. As some of us may remember, when the boy starts loving any of his stuffed animals, they start to become Real. Because the boy grew to love the Rabbit very much, the Rabbit, as expected, started the process of becoming Real. ...

We each uncover different meanings in *The Velveteen Rabbit*, for each of us wears a different skin. For our purposes the following observations have special relevance. Love makes us real. Love creates us and sustains us in the process of realizing who we already are. Love breathes us into being (Gen. 2:7). God is divine breath breathing. Humanity the divine breath breathed. ...

There are some things that Love alone can do. Love plumbs the depths that our thinking mind cannot, and so must take Love's word for it. This distinction does not imply a separation between loving mind and thinking mind. It simply designates areas of expertise. The fourteenth century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* acknowledges the distinction (not separation) between what our love can do and our thinking mind cannot. "God is forever beyond the reach of the intellectual faculty; but by means of the loving faculty, [God] can be fully grasped by each individual being." "God can well be loved but God cannot be thought." ...

The practice of contemplation cultivates stillness in our thinking mind, so that it does not dominate the time for prayer. ... The more we give our lives over to the practice of contemplation, the more our thinking mind is trellised by silence ...

Contemplation is the consummation of what it means for us to be made "Real" by love. This consummation includes all our jagged edges—everything about ourselves, published or unpublished, which we resent but God seeks out as His own abode within us and among us. ...

—Martin Laird, *An Ocean of Light*, excerpts from the Preface.

Contemplative?

It's in our DNA



Contemplative presence, contemplative living is our birthright, a natural capacity of every human being. To be attuned to God's presence in the stillness of the heart is to become who we really are. Just as in early May the wren rejoices building her nest and the azalea bursts forth in vibrant flower, so we humans are created to realize the fullness of our being in conscious, participative communion with God.

For most of us, realizing this communion is a gift fostered by a solid grounding in some practice of contemplative prayer. The practice of sitting in silence, willing to let go of thoughts and images so that one can lean into the Presence of Love seems to be an essential starting place. And then every moment of our daily life in all its ordinariness becomes the way we bring this gift to the world.

Scripture:

Abba, I have made your very being known to them—who you are and what you do—and continue to make it known, so that your love for me might be in them exactly as I am in them.

—John 17:26, *The Message*



At the 2017 LCWR Assembly when she received the Outstanding Leadership Award, Carmelite Connie Fitzgerald shared the evolutionary direction of contemplative prayer:

“The Dark Night of contemplative prayer is about being grasped by God, transformed; it's about having the familiar boundaries of our souls stretched and stretched so that we become more and more capable of holding within ourselves the full relational life of Jesus Christ.

The conflicts, misunderstanding, losses and dyings, together with our myriad embodied experiences of Christ in prayer and ministry these past years, have all been and continue to be at the service of our becoming Christ, his identity shaping our graced identity, our becoming humanized and divinized by the human and divine Christ, his knowing and loving becoming ours, our becoming conscious with Christ's very consciousness, his whole relational life becoming ours. This is breathtaking!”

EVERYTHING ... is at the service of our becoming Christ.

—Connie Fitzgerald, OCD

When I Met My Muse

I glanced at her and took my glasses off—they were still singing. They buzzed like a locust on the coffee table and then ceased. Her voice belled forth and the sunlight bent. I felt the ceiling arch and knew that nails up there took a new grip on whatever they touched. “I am your own way of looking at things,” she said. “When you allow me to live with you, every glance at the world around you will be a sort of salvation.” And I took her hand.

—William Stafford, *An Oregon Message*, 1987

*The muse is anyone or anything that helps us come alive. We can identify with the singing Stafford hears from his glasses after glancing at his muse, there is an immediate, tonal quality to coming alive. What in your life recently has “buzzed like a locust?” Where and how has your aliveness been kindled? Awakened? Stirred?

For Prayer and Reflection

How much time for silence do you need? How can you create a lifestyle so that there’s enough space for you to get what your soul requires?

When you review your day in the evening before sleep or the next morning, actively trust that everything—the conflicts, misunderstandings, losses and dyings as well as all the beauty and joy—are all at the service of your becoming Christ. How can this make a difference in your day?

To be made “Real” by Love through contemplation includes welcoming everything about ourselves—all our jagged edges. How would it help you to take some time in prayer daily or weekly to hold your jagged edges in Love’s Presence?



Artwork: Donna Korba, IHM

*This reflection is by Glen Mitchell, director of Oasis Ministries in Camp Hill, PA, from a retreat he gave on the poetry of William Stafford.

Practice: Embodied Prayer

Try beginning your contemplative time by grounding yourself in your body. The practice of sensing and sustaining presence in your body, learning to feel your center of gravity in the belly, is a way of overcoming the dominance of thought and allowing emotions to quiet. As you breathe, notice that your out-breath becomes a little longer than your in-breath. Now simply rest in Love's presence.



During the day, take a one-minute 'pause that refreshes' by returning to your grounding in the body. Embodied presence can heal your entire nervous system. Find out if this is true by experimenting with it.

Song: Dust Alive

from CD *Together in the Great Work*, ©2003 by Jan Novotka

The dust of the stars is my flesh. The dust of the stars is my blood.
Oh, the dust of stars holds the gift of life; stars transformed; stars reborn; dust alive!
The dust of the stars is your flesh. The dust of the stars is your blood.
Oh, your flesh and blood, full of stars' delight; becomes breath; becomes prayer; dust alive!
The dust of the stars is this bread. The dust of the stars is this wine.
Oh, this bread and wine, our communion in all things; Flesh of God; dust alive!

For contemplative dialogue:

Begin your dialogue pondering the meaning of any sentence in this resource. Let go of certainties; approach everything with an "I don't know mind." In contemplative dialogue, it can help to have pauses in your conversation so that the deeper wisdom can emerge.

How are you/how are we experiencing becoming more and more capable of holding within ourselves the full relational life of Jesus Christ? What might that look like, feel like in concrete daily situations, in team meetings? Where have we seen it in another?

Explore what it means to say: "When you allow [your muse] to live with you, every glance at the world around you will be a sort of salvation." How can WE allow our muse to live in us?

Resources:

Martin Laird, *An Ocean of Light: Contemplation, Transformation and Liberation*, 2019.

Risa Kaparo, *Awakening Somatic Intelligence: The Art and Practice of Embodied Mindfulness*, 2012. This book introduces Somatic Learning, an innovative healing approach rooted in body awareness that incorporates the latest research in psychology, neuroplasticity, and mindfulness.

From LCWR *Occasional Papers*:

Mary Jo Nelson, OLVM, "Tending the Heart of Our Life," Winter 2018

Theresa Sandok, OSM, "Creative Receptivity: Waiting Together for WE Know Not What," Summer 2015

On YouTube: Risa Kaparo and Thomas Huebl have a conversation about Somatic Intelligence at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yz8H_4ctEbA