



A Newsletter For Prisoners
Based on the Conversations with God Material

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My Best Path

I've recently read a wonderful ebook, *9 Secret Ingredients of a DELICIOUS Life.*, by Spryte. Delicious, here, is used as a wonderful adjective to describe the kind a life we can all live. It is also an acronym for the 9 ingredients: Deservedness, Enlightenment, Laughter, Integrity, Co-creation, Imagination, Omni-presence, Unconditional love, and Service.

How yummy is that!

I loved reading about each of the ingredients but I was stopped in my tracks by one of them: Integrity.

What a concept integrity is. As I was reading that chapter, I was struck by how very powerful I believe integrity is. But as with any abstract concept, we do not all see integrity in the same way. So I will describe to you what it means to me.

When I think of integrity, I imagine a line, a vector that connects me to God, to the Universe starting over the top of my head; I actually feel this connection go into my brain, from there to my heart, then to my stomach and outward again. As I feel this connection, I say to myself, "As I believe, I think; as I believe and think, I feel; as I believe and think and feel, I am; As I believe and think and feel and am, I do.

For me, integrity means being aligned in this way when all that I am, think, believe, feel, say and do are connected to the

Divine. When I am in integrity, I am at my best. When I am in integrity, I live my best moments, my best life.

When I am in integrity, all else falls in place, I feel deserving, enlightened, joyful, powerful and creative, and loving.

"For me, integrity means being aligned (...) when all that I am, think, believe, feel, say and do are connected to the Divine."

to live my best life.

So what do I do when I am in integrity? Well, as with a lot of things for me, it's easier to state what I cannot do if I choose to live my best life.

I cannot say I will do something and not do it. I cannot make promises and not carry through. I cannot say I will meditate and not do it, exercise and not do it, let go of resentments and not do it, stop judging and not do it. Notice here that all these promises are made to myself and not to others. This is important to me.

Why? Because the one I need to live with everyday of my life is my Self. The only one who knows what my divine connection is all about is me. What others think and do is really none of my business, even when they say and do it to me. At my

best, I love and accept others as they are, using them in a very real way, as opportunities to experience my divine nature.

And at my best, I love and accept myself. In other words: my Self loves and accepts myself; my Spirit loves and accepts my ego; my Eternal Being loves and accepts this illusion I am living.

This is what Integrity means to me. Living this way fills me with so much Love and Peace, I cannot begin to tell you. It is wonderful.

But wait! I had a really interesting experience the other day. I was watching Debbie Ford's DVD titled *The Shadow Effect* where she speaks about the dark side of ourselves, the one we so dislike, the one we would like to have disappear. She speaks of the gift this side can bring us.

So, at the end of the presentation, there is a little exercise she leads us through. She first asks us to determine what our very best quality is. Try it. Choose the one quality you would keep if you could only have one.

Interesting idea, isn't it? So I will tell you my choice: kindness. This is by far the quality I see in others that attracts me the most. It is also the one in myself that I like best.

The exercise continues asking us to remember things we have done that would

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make others think we are being kind...or whatever your quality is.

After having done that, we are asked to think what the opposite of this quality is. Now here, I was surprised at my answer. I would have thought that something like cruelty, selfishness or something of the sort would be the opposite of kindness but that is not what my answer was.

To me, the opposite of being kind is being closed off. Closed off from others, closed off so the love cannot circulate, either out or in. Closed off so that I cannot see but my own view point, Closed off so that there is a wall between me and others. This leads me to be as far from kind as I would ever wish to be. It is also, not so surprising but very interesting to me, what I find the most difficult to take in others!!!!

The last part of the exercise is to find the gift that we receive from this "shadow". And, here I surprised myself again by how easily I found my answer: It is when I am closed off that I am most attuned to my inner voice. It is when I meditate, when I look inside and take no notice of what is happening around me that I am most connected to Spirit.

So ok, we are speaking of levels here. Which reminds me of something Neale Walsch says in some of his talks (I don't remember if it is in any of the Conversations with God books) that there are no faults, nothing that we need to completely eliminate from our personalities. There are only things that, if we dialed them down a notch or two, would become great qualities.

So my being closed off brings me great joy and strength when I use it to connect to Source. Whenever I push it too far and don't "experience" the person in front of me, when I don't give them all my attention, all my love and acceptance, then I am unkind.

I ended this exercise feeling very good about myself and this beautiful "shadow" that brings me such gifts.

But then I thought, "What?!?"

What did I just do? Did I not just a few days ago decide that Integrity was my very best thing? What happened to that? Where was that answer when I decided my best quality was kindness?

This time, I didn't like my answer so much: I'm a wimp!

I personally find it soooooo much easier to be kind than to live in Integrity. I don't have to be kind all the time, do I? I only have to be kind when there is someone in front of me.

And I live alone...in the boondocks!

Isn't that just great! Choosing a quality I don't have the opportunity to practice everyday! How wimpy can I get?

But when I think of living in Integrity, then things get more difficult. Living in Integrity (notice the capital letter) involves my thoughts, my feelings, my beliefs and my actions....a little more all-encompassing, don't you think? And scarier. Not something I can do once in a while and forget about the rest of the time.

So I'm back to Integrity being the cornerstone of my life now. I choose to build my life on that foundation (or am I mixing my metaphors a little too much?).

It will take my full attention, all my energy and strength but it is the path I am choosing. My Best Path.

And along the way, I am completely attracted to kindness, in myself and in others. While being grateful for my time listening to my Inner Voice and for all those around me who mirror all these qualities so marvelously.

In loving Integrity,

Janine

August 25
From *Chicken Soup for the Prisoner's Soul*
Jack Canfield, Mark Victor hansen Tom Lagana

A diplomat is a man who always remembers a woman's birthday but never her age.

Robert Frost

Before me stood a tall man, about sixty years old. He had a perfect crew cut, even though it was not the current style. He had bright blue eyes and wore a wide smile. He extended his right hand to mine, simultaneously reaching his left hand to my shoulder. It had been the warmest greeting I'd received in over three years. Then he handed me a business card that read "J. Richard Cook" on one side and "Happy Birthday to me—Remember August 25," on the other.

I had been startled by his humility because I already knew who he was. The inmates referred to him as their "guardian angel". He was the counselor to the Project Workers at the Plummer Community Corrections Center, a work-release facility.

Project Workers are inmates who have a prison sentence but are permitted to serve their sentence at the Center instead of a traditional prison facility. Project Workers are the cooks, maintenance people, groundskeepers, janitors, receptionists, switchboard operators and mail sorters. Project Workers who have their GEDs or their high school diplomas also serve as peer tutors to help others earn theirs. The Plummer Center project Workers are also involved in community projects, from mowing lawns at churches to clearing snow from city streets and sidewalks.

The workers live in a converted house called the Mandatory Building. Their bunk beds are in a crowded bedroom instead of a cell. The building has a kitchen, dining room table, living room furniture and a TV. When the workers' loved ones come to visit, they may hug them and eat the food prepared especially for them.

One worker shared, "As Dr. Cook and I sat and talked, I realized that he knew more about me than I know about myself. As we spoke about my crimes and my shortcomings, truth was the only option. There was no room for excuses or blaming others. He listened intently without judging or pitying me."

Dr. Cook would ask a worker, "Did you use your incarceration time wisely?" Then he'd briefly review their various responsibilities and how they were responsible to be on-call twenty-four hours a day. He'd say, "Your integrity must be beyond reproach. Nothing less will be tolerated."

After Cr. Cook met with a worker, he'd stand up,
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Winter Feast 2010

Preparing for the 2010 Winter Feast for the Soul
Bring Sunshine to Your Soul This Winter
 By Valerie Skonie

In the last issue of *Freedom Inside* we invited you to become part of the coming Winter Feast for the Soul, which begins on January 15, 2010. The Winter Feast is a commitment to 40 consecutive days of spiritual practice for forty minutes each day. This can be silent meditation, prayer, reading a sacred text, or even journaling or drawing.

What is important about your commitment is your intention. Your commitment is to inner peace and to world peace. To reach that goal you must bring your mind to silent stillness and focus. There you will find your own natural place of inner peace ... a peace is always present. But for the most part that peace is hidden behind a barrage of words and thoughts that we have come to consider normal. *The problem is that many, if not most, of these thoughts are not even true.* They are constructed by our minds and come as a result of events that happened when we were very young and unable to tell right from wrong and true from false. They are simply habits of mind.

As adults we have access to an inner wisdom that knows better. But without stillness it is not possible to access that wisdom. [And] we cannot reach this stillness without quieting our minds. This is most commonly achieved through a practice of silent prayer or meditation. It is that practice that I will try to guide you into in this article and it is that practice that the Winter Feast for the Soul promotes.

I invite you to find a quiet place

where you can hear the loving, wise inner voice that wants to reach you at every moment of the day and night. You may call it God, your Higher Self, or the Universe. *If it is not kind, and does not generate peace in your heart, then change the channel, because I assure you that when you find that place you will feel loved and you will then become more loving.* The question is how do you get there on your own?

In fact, it is simple, but not always easy, to access this inner sanctuary. You have to do very little to reach this place. The hard part is to quiet your mind. This is something that people in the Western world know very little about. Here is what I suggest:

1. Find a quiet place where you can sit with your back straight, even if you are sitting with your back against a wall.
2. Close your eyes and begin to focus on your inner world.
3. Begin by watching your breath, noticing how it flows in and out effortlessly. *There are some who say that the breath is like a thread that connects the soul to God.* To watch the flow of the breath is a very important act.
4. Notice how the breath slows down as your mind becomes quiet. This is the beginning of your practice.

Now let's talk about what happens next. For most of us it [is] not long before the mind begins its familiar habit of generating thoughts: important

thoughts, foolish thoughts, even irrational thoughts that have no meaning. Sometimes these thoughts seem important and do not want to go away. Sometimes they are accompanied by emotions that seem important and impossible to let go of. In any event, *I assure you that you are powerful enough to "command them to pass"*. Here are some suggestions:

- Imagine that these thoughts or emotions are like clouds that move across the sky and disappear from view. Let them dissolve and go back to focusing on your breath.
- Imagine that all your thoughts are like waves on the ocean's surface. Drop down deep enough that you reach the floor of the ocean where everything is peaceful with fish peacefully swimming in and out of the coral reefs. Now go back to watching your breath.
- Imagine that you can see through the thoughts. Your mind, in its natural state is like the blank screen in a movie theater. Once the projector begins rolling we are transported to amazing places and events. It is hard to believe that without the projector, the screen is clear and white. Turn off your mental projector and allow the mind's screen to return to stillness by refocusing and going back to your breath.

Now I will remind you of two important
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tant truths about your relationship with your thoughts. First, you can always return to focusing on your breath. Second, and most important, do not judge yourself as having failed when thoughts take over. This is the human mind and its way in our culture. Through these practices you are retraining your mind.

One of the most important things to remember is that this shift will not happen overnight. As a matter of fact, after nearly thirty years of meditation practice I still find that I “fall into a ditch” with my thoughts on occasion, or become distracted by the events of the day that has passed or the coming day, and I have to start all over. In meditation, starting over is not a crime. It is a good habit to acquire for all of life. We are often called to start over. Do it without shame

and know that it is part of the rhythm of life. Each morning the sun starts over, starting a new day.

The most important thing I have learned through my meditation practice is not to judge myself as having failed when I am carried away [by] my mind and its thoughts. Harsh judgments of myself spill over into harsh judgments of others. Kindness toward myself will also spill over into kindness toward others. What could be more important than that?

As I complete this article I see that there are 143 days, a little over 20 weeks, till the 2010 Winter Feast for the Soul begins. *Start training your mind now. Try smaller increments of time at first, say 10 or 15 minutes...even five minutes will be a good start. If you can, ask someone else to time you and let you know when*

the time is up. Otherwise you will be distracted by looking at your watch and by your wonder of how much time has passed. The important thing is to begin to stretch your limits and to tell your mind that it is capable of resting in stillness. You will both be the better for it.

Till next time I send you love, peace, and prayers for your success.

Valerie Skonie is a retired business-woman and interdenominational meditation teacher living in Hailey Idaho. She directs the third annual Winter Feast from her home with the help of a small group of volunteers. Valerie can be contacted by email at:

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shake their hand and say, “Doctor, nice talking with you.” He called people Doctor when he forgot their names. In spite of that, he still left the workers feeling more positive about themselves.

Dr. Cook escorted the workers to funerals, weddings, hospitals to visit a family member or the train station when it was time to go home. I’d watch him take them through the prison gates. He could have used a state-owned car, but I knew he didn’t, because the license plate read “AUG25”.

Dr. Richard Cook not only gave of his car, but he gave of himself. He was always there to guide the workers. He was a mentor, friend and critic—even if it hurt. He was a man with a colorful sense of humor. He had a basement full of

treasures he stored for the inmates until their release and a phone bill lined with collect calls.

What did this man expect in return? Birthday cards, no matter whether they were from a store, homemade or from a computer. It didn’t matter, but he only wanted one signature per card. He was even known to buy a box of cards and hand them out. He received cards from inmates released years before. Many had moved to other states and new successful lives. Dick Cook loved his birthday and everyone knew it.

On October 15, 1997, the Earth stood still. Our most beloved Dr. J. Richard Cook passed away in the place he loved—the Plummer Center’s Mandatory Building—surrounded by those he

loved and those who loved him.

The Mandatory Building was re-named The Cook Building, and a tree now stands there in his honor. People still send birthday cards every year to our facility on August 25, even though they know Dr. Cook is no longer physically here. His spirit is alive and well. Thank you, Dr. Cook, and happy birthday.

Gail Valla

Anyone can stumble upon a treasure chest, but it takes a thoughtful, patient and creative person to find the treasure inside.

Brandon Lagana

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

Freedom Inside now contains 12 pages. We're growing and I just love it. A while back I bought an internet course called The Thomas Messages that I found wonderfully uplifting. I am now choosing to share this course with you in these new pages. There are 16 messages in all, I will include one in each issue until all 16 messages have been shared with you.

If some of you would like to receive the messages more quickly, please go to www.emissaryoflight.com and for a suggested donation of 50 US dollars, you will receive one of these messages every few days.

Here is how James Twyman, the author of the course, describes it.

THE THOMAS MESSAGES:

In 2002, a book was published called "Emissary of Love: the Psychic Children Speak to the World" chronicling my journey into the mountains of Bulgaria to meet a group of children who possess amazing psychic powers. One of those children, a young boy named Thomas, claimed to be able to send messages and insights over great distances, even to the other side of the world. I didn't remember this until I was sitting in a hot tub some months later and "felt him" inside me.

It was the first time I ever had an experience like this, and it was the beginning of a long discourse on the role of the New Children (sometimes called the Indigo Children) and their role in healing the world. These amazing lessons, all from the mind of Thomas, are the result of that dialogue. He claims that there are thousands of children in the world today who have the same gift, the ability to "align" with others who can then help them complete their Great Work.

If you are interested in learning this, or connecting with one of these young masters, then this course is the way. Thomas shares insights that will help you live a fulfilled life, and even teaches how to enter the "Grid" where the children work together.

It is important for you to decide why you are taking this course. Is it because you want to perform miracles? Do you want to feel more powerful than you have ever allowed yourself to be in the past? If these ideas approach the reasons you are reading this right now, then it would be best for you to stop. Find something else to occupy your time. You will not achieve these things if they are the goal you seek. However, if you are reading this because you have decided that you are on this planet to be an "Instrument of Peace," and to heal the world by healing your own mind, then please continue. If you open your heart and mind to these simple lessons and dedicate yourself to this mission, then you will achieve it. Guaranteed!

And here is the paradox: If you do seek these higher ideals, to love and to realize that you are already whole and enlightened, then the miracles will surely follow, and you will realize yourself to be more powerful than you have ever allowed yourself to be in the past. They are not the goals, but they are the products of a higher goal. You are here to learn how to apply the force we call LOVE. It is as easy as learning a certain technology that has been known by the mystics of many spiritual traditions for thousands of years. Now it is your turn to learn it, then apply it to your life.

Message Fourteen

I have very little to add to this lesson's letter from Thomas. It came through with such power and clarity, and I feel it is best to let it stand on its own. And so I will. Enjoy!

Perhaps you are now able to see the progression of energy we have shared over these last thirteen lessons. Perhaps you can sense how the Children have been leading you to this very point, just so you can join us in the work we have chosen. You already know what that work is, even if you don't know it consciously. You chose to be part of this before you were born, just as we did. And now that we are here together, we join our energies as one force that has the power to shift the vibration of this planet, the consciousness of humanity and all consciousness, to reflect the beauty that has always been your foundation. Now we can begin the work of God, for that is why you are here.

It is not an accident that Children are leading the way. We are working toward a complete reversal of the patterns you have grown used to, and your relationship with the Psychic Children is symbolic of that reversal. And yet, it is more than a symbol, but a return to grace. The grace you knew when you were young is still within you, still part of you, and it is this reality you have been opening to in this course. If you are to work with the Children who have chosen this task, then you must learn how to act and think as they act and think. How else will we understand one another if we do not speak the same language of innocence. And to speak this language you must know it within yourself. We have said that you must become like a little child, which is to adopt the childlike qualities that have always been within you. Only then will you be able to embody the shift, or be the vehicle through which it may occur.

I hope this is clear to you at this point. You have been preparing to think in a new way, or perhaps an old way, a way you have forgotten till now. You are being shown how to look out upon a healed and perfect world, which is what the Children have always done. This is why they are leading the way. Every role is being reversed, beginning here, and yet this reversal has nothing to do with age or position. It has only to do with your willingness to accept that you are innocent now and always, and this is true for each one of us. Then you will be able to see the job that is before us, and you will play the unique role you have come to play.

You are ready for this. I realize that you have already heard those words, but it must be stated over and over. You need to hear this message on many levels, not just consciously. Your soul has not forgotten, but the rest of you has. Your mind and your emotions believe that you will never achieve your truest desires, but your soul knows better. You are now learning to listen to your soul by perceiving holiness within everyone. Now that you have done this it is time to complete the cycle.

It is time for you to enter the Grid with the Children. You are ready, so prepare to take your place.

In this lesson I want to describe what the Grid really is so you will recognize it. The last two lessons of this course will be centered on you stepping into it, becoming it, and extending it to everyone.

Many of you have very mystical and complex ideas of what the Grid means. It is far more simple than you can imagine. In fact, you have been working with it and shaping it all your life. It is impossible to be outside the Grid, but it is very possible to consciously access limited versions of it. (This is the ego's choice, because it allows you to stay small and insignificant.) You are here now to open a bit wider, to allow a tiny bit more knowledge to flow into your mind. There are infinite levels you could realize, but we are not interested in that at this time. For now we are only interested in the next step. In other words, we will take this process one step at a time.

The Grid is simply the foundation upon which you stand when you seek to understand your Self.

Notice that I chose to say "your Self" rather than "yourself." This should tell you a great deal. Your consciousness is the foundation you use to experience the world and every relationship you

have in that world. Unfortunately, our ego beliefs have made it difficult to establish a vibration high enough to support a true understanding of reality. It is like living your life with a blindfold tight around your eyes. You feel with your hands and you think you understand what you feel. But you are working with a limited amount of information, and so the decisions you make are not accurate. They are not necessarily wrong, just incomplete. In order for you to move to the next foundation, or the next level in your experiencing the reality that flows through you every instant, you must remove the blindfold and truly SEE what is there. That has been the focus of our course till now. And now that you can see a bit clearer it is time to step up the vibration.

The Grid can be experienced in two ways, either individually or collectively. There is a collective manifestation of the Grid, which is the energetic mid-range of humanity itself. (We are not including other sentient beings in this, because each group vibrates at a different level and so their experience of the Grid is different.) Then there is the individual manifestation of the Grid, which is the level you find yourself experiencing personally. It is easy to see that one influences the other. Each individual who makes a successful leap into the next frame of the Grid strengthens the possibility of others doing the same. The mid-range is increased until a quantum leap catapults the whole group to the same place. As more and more beings achieve the shift then it gets easier for the rest, and the quantum leaps is assured.

That moment is now. There has never been a more opportune time for each individual on this planet to step into the Light, and assure the leap in consciousness for the rest. That is why the Children are here, and it is why you are with us.

But it can be delayed, which is what the opposing force desires. But this force is not outside you in any way. There is no villain trying to stop you from realizing the Truth of your soul. You are simply afraid, and that fear is showing up in so many ways, including the ones that seem to have nothing to do with you. That is impossible. You will not be able to shift your personal frame of reference and move to the next foundation on the Grid until you realize and accept that everything you experience is yours. It doesn't belong to anyone else, no matter how it appears. This offers you great freedom, though to the ego it is the greatest confrontation. To the ego this means death, but the Spirit sees it as life itself.

The Grid is a very real energy force. Without it you would not be able to exist on this planet. As such, its influence does not extend past this planet, except partially. You are certainly One with all life everywhere no matter where it is revealed, but each race is presented with unique challenges and will experience different aspects of the Grid. Some are more advanced and others are not. But this should not enter into this conversation at all because we are only concerned with what is happening here. This is where you find yourself, and trying to project your problems to other galaxies will not serve any function.

Ultimately, there is only a limited amount of information we can offer about the Grid, at least intellectually. It cannot be experienced with your intellectual mind, only with your soul. So that is where we will stay. Your soul knows all these things, and as you continue to give the gift of grace and holiness to others you will be able to access all the information you need. That is the essence of the shift, and it is happening now.

The next two lessons will be like graduation. You are ready to step forward and truly be of service to the world. That is what you have been prepared for, and it is the only thing that will bring you true joy.

So focus on your innocence now. Let this message wash over you and prepare you for the step ahead. It will be as easy as opening your eyes.

*We love you,
Thomas*



Dear Janine,

You wrote of the choices you're facing and it reminded me of a story:

After a long, hard climb up the mountain, the spiritual seekers finally found themselves in front of a great teacher. Bowing deeply, they asked the question that had been burning inside them for so long, "How do we become wise?"

There was a long pause until the teacher emerged from meditation.

Finally, the reply came, "Good choices."

"But, teacher, how do we make good choices?"

"From experience," responded the wise one.

"And how do we get experience?"

"Bad choices," smiled the teacher.

Either way, we learn and we gain experience, don't we?

We live so much of our lives by established habits and predilections. We may not remember whether we chose them or they chose us, but when we leave our comforting routines, the ground underneath us seems to tremble. We know we are entering territory with new uncertainties, infuse our lives with energy. Choosing wisely confers life and commitment to something worthwhile, but finding a comfortable groove helps us avoid choosing and leads to a dulling of our spirit.

In one of his poems, Robert Frost describes a man who came to the junction of two roads, and he took the one less traveled knowing that through his choices—through every serious choice—he was altering his life in a way that could never be rolled back. The poet tells this story "with a sigh" as if we all hate it that such irrevocable choices must be made. But he also comments that choosing a road less traveled is what has "made all the difference".

In thinking of your decision of whether or not to move to Ashland, you wrote, "I felt excited...feeling good is very big for

me".

What an exciting time this is for you, Janine. A thoughtful choice, by its very nature, is a powerful investment of our energy. At a time like this, we can give ourselves to what energizes us to a life in which we accept what comes most easily. If we choose—rather than let our choices be made for us—we increase our chances for exciting and meaningful lives, and those who follow us will be encouraged by the choices we have made.

As you listen to your inner voice and pay attention to your feelings, you will know what choices to make. You will learn from them and be blessed by them.

As you enter this new chapter in your life, I'll be cheering you on in every way I can.

Hoorah for you! God, girl, go! :-)

May your smile be a little broader today and may the sun shine ever so brightly on you...even if it's cloudy.

CTB
Arizona

Dear CTB,

I wish to thank you and everyone else who is sending me the lovely thoughts and energy I have been receiving these last few weeks. It is truly appreciated.

My decision is made, I am moving to Ashland. Now I am leaving it to God, to the Universe to decide when, where and how this will happen. Even if it will happen.

My prayer now is this,

"God, take my life and use it for the Greater Good.

Take my strengths and use them for the Greater Good.

However, whenever and wherever is the Greater Good. Your Will be done."

I will let you guys know what happens now.

In the meantime, I am including here the wonderful poem by Robert Frost that CTB spoke about.

Enjoy!

Janine

ROAD LESS TRAVELED

Two roads diverged
 in a yellow wood
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down
 one as far as I could
To where it bent
 in the undergrowth

Then took the other
 as just as fair
And having perhaps
 the better claim
Because it was grassy
 and wanted wear
Though as for that,
 the passing there
Had worn them really
 about the same

And both that morning
 equally lay
In leaves no step
 had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first
 for another day!
Yet, knowing how way
 leads onto way
I doubted if I should
 ever come back

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence
Two roads diverged in a wood
And I took the one
 less traveled by
And that has made
 all the difference

Robert Frost



From the Mail Bag

Dear Janine,

In the May issue you wrote, "My mother is dying and I have never been more at peace". Yes, an intense experience like this is like a bracing wind that clears our being of pettiness. It makes us more alert to life's fragility. It awakens us to life's preciousness. To be fully human is to care, and attending to the death of a loved one prompts the most eloquent form of caring possible.

At a time like this, we struggle to extract meaning from loss, and we find that we are never closer than when we ponder the

great mystery that beats at the heart of our shared being.

Hope is woven into the lifelines that connect us, bridging the space in our tears. To see our own tears in another's eyes is the most holy of intimacies. We enter the realm of the heart where the one thing that can never be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we go.

As our loved one is released from all further obligations and slowly says goodbye, we can say, "You're safe, we love you and you can go now." This is life's most per-

fect gift, the final expression of unconditional love.

Morning has broken, and we are here, you and I, breathing the air, admiring the sun as its warmth calls us to attention, calls us homeward.

Dust to dust.

Heart to heart.

With boundless love,

CTB
Arizona

The Last Essay

It was late afternoon in the prison classroom, and we were discussing the topics for the GED essay when a hand went up in the back of the room. It was an elderly inmate who asked me a question that I'm still thinking about today. He asked, "If you knew you didn't have long to live and could only write one last essay, what would you write?"

As I think about that question, I recall some of the lyrics to a song called "The Last Song":

"If this is my last song,
If this is my final day,
If tomorrow I'll be gone,
What do I want to say?"

Have I given hope to the hopeless?
Have the hungry all been fed?
Has the child stood a little taller
'Cause of something that I said?

Have I left a little kindness?
Have eased a little pain?
If so, then I'm glad I came.
For that, I'm so glad I came."

One day we will reach a point where we will realize we are on our last leg of this time on Earth. We will see that so much came and went, so many people came and went, and so many things seemed real for a while, and then they were gone. Some we will remember, many we won't.

Through grace, we'll know that it is not the end of what is real; it's only the end of the body, the end of the grand performance. We'll know that our true Self doesn't grow old and die. We'll feel gratitude knowing that we live in eternity, without beginning or end, forever and always now.

In the end when we look back over the meaning of our life, we'll see that all that really mattered was the way we cared for each other and that its greatest expression was in helping others. We'll see that when we enter the sacred realm of the heart, the one thing that can never be taken from us, even by death, is the love we give away before we go. We'll see that the most eloquent answer to death's "no" is life's "yes".

CTB
Arizona

Dear CTB,

Saying thank you for sharing these beautiful thoughts seems quite inadequate to me but they are the only words I have.

So thank you, dear One, for shining your beautiful light on this subject.

I will treasure them always.

Janine

A Magazine based on A Course in Miracles

Jon Mundy, one of the original people who frequented Helen Schucman, the scribe of *A Course in Miracles*, is going to begin sending [The Miracles Magazine](#) to prisoners.

If you are interested in receiving this magazine, please let us know at *Freedom Inside* and we will forward your information to Joseph Wolfe who is responsible for the distribution.

A year's subscription is \$20.00. If you cannot afford this, there are a few donated subscriptions available.

*****DONATIONS NEEDED*****

Joseph Wolfe is sending out a request for much needed donations just for the purpose of getting more subscriptions sent to prisoners. If you like *A Course in Miracles* along with *The Miracles Magazine* and would like to help, please send donations to the address that follows. (US postage stamps in any denomination would also be gratefully accepted)

Mail To: *Spirit Light Outreach*
Joe Wolfe
The Peace Center
6833 Stanley Avenue
Berwyn, IL 60402

Instead of asking why me, ask why not me!

Who are thou that thou shall not suffer and have obstacles before me?
 I am nothing, but a man
 Flesh and bones.

Am I such a just man?
 That I deserve no pain and suffering in my period of dwelling?
 And if I had no pain and suffering, what manner of man would I be?
 Would I be a content human being?
 Would I be satisfied and thankful of life, as I would be?

Is a man with no struggle better than the man with struggle?
 Can the two co-exist on the same level?
 Did not God say, that a man would be the labourer of land?

Did not God put all men
 Of the Old and the New Testament
 Through struggle in order to make them great men?
 If thou continue to fumble in the darkness of life,
 Thou shall forever feel why me?

Why me, is to be of closed mind;
 The growing of understanding ceases to be trapped
 Or caught up in one's own sorrow.

Why not me, is to live and understand the spiritual reality of times
 B.C. and the revelation of what's to come.

Why me, to remain in darkness,
 Why not me, to seek the light?

Isn't it strange?

Isn't it strange
 That princes and kings
 And clowns that caper
 In sawdust rings
 And common people
 Like you and me
 Are builders of eternity?
 Each is given a bag of tools;
 A shapeless mass.
 And each must make,
 'Ere life is flown,
 A stumbling block
 Or a stepping stone.

Do you have a poem that reflects
 the message in Freedom Inside?
 If so, send it in, it just may be
 chosen for a future

POETRY CORNER

JS
 Florida

My Bag-Lady Friend and me

"The greatest healing therapy is friendship and love."

Hubert Humphrey

"Burn her! Burn the witch!" all the kids would tease.

This I remember clearly, thinking back to when I was in ninth grade. I had to take the subway across the city because I had been kicked out of the school close to my home. This was nothing new for me, since I found trouble easy. I can remember the nuns would always tell us to respect our elders, yet some of the same kids in our school were teasing this poor old bag lady.

Growing up, I was big for my age and a bully. I knew I could stop this abuse, if I wanted to, but no one would believe I'd do such a thing. To do so would show weakness. But something inside me kept tugging at my heart every time I saw the abuse of this poor soul—I had to do something.

I put my foot down and made some threats. You can bet, not one of those kids ever messed with that poor bag

lady again. In fact, we became fast friends. At that time in my life, I was basically on my own—my dad was in prison and my mom was out most every night looking for "love".

There were no rules at home. I'd have a stolen car every day and pick up my new friend to keep her warm, or I'd see her in the subway and we'd hang out. Her name was Rose, and she had been a high school teacher until her husband and two sons died in a house fire. Something inside her snapped, and something inside me had already snapped.

Rose taught me so much! She was rich in wisdom, and I'll never forget her lessons. "Never judge a book by its cover," she would say.

Between sips of booze, she would tell me about God. How strange—this haunted still loved God and tried to share him with me, of all people.

We would sit for hours and talk about her favorite subjects—poetry and English literature, which she used to teach in school. There I was, hair greased back, a cigarette hanging from my mouth, wearing a black leather jacket, talking to a bag lady about God and poetry.

She said it was a release to write poetry when she was feeling alone. *Yeah, okay, sure, lady!* I thought.

Rose would only talk to me. Sometimes the police would come to my house and ask me to take her to the shelter. She was giving them trouble and wouldn't go when it was cold at night.

When I picked her up, she said I reminded her of her son and to make sure I did my homework. She handed me a poem and said, "I wrote this for you." When Rose got out of my stolen car, she said, "Get here early next time!"

That next time never came. I found her lying in the snow where we would meet—some said she waited all night. I was in the city jail for shoplifting some food for our supper. My beautiful bag-lady friend was dead—my little buddy, the only person in the world who broke through all the meanness.

Our next time together would never come, but that was the day I wrote my first poem,

My Bag-Lady and Me

My Bag-Lady and Me

We sat together on the orange line subway—
That beautiful woman, my bag lady friend and me.
I was on the run for some crime or another
But still we talked of poetry and things.
I said, "This time will take us to no where
And back again, it may take hours."
She said, "I've no where to sleep
And God knows it's cold out tonight."

Better go now. I've places to go and people to meet
Like two old paupers, we parted only to meet again—
She was my only friend, my beautiful bag lady
So rich in wisdom—everyone who did not know her
Laughed and threw stones—I cried.

That beautiful, mild woman
There's so many like her, my heart aches—
On finding her laying still in the snow, I cried—
She didn't labor to be beautiful, she was—
My bag-lady friend and me.

I sat down where we used to sit in the name of love.
I caught the last embers of the daylight die
And thought I could hear her say, "Stay for a while."
My beautiful bag-lady friend, "I've no where to sleep
And God knows it's cold out tonight." Let's talk.
I've missed you.

Brandon Lagana
From *Chicken Soup for the Prisoner's Soul* (2000)



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Janine Cantin*

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