

The Six Medicines of BodhiChristo



By Heiwa no Bushi
and Krin Van Tatenhove

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PhotoOils by Krin Van Tatenhove

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Healing the world begins with healing yourself.

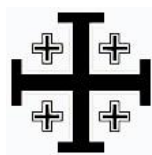
- Anthon St. Maarten

Interrupting our destructive habits and awakening our heart is the work of a lifetime. – Pema Chödrön





Introduction



A friend and I were recently discussing our favorite inspirational books. He and I are co-explorers, coloring outside the lines of conventional spirituality, testing every truth in the laboratories of our own lives.

We had a good belly laugh as we recited the *steps*, *secrets*, and *keys* touted by various writers. So many of these maxims are similar, recycled and refreshed to make them seem trendy.

In reality, this is age-old wisdom transmitted to us by a myriad of cultures and teachers. The ancient Hebrews called it *derek olam*, the everlasting way inscribed in our genes since the beginning of time. It is dharma, Tao, the cosmic order, a river wending its way to the ocean and inviting us for a swim.

So, it begs a question. If most of us have already heard this ageless advice, why are we still bound by our struggles, worries, and disappointments? Why are we still suffering, longing for the freedom and joy that is our birthright?

This brings us to the key word of this volume you are about to read and *hopefully* digest.

Medicine.

Instantly, our minds conjure up pills, prescriptions, faithfully following doctors' orders by ingesting each capsule in a vial, hoping we have enough refills to weather

the tide. If you are a good patient when under the care of your physician, kudos to you. Now, let's apply this same diligence in our efforts to be free!

It may help to share a vignette from my personal life.

Some years ago, near death's door due to alcoholism, I landed in a treatment facility, bunking with convicted felons and those who had recently been homeless. Addiction is no respecter of class or color, and I soon felt a kinship with my new band of brothers.

In the course of my treatment, I had a wise counselor. She saw how I undermined my life with self-deception, so she firmly confronted me. "Krin, you're an intelligent man," she said. "If you had diabetes and a doctor told you to take insulin on a daily basis to avoid death, what would you do?" I replied, "I would take it, of course!" "Then you need to do the same with the spiritual practices you are learning for recovery," she said. "They will save your life."

Since then, blessed with the miracle of sobriety, I have been slowly progressing, and though I am surely imperfect in applying my daily disciplines, I am devoted to them nonetheless. I remind myself of a potent truth found in the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous: "What we really have is a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of our spiritual condition. Every day is a day when we must carry the vision of God's will into *all* of our activities."

Substitute whatever word or phrase that makes sense to you for "God's will." Spirit, Higher Power, True Self, Source, Dharma, Creator, Mindfulness. We are not here to

quibble with your chosen path. We are here to emphasize the need for *daily* practices, *daily* adherence.

Certainly, **The Six Medicines of BodhiChristo** echo with familiar tones. You may be tempted to say, “Yes, that’s true, and I’ve heard it all before. Thank you very much.”

Please consider, again, the urgency and immediacy of *medicine*. These practices bring vigor and liberty. Guaranteed! Daily doses, taken with great intentionality, make all the difference. And the beauty is that these truths are accessible to *every* person who is willing to examine human existence more fully. This is not the rarified possession of holy men and women. It is our common inheritance, as readily available as the oxygen we breathe.

It is our desire to help *all* of us absorb this medicine more fully, to let it dissolve the suffering that so easily weighs us down.

Jesus said, “You will discover the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Or, as Alan Watts said in his desire to bring Buddhist teachings to a Western audience, “The only Zen you’ll find on mountain tops is the Zen you bring up there with you.”

It’s up to each of us to discover our liberation, and we need each other.

The Path of BodhiChristo

Heiwa no Bushi uses this term to describe his unique blending of the teachings of Jesus and the Buddha.

“I’ve discovered,” he says, “that both Jesus and the Buddha, had they existed at the same time, would have

probably gotten along very well. We so often refer to Jesus as the Son of God. However, there is another term used less frequently within the same holy text of the Christian lexicon: Son of Man. I think it is the human side of Jesus, his flesh and blood, that we need to plumb more deeply for the betterment of human society. If we don't understand his human side, we can never really comprehend what we call, or assume to be, his divinity.

"I practice a form of Zen Buddhism called Daishin, which means 'big mind, big heart.' So many of what we call our 'limitations' are due to the voluntary 'caps' we place on our human potential, largely due to the mental hardware of what others teach us. We surrender our thoughts and actions to small minds, small hearts. We give up our basic sanity; we cap off our lives based on someone else's definitions or expectations.

"I call this mentality 'capism.' And while some of us bemoan the deadening effects of capitalism, I say to you that 'capism' is far more debilitating to the human being. It prohibits us from cultivating unity within the human population.

"During one of my talks, someone asked me, 'What is the greatest obstacle you have faced during your journey of becoming BodhiChristo?' What rattled me the most, I replied, was that there are people in our lives and circles who will teach us certain things—holy, ethical, and cultural things—that we accept and work with as benchmarks for our lives. But then, when we find another way—a bigger

answer, another church, a new mindset—they reject us for it.

“Have you ever been the prodigal child or black sheep in your family? They dislike you because you are not following their code, because you have jumped ship from their mindset. The only thing this proves is that *they* have not changed. When we allow this rejection to alter the course of our own journeys—if we follow external codes out of mere obedience—we have voluntarily placed a cap on our lives.

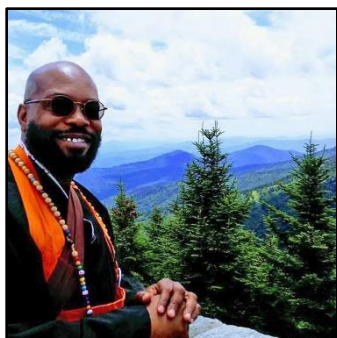
“What were you before you were told everything that you are now? Can you uncover the sacredness of your own humanness? Many of us never have the chance to discover this. We are born with a name that is not our choosing, then christened or baptized into a tradition that makes us one of ‘them.’ We are told that ‘this is what a real man does,’ or ‘this is how a real woman should act.’

“Let’s just *be*. That simple phrase is so broad that it rocks the foundation of many people’s spirituality and psychology. They can’t find a stable footing in just *being* because they have invested themselves so much in ‘the code.’ Jesus was very clear in calling us to break rules. He repeatedly said, ‘The law says this, but I tell you...’ The problem is that many of us have been so deeply assimilated into ‘the code’ that we don’t know we have become part of the problem.”

A Note about Our Partnership

I first met Bushi through social media contacts. I became intrigued by his teachings, then reached out to him. He was gracious enough to recommend one of my books, *Invitation to The Overview*, and later we collaborated on *Four Truths on a Crosstown Bus*, a story about the providential meeting of a Christian and Buddhist. You can download both volumes for free at my website, krinvan.com.

In another one of my projects, *The Smile on a Dog: Retrieving a Faith That Matters*, Bushi generously shared a summary of his journey. Let it serve as a mini-biography for this current collaboration.



His Sacred Humanness (HSH) Heiwa no Bushi is a Buddhist-Christian monk and Abbot of the Thomasville Buddhist Center in Thomasville, North Carolina. He is a former Christian minister,

having served in the Christian denominations of Southern Baptist, Missionary Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and Church of God (Anderson, IN). He has advanced degrees in philosophy and systematic theology. He also received training in both Mahayana and Daishin Zen Buddhism. As a physical specimen, Bushi holds

black belts in three different Japanese martial art forms, making him, as friends often say, an “official badass.” Heiwa no Bushi places his teachings under the moniker of “BodhiChristo,” which means “enlightened Christ,” an amalgamation of the two rich streams of Buddhism and Christianity. Here he describes the arc of his journey until the present.

“This is my story; however, I believe it reflects *all* of our stories.

“I grew up in South Florida, particularly West Palm Beach and Riviera Beach on the Atlantic Coast. I was a preacher’s kid. My minister grandmother was heavily involved in both the Southern, Missionary, and Primitive Baptist churches. She was so devoted that when people within her circles wanted to erect a building, she loaned them the money and became a member of their Board of Trustees.

“By the time I was six years old, my grandmother had become a minister in that church, but she struggled constantly against patriarchy. The congregation was so misogynistic that they wouldn’t allow her to be a regular preacher. However, she was a very clever bird. She decided that every time they gave her an opportunity to speak from the pulpit, she would use me to introduce her. It was a way of deflecting all the attention from her, and the result was that I became a phenomenal, well-spoken, entertaining bit of

Sunday mornings. People came to hear my grandmother because there was a young boy doing the introduction, and he really knew how ‘to lay it out there.’

“All that time I worked with my grandmother, traveling to various congregations, I saw the inconsistency between her church life and her home life. At church she was outwardly ‘righteous,’ but at home she would speak in ways normally prohibited. As a boy being raised in the ethic of Christian fundamentalism, I thought it was quite hypocritical, but she would often quote the Apostle Paul from First Corinthians: ‘I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.’

“As Granny’s ministry grew, I began to feel a leading, or calling, to attend seminary. I would later receive my theological training. In my early 20s, I traveled overseas with the military and found a myriad of contradictions regarding culture, history, and my own Christian faith. It was a time of hands-on experience for me, or better said: *mind experience*. It was what I call ‘tacit education.’ These diametrically opposed theologies, ethics, and human understandings challenged me to look at the deeper and wider aspects of life on our planet. I encountered many other faiths and religions. Not only did I see the beautiful richness of religious diversity, but also their many parallels to my

Christian faith, particularly referencing ‘The Golden Rule.’

“In my experiences as a Christian, I had not encountered a real moral teaching about how to treat our planet, especially the ‘lesser creatures,’ or sentient beings. As a lover of creation, I found a much greater connection to the earth through other religions, especially Buddhism and its tremendous emphasis on caring for *all* living things. Jainism also intrigued me. It insisted on not naming ‘God,’ believing there is no particular god outside of ourselves.

“These religions lifted up a type of humanity for me that many circles of Christianity seemed to usurp and ignore. These experiences spoke volumes of higher learning to me, and it seemed to me that Christianity’s attempt to nurture and care for the Earth and its sentient beings, big and small, did not stand up in the court of reality. For instance, where in Christian scripture is the insistence on cultivating an intimate relationship with all living things? What is the theological course of study for that called? Where might we find a majority of ‘Earth Conscious Christians’ in America?

“Then I thought of the parable Jesus told of seeking out the one lost lamb. He was saying to the majority: ‘You hold on tight; I’m going to get the one that matters in this moment.’ These insights began to bring out what I call the ‘more mature’

interpretation of Christ that I am trying to live out today.

“In my teachings, I emphasize that there are three types of knowledge.

- **Explicit knowledge** that comes to us from textbooks, manuals, Sunday school lessons taught as literal. This is a form of cultural programming, even indoctrination.
- **Codified knowledge** that comes from the design of the society around us—from traffic signs to laws to the licenses we need to practice our professions. All this is meant to make sure that we follow the rules and remain in compliance with the status quo.
- **Tacit knowledge** that we gain firsthand in the laboratories of our own lives. It can’t just be told to us; we must *experience* it and adapt it to reality of our own understanding.

“The bottom line is that we *must* test any truth for ourselves! We must examine it in the light of our minds, hearts, consciences, and through personal experience. I deeply feel that religious institutions, especially the Christian church, should be some of the most unregulated bodies in our society. They should always call us to the high adventure of exploring a fuller humanity and spiritual life. Humanity first!

“On this adventure, I remain a lifelong learner, carrying on something my grandmother taught me

long ago. ‘Go beyond what educational systems teach you,’ she said.

“Take on the world. Tacitly hold it, experience it, live it and understand it!”

Here is a short bio about me.



Krin Van Tatenhove is a writer, photographer, Master Naturalist, and spiritual adventurer—one who has lived numerous lifetimes yet is still exploring. He was a Presbyterian pastor for 32 years, serving churches in urban, suburban and rural settings, always an advocate for ministries of justice. He has also been an organizer for Habitat of Humanity, a substance abuse counselor, a hospice chaplain, and Director of a nonprofit. His 40 years of professional writing experience have led to countless articles and a dozen books, most recently *The Smile on a Dog: Retrieving a Faith That Matters*, and *Neighborhood Church: Transforming Your Congregation into a Powerhouse for Mission* (co-written with Rev. Rob Mueller). You can freely download most of his work—including full-color art collaborations—by visiting krinvan.com. Krin holds a doctoral degree

in ministry, his dissertation plumbing the meaning and power of spiritual gifts. He is married, has four precious children, and currently lives with his wife and special-needs adult son in San Antonio, Texas.

Now, let's get to the medicines, tested by both of us through struggle and exploration, shared out of love and a desire that all of us will eliminate unnecessary suffering.

As Bushi says, "These medicines are not 'fix-alls.' We have to work with them so that they can teach us. The more you practice them, the more you will see a noticeable change in your life. You will get closer and closer to yourself. You will be able to truly see the reality of the psychospiritual damage you have been inflicting on your mind and personality: the lack of empathy you possess, the intolerance you hold for people who are different than you, and the history of grief, anger, and sadness that you've carried throughout your life. As you learn to let these things go, you will feel more loving kindness and compassion.

"Religion has failed us. Heaven and hell have certainly crumbled in the psychological skies of many humans, so what do we have left? We still possess our own human fabric to refashion our own human salvation."

Namaste! God bless you! As-salamu alaykum! Mitakuye oyasin! May the Force be with you! Keep on truckin'!

Krin Van Tatenhove

June 2021, San Antonio, Texas

The Six Medicines

Just for Today

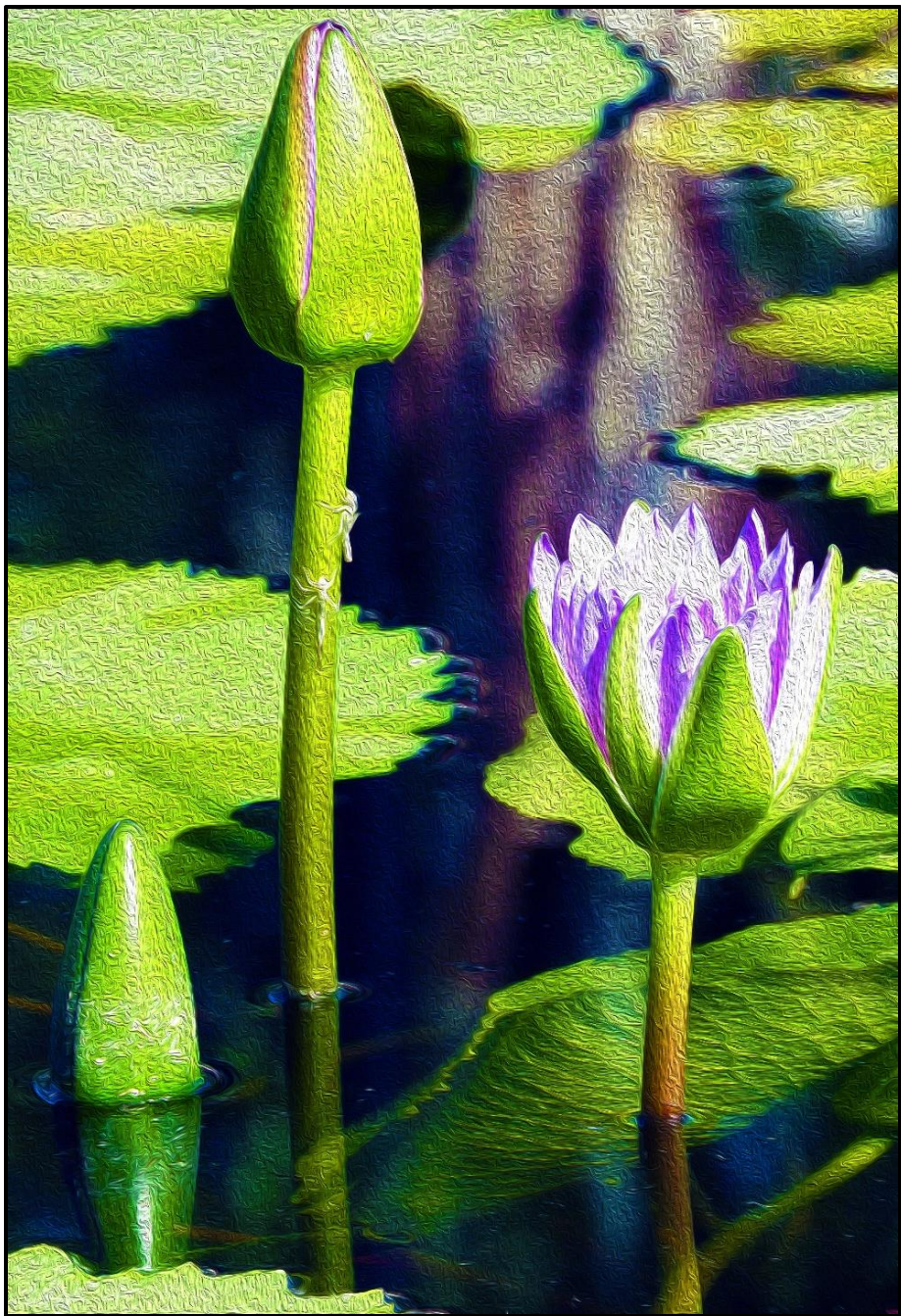
Don't Be Angry

Don't Worry

Be Grateful

Work Hard

Be Kind to Others





THE FIRST MEDICINE: JUST FOR TODAY



You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment. Fools stand on their island of opportunities and look toward another land. There is no other land; there is no other life but this.

— Henry David Thoreau

Bushi: *Just for today*—these three words are ingredients for good living!

We exist in a society where everyone lives at a rapid pace. Rush, rush, rush, go, go, go. “Get it while the getting is good,” we say. We’re like drag racers on this strip of life. In many cases, this means we are burning up and trampling over our lives just to get to materialistic goals or objects we deem essential. And when we trample over our very existences—*the present moment, the living*—we miss the beauty around us: the birds, the bees, the smiles, the tears of others, the greenery of Mother Earth. We miss the chance to inhale oxygen and truly taste it. When we act and live in this manner, we are creating our own calamity.

This very potent medicine, like all of them, is a vulnerable and voluntary practice. Focus just on today. Twenty-four hours.

I fully realize there is difficulty in staying within this timeframe. Even the suggestion to do so can cause anxiety. Why? Because for generations, people have lived in a rush!

When I was a boy, there was the space race between America and the Soviet Union, competing to get to the moon first. I believe that in many ways this caused what I call a human anemia in our society. You may say, “But wait, Bushi, we got to the moon first. We won. We made it. Everything turned out OK.” On one level, yes, but that rush contributed to a pattern in our society where production is the capital virtue. We are *always* on a frantic time schedule; a rushing to compete that creates an anemic response to actual human life.

From the moment we arrive on this planet, others give us a mental agenda predicated on the structures of our society. In America, it’s tied to industry and capitalism, like pipelines that funnel a code to us about what we are supposed to put “first” in our lives. We end up circumnavigating our own existences; we become beasts of burden, carrying the load of what the complex, the system, the government wants us to be. We are so deeply engrossed in this mindful-less behavior that *long* before we know ourselves, we have taken up the mantle of external codification and certainty. Sadly, we go to work and put on a smile, only to maintain our place within the system.

Look at the lamentable phenomenon that little girls must deal with at such young ages. Even before they get to school, they will start adorning themselves in ways that suit the crowd—the visual requirement—just to fit in.

When we do this for the full extent of our lives, where are we? We don’t tend to our deepest emotional and

mental needs. We have been projecting to the world what I call an artificial signature.

You can see this in our educational system. Take, for instance, Black history. In our rush to have a standardized and White-dominant school system, so that we didn't fall behind other countries on this planet, we cut out the parts of our past which created controversy and stagnation in America. We thought that if we could create a "standard" that got everyone educated more quickly, then we would supposedly be contenders in the educational arena of the world.

No system we have created or adopted in this country has helped the American mind slow down and become more unified in our humanness. We continue to play life by the calendar, clock, standard, and schedule. That is why this medicine is one of the strongest, because it deals with time. Time can be neutral, but one thing we must understand about time is that if there is no distance to travel, time is irrelevant. Courage does not come from 10 or 12 miles away. It comes from within ourselves, voluntarily.

Many of us are already three weeks ahead on our vacation before we even pull out of the driveway. Look at opioids, designed to take away the pain, to slow down the painful effects of life. We have overstepped our bounds and become horridly reliant on artificial crutches.

No matter what religion we follow, it should encourage us to realize that time is *now*. If we do not slow down, if we do not volunteer to do so, our efforts to just be

and enjoy life; to pursue *real* happiness, will never come about.

This practice calls us to pay very particular attention to what is happening in our lives during *just* these 24 hours, second by second. In Buddhism this is referred to as awareness. Take the time offered to you. Learn to appreciate what your foot feels like on the ground. That's where we come from—the earth. Slow down and be with the naturally occurring karma; the natural order of existence that is autonomously in motion. The Earth is hung neatly in the universe without our involvement, a perfect distance from the sun that suits us well for human life. This natural order is around us each and every day, but we have been hastily taught to dismiss our own sensations and adopt ideas and religious tenets to justify our lives. We have been educated to dehumanize our own humanity.

Just for today teaches us to be present with what is taking place around us. To *be* with it. Breathe, listen, focus on whatever is happening in the moment. Don't discriminate with likes or dislikes. Just receive it.

I find it helpful to choose an object near me and just focus on it for two minutes—the lights, a bug, my fingerprints. Focus, breathe, settle into the present. You don't have to like it or dislike it. Suspend that impulse within you to judge everything.

You can't pray your way into this practice. You have to take your flesh and just do it. Say to yourself, "All that chatter filling my mind ceases right now! I am going to pay attention!" And when we inevitably find ourselves slipping,

we reorient again and again to the natural beauty that exists in the universe.

Isn't it interesting that we live in a world where there is very little color. By that, I don't mean that there are literally no colors, but that, allegorically, there is no enthusiasm for this present moment; no intrinsic bonding with the birds flying by or human beings we meet. There's no enthusiasm for *being*, even with the fingerprints of our own hands.

We often wonder what forces are against us? Where are those "principalities and powers" mentioned in the Christian Bible that move against us? In most cases, we will find them in our own minds, our daily routines and social structures. And because we too often focus on other times or periods, we often miss these things. We end up asking ourselves, "What am I not doing right? What am I not seeing? What is not connecting for me?"

We can answer these questions more readily when we focus just on today. Not tomorrow, next week, or what is coming down the line. These are the 24 hours we have been given. This is our life. So, just for today, focus on you. This medicine teaches us to be alive, to be enthusiastic about the ever-changing moments right in front of us.

Krin: I've always loved this apocryphal story about the Buddha.

One of his students reportedly asked him, "Are you the Messiah?" "No", answered the Buddha. "Then are you a healer?" "No," the Buddha replied. "Then are you a

teacher?" the student persisted. "No, I am not a teacher." "Then what are you?" asked the exasperated student. "I am awake," said the Buddha.

In the midst of "woke culture," how many of us are fully alert? How many of us hear the wake-up calls surrounding us on a daily basis? If you're like me, we can be pretty persistent in staying asleep!

I am often grateful for pivotal moments in my life. In this chapter titled *just for today*, it may seem odd to mention a 25-year-old memory, but here it is.

I was passing through one of the most difficult periods of my life. I had gotten divorced, was scrambling to find employment, and was wrestling with numerous demons. I finally landed a low-paying job as a fifth-grade teacher at a private school. I desperately needed the medicine of *just for today*, but like many of us, my struggle to survive clouded my clarity.

Then, on a bright spring day, I was hurriedly crossing the playground, intent on using the bathroom, the phone, and the copy machine during my short teacher's break.

Wait a minute...let me rephrase that. It was a *gorgeous* morning in a desert environment! Overnight rain had released the sweet smell of creosote, that briny aroma of the outback. Did I fully notice it then? Did I stop to absorb all that beauty in the midst of my haste?

Suddenly, one of the third-grade girls bounded up to me and tugged my arm.

"Mr. Van! Mr. Van! Will you listen to my speech?"

Select students from each grade were preparing for a regional speech meet, which meant a clear and dramatic recitation of selected Bible passages. Porsha was her class representative. She stood before me slightly breathless, red beads woven into her corn braids, her dark eyes eager and full of life. What a precious child! I mentally placed my own agenda on hold, and believe me, that took some effort!

“Of course, I’ll listen to your speech,” I replied.

“It’s Jesus’s words from Matthew, chapter six,” she said.

With no other formalities, she reached into her memory and began.

“I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”

“That was great, Porsha!” I exclaimed, giving her shoulder a warm squeeze. “I’m impressed with the *feeling* you put into it.

“Thank you, Mr. Van. Have a great day!” Then she bounded away towards her classroom.

As I watched her leave, I thought to myself, *Teacher, teach thyself! Listen to this master speaking to you across two millennia!*

My life at that time was drenched in worries. Financial worries. Career worries. Relationship worries. Worries about why I was worrying. I went to bed at night trying to quiet their myriad voices, and I awoke in the morning trying to fend them off. To make it worse, I was sadly aware that stress and worry had been the dominant patterns of my life. So much of my precious existence was spent on a delusional hamster wheel that I failed to savor the fleeting gift of each day.

There's an old adage in recovery: "Fake it 'til you make it." I now look back on that moment through the lens of great irony. It has taught me to laugh at myself in a healing way. You see, for many years afterwards, while pastoring congregations in various settings, I preached on that same passage from the Sermon on the Mount. I exhorted people to seize the day, to savor the blessings of each second. I even proclaimed that if every human being on the planet practiced this single teaching from Jesus, there would be a worldwide revolution.

Yet, behind the veil of my verbosity, it remained a struggle for me to live more fully within the bounds of 24 hours. Sometimes, it still is today.

Can you relate?

If so, remain compassionate with yourself and keep reorienting to here and now. This medicine is daily and voluntary. There are so many suggestions for how to practice it, but the critical aspect is to find a discipline that works in your own life.

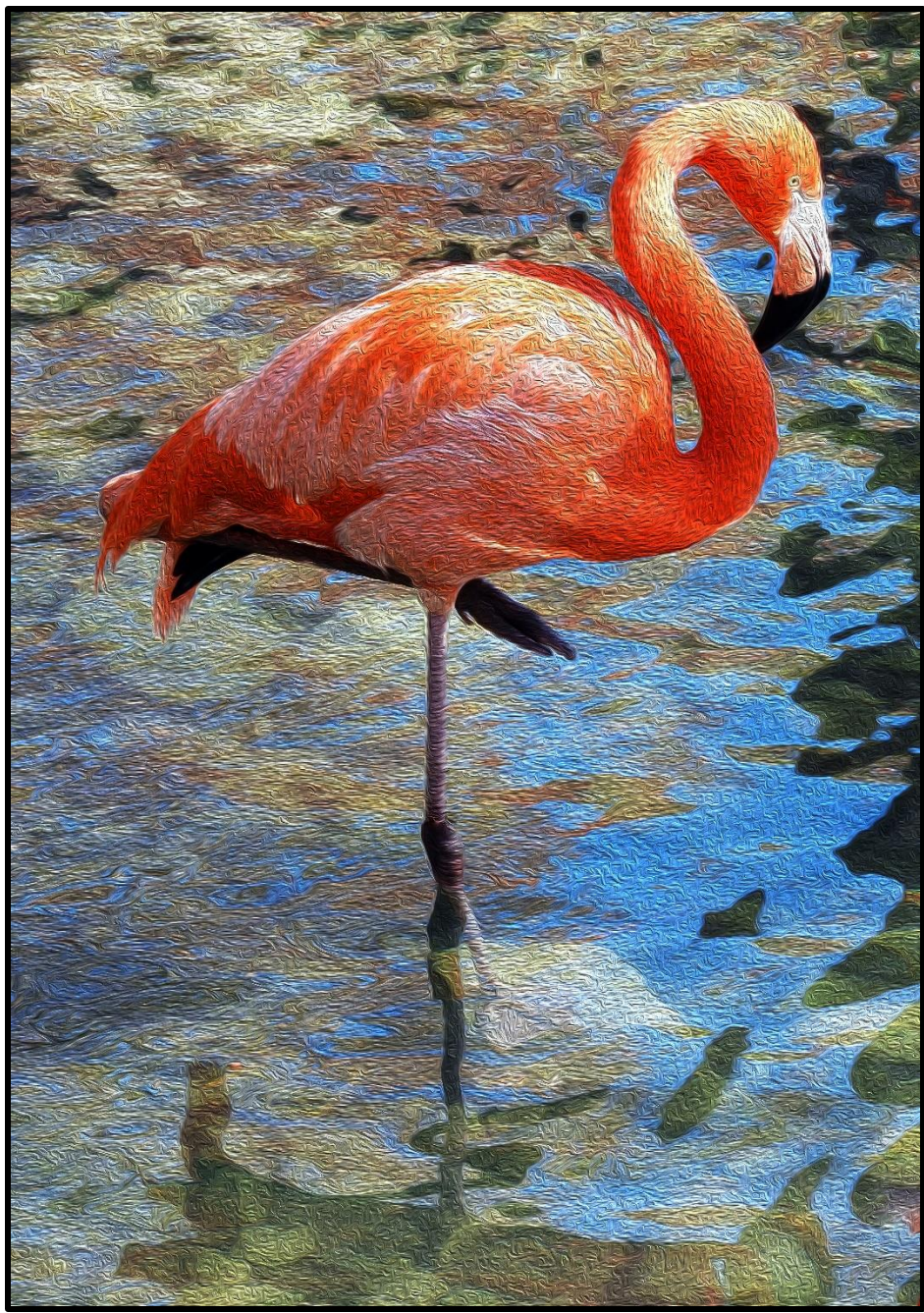
For instance, many of my friends extol the virtues of various forms of meditation. They tell me it is the only way they have learned to truly calm the chatter in their brains and settle mindfully into the present.

I celebrate their success, but (so far) sitting still doesn't fit my metabolism or learning style. I benefit from a wise counselor set me free with practical advice. He knew my love of daily physical activity—hiking outdoors, swimming, exercising at the gym—so he said: “Use those moments to cultivate living in the present. They will be a portal to the serenity your soul is seeking.”

Today, I find time to hike at local parks, state parks, national parks, even my neighborhood with its variety of trees. During each excursion—while my heart is pumping, blood coursing, lungs inhaling—I turn my senses to the natural world. I savor every sight, sound, smell and texture. I remind myself of something Thomas Merton once said: “With my hair almost on end, and the eyes of my soul wide open, I am present in this unspeakable Paradise, and I behold this wide-open secret which is there for everyone, free, and no one pays attention...”

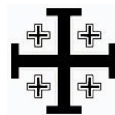
During my daily regimen at the gym, while laboring full bore on a piece of equipment, I take deep breaths and focus fully on my surroundings. It is so true for my learning style: when my body is challenged and engaged, my mind finds a more ready balance.

My point? Since this practice of *just for today* is medicine we all need, find a way to reorient to the present that works for you. Not someone else! You!





THE SECOND MEDICINE: DON'T BE ANGRY



When we are caught up in a destructive emotion, we lose one of our greatest assets: our independence. – Dalai Lama XIV

Bushi: Anger is exclusively a reaction to expectations. We are acting as if we are the rulers of our own universe, in charge of all the standards. We hold ourselves to be gods, then we enforce the boundaries of our pitiful reign.

Switching metaphors, we see ourselves as whirlpools, spinning and devouring, yet overlooking the basic fact that we are part of the ocean.

You've seen people like this. They buy a pair of new shoes, you step on them, and they will nearly kill you. You stepped on their universe. They expected the shoes to stay clean. They put so much pride into those shoes that they will even harm another person as a reaction.

Anger is a choice that others have taught us to use for reprimand and reaction. Anger is natural, but it is a symptom. It shows us that we have become so attached to our own ideology that we allow mere words to cause instability in our lives. Then, if we nurture that instability, we only perpetuate our angry reactions.

We have not learned to master our anger, so we use it to hurt others. In America, the First Amendment of the Constitution promises that we can think and speak exactly the way we want, and while that may be true on some levels, it has contributed to a type of absurd sociological

childishness. Freely expressing our anger certainly does more harm than good.

This is why education is so important in preventing anger. We have to understand the world around us, how it works, how people are different. This helps us recognize the wide range of other people's perceptions from an empirical, firsthand perspective.

For instance, why do we get upset at a drunk man begging for change? Is that not a lot in life? Do we not see these things every day? As we ask ourselves these questions, as we adjust to the reality around us, we are more able to regulate our own reactions.

All of us have the capacity to be angry, and anger in itself is not a terrible thing. It is akin to a stethoscope hanging on a doctor's neck that can detect the imbalances in us. Be aware of when your anger is arising, and in that moment of recognition simply sit back, cross your legs, and watch the show. You are not a participant when you are watching the show. What you get to see is how the character—*you*—is acting. That is very difficult to do, to watch ourselves truthfully, but it is *so* necessary.

Jesus taught his followers to be compassionate, to give up things, because holding on to them is destructive. And yes, he became angry, but it was how he dealt with it that made all the difference. There is a way that our flesh should be managed. Human flesh should be handled loosely, not so bound up and rigid. When we react to the world through our rigidity, we shut people out. It is then so easy to perceive violation, intrusion, and trespassing on our

territory, and this causes anger. *Me*, *my*, and *I* are constructs of our psychology that imprison us emotionally and psychologically.

Think about the very stark teaching of Jesus to love our enemies. Anger and hate sleep together; they make love together in our minds, and on rare occasions they will have a *ménage à trois* with a little self-consciousness. Not self-consciousness in the sense of trying to heal ourselves, but to justify ourselves. We become aware of our anger, then we pile on the justifications. It is difficult to love our enemies when we are shoveling so much shit on our own minds.

Anger is rooted in our ego, not in enlightenment, Christ-consciousness, universal wisdom, or Spirit.

Christian scripture says, “Be angry, but do not sin.” I assert to you that if you have been angry the entire day, you have caused yourself a great deal of harm. You have “sinned” in some respect. When we are thinking, “Oh, I hate that person so much, I wish they would just die,” we are bringing that condemnation first on ourselves. Meanwhile, that person we hate may be off somewhere enjoying ice cream in total bliss, yet we continue to punish ourselves.

It is not going to kill us to cease being angry. We’ve been taught in America to give free rein to our anger. The second Iraqi war is a perfect example. We went into another country, reacting, sending thousands of troops overseas to find what? No weapons of mass destruction. We killed a man because we perceived he was some sort of wicked ruler, yet we were still wrong in sending our own sons and

daughters across the seas to fight in that land knowing that those weapons of mass destruction were not there. It was all fueled by anger and greed.

Are there circumstances in life that will cause us a great deal of harm? Are there events that threaten to unravel us? Yes. But anger is just one emotional reaction. Deeper than getting angry is understanding the distortions, rivalries, and circumstances that create our anger and frustration. Once we understand them, life gets a little easier.

Instinctively is how we normally live. Reactively is how we normally live. We must be willing to volunteer to not get angry. Condition yourself to understand rather than react. You have that power. You don't have to pray for it. You have the capability to say to yourself, "I'm not going to get frustrated over this. I'm going to see it as it is and do everything possible to make peace with it."

Again, recognize when we are getting angry, then participate as the audience, watching our response and becoming conscious of it. Then we work to change our character's motives. We work on giving our character a new plot, being patient and compassionate with both ourselves and others, recognizing the essential Buddhist tenet that all life is suffering. Even our enemies are suffering, acting out of their pain. There is no need to get angry.

Say to yourself, "I could be angry about this. I could be egotistical. But I am going to let that go." When we feel that someone is attacking us, taking something from us, or

not seeing us as we see ourselves, try empathy! We are *all* incomplete. Why be upset about someone who doesn't understand you fully?

So much of what we get angry about is not whole, essentially without consequence. When the Buddha was on his deathbed, his disciples asked for a last teaching. He said, "All component things are empty *and* they all have a value." Those things we muster to fuel our anger originate from ignorance. They are empty except for their value in awakening us. So how can we be righteously true in our anger?

Don't get angry. The moment you sense it arising, become aware of it and volunteer to turn it in another direction. This, in and of itself, will shock the living hell out of those you are angry with.

Krin: One of the central teachings of The Twelve Steps, a pattern for living that has brought healing to countless people, is that resentment destroys our serenity. As Bushi so rightly says, the root of this resentment is our expectations. The old adage is true: "Today's expectations are tomorrow's resentments." And those resentments inevitably fan the flames of anger.

Sure, there are rational expectations we have of certain people and situations in our lives. We rightfully expect coworkers to be on time and productive. We expect our local government to use our taxes appropriately in providing public services. In our marriages, we expect our

spouses to honor the vows we have taken to love, cherish, and protect each other. We expect fidelity.

When these basic, seemingly justified, expectations are not met, we have to face a deeper and more sobering truth. We ultimately have no control over the world around us. To try and exert that control more forcefully only causes untold suffering. The art is in learning how to redirect the resentment and anger that arises within us.

Take, for instance, our struggles for justice. When we observe racism, homophobia, economic injustice, police brutality, or the unchecked pollution that continues to escalate global warming, it can kindle anger within us. What do we do in those moments?

There is a standard misrepresentation of Buddhism that runs something like this. All desires are bad. They cause attachment, and attachment causes suffering. Actually, the Buddha never advocated life without desire. What he warned against is *tanhà*, meaning thirst, a burning need to quench a certain drive or need within us. This can take many forms: greed, lust, a craving for recognition. Clinging to these kinds of desires undermines our psychological and mental health. In its extreme forms, we call this addiction, and too many of us have seen its tragic consequences.

In contrast to *tanhà* is the presence of aspirations. These are desires and intentions that stem from the truest parts of our being. They lead us to actualize our unique purpose and identity. Sometimes, aspirations are related to creative endeavors; at other times, to our urge to find

serenity and balance. According to the Buddha, aspirations for our own enlightenment or compassionate engagement with the world are admirable expressions of desire.

Let's look at this in light of our current society. If inner peace is a desirable aspiration, what happens when our perceptions of injustice stir anger, even rage, within us? We find part of the answer as we consider the difference between *natural concern* and *self-righteous anger*.

Self-righteous anger is something we must always be wary of. We can all point to examples when people used "righteousness" to justify intolerance towards the realities of others. This does not lead, however, to the conclusion that all truth is relative, that there is ultimately no foundational premise upon which to stand. The suffering of others is undeniable. It calls us to respond in a way that has moral gravity and certitude. As Desmond Tutu famously said, "It is small comfort to a mouse, if an elephant is standing on its tail, to say 'I am impartial.' In this instance, you are really supporting the elephant in its cruelty."

Natural concern is a perfectly normal response to the very real injustices around us. It is right for us to join the struggle in eradicating these evils. This is a heartfelt expression of our compassion and love.

How we join is the question! If we come from a place of self-righteous anger, we have lost our center of love and compassion. This kind of anger is a clear indicator of underlying anxiety or fear—destructive emotions that urge us to take our viewpoints and bludgeon others out of personal angst. We objectify our opponents as two-

dimensional types. Ironically, we begin to use the same tactics as those whose unjust behaviors we abhor, perpetuating the same cycle of action/reaction that has enthralled our planet since the dawn of consciousness.

Mahatma Gandhi had some well-known character flaws. Like all of us, he was imperfect. Still, he remains one of the greatest practitioners of nonviolence in history. It is important to realize that Gandhi was never a passive, weak-kneed guru. Nor was he a man who had permanently purged himself of anger. It was what he did with this emotion—these moments of natural concern—that made the difference.

In his book, *The Gift of Anger*, Arun Gandhi, one of Gandhi's grandchildren, remembers conversations with his grandfather. He says that the great man, called Bapu by the Indian people, regarded anger as a positive force. He quotes his grandfather as saying, "It is an energy that compels us to define what is right and wrong...I have learned to use my anger for good. Anger to people is like gas to the automobile—it fuels you to move forward and get to a better place. Without it, we would not be motivated to rise to a challenge. It is an energy that compels us to define what is just and unjust."

Another way to think about this is the difference between *revenge* and *justice*. America has always been a culture that adulates frontier ass-kicking—gun-slinging lawmen who mete out righteous retaliation. We have a perverse fascination with vigilantes who get lethal satisfaction outside the boundaries of law. Think of how

many “revenge movies” begin with the protagonist experiencing the tragic murder of a spouse, child, or even a dog! The film then runs on the steam of expected reprisal for its duration. Viewers and the protagonist will not be satisfied until the moment of retribution, which usually means the shedding of blood.

Revenge is personal, a deep-seated, almost primordial need to carry out a vendetta for gratification. Justice, on the other hand, is impersonal and impartial. It flows from an ethical center that desires protection of both individuals and society.

How can we know the difference? By sitting back, as Bushi says, and examining our state of being. Revenge elicits hotheaded emotions, fantasies of getting even, including harming the other person so that they “know how it feels.” Justice is rational. It is about righting a wrong that higher consciousness has revealed as morally culpable. It is our anger converted into creative action.

When anger arises within me, I take Bushi’s advice and try to dispassionately observe what is happening. I ask myself two questions.

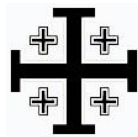
First, is my response based on egotistical, self-centered expectations of how others should act? If so, I let it go, no matter how many times it takes.

On the other hand, is my anger a legitimate response to injustice, a natural concern? If so, I strive to convert it into compassionate action for change. I try to divest myself of the egotistical parts and replace them with determined mercy.





MEDICINE THREE: DON'T WORRY



*Worry pretends to be necessary but serves no
useful purpose. - Eckhart Tolle*

Bushi: It's amazing that we would naturally not worry if no one told us we should, if no one put the *need* to worry in such acceptable forms. People say things like, "I don't know why you're not worried!" You see?

If faith is real, then what does it look like? As a child, I remember my mother, my grandmother, and every preacher telling us, "Don't worry. God's got it!" I remember gallivanting off and thinking, "Well, alright, Mama said God's got it, so it's going to be OK." But then, as I got older, I realized that there was a heap of worry trailing *all of us* through the generations.

Karma is within the DNA of us all. We are truly existentialists, whether we want to acknowledge it or not. We are going to live for a while and then die. That is the only truth that is viably a part of everything in the universe. All things change, so there is no need to worry when you understand the natural order of the universe. All those issues we think we need to worry about are based on some sort of construct, some violation of a belief, code, oath or tenet that we think we have broken, or some violation of our perceived personal rights.

When we live every day, we don't die. When we eat every day, we don't die. And we have so many people in our circles who offer us opportunities to be alive.

Are there imminent things that can cause harm? Yes, they have always existed. When the first meteors began hitting the earth and those who were not fully upright were seeing those things, they began to worry. They did not understand. Now, we have high-tech radar and telescopes that tell us a meteor shower is headed our way, and we worry less. We pull out our cellphones and catch the streaks as they sear through our atmosphere, often uploading our videos and pictures to social media.

Understanding quells worry. People live, people die; that's a factor of life, and there is no use worrying about it. We worry because we have expectations about life and death, but the karmic pendulum will continue to swing back and forth. If we align ourselves with the cosmic forces, then we will not worry at all.

So much of what we worry about in human society is manufactured. That is why education is vital in preventing worry. Knowledge. Logic. Looking into things helps us understand the components of what really worries us.

Worry seems to be the principle work of humanity, living in societies that insist we be anxious. Today, it is easy to be worried. There are opponents in the political, social, religious, and other realms that are pushing our buttons, doing things that affect us, and some of those things cause a great deal of worry and harm to the citizens of our country and the world.

One of the things we need to work on intentionally is to eradicate all the unnecessary tentacles that grab our minds and keep us in worry. One of the strongest forces is the media, a powerful tentacle that can suck our minds into worry and anxiety, tearing us apart. It can cause us to worry every day about things that never come to pass. We watch the media broadcasts, smiling newscasters telling us about the demise of this or that, then we equate ourselves with those worrisome situations. We transfigure ourselves into the same pattern of worry.

Jesus repeatedly encouraged us to “fear not.” Worry stagnates the human body, pumping it full of anxiety or stress. We become hasty and rash.

People sometimes ask me, “But how do you not worry?” I answer, “How do you not breathe?” Take the gift of life, breath it in, and things will follow their natural course. Instead, if we worry about taking each breath, we become a self-devouring individual.

Worry can cause us to be so deeply concerned that we become paralyzed in our ability to see further, beyond, better. We get locked down, and it begins to affect our eyes, our skin, our entire bodies. If we are united to this worry, then our God-given universal blessing of life is diminished.

Don’t worry. It’s OK.

Krin: When it comes to worry—either momentary or chronic—we need to learn the art of letting go. This is a process, a daily releasing of thoughts and behaviors that

twist our lives. Practice is what leads to personal serenity. We are looking for progress, not perfection.

Siddhartha (the first Buddha), didn't believe in a personal soul or deity. He held to a pattern of thinking and behavior now called The Middle Way. It strikes a balance in eight different areas: our viewpoints, intentions, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. The Buddha offered these teachings and disciplines to help others avoid the extremes of thought or behavior that cause us to suffer. This path helped him and his followers let go of habits that kept them shrouded in darkness.

Here is a description of The Middle Way from Ajahn Chah, a revered Thai Buddhist who died in 1992. It may seem odd to Western minds, but let the analogy unfold.

If we cut a log of wood, throw it into the river, and it doesn't sink, rot, or run aground on either bank, it will definitely reach the sea. (The Middle Way) is comparable to this. If you practice according to the path laid down by the Buddha, following it straightly, you will transcend two things. What two things? Indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. These are the two banks of the river. One of the banks of that river is hate, the other is love. Or you can say that one bank is happiness, the other unhappiness. The log is our mind. As it flows down the river it will experience both happiness and unhappiness. If the mind doesn't cling to either, it will reach the ocean. You should see that all emotions and thoughts arise then disappear. If you don't run aground on these things, then you are on the path.

Because we have not learned to let go of extreme thinking and behavior, our minds are often unsteady. We carom from one fear or preoccupation to another, crashing into the banks of our old, seemingly deterministic modes of living. Every collision is detrimental to our well-being.

Letting go starts as a simple process in our daily lives, but it progresses to ever-deepening levels. Eventually, we encounter deeply-rooted resistance that, nonetheless, still invites us to let go. Here are a few examples.

- **Fear:** For some of us, the “devil we know is better than the devil we don’t know.” Even if we see the allure of a new life—an azure lake on the horizon of our desert—we have become accustomed to our bad habits. In a sick way, they provide a level of comfort, even if this comfort means sacrificing our freedom.
- **Trust:** If we have been hurt in life, or raised in families that were chaotic or dysfunctional, truly trusting anyone or anything is hard. If we let go into a new lifestyle, will the arms of safety be there to catch us? Is our chosen pathway trustworthy? One woman remarked that in her estimate, “God” had never been there for her during difficult times in her life. Why would “God” suddenly show up now?
- **Laziness:** Yes, laziness. We realize that applying this medicine will take effort and vigilance. Though others have told us it will get easier over time, we wonder how long it will take. If we submit, what are

we getting ourselves into? It takes less energy (lie!) to remain stuck.

- **Deep woundedness:** Some of us have experienced trauma that is hard to overcome. We need more thorough counseling from an expert to help us extricate ourselves. This can be especially true for those of us who grew up in families that shamed us. Shame is a deep and toxic response. Like any other conditioning, it can be released, but it helps to seek the guidance of a counselor, mentor, or spiritual guide. Learning the origin of our shame helps us transition to a life of trust and affirmation.

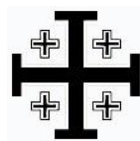
As we release our worries on a daily basis, consider this quote by Richard Rohr from his book *The Art of Letting Go: Living the Wisdom of Saint Francis*.

Authentic spirituality is always on some level or in some way about letting go....Once we see truly what is trapping us and keeping us from freedom we should see the need to let it go. True liberation is letting go of our false self, letting go of our cultural biases, and letting go of our fear of loss and death. Freedom is letting go of wanting more and better things, and it is letting go of our need to control and manipulate God and others. It is even letting go of our need to know and our need to be right—which we only discover with maturity. We become free as we let go of our three primary energy centers: our need for power and control, our need for safety and security, and our need for affection and esteem.





MEDICINE FOUR: BE GRATEFUL



Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude. - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bushi: I deeply believe that we should be grateful for *everything*. If someone yells at you because you got in their way or cut them off, be grateful that you were recognized. If you don't have something you desire, be grateful for the ability to see it, to recognize it in the lives of others. After all, you're not hanging by a noose in the last moments of your life, your eyes fading and your mind fixated on all the subconscious things of darkness as you lose your vital substance. No, you're alive in the world of light, so be grateful!

Once again, when we have expectations, it can take away our gratitude. Every moment, even a dull or trying one, is a gift from the universe, so be grateful.

Gratitude helps us avoid myopia. We can then see other people more clearly and fully as they are. In this light, we can even learn to be grateful for our enemies. It teaches us about their struggles or their deeply held beliefs.

Imagine going to a neighbor's door, handing her a ledger, and saying, "Please write down everything that bothers you." Then, after we have that list, imagine going

home and studying it, even the things we don't care about or disagree with, and learning to be grateful for *all* of them.

Thankfulness for every damn thing in our lives is a mindset. We have to volunteer to practice and develop this capacity. As we do, it liberates us.

People look at me sometimes in the robes of my vocation and think that I'm odd, especially in this day and age when so many want to wear designer clothes. I've met some other monks who get angry at people for not respecting them, disregarding their sense of self-importance in their robes. I say to them, "No, be grateful that you are odd, because you don't want to limit your abilities to accept the contradictory aspects of your life." In other words, don't *ever* exhaust yourself over someone else's limitations.

When we look back over the spans of our lives, we may have had circumstances that caused us a great deal of harm. Now, we've arrived at the other side; sometimes a lot better, sometimes a little better, sometimes the same. But no matter the outcome, be grateful. If the circumstance has not killed us, then the universe has offered us another chance to see more, to be alive more, to push more for the things that we see are good for ourselves and the world.

During my time in the United States Marine Corps, I was shipped to various Middle East countries during periods of war. It made me dread having made it to that noble place of being a Marine. I went into the service to develop self-reliance and education, but I was shipped off to combat.

My mood disorders when I returned were a heavy load, but life kept coming at me in the civilian world. I discovered that many of the tools I had learned through that muddy and mystical time of my enlistment helped me deal with others who were going through difficult times less stressful than war. It gave me resources and skills I could draw from.

I learned through that experience to push myself to my limits, and then push through even that limit to accomplish much more. For God's sake, Jesus hung on a cross. It can't get any worse than that, but he still recognized that "this is supposed to be." He pressed forward to his own crucifixion. We *are* capable of being grateful in a nasty, grimy world. We can either get stuck in the misery or learn to master our ingratitude and push through to thankfulness.

Sometimes we are grateful for "things," but not for the Giver of Life that provides the substance of all these things.

Let me repeat. We should be grateful for *all* our experiences. We are forged by them. They are the forces that make us who we are, so overlooking any of them as solely bad is to miss the teaching opportunity. If we had not come through those circumstances, we would not have the capacity of mind to realize how we can persevere.

The word "grace" in Greek is *charis*, meaning gift or present. All our moments are "presents" from heaven. They are *all* grace, teaching us to be stronger and to know more about ourselves.

Krin: Thankfulness is a banner of victorious living. It is a prayer flag that we plant on the highest summit of our lives, letting it unfurl. And then we realize that the peak is *here, now, this precious day!*

I consider gratitude a cardinal virtue. If we count our blessings, most of us begin with obvious gifts: food, shelter, loved ones. It's like stepping up Maslow's ladder of need, relishing the view from each rung. We may even do so with a prayerful awareness that these basic needs are often lacking in the lives of others. A colleague of mine calls this Gratitude 101.

I, too, am thankful for the surface abundance in my life. Yet, as Bushi so rightfully asserts, the path of gratitude means learning to be thankful for those treasures born out of our deepest struggles.

I love this quote from Anthon St. Maarten. "If we never experience the chill of a dark winter, it is very unlikely that we will ever cherish the warmth of a bright summer's day. Nothing stimulates our appetite for the simple joys of life more than the starvation caused by sadness or desperation. In order to complete our amazing life journey successfully, it is vital that we turn each and every dark tear into a pearl of wisdom and find the blessing in every curse."

So true! Over the past few years, I have been trying to develop a spiritual discipline I call "decreasing the lag time." Here is what I mean. Too often, we look back over our hardships and challenges and see that those trials

helped develop our character. They instilled courage, persistence, and stamina.

But why should we have these epiphanies only in retrospect? What I am trying to do is this: as I face a difficulty, I try to yield to it gratefully, believing it will teach me a valuable lesson. I will do that NOW, not at some undisclosed point in the future.

Developing this mindset has helped me treasure two pearls in my life. Jesus might have called these pearls of great price.

One represents my recovery from alcoholism. Early on, as I attended meetings and absorbed the wisdom of others, I heard a phrase that startled me: “My name is ‘so and so’ and I’m a grateful alcoholic.” What?! You’re grateful for a fucking disease that causes blackouts, ravaged relationships, poisoned bodies, the suffering of incarceration and/or rehab? How could those two words—*grateful* and *alcoholic*—even be spoken in the same breath?

Now I know. My recovery process brought me to my knees, offered rebirth through surrender, and today I am eternally grateful for a path that leads to serenity if I follow it with the tools I’ve been given.

The other pearl symbolizes my journey in parenting a special-needs son. At the time I am writing this, Kristoffer is 23 years old. He lives with my wife and me, and probably always will. Raising him has required herculean doses of patience, a quality that was never my forte. But now I am abundantly grateful, not only for this daily character shaping, but for the privilege to see life through Kristoffer’s

eyes, to affirm forever the dignity and worth of every human being, to see the *imago dei*—the image of God—in a young man that most others in our world will quickly overlook as irrelevant to the competitive rat race.

There's a classic story of gratitude that many of us have heard, but it bears repeating. It is Corrie Ten Boom's story of the fleas in Barracks 28 at Ravensbruck, a Nazi concentration camp for women. Corrie and her sister, Betsy, were imprisoned there for harboring Jews at their home in Haarlem, Netherlands.

Amidst the squalor and horror of Ravensbruck, the Ten Booms held secret Bible studies with the other women. This was forbidden, and they were constantly at risk of being discovered as the guards did routine searches and shakedowns.

Then, one day, they were moved into Barracks 28, a setting that, inconceivably, was even *more* squalid. It was filled with fleas that pestered the women constantly, biting their skin and causing rashes.

One day, while reading a passage in Thessalonians, Betsy came across these timeless words: "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances." It was a revelation for her, and she called upon her sister, Corrie, to be thankful for even the fleas that infested their cramped and filthy quarters.

Corrie thought her sister was mad. Gratitude for that horrid pestilence? Impossible! However, Betsy's attitude proved true in an unlikely way. The presence of all those fleas kept the Nazi guards out of Barracks 28, allowing the

women to have their Bible studies unmolested by their captors.

Some of Betsy's final words before dying in captivity were, "We must tell people what we have learned here. We must tell them that there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still. They will listen to us, Corrie, because we have been here."

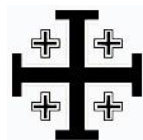
I might phrase this a different way. Let our lives be so steeped in gratitude, embracing *every* circumstance, that people will draw strength and hope from our example.

This is one of the greatest blessings from learning to be grateful for *all* our hardships. It not only imparts a deeper level of understanding and freedom; it gives us a message we can carry to others. We become shaped into vessels that help liberate our fellow human beings from their suffering.





MEDICINE FIVE: WORK HARD



*I want to be with people who submerge in the task,
who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along. – Marge Piercy*

Bushi: When I say *work hard*, some people immediately respond, “But I hate my job!” Instead, think of it this way: work hard at practicing the medicines. This is a design for living that we can fully apply to ourselves.

Personally, as I approach the six medicines, this one is the most intense for me. It doesn’t necessarily mean putting elbow grease into manual labor. It doesn’t mean exhibiting our strength or outdoing someone else, striving to be number one. It doesn’t imply muscling our way through a thing and then showcasing our conditioning with fist pumps.

Instead, it means being very intent and deliberate about understanding what it is we are doing and the effects it will cause. For instance, if we are growing oranges, consider how much wholesomeness goes into the process: the soil, the nourishment for the trees and the groves. And then consider what we could do better to enhance the outcome, being very conscious about the best way to grow the final product so that we and other people will benefit from it.

If we are writing a paper, we do so with sincere devotion, deep assertion, great commitment to critical thinking, leaving nothing unturned until we get the full experience of what we are writing.

Working hard means paying very close attention to our minds and how we are experiencing the world about us through *all* our senses. It means exerting a voluntary and deeper awareness into whatever task is at hand.

We must be intelligent about our lives. We must be willing to break the rules. This is the only way we can truly see, even if we risk rejection. The moment we change our minds, people may turn on us. Listen: you simply changed your mind! You didn't leave the house and move down the street. You didn't color your hair orange, green, or purple and spike it. You just changed your mind! When our churches and families aren't big enough to flow with the changing mind, when they do not accept a broader and more inclusive perspective, when they say, "we don't want *yours*, we want to give you *ours*," then these institutions are becoming irrelevant. They are doing a sloppy job in reaching people where they are at.

The exhaust of our own and other people's perceptions can fill our minds with an acrid psychological scent!

How can we understand spiritual things if we don't know where we started from? How can we know something is really true if we haven't tried it for ourselves? If we always rely on leaders, we end up renting our mental space at a cheap rate. In a sense, we all suffer from the PTSD of

“capism,” capping our minds, confidence, and clarity. As long as we are emotionally tied to what others think of us, we will dumb down our greatest efforts. This is why heaven and hell have collapsed in the thoughts of most people.

We are all born with a sickness that comes from the infusion of our parents’ meager knowledge and wisdom imparted to us. We never really look at it in this sense until we decide to change our minds in relation to our upbringing.

Let’s face it: the world celebrates people who reflect the standards of what we are “supposed to be.” This is the opposite of love. It is based on conditions, and when the conditions change, when we are unsettled with the result, our caps tighten on our minds, restricting us from seeing. We hold on to some artificial masterpiece we have envisioned. When those images get shaken up, it has many volatile consequences.

We can see “capism” in many instances of our lives. Any time we like or dislike something, we are tightening the cap in relationship to our own peace, our own acceptance or nonacceptance. I often tell my students as we begin that for the first 48 hours I want them to practice not liking or disliking anything. If they are to be successful in understanding gratefulness—not worrying or being angry—then one of the first practices is to not let our minds traffic in the liking or disliking of *anything*. This allows us to see that karma is doing what karma does, trying to move us toward greater freedom. If we relinquish our likes and

dislikes, letting ourselves go, we can fully be with all of God's grace. This takes hard work.

Too often we experience life in limiting ways and place a period at the end. But it is not the end! There is so much more! For instance, think of a rib bone. It is one thing to us, something quite different to a dog. We limit ourselves by defining everything. And if we define it, we have to defend it. Instead of working hard to defend our fixed and limiting positions, let us work hard to take off our caps and open our minds to new broadness.

We call ourselves the United States of America; we define ourselves as "united." But how can we defend that? We are anything but united. In order to find that unity, we have to evolve into a more limitless form of understanding. We have to work hard to develop an expansive view, to expose ourselves to the boundless offerings of our existence and let it get under the epidermis of our nation.

Think of it in terms of how we label gender. Many parents struggle with the fact that their children are LGBTQ. They define that sexual orientation as something negative, and as a result of that definition they cannot fully love their children. Even Jesus said, "Which one of you will give your child a snake rather than bread?" Do you understand what I am saying?

The scriptures are replete with wisdom, with dharma, and this is why many Christians don't understand. They are taught Christianity, but they don't understand the natural laws of the world, of nature, of humanity. We are always striving to augment that nature, to call an audible

like a quarterback on a football team. We call these audibles thinking we are going to make things better, but it pulls us away from what nature truly is for us.

Sometimes, you will see runners who get near the finish line and realize that they are winning. There is no one behind them. So, what do they do? They slow down rather than punching through to the end. It's like getting near the close of a day in practicing the medicines and thinking, "OK, it's the ninth hour. Now I can just tell people to 'go to hell.'"

Let us push through to the finish line! Let us work hard to stay focused, to deepen our understanding, to relieve ourselves of the strictures of our definitions. This is not easy. Society insists that we see things in a certain way. "How can you be that way!" "How can you believe that?" These are the limitations that kill us, that destroy us, that tear the fabric of humankind in half.

Krin: My parents were children of the Depression, raised on the notion that hard work is a foundational principle of life. They imparted this value to me and I have embraced it. When it comes to *any* kind of labor, I employ myself wholeheartedly. I confess that I have very little patience for those who don't apply themselves with diligence. I choose to partner and collaborate with people who have a sense of excellence and timeliness in our shared projects. This is a like/dislike that I have learned to modulate through the setting of healthy boundaries.

When it comes to a certain aspect of hard work, I doubt my parents (bless them!) ever expected me to work

so persistently in challenging the notions of faith and religion they passed on to me. It was part of their chosen cultural mandate to have me “confirmed” in a conservative Protestant tradition. The task was to memorize and confess the right beliefs. The presiding pastor *never* encouraged us to think for ourselves, to test every truth in the laboratories of our own lives.

No matter how well-intentioned this type of religious education claims to be, it is still a form of indoctrination. As Bushi says, it is a funneling of “the code” directly into young minds before they have fully developed the capacity for critical thinking.

Thankfully, nothing could quench my spiritual thirst for finding deeper answers. I was a rebel, a challenger, an iconoclast. This is part of my nature, and I have chronicled my evolution in a number of my books.

In this search, I came across a theory about human development that has been very helpful to me. It comes from James Fowler, expounded in his landmark book, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*.

Fowler asked a question based on the theories of Maslow, Kohlberg, and Piaget. If human beings grow through ethical and intellectual stages, do we also develop spiritually in a recognizable way? His answer was “yes,” and you can easily research his theory yourself.

Please hear me! I realize that the fluid consciousness of a human being cannot be dissected and pinned like a butterfly under glass using mental constructs alone. But as

a pastor for 32 years, I observed the truth of Fowler's theory—not only in my own development, but in the lives and behaviors of many others. I have especially seen how difficult it is for people to move beyond Stage 3 faith, what Fowler called Synthetic-Conventional faith.

We usually enter Stage 3 sometime in our teenage years. At this point, our lives include several different social circles and there is a need to pull it all together, to synthesize. We commonly adopt some sort of all-encompassing belief system, most often the conventional one of our culture. This can be a political philosophy or religious faith. It can be an alliance with a group of people who have a distinct set of rules and regulations. On one level this is a natural, understandable way to find security and a sense of belonging.

There's only one problem: we too often get stuck at this stage. We have a hard time seeing outside our box. We don't recognize that we are inside a belief system. We are like fish in water who cannot imagine what it would mean to breathe air on land. To protect our viewpoint, we place authority in individuals or groups that represent and confirm our beliefs. We like belonging to our herd. We become attached to the forms of our religion and get extremely upset when these are called into question. This is the stage in which many people petrify. More tragically, it's the stage that has justified intolerance since we crawled out of caves.

Perhaps the most difficult issue when dealing with those stuck at Stage 3 is their self-appointed role as

“defenders of the faith.” They spend an enormous amount of time trying to prove that their worldview is correct and exclusive, trumping all others. This shuts down effective dialogue. It makes it nearly impossible for conventional people to see the beauty and mystery in the stories of others.

However, if we are courageous, we will push on to the next stages, beginning with Stage 4—Individuative-Reflective Faith. This is a tough transition, what I call “a deconstruction period.” We start seeing outside our box and realize there are other boxes. We begin to critically examine our own beliefs and often become disillusioned with our former faith. Stage 3 people usually think that Stage 4 people have become “backsliders,” when in reality they have actually moved forward.

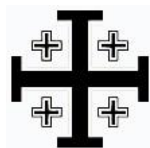
Those who continue their quest find the beauties inherent in Stages 5 and 6. This is when we begin to realize the limits of logic and start to accept paradoxes. We begin to see life as a mystery. We often return to sacred stories and symbols, but this time without a theological or ideological box. We relish the diversity of myths and symbols in our world, gleaning what they can teach us with an open mind. Not enough people reach this stage.

Those who do, often live their lives in the service of others. They learn to dance, to join the chorus of what Hermann Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* called “the laughter of the immortals.”





MEDICINE SIX: BE KIND TO OTHERS



Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see. – Mark Twain

Bushi: You will notice that on the surface, all these medicines don't appear to be spiritually based. Precisely! They are *human-based*, because that is what we truly need. Spirit hasn't really done a great deal in our country over several hundred years. Spirit hasn't saved us from hatred, bigotry or envy. Spirit hasn't changed the trajectory of our nation.

What we need is more kindness.

Maya Angelo once said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." In this sense, if we treat people kindly, we will have a never-closing door to their hearts.

I once read about an occurrence in the Civil War. There was a period during the snowy winter when each side was left without certain critical supplies. They would convene at a creek and swap items to meet their basic requirements. This kindness towards each other arose from the necessity of hunger, a human need that transcended those divisions of right and wrong, Union and Confederate, that these men were fighting to keep in place. Kindness born of their human nature put all of that aside.

In the *Udānavarga*, chapter 27, we find a critical teaching of the Buddha. Here is an English version: “The faults of others are easier to see than one’s own. The faults of others are easily seen, for they are sifted like chaff, but one’s own faults are hard to see. This is like a cheat who hides his dice and shows the dice of his opponent, calling attention to the other’s shortcomings, continually thinking of accusing him.”

Jesus taught the Dharma equally, recorded in Matthew, chapter 7. “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite! First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.”

Both Jesus and the Buddha are basically saying “How can you judge others when you harbor some of the same faults.” Conflict begins when we believe our right is *righter*, or other people’s wrongs are *more wrong*. This causes division, and a house divided against itself cannot stand. God allows the rain to fall on both the just and the unjust.

Let us choose to be kind in lieu of being right or wrong. Being kind is the only mutual fabric that has any hope of unifying us. If we are going to come together under frightening conditions, we need this practice of kindness. Being kind is not a weakness; it is a great strength. Yet it is

not promoted by those systems that want an assurance we will know our place and sustain the wheels of commerce.

Enter into the spaces of servitude and learn to be empathetic. Let go of your own perspective and experience someone else's point of view. We see this so powerfully in Jesus's last moments on the cross when he said, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they are doing." In my opinion, that is when Jesus became fully God, fully human, but it also reflects the deepest parts of Buddhism, which call on us to exercise compassionate forgiveness. Jesus emptied himself, which is also part of Buddhist practice. Both these men realized that all the harm that was happening in their societies was due to ignorance, and seeing the total picture allowed them to express compassion.

In the end, being kind is the best thing we can do for each other. We don't need more graduate schools to teach us about the humanities. We need to learn more about humanity. We educate ourselves about psychology and psychiatry—what we believe is going on in the mind—but we have failed to teach people how to manage their human consciousness, how to avoid their mental disturbances in the first place.

Be kind at *all* times, even when the other person doesn't seem to be grateful for your kindness. Guess what? That's not your problem. You have exhibited what is necessary and important for all sentient beings, and that is kindness. It's not about what you can get in return; it is what you have given to others that counts.

The simple, voluntary act of being kind to others is what ties all things together. I believe that kindness is the greatest superpower on the planet. So many people are full of delusions, standards, beliefs and rituals that they follow, and often these fixed notions cause them to create suffering for themselves and others. They poise themselves to be in defense of, or in opposition to, every other human being.

We tend to become tribally oriented, and this pushes people aside. It does not include them. And along with this non-inclusion comes an apathetic attitude, a meanness that we perpetrate towards people. This sixth medicine teaches us to not get so involved in the egotistic aspects of others, but to view them as ourselves and treat them with the same kindness we would wish for ourselves.

People will upset you, say mean things, do things to undermine your progress, but you must be willing to volunteer to be kind to them. You see, this kindness is the same medicine that they need. You have to show them the way by being kind, even if it hurts you. Without practicing kindness, it is virtually impossible for us to break free to true liberation.

John Shelby Spong once said, “Love wastefully.” Turn on both spigots and let it run until the soil is good and muddy, until there is a pool that forms where others can be refreshed.

Well, I say, “Be kind ridiculously!” So many people are hurting. So many people are angry. And if we continue to react to each other’s hurt and anger with the same emotions, there is no hope. Instead, if we see the

“worthfullness” of our fellow human beings, if we are kind to all of them—even our enemies—then we can help transform the world around us.

This helps us accomplish our basic mission in life.

Krin: I am grateful to have met many “gurus of kindness” in my life, people who exuded grace to others at all times, even when their own circumstances would seem to thwart them. People like my late uncle Jerry, a man whose life was extremely difficult by the world’s standards.

Jerry was one of six boys, a quiet soul. After a tour in the Army he got married, and shortly afterwards began his descent into mental illness, starting with severe depression. When he sought help at a VA hospital, they submitted him to dozens of shock treatments. Those brutal currents ravaged him, permanently rewiring his personality.

For the rest of his life he carried the label “Schizoaffective Disorder.” Heavy doses of Thorazine, Stelazine, and Haldol gradually eroded what was left of him.

I vividly remember Jerry at family events. He was shy, affable, eager to please. He was rarely delusional in conversation, but when you glanced at him from afar as he chain smoked cigarettes, you could see his lips moving in dialogue with his inner companions.

As his illness progressed, he would leave home and hitchhike, panhandling across the continent. He would call relatives at ungodly hours, telling us he was at a homeless shelter in some remote city and needed funds for a bus ride home.

Jerry's wife, Frances, was caretaker, a merciful soul, but their union eventually dissolved. For years, Jerry lived with my grandma until his vagrancy left her exhausted. He spent his final days in group homes—some compassionate, others like human warehouses.

But the miracle of Jerry was that this crucible of his illness forged a gracious spirit. He was generous and big hearted, intent on helping those who were even more unfortunate than he.

On numerous occasions, he visited our home while I was living in Las Vegas, Nevada. Each morning he would bum a few dollars from me, then take to the streets. He was off to buy coffee at local restaurants and cigarettes at convenience stores.

One day he didn't return. Late in the evening, he finally called. Could I pick him up at the Greyhound Station downtown? He was tired and needed a lift.

I parked on the street, scanning the sidewalk and station, finally spotting him through the window of a greasy cafe next door. He was seated with a younger man who looked homeless—unshaven, dirty, a backpack on the chair next to him. As it turned out, Jerry had used my daily donation to not only buy the man a meal, but to help him fill a prescription at a nearby drug store.

That was my uncle Jerry, a guru of kindness.

Jerry died in 1996 at a relatively young age. Our extended family asked me to preside at his graveside service.

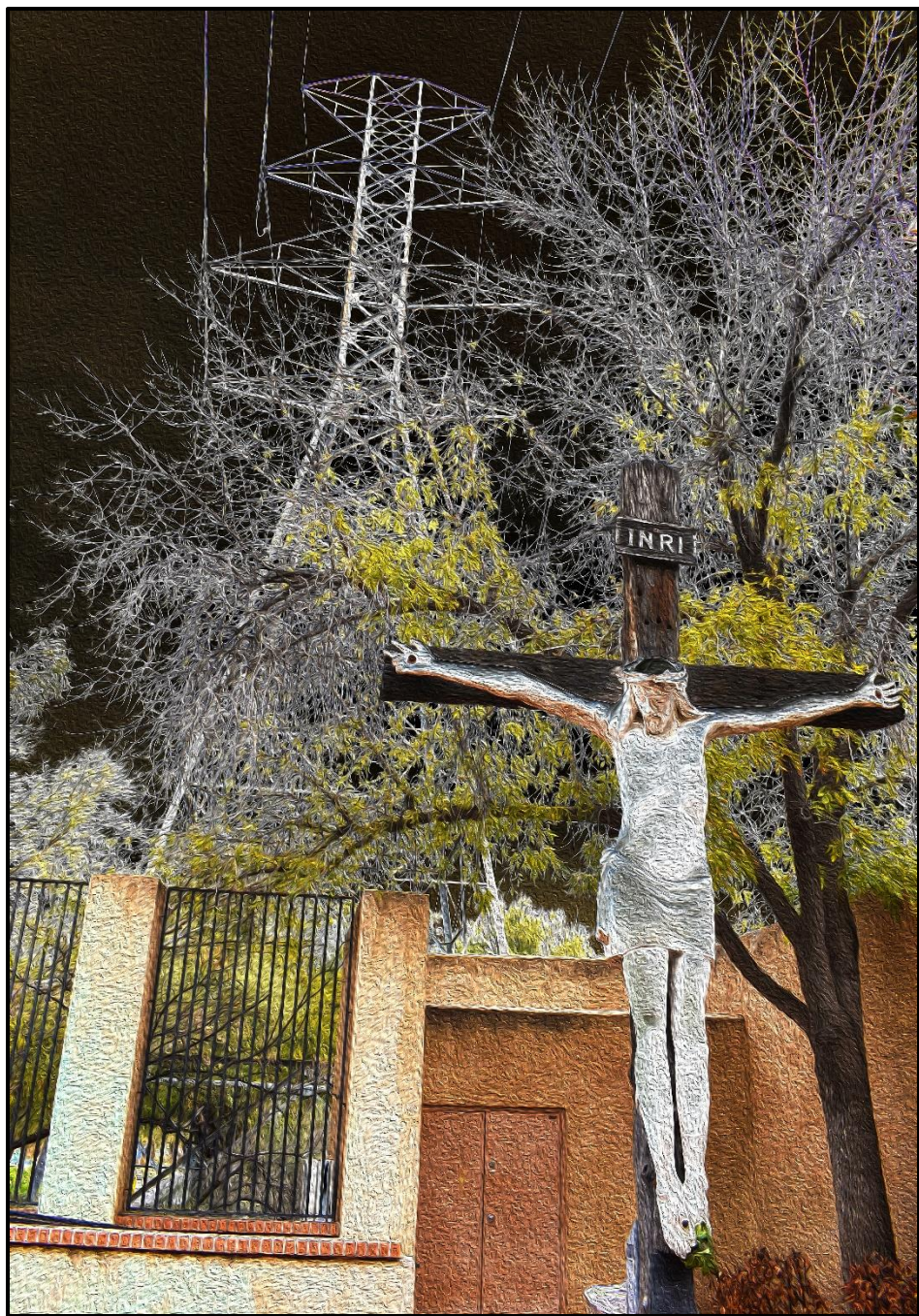
We gathered on a brisk November afternoon in Southern California. Brown leaves skittered across the cemetery grounds, bunching up against the headstones. We huddled in our coats, joining to say goodbye and give our last respects.



I remember opening my Bible to a text I had chosen to share. Romans 8:26. *“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words...”*

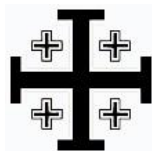
I looked around at our small circle of loved ones, then down at the casket. A shiver ran through my body, and a deep sadness filled me as I pondered how many people endure far more than their share of pain and struggle in this life.

Yet, when it came to “knowing what to pray for,” it was abundantly clear in that moment. We joined hands around that gravesite long-forgotten by the world and gave thanks for the quiet, even saintly, example of a man who, despite his brokenness, chose to show kindness whenever and wherever he could.





CONCLUSION



Our ultimate goal, after all, is not a good death but a good life to the very end.

— Atul Gawande

There is a common theme in these medicines, and that is the *voluntary effort* of our minds and wills to return to their application. As we have reiterated many times, we vow to practice these medicines even when we don't feel like it. Why? Because we know that without them we cannot fully heal as human beings. So...

- We may have filled our schedules with preoccupations that could easily fritter away our days, but we choose to bring ourselves into the present, relishing our lives **just for today**, for this single period of 24 hours.
- Due to our expectations, we find that some person, place or thing has riled us, but we voluntarily remind ourselves, “**don't be angry.**” We dispassionately observe the situation, trying to understand its antecedents so that we can choose to respond differently, morphing our anger into creative action.
- We find our minds awash in reasons to be anxious, but we voluntarily choose to repeat to ourselves, “**don't worry,**” reorienting to the natural flow of our lives and trusting it. We choose to let go of worry at ever deepening levels.

- We may be going through a time of great challenge and hardship, tempted to say, “why me?” Instead, we voluntarily choose to **be grateful**, believing that every single thing that comes into our lives is an opportunity for growth.
- Each day, we **work hard**, not only in our chosen tasks, but in our evolving understanding of karma and our response to it.
- Motivated by the calling to **be kind to others**, we seek to treat everyone as we wish to be treated, exuding this grace as a balm to both ourselves and the world around us.

We are with you in this daily administering of the medicines that can save our lives.

Namaste!

God bless you!

As-salamu alaykum!

Mitakuye oyaasin!

May the Force be with you!

Keep on truckin’!



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