

“Ripening”

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First quote

We’re all just walking each other home.

– Ram Dass

Second quote

Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.

– Maya Angelou

Thank you, Rev. David, for the invitation to be here today. I love that we also enjoy yoga in this space as well as some more earth-based practices just outside these doors. It is deeply healing for me to be here with you all today. You see, I grew up with what I can now say was spiritual abuse. When I was two But wait; let’s back up a little further for those of you who don’t know me yet. When I was born, the doctor pulled me out, slapped me on the butt, handed me to my mom, and said, “Congratulations! It’s a girl!” I’ll let that sink in a minute. Yes, that does mean I am a transgender man. Ok, back to my early childhood. My Mom has a picture of me sitting in the bathroom sink with a hand towel on my lip because I had cut myself shaving with Dad’s razor. Now mind you, when my sister was two, she was putting mom’s lipstick on. When I was four, I came out of the closet wearing Dad’s boots, not mom’s high heels; again, different from my sister. At five, you were not going to make me wear a dress, much less get my brown leather jacket off of me! And at six, I was praying for death. I used to have to bow my head at the end of my bed and say my prayers. One night I asked my Mom why God didn’t answer prayers. She said “Well, honey, tell me your prayer and maybe if we both ask God, He will hear us.”

Let’s pause for a minute. At six, I already thought God couldn’t hear me, already thought I wasn’t deserving of Divine love! I said to Mom, “Every night the last prayer I pray is that I wake up a boy or I don’t wake up at all!” At six, I said that to my mother! That’s not something I could have learned at school, or on TV, or on the street. That was the still small voice of my Divine, waking up. Now, I’m going to ask you to hold my Mom with compassion when I repeat her response. She was barely twenty-four and living in her own fear of hell and damnation, and her very own salvation was at stake as well (or so she believed back then). In her own fear, she repeated her karmic wounding and said, “That’s the Devil, and you’ll go to hell for that prayer.” The next day she burnt me with her cigarette. Then said to me, “That’s how your whole body will feel when you keep saying that prayer.” That was a life-altering attempt for her to love me, the best she could, at that moment in time. The rest is my journey to coming back to my inner knowing, my still small voice, my ripening process. Today my mother and I have a beautiful relationship. It only took her five years to call me her son (but that’s is a whole other sermon!).

You know, my guru Ram Das says “We are all just walking each other home.” Think about it. When we are kids, we hold the hand of our parents; when we are middle aged, we look for someone to hold our hand in matrimony; then when we age, we need a helping hand. What if we can look at that parent or that sibling who has behaved poorly towards us, and just for a moment, trust that even when they are behaving like a child, in that adult body right there in front of us, they are doing the best they can in that moment, even though we think they should do better. Our suffering comes in resisting what *is*. The fact is that embodying deeply what I knew to be true about myself, when I acted out in child-like behaviors, it was the best I could do, in that moment of my childhood wounding, surfacing in my adult body. I have to believe that each of us is doing the best we can, at any given moment. The great Maya Angelou tells us to “Do the best that you can until you know better. Then, when you know better, do better.” These very words invited me to put down the bat of shame and guilt and fear for the moments along my journey where I had a “growth opportunity.” No mistakes, only opportunities to do it differently next time. If we look at our Mother, the earth, she teaches us how to be. If you’re going to be a tree, find a spot in the sun, grow a deep tap root, grow your roots in the winter, soak up the cleansing springtime waters, be fruitful and multiply, love from your core, and be grateful for the abundance in your life.

Today’s message is loosely based on David’s song to God. He cried out in joy because he was saved from his enemy. He is rejoicing and recounting the moment he surrendered and cried out. Let’s remember, every opening begins with a crack! In short, in David’s song he is exhausted from fighting, and then, in the middle of his exhaustion, and overwhelmed by caring for his people, his BFF, his beloved Jonathan is killed. His Crack! Have any of you cried out in total surrender? Any “I give up’s” out there? Any “please help me’s” amid desperate choked-back tears? After years of invalidation of who I knew myself to be, exhausted and overwhelmed, with a handful of pills and a glass of water, I cried out! “If you don’t help me understand this hell I’m living in, I’m coming to meet you, and we’re gonna have a little chat about this transgender thing!” No sooner did I get those words when I heard, “When you’re already in hell, there’s no place to go.” Then my phone rang. It was after midnight here. My sister was on the caller ID. I put down my glass and picked up my phone. “Are you OK?” “Yes.” “Are all the kids OK (she has six)?” “Yes.” “Why are you calling me so late?” “I just needed to hear your voice (my sister hadn’t called me in eight months).” Divine intervention. Anyone else felt that kind of overwhelm and exhaustion in their life? Like if one more item of dis-ease comes along it might just push you over the edge of your own mental stability? David, the leader of his people is in a fight for their life, and he has the audacity of authenticity to cry out to the Divine and say “I am crispy, God; I need some help!” I cried out!

Today, right this very minute, our youth again this weekend are standing up in exhaustion and overwhelm and crying out protest to the way the Earth, our Mother, is being mistreated! David cried out, and the Bible says God came with a thunderous roar. I had a handful of pills and a glass of water and my sister called. When have you heard the Divine voice in your life? Thunderbolts and lightening; a phone ringing; an exhausted and overwhelmed voice of a child.

As the harvest moon wanes, it’s time to begin the process of letting go of those things which no longer serve us. As the harvest becomes the winter, stock and the trimmings become the compost. Our Mother teaches us that sometimes some of us are full of bear medicine and deciduous medicine, and we need to lose our leaves and cave for the winter, to go within and grow our roots so we are strong for the springtime rebirth!

It's funny how the medical community wants to diagnose us as having SAD – "Seasonal Affective Disorder." Maybe the medical community has BAD – Box Attitude Disorder. They need to put people in boxes so they can diagnose those of us who live attuned to our Mother, the Earth! What if, like Mother Nature, we honored our differences? No two flowers are the same, yet all are beautiful. A giant redwood, a teacup poodle, rare and revered; but a rare human is judged by socially-constructed boxes of conformity? Box Attitude Disorder! What if we threw out the boxes and all just played in the sand together? Our Mother shows us that some of us need to cave in the winter; some of us need to live at the ocean's depths of darkness; some of us need the hottest of the deserts. Our Mother shows us that different is not good or bad, right or wrong; we are just not the same. What if we nurtured the bear medicine in our neighbor, and instead of diagnosing their ripening process, we honored it? Where could our mental health in this world be if we nurtured what *is* instead what we want it to be?

As we move from this time of abundance into the time of going within, it will be time to release that which no longer nourishes us back to our Mother. She teaches us to compost our waste: fear, guilt, shame, worthlessness, feelings of being a burden—those things we allow others to put on us, and what we take on that's not ours. A Martha Graham inspiration helps me understand that it is not my job to determine the worth of my springtime fruit, my gifts in the world. It's my job just to be fruitful and multiply. Mother Earth teaches us to compost "fruit that has past" as opportunities for learning, not dying! In the best of conditions and when we are in so much abundance, a piece of fruit rots and falls to the ground. The tree doesn't die. The decomposition of that rotting fruit becomes nourishment for the tree's very root system. The worm on the other hand says "Dinner!" And the early bird then looks at the worm and says "Breakfast!" We are all connected! Air becomes human when we inhale. Plants inhale what we exhale. Animals eat plants. We are only separate when we see with our eyes. We are the same when we feel with our hearts.

Thoughts become things. This pen was a thought. This paper, a thought. Trans HeartLine, a thought. This dream of a safe space for people having gender affirmation surgery to recover in safety became a thing! I didn't feel safe in my own recovery process. I have the gift of being a transgender man. The *Bhagavad Gita* tells me it is my duty to share my gifts, it is my job to know who I am, in the face of my enemy: the mother acting from her own wound, the grandmother, the friend, the stranger, who thinks they know me better than I know myself.

Friends, I invite you to consider that no one can know you better than you know yourself. Now, let me ask, how well do you know yourself? It is my duty to stand tall in who the Divine created me to be, share my gifts in the world, and hold my relationship with my still small truth; to be unshakeable in my love for the Divine. I did not expect that this was going to turn into a nonprofit. I had to let go of what I thought Trans HeartLine was going to be and be open to the Divine's call. I thought I was going to put my head down and just do the work behind the scenes. I was a massage therapist for twenty years. I worked in a small, dark, quiet room for twenty years, not needing to find much voice. From a little girl raised to not have a voice, I could *never* have imagined I would be standing here today, speaking to you! The Divine has a way of answering a call from surrender, with lightning bolts and thunder or a still small voice. There have been many times I have been kept safe in this human embodiment. This time lightning bolts and thunder came in the embodiment of a beautiful soul named Janie Spahr. God's lightning came through her, struck my sand, and a beautiful creation called Trans HeartLine is taking shape. We have a safe

space for humans to ripen safely while becoming wholly who they are called to be. A special ripening process, in a special time, in a special place. From Ram Das to Maya Angelou, even to David's story, they gave me the courage to know who I am and the strength to put down the bat I beat myself up with: fear, shame, guilt, worthlessness, burdensomeness. Consider that "perfect" is no more than a social construct, a judgment about being different.

I don't believe we are a broken people in need of fixing. I believe we come into this life needing a few updates and downloads. We come to a table to be nourished by the grape and the grain, nourished by the love of our mother and our father, all of us exactly where we are supposed to be in our ripening process. Some of us a little green, some of us a little rotten. When we know the polarities, we can appreciate the Tao, the center. As you feel the sun, our grandfather, warm your flesh, feel the union of your divine feminine power in your roots and core, and your divine masculine in your limbs and on your flesh. From this place of embodied presence, lay it all down and call out to your Creator. Feelings know no boundaries. We have to feel it to heal it. What if the reason to exist is to know love, feel it being given, feel it being received, feel it being withheld, feel it being overwhelming?

I invite you to dare to lay down the mask of ancestral history. Be bold enough to lay down the mask of culture. Be brave enough to lay down the mask of color. Be vulnerable enough to lay down the mask of gender. Be open enough to lay down the mask of separateness. Just for a moment, feel this vastness of oneness we sit in, this place of union—open, exposed, and still safe in love. From this place, I invite you to take the hand of your neighbor. From this place of vulnerable, authentic love of self, this gentle knowing, every day we learn to do better. From this place, love your neighbor. In the midst of your exhaustion, hold your sorrow, see your exhaustion, love your overwhelm. David asked for what he needed, and his people said YES!, allowing him to take refuge in what he knew he needed. His Divine needed to be held by his Divine.

Friends, I invite you to lean into those vulnerable places as you move through the world. Don't be afraid to cry out, but mostly don't be afraid to lay it all down. David surrendered; the Divine came. Our mother shows us her polarities so we know her beauty! When we know the light, the dark is just the weather. A storm cloud passing. We *are* the SKY! When we know joy, we can hold ourselves in sorrow. When we can trust the Divine has our back, we can move in love and through love, and as Mother Teresa says, "You may not be able to do great things, but you can do small things with great love." May it be so.