

Self-Empowerment

Summer 2010

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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GIVING & RECEIVING BLESSINGS

Have you ever heard of circular breathing? There are people who have mastered the art of circular breathing and can play a continuous sound without interruption on their wind instrument. It seems impossible but it's true. I have seen and heard musician Harold E. Smith play a note continuously for many minutes on the didgeridoo. His ability to do that boggled my mind. The incredibly long sounds touched the hearts of all who attended his concert.

I wondered how it is done, so I looked online for the answer. According to Wikipedia, circular breathing is a technique used by players of wind instruments to produce a continuous tone without interruption by breathing in through the nose while simultaneously blowing out through the mouth using air stored in the cheeks. Very interesting. That sounds do-able, albeit something that would take much practice to learn.

Logic tells me that when I breathe, I am either breathing in or I am breathing out. That's how we "normally" breathe. But there *is* another way. Once understood, the practice of circular breathing becomes less of a mystery and more of a challenging technique that can be mastered with disciplined effort.

Circular Blessing

In preparing a recent sermon on the subject of blessing, the phrase "circular blessing" came to mind. That was the catalyst for investigating the technique of circular breathing. The image of trying to breathe in, while simultaneously blowing out at the same time, provoked me to investigate circular breathing and reflect on the circularity of blessing.

I had previously thought that one either gives a blessing *or* receives one, like breathing in *or* out. But my Inner Wisdom tells me that there really is a circularity to blessing. It can be experienced as both giving *and* receiving at the same time. However it wouldn't employ a *technique* similar to circular breathing – not holding onto some piece of blessing to extend later. Instead, I am realizing that the *nature* of blessing is in itself multidirectional.

But how does one describe the nature of a blessing? There are a variety of definitions and human

understandings of what a blessing is and what the action of blessing can be. Here are a few:

1. The act or words of a person who blesses – *His beautifully expressed blessing moved her to tears.*
2. A special favor, mercy, or benefit – *We enjoy the blessing of freedom.*
3. A favor or gift bestowed by God – *My miraculous healing is truly a blessing.*
4. The invoking of God's favor – *May you receive the blessings of health, abundance, and peace.*
5. Praise, devotion, worship, grace before a meal – *The guest was asked to speak the blessing before dinner.*
6. Approval or good wishes – *If you choose to do it that way you have my blessing.*

When one employs the action of blessing they consecrate, sanctify, glorify, request divine favor, bestow good upon, and/or offer protection from evil.

While some think of it only as a religious rite, others unconsciously offer blessings all the time, especially when anyone sneezes. "Achoo!" "God bless you."

I am intrigued by the way in which I am aware that when I bless, I am blessed. My experience is that the thought or desire for blessing does something wonderful to both the giver and the receiver of the blessing.

Imagine a garden hose. Its function is to spray water onto plants. The hose does not create the water; it is the conduit for the flow. Similarly, my expression of blessing is like turning the tap that allows the blessing (water) to flow through me (hose). The garden receives the benefit of the sprayed water, but the hose's fulfillment is the water flowing through it. In the same way, I feel fulfillment as a blessing flows through me. Neither the water nor the blessing are of my creation. I am the channel through which it flows when I am willing to turn the tap, saying yes to the flow.

There are some wonderful books on the subject of blessing, two of which I highlight in this issue.

If you have any thoughts or experiences to share about blessings, I would love to hear from you. I feel blessed to have this opportunity to connect with you in this way.

Many blessings to you and your loved ones!

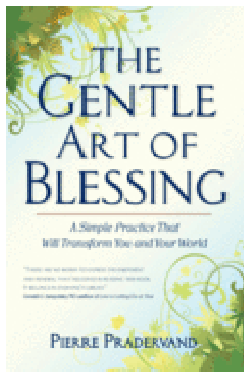
Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

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The Gentle Art of Blessing: A Simple Practice That Will Transform You and Your World

by Pierre Pradervand

Book description on GentleArtOfBlessing.com



How can a blessing change the world? According to Pierre Pradervand, making the conscious choice to bless every person or being around you can truly make a world of difference in yourself and in others around you.

In the Gentle Art of Blessing, Pradervand shows that the practice of blessing has the power to create more than just a renewed perspective. It unleashes tangible benefits throughout your entire life — through your daily interactions, your life-long relationships, and in the way your approach your place in the world.

Pradervand describes blessing as genuinely wishing the best for another person through seeing their individual worth and honoring them for it. By looking at several different perspectives — providing spiritual inspiration from Hinduism, Taoism, the Koran, the Bible, and other important spiritual sources — *The Gentle Art of Blessing* explores the potential in shifting one's attitude from confrontation and negativity to acceptance and enthusiasm. A powerfully simple way of perceiving and shaping our surroundings, blessings can reflect the unconditional love and acceptance that is necessary for world — and inner — peace.

The unthankful heart discovers no mercies; but the thankful heart will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings.

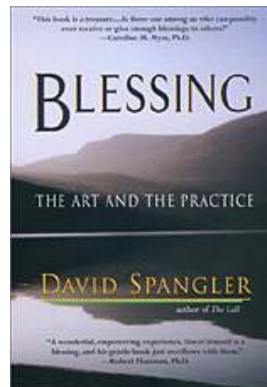
Henry Ward Beecher

Blessing: The Art and the Practice

by David Spangler

Book review on SpiritualityAndPractice.com

In ancient times, people would regularly bless each other, their labors, their homes, their land, and their animals. Nowadays, this spiritual practice is often limited to religious services and ceremonies, the occasional "bless you" when someone sneezes in public, or the response of a homeless person after receiving a gift of change.



Philosopher David Spangler (*Parent as Mystic, Mystic as Parent; A Pilgrim in Aquarius*) wants us to change all that and come to see blessing as a regular, natural, and grateful part of our everyday lives: "A blessing is not the function of a particular role. It is the natural expression of the fiery love and inclusiveness of our

inner spirit. It is the manifestation of a soulfire, and each of us can be its hearth."

Spangler gave a blessing to a woman who asked for one back in 1966 in Los Angeles and ever since then he has practiced this art, which he believes is an affirmation of our interconnectedness with others, our creativity, caring, and kindness. "A blessing is the passing of spirit between us. It's a slash in the flesh of the ego so that the blood of the soul may be exchanged and we may become life brothers and life sisters. . . . In the act of blessing, we consecrate each other. We give of ourselves to each other."

The author has taught a course on blessing, and much of the material in this satisfying and edifying book is taken from his experiences and those of his students. Spangler outlines the four steps of this practice and then presents a blessings workbook replete with imagery exercises and suggested ways to bless a place, another person, the non-human world, an activity, inner work, and world work.

All blessings emanate from a deep and holy place of gratitude within us. Anyone trying these practices will reap the benefits of extending his or her love to others. We agree with Spangler's imaginative approach to this spiritual art. In these uncivil times, blessing is more important than ever.

The Gentle Art of Blessing (excerpt)

By Pierre Pradervand

On awakening, bless this day, for it is already full of unseen good which your blessings will call forth; for to bless is to acknowledge the unlimited good that is embedded in the very texture of the universe and awaiting each and all.

On passing people in the street, on the bus, in places of work and play, bless them. The peace of your blessing will accompany them on their way and the aura of its gentle fragrance will be a light to their path.

On meeting and talking to people, bless them in their health, their work, their joy, their relationships to God, themselves, and others. Bless them in their abundance, their finances...bless them in every conceivable way, for such blessings not only sow seeds of healing but one day will spring forth as flowers of joy in the waste places of your own life.

As you walk, bless the city in which you live, its government and teachers, its nurses and streetsweepers, its children and bankers, its priests and prostitutes. The minute anyone expresses the least aggression or unkindness to you, respond with a blessing: bless them totally, sincerely, joyfully, for such blessings are a shield which protects them from the ignorance of their misdeed, and deflects the arrow that was aimed at you.

To bless means to wish, unconditionally, total, unrestricted good for others and events from the deepest wellspring in the innermost chamber of your heart: it means to hallow, to hold in reverence, to behold with utter awe that which is always a gift from the Creator. He who is hallowed by your blessing is set aside, consecrated, holy, whole. To bless is yet to invoke divine care upon, to think or speak gratefully for, to confer happiness upon - although we ourselves are never the bestower, but simply the joyful witnesses of Life's abundance.

To bless all without discrimination of any sort is the ultimate form of giving, because those you bless will never know from whence came the sudden ray of sun that burst through the clouds of their skies, and

you will rarely be a witness to the sunlight in their lives.

When something goes completely askew in your day, some unexpected event knocks down your plans and you too also, burst into blessing: for life is teaching you a lesson, and the very event you believe to be unwanted, you yourself called forth, so as to learn the lesson you might balk against were you not to bless it. Trials are blessings in disguise, and hosts of angels follow in their path.

To bless is to acknowledge the omnipresent, universal beauty hidden to material eyes; it is to activate that law of attraction which, from the furthest reaches of the universe, will bring into your life exactly what you need to experience and enjoy.

When you pass a prison, mentally bless its inmates in their innocence and freedom, their gentleness, pure essence and unconditional forgiveness; for one can only be prisoner of one's self-image, and a free man can walk unshackled in the courtyard of a jail, just as citizens of countries where freedom reigns can be prisoners when fear lurks in their thoughts.

When you pass a hospital, bless its patients in their present wholeness, for even in their suffering, this wholeness awaits in them to be discovered. When your eyes behold a man in tears, or seemingly broken by life, bless him in his vitality and joy: for the material senses present but the inverted image of the ultimate splendor and perfection which only the inner eye beholds.

It is impossible to bless and to judge at the same time. So hold constantly as a deep, hallowed, intoned thought that desire to bless, for truly then shall you become a peacemaker, and one day you shall, everywhere, behold the very face of God.

Pierre Pradervand has worked for decades in personal development and social justice. His impressive career includes work on nearly every continent, and as a speaker and workshop facilitator, Pierre often gives talks on how to live a more enriched and contented life. In his workshops, he provides personal development tools that empower everyone to find and strengthen their internal anchors. Visit GentleArtOfBlessing.com

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Bless this food – *Giving thanks before meals is the most common form of spiritual nourishment. Following are a few examples of blessings spoken before meals found on Beliefnet.com*

Jewish prayer, "Blessed art thou O Lord my G-d, King of the universe, who brings forth the bread from the earth."

Christian: "Bless us O Lord and for these Thy Gifts which we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful. Amen."

Buddhist blessing: "For every grain of rice we are thankful for thousands of workers. For every drop of rain we are thankful for God's blessings. Amen."

Non-denominational: "Creator, Sustainer, and Life-giver, Bless this food to our use, and us to your service, make us grateful for all your mercies, and mindful of the needs of others. Amen."

Native American: Smudging the food and self with sage smoke we say "We thank Great Spirit for the resources that made this food possible; we thank the Earth Mother for producing it, and we thank all those who labored to bring it to us. May the Wholesomeness of the food before us, bring out the Wholeness of the Spirit within us."

Hindu: "This ritual is one. The food is one. We who offer the food are one. The fire of hunger is also one. All action is one. We who understand this are one."



INNER WISDOM MESSAGE:
Question: "Is everything a blessing?"

Greetings, Dear One. Thank you for your question about blessings. It is indeed a joy, and a BLESSING, to respond to your question.

The feeling tone of your question makes it obvious that you are wary of any answer that would lose distinctions between good and bad experiences. You do not want to receive an answer that would make light of difficult or painful circumstances in your life.

You are assuming that the circumstances themselves, such as illness or loss, are going to be called "blessings in disguise." It is a human perspective that attempts to re-name negatives to positives, in an attempt to capture the blessing that can be found in any experience. The blessing is the life-force, or love, that is expressed or experienced, not the illness or loss. There is no blessing in the many symbols of death, but there is always the opportunity for you to allow blessings to flow through you despite any difficulties that you face in your life.

Each individual is capable of receiving Grace, Joy, Peace, Harmony, Compassion, Beauty, Power, Courage, and Blessing in each and every moment. Are you willing and ready to receive it now? It is here, all of it, in abundance, available to you, here and now. It has nothing to do with circumstances. The circumstances are sometimes your excuse, or motivation, for letting the Divine Essence Qualities of Your True Life shine forth into expression. But you need no excuse. It is simply a matter of letting your defenses down and letting your heart receive the Blessings that Life wants you to feel as your very nature. In that way, yes, everything is a blessing – for all life is a blessing. The circumstances that you are concerned about are your inaccurate perceptions and interpretations of life. They are not blessings, but rather opportunities by which you may choose to be healed. Let Inner Wisdom guide your perceptions – then see if you still have resistance to *everything* being a blessing.

Infinite Love and Eternal Blessings, Dear One.
Amen

Inner Wisdom inspirational messages are shared with you through Rev. Jill Carel who has been sharing messages of comfort, healing, and guidance in private counseling sessions. Through group workshops and individual lessons Jill teaches others to access Inner Wisdom for themselves.

Daily Word

Blessings are flowing to me and from me this day.

I live by faith--a faith in God that is like a bridge over troubled waters. Secure and confident, I rise in thought and act above whatever challenges may be swirling around me. I live the fullness of life.

Getting past a time of trouble is not about my knowing the details of how blessings will come to me. In faith I know with certainty that I will receive them. Living in the moment with God, I understand that change ushers in a time of newness and discovery.

Faith assures me so that I accept each change for what it is: a new beginning. This is a time for greater strengths to be realized and expressed by me, for greater blessings to flow to and from me, for greater fulfillment to be accepted and shared by me.

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Receiving & Sharing Blessings

I recently attended an event with spiritual teachers Alan Cohen and musician Karen Drucker. I was familiar with Alan's work, as he has authored many inspired books, but I was not familiar with the work of Karen Drucker. The event was delightful. I purchased two books, one by Cohen and one by Drucker:

Dare to Be Yourself: How to Quit Being an Extra in Other People's Movies and Become the Star of Your Own by Alan Cohen looks like a meaty workbook. There are self-inquiry questions to explore with each chapter topic. I am looking forward to working with it.

Karen Drucker's book *Let Go of the Shore: Stories and Songs that Set the Spirit Free*, includes a CD of 14 of her songs. Reading personal stories of her life and hearing the related songs she wrote, I have a great appreciation of her inspired music. In light of the hurdles that she overcame to get where she is today, she is a beacon of hope. Knowing that her wisdom and success came as a result of hard work can be a powerful example for many of us.

Recently, one of my counseling clients was surprised to learn that I have attended Co-Dependents Anonymous meetings. The image that she had of me

was that I was *always* empowered. Ha! Knowing that I (like Karen Drucker) had to work hard to get where I am emotionally and spiritually was a meaningful symbol of hope for her. She is inspired by my example and can now believe that it isn't too late for her to awaken to her own clarity and power. *It is never too late!!*

It has been my calling to share from a place of abundance. As I learn and grow, I teach and share. In that way I deepen my own learning while helping others who may benefit from what I have learned. In turn, I am blessed by the teachings of others who travel this path.

My prayer for each of us is that our hearts fully open to the blessings of meeting life's challenges with love, wisdom, clarity, and peace of mind.

Blessing Quotes:

My imperfections and failures are as much a blessing from God as my successes and my talents and I lay them both at his feet.”
Mahatma Gandhi

When the first light of sun, Bless you. When the long day is done, Bless you. In your smiles and your tears, Bless you. Through each day of your years, Bless you.
Irish blessing

When people bother you in any way, it is because their souls are trying to get your divine attention and your blessing.

Catherine Ponder

The man who sows wrong thoughts and deeds and prays that God will bless him is in the position of a farmer who, having sown tares, asks God to bring forth for him a harvest of wheat.

James Allen

Blessed are we who can laugh at ourselves for we shall never cease to be amused.

Unknown

Inner Wisdom Evening

Join Rev Jill for an introduction to accessing your Inner Wisdom.

Dates: Thursday, July 15 / August 19, 2010

Time: 7:00 – 8:30pm

Suggested donation: \$10

Register: 215-742-0552 or Jilleroni@juno.com

THANK YOU!



Thank you for your continued generous support of this newsletter and the work of Agape Interfaith Ministries during our Spring Fundraiser – or any time throughout the year.

Whether you sent a financial contribution, a book of stamps, a note of appreciation, or a prayer, please know that each of you is loved and appreciated.

You are a blessing! I am grateful for you!

**Thank you for your support!
Blessings to you!**

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Love

The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.