

Reflection
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Psalm 86
June 25, 2017

So Mary Ellen was scheduled to do our second reflection for today, but could not be with us—news that I received just yesterday. When in doubt (or in panic!), I always figure a psalm will help, so this morning I will offer a few passages from our psalm for the day, and make just a few comments about where this might take us.

I'm reading from Nan Merrill's lovely paraphrase, by the way, which we use often here at SPC. She offers us lovely, fresh, prayerful language for engaging these very traditional words; it is a wonderful resource for prayer.

Psalm 86 (Nan Merrill)

Give ear to my cry, Eternal Word, and answer me, for I am in need of You. Awaken new life in me, as I yearn to do your will; dispel the ignorance of my ways, as I put my trust in You. You are the Beloved; be gracious to me, Heart of my heart, for with You would I walk all day. My soul is uplifted, as I abandon myself into your hands.

For You are kind and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon You. Give ear to my prayer, Compassionate One; listen to my heartfelt plea. In the time of trouble, I dare to call upon You, for You hear the cry of those in need.

Be present to me and receive my prayer; imbue me with strength, and help me to release each fear. Pour forth your Light into my soul, that all that is hidden in darkness may come forth into awareness. For You, O Beloved, are my Redeemer and my Comforter. Amen

In the last couple of weeks, I've been in conversation with several people who are really struggling with darkness of one kind or another—darkness inside, darkness out there in the world, and very often both at the same time. Most of us have been or will be there. So I love this particular line from Merrill: *Awaken new life in me.*

It brings immediately to mind one of my very favorite spiritual teachers, Anthony De Mello, who talked *often* about **waking up** as THE primary task of our spiritual work and lives.

De Mello, by the way, was one of those fabulous interspiritual pioneers—he was a mid 20th century Indian Jesuit priest and psychotherapist, who also happened to be deeply rooted in Hindu spirituality. In his teaching, he brings together the deep wisdom of the west and deep wisdom of the east, and winds up something way bigger than either one.

And it is from that place of deep and interconnected wisdom that de Mello talks about “waking up”. In those moments when we are really and truly awake to what already is, *everything changes*. We all have those moments, by the way! And once in a while, we might even notice.

So, spiritual practice is not about earning the favor of an angry deity, or convincing an absent deity to pay attention to our personal to-do list, or even achieving some great state of enlightenment. Its really all about allowing ourselves to wake up. To be awakened.

In the opening pages of his marvelous book *Awareness*, de Mello declares this:

“Spirituality means waking up. Most people, even though they don’t know it, are asleep. They’re born asleep, they live asleep, they marry in their sleep, they breed children in their sleep, they die in their sleep without ever waking up. They never understand the loveliness and the beauty of this thing that we call human existence. You know, all mystics—Catholic, Christian, non-Christian, no matter what their theology, no matter what their religion—are unanimous on one thing: that all is well, all is well. Though everything is a mess, all is well. Strange paradox, to be sure. But, tragically, most people never get to see that all is well because they are asleep.”

Merrill, by the way, composed her entire collection “Psalms for Praying” in the midst of the worst darkness of her entire life. Her husband had left her with small children to raise, she was unemployed, and desperately alone. She turned to the psalms. She said she didn’t so much compose these paraphrases as *hear* them, and let them wash through her. And so, she wrote them down. And they have become a source of light and life for countless other people. Waking up sometimes has quite surprising consequences!

O Beloved, awaken new life in me.

In the days ahead, pay attention. See what comes up. What new life, new thing, new prayer, new opportunity might the Holy One be inviting you to wake up, to see, to claim? Pay attention! Wake up! And let me know what you find!