



Living in the Balance

February 2012

“God loves a cheerful giver.” “It is better to give than to receive.” Sounds good. I want to be generous. I want my gifts to be freely given. But lately, I have been in touch with this inner, stingy, miser me that has been keeping account of times I think I’ve been generous and when that generosity has not been returned. I can hear Little Miss Scrooge rapping at my inner door and saying, “You’re being taken advantage of and here’s my list to prove it! I’ve been taking a very close accounting. I can tell you right now, you are owed....yes, you are! For your convenience and clear viewing, I have put this data in an Excel spreadsheet, color coded and categorized so you can see clearly what you’ve done! And for what? You don’t have much to show for it in my estimation, according to this handy ‘sum total’ feature.”

True generosity does not expect accolades nor does it have an agenda. When what started as a gift becomes a duty or an obligation, generosity is no longer part of the equation. A sentence that begins, “I’ve been more than generous....” or “After all I’ve done for you....” means I’ve given with strings attached. A gift that comes with expectations is not a gift; it’s part of a contract or a barter or an exchange. Sometimes, I am unaware that my gift has strings. At other times, I am only willing to acknowledge the back hand in the open hand when I start feeling resentful and put upon. And the resentment actually grows and festers. The aggrieved part of me begins retreating and withholding and being generally snitty. I become a scorekeeper playing tit for tat, and the consequence is a closed and locked heart. My soul is now in cold storage.

Being generous is a spiritual stretching and discipline of the heart of the giver. I recently found this brief anecdote. “One spring day my father called me to go with him to Mr. Russell’s blacksmith shop. My dad had left a rake and a hoe to be repaired and they were ready, fixed like new. Father handed over a silver dollar for repairing them, but Mr. Russell refused to take it. ‘No,’ he said, ‘there’s no charge for that little job.’ But father insisted and I’ll never forget Mr. Russell’s reply. ‘Sid,’ he said to my father, ‘Can’t you let a man do somethin’ just to stretch his soul?’” Forging metal requires a fire and a lot of slow melding to make the metal yield. The same kind of work is required to give our hearts over to being open and generous.

For me, soul-stretching generosity begins with gratitude. When I’m feeling resentful and drawn in tight, I can only begin to loosen up if I acknowledge the countless ways that people and life itself “gift” me each moment. I am humbled by the number of times I have been the beneficiary of generosity, and I realize that I didn’t “merit” those moments. They came unbidden, unexpected. And that bounty of blessings fills me with thankfulness. It’s hard to be stingy and withholding when I’ve been anointed with Grace.

Still, I admit that it is easier to practice charity of the heart on some days than others. Sometimes, it is a *real* stretch. I find myself pulling out the spreadsheet. But I am becoming deeply aware that generosity isn’t about the “what I’ve done for you.” Generosity is what it does for me. Without generosity, my own heart will become stiff and unyielding. My soul will shrivel and shrink. But generosity requires more still. Generosity is about how it serves that which is great than me. I have to recognize that I am not the Source of any true gift that is Heart Charity. At best, I can only be a servant and a tiny channel for the Spirit that is and always has been the Source. To be truly generous is to be willing to serve the Spirit over self. And that is at the Heart of the Sacred Stretch.

*Blessed are
those who can
give without
remembering
and take without
forgetting.*

Princess Elizabeth
Bibesco



Calendar considerations.....

Engaging Faith Conference featuring Brian McLaren and Yvette Flunder

Friday evening, February 24 and all day Saturday, February 25, 2012
Offered by NEXUS and to be held at Furman University
www.nexusconnects.org

Introducing Islam, Sufism and Rumi

February 10-12, 2012
Rev. Lynn C. Bauman, Ph.D
Convent of St. Helena, Augusta, GA www.osh.org

Natural Spirituality

February 10 -12
Mikell Conference Center, Toccoa, Georgia
For more information e-mail Bekki Wagner at bekwag@aol.com

Interfaith Forum Spring Events

Winter Film and Discussion – *For the Next 7 Generations*
Thursday evening, March 1, at 7:00 p.m. at the Kroc Center in Greenville

Living out your Faith in Community – Panel in partnership with the Lilly Center at Furman
Speakers Tony McDade of GAIHN and Deb Richardson-Moore from Triune Mercy Center
Tuesday, March 27 at 7:00 in Johns Hall in Furman Hall at Furman University, Greenville

Iconography: The Gospel of Line and Color

February 11 – 17 at Kanuga

Life in the Second Half --- The Bowen Conference

Featuring the Rev. Margaret Guenther and the Very Rev. Alan Jones
February 27 – 29, 2012
Kanuga Conference Center, Hendersonville, NC
www.kanuga.org

Anderson School of Theology for Laypersons

Lillian Daniel – Sunday, March 11, at 3:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
John Selby Spong – Saturday, August 4, at 3:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
James Carroll – Sunday, September 30, at 3:00 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.
www.astlonline.org

Tumbling Downwards, Fumbling Upwards: Embracing Grief and Loss

Friday, March 16

Begin the New Year with Practices that Support Opening the Heart

Friday, May 4

Valle Crucis Conference Center, Valle Crucis, NC www.highsouth.com/vallecrucis

Caring for Creation Conference at Lake Junaluska

March 13 – 15 For complete details go to www.lakejunaluska.com
Dr. Bill McKibben will be the featured speaker. Caring for Creation is a faith based eco justice event exploring ways individuals and faith communities can become more environmentally conscious.





Calendar considerations.....

Sacred Listening: Group Spiritual Direction

March 11 – 14

Montreat Retreat Center www.montreat.org

Spirituality and Practice

Praying for Justice and Peace with Jane Vennard – one month on line retreat.

January 30 – February 24

The Tao Te Ching as a Path and a Practice with – on line retreat

January 30 – February 27

On-demand courses available with Cynthia Bourgeault, James Hollis, Sr. Joan Chittister. You'll find a variety of faith traditions represented.

www.spiritualityandpractice.com

Abbey of the Arts offering a variety of on-line courses

“Way of the Monk, Path of the Artist,” and “Eyes of the Heart....photography as a contemplative practice.”

For information see www.abbeyofhearts.com

The Sophia Institute

Listening Beneath the Noise by Anne LeClaire – February 17 and 18

The Art of Creating a Beautiful Mind by David Whyte – March 2 and 3

Perseverance, Igniting the Heart in the Midst of Uncertainty by Margaret Wheatley – March 23 –25

Charleston, South Carolina

www.thesophiainstitute.org

Machu Picchu and Peru's Sacred Valley – A Pilgrimage

August 8 – 20, 2012

Offered by Jerry Wright, Jungian analyst, and Diana McKendree, Jungian psychotherapist.

The pilgrimage will include Peruvian teachers and guides.

For more information, contact Jerry Wright at jwright@morrisbb.net or call 770-656-3818

Summer Dream Conference – God's Forgotten Language

May 27 – June 1, 2012

Offered by the Haden Institute

Held at the Kanuga Conference Center, Hendersonville, NC

www.hadeninstitute.com

Southern Dharma Retreat Center in Hot Springs, North Carolina

Check their website for programs for 2012

For more information www.southerndharma.org





About Spiritual Direction —

- Offers a space and time for you to explore, reflect upon, and deepen your relationship with God.
- Provides a haven from the daily busyness of the outer world and opens a time to be still and to reflect on your inner journey.
- Is a companioning relationship grounded in dialogue and discernment.
- Explores ways you may integrate spirituality into your daily life.
- Is not limited to any one spiritual practice or tradition.
- May involve one or two meetings or multiple meetings over time.

You may wish to consider spiritual companioning if you are —

- Longing for a deeper relationship with the Divine
- Looking for a place to dialogue about spiritual questions
- Seeking ways to connect with the Spirit in a more intentional way
- Discerning ways to live in a more integrated and whole way
- Standing at a crossroads in your life
- Exploring new or fresh ways to be in relationship with God

For more information about Spiritual Direction, please feel free to contact me by phone
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The photos are my work and all were taken on the grounds of the Kilgore Lewis House in downtown Greenville. I have taken numerous photographs of the statue in the gardens. She fascinates me. She has already appeared in an earlier journal and I know she'll show up again.