

FROM FEAR TO LOVE Spiritual Grounding in Anxious Times

“Naming Fear, Claiming Hope”

July 16, 2022 | Meditation Part One with Marjorie Thompson

All Shall Be Well

Mother Julian of Norwich

I wondered why God’s great and wise foreknowledge had not prevented sin’s beginning. But Jesus answered these thoughts and said, “Sin was unavoidable. But all shall be well.” Our Protector brought to mind all that is bitter and divisive; the malice and total negation of all that He was. Our good Protector was quick to comfort, saying, “Granted, sin has caused you all this pain, but all shall be well.” These words were said with so much love, with no hint of blame. We are connected by intimate bonds, and guilt and blame have no part in such a relationship. Yet as I looked at all these things, I was troubled and said, “Ah, good Protector! How can all be well, when our separation from You has damaged Creation so terribly?” Our Protector answered patiently, and taught me to focus my attention instead on the bright and splendid fulfillment of all life—for this mending of what was broken is more pleasing to God and of infinitely more worth than Adam’s sin was harmful. He wants us to keep this thought: “If I have made well this most basic damage to reality, you can rest assured I will be able to make well all things.” I saw through this that Christ has compassion for us because of sin; then that the compassion we feel for each other is actually Christ in us.

(abridged from Ellyn Sanna, *All Shall Be Well*, 122-126)

Practice: Befriending a Difficult Feeling

This may be practiced in quiet space or when an uncomfortable feeling arises in the midst of your day. It will be helpful to practice in quiet first, so you have familiarity to bring to actual moments when emotions arise in your life. Step 1 is only required for quiet space practice.

1. Take a few deep breaths and allow awareness to move inward. Recall a situation that evoked uncomfortable feelings. When starting this practice, don't pick your most upsetting situation, but something a little easier to work with.
2. Ask yourself, 'What am I feeling?' Anger? Frustration? Resentment? Envy? Sadness? Shock? Anxiety? Fear? Panic? Disgust? Shame? Guilt? Grief? Despair? Are there two or more feelings? If so, choose whichever feels deepest or strongest in your experience.
3. Notice any thoughts you have in response to this feeling. Thoughts *about* a feeling are not the same as the raw energy of the feeling itself. Become aware of the thoughts or stories you tell yourself that typically accompany this feeling. Examples: "Here I go again, ..."; "I hate feeling this .."; "Anyone would feel this way about what happened." Become curious and nonjudging about these thoughts or story lines. Just notice and observe what you tend to think when you feel this way.
4. Now turn attention to your body. Ask, "How do I experience this feeling in my body?" Then notice what and where you are aware of physical sensations, such as:
 - Shallowness/tightness in breathing
 - Clenching in hands, chest, shoulders, jaw, stomach
 - Shakiness in the gut or pounding heart
 - Numbness or tingling in any part of your bodyName sensations as you notice them, without judgment or any effort to change them.
5. Stay with the sensation, let it be; give it space, breathe with it. Breathing with/into the feeling can allow us to accept it, and get to know it. Notice what happens as you do this. Does the feeling intensify? Dissipate? Stay the same?
6. As you continue to breathe with the feeling, let a sentence or gesture come that expresses befriending it. Examples: "I can allow ... in my experience," or "This is what ... feels like" or "I can breathe with ...," or just "Hello," A gesture might be: wrapping arms around yourself; or soothing strokes over areas of uncomfortable sensation.

Here is a shorthand to the steps: 1) Notice and name; 2) Breathe and befriend.

"Once you start to have compassion for yourself, it's remarkable how much compassion you can have toward others as well."

Abridged from Abby Seixas, *Finding the Deep River Within* (Jossey-Bass, 2006), Ch. 6

Psalm-Poems of Lament

How long, O Lord? How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?
Give light to my eyes or I will sleep the sleep of death,
And my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. (Ps. 13)

When shall I come and behold the face of God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
While people say to me continually, "Where is your God?"
Why are you cast down my soul,
And why are you disquieted within me? (Ps. 42)

Psalm-Poems of Imprecation

O Lord, God of revenge, appear!
Rise, judge of the world, and give the proud their desserts!
How much longer are the wicked to triumph?
Are these evil men to remain unsilenced, boasting and asserting themselves?
Lord God, they crush your people, they oppress your people,
Murdering and massacring widows, orphans, and strangers. (Ps. 94)

May their own table prove a trap for them,
and their plentiful supplies a snare!
May their eyes grow dim, go blind,
strike their loins with chronic palsy!
Vent your fury on them,
let your burning anger overtake them;
may their camps be reduced to ruin,
and their tents left unoccupied.
Charge them with crime after crime ...
Blot them out from the book of life. (Ps. 69)

Slow Work

Oh, my dear ones,
I know you were hoping
For a once-and-done.
For an earthquake,
A tidal wave.
Hoping that if we gave it our all,
A single push would be enough.
That after this, we could
Sink
Back into complacency,
Back into the comfort of our privilege.
I confess, in the secret corners of my heart,
I wanted to believe it could be that easy
That justice would emerge as from an egg
Fully grown
Not with wet down and weak wings...
But beloveds,
We are chipping away at a mountain,
Not a boulder.
Calcified structures
Created to oppress,
Control,
Kill.
2000 years of this stupid idea
That some are worthy,
Some deserve power by virtue of who they are.
Erosion is slow work, sweethearts.
Celebrate the progress
The triumphs.
Celebrate also the heartbreaking almosts.
Breathe.
Rest for a time.
Then get up and turn again toward kindness,
Toward your neighbor in need,
Toward those who are still trapped in the stone.
Tell them, "I won't give up."
Tell them, "I am with you. ...
Until the mountain crumbles to dust."

--Elizabeth Stevens