



# Contents

Opening Letter from the Author	v
CHAPTER 1 Know Your Divine Identity	1
CHAPTER 2 Learn Affirmative Prayer	25
CHAPTER 3 Reform Your Language	47
CHAPTER 4 Practice Denials and Affirmations in Prayer	73
CHAPTER 5 Practice Daily Prayer and Meditation	109
CHAPTER 6 Realize Wholeness Through Prayer	127
CHAPTER 7 Pray with Others Affirmatively	147
Affirmative Shared Prayer: Removable Guide	165



Beloved reader,

My deepest desire is to expand our awareness of All That Is—one of my favorite names for GOD. Chances are you have a favorite name for GOD. Chances are you have opened this book because your awareness of GOD has expanded beyond religious conventions. Perhaps you, like countless others, are leaving your church, temple, synagogue, or mosque in disillusionment. Maybe you are filled with knowledge based upon your religion's teachings about GOD, all the while longing to *experience* GOD. Maybe you are ready for a concept of GOD that is unconfined by dogma and an experience of GOD that is intimate as well as expansive.

My deepest desire is for each of us to realize all that GOD is, we are. Although to some readers this may appear an outrageous, even blasphemous, assertion, to me it is the key to affirmative prayer. GOD cannot be diminished when a person asserts her Divine Identity. To the contrary, GOD appears bigger, brighter, and more glorious when we bring into visibility the invisible GOD. The importance of Jesus Christ, the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), and spiritual masters of all ages does not diminish by an individual's assertion of his Divine Identity. Rather, we honor them for their achievement of GOD-consciousness, and we accept their guidance about how we too might live as visible evidence of the invisible GOD.

As you read this book, I uphold your highest intentions. I celebrate your Divine Identity. I appreciate your deepening realization of Divine Power revealed in prayer. You and I have no greater work to do in the world today than to pray. May our wonderful world benefit from our rising divine consciousness.

—Linda Martella-Whitsett





## Chapter 1

# Know Your Divine Identity

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? . . . For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are.

—1 Corinthians 3:16–17\*

**Words and methods of praying are informed by our understanding of Divine Nature. Understand Divine Nature and your Divine Identity.**

### **God Is Not a Superhuman**

Sitting on a deck above the Guadalupe River, I was enjoying the gurgle of the water below and the intermittent chatter of the wildlife around me. I felt centered on that spiritual renewal retreat, content on my third evening away from the demands of daily living. Then a deep human voice intruded from

---

\* All Bible quotations come from the New Revised Standard Version.

the porch next door. My neighbor was speaking to someone on the telephone, becoming louder by the minute. He said something about God. I listened. Next thing I heard: “I’ve been praying about your diabetes for two weeks. It’s gonna work. I know it. God’s gonna take care of it.”

Having been a student and a teacher in a New Thought denomination, I was surprised that I felt surprised by this well-intentioned man’s statement. But I knew my way of understanding the Divine Nature and my way of praying could be seen as blasphemous to this kind man. I believed—and continue to believe—the Divine Nature is not a person who cares how people pray. In fact, prayer researcher Dr. Larry Dossey confirmed in experiments that any form of heartfelt praying makes a difference. Yet, it mattered to me that my neighbor seemed to be gambling regarding his friend’s health—blowing breath into his hands holding the dice, saying *This time it’s gonna work. I know it.*

I blessed that other person, the person on the other end of the telephone line, and the situation. I was cool. And then I went to a gathering of colleagues, or maybe I listened to another New Thought church’s podcast—I can’t remember exactly what I did next. But I do remember what I thought: I was surprised again to hear people who had studied what I had studied saying *Dear God, thank you for this; help us with that.* I wanted to shout, “Stop talking to God! GOD is not a superhuman!”

Little children, concrete thinkers that they are, believe what they see. They see someone in a Santa Claus costume as proof of Santa Claus’s existence. When my son, Adrian, was two and a half, a neighbor came to our house in a Santa suit one evening after Adrian had gone to sleep. I went into my son’s room to rouse him

just as Santa was walking up the stairs, jingling all the way. Before Adrian saw Santa, he heard the bells. From that night until age twelve, much later than most other children, Adrian knew Santa was real because he had heard sleigh bells.

In the years after Adrian recovered from disillusionment about Santa, he found a new delight in the holiday season. He realized the spirit of Santa Claus is the spirit of giving, loving, and caring. He could embody the Santa spirit even though he no longer believed that mythical man actually existed.

Eventually everyone realizes that Santa Claus is not a superhuman. GOD is not a superhuman either.

### **Evolve Your God**

Sooner or later, every child must grow up. Everyone must become self-sufficient. Those who do not mature live out their lives handicapped by dependency. Sooner or later, I believe, everyone must evolve in spiritual understanding and claim divine self-sufficiency. All spiritual masters have done so, even as they credit the One Power that is inclusive of their humanity as well as greater than it. Those who do not mature spiritually feel powerless and dependent upon a divine parent they must plead with and please.

Come along with me, and I will share with you my evolving understanding of Divine Nature. While I describe my experience, I invite you to tune in to your own unfolding understanding.

As we begin, notice two variations of the printed word *God*. Throughout the book, *God* is used in quotations as well as when the Divine is personified. *GOD* is used to highlight an understanding of the Divine as All That Is, not a person but a power.

## The Invisible Parent

For many years, I believed in a God I had to plead with and please. From early childhood through my teens, I thought of God as physically “out there,” as an unseen parent, and specifically as an unseen male parent. I could ask God for help but never could hear him talk to me; God could see me, but I could not see him. God was an elusive superparent, far away from me but watching me and holding all the cards.

Bible stories from my childhood reinforced this notion. God was, I learned, the *cause* of all human experience, especially human suffering. Everyone I knew believed in the God who would not show himself to us and caused car accidents, diseases, and death. God had all the control and wielded it, like the Wizard of Oz, from behind a curtain.

While God was unseen, he was demanding. Under threat of eternal damnation, he required my attendance at Sunday Mass, my abstinence from meat on Fridays, and my admission of sins to a priest. God would reward me when I behaved well. God would punish me when I misbehaved. “He sees you when you’re sleeping. He knows when you’re awake. He knows if you’ve been bad or good, so be good for goodness’ sake” might have been sung about God as well as Santa.

The threat of God’s punishment was so instilled in me that I imagined the religious statues in my childhood home had eyes—especially the Blessed Mother statue on my bedroom windowsill. Oh yes! When in adolescence I was discovering the pleasurable feelings of my pubescent body, I turned the Blessed Mother statue around so she would not be able to watch me.

## The Bodyguard

“And He walks with me and He talks with me and He tells me I am His own . . .” Lyrics from the classic hymn “In the Garden,” along with similar songs, poems, and stories, stirred in me a longing to feel, if not see, Divine Presence as I learned about God’s loving protection and mercy. Like the psalmists of the Hebrew scriptures, I prayed for help when I needed to feel safe or when I was in trouble. God became my bodyguard.

God the Bodyguard is the God many people rely upon for protection and comfort. Many people I know have matured in human ways but have clung to the Bodyguard as their primary conceptualization of the divine. Popular prayers and poems reinforce this image. In “Footprints in the Sand,” Mary Stevenson put these words into the mouth of the divine: “The times when you have seen only one set of footprints in the sand is when I carried you.”

The Prayer for Protection, written by spiritual teacher and poet James Dillet Freeman declares, “The presence of God watches over me.” One of numerous promises conveyed by biblical prophets is this passage, intended to soothe the exiled Israelites: “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13).

Images evoked by these words pointed to the Bodyguard looking out for my safety, a presence benevolent toward me and separate from me. The Bodyguard was a hired hand. Sometimes I wanted the Bodyguard on duty, sometimes not. Sometimes I bargained with the Bodyguard. How many times I cried, “Just get me out of this predicament, and I will go to Mass the next four Sundays, stop secretly smoking cigarettes out my bedroom window,

and think only kind thoughts about my parents.” As if the Bodyguard cared about any of that!

## The Incredible Shrinking GOD

In my early twenties, I was a practicing yogi living in an American ashram. My days were devoted to hatha yoga, holistic health, meaningful service, and meditation. One of the meditation techniques I was taught was to gaze at a photograph of the guru for several minutes, then close my eyes, lift my closed eyes to the midpoint of my forehead—the third eye—and allow the guru’s image to appear there, in my mind. Later, when my guru taught, “the guru is within,” I would chuckle at the thought of my guru shrinking to fit inside my head. Of course I realized this idea was a figure of speech, at least I’d like to think I did.

Although my religious education up to that time had located the divine elsewhere, I easily accepted this idea as natural, as natural as my human DNA coming from my earthly father and mother. I believed Jesus Christ’s teaching that GOD can be found within: “The Father who dwells in me does His works” (John 14:10). Spiritual teachers through the ages have echoed Jesus’s message. The writer of the Bible’s book of Colossians emphasized the mystery of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27b). Meister Eckhart, a 13th-century Christian mystic, declared, “You need not look for God either here or there. He is no farther away than the door of your heart.”

During years of yoga meditation practice, I developed a voracious desire to know the divine within me. In transcendent moments, I did know. I had no words to describe the experience

except that I perceived no person, certainly no “He.” Rather, I felt at one with everything and everyone. I felt whole.

Later I was introduced to Unity, a spiritual movement emphasizing that GOD is Oneness and that we are one with GOD. When I learned Unity cofounder Charles Fillmore’s invocation, I found a new way to understand the internalized divine of my meditations: “I am now in the presence of pure Being; immersed in the Holy Spirit of Life, Love, and Wisdom . . .” Oh, I realized, GOD is Divine Life, Divine Love, and Divine Wisdom within me!

It was comforting to believe I could go within. I carried GOD with me all the time. Yet, the idea of an incredible shrinking GOD seemed incomplete. The divine could not be limited by the borders of my body and the boundaries of my comprehension. Furthermore, I wanted a GOD bigger than me.

## Divine Omnipresence

By the time I had graduated from Catholicism, invested three years in intensive yoga training, and begun metaphysical studies in Unity, I had absorbed the wonderful truth of the divine as an indwelling presence. Unity Sunday services and classes all began with the call to go within. Answers to my questions could be found within. I knew this. I also knew answers could come from a conversation with a friend, through an advertisement on a billboard, from a dream, or in any number of ways logical and illogical. Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom resided within me, certainly. Also, Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom resided everywhere else.

I had been a resident at the Kripalu ashram for nearly three years when my college sweetheart, Giles, and I reconnected and

decided to marry. A trusted adviser recommended I participate in the ashram's four-day inner quest intensive, in order to become conscious and clear about my choice. The intensive incorporated Gestalt and '70s-style personal transformation modalities. Every detail of the intensive was designed to quickly peel off exterior concerns, getting down to raw emotion where limiting core beliefs could be recognized and released. Windows in the rooms we occupied were covered with brown paper, clocks were removed, mealtimes and rest times were deliberately manipulated to confuse bodies and brains that thrive on routine. In this setting, I faced my excuses for getting married. With the support of a facilitator's probing questions, I realized:

I long for Disney's "happily ever after."

I want to be taken care of.

I fear being alone.

I don't want to be responsible for myself.

I need someone else to love me in ways I do not love  
myself.

I do not love myself.

I do not trust myself.

I am not enough.

I am terrified of being alone because I am not enough.

Deeper and deeper I went into a dark, empty, isolated state. I went to a reality that seemed devoid of anything, even the divine. I was totally alone. Moreover, no one else could give me all I felt

I lacked. Spiritual freedom as well as human happiness could not be conferred on me by anyone else, not even by the divine. I would have to love myself. I would have to love myself! Doubled over in spiritual pain, I curled up on the floor in the fetal position. I was utterly alone. Despondent. Disappearing. Dying.

A warm hand covered mine, a soft voice saying “Come with me.” One of my ashram sisters practically carried me to my bunk, laid me down, sat with me, and stroked my hair. I filled up with love. She became Divine Love for me.

The more I thought about it, the more I began to notice Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom appearing in unexpected moments, in surprising ways. Several years later, bedridden for four weeks with pericarditis, an inflammation of the fluid surrounding the heart, I continued to notice Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom in the faces of the divine appearing at my side, tending to my every need. Every day brought new insights about my life, including my increasing capacity to relax and let Divine Love in. Divine Wisdom was revealing the benefit of extended rest and renewal. I received this temporary condition as a gift of Divine Presence, true to Jesus’s proclamation in the Gospel of Thomas that “the kingdom of the heavens is within you and all around you” (3:6b). This kingdom came to me.

One of the most moving moments in film, I believe, occurred toward the end of *Dead Man Walking* when Sister Helen Prejean heard Matthew’s pre-execution confession. Matthew revealed that despite self-condemnation and his expectation of eternal damnation, he had prayed for the kids he had murdered. Sister Helen, with full-on eye contact, spoke with spiritual authority to the

convict. She said, “You are a son of God, Matthew Poncelet.” He broke down. No one had ever told him.

Turns out, the divine can be found in murderers as well as in masters. In pain as well as in pleasure. In failure as much as in success.

Divine Omnipresence means GOD is within us, we are within GOD, and GOD is everywhere. Moreover, GOD is everywhere-ness, not a being who is everywhere but the pervasive essence of all, as suggested by 17th-century Hindu mystic Ramadasa:

*Wherever you cast your glance,  
it is before you.  
You in fact see within it.  
It is both inside and outside.  
Where we feel it is not,  
it immediately manifests itself.  
Whatever object we take in hand—  
it is nearer to us than that.*

With these realizations, GOD as a person ceased to exist for me. I stopped referring to GOD as God. Instead, I began relating to the divine as Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom. “God is Principle,” Myrtle Fillmore, cofounder of Unity, wrote in *How to Let God Help You*. “God is not a cold, senseless principle like that of mathematics, but the Principles of Life, Love, and Intelligence.”

## The **I AM**

I came to realize that Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom are not personal; that is, they do not register in my thinking as GOD coming

down to my size, fitting within the confines of my body and brain. Still, Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom seemed to be something other than *me* living in me or flowing from me. I felt disturbed by the possibility that some force could blow through me perhaps without my consent. When I heard people say after praying aloud, “Those were not my words but the words of the Spirit flowing through me,” I cringed. I cringed because I sensed a false modesty in their words. I knew they were not disinterested bystanders but active participants in expressing the wisdom of their words. I too have experienced moments when inexplicable wisdom has flowed from me.

When I was a practicing massage therapist, it was not uncommon for me to feel from within my hands the places of greatest pain in my clients’ bodies or to get a persistent thought about them that would not quit until I asked their permission to share it. In my pastoral ministry, I frequently feel a consciousness shift before delivering a potent Sunday message or entering a hospital room for a prayerful visit.

But . . . but . . . but . . . Am I unnecessary to these occurrences? Am I under a spell, so to speak, during these moments so that “something” comes over me? Can these phenomena occur without my cooperation?

No! *I am* present. *I am* feeling the truth before I speak it. *I AM.*

Rev. Dr. Paul Hasselbeck, dean of Unity spiritual education and enrichment at Unity Institute, upgraded Charles Fillmore’s invocation to reveal the truth in it: “I AM the presence of Pure Beingness; expressing the whole spirit of Life, Love, and

Wisdom.” *I AM* is the Divine Name. *I AM* is the Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom.

I settled on the understanding that I AM Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom expressed.

I AM.

## The Ineffable

The Most High. The True Light. Divine Mind. Source. The Holy One. Infinite Love. I cannot define it, but I have experienced it. Perhaps you have experienced it too.

Poets and mystics of every culture and faith tradition have attempted to describe the indescribable, the ineffable Divine Nature. Formless yet capable of taking any form; unseen yet appearing in visions; unknowable yet revealing itself to devotees; timeless yet pondered in every era—the confusing yet compelling Divine Nature.

We try and we try to understand the incomprehensible!

In the Bhagavad Gita (Hindu scripture), the mythological warrior Arjuna glimpses the True Nature of Lord Krishna. Arjuna exclaims: “You are the knower, the known, and the state beyond knowing—all the universe is filled by you, O Lord of Infinite Forms.”

The Koran (6:103) teaches: “No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision; He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.” (‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān*, 10th ed. [Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 1999].)

A hymn from the Twa, a central-African tribe, proclaims:

*Who can make an image of God?*

*He has no body.*

*He is as a word which comes out of your mouth.*

*That word! It is no more,*

*It is past, and still it lives!*

*So is God.*

(Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama [Eds.] *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, vol. 2 [Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2009])

In the Bible, Job pondered, “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea” (Job 11:7–9).

Each of these references points to the indescribable, ineffable Divine Nature. Why do we care about the divine? Why do we quest and question? Why do we hunger to understand Divine Nature? For one reason: Divine Nature is our True Nature. As Jesus Christ is reported to have taught, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods?’” (John 10:34). All that GOD is is our True Nature. We are divine.

## **Your Divine Identity**

Our words and methods of prayer derive from our sense of identity. When we view ourselves as “only human,” we pray to God from a consciousness of powerlessness. When we realize our Divine Identity, we pray from the Divine Consciousness.

## You Are Not a Sinner

I delivered my second child in a hospital birthing room. I worked long and hard for seventeen hours, eventuating with the primal push and groan of delivery. Giles was first to behold the seven pounds of wrinkles-with-girl-parts. Giles cut the cord, gathered up her crumpled body, and laid her in a warm bath.

I turned my head and watched, mesmerized along with Giles, as our baby's toes uncurled and turned pink—then her legs, her belly, her torso, arms, and fingers one by one pinkening and stretching. Finally, her face filled out, evidence of life flushed her cheeks, and her eyes opened along with her mouth as her healthy lungs brought forth a demanding cry. Giles wrapped her in a soft blanket and placed her in my arms. She turned her dazzling little face up to mine. In that moment, captivated, I spoke the words that I knew were on everyone's mind—the doctor's, her daddy's, the nurse's. I cried out, "God help you, you miserable little sinner!"

All right, all right, I did not say that. Who would say such a thing? Who would think such a thing? All I knew and all I saw was this marvelous bundle of possibility. I saw the purest expression of love in human form. I saw the beauty of absolute perfection.

No religion except Christianity condemns a person before they behave badly!

If you grew up in Christianity, chances are you learned that Christianity contributes to, and may be the origin of, the idea that humanity is fundamentally ungodly. The "sin gene" passes from one generation to the next so that, according to many Christian denominations, every newborn enters this world corrupted by inherent sinfulness. *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Abstract*

*of Principles* (1858) teaches that God originally made humanity in God's own image, free from sin. Humans fell from our original holiness and righteousness, however, when we disobeyed God under the influence of Satan. "His posterity inherit a nature corrupt and wholly opposed to God and His law, are under condemnation, and as soon as they are capable of moral action, become actual transgressors" (VI). By this doctrine, a person is damned from birth.

Roman Catholicism concurs. Catholicism teaches that everyone is born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, making every individual unworthy of being a child of God. A baby is baptized as soon as possible after birth so that, through the act of baptism, the taint of sin can be erased.

Interestingly, Judaism rejects the notion of original sin, believing that the image of God in which humans have been created means humans can think, reason, and choose. Having a dual nature, and free will, humans sometimes choose "good" and sometimes choose "evil."

Islam points to the sin of Adam and Eve, their repentance and forgiveness, as an example of what not to do. Muslims learn that they will be tempted by the devil, but they will be less likely to sin when they are faithful to the Koran.

Eastern religions do not subscribe to a doctrine of sin. Comparative religions expert Ernest Valea teaches that in Hinduism, ignorance gives rise to poor conduct, the remedy of which is guidance rather than damnation. Everyone is born with the Divine Nature and the capacity to live into that Nature.

That we in the Western world have inherited the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin seems a little unfair. It reminds

me of the times one of my six siblings misbehaved, when we were children, and all of us got sent to our rooms without supper. Belief in the sin gene permeates the Western world. We have produced a culture of shame. Exasperated parents—the same parents who beheld the perfection at their children’s births—point fingers at their children: *Bad boy! Bad girl! You should be ashamed of yourself! Who do you think you are?*

As children, we internalized shame. We still carry guilt and shame, even if “only” within our subconscious, retained from times in the past when we heard those words or adopted them by misinterpreting someone’s message. How often each of us thinks, *I’ll never be good enough. I can’t seem to do anything right. I’m a loser.*

Even at fifty years of age and older, we might still try to prove to our parents that we are worthy, because we ourselves do not believe we *are* worthy. We attempt in every way to measure up to someone else’s expectations. Even when we achieve a goal or accomplish some good, we ask, *Who am I to be successful?* Or, ironically, we hear the voices of our families telling us, as they’ve told us before, *You’re getting too big for your britches; come down off your high horse.*

We do not intend to demean ourselves with guilt and shame. We do not consciously agree with these ideas. They are imbedded falsehoods that we have presumed to be true. They do not originate with us, although they tap into our deepest human insecurity, which is for many of us fed by religious doctrine. We do not intend to diminish our children’s sense of identity, either. In fact, never in my life have I met anyone who believes, really, that their children could have inherited the sin gene.

## You Are Divine

We do not believe in the sin gene because we know, inherently, that we are divine.

An eagle egg, if it could be self-aware, might behold a mature eagle spiraling upward on a current of warm air and think to itself: *I'll never fly like that. Eggs cannot fly.* That's right, they never will. But eggs can hatch into eagles.

The yolk of an eagle egg contains the genetic code for *eagle*. Eagle is its true identity. The shell of an eagle egg hardens into a protective crust around the chick-in-progress. The chick must at some point emerge from the shell, casting it off, in order to grow and finally to fly.

Spiritually speaking, the shell can be equated with a person's external sense of self covering his true self. Through spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation, an individual breaks open the corporeal, only-human identity as she realizes her eternal spiritual identity, her true self. In the same way we mature humanly by realizing, increasingly, our human capacities, we mature spiritually by expressing, increasingly, our Divine Nature. Charles Fillmore taught

It is your mission to express all that you can imagine  
God to be. Let this be your standard of achievement;  
never lower it, nor allow yourself to be belittled by the  
cry of sacrilege. You can attain to everything you can  
imagine. If you can imagine that it is possible to God, it  
is also possible to you.

We have the hearts of Divine Love, the minds of Divine Wisdom, the lives of Divine Life. Since the divine is not a person but

a principle and we are made in a divine image, the Love Principle, the Wisdom Principle, and the Life Principle are our nature. We identify ourselves as these principles. We claim Divine Identity.

Identification with our roles, relationships, and conditions results in false identities precisely because roles, relationships, and conditions are temporary and changeable. For example, my current role as parent to my two children is significantly different in their adulthood from what it was in their childhood. They no longer need me to keep food on the table, but they ask my advice when they're buying their own kitchen tables. I have changed careers



We have the hearts of Divine Love, the minds of Divine Wisdom, the lives of Divine Life. The Love Principle, the Wisdom Principle, and the Life Principle are our nature. We identify ourselves as these principles. We claim Divine Identity.

I can illustrate this idea with a story about something real and tangible. In the fifties, a community of Buddhist monks learned that a road would be built precisely at the site of a shrine housing a gigantic clay statue of the Buddha. The crane brought in to

three times. I had a trim, petite body when I married Giles more than thirty years ago and, well, let's just say there is more of me to love nowadays. But my true identity is changeless, permanent—made in a divine image and likeness—and not conditional to the between-the-lines human inference *only when you behave perfectly!*

You are made in the divine image. This is an irrevocable truth. Your True Nature is divine. You are destined to grow up to this realization, to identify yourself as divine.

relocate the statue was not up to the task and cracked the statue in several places. The monks called for a larger crane, but it would not arrive until the following day. Rain was expected overnight. The monks covered the statue as best they could before retiring for the night.

During the night one of the monks took his lantern outside to check on the site. When the light fell upon the statue, the monk noticed a glow between some of the cracks. He returned indoors for a hammer and a chisel with which to carve away a little of the clay. Astonished at what was revealed, the monk ran back to the sleeping quarters and awakened the entire community. Everyone chipped away at the statue, revealing beneath the clay exterior a solid-gold Buddha statue. The monks surmised that the gold statue had been covered with clay centuries earlier to protect it from being confiscated during war.

Our external identities are like the clay surrounding that golden Buddha. Charles Fillmore taught, “We are all, in our personality, wearing the mask that conceals the real, the spiritual, *I AM*.” (Charles Fillmore, *Jesus Christ Heals* [Forgotten Books, 2008], 102.) Unconsciously a person crafts an external identity, a personality that fits in with other personalities. He molds thoughts, words, and actions to gain approval from a disapproving family. She pretends to be as tough as she thinks she needs to be to survive in a dangerous world. He nods in agreement when one friend gossips about another, while his heart is screaming no. She unknowingly hides her golden true self under the clay cover of acceptability.

All the while, Divine Identity is intact, complete, and immutable. All that you will ever need of it is within you already, and you do not need to go in search of it as though you had gotten

separated from it. You are not divine potential but the fullness of Divine Nature.

In any moment you can realize and live from your Divine Identity. You do not have to acquire your Divine Identity; you have only to mature in your understanding of this true identity and claim it.

## Claim Your Divine Identity

You recall the Bible stories about the prophets Elijah and Elisha? I call my daughter the prophet Alicia. One evening a couple of years ago, Alicia called me from her apartment in Chicago. She had just turned off the television after watching the show *Prime-time*. On the program, a man showed video clips of troubling occurrences, asking the audience to ponder, “What would you do?” in those situations. Alicia was in tears as she recounted one of the clips depicting a homeless elderly man being beaten by a group of young men. The reason she was so upset? Because, she cried, “I don’t know how I would answer that question! I would like to think I would do the right thing, but I am afraid I would run the other way instead.”

The following afternoon, Alicia called again, which was unusual since we usually stuck with weekly chats. “You won’t believe what happened today!” she said. As she did every weekday morning, Alicia had taken the train to the bus stop, where she would transfer and continue on to her job as a teacher. Alicia waited along with others at the stop, which was located in front of a middle school. While waiting, Alicia overheard a group of students talking among themselves. She started to feel uncomfortable as

their voices rose and their conversation turned violent. Suddenly, the biggest of the boys turned and began pummeling the smallest boy. Alicia responded instinctively. She ran over to the boys and attempted to pull them away from each other. She shouted, “Stop!” over and over as she continued to tug at the arms of the big teenager. Then, as suddenly as it began, the skirmish came to a halt. The big kid turned his attention to Alicia, an incredulous look in his eyes. Alicia stared him down, undaunted by his bravado. The boy dropped his eyes, turned, and walked away. Recounting the story to me over the telephone, Alicia marveled, “Mom, I did it! I answered the question!”

Alicia may have felt astonished by her instinctive response in this situation, but I was not surprised, for I had witnessed her true self in action throughout her life. The prophet Alicia has always been my teacher. She has a built-in sensitivity toward others that confirms her Divine Identity. She is a magnificent expression of Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom.

Seeing so clearly Alicia’s Divine Identity, I find it hard to believe that she does not see it. Like most people, Alicia recognizes her shortcomings more readily than she does her strengths, her mistakes more easily than her accomplishments. She does not believe that her Divine Identity is intact and independent of her actions. She thinks she has to qualify for Divine Nature. I tell her, “Just as you are, you are magnificent! Just as you are, you are divine!”

Just as *you* are, you are magnificent! Just as *you* are, you are divine!

We have misunderstood the great truth about Divine Identity. We have called it “potential” as if we have to work toward the goal of divinity. We have believed it to be conditional, as if each of us

could gain or lose individual Divine Identity depending upon individual actions. We have thought we have to journey to find our Divine Identity, as if it had gotten lost or separated from us. We



You claim your Divine Identity moment by moment, choice by choice. What you know yourself to be in any moment determines your approach to prayer.

do not have to claim our Divine Identity in order to have Divine Identity. But what good is a Divine Identity if a person does not claim it?

What good is a talent for music if a person never plays an instrument? The talent is intact, but it must be claimed if it would be expressed and enjoyed. Deciding not to play music does not make someone evil, nor is the person punished for that choice. The music remains in that person, latent until she chooses to express it.

When will you claim your Divine Identity? When you have the choice of how to respond to someone's hurtful remark, will you throw back angry words, or will you express Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom? When feeling tempted to judge your appearance harshly in the mirror, will you instead gaze through to the Divine Life, Love, and Wisdom reflected there?

You claim your Divine Identity moment by moment, choice by choice. What you know yourself to be in any moment determines your approach to prayer.

## **Talk to Yourself**

- What did you believe about God when you were a child? How have your childhood beliefs about God influenced your adulthood?
- Write or speak of a time you experienced the divine in another person, and then in yourself.
- Remember a mystical moment when something of Divine Nature was revealed to you. How did your understanding of the divine change from the experience?
- When you address God, regardless of the name and nature you ascribe to God at the time (Gracious Father, Sweet Spirit, Dear God, Infinite Love, etc.), what are you supposing about Divinity, or Divine Nature? About yourself?
- How might you describe your Divine Identity without personifying the divine?