Praise for No Ordinary Time

In No Ordinary Time *and its daily readings for one week, Jan Phillips has packed a lifetime of "AHA's"—thoughts that suddenly give us clarity about ourselves and other selves, the world around us. You will keep sentences in your mind, on your bulletin board, in your pocket and in your heart.*

Gloria Steinem, activist, author of *Revolution from Within*

Superb book for finding inspiration and guidance for maneuvering through these extraordinary times. Jan Phillips is spot on in knowing what it takes to get us through into the world we all want. Don't hide this book on a shelf but keep it always in sight to go back to again and again. Elisabet Sahtouris, PhD

Evolution biologist and futurist, author of *EarthDance: Living Systems in Evolution*

The Book of Hours without a Monastery, Psalms without a Psalmody, Prayer without Gregorian Chant! Jan Phillips weaves an intriguing and inspiring tapestry synthesizing the wisdom embodied in an ancient tradition with the spiritual awakening engaging sojourners of the 21st century. This book provides a creative synthesis from monastery to market-place, from psalmody to poetry, from monastic time to the sacredness of every day, and every hour therein. Jan Phillips has provided an inspiring resource for our time. Diarmuid O'Murchu, author of *Evolutionary Faith*

Jan Phillips is that rare blend of deep, creative thinker, passionate heart and true visionary. Her clear and special talent to communicate and to inspire action is needed now more than ever as we all try to navigate these extraordinary times.

Rev. Wendy Craig-Purcell, Unity Center of San Diego, author of *Ask Yourself This*

No Ordinary Time *is not so much a book to be read as a sacred moment by moment practice to be engaged in. This is in stark contrast to most books whose ideas we read and forget the next day. If you are committed to exploring and living your destiny in service to life,* No Ordinary Time *is an extraordinarily practical wisdom teaching and gift you can give yourself that can help you embody the Divine in your own unique way.* Jeff Hutner, editor, *New Paradigm Digest*

An out-of-the-box Book of Hours that will stir your soul, stretch your mind, and embolden your contributions to mending the planet. Jan Phillips blends creativity, mysticism, and spiritual practice into startling and illuminating new configurations.

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, authors of *Spiritual Literacy*

No Ordinary Time

The Rise of Spiritual Intelligence and Evolutionary Creativity

A Book of Hours for a Prophetic Age

Jan Phillips

No Ordinary Time —
The Rise of Spiritual Intelligence and Evolutionary Creativity

A Book of Hours for a Prophetic Age

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Introduction

Seven times a day do I praise thee. Psalm 119:164

These are no ordinary times. We are witnessing and participating in an evolutionary leap unlike anything in our history. There is evidence in the human family of an upward shift in consciousness, a maturing spirituality, a connectedness that grows more intimate and global by the day. And that uplift is countered by the dissolution of myths that no longer serve us and the demise of institutions that have underpinned our culture since the beginning of our history. Our planetary worldview is shifting to wide angle as we awaken to the reality of our interdependence.

We are the myth-makers and co-creators of the 21st century, the prophets and writers of new sacred texts. Growing up spiritually is a requirement of us this hour. There is no Geppetto God out there pulling strings. We are the vessels of the Divine, agents of Supreme Intelligence, neural cells of our home planet, and it is our job now to call God home, to tend to the kingdom that is all around us, and to create stories and cultures of hope and compassion.

This book is a call to mindfulness, a reminder that evolutionary action begins with stillness, that visionary ideas arise from spiritual practice. It is a book for people conscious of their power and ready to co-create new sacraments and ceremonies that celebrate the Divine dwelling within us. It is a handbook for people committed to justice, peacemaking and spiritual integrity who are eager to evolve themselves spiritually and creatively.

While its form is taken from the medieval *Book of Hours*, its content stretches into the future—an ancient chalice for tomorrow's wine. It is a guide to reclaiming your spiritual authority, rethinking your inherited beliefs so you can create a life that is prophetic, ecstatic and true to your soul. It bridges the One and the many, East and West, masculine and feminine, darkness and light through an array of stories, poems, prayers and songs.

The *Book of Hours* originated in the Middle Ages as a way for people to stay spiritually mindful. The Jewish practice of saying prayers during the day was adopted by Christians as the basis for their daily spiritual practice. The Jews of the pre-Christian era had a source of devotional verse in the Book of Psalms, which included 150 prayers, poems and hymns. Christians adopted this book for their own use, and the "Psalter" soon became their main devotional text as well. Monks and nuns recited the Psalms according to guidelines laid out in monastic rules established primarily by St. Benedict.

In order to distinguish the divisions of time between the prescribed prayers, the Catholic Church established the canonical hours, also referred to as the Divine Office. Life in many medieval communities revolved around these hours of the day which were designated as Matins (midnight), Lauds (sunrise), Prime (6:00 a.m.), Terce (9:00 a.m.), Sext (noon), None (3:00 pm), Vespers (sunset), and Compline (9:00 p.m.)

Over the centuries, a number of supplementary texts were added to the Psalter. It became customary, for example, to frame the Psalms with "antiphons"—brief passages that helped to create Christian significance in the old Jewish texts. The antiphons were joined by a variety of prayers, canticles, hymns, readings from the Bible, and dialogues. The book that was developed for lay people who wished to incorporate elements of monasticism into their devotional life was called *The Book of Hours*.

This *Book of Hours* is designed for the same purpose—to give people a way to stay spiritually grounded throughout the day. It is based on the premise that we are in consort with our own Source and Creator, the Invisible One known as God and the visible one known as Earth. I am writing it for the ones who already know there is no distance between the Divine and the mortal, who already engage in an unmedi-

ated love affair with the Creator, and who, in such large numbers, have had to leave the churches that refuse to be relevant in these times of crisis. Many of these words will seem blasphemous to religious adherents who think there is only one way to be faithful, but one of the greatest ways we can serve each other is to challenge each other's thoughts.

When the German philosopher Jean Gebser wrote about his vision of the emergence of human consciousness, he referred to the myth of Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom, who was born from the head of Zeus. In *The Ever-Present Origin* (1949) Gebser uses the ancient myth to capture the epic struggle and effort of human development:

> And it would be well for us to be mindful of one actuality: although the wound in the head of Zeus healed, it was once a wound. Every "novel" thought will tear open wounds . . . everyone who is intent upon surviving—not only earth but also life—with worth and dignity, and living rather than passively accepting life, must sooner or later pass through the agonies of emergent consciousness.

If this book does what I hope it does, you may experience some of these agonies as you release the old for what is emerging. I have stretched in my spiritual practice to think and pray not only as a Christian, but as a Jew, a Muslim, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Native American, an atheist, a post-theist. I try on different hats as I light my candle, and while my thoughts might change or my prayers change, the Presence I am steeped in never alters, the Ground of my Being never moves. No matter what my spiritual stance, awe and adoration are the common ground. As I wrote one day during my morning prayers: "If there is a God, I am in awe. If there is not a God, I am in greater awe."

We are not here to debate what God means. We are here to live out the meaning of God, to BE the God we want to see in the world. This book is a holy book, full of reverence, praise, lamentations, and songs. It is one poet praying, to forces visible and invisible. It is one person sharing her intimacy with the Beloved. It is an adventure in aliveness, a sojourn for the soul. Come along. Let go and lift up.

Chapter One Monday

When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. 1 Corinthians 13:11

Awakening

At an early age, I learned that God was a Being who dwelled in a place far from where I ever stood. I learned to commune with the transcendent God of the Above, not the immanent Divine Within. But over the years, as I let go of childish thinking and took responsibility for my spiritual life, my perception of God changed dramatically. I am guided now not so much by teachings that were handed down to me, but by ideas that have risen up from within—a shift that began thirty years ago when I was a young postulant nun in a religious order taking my first theology class.

The Jesuit priest stood in front of the room and asked us what we believed about God. One postulant raised her hand, stood up and said "God made me to show His goodness and to share his everlasting life with me in heaven." I nodded my head in agreement, having memorized this years ago just like everyone else in the room.

The priest looked dismayed. "That's it?" he asked.

"Yes, Father."

"Sit down," he barked, looking around for the next hand.

Up it went, and the next brave soul stood up saying, "In God there are three Divine Persons, really distinct, and equal in all things-the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

I nodded again, and the priest frowned. "Is that the best you can do?"

"Yes, Father."

"Next," he yelled, as she took her seat, looking around in wonder.
By now, we're all confused, but one more raised her hand.
"God can do all things, and nothing is hard or impossible to Him."
"Sit down," he said.

He rolled his eyes, crossed his arms and surveyed the whole group of us with a kind of silent disdain. By now, I'm feeling anxious and blood is rushing up my neck. I feel hot and sweaty. My first anxiety attack.

"How could he do this?" It seemed so mean. He asked for our ideas about God and yet, when we said them, it felt like he took a sledge hammer and smashed our beliefs into a thousand pieces. A tear rolled down my cheek.

It was a moment of devastating loss, incomprehensible sadness. I felt as if everything I believed in, everything on which I had based my life, was now being challenged. We sat there, thirty of us, for what seemed an eternity, reckoning with the obliteration of God as we had known Him. What if everything we believed wasn't true? Did Father Grabys know something we didn't know?

Finally the priest spoke. "You should be ashamed for having nothing more than catechism answers to this question. Are you just a bunch of parrots, repeating everything you've been taught? Hasn't anyone here gone beyond the Baltimore Catechism in your thinking?"

The air was thick with silence. Hands were folded, eyes cast down. Tears cascaded down my face. I prayed he wouldn't call on me.

"You must come to know what is true about God from your own experience," said the priest. "If you are to be a nun worth your salt, you have to arrive at a faith that is deeper than your learning, one that is rooted in your ultimate concerns and rises up from the nature of who you are."

I looked up at him, wondering how in the world to build a faith from my human nature. Wasn't faith something I was born into? Something I inherited, from the outside? I was a Catholic by default. They told me everything I was supposed to believe. That was the point, wasn't it? I was just lucky to be born into the one true faith. I certainly didn't have anything to *say* about it. That's what infallible popes were for.

I raised my hand and asked him how someone could create a faith from the inside out, and why we even needed to since we knew what we needed to know

from the catechism.

"What you believe, that is religion," he said. "Who you are, what you live for—that is faith. And that is what we are here to explore, to create and to declare—our faith and spirituality. You can let go of your beliefs for awhile as you learn how to create a faith that will see you through everything."

I didn't want to let go of any beliefs. They were all I had. And they were enough. I didn't need anything more, or so I thought. As we continued on in the class, the biblical paradox that says we must lose our lives in order to find them suddenly began to make sense. Taking responsibility for our own spirituality was a painstaking process that lasted the entire semester as we worked to find and define our own commitments and ultimate concerns—a task that was supremely challenging for young women who had been taught all their lives *what* to think, but not *how* to think.

We never looked at another catechism, never recited another memorized belief, but step by step, we built a new spirituality for ourselves that was deeply personal and rooted in our ultimate concerns. And every day, during meditation, there was something new and profoundly elegant to contemplate: myself as the creator of my own spiritual path.

The prayers, poems, hymns and reflections that follow are invitations to pause during the day to stay attuned to the Creative Energy coursing through us. They are modern day parables, written for the mystics and prophets of *these* times. They are revelations of a kind, distilled from hours of prayer and silence, and years of noisy living, calling attention to the hungers of the world and our role as co-creators to respond with love.

Matins (midnight)

When I open my eyes, there I find you
When I speak, does your love flow out
When I touch one in pain, do you heal them
When I am silent do you bathe me in joy.

Carl Jung wrote that "One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious." But what training do we have for this? How do we enter into our own depths and make sense of the dark and penetrating mysteries? How do we awaken to our own knowing? How do we remember what we came here for, so the grand mission of our soul can be the propelling force of our lives?

How has it happened that, after all these years, we are still seeking, still dissatisfied, still comparing ourselves to this one and that, always coming up short? It is because we have listened to the voices outside of us and not to the sound of our own soul. We absorb the absurdities of this culture and shape our thoughts to its contours, rather than thinking originally and creating a jubilantly authentic life. This is a total abdication of our original bliss.

Our soul took on a body to do its work in this earthly milieu, and now most of us have forgotten the mission we came for. How many are trapped in meaningless, maddening jobs just to support a life we never came here to live? And it happens almost by default. Almost overnight. We have a notion, when we're young, of a life that is fitting, in tune with our spirit. We start in that direction, but the cultural undertow takes us down. Everyone talks about money and new cars and big houses. No one says anything about work that matters. No one mentions the soul, the spirit, the passion and energy that comes from giving ourselves to something we love. Joy gets connected to *having,* and *being* takes the back seat.

Next thing we know, we're forty, fifty, sixty, and it's taking all our energy to keep what we have. Who ARE we then? What are we doing and why? Where are our choices coming from? Do we even remember our soul's purpose, our heart's desire?

Making the darkness conscious is about removing our blinders, restoring our sight. It is a journey to the deeper voice, past our programming and conditioning, beyond our self-doubts and insecurities. It costs nothing and gives us everything. But we must be prepared for a shattering of what we once held to be true. We survived the dissolution of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny and we can survive the

dissolution of other myths that keep us childish and no longer serve us.

Anthony de Mello, a Jesuit retreat director and psychologist, often said, "It's not that we fear the unknown. You cannot fear something you do not know. It's loss of the known that we fear." And awakening is just that—it's giving up old thoughts and habits that no longer serve us. It's creating our own creeds to live by. It's remembering that we are born creators and that our ultimate, unique creation is our own life.

It's a bit embarrassing, when we first wake up, to realize how much of who we think we are and what we think is real depends on what other people have told us. We are full of inherited voices, most of which were handed down by insecure people trying to pass on what someone told them.

When I was young, I'd ask my mother why my father said terrible things about some groups of people. She'd say to me, "Oh, honey, it's not his fault. It's just what he learned." And I'd go away confused every time, wondering if he was a grown-up, why didn't he think his *own* thoughts? Why did he have to keep thinking what people *told* him to think?

Anyone who has been shaped in any way by religious traditions has been exposed to a tremendous amount of contradictions. Sacred texts have been mistranslated, misinterpreted, and misunderstood for millennia. Depending on our programming, we can find in them anything we need to support our bad behaviors—sexism, racism, homophobia, slavery, violence.

That is why we need to inquire within, dip down into our own well of wisdom and come up with a faith that is true to who we are and what we know. If something you've been taught doesn't ring true, alter it. If it's too small to contain your magnitude, expand it. If it polarizes people, excludes people, leads to anything other than understanding and openness, broaden it or abandon it. It is up to us to create new canons of compassion and morality. We cannot wait for leaders to rise up from the masses and save us from ourselves—we are the leaders and this is our time.

Great Being of light and darkness,
I stand with you and in you
a citizen of earth
a co-creator of culture.

I am the bulb to your Light
and your radiance illumines the paths I take.
Only praises ring out from my lips,
tears of joy flow like rivers down my cheeks.

This is the beginning of a new day. Each day you awaken to a canvas of twenty-four hours, ready for what only YOU can create. What will you make of this gift you've been given? What do you need to fulfill your mission?

Lauds (sunrise)

Though they speak of the distance between us
Though they think you are light-years away
I've awakened to find you within me
As I breathe, you walk through my door.

I light my morning candle
as a humble hello
to You, Invisible One.
It is me here, I say,
from the land of matter.
Word made flesh, I announce
breathing you
(even when I doubt you)
in and out,
in and out.

I am steeped in the mystery
of holy communion
of known and unknown
energy and mass
heaven and earth

If there is a God, I am in awe.
If there is not a God,
I am in greater awe.

I bow like a spelunker
in the cave of mystery.
I pray from this cave
I cut all ties to certainty

I rejoice in wonder,
bend my knee to the darkness

Inside me there is a spark
called my spirit
I spend my days calling out
thanks for this
in every direction,
to the right and the left,
the above and below,
and I will do this faithfully
till my last breath
vanishes one day
into the blue sky of You.

Your own Self-Realization is the greatest service you can render the world.
Ramana Maharshi

Self-realization, or spiritual awakening, is the actualization of our own divinity. It is a recognition of ourselves in all things and all things in ourselves, found through the contemplation of things as they are. The opposite of selfishness, it is a manifestation of ourselves as gift and mirror to others. The deeper one's self-awareness, the clearer we can reflect the other.

Self-realization is an exploration into the complexities and contradictions of life, an attempt to plumb the opposites until we arrive finally at the Oneness that contains them. It is a process of observation, an astute probing into reality, past our learned illusions of separateness into the exuberant experience of our connectedness.

When we observe something deeply, we enter into it, become one with it. Something of its essence enters into us, and we are changed in the process. When we read a novel, see a play, listen to a story, we enter into its world, place ourselves in the scene and experience the drama and conflicts as if they were ours. We often come away from someone else's creation with a deeper understanding of our own story.

In my quest for the Infinite, I have come to believe that God, Truth, Beauty, Love—all those concepts I associate with the Divine—are not things that are

"found" at the end of the path, like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but are rather what I experience on the journey as I travel through life—or perhaps, more explicitly, they are the journey itself.

God, to me, is the universe unfolding, the power and potential within all our lives, the Oak within our acorn selves. We are not separate at all, but intermingled like salt and the sea. The Divine is ever-present in the faces, the scenes, the feelings that pass through my life day to day.

Whenever I'm tempted to speak of God, the words of Lao Tzu come to mind: "He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know." Or the Zen saying, "Open mouth, already big mistake." Or St. Augustine, "If you have understood, it is not God." God, like love, is better defined by what it isn't than by what it is. Meister Eckhart, the Christian mystic, wrote that the ultimate leave-taking is the leaving of God for GOD—the final letting go of the limited concept for an experience of the real thing.

When I was young, I prayed to be a martyr. I wanted to show God and everyone else that I loved Him enough to die for him. I wanted to go into battle for Him, be another Joan of Arc, a hero for God's sake.

Now all that's changed. I wouldn't think of dying for God, but am doing my best to live for God—not God as person, but God as Goodness, Justice, Mercy. There are no more lines of separation, only strands of connectedness. My eyes find holiness everywhere, in every living thing, person, in every act of kindness, act of nature, act of grace. Everywhere I look, there God is, looking back.

I have felt the swaying of the elephant's shoulders and now you want me to climb on a jackass? Try to be serious. Mirabai, Hindu mystic poetess and singer (1498-1546)

Dear Invisible One,
I may be all alone out here
but it works better
for me to think not.

Somehow
it's less lonely,
more fun to imagine
an invisible force
shoring up everything I do
from the other side.

Like a wave to my particle self,
hydrogen to my oxygen,
a puzzle that needs my piece
to be complete.

It's moot in the long run—
it is what it is—
and on this plane
will only be that
till I climb the next rung
of awareness
where all heaven breaks loose
Or not.

When it's time to go around the circle and name our commitments, one woman in the group says, "I'm committed to living in bliss twenty-four hours a day." A huge roar of laughter follows.

"You can't really mean it!"

"You know that's not possible, right?"

"Great joke! Now what are you *really* committed to?"

I find myself in one of those pregnant moments. I laugh, at first, but the laugh turns into a wonder…hmmm, I think, why not?

Bliss is just a matter of waking up. It means living in the present moment and not veering off into the past or future. Bliss is what happens when we stop resisting, stop struggling against the events of our lives and start mining them for the jewels they offer. It is the result of choosing the moment instead of clashing with it. Bliss is what bluebirds have, what howling wolves and singing whales have. By itself, without analysis and additions, life is glorious. Perfect. The only thing that keeps us from bliss is our opinion that we don't have it, can't acquire it or hold on to it. When we start to focus on having it, instead of being in it, we become like fish swimming in circles, searching for water.

When his son was born, my brother gave my mother a license plate holder that read, "Happiness is being Chad's grandmother." It survived many winters in upstate New York, but eventually rusted out from the salt they use to melt the ice on wintery roads. Now only half of it remains, but the message is true. It reads: *Happiness is.* Knowing this is the first step in awakening. When happiness *isn't*, it's simply a warning sign that we have nodded off, forgotten the real and added some illusion

or expectation to the situation.

Waking up is not easy, but it is the only way to go if we want to live a life with any passion and punch. It means we have to give up blaming. Give up making others responsible for our happiness. Abandon that habit of judging people, dwelling in the negative. Waking up means being able to observe our life as if it were happening to someone else. It means thinking and speaking consciously, knowing that what we think and say on Tuesday becomes the life we live on Thursday. Waking up means we don't see the other as better or less than ourselves. We see the other *as* our self.

Prime (6:00 AM)

Though others may judge and degrade me,
cast me out for blaspheming your name
Still I will say that I hold you
like a flower in the palm of my heart.

My chiropractor's office was filled with worker's comp cases today. "I don't understand why they're doing this to themselves," he confided to me. "They're overworking, over-stressing, taxing themselves beyond reason. It's like they're on some treadmill and don't know how to get off. They're waiting for someone else to say 'slow down,' but corporate America is never going to say that to their workers. We have to start saying it to ourselves."

In *The Revolt of the Masses,* Jose Ortega y Gasset wrote, "Our life is at all times and before anything else the consciousness of what we can do." Waking up is about clarifying what we can do and what we *cannot* do. If we're aiming for balance, we cannot be checking email, engaging in a conference call, and sorting through papers on our desk all at the same time. Multi-tasking is something we all *can* do, but the question is *should* we? Are we really more efficient when we do several things at once or does it fragment our thinking, fracture our integrity? What does it feel like to you when you are trying to talk with someone who is typing away on a computer or texting as you talk?

An Algonquin elder, when asked the key to happiness responded: "The key to happiness is giving each task all the time it requires." Imagine signs posted at the

water cooler, above every desk and workbench, in rest rooms and restaurants: GIVE EACH TASK ALL THE TIME IT REQUIRES.

These days, that seems counter-cultural. To give each task all the time it requires frees us to bring our complete beings to the table—not just our time, but the wisdom we have gathered, the imagination we have access to, the resources of our spirit, our joyfulness, our sense of connection to others. That wholeness is what translates into excellence. That whole-brain, whole-body approach is what leads to extraordinary creativity, breakthrough thinking.

If we are trying to do three things at once, each thing gets only a fraction of our mind, a small chunk of our magnitude. Our contribution then is stunted, stymied by the clutter of other objectives in the way. But if we take one thing at a time and give it our full attention, then each thing we handle gets all of us.

And the same is true for our journey into awareness. It will take time and conscious attention to detail. It will call for practice, discipline, and compassion for yourself as you learn to navigate this new terrain. You will stumble over and over, and every time you notice a faltering, that noticing is a success. Every time you become aware of your thinking and reconfigure it, that is a step ahead. Every conscious re-entry into the present after a foray into the past or future, that, too, is a stride forward.

If you pay attention, you cannot fail. "All the way to heaven *is* heaven," said Catherine of Siena. You have already arrived. The journey is simply to live in that awareness.

Every encounter we have is colored by our thoughts. If we approach an experience with fear or negativity, the experience will be a receptacle for that. If we enter into it with kindness and a sense of communion, the experience will contain that. Our thoughts precede and create our reality. Begin to observe your thoughts and direct them.

Whoever knows the All but fails to know himself lacks everything.

Gospel according to Thomas

Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." Buddha, on his deathbed, said "Be lamps unto yourselves." The Koran says, "Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God." Light within, light coming through us, light in the presence of all that is. The Masters have said it, but does it ring true? Do these voices resonate with your own knowing? Is it true for you?

If you were asked to think of a person who's of the light, who comes to mind? Why? Is it because there's some purity of intention there? Some steadfastness in commitment? Some sense of inner authority, authenticity, joyfulness? How are you being a light to others? How does the light come through you? How do you experience the light coming through others?

When I think of people I know who are lights in the world, I think of my friends who are fun-loving, imaginative, in love with the lives they are creating day by day. They are the ones who laugh a lot, sing a lot, cry freely, hug tenderly. They talk about themselves, not others. They are spellbound at life's mysteries. They are the ones with more questions than answers. If they are striving for anything, it is to be free of illusion, one with What Is. Their actions are connected to their values. They *are* their thoughts, their words, their feelings. They are the embodiment of the light they believe themselves to be.

How have you learned to be compassionate with yourself so you can better love others? What new things are you discovering about who you are and why you do things?

Imagine the Divine as the Source of Light shining through the prism of earth's atmosphere, breaking into billions of tiny, colorful, radiant refractions called human beings. Imagine that you are that same Light, at a different density. It is only our illusions that shroud the light. Any thought that we are separate from the others, separate from the Source, is all illusion, and any creed that fosters this notion deserves to be forsaken.

The poet Kabir wrote, "If you have not lived through something, it is not true." Experience is an essential part of knowledge. So the question is, "Do I experience myself as a light in this world? Do I operate from this premise? When I set sail in the morning for a day at sea, is this the wind that propels me?" If it is, then how is it obvious to those around me?

Terce (9:00 a.m.)

In the silence of dawn do I find you
In the roar of the crowd you are there
In the eyes of the foe can I see you
In my enemy's heart do you dwell.

When I first began my spiritual practice in 1989, I committed to 20 minutes of silence in the morning before I got up. I sat in my bed with a candle burning in front of me and a cup of coffee in my hands. I imagined myself as a satellite dish, receiving messages from Mind-at-Large. This poem is the first poem that came through, which turned out to be a song. It's called *Rebecca's Song* because when I inquired into the voice and asked if it had a name, it seemed to say Rebecca. I think the angel she is referring to is the Immanent Divine, the Holy One within.

Rebecca's Song

Now is the time to be mindful of light
to keep the flame going, to give up the fight
for life is a pleasure, it's not meant for pain
let go of the struggle and dance once again

For you all have an angel who sits at your side,
who waits for your calling, who hears every cry
she's there at your service, there as your guide,
so call her, she's waiting with arms open wide.

The God that you're seeking needs not to be sought
you're already one like the sea and the salt
the Source is within you, the force is at hand
it's been in your soul since your life began.

So rejoice, my child, in the gifts that you have
the light of the world is the torch in your hand
and when you get beyond your fear and your pain,
you'll see God in the being who goes by your name.

We can't afford *not* to be thinking now, when it's our very thoughts that are shaping the world. We're facing crises the world has never known, and we're in labor now, trying to birth a new consciousness, evolve a higher form of humanity that comprehends its sacred essence. If we, as a human race, are to make the shift from puberty to full maturity, we must respond to the crisis of our times as every cell in the body responds to a gunshot wound—with unremitting alertness, undivided attention, generous and humble in its service to the whole.

The future ahead of us is the future we create everyday, in our workplaces, our families, our encounters with strangers and friends. Our real work is to imagine the life we want to be living and draw it toward us. It is not to look behind us to see how they did it before, not to rustle through old texts for solutions, but to re-examine everything we've been taught and dismiss whatever divides us from one another.

If you want to wake up, examine the thoughts in your own mind and weigh them against what you know to be true from your own experience. We are the eyes and the ears and the voice of the earth, cells in the body of God collaborating in the continuing creation of our planet. We have one lifetime under this name to speak our truths, to manifest in the world the supreme force of love that cannot be made explicit without our hands, our eyes, our voices and actions.

We are here to make the Invisible visible. No matter what our business cards say, no matter what we are paid to do, no matter how we define ourselves, the essence of our work is spiritual—and it is that element that gives it meaning and magic. When we wake up and take our souls to work, consciously, everything about the workday changes. It becomes a playing field, an opportunity to create what wouldn't exist without us, to see ourselves reflected in others, and mirror them back to themselves. It is a chance to practice being in the moment, choose what is before us. It is an eight hour class in the possibility of bliss.

Every day we experience dozens of encounters. We hear people say things. We notice the behaviors of people. We see and hear ourselves talking and acting. We're in the school of life all day long, but what do we make of it? What do we say at the dinner table when they ask, "What did you learn today?"

I'll tell it to you again
we are flowers in the same garden
descendents of one Mother
you, a rose,
me, an iris
she, a gardenia splashing scent with every breeze

I could go on and on about our likeness
every one of us a leaf on the same tree
a snowflake in the same blizzard
bubbles in the same champagne
can you stop laughing long enough
to digest this mystery?

If these were the headlines of your daily paper
would you eyes pop open with joy?

Do you see the wonder here?
Can you find your adorable face in this house of mirrors?

Do you hear it clearly?
That what you are enveloped in is the body of God
what you were born from is the mother of Life
the air you breathe is their giant exhalation
their sigh of delight after a long night of love

Do you really want to know you're a child of desire
born from the embrace of heaven and earth?
can you bear it? can you be this huge?
embody this mystery?

In case it comes as a bit of a surprise
I'll tell it to you again:
You, my dear, are a beautiful rose
and I am an iris
and all those around us:
flowers in the same garden
descendents of the same Mother

This is the Eden of your beginning and end
This is the Heaven you have sought all along.

Meet this day with clarity and be a light in the darkness. Unfold your arms and let others in. Listen and speak like your life depended on every utterance. Practice truthfulness. Say things about yourself and others in a kindly way. Direct conversations in an upward spiral. Do not collude in negativity. Finding calm in this storm is a matter of mindfulness. We can be at peace every moment if we meet it with awareness and remember our source. The moment we choose peace, it is ours.

Sext (noon)

Though the newspapers dwell on disaster
Though the media spreads only fear
I am a beacon of hopefulness
Only light shall I cast on the world.

It is so easy for us to get tangled up in others, to forget what we once knew. How do we keep our knowing fresh if no one ever asks us about it? And why would anyone ask us if we never ask anyone else what they know or really care about? If someone doesn't go first, how do authentic conversations ever get started?

I learned a lesson about going first on a cross country trip a few years ago. My plan was to interview people in small towns about their values, getting the latest scoop on Americans' changing attitudes and spiritual outlook. I'd driven through six states before finally stopping at a restaurant in rural Virginia where I found a young man willing to talk with me.

"I'm trying to get a sense of changing values in this country," I blathered as I rifled through my bag looking for my pad of questions. Finding it, I launched quickly into the first question. "Where did you get your values from?"

"W-H-U-T??" he asked, his brow scrunched up like a furrowed field. I could see he had no idea what I was talking about. Then I heard a little voice in my head. "Go first," it said.

"Oh yeah," I started, "like with me, how I got one of my values was from my Mom who always said, 'If you pass by someone on the street, be sure to look them in the eye and give them a big smile, because they might be having a real bad day and your smile can make all the difference in the world." I told him I never particu-

larly liked that assignment, but I took it on, trusting in my mom's wisdom, and now I can't help but do it. "I've been smiling at people on the street for the last forty years," I told him. "That's a value I got from my Mom."

He sat there silent, his arms folded tight across his chest. Squinting at me, he nodded his head without saying a word. His toothpick shifted from one corner of his mouth to the other while his mind worked the idea like a plow in a pasture.

Finally, the pieces came together. "Ya' mean like when my daddy used to get into his whiskey and whup my butt-and I'd go out on the back porch where my grand-daddy would be rockin' in his chair. He'd see me there, trying not to cry, then he'd say to me, 'Son, I see ya' got some big feelings there. Why don't ya' sit on down under that oak tree and write yourself a poem? That'll help you get them feelings out.' And now I do that, I write poems."

"My grand-daddy always said 'If God has given you a gift that you can give back to people, don't you ever turn your back on it. Whenever you feel a poem coming on, you sit down and write it. And after you write it, find some way to share it, because that's what God gave it to you for.' I guess that's a value I got from my grand-daddy. Wanna hear one of my poems?"

I was stunned by this time—stunned that he was sharing this story, stunned that he wrote poems and wanted to recite one to me, stunned that this interview thing seemed to be working. He went on to recite his latest and a few others.

Then we went on to tell the stories of our childhood, our favorite memories, things people had told us to keep us in our place, ways we'd come into our own knowing and what we were doing with what we knew. Two hours passed and we were still there, drinking coffee, losing and finding ourselves in each others' stories.

What I learned that day about going first has changed everything. Now I know that the kind of conversations I crave don't happen by default. They happen when I take a risk and go first. Many of us hunger for a conversation that matters, but we wait for someone else to start it. It's scary to take that risk, so we pretend that communion doesn't matter, that we aren't interested in another's experience.

If that's the case, why do we enjoy overhearing conversations? Why are millions of viewers hooked on reality TV? How have some soap operas stayed on the air for fifty years? We love watching the human drama unfold. We're looking for reminders of what we once knew. Like sea turtles returning to the place of their birth, or penguins listening for the call of their mate. We're longing for connection, a sign that we matter, a story that reminds us it's the same way there.

Song: The Conversation (this is a conversation between my Muse and me)

You are my spirit and I call on you
to help me remember what I know
you are the flame that lights the path I walk
when my memory of our oneness starts to go
you are the force that keeps me moving on,
the guide whose hand I need to lead me home
take me in your arms and lead me through the dark
to the spring from which all healing waters flow

I am the one whose hand is in your hand
I will lead you down whatever path you choose
I am your guardian, I'm your dearest friend
I'm your deepest intuition, I'm your Muse
I am the voice that calls you to the Light,
the truest of the voices that you hear
and every time you call on me I'm there for you
I'm always at your side, I'm always near.

Then do you have the answers I am looking for?
All the answers that you seek, you have inside
How am I to know if what I choose is right?
If you've chosen out of love, love will abide
and when I feel the darkness of the world in me,
what am I to do with all my grief?
My child, your world is only what you say it is
If you call it dark then dark is what will be

How am I to know what I am here to do?
Just be who you are, the doing will get done
How can I get past the fear of what's to come?
All that fear will disappear once you've begun
How can I remember I am of the light
when there's hunger and hardship all around?
Take the hand of everyone you're walking with
and the love you feel will spread that light around.

Intimate conversations are masterful collaborations of two creators, each aware that giving is receiving and listening is an active verb. They can happen in a corporate cafeteria, on a train, in a living room, board room, or rest room. The Essene Gospel of Peace reminds us that "Only through the communions…will we learn to see the unseen, to hear that which can't be heard, and to speak the unspoken word." Our communions are the bridge from soul to soul, heaven to earth, dark to light. They are the way in and the way through, and all we need to do is go first.

None (3:00 pm)

Wake me from my sleep and rouse me
break through my dreams like a bird
Be the voice that guides me
Let your kindness flow through me day and night.

To become our own spiritual authority, we have to move and think and speak from our own personal knowing. Our power comes from our ability to transform what we have experienced into what we know. It's an alchemy of sorts, where we transmute the lead of our experience into the gold of our wisdom. Making a life is the process of converting our wisdom into action. Each of us knows what no one else knows because no one else has lived our lives, seen what we've seen, felt what we've felt. The great Persian poet Rumi writes, "The throbbing vein will take you further than any thinking." This is a great clue.

When you think of the people who have inspired you, changed your thinking, altered the course of your life, are they not the ones who spoke and lived from the heart? Are they not the ones who stand before you with the courage to be simply who they are, to share their visions, their struggles, their fears? This is the stuff of spiritual authority—this transparency, this risking, this willingness to say "It's a new frontier here, and not one of us has a map, but with what we know together, we can surely make it."

As we proceed along the path of inner self-management, structural changes occur within us that allow a significant increase in the level of indwelling spirit and this, in turn, appears as a significant increase in one's level of consciousness.

William Tiller, physicist

Vespers (sunset)

With tears in my eyes I behold you
Every place that I turn, you are there
In the wars, in the floods, in the earthquakes
Through our hands do we bring you to life.

Theism is the belief that one God, personal and omnipotent, created and rules the world and humans. The term derives from the Greek *theo*s meaning God. It was first used by Ralph Cudworth in the 1600s. It is conjectured that theism emerged to help our ancestors survive the trauma of self-consciousness and the shock of non-being. They came up with the concept of God to help them deal with their awe, their powerlessness over death, their wonder at the beauty and vastness of the universe. All that they could not perceive as belonging to themselves they projected outward onto the Supreme Being they called God. God was the Creator of all things, the controller of all things, the force behind all great powers. God, understood theistically, is a human construct.

> *The courage to take meaninglessness into itself presupposes a relation to the ground of being which we have called "absolute faith." It is without a special content, yet it is not without content. The content of absolute faith is the "god above God." Absolute faith and its consequence, the courage that takes the radical doubt, the doubt about God, into itself, transcends the theistic idea of God.*
>
> Paul Tillich, theologian

Waking up is a process of finding ourselves, listening to ourselves, our thoughts, our bodies. This the work of the soul—to discover what is true and align ourselves with that. To experience every tragic and terrible thing knowing that it holds a lesson for us. To know that what we think has an effect on how we feel, that what we feel has an effect on what is, that our thoughts and words are the tools with which we forge our lives.

Many of us don't even know how we feel about something until long after it has happened. We've been so conditioned to how we "should" feel and act, that it's

hard to separate what we "should" be feeling from what we actually *do* feel. Waking up is the first step in turning that around. It's taking time to breathe before we speak. It's sitting down every once in a while and locating our feelings, noticing which way they're pulling us, giving them our love and attention.

Waking up is also knowing we are *not* our feelings. We are the one observing them, tending to them, finding ways to release them and keep our energy flowing. They are not us. They are transient, passing through. We don't become them any more than the mirror becomes what it reflects. We can throw black paint at the sky all we want, but the sky will not change colors. To be awake is to have a mind like sky, untainted by the particularities of any event.

William James wrote that "the greatest revolution in our generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives." If we feel like we're in the middle of a nightmare, we don't have to stay there. We can wake ourselves up, get to the bottom of what's scaring us, see what illusion or expectation we've brought to the table. We can check to see if we ventured off into the past or the future, then get back to being in the present moment.

To be awake is to be constantly rearranging our inner attitudes, shape-shifting our thoughts as we become mindful of their power. The contours of our lives are shaped by our thoughts, molded by our speaking. We are the inventors of our own reality, and every relationship, every meeting, encounter, email and text message is a canvas, a stage upon which we create and express ourselves.

How many of us experience work as something we have to do in order to buy ourselves time on the weekends for our real lives? How many of us put in our time, but hold ourselves back, as if to be fully alive, fully joyful and intimate and creative in the workplace would diminish our supply for later? The other day, a woman in the armed services was interviewed on National Public Radio about preparing for war with her fellow soldiers, "Finally our lives have meaning now—they don't just revolve around what we do all day." If it takes a national disaster or a war for us to feel that our lives are meaningful, something is terribly wrong.

Disaster originally meant *out of touch with the stars*—but look at us now. We are out of touch with ourselves, out of touch with our neighbors, out of touch with the meaning of our connection to others around the globe. Out of touch with the potential we have to be inspired artists creating from our own personal and deep wisdom. Studies reveal that most peoples' worst dread is the thought of having lived a

meaningless life, but what is it that gives our life meaning? It's connection, community, a sense that the part we play matters to the whole.

In the course of a day, there are many opportunities to feel powerless, many occasions in which we feel less the actor and more the acted upon. In the workaday world, there is often pressure to produce, a false sense of urgency, a mentality of scarcity, a tendency to overcomplicate things and make unreasonable demands on people. It is our job to stay balanced in the face of this.

Compline (9:00 p.m.)

Into your arms I commend my spirit
though I sleep you continue to breathe
I give thanks for this day and this lifetime
I give thanks that you hold me this night.

Recognize what is before your eyes and the mysteries will be revealed to you. For there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. Gospel of Thomas

I gave a talk at a hospital the other night, introducing an exhibition of photographs done by a group of doctors. A couple of them were in a snit, wondering why I'd been invited as the speaker. For some reason, they were uneasy with the fact that I'd written a book called *God Is at Eye Level—Photography as a Healing Art.* They grumbled about this to the woman who invited me to talk, and she called me saying, "You might want to soft-pedal the God part and the healing part. These guys are just hobbyists. They say their photographs don't have anything to do with healing."

I arrived early enough to view all their photographs and was deeply moved by their images of the Himalayas, Canyon de Chelly, a barrio in San Diego, close-ups of flowers and children and animals, black and white studies in shadow and depth. They were incredible images and had a powerful impact, especially since many brought back memories of some of my favorite places.

When I started my talk, I was careful to speak only for myself, sharing with the audience how photography is a healing experience for me, how it calms my soul,

keeps me in the present moment, gives me a sense of being one with the Divine. I speak freely about spiritual matters all the time, and never edit my words or feelings about the sacredness of life. So when I commented on their images, referring to each doctor's work and how it specifically affected me, altered my awareness, conjured up memories and meaning, I wove in words like holy, healing, the Divine, oneness, commonness—and I saw some of those doctors move to the edge of their seats with tears in their eyes.

No one had ever spoken about their work before. No one ever said concretely, this is how it mattered to me, this is where it took me, this is how it made me feel and what it made me think of. This is why I think it's holy, healing work.

At the end of the talk, every one of those doctors came up to me privately and acknowledged how proud they felt to have their work referred to as spiritual. One after the other, they said things like, "You know, you can't use the G word in the office, but I think you're absolutely right…I'm glad you said that. I believe it, but you can't let people know that…Thanks for talking about my work like you did. I could never say those things. You have to watch what you say, you know."

I felt a little sadness driving home. That men like that—educated, talented, in the helping professions, and several of them close to retirement—had caved in to the notion that it's not OK to reveal your inner self. Not one of them would dare to speak of the holy in the workplace, but they loved when someone else did. My going first, it opened up something for them. I'll never know what or how it matters, but I know it did some good that night.

The ultimate and highest leave-taking is leaving God for GOD, leaving your notion of God for an experience of that which transcends all notions. Meister Eckhart

I don't need a personal God
to be grateful for my life
and all that's in it.

I don't need to feel that Some One
fashioned me with His Own Hands,
knows all the hairs on my head
jerks His knee in response to
my every prayer.

I don't need pearly gates,
fires of Hell, vestal virgins
to live right, to give this opportunity
of a *lifetime* my whole devotion.

I am not in training
for some other time
to satisfy some Other Being.
I am here to make lighter
the burdens of everyone
I stumble upon
and to those across the seas
to whom I'm connected
like hand to mouth.

Then why, I wonder,
do I call out so often,
O God this, O God that,
like God is on the other end of the line
waiting for me alone?

My brain and my heart
are two rivers
running their own course
on the way to the Sea of Everything.

One knows, one feels,
One is the elder, one the child.
It's only when they fuse
that the God of the Heavens
explodes into light and becomes my way.

After reading the first chapter of this book, my Mom asked, "Do you really think there's something to this evolutionary stuff?"

I said, "Mom, in 1976 when I came out to you, you told me never to tell Dad or I'd be responsible for him dying of a heart attack. Would you say that if I came out to you now?"

"No."

"And in 1980 when I was in my militant-angry feminist phase and stopped shaving my legs, you wrote me a letter saying how selfish I was. Didn't I know I was an embarrassment to my brother and sister when their friends saw my hairy legs? Would you say that to me now?"

"No, of course not."

"And in 1981, when Dad disowned me for living in the same house with a man, you went along with him and refused to let me come home. Would you do that now?"

"No, I'd stand up to him. He was wrong to do that."

"That's what I mean by evolutionary. You have advanced your consciousness over the years. You have grown yourself up spiritually. You've taken responsibility for your own thoughts and decisions. You're your own authority now."

"Oh, I get it," she says. "OK, hurry up and finish it. I can't wait to read the next chapter."