

All Souls Interfaith Gathering

September 30th, 2018

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Good evening!

As we begin together, I invite you to take a breath in... and a breath out. And as you breathe to allow for the awareness of what a gift it is simply to be here... however you are... whatever you're feeling... whatever is going on for you at this time. And as you feel that awareness of your simple presence, to make reflection on it in your heart, three times:

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

May all beings in all places, without exception, be happy... and peaceful... and free from suffering.

Imagine a heart-shaped earth. What does that mean to you? Let's not worry about the physics of it, or how it would spin, or whether we would get awkward sunrise-shadows in some places. But what does it feel like? *A *heart-shaped earth*.*

To me a heart-shaped earth feels like being alive. It feels like being *truly alive*. It feels like being in love. And that is why we are here: to feel that we're alive, to be in touch with our hearts. To transform this planet into a heart-shaped earth.

I grew up near this great barn, which in its time was a marvel of achievement, the manifestation of dreams. And I know from having lived among these fields and with the people in this community that there is a lot of heart-shaped earth in this place. But we forget, from time to time, or we want to remember more deeply. And that is why we come together, at times and in places like these, to re-member together: to put ourselves back together again.

We have felt separate: we come together to feel connected.

We have felt small: we come together to feel like part of something greater.

And we have felt great: we come together to once again feel small.

These are times of great confusion. But it's a particular kind of confusion: the kind we experience in the liminal spaces of dusk or dawn, in the space of contrast. In daytime it is clear and we walk about freely, with darkness nowhere found. At nighttime it is dark, and we either rest in the peace of darkness or we create light for ourselves.

At dusk and at dawn is when we are aware of both darkness and light, and

anticipating the coming of dawn after a night of sleep, we look with eagerness and wonder to the rising of crimson colors on the horizon.

Imagine the last time you were up early enough to watch the rising of the sun. The world is alive in a chorus of celebration. It is a time of music. And in that time of grey light between the worlds, there is in fact a great possibility of confusion, of illusion, of misunderstanding what you see. There is enough light to see, but not always enough to see clearly. The friendly can appear as the phantom, the simple shadow as the specter.

And so it is now, for our continuing emergence into the light of ever-greater awareness creates the possibility of confusion in the contrast between dark and light. But we need not fret or fear, for just as in the twilight of dawn, the way to clarity is simply to watch, and be present, and to feel for what is true. For dawn brings warmth, and with that a tingling and a stirring that invites us to shed layers of all that once was necessary to keep us safe, and warm. We emerge into a lighter way of being. From winter into spring, or from night into day, we emerge into a place that feels familiar, for we *have* been here before. In fact, it is the place from which we have come.

Animals give birth in the spring. The warming is where we naturally begin. And yet we return to the places of colder climes, of less light, shorter days, not because the contraction is bad or to be avoided, but because it is a place to incubate all that has occurred in the opening times of warmth and light. It is a time to look into ourselves, and into each other. To cultivate inside ourselves that same warmth and light which surrounded us overtly in the times of summer and daylight.

The times of darkness are a time of practice, of integration. We dream at night to integrate the experiences of our day. These are times of sense-making, of recalibration, of return.

And if we do our work in these times, we return to the next coming of light as though climbing a spiral staircase. There is a familiarity to the new day, but we are a level higher. And we don't disparage the level of the stairs from which we came, for we see clearly how it lifted us to where we are now. There is no need to carry on our backs the stairs we have just climbed.

Have you seen the drawing by MC Escher of an infinite staircase? It appears at first to be going down, but if you follow it all the way around, it then ascends. We see that, by a trick of the eye, the descent was in fact an illusory aspect of the ascent, and vice-versa. Up and down reveal themselves as they really are: interrelated, two aspects of the same.

So it is in a community, where the seeming opposites of self and other are revealed to be not two separate things, but the two poles of a single unity.

This is a unity made up intrinsically of differences, and thus it is a community. As we walk our individual paths, we also walk together.

In this season, as we descend into the holy nights, *we descend together*.

We turn inward—and towards each other. The spaces become shorter, closer, and in these smaller spaces we find greater intimacy. Our bonds with each other deepen and grow stronger so that when we again expand in the opening, ascending times, we can expand farther than ever before without losing that connection to each other.

If summer and spring are times of cultivation and creation, the fall and winter are times of sharing and savoring. This is why we give gifts in the times upcoming: to share and savor with each other all that we have created.

And the **very** greatest gift we can share with each other is ourselves. For as much as we create out there in the world, our true masterwork is ourselves. The quality of our being. Who we have become. This is the finest gilding, the most delicate and magnificent work of emotional and energetic architecture ever conceived. The greatest cathedrals in the world are nothing in comparison to the complexity and the wonder of a being incarnated into this human form. And that is really what we share with each other, for all other sharing is ultimately an **expression** of who we are.

And as we share who we are as individuals, we create who we are as community. Just as cells sharing themselves with each other in one body create an individual human life, we sharing ourselves with each other in one community create an expanded human life, a total co-organism with as much reality to it as the individual. That whole is both created by and reflected in every individual who comprises it, like a spider's web wet with a thousand dewdrops, all mirroring each other in the morning sun.

So just as we create ourselves as individuals, growing and expanding as we spiral upward through the cycles of life and seasons and all the revolutions of the cosmos, so do we create ourselves and refine ourselves and evolve ourselves as a community.

As a friend of mine told me recently, “The fall is a time to gather our inward forces and fuse the worlds of spirit with our will.” So as we gather ourselves together, communing with each other in the intimacy of smaller and closer spaces, what *WILL* we be?

What kind of *community* will we be?

Will we drive each other farther out into disconnection and confusion? Or will we invite each other home: to connection, to remembering what really

matters?

What kind of community will we be?

What will we reward, encourage, uplift in each other? Will it be the things we do, the things we achieve, the markers and measures of external success? Or will it be the quality of the heart we bring to **whatever** it is we do?

What kind of community will we be?

What will we allow to be our motivation? There is only one real question here, the others being variations on the theme:

Will we be driven by fear, or will we be inspired by love, and a total awareness of beauty?

Let us contemplate this question. The answer in our hearts is always clear. The work is simply a practice of learning to listen, making space for the still, small voice of love's infinite language to express itself.

Now if you will join me in closing your eyes, focus your attention on a place in the very center of yourself.

There is a space between your front and your back—not on your chest but in it. It is the place where the vertical line of your body, expressing itself as you stand tall into the world, meets the horizontal line of arms outstretched to either side, helping you find your steadiness as you walk this finest line of balance that is a human life.

In the place where those two lines meet, that is where you will find yourself, and it is FROM that place that you will find another. Breathe into that space. Feel the familiarity there, the warmth. In all you do, in all you say—both to others and to yourself—make space for **that**.

Let that be the space that expresses itself **through** you.

And may our descent into these holy nights be bright, and full of wonder.