

Abundant Possibility, Here and Now

Good morning. How is everyone doing this beautiful Sunday morning? Life is good, yes? *Can I hear an Amen?* I told the Book Club group I was going to say that today. It just means *so be it, or and so it is*. Life is incredibly interesting right now...but all in all, for those of us here this morning, life is good. What is it that Rev. Andriette from the Oakland CSL says? I am grateful for absolutely everything, and I have no complaints whatsoever! Isn't that a great way to walk through life?

We find ourselves in an unprecedented time...a time that offers the largest opportunity in the history of the planet for transformation. Sometimes we hesitate to move willingly into change, and so now we don't have a lot of choice. We're being faced by more changes every day. Has it been a little disorienting for anyone? I know it has for me, but it has certainly gotten my attention.

There we were, just strolling along through life, when all of a sudden, life as we knew it is gone...at least for the time being. Each of us was doing whatever we were doing...we, as a community, were just getting our feet wet as a new and thriving Beloved Community...and suddenly, our processes have been disrupted, to say the least. Thanks to the amazing commitment and flexibility of our community, we continue to thrive, but we've had to do some quick shifting.

Humans tend to see disruption as a negative thing. Have you noticed? But disruption can be positive...it can lead to radical creativity and transformation. And I believe with all of my heart that one of the greatest transformations, one of the biggest paradigm shifts in our history is underway. And looking at the state of our world, I would say that change is coming in the right and perfect time.

Thanks to all of the changes we are experiencing, some of us are finding that we have a lot more time on our hands. And to me, that means that we have an unprecedented opportunity to grow spiritually, which can only help to smooth the way for personal and global transformation to happen Gracefully. So, today I would like to share what spiritual teacher Craig Hamilton calls *Skills for Surviving the Chaos*. I prefer to call them *Tools for Thriving in Times of Transformation*. There are four qualities or postures that he suggests we can adopt and practice that will ease the anxiety that seems to be thick in the air and leave us grounded in a more peaceful and loving place. For each one, I will offer suggestions for Meditation Practice, but also for *Awakened Life Practice*...the Practice that you can carry with you as you move through your day...*the prayer without ceasing* that the apostle Paul spoke about in the New Testament of the Christian Bible.

As I begin, I want to encourage you to listen in a particular way...

Rather than listening for information, for useful tools that you can apply later, I invite you to listen from the heart...not the place in the center of your chest, but the part of you that is able to attune to Spirit, the part that can feel or sense deeply into the Truth that lies beneath appearances. Let's take a few moments to breathe together, into that heart space.

One of the things that people seem to be feeling right now is that we want to know what is really happening, what is going to happen...we want the truth. There is a lot of uncertainty in many aspects of our lives. To make ourselves feel better, we tell ourselves a story...and that story says that we know...and we're pretty attached to knowing. We are thinking animals. We like to solve problems...we like having the answers. And while it is often useful to try to understand, if we really get honest with ourselves, we don't ever really know from one moment to the next what is going to happen. There are always so many variables...there is no way to know.

One of the greatest things about not knowing is that it offers us an Abundance of Possibilities. By not knowing, we impose no limitation on what can happen. For some people, that's good news...the sky's the limit. For others, the lack of limits is terrifying.

In general, human beings are not comfortable in the unknown. Knowing makes us feel safe, in control. But part of our spiritual awakening is opening to the Mysteries of Life. We begin to see that there will always be things we cannot know, and gradually we begin to loosen our grasp on our need to know, on the need for certainty. Spiritual Awakening enables us to live and to be comfortable in the unknown. We start to discover that *not knowing* is actually more powerful than *knowing*. It makes us receptive to greater possibility. In the unknown, we become humble, flexible, open, and available to the moment. This capacity is one of the most powerful qualities we can access as human beings during challenging times. Instead of merely surviving challenging times, it helps us to *live into* the unknown, to thrive, to be powerful, wise, clear, and creative...and to respond rather than react.

"Okay, fine...but I really like to know what is going to happen." Am I reading your mind, or is that just mine? Fortunately, we can practice letting go of the need to know. In meditation, we can practice letting go. As we sit and relax our bodies, we simply let go and our minds become still, right? Okay, so that's not how the mind works. It is a problem-solving machine and so it just keeps churning on. And that's the good news. Because whatever questions the mind sends up, whatever thoughts arise, we have the opportunity to practice not knowing...resting in the unknown, not needing to know.

This type of meditation is really helpful, but it is even more effective to have practices to call up as we move through the day. I like the name that Craig Hamilton has given these practices...awakened life practices. One way to build the capacity for being comfortable with not knowing is observing your own need to know as it comes up. Do you find yourself wanting to assert how things are or should be? Do you notice that you enjoy having the answers? As you notice your thoughts, you're not making them wrong or judging them. The practice is more like, "What if I don't really need to know that? What are the feelings that are driving this need to know?" It is really just mindful self-reflection.

Okay, moving onto the second quality or posture that is helpful during times of challenge or change...the spiritual quality of equanimity. This means not being knocked off center...being rooted in a depth that is unaffected by the ups and downs of life...not being whipped from side to side by the volatility of the world. It means that whatever happens in the world outside or inside me, I'm fundamentally centered in a place that is not affected. Another word for equanimity might be poised...a perfect blending of peace, power, and presence.

Does this mean I feel great, or am happy, all the time? No. It's not about how we feel...it's beyond emotions. It is being so deeply rooted that we can allow our feelings to come and go as they do without reacting to them or from them.

Just think about a big, strong tree with roots going down into the earth, keeping it solid in the midst of a storm, flexing and bending as needed, but standing firmly planted when the storm dies down...or like a giant boulder sitting in a river bed...no matter how much water gushes toward it, no matter how deep the water gets, the boulder is unmoved.

What would it be like if even 10% of the world's population lived from this place of complete equanimity? For most of us, this kind of groundedness is not likely to come like a lightning bolt from the heavens...it is something that we can practice, both in meditation and in our daily life.

It's possible, even as I move through the world, being engaged and making things happen, to do whatever I'm doing from a place of groundedness and profound depth. As an *Awakened Life Practice*, I can practice attuning to the place in myself that is solid, deep, still, and does not get blown around by the chaos storming around me. As I'm holding that intention, I can observe what triggers me into reactivity. What causes me to feel off-center? I make it a point to notice, to remind yourself to make room for everything, to not be reactive, to step into the stillness. I can explore what it is like to live from that center.

The third posture that I can take to help myself move through times of change is...are you ready? Surrender. Oh no, not that *again!* It is very helpful to Give up the illusion of control. We all assume a level of control in our lives. And it is often true that the more control we have, the better the outcome. I don't know about you but I want to have control over the car when I'm driving, and its useful to have a sense of control over my finances. But compulsively trying to be in control of every aspect of our lives becomes an obstacle to our awakening, to our spiritual freedom.

Spiritual Awakening is opening us to a way of living in which we are giving up control. Do you see how closely-related this quality is to the first one we talked about? The need to know? In that case, we surrender the need to know, the need for certainty. And in this case, we are surrendering control...and right now, there is so much we don't have control over. It's actually a good time for us to practice surrendering. In our meditation, it means letting go of what is happening, of trying to make anything happen, being content with what is...with how you are right now...not trying to change anything at all. Not trying to feel peaceful, not trying to slow your mind, not trying to give your mind something to focus on...just letting it be...not needing things to be any other particular way, not insisting that something is wrong...or should be other than it is. It means allowing one moment to unfold into the next without trying to steer or control it...not even releasing anything...just letting everything be as it is.

In our daily life, it is important to remember that surrender is not a kind of passivity, accepting everything that happens as though it happens for a reason and not trying to do anything about it. In meditation, yes. In life, no. So then how can we bring this practice of surrender into an *Awakened Life Practice*? I have to be willing to see things as they are...not avoiding the factual reality, not ignoring uncomfortable situations. I have to have the courage to face what is, to take an honest look at whatever is going on in my life or in the world. This is really an active surrender...I become fluid, flexible, agile. If I'm really in touch with what's going on, there is a greater opportunity for me to move and flow with life. I can more quickly respond to changes.

Finally, there is one more posture that is really helpful as we navigate challenging times...Not waiting for a better future. Sometimes when we are in the midst of uncertainty, there is a temptation to just sit still and wait...looking ahead for when things are different, when things are better. One of the most challenging things to really know or embody is reality in its very essence, and we, in our essence, are already whole and complete, lacking nothing. We live our lives as though there is somewhere to get to in our future. We live as

though we have not done enough of our work to fully let go, to live life full-out. We put off fully living until some unknown future time because this moment doesn't seem adequate.

I have a secret for you...there are always things that can be better, both inside and outside. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't live as fully as possible, here and now, and in every moment. There is no better moment yet to come. This moment is it...this moment is already full to overflowing. "The sacredness, the illumination I am seeking, has always been here. I am already that which I am seeking." (Craig Hamilton) Once I get this, the illusion of lack is shattered. I am flooded with the knowledge, the experience of fullness and completeness, of perfection. There is nothing missing.

Times such as these are perfect for practicing the fullness of this moment because when we look around, it seems like things are so imperfect. In meditation, I can let go of the idea of a better future...I can embrace this moment as the only moment...let go of the idea that there is something wrong with this factual reality...that something is missing...whatever I am experiencing is enough. Even with everything happening in the world, life is good. I can embrace the moment, exactly as it is. Today is the only day...This is the moment we have been waiting for.

How do I bring this into an *Awakened Life Practice*?

I can practice being a *Whole-hearted Yes to life* in every moment. When I realize that there is nothing to wait for, nowhere to go, I have the opportunity to be fully present, fully alive to the moment I am in, to the situation at hand. As I give up, postponing...opening to my Essence...opening to the Infinite Wisdom and Power that are ever-present and inherently mine, I can give myself fully and the floodgates open...and I find that I have what I need in every moment. When I let go of the need to know and to control, when I let go of waiting and live fully in every moment, and when stand rooted in equanimity, I am carried by the ever-present Grace of the Divine. God is my Source and my Nature. And the same is true for you.

Let's pray...