

February 19, 2007

- *Spiritual growth through relationships*

You are all gathered together as a single spirit. Of course you are individuals, but in spirit you are one. It is easy for you to sense this when you share a common place along the path of spiritual growth, but it is also true of all human beings. Every human being shares as a participant in the same single unified spirit.

A tree has many colors and hues and shapes even though it is a single tree. You identify a tree by its collective shape, but you recognize its elements as being individualized. It is precisely this way that each of you belongs to a unified spirit, although you have different shapes, different characteristics, different needs, different objectives, different sensitivities. These differences, when viewed with a broader perspective, meld together into a single unit. All human beings belong to this tree.

Each collection of creation has its own tree and together they comprise the forest, and that forest has shape, has depth, has an identity, has a purpose, and is part of the totality of all that is considered to be God's realm. You can identify many trees within the forest, but within that forest are countless other trees of which you are totally unaware. If you were to back away from that forest, you would recognize the forest but you would be unable to see the details or identity of each tree.

It is this kind of reality that characterizes what God has created. You are aware of that creation from your own vantage point, and yet there is much that is beyond your view. What lies beyond is of no less importance than what lies within.

There was much conversation in your gathering this evening dealing with relationships. Your lives are characterized completely through your relationships—your relationships with others, your relationships with your environment, and most especially your relationship with yourself. All human beings find times when they are confronting demons of one kind or another. The greatest demon that impacts your lives is the demon of self-awareness, and with that, self-respect. If you are to engage constructively with relationships, you must also account for your relationship to yourself. This is easy to say but it is also a lifelong ambition. It is an effort that is never fully concluded, for each of you and all human beings attempt to understand yourselves within a wider community. The community may be academic, may be family, may be a community of worship in absolute silence, but it is nevertheless a community. It is important for everyone to recognize that it is not just you as an individual who must come to terms with yourself, but it is for all individuals to establish their own firm footing.

Difficulties in relationships always emanate from self. If you have difficulty with the actions or beliefs of another, the difficulty is yours. It may not lie only on the shoulders of others. If one nation or one community is in conflict with another, the real difficulty stems from that community or nation experiencing the difficulty, for each

February 19, 2007

nation, each community, each individual interacts with the environment from the only perspective they can have...that is, their own.

We ask you often to place yourself in the position of another. In asking this, we never expect that you will take another's actions or beliefs as your own, but rather that you come to understand that the actions or beliefs of others are always based on the perspective of the other. If you disapprove of what a group espouses, you must always acknowledge that what they believe, they believe. Those beliefs are not formed to be in opposition to yours. They are formed because it is what they believe. Every nation, every group, every individual holds a certain set of beliefs, and it is those owned beliefs, those relationships with themselves, that motivate interaction. Conflict, as you understand it, is therefore a disagreement in perspective. The perspective is not set up in opposition to anything. The perspective is the perspective.

When you seek understanding in your relationships with others—family, associates, communities—you must always acknowledge that the actions you observe are based on firmly held beliefs and understandings. You may disagree with what someone does, but that action is based on conviction. You are never asked to agree with all points of view. You are never asked to be in agreement with all variety of actions. But you are asked to acknowledge the basis for those actions, the commonly held beliefs. In doing so, you affirm the value of that entity with which you are in conflict.

Human life is about relationships. The spiritual growth that you achieve comes as a result of your growth in your relationships. There is little growth of the kind that is essential to your soul, that takes place when everyone is in full agreement with everyone, for there is no need to reach out to try to understand. There is no effort expended to affirm. There is no energy required to act compassionately. Growth of the spirit comes through your relationships. You grow in your relationship to yourself. You grow in your sense of self-respect. You grow in your relationship to others. You grow in your ability to affirm. This is why you are given human life. There are other life-forms occupied by spirit, but those forms are the halls of a different kind of learning. The learning that is needed is not the kind achieved within the human experience. You are given your life because of the need to grow through that experience.

Conflict is never pleasant and it is because of that that learning takes place. You do not become stronger sitting in a chair. You become stronger through the use of muscles in activity, in meeting resistance, be it gravity or some other kind. It is in engaging that resistance that you become physically stronger, and it is likewise in engaging resistance in your relationships that you become spiritually stronger.

Life is not for the faint-hearted. Life is to be grasped and embraced "warts and all," as you would say. Life is not intended or designed to be free and easy, but when you meet challenges along the way, the growth is achieved by their encounter, not by their avoidance. So you must welcome conflict, not because of its comfort but because of its nourishment. You are nourished by all that surrounds you. You are nourished by

February 19, 2007

humankind. You are nourished by nature, even when nature threatens and destroys. There is a nourishment that nevertheless takes place. You are nourished by the air you breathe, by the impurities that are contained within. This nourishment is the foundation for growth. It does not mean all is pleasant or enjoyable. It doesn't mean that all nourishment is easily seen as being helpful. You are nourished through your human experience. This nourishment can only be recognized from the perspective of spirit. The growth in the forest continues regardless of a tree falling or a branch breaking. The growth nevertheless proceeds.

Your lives therefore grow and expand even at times when you feel defeated or threatened. You grow in illness as well as health. You grow through the challenge, for growth is the natural state of spirit. Spirit never withers. It is never defeated. It is never diminished. It grows ravenously or it grows slowly, but it always grows.

There is nothing in your lives that prevents the spirit from this growth, and yet all in your lives contains what is needed to nurture that growth, to give it strength and a resilience and a vision and illumination. Your lives are a gift to each other, but they are gifts to you as individuals. You must expend energy in your desire to formulate the positive and beneficial relationship with yourself.

When the battery is charged, it is capable of assisting the production of great light. Think of your spirit as a battery, but the kind of battery that never gets weaker and only gets stronger with use. It is the opposite of what you know to be the truth about batteries, but your soul is a kind of anti-matter. It grows through challenge. It grows through illness. It grows through difficulty. It grows when used. Each of you, therefore, has within your own abilities a capacity to charge and to recharge and to recharge.

Your lives are comprised of all that is able to give strength to the soul. An individual who approaches life through the awareness of spirit is nourishing the soul every moment. The individual who is not aware of spirit provides the home for the spirit to develop on its own. The spirit therefore always grows, but the growth that is needed is much enhanced and is strengthened in its own ability to enhance other spirits.

You don't live on an island. Your spirit does not exist in isolation. Your spirit is meant to mingle with other souls. You as a result are meant to interact with others in the course of your life. You must embrace the value of interaction and you must embrace the value of self-respect, the value of the awareness of spirit and the value of using that awareness as the guiding strength in the wider world, regardless of how that world may be defined.

Each of you is on a mission. Take up the challenges. Welcome them. Be engaged in prayer that focuses on spirit and you will be directed in all ways toward the Spirit Center and the light of God.

You are bathed in that Light. You are blessed in your awareness. You are blessed by each other. You are blessed in your awareness of the loving spirits that

February 19, 2007

serve as reflectors and transmitters of the essential love that unites *all* that has been created. Rejoice! Rejoice!

Amen.