

## A Hundred Ways...

Dr. Rebecca Nunley

I would like to begin with a few lines of familiar poetry from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet, Jalal ad-din Rumi

“Today, like every other day we wake up empty and frightened. Don’t open the door to the study and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.”

The first time I heard that I thought, “Oh yeah, I get it everyone is different.” But for me there is a BIG difference in hearing the words and comprehension, much less shifting the way I view reality.

My studies these past three and a half years have provided a wonderful door to awakening and shifting my views of “reality”. I have participated in spiritual practices with masters from many traditions, Native American, Yoruba, Hindu, Sufi, and what I call Mystical Christianity. We have written and told our stories, sang, danced, hummed, drummed, chanted, practiced chi gung, prayed with our bodies, drawn with crayons and interrupted international scholars to watch a monarch emerge. Through out every moment, the constant current remains – find your path, speak your heart, and your contribution is unique.

Attending First Presbyterian these 21 years, there has been little argument – God dwells within. It required some effort for me to expand my understanding to include God within and all within God. If God is within and I am in God, how do I hear? If my life is unique, my creativity unduplicated how do I know what is true for me?

One translation of our theme “awakening” in my life would be giving up control. When I connect or touch that reality of Divine Love – my

life changes, I loosen my grip. It feels a little bit like what I was promised in the altar calls of my childhood, only it is much more subtle. A few years ago, after several weeks of one of my meditation efforts, I still can't bring myself to call what I do meditating – I call it sitting, Richard asked me, "Have you noticed you aren't yelling so much?" I was shocked; I really hadn't noticed the change.

In some ways, I feel like I am representing that Parsifal element today. You remember Parsifal, the bumbling fool who stumbled onto the Holy Grail. I am quite confident that my efforts are never enough, never right. And somehow by being willing to try no matter how "not right" my efforts have been – when I open the door spirit enters and with patience I see the results in my life. And like Parsifal I am learning, I am getting better at noticing the many blessings that surround me.

So, awakening doesn't have anything to do with being perfect or doing it perfectly. There isn't a right or wrong way. And each of us has to find our own way. Everyone has a different path. No one knows what is right for you – but you. In the meantime while you are searching, maybe even considering a search – I would encourage you to give every opportunity that comes your way a try. I have been stunned by the wide array of paths that lay at our feet. I particularly like this image from Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna – was a Hindu Sadhu who lived from 1836-1886. He used this metaphor to describe the different religious traditions....he is speaking here of the Divine Mother.

"The Mother, he tells us, cooks 'the whitefish of awareness' in different ways, depending on the appetite and taste of her children; some like it with slices of mango, some like it cold, some plain as Zen, but everyone is still eating the same fish...."

Ramakrishna was an unusual mystic as he pursued "awakening" in different traditions, following the mystical paths of Islam, Christianity, and a variety of Hindu sects. His experiences led him to honor all paths and faiths as leading to a single Truth. This led to one of the

key concepts of Ramakrishna's teachings; the unity of God and the harmony of religions.

I agree with Ramakrishna and a host of other teachers that many paths lead to the same truth. Andrew Harvey likens the “whitefish” image to a great smorgasbord – find the taste you like – among a beautiful variety of traditions. With information so widely available to us, sample the various traditions, and as Rumi suggested “Let the beauty you love be what you do”

Sally McFague suggested writing our personal spiritual truths, reducing them to simple phrases that we can use in our daily lives, to help us remember and connect. To follow McFague’s suggestion, I would like to share two phrases important to me. Studying the universe story also known as the new cosmology has helped me embrace that “All of life is connected.” My second phrase comes from a poem by Telliard de Chardin, “Patient Trust in Ourselves and the slow work of God.”

So why would anyone want to “awaken?” I would suggest that awakening opens our day to day lives beyond our own minds, beyond our own imaginations– offering the chance to connect with a larger reality that brings peace, joy and unimagined opportunities to enrich our lives. Please don’t think I have been cured of yelling or losing my temper. Awakening doesn’t require or provide a cure; I am only hoping to continue to learn as each teacher arrives.

To close,

Today, like every other day we wake up empty  
And frightened. Don’t open the door to the study  
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground. –

I included this poem in my notes and chose as I ended which of the two to share. This is one of my cornerstones.

**Patient Trust in Ourselves and the Slow Work of God**  
Pierre Teilhard De Chardin (adaptation by Alexandra Kovats)

Above all, Trust in the slow work of God.  
We are, quite naturally,  
impatient in everything to reach the end  
without delay.  
We should like to skip  
the intermediate stages.  
We are impatient of being  
on the way to something unknown,  
something new.  
And, yet, it is the law of all progress  
that it is made by passing through  
some stages of instability - -  
And that it may take a very long time.

And so I think is it with you.  
Your ideas mature gradually - -  
Let them grow,  
let them shape themselves,  
without undue haste.  
Don't try to force them on,  
as though you could be today  
what time (that is to say grace and  
circumstances acting  
on your own good will)  
will make you tomorrow.

Only God could say what this new spirit  
gradually forming within you will be.  
Give our God the benefit of believing  
that God's hand is leading you,  
and accept the anxiety of  
feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete.

