

BARE
NAKED
at the
REALITY
DANCE

Journal One

Suzanne Selby Grenager



BAKULA
BOOKS

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PART I

Feet to the Fire
with Maha



August into October 2004



August 17, 2004

It's Time to Climb Again

I spend—make that *waste*—oodles of time doing ordinary things like drinking that wine of mine, eating meats, sweets and practically everything else but roadkill. I read cheesy magazines to “keep up.” I watch TV and movies I could definitely do without. I get my hair cut and colored to look younger and prettier. I make up my aging face for public consumption for precisely that reason, and I shop (speaking of consumption) for the same *keeping up appearances* purpose. Most wasteful though is the fretting I do about it all.

Still, what's so wrong with that? Nothing is *wrong*, except unlike most people who do that and way worse, I've been knocked awake and trained by the best of them to be anything but ordinary: a spiritual scribe, if I daresay it. Yes. A spiritual scribe is who I am and what I am meant to be. When I stop to remember, I know it like my many names. There is no excuse but fear to keep me from living my destiny. *Thy will be done, oh Lord, not mine.*

Now that I see I have been hiding out under the mantle of ordinary—as if I didn't know who I am and what I am meant to be up to—the trick is not to *hate* myself for it. The trickier trick is to let the new awareness transform me. Must I fall apart and wallow in shame, or writhe in physical pain, as I've often done before in the interest of personal growth and transformation?

Maybe. Or just maybe I can instead say yes to the query my soon-to-be life coach Maha recently posed for me: *Are you ready to grow without pain?* What a great question! And God knows I'd like to be. So here's what *I* want to know: Is it time to pick myself up and make my way—gently this time—over the next ridge? Might I be able to move toward expansive views and heightened awareness without going to hell and back every other step of the way?

I have traveled too far to go back, and I know too much to forget, two resonant clichés that present two more simple questions for me: *Where am I? What do I know?*

I am at the further reaches of the plateau I've been walking for a while. Standing still is not an option, though I sure wish it were. What I know is it's time to climb again—with renewed patience and greater surrender and trust. I must ask for and be open to receive all the help I can get.

I must remember that however lonely I sometimes feel, I am not alone, and that grace is a state we don't have to *earn*, not in the usual sense of the word, tit for tat.

Grace is a state we don't have to earn, not in the usual sense of the word, tit for tat.

Grace happens when we waltz our cumbersome minds out of the way of the heart and soul. Grace is re-*mem*bering, embodying again in our members, the knowledge we are born with and forget—that *I am The Way, The Truth and The Life*. I am that, for where else would wisdom reside but in the divinely inspired beings that I am and you are? When we abide in the pure awareness that is grace, we know that *we are the one we have been waiting for*.

Are these mere words I write, or are they transmissions of truth? Are they grace come to life on the page? I do not

know for sure. I do know I resonated with the sweet words of Eckhart Tolle's *Stillness Speaks* earlier this morning. And now it's my own words creating in me a cosmic pulsation. Our words, his and mine, have the power to move us because they are not *his* words and *my* words. The words we write from our hearts are *our* words—whether Tolle's, mine or yours. What comes through me now is not by or for me alone; it is a universal expression, the sum total of humankind thrumming to the wordless harmony we call life.

Ego cannot understand these heartfelt words of ours. All it knows to do is wordlessly grasp, and grasp some more. It is ever fearful that it won't get what it wants, or that it will get what it doesn't want, and will be miserable either way. Ego knows only the words it's been told and has taken to heart—a pack of heartbreaking lies. We live our lives for those lies, and our hearts *are* broken.

They are broken, but they are not broken *open*, which would bring us everything the lies promise but do not deliver, and so much more.

No, our hearts are *broken*, as in crippled, stunted, diseased and useless, anything but open. We know nothing of love—*agape*—the only thing we have ever

We know nothing of love — agape — the only thing we have ever wanted.

wanted. What a sorry state of affairs! Yes, I see that is where I am and where we are, the sad wide world of us. Now for how to fix it, that broken heart of *mine* first off.

August 20, 2004

If I Were Bapuji

It's the day before my son—Trond's and mine—was born thirty-three years ago. I will not live that long again. *So much to do, so little time*, quips my mind as if to goad me on. But I won't be goaded. The weather changed yesterday from soft summer sky and 80 degrees to dark, gloomy and cold. Here in our Nova Scotia summer cottage, I am bundled up and hunkered down against the rain, fog, chill, and that goading mind of mine. With Trond gone back to Pennsylvania to tend to business, I'm here alone all week and feeling anxious.

Yesterday, I felt better for a bit, thanks to calls with two of my life coaching clients, where I got to bring much of who I am to bear. I was bolstered, too, by the prospect of a massage, which turned into a session of deep painful shoulder work. The idea was to get at the ingrained tensions that have lately held my poor neck stiff as a proverbial board. It was not a “feel good” massage, nor meant to be. Nor is this latest Nova Scotia masseuse of mine the gifted healer Kim Beckett is, she who used to hold and love me like an angel.

Oh, God, how can I do that for myself? How, please, can I pick up the abandoned child inside, hold her close and roll her back into the heart? *So much to do, so little time*, methinks again. The inner fog persists and I am unclear about what is mine to do with the shrinking time I have left. Okay, it's to *bring more love*, I know it, but how to do that gently and effectively. How, please, do I spread love

around—or better yet, awaken it in others’ hearts, as my blessed Bapuji did?

Bapuji kept silence, meditated ceaselessly, and wrote. He had no family or ordinary life like mine. People gave him shelter and brought him food. There was nothing he had to do but pray, and even that was his choice. If I would be like Bapuji, and I’d like to be, I’ve got a challenge—the package I am wrapped in, a very different disguise from a swami’s saffron robes.

But the American Girl is a disguise of sorts, too, a persona embodying the sadhak yogini and scribe beneath.

This journal writing is starting to feel truer than any other way I know to share the awareness growing wild in me, and with it, Bapuji’s love. What better means than this direct and simple one to inspire those who know they are looking for love but look in all the wrong places—outside themselves. How better than this humble diary medium to kick-start disgruntled souls who know something is not right but, like me once (and *still* sometimes), haven’t a clue what’s the matter.

I read some of this recent writing aloud to my original life coach Kimberly, and to my soon-to-be new one, Maha. I found myself moved by the spare truth I’ve laid down

Bapuji, which means beloved Grandfather, was the nickname for Swami Kripalvananda, for whom the Kripalu Yoga that I practiced and taught for many years was named. Bapuji came to America from India in 1977 to bestow his blessings on his spiritual grandchildren at the Kripalu Center, then located in my state of Pennsylvania. So I was often in his presence during the four-and-a-quarter years he surprised us all by staying.

And I was far more affected by him than I realized until I began turning my journal into a book and found his wise, loving influence throughout.



on the page, which they both told me moved them too. I've been putting pen to the great white void of this black sketchbook without much thought or effort these days, the words arriving in the same easy out-of-the-blue way my poems came in the year 2000—as naked, unimpeded wisdom from the heart.

The American-Girl-in-Canada hears a knock on the cottage door. If I were Bapuji, it would be a disciple bringing me breakfast. But no, when I put down my pen and get up to answer the door, I see it's our carpenter friend and neighbor Pat and his painter sidekick, here in Trond's absence for a consult with me about finishing the floor of the guest loft above the new garage.

We look at samples, we make a plan. They thank me and leave, returning me reluctantly to the page. But it is no longer the act of writing itself (which used to terrify me), or even the frequent householder interruptions, that tests me most. The bigger challenge has been to see if I can write in a way that feels right for public consumption, though I'm not sure that's it either. *Am* I to write for public consumption? Who says? My ego for sure, though lately my heart has chimed in. My greatest challenge may be simply to sit

Surrender is a spiritual concept having little to do with the white flag of defeat. The antidote to making life happen from willful mind, surrender is about letting life happen through the heart. In Christian parlance, surrender is alive in the words, "Thy will be done, Oh Lord, not mine."



myself down consistently to write what feels right for me.

I've never been much for discipline, so years ago when Bapuji offered us *surrender* I glommed onto it like a baby bird to its mommy's worm. "Love, service and *surrender*"

was his motto and his mantra. It summed up the way he lived and the values he encouraged us seekers to embrace.

Maha believes far more in discipline than I've cared—or is it *dared?*—to do. But is my stout defense of surrender over her practice of will simply a reactionary response on my part? No doubt I am anti-authoritarian: *I want to do what I want to do, and not what I don't.* It's the refrain of a rebellious little girl who was not the one her parents ordered, knew deep down she never would be, and didn't like trying to meet their expectations one bit. Is Maha my new Mommy? Maybe, but even if the seditious child has kicked in here, mightn't it be okay, maybe best, for me to do only what I want to do?

Discipline isn't an issue when we do what we love to do. But I need to know what that is. *Is it to share my writing more widely?* If

Discipline isn't an issue when we do what we love to do.

so, which writing are we talking about? And might I have to discipline myself to do it? Possibly not. The journal words, which speak from the heart to the heart—like Bapuji's life and presence, I hope—flow as naturally as my breath. Little *discipline* needed. The words come through me from heart to hand to pen to page with ease and, yes, grace. *It is what it is* and whatever *it is*, I feel it changing me in ways my calculated writing never has.

Unlike individual articles about something I have done or known, or the memoir I started, which rehashed and tried to make sense of the past, this writing makes sense of the here and the now, as it happens; it helps me face the emotional challenges of this moment, turning my fear back to love today. When I start with what's up for me personally in this minute, I seem to move naturally from my particular

situation to what feel like larger life lessons, rife with universal truths for us all.

I started this regular journal-writing practice to bring the clarity, emotional resolution and peace of mind that keep me grounded in myself. Both kinds of writing, the journal by hand I do for me and the stories on the computer that I composed with a reader in mind, may

Life coaching is a service that helps people clarify their values, appreciate their strengths and align their lives with who they most essentially are. After my multi-faceted career as a teacher, writer, yoga instructor, mentor and body-mind therapist, life coaching seemed like a natural follow-on, bringing all of me to bear as it does. I love that the work is over the phone, leveling the playing field. And I love its premise that clients know best how to create a life of fulfillment and joy uniquely their own. Unlike traditional therapy, which explores what's wrong, goes back and asks *why*, coaching builds on what's right, urges clients forward and asks *why not*.



add to my store of wisdom, and the larger world's. But this journaling, which feels almost like *transmission*, is more organic and compelling by far. How these two types of writing might come together to create the book I have long meant to write—perhaps along with my poems—remains a wide open question.

If Maha can help me think this through, she will be of invaluable service. Now I am off to read her “Welcome to Life Coaching” materials in advance of our first official call.

August 24, 2004

A House Divided

Life is a great festival and I am an honored guest. I remember that most mornings, so long as I sit still reading words that encourage gratitude and equanimity. I gaze out the trio of floor-to-ceiling windows in our living room and am treated to a panoramic view of Mill Cove and sky. It looks like a big three-panel Georgia O'Keefe cloud *oeuvre* I once saw. A massive mottled rock anchors my view in the middle of the center window, but *I*, I notice, am not anchored in my middle.

A gull catches the wind and sails across the soft blue canvas peopled with pale gray clouds, which slowly threaten to overtake and fill it. A great green tree framing my view on the left shakes its multitude of leaves for a minute and then goes still as a painting. It's another beautiful Nova Scotia morning, and I am still here alone, and in a way not here and not entirely alone.

Again this morning I am a house invaded and divided by my mind, and I am sick of it. The rude machinations of my head are keeping me from the wholeness of my heart. While I am wise enough to know that none of this is me—and that *all* of it is—I continue to choose suffering.

This is not serious suffering we are talking about, but a low-grade insipid malaise I apparently enjoy being stuck in. Ever since Trond left to return to Pennsylvania, I've felt abandoned, not by him, but by me. I am angry and disappointed I am not doing more—in his absence and in general—to share myself and my presumed gifts, as a writer,

teacher and inspirational force, with the larger world in need of love. Isn't it about time?

A nano-second later, I am flooded with doubt about what I have to offer anyway. "Who do you think you are?" my ego taunts me. How can you presume to be an example to others when you are such a mess yourself? Let Tolle and Byron Katie, who seem freer by far, be the teachers. Where

has your so-called pathless path gotten you that you should dare to share it with the wide world?

Byron Katie, the author of *Loving What Is*, developed a radical process called The Work. It involves asking ourselves four questions about anyone or anything we judge or find difficult. Her truth-baring practice inevitably has us turning the spotlight back on the self to discover the source of the problem within. Katie's process has inspired my coaching and personal growth work.



Okay, ego, you are right—I've been undone this week, and not exactly willing to do what needs to be done to undo my undoneness. That, my path suggests, is to be *in it, with it, okay with it*, letting myself come as undone as God would have me

do. How does that work? You stop getting in your way, Suzanne. You let go of any agenda but *being here now* and *loving what is*—thank you, Tolle and Katie. And thank *you*, Suzanne, for stopping to remember what you, too, know.

A fat brown-striped kitty strides into view through the living room window, crossing our deck for a sec before just as quickly disappearing. I smile. But *sans* the distraction, the twinge in my colon and tightness around my heart, which I've felt all morning, are right back at me. I take a quick, deep breath in, and let it out with a sigh.... Okay, there's a little more life in you now, girl.

I begin to move out of my head, where stuckness starts and stays, breathing a sallow, shallow life of its own. But along with paying attention, this writing about what I notice is a way to work with it, to reclaim the heart by dropping (or lifting) me into the so-called Higher Self, where there is compassion for the so-called lower one—the poor, egoic part of us. I love

to write this way, *and* I don't want to give up my dream of writing a real book. Maybe I don't have to. It has been suggested—even, we know, by me to myself in a bold moment—that rather than trying to write *a magnum opus*, I locate someone to type up these handwritten notes and make *them* into a book.

Scary as it is, that idea causes less churning in my stomach than the thought of turning articles I've written into proper chapters, writing more of them, and organizing it all into a proper tome. That means something too. But it all feels hard at the moment, and I know hard is never what's needed. Soft, easy, peaceful, *surrendered*, is always, in all ways, the way. Why the fuck can't I live it?

Ah, but hear the violence, the hardness of heart toward yourself, my dear, in that angry F-worded question. Oh, dear God, why are we so hard on ourselves—and we nearly all are. Why can't we more easily see that our intentions are good, as God knows they are, when we are conscious

God is a term I seem to use interchangeably with life, reality, Source, the universe, love, and the Self of All (the latter also my synonym for what some call the non-egoic soulful Higher Self). God is the word that slips out when I feel particularly inspired by life's mystery. Do I believe in God? I don't know. Maybe, since the God word has shown up often during this writing I let flow.



enough to have intentions at all? We must learn to trust that we are doing our best, a courtesy we grant even strangers who screw up. We must let up on ourselves a bit; we must.

*We must learn to trust
that we are doing our best,
a courtesy we grant even
strangers who screw up.*

I'm beginning to see
I must be willing to be
precisely where I am,
however *hard*, before I

am free to be anywhere else. Surrender—not striving—brings transcendence. If we are not to stay stuck, we must be willing to feel the pain, the exact physical sensations and psychic consequences we've brought on ourselves by choosing strife over surrender. The practice becomes to let life come—everything we perceive within and without—and then, as best we can, to let it go. We can't let go what we haven't let come. We must receive our dear life without holding on for dear life.

I want to be of greater service, I honestly do. Please show me how. Let this morning's coaching call with Maha bring me closer to myself and to what is and is not mine to do and share.

Thy will be done, Oh Lord, not mine.

August 25, 2004

A House United Again

When we live in and from our minds, there is bound to be at least low-level tension, because the *I* that is our mental awareness of ourselves is not lined up with the *I* that is our body. The body is always here *now*, and if we live in the mind, our awareness is in the past or in the future. Mind is the province of dreams and memories (along with figuring out stuff, which creates a tension all its own). But to the extent we are thinking about anything at all, we are not fully present in our bodies, which creates the tension of separation. We are a *house divided*—body from mind—and nobody is home.

For as it's famously said, home is where the heart is, and when we live in our heads, we are heartless, homeless, lost. We think our thoughts, speak our words and decide to act without being informed by Source, the truth and love that we are. Lacking our inner compass, we miss the point, the very reason for our existence—to love and be loved from and for *all* of who we are. We think we are supposed to do something brilliant out there, when all we really need to do is bask in our innate brilliance.

Jesus got it right, even if many who took his name did not. He said: *I am*

the light of the world, and there's every reason to think that is also our destiny, yours and mine. For when I drop out of my

We think we are supposed to do something brilliant out there, when all we really need to do is bask in our innate brilliance.

head into the heady, holy terrain of the heart, there can be no difference between who I am and who Christ was and is. We are all cut from the same divine cloth, sweet relics of the God who made us and who would have us return as simple supplicants to his holy lotus feet.

I only know these truthful things (if often dimly) when

The phrase "**holy lotus feet**" is part and parcel of the path of yoga, with its gurus and disciples. Bowing down to and even kissing the guru's feet, which are said to be as pure and fruitful as the thousand-petalled lotus flower, is an act of reverence for a yoga devotee. In this way, the disciple puts her head below her heart, symbolizing (and ultimately realizing) a surrender of her will to the higher good the guru represents. For me, the term is synonymous with humility and love.



I suspend thought. And that, it turns out, is both all the discipline we need, and for some of us, the hardest thing in the world to do. The trick is to stop the mind, stunning her into sweet stillness before she knows what's hit her.

That's what I do first thing in the morning here in Nova Scotia while Trond is away. I get up, change out of my pajamas or not, and quickly fix my ritual black tea with cream and honey.

Settling into the old blue and vanilla striped couch we brought here from the farm, I gaze down at the rippling waters of Mill Cove and out across the gray rocks. I close my eyes, letting the call of a gull, now the wail of a neighbor's bagpipe, creep in past my mind and return me to inner stillness.

It is remarkably quiet when birds and bagpipe suddenly stop. But it's a vibrant silence, which overcomes me in waves, until I rest in it and it in me. When I set it up like this, full of intention to get ahead and ahold of my mind

before it can get ahold of me—when I do what that takes, which is just about nothing *but* intend—nothing bothers me. Even a phone call from Trond, in Maine making his way north, does not interrupt the palpable flow of peace to and from my heart.

I find myself taking big deep gulps of air now, as if to ground me in this often elusive clarity of mind and fullness of heart. I could sit here all day like this. But I can't, which is to say I won't, because I have an agenda, beginning with an exercise regimen before my coaching call in an hour. Will I maintain the peace while I strengthen my muscles and talk with a client? More importantly, can I accept myself and what arises if I don't? Yes and yes again, so long as I stay connected with that Source we call heart, through the power of Divine Mother's breath.

The concept of **Divine Mother** exists side by side in some spiritual traditions with the idea of a Holy Father. The concept is central to Hinduism, which is closely related to the path of Kripalu Yoga I followed for almost two decades during the 1970s and '80s. For me, Divine Mother represents a powerful feminine energy, which can be awakened and enhanced through deep yoga breathing, known as pranayama, my most enduring and consistent spiritual practice.



September 2, 2004

Hiding Out in My Family No More

Well, it's a whole other day in my once drowsy inner and outer worlds. And to kick things off, here come the clichés: There is no rest for the weary once the happily napping cat is out of the bag—the *weary* in this case being yours truly, and the *cat* being my consciousness. Once we have been awakened, we cannot so successfully fall asleep again, not without a drug habit or other serious addiction; and even then, likely not for long. And awakened I have been, again!

Here I was in sleepy Chester, Nova Scotia, my ego hoping for a vacation of sorts—after all it is summer and we are by the sea—and what do I do? I up and hire a bell-ringer to keep me *up and at it*, week after week after week. And she's good, this one, dangerously good (says my nervous ego). I am talking, of course, about my new life coach Maha.

We had our third phone session yesterday, despite a not-so-clever ploy on my part to avoid it. With Trond back from Pennsylvania, Nora here for her summer visit, and her boyfriend Jack plus Sam and Kayda all on their way, I tried to get myself off the hook, asking Maha if we might postpone the last two of the four coaching calls I'd agreed to. *Couldn't we just wait till everybody went home?*

Not if Maha had anything to say about it, we couldn't. As I feared, Maha caught me in the act of avoidance, saying I am hiding, presumably from myself—and as she bluntly put it, from the work I am here to do. We both

know that isn't about entertaining myself or the family. No, it is soul work: the evolutionary, transformational business of freeing this sometime lost soul of mine from the sticky web of doubts and fears in which it has long been enmeshed.

I've heard tell the longing to be free must be paramount in order to be realized—for us spiritual seekers to be realized. What I see, thanks to Maha, is that *long* as I might, I do not yet long enough. Maha and I agreed on an earlier call that I am dulling myself with drink, and now she shows me I am hiding from myself and my soul work right in the bosom of my family. Oh, God!

Much as I hate to admit it, Maha is right. The yogic scriptures are very clear on this point. If we are to be free and to know God as ourselves, we must be willing to sacrifice everything that is *not* that—*everything*. We may never *have* to renounce it all, but we'd better be ready and willing to. "Give up even thy soul to him," says the authoritative *Sri Guru Gita*, with not a shred of ambiguity.

Lest we miss the point, the same scripture instructs: "Wife or husband thou must release;" the seeker is urged to look way past the family for sustenance. It doesn't mean we must get divorced or retreat to a cave. It means God and guru—and so, the self—are to be honored above all else.

The *Sri Guru Gita*, or "Song of the Guru," has long been my favorite Yogic scripture. I listened to and sang along with a taped English version of it countless mornings over many years. If yoga breathing has been my most enduring yoga practice, chanting the *Sri Guru Gita* was the most inspirational, thanks to its promise of countless blessings, and its heart-opening devotional tone.



I know there is no other way but to be willing to let everything go—and I can hardly bear it. Tears well up, as I comprehend what Maha, in all her fierce courage, is exhorting me to do. “When will you start saying no?” she asked me, and my entire arsenal of defenses rose up as one. “I *do* say no; I have *great* boundaries,” I insisted at first. But even as those words arose in my head, I knew, from the place in my heart that once awakened never sleeps, she spoke the truth: I sell myself and my purpose short, day in, day out, in myriad ways, small and not so small after all.

“Thy will be done, Oh Lord, not mine” is easy to say and to feel as a possibility, while meditating and journaling like this. But to *live* sweet surrender to the soul, in the thick of family life, here, now, in a teensy cottage, overrun however thoughtfully with Trond, Nora, and her much adored dog Delilah playing with her lobster squeaky toy on the other side of a thin wall, that is a challenge—and one I am thankfully starting to see my way through, for the moment if not beyond.

Yep, Maha has shown up to show me that I betray myself. By asking to postpone our calls, which represent my current commitment to my life’s purpose, I relegated my soul to the back burner. It’s one glaring example of how willing I’ve been to find convenient excuses to abandon myself, and forgo my journey to restore *me* to my rightful place on the throne of my heart.

However casual I wanted it to be, I made a solemn commitment, to Maha and to myself, to show up on the phone for coaching every week this month. Now I wanted out, precisely of course because I need practice in staying the course of commitment—to myself, to others, and to God.

Being here writing right this moment is a step toward honoring that commitment. This is sacred time I make for my heart's desires and the chance to speak them on the page. The easy thing to do this morning—what I would have done without Maha's reminders—was to go out and chat with Nora (who just came over from her guest quarters), as any ordinary mother who loves her daughter dearly would do. Trond has been in and out of the cottage, too. I love them both very much, but morning is my holy time. And *I want to do this*, this thing that feeds me and my soul.

This is sacred time I make for my heart's desires and the chance to speak them on the page.

You have a pattern of hiding out in your family. When are you going to say no?

It was with Maha's words ringing in my head—and my heart chiming in—that I excused and recused myself as soon as Nora showed up. After a quick hello, I was back in the relative haven of this little room of mine. I closed the door behind me and sat down on the bed to write. When Nora and Trond got noisy, I popped in earplugs. When I was distracted by Nora throwing balls for Delilah right outside the window I face (where else?), I drew the blinds. There is now a riotous lot of coming and going through the front door just outside my room. Tempted as I've been to give up—if you can't beat 'em, join 'em!—I'm resisting, and getting stronger by the minute as I do.

So this is what commitment looks like. It feels as right as it does strange, to sit here in splendid isolation, tending to me first while my family swirls around in a nearby sphere. I know it might sound selfish and crazy. But Maha

is right: I matter too much not to start saying “no” to soul work distractions. *Thy will be done, Oh Lord, not mine*, and give me the wisdom to know the difference. *Good for me* for letting the truth in Maha’s words resonate with the truth in my soul.

The inquiry I created for myself at the end of the coaching call I didn’t get out of is this: *How can I be true to myself no matter what?* The challenge posed by this question is sure to get even tougher in the next few days, with the arrival of Jack, Sam and Kayda. What I want to do is hold that intention as steadily as I’d hold a meditative gaze upon a flame. I must intend to be true and I must be willing to let go and (as they say) *let God*. Thank you, God; thank you, Maha, and thanks again to me too, for my willingness to keep looking through the daunting darkness for light.

September 4, 2004

Growth without Pain

When we started working together, Maha asked me if I was ready to grow without pain. Though we know I liked the question, I didn't fully get why she was choosing to ask me that, or exactly what she meant, though I had an inkling. Pain is part of life. And for the last three decades, I've tried my best to use angst, which arises when I resist what is, as a tool for the growth of my spirit.

“No pain, no gain” is a familiar litany on the field of sports—and of spiritual development. But I've never believed it. At first, when Lucy's death threw me into psychic pain beyond my wildest imaginings, I wasn't *trying* to use pain to grow. That is simply what happened. My choice to head for Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in 1975 to bear witness to the hideous demise of my oldest dear friend provoked a profound emotional tumult that unwittingly set me on my spiritual path.

The path I chose—or that chose me, which is how it felt—began with Kripalu Yoga, a tool for personal growth if there ever was one. During the first murderous months after losing Lucy, I learned that the dynamic duo of emotional pain and yoga was one hell of a vehicle for a freedom ride, though I didn't yet know the half of it. Over two decades of practicing and teaching yoga, doing the related body-mind work called the Rubenfeld Synergy Method, and plain sitting and squirming in pain, I have gotten better (and better than most, I dare say) at transmuting the challenging experience of fear—and sometimes sheer terror—back to Source love.



I've often done the work, but I've also been stubborn about not doing it. As recently as the last two weeks when Trond was gone, there were times I failed to sit often enough with my angst to turn myself around. That is until Maha and her piercing questions provoked me. Today, a few weeks after she first asked me about growing without pain, I may better understand the question.

What she was asking, I think, is whether I might be willing and able to *choose the challenge of growth*, rather than having to be prompted or forced to it by the presence of unwanted psychic—or physical—irritation. Must I wait for fear, shame or pain to drive me back to myself, the loving Source I always am; or can I really decide to take growthful leaps in that direction when I am well and more or less happy? Might I elect the effort of expansion over complacency while nestled (but not hiding out) in the bosom of my family, in the thick of a full and fulfilling life?

Can I remember to do what it takes to stay self-connected then? After another day or so of shutting my door and putting my soul work first, the answer to Maha's question, I am thrilled to report, is yes. It is the same resounding "yes" she was asking for in my commitment to our work.

Thank you, dear Maha, for showing me I do not have to sacrifice one iota of the self-love and care that promote growth. I need not show my true self the door just because life's everyday demands—or other people—show up at my door. I can decide to put myself first without the benefit of even a minor

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physical or spiritual emergency, and in the midst of a busy life.

The day before yesterday I had four long calls with coaching clients and still created space to sit, feel, and write the last lengthy entry here. Fully booked as I was, I made time for me and my journaling, which made my day. And the well-being I generated by choosing to put myself and my deepest needs first has lasted all through yesterday and into today. The used-to-be hard-won sense that I, sweet soul, am *enough* is with me even now, as I sit alone in the rain, looking forward to a not-so-thrilling day of laundry, housework and grocery shopping.

This gift of myself came to me not through pain. It came to me because I remembered and decided again that there is nothing in this world so precious as maintaining the deepest possible connection to my soul. There is nothing else, *nothing* that feeds me like this quiet joy, this peace that passes all understanding, this embrace of the One that I am, and that we all essentially are.

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Self-transcendence is more dear to me, truly, than husband, children, probably life itself. At last the longing has grown great, and there is no time to waste. I must not and will not let anything tear me away again. That is my sacred intention, shared yesterday with my first (mentor) coach and friend Kimberly. She understands and is glad for me—and for herself, eager as she is to examine her own behavior in this new light that has been shed for us by Maha, and to continue the conversation she and I are also now engaged in—about how we can grow without pain.

Tomorrow is the day my not-so-little brother Sam and sister-in-law Kayda finally arrive, presenting a fresh challenge to my commitment to stay true to myself and to keep writing, even at the risk of offending them, which I dearly don't want to do. Whether in pain or joy, *en famille* or *toute seule*, no matter what the external circumstances, I'm going to try to be true.

I can grow in love without the prompt of fear. I've done it for forty-eight hours, using yoga, mantra, meditation, pranayama and mundane mind to keep returning me to myself. What is new, inspiring and potentially transformative is that I realize far more keenly now that the power is mine to choose self-nurturance always. Like never before, I understand how critical it is to remember to do it. I have long had the tools; now I better appreciate that I can use them in all situations. *Thy will be done, Oh Lord, not mine.* Yes indeed, thank God and everyone involved.

September 13, 2004

A Yogi's Way

Fall is in the air here in Nova Scotia, where I am now alone after a deluge of guests and nonstop socializing that would once have sunk me. Although I withdrew a little into a protective shell, I did my best not to hide out either in or from the family or from myself. And I did not drown. But with all the comings and goings, and the giving over of our bedroom loft and our not-quite-completed garage guest quarters—to Sam and Kayda, and Nora and Jack, respectively—there was very little time in my life, or room in our mini-compound, to be fully attentive to the Self of All that I am. That is not an excuse I hope, but an observation, which serves to remind me of the critical importance of creating the rest of my life as *sacred space* whenever and wherever I can.

But what do I mean by *sacred space*, which is the phrase that came to me in the way words do only when I am in sacred space. I mean if I am to value myself—my soul's vessel—in ways that serve me and the world around me, I must be attentive to the task of conserving my energy, from the inside out, and vice versa. I must protect myself from all influences that rob me of my spirit. As Maha understood and suggested, I *must choose to say no to everything but inspiration*.

Wow. That's a big one. Why? Because it requires I be consistently conscious—*vigilant*—about how what I do, say, think and feel *affects me*. And once I've got that straight, I would have to discipline myself to do only what lifts me up

and not what brings me down. I said “Wow” because I got right away how different my life would look if I followed that newly minted guidance. It would look different on the outside, sure. But if I said no to everything but inspiration, I would instantly reap a quiet joy, contentment and peace on the inside, where it most matters.

But first, how might life be different outside? Well, as we’ve suggested before, I would finally spend—make that *waste* again!—less time watching videos and reading *Time*, *The New Yorker* and other stuff not pointing me to God. I might even cancel my *What Is Enlightenment?* magazine, which I sometimes find off-puttingly intellectual, its profiles of spiritual seekers and descriptions of spiritual tools rarely aflame with the heart-driven inspiration I need for walking a path of love.

Then there’s Bapuji. Last night I began reading spontaneously to Trond from *Pilgrim of Love*. It’s a book about Bapuji compiled by a Kripalu sister disciple, Atma Jo Ann Levitt. Sharing Bapuji stories aloud—stories about and stories told by him—I felt him come alive again. For me, Bapuji stands head and shoulders above everyone as a model of love incarnate. *He is who I would be.*

To live love and let everything else go: that was Bapuji’s path, and it is my challenge. To let heart reign at the expense of whatever may stand in the way, including even my good name. Yep, I must let go of whatever may be left of my mistaken identity, my *reputation*—the way I have wished to be seen in my mother’s, and last week my brother’s, and always others’ eyes. All that must go.

Of course little Suzie still wants to be loved. But the way to love is never through self (or self-image) protection, any more than it is through seeking love from

outside. The way to love is direct. Love thyself and—by absolute extension—you will love your neighbor, and vice versa of course, whichever opportunity for love happens to present itself first. The way to love is love.

You learn this love, if you are lucky enough to have a lick of devotion, as I do, by giving yourself to God, to life, to yourself, to others, to whatever draws you, any

way you can. Chant and dance if you dare. Kiss the ground or the guru's feet, or your dog's wet, sloppy face. Listen to heart-rending music, read scriptures or poetry or whatever words carry your mind to the deeper reaches of your heart, where love lives. Tend to lepers as Mother Teresa did. Walk in the woods, disappear among the trees. Let God have you always, in everything you do.

God realization is the answer, heart's love the quickest way. So why do we avoid it like the plague? Because it is so much easier to hide out in the mind, letting ego drug and drag us, dropping us anywhere but here, now, where heart prevails. It's far simpler to merge with the crowd at the trough of business as usual, to lose ourselves in our material girl (or guy)—to worship Madonna rather than the Christ Child of the heart—because we can almost pull it off; it's *what people do*, and we want desperately to fit in, feel good and get on with pulling off normal.

But I can't do normal so well any more. I leaf through

"Little Suzie" is the name I gave to the "Inner Child." While training to become certified in the body-mind Rubenfeld Synergy Method, I discovered the little girl I once was buried deep inside, alive but not entirely well. I came to realize that, buried though she may be, "Little Suzie" was a force to be reckoned with—best, by loving her to death, as most parents seem unable to do.



those magazines Trond thoughtfully brought back from his trip to Pennsylvania. The well-crafted rhetoric seems empty, when I am even able to pay attention. The news of ugly, ignorant, fear-driven political and personal behavior curdles the sweet milk of love that is my Source. Even my nightly hit of wine can feel sadly dulling now. Once you taste the real nectar again, it's hard to fall for pale imitations.

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I don't pretend to have a passion for God akin to Bapuji's. *All* he seemed to do was practice love, in his meditation, reading, writing, and sitting with us. But the more I taste divine nectar—the Sanskrit word is *amrit* (my once-guru's given name)—the more enticed I am. Love breeds love. Every act of true self-love, like writing my heart out in this journal, quickens the love in me *for* love, bringing me closer to myself, and so to everyone. Love works like that, thank God.

Bapuji must have been addicted to love. He himself said he “could not live a minute without it.” How natural and how utterly abnormal to *love* love so much. Though everyone wants nothing more or less than love, most of us have gone so far afield in our search for it that Bapuji's one-pointed devotion to it stands practically alone, at least among those I've known, or known of.

I am not ready to retreat to a cave, stop speaking for years as he did, or meditate for hours on end, as a few folks I know say they do. But I want more God, more love, and more of the stillness and surrender that point the way. That must mean I want less of everything else. I must want to meditate more, do yoga again, and retreat further from the

world in whatever ways I feel I can (or dare). I am lucky and grateful to live in two quiet places with an understanding family and the relative freedom to say no to much of the craziness that passes for normal on Planet Earth.

But if I am to be a beacon, I must somehow turn up the heat. I must stoke body and mind with the fire of my heart's desire, fueling its inborn capacity to love and be loved. I must go sailing with Trond, and let him make love to me, and make love back. I must wake up to what love does and does not look like, recognizing its myriad forms in a Western woman householder's daily drill.

I must make ongoing adjustments as I stay vigilant to what does and doesn't quicken my heart. As I once wrote in a poem, "love is what happens when there is nothing else going on." It slips in the door when we give up pushing against it or grappling for it (and for and against life itself). That must be why the yogic scriptures say: "When you can surrender in full love to God, you'll rise to the heights of the heaven within. In blissful awakening you'll know your true self, and fathom the depths of the whole universe." Devotional surrender is the most direct path to God, period.

Happily, we really can encourage love through whatever devotional practice we like; there is no one exclusive way. We can best let go into love by making everything devotional practice. We can stay connected to our source in the heart, and make that the business, the purpose, the mission of our every day, and little by little of our whole life. What on earth else is there to do?

So help me please to stop, breathe and *re-member*—literally breathing life and love back into my members again—as often as I can and must. That is a yogi's way.