

# Stalking the Gaps: Embodied Spirituality and Repair of the World

“There is always a temptation to diddle around in the contemplative life, making itsy-bitsy statues.”

Thomas Merton



“There is always an enormous temptation in all of life to diddle around making itsy-bitsy friends and meals and journeys for itsy-bitsy years on end...saying I never merited this grace. I won't have it.

The world is wilder than that in all directions, more dangerous and bitter, more extravagant and bright. We are making hay when we should be making whoopee; we are raising tomatoes when we should be raising Cain, or Lazarus.

Go up into the gaps...Stalk the gaps. Squeak into a gap in the soil, turn, and unlock - more than a maple - a universe. This is how you spend this afternoon, and tomorrow morning, and tomorrow afternoon. Spend the afternoon. You can't take it with you.”

Annie Dillard, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek



**AWE**

**Jason Silva, Youtube**

## Exercise:

- Consider a moment that you would define for yourself as spiritual – what ever that means for you – a moment when you were **awake** and awakened to that part of you that is fully **deeply truly you -- in awe perhaps** - and at the same time **connected to something larger**.
- Jot down words to describe that experience. What happened? What was it like in your body? What did you feel? How did it change you? Your view of life?
- Find a partner...



wholebeing institute

As We Move Toward the Spiritual...

We move toward presence...and toward mindful awareness...

“Through mindfulness we elevate the ordinary into the extraordinary,” Tal Ben-Shahar

“The great gift of a spiritual path is coming to trust that you can find a way to true refuge. You realize that you can start right where you are, in the midst of your life, and find peace in any circumstance. Even at those moments when the ground shakes terribly beneath you—when there’s a loss that will alter your life forever—you can still trust that you will find your way home. This is possible because you’ve touched the timeless love and awareness that are intrinsic to who you are.”

Tara Brach, True Refuge: Finding Peace and Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart



## As We Move Toward the Spiritual...

We move toward wholeness...and toward interconnectedness...

“The simple act of being completely attentive and present to another person is an act of love, and it fosters unshakeable well-being. It is happiness that isn’t bound to a particular situation, happiness that can withstand change.”

Sharon Salzberg, Real Happiness

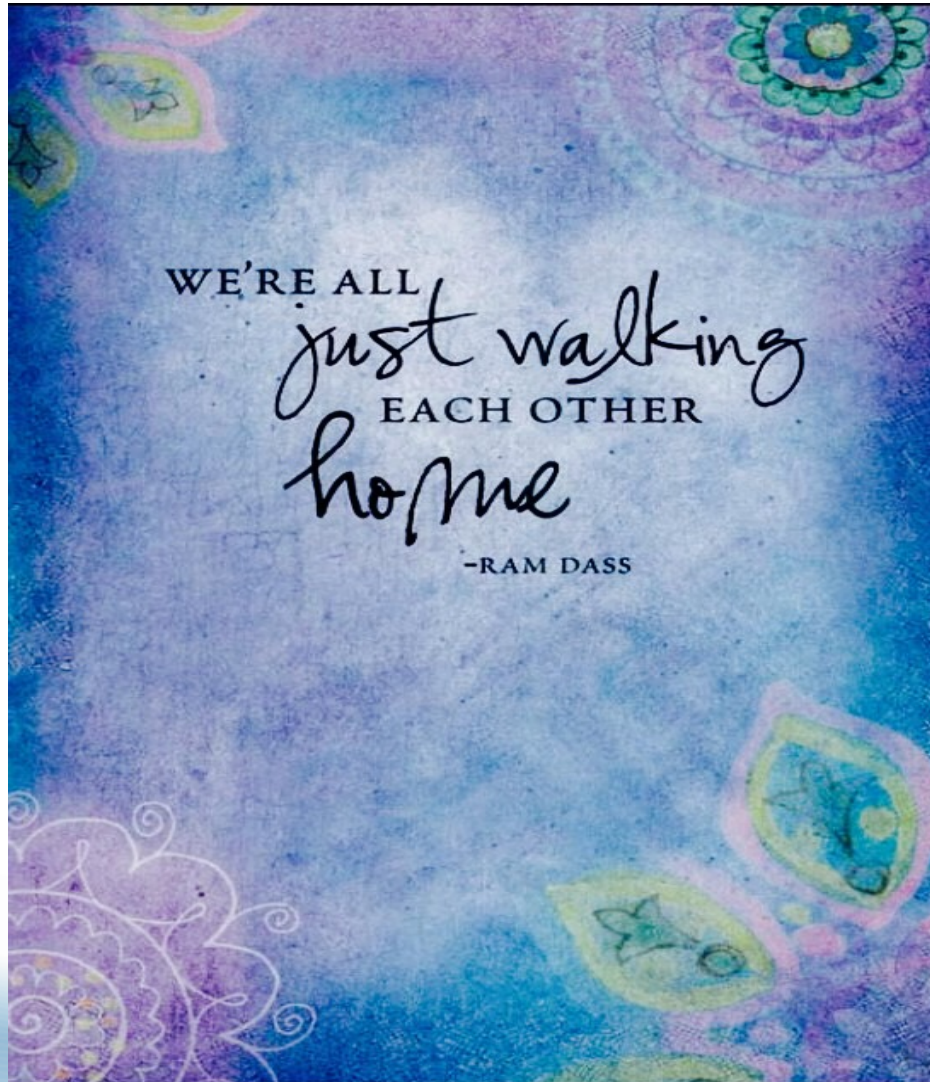


“Einstein said: “A human being is part of a whole, called by us the ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

Matthieu Ricard,

The Quantum and the Lotus: A Journey to the Frontiers  
Where Science and Buddhism Meet





## Exercise:

- Journal for a few moments now...
- In what ways might I be keeping my self separate from the spiritual in my life?
- What good emerges from my direct connection to my spiritual practice or way of being?



## As We Move Toward the Spiritual...

We move toward purpose...and a sense of life  
(ours and others) as significant...

“I have felt the swaying of the elephant's  
shoulders; and now you want me to climb on a  
jackass? Try to be serious.”

Mirabai



## **A Significant Life**

Jessica's Daily Affirmation

“Superhero Training”



## As We Move Toward the Spiritual...

We move toward compassion for the suffering of ourselves and others...

If we define our spirituality only in positive and glowing terms, it will become sentimental, and then it is of no use. To be spiritual is not just to pray and meditate but also to be involved in the struggles of marriage, work, and raising children; in social responsibility and in the effort to make a just and peaceful world. Thomas Moore

Whether things turn out for the better depends on what we do. We ought not spend our time masterminding the future, but recognize our marching orders: to do the best we can for history and the planet. Huston Smith



## The Body/Spiritual Connection

“Research indicates that self-compassion may be a powerful trigger for the release of oxytocin.”

“Self-criticism appears to have a very different effect on our body...When we experience a threatening situation, the fight-or-flight response is triggered: the amygdala sends signals that increase blood pressure, adrenaline and the hormone cortisol, mobilizing the strength and energy needed to confront or avoid a threat. Although this system was designed by evolution to deal with physical attacks, it is activated just as readily by emotional attacks — by ourselves or others. Recent research indicates that generating feelings of self-compassion actually decreases our cortisol levels.”

Kristin Neff, *The Chemicals of Care: How Self-Compassion Manifests in Our Bodies*



## The Body/Spiritual Connection

“...integrated within our DNA are these very powerful mechanisms that make us care, that make us respond to suffering of another, and actually have a desire to intervene.”

Evolutionary mandate: ... as we began to develop a larger cortex and frontal lobe in order to think abstractly, we developed sophisticated language, ability to strategize, these changes mandated that we also develop longer gestation period, reduced litter size, and offspring that took a decade to function independently, which led to development of extraordinarily long bonding and nurturing pathways within the species.

James Doty, Professor of Neurosurgery, Stanford University School of Medicine; Director, Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education

## The Body/Spiritual Connection

In states of mindfulness and compassion we see:

### Biological Profile of M4 (Compassionate or Wisdom Mindfulness)

- Increased Vagal Tone and Autonomic Flexibility
- Increased Oxytocin Tone
- Increased Hypothalamic-Midbrain Social Bonding Tone
- Increased Frontal Lobe Flexibility
- Increased Connections between Reward and Social Engagement/Expertise Pathways
- Decreased Connections between Fear/Vigilance and Social Engagement/Expertise Pathways (reducing social comparison competition and inadequacy)
- Decreased Overregulation of Attunement/Emotion Suppression (feel emotions richly, and they guide you)

Emiliana R. Simon-Thomas, Science Director of the Greater Good Science Center, Berkeley



## Spirituality Embodied

We are wired for connectedness, compassion, care  
of others

AND

Our bodies do best when we move toward qualities  
of a spiritual existence

