

All of us, at sometime, pass through a dark night of the soul. Overwhelmed with pain and suffering, filled with fear and foreboding, we feel lost, hopeless, and abandoned. What is to be done?

We may seek solace in nature, meaning in a spiritual quest, or guidance in practicing the presence of the divine.

Above all, believer or nonbeliever, we may find relief in changing our relationship to pain. For suffering is increased by a lack of meaning. If we can come to accept that suffering is our teacher, not only unavoidable, but part of our path to growth—if we can accept this, the unbearable may become bearable. For it is through suffering that we become strong, wise and compassionate.

—KS

May this journal bring you comfort
in your dark night of the soul.

O SPIRIT OF LIGHT

Who art both infinite and eternal,
Illumine our lives
And the lives of those
We love and have loved
With the healing power
Of thy divine radiance.

In this dark night of the soul
Be present with us in our suffering.
Help us to find solace in nature's constancy.
Help us to learn from our fear.
Help us to seek and rest in thy truth.

May our suffering enable
Our souls to grow
Until we live in the light
At one
And at peace
With all.

—KS

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

—Wendell Berry

Reprinted from *Collected Poems: 1957-1982* by Wendell Berry,
San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985.

Winslow Homer, *The Coming Storm*

excerpted

THE PORTABLE THOREAU

Something Kindred

There can be no very black melancholy to him who lives in the midst of Nature and has his senses still....I have never felt lonesome, or in the least oppressed by a sense of solitude, but once, and that was a few weeks after I came to the woods, when, for an hour, I doubted if the near neighborhood of men was not essential to a serene and healthy life. To be alone was something unpleasant. But I was at the same time conscious of a slight insanity in my mood, and seemed to foresee my recovery. In the midst of a gentle rain while these thoughts prevailed, I was suddenly sensible of such sweet and beneficent society in Nature, in the very patterning of the drops, and in every sound and sight around my house, an infinite and unaccountable friendliness all at once like an atmosphere sustaining me, as made the fancied advantages of human neighborhood insignificant, and I have never thought of them since. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me, even in scenes which we are accustomed to call wild and dreary, and also that the nearest of blood to me and humanest was not a person nor a villager, that I thought no place could ever be strange to me again.

—Henry David Thoreau

“Walden,” from The Portable Thoreau, edited by Carl Bode, New York: Viking Books (an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.), 1977. Rpt. in Meditations of Henry David Thoreau: A Light in the Woods,

Benjamin B. G. Stone,
A Peep at the Hudson at the Home of Thomas Cole

The Seasons In You

To insure health, a man's relation to Nature must come very near to a personal one; he must be conscious of a friendliness in her; when human friends fail or die, she must stand in the gap to him. I cannot conceive of any life which deserves the name, unless there is a certain tender relation to Nature. This it is which makes winter warm, and supplies society in the desert and wilderness. Unless Nature sympathizes with and speaks to us, as it were, the most fertile and blooming regions are barren and dreary....

I do not see that I can live tolerably without affection for nature. If I feel no softening toward the rocks, what do they signify?

I do not think much of that chemistry that can extract corn and potatoes out of a barren, but rather of that chemistry that can extract thoughts and sentiments out of the life of a man on any soil. It is in vain to write on the seasons unless you have the seasons in you.

—Henry David Thoreau

"Journal," from *The Portable Thoreau*, edited by Carl Bode, New York: Viking Books (an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.), 1977. Rpt. in *Meditations of Henry David Thoreau: A Light in the Woods*,

Robert Jordan, The Trail to Champney Falls

excerpted

BLESSINGS

We are part of the vast continuum of existence that includes all things conscious, unconscious, inert, physical, mental, emotional, known and unknown, imaginable and unimaginable.

—Susan Baker

The Seasons of My Heart Have Purpose and Meaning

Ibless my connection to all that is. In times of doubt and despair, I turn my attention to the natural world. Recognizing that all things have seasons of growth and birth, seasons of decay and gestation, I allow myself to experience the cyclical in my own life. Where I experience loss, I anticipate future growth. Where I experience emptiness, I anticipate an inflow of the new. Where I experience doubt and dismay, I welcome a resurgence of faith and conviction. I allow my life to be tidal. I allow my life to fill and empty according to a plan higher than I might naturally perceive. Out of my periods of drought and desolation, I affirm that new growth occurs, funded in deeper strength due to my times of testing and difficulty. It is all for the good, I remind myself. There is a purpose and a point to all I undergo. My pain engenders in me a compassionate heart toward the pain of others. When I suffer, I remind myself that my suffering carries a gift within its hardship, a goal within its trial. Choosing to recognize the powerful good within my adversity, I bless all seasons of my life for their wealth and value.

—Julia Cameron

“The Seasons of My Heart Have Purpose and Meaning,” from *Blessings: Prayers and Declarations for a Heartful Life* by Julia Cameron, copyright © 1998 by Julia Cameron. Used by permission of Jeremy P. Tarcher, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Samuel Griggs, Mt. Chocorua

All around us, each way we look, we see only whiteness. And the sky itself is heavy with snow which keeps dropping silently, whiteness upon whiteness. The only sounds are the sounds of our voices, muffled and small. Yet we speak rarely. Our minds have become as plain as the landscape around us. And the rhythms of our bodies, moving steadily through these drifts, have become slow. Hour after hour things appear to be the same. Yet the drifts grow deeper. This landscape seems to be frozen still, and we cease to believe that under this ice there were ever leaves, ever a soil, that water ever ran, or that trees grow here still. No evidence of these beings can reach us. And our memories of this place are sealed from us by this winter; none of the sharp edges of existence reach us, the odors of this place, its taste, blunted. And even the snow itself becomes unreal. Our skin which at first was stung by the cold has now become so cold itself that it does not recognize coldness. Our feet and our hands which burned with pain are numb. Our vision seems half blinded by the relentless light from the snow. And we have come to believe there is nothing to taste; nothing to smell. We are certain that all that is around us and in us is absolute stillness. This has always been, we tell ourselves. Yet something in us is changing; our hearts beat slower and slower. And we who were so eager to go on think we want to rest here in this place.

That it is best not to continue. Our bodies grow very heavy. Our eyes are almost closed. We would let ourselves sink into this snow. We would sleep. To end this struggle is mercy, we think. We marvel at how pain has left our bodies. We feel nothing. We dream that this is not really happening. And kindness we say is quietness. We would sleep. But some voice in us labors to wake, cries out so that we are startled, and we work to open our eyes. Our hands reach out into the snow and we wash this ice over our faces. As we awaken, our skin stings again. And as we push our bodies toward movement, we ache, and we feel pain again in our hands and our feet. We shiver. We are on the verge of crying that these chills are unbearable. But we do not sleep. We see clearly where we are now, and we know that it is winter. And suddenly, through this shocking cold, we remember the beauty of the forest lying under this whiteness. And that we will survive this snow if we are aware, if we continue. And now we are shouting with all our strength to the other sleepers, now we are laboring in earnest, to waken them.

—Susan Griffin

from *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her*, by Susan Griffin,
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E. Ambrose Webster, Tamworth, New Hampshire



LIGHTHOUSE WHISPERINGS

I always go to the sea for solace. There's a rugged rubblestone lighthouse I visit that stands high off a tall, rocky scrap of land along the Pacific coast. It's a grand old sentinel, at once imposing and inviting, spiraling cathedral-like over the rolling blue-green waters it surveys. In a way, it's where I go to pray.

Today, I am praying for my best friend. She has cancer. As I scuff along the narrow, empty beach, I am lost in thoughts of her struggle to survive and my feelings of helplessness and terror. How will we weather this storm? My tears fall as softly as the gentle fog settling in over the vast sweep of ocean stretching before me. A melancholy breeze carries an almost imperceptible scent of salt on the air and the faint low moan of a nearby fog horn.

Suddenly, the sea turns unruly, flinging gusts of thick, bone-chilling mist in my path. I scurry into the tower seeking shelter, somehow knowing that I'm entering a sacred cove. A puff of wind blows through the landing, urging me up the curling wrought iron staircase. In the eerie silence, there is only the hollow echo of each solitary step. As I pass a small open portal, phantom voices come crashing through like cresting waves wailing, "Breakers ahead!" The blow comes quick and heavy. Gale force winds whip the whole sea white. Huge waves beat mercilessly into the brick and mortar structure and the tower shivers for an instant. My hands freeze to the trembling railing and my heart pounds uncontrollably. "Hold fast," someone howls, "Hold fast!"

In the inky darkness, I continue my voyage. The journey seems endless. Am I just a lonely seafarer pitching and turning on an anchor-less ship, adrift under a starless sky? "Steady, keep your course steady," a voice beckons, "Go as far as your heart will take you." Gradually, the furor begins to subside. The fierce roaring surf ebbs to a singing ripple, and once more, the timeless tower stands firm against unrelenting winds and unforgiving seas.

Just ahead of me is a dim flickering ray, like a fluttering candle, slowly driving the shadows away. The further I ascend, the more radiant the glow. Once in the lantern room, a flood of white light swirls around me and I am enveloped in the whisperings of a flinty, otherworldly voice: "I am the keeper of the light. Under constant siege by the tossing, tormented sea, time and salt air have taken their toll. I've been pummeled, bruised and scarred from the ravages of violent storms and tumultuous squalls. My ruddy, weathered face is cracked and lined with age, but my eyes, which hold in them the great beacon, still sparkle and gleam."

The mighty beam blazes clear and strong and I am all but hypnotized by the prisms' dancing colors. Shining there is the face of my best friend, smiling. Magically, the lamplight is transformed into a vivid reflection of her love for me. A final hushed voice murmurs, "We can endure life's stormy seas if we keep the light inside us burning bright. Keep the light, keep the light evermore."

—JoAnn Semones

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A Light in the Mist.

It was a hot August in New York City, 1977. I was renovating a loft in Soho and had to move out of my old apartment by the end of the month. My days were filled with packing crates and construction headaches. I was feeling overwhelmed. Then, in the course of one week, my mother's nursing home in Pittsburgh called to say that her health was failing; my sister, who also lived in Pittsburgh, suffered a cardiac arrest; and my gynecologist discovered a huge fibroid tumor on my uterus.

Because the tumor had developed so quickly, my doctor thought it might be malignant and wanted to remove it as soon as possible, even though the operation might damage my uterus. The thought of a future without children was unbearable to me.

Meanwhile, my thirty-six-year-old sister was unconscious and on life support. Her husband said the prognosis was not good. Her heart had been stopped for as long as ten minutes before they managed to resuscitate her.

I could hardly comprehend these crises, much less determine which to attend to first. I had lost my father just four years before. Now I might lose the rest of my family, too.

I called my friend Suzi, hoping that she could help me make some decisions. Her boyfriend, Mick, answered. Suzi was away for the weekend, but Mick knew about the turmoil in my life. He was also a psychiatrist.

“How are you doing?” he asked.

“Not very well,” I replied.

“How about a cup of coffee and a walk?” he offered.

Mick and I walked all over Greenwich Village that afternoon.

“How do you feel?” he asked after I had been quiet for a block.

“I feel like God hates me,” I said. “And I hate him. He’s taking everything!”

We were standing on lower Fifth Avenue in front of an Episcopal church. A Vespers service was in progress.

“Let’s go in,” Mick said. “Confront him!”

We caught the last few prayers. The familiar liturgy made me weep instantly. As everyone was leaving, Mick approached the young priest and asked him to talk to me.

This has to be the low point of my life, I thought. A psychiatrist is turning me over to a priest. I looked at the priest’s sweet, boyish face and wondered what on earth he could possibly say that would help me.

He listened attentively to my story. “Maybe my sister will die,” I sobbed. “Maybe my mother will die. Maybe my tumor is cancerous and I’ll never have children. I have to move in two weeks. I don’t know what to do first, and I despise God for heaping all this pain and terror on me.”

I paused, hiccuped, and blew my nose. I knew this was pointless. There was no answer he could give

that would be useful.

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Asher B. Durand, Landscape: Creek and Rocks

excerpted

LETTER TO A YOUNG ACTIVIST
DURING TROUBLED TIMES

I too have felt despair many times in my life, but I do not keep a chair for it; I will not entertain it. It is not allowed to eat from my plate. The reason is this: In my uttermost bones I know something, as do you. It is that there can be no despair when you remember why you came to Earth, who you serve, and who sent you here. The good words we say and the good deeds we do are not ours: They are the words and deeds of the One who brought us here. In that spirit, I hope you will write this on your wall: When a great ship is in harbor and moored, it is safe, there can be no doubt. But ... that is not what great ships are built for.

...This comes with much love and prayer that you remember who you came from, and why you came to this beautiful, needful Earth.

—Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Ph.D.

excerpted

THE ART OF FORGIVENESS,
LOVINGKINDNESS, AND PEACE

The other great enemy of love is fear.
Fear contracts the heart. Its worries
and anxieties stop the flow of love.
Do we really want to live in fear? As the
Persian poet Hafiz kindly puts it:

Fear is the cheapest room in the house.
I'd like to see you in better living conditions.

—Jack Kornfield

from The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace, by Jack Kornfield, New York: Bantam Books (an imprint of Random House, Inc.), 2002.

Benjamin Champney, Mt. Chocorua, New Hampshire

I stand by the bed where a young woman lies, her face postoperative, her mouth twisted in palsy, clownish. A tiny twig of the facial nerve, the one to the muscles of her mouth, has been severed. She will be thus from now on. As surgeon, I had followed with religious fervor the curve of her flesh, I promise you that. Nevertheless, to remove the tumor in her cheek, I had to cut the little nerve.

Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed, and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight, isolated from me, private. "Who are they," I ask myself, "he and this wry mouth who gaze and touch each other so generously?"

The woman speaks:

"Will my mouth always be like this?" she asks.

"Yes," I say. "It is because the nerve was cut."

She nods, is silent. But the young man smiles.

"I like it," he says. "It's kind of cute."

All at once I know who he is. I understand, and I lower my gaze. One is not bold in an encounter with a god. Unmindful of my presence, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth, and I'm so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate hers, to show her that their kiss still works.

I remember that the gods appeared in ancient Greece as mortals, and I hold my breath and let the wonder in.

—Dr. Richard Selzer

from *The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace*, by Jack Kornfield, New York: Bantam Books (an imprint of Random House, Inc.), 2002.

We are born with a body that experiences pain and comfort, a heart that suffers and feels joy, a mind that strives and is peaceful, a spirit that yearns for both solitude and communion with others, and a contract on earth that has a beginning and an end. Each one of us knows this, and yet, each one of us spends much of our time swimming against the current of life's reality. The spiritual path teaches us how to float on our backs, relaxed and aware, in the waters of reality. The Buddhists define spirituality as shamatha, or "tranquil abiding."

We are drawn to a spiritual path out of a desire for tranquil abiding. Just saying the words feel wonderful, like an antidote to the fear, unhappiness, and anxiety with which we often approach life. Fear of what? Fear of our basic human condition. If we stop long enough to take a quiet look at our situation, we'll hear the tick-tock-ticking of time's impersonal progress. For each of us, time's march breeds a different fear: for some it is the terror of death; for

others it is the worry of a life unlivéd; for some it signifies the loss of what we hold dear and familiar. These are not thoughts on which we usually enjoy lingering. Spirituality invites us to linger. It gives us a way of standing naked in the truth of the human condition, meeting it head-on with curiosity and openness. This is serious work, but the mysterious outcome of the work is a lightness of heart—what we call happiness.

Fearlessness sows the seeds of happiness. First comes a loosening of fear; from this relaxation comes a growing acceptance of life on its own terms; then a sense of wonder awakens, one that is large enough to contain the many ups and downs that are natural to our physical, mental, and emotional makeups. All around us are the ingredients for happiness—happiness, but not perfection. Perfection is an idea; imperfection is reality. Happiness within the field of imperfection is a promise of the spiritual quest.

—Elizabeth Lesser

Please share these diminutive tear-out cards to inspire a quiet personal moment, or as a reminder of the solace found in nature.

from *The Seeker's Guide: Making Your Life a Spiritual Adventure* by Elizabeth Lesser, New York: Villard Books (an imprint of Random House, Inc.), 1999.

Life's meaning has been variously and wonderfully addressed by poetry and philosophy, art and music, but it's the principal focus of religion. Embarrassing as it is to admit, it was only when I began to investigate the great spiritual traditions that I started to wonder about the purpose of my own life—not in the usual sense of fulfilling various roles in the everyday world but from religion's vast perspective. What if anything that was special did I bring to this really big party? Something beyond being a wife, mother, daughter, friend, taxpayer, cat owner? It was an interesting exercise.

After some thought I realized that since childhood some animating spirit has led me to be curious about why we human beings do the things we do. As a little kid I just thought about such matters while riding my bike or sprawled on my bed. In college I studied what literature, philosophy, and psychology had to say about our ways. As an adult I write about human behavior. Suddenly I saw that journalism

isn't just an interesting career that pays the bills but my window to and contribution to life's grand design, which creates personal experiences and connections with others that would otherwise be impossible. This isn't rocket science, is it? Anyone—teacher, cabdriver, homemaker, Supreme Court justice—could draw a similar conclusion about his or her work. Since I had this epiphany in a teacup, what I do hasn't changed, but how I do it has. On the surface my life looks the same, but inside everything feels different.

That's not to say that just because I've come to regard it as the science of life's meaning, I don't continue to struggle with religion. In our relentlessly secular culture, many of us have a hard time accepting what lies beyond the grasp of our intellects and senses. We want to understand before we trust. One day, however, an encounter with an anonymous spiritual genius showed me that sometimes we may have to trust before we can understand.

—Winifred Gallagher

from *Spiritual Genius: 10 Masters and the Quest for Meaning* by Winifred Gallagher, copyright © 2002 by Winifred Gallagher. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.

John H. Twachtman, Springtime

When It Happens to Us

This is a fact of life; we don't like pain. We suffer because we marry our instinctive aversion to pain to the deep-seated belief that life should be free from pain. In resisting our pain by holding this belief, we strengthen just what we're trying to avoid. When we make pain the enemy, we solidify it. This resistance is where our suffering begins.

Again on experiencing pain, we almost always immediately resist. On top of the physical discomfort we quickly add a layer of negative judgments: "Why is this happening to me?" "I can't bear this," and so on. Regardless of whether we actually voice these judgments, we thoroughly believe them, which reinforces their devastating power. Rather than see them as a grafted-on filter, we accept them, unquestioned, as the truth. This blind belief in our thoughts further solidifies our physical experience of pain into the dense heaviness of suffering....

How do we live the practice life when we're in pain? To apply such phrases as "Be one with the pain" or "There is no self" (and therefore no one to suffer) is neither comforting nor helpful. We must first understand that both our pain and our suffering are truly our path, our teacher. While this understanding doesn't necessarily entail liking our pain or our suffering, it does liberate us from regarding them as enemies we have to conquer. Once we have this understanding, which is a fundamental change in how we relate to life, we can begin to deal with the layers of pain and suffering that make up so much of our existence.

—Ezra Bayda

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Winslow Homer, *Canoes in Rapids*, Sagnenay

excerpted

WHEN THINGS FALL APART

Fear is a universal experience. Even the smallest insect feels it. We wade in the tidal pools and put our finger near the soft, open bodies of sea anemones and they close up. Everything spontaneously does that. It's not a terrible thing that we feel fear when faced with the unknown. It is part of being alive, something we all share. We react against the possibility of loneliness, of death, of not having anything to hold on to. Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth.

If we commit ourselves to staying right where we are, then our experience becomes very vivid. Things become very clear when there is nowhere to escape.

• • •

What we're talking about is getting to know fear, becoming familiar with fear, looking it right in the eye—not as a way to solve problems, but as a complete undoing of old ways of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and thinking. The truth is that when we really begin to do this, we're going to be continually humbled. There's not going to be much room for the arrogance that holding on to ideals can bring. The arrogance that inevitably does arise is going to be continually shot down by our own courage to step forward a little further. The kinds of discoveries that are made through practice have nothing to do with believing in anything. They have much more to do with having the courage to die, the courage to die continually.

—Pema Chödrön

from *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times*
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excerpted

THE SOUL'S RELIGION

The unpleasant sensation of falling apart need not be literally negative. It can open us up to receive the creative impulses of the spirit and take another step toward what fate has in store for us. Let's look even more closely now at ordeals, at the initiatory aspect of falling apart. This is one way spirit and soul come together. The emotional struggle, engaged but not necessarily "won," affects the soul profoundly and allows us to have a larger view of life and its mysteries. Initiations—it seems we're always in one or another—pulverize those parts of us that are rigid and break up self-protective explanations and understandings. The suffering involved allows something infinitely large to penetrate, and simple pain turns into ordeal, trial, and initiation. The passages of the soul give birth to the spirit.

—Thomas Moore

from *The Soul's Religion: Cultivating a Profoundly Spiritual Way of Life* by Thomas Moore, copyright © 2003. Used by permission of Harperperennial Library, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

excerpted

THE WOUNDED PROPHET

You have been wounded in many ways. The more you open yourself to being healed, the more you will discover how deep your wounds are... The great challenge is living your wounds through instead of thinking them through. It is better to cry than to worry, better to feel your wounds deeply than to understand them, better to let them enter into your silence than to talk about them. The choice you face constantly is whether you are taking your wounds to your head or your heart. In your head you can analyse them, find their causes and consequences, and coin words to speak and write about them. But no final healing is likely to come from that source. You need to let your wounds go down to your heart. Then you can live through them and discover that they will not destroy you. Your heart is greater than your wounds.

—Henri J. M. Nouwen

from The Wounded Prophet: A Portrait of Henri J.M. Nouwen by Michael Ford, copyright © 2002. Used by permission of Doubleday/Image Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Albert Bierstadt, On the Hudson

excerpted

DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

This is a soul that has been suffering. Suffering is more fruitful than pleasure. It is in suffering and in stillness that God strengthens the soul. When she is active and satisfied, she practices nothing more than her own inclinations and weaknesses. In suffering, the soul evolves in virtue and purity. She wakes up and grows wiser.

—St. John of the Cross

from *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross, translated by Mirabai Starr, copyright © 2002 by Mirabai Starr. Used by permission of Riverhead Books, an imprint of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

Sanford Robinson Gifford, *Night on the Hudson*

excerpted

LIVING IN THE LIGHT

Transformation begins on an individual level and moves out into the world. The more I'm learning to trust my intuition and act on it, and the more I'm willing to experience and accept all my feelings, the more the energy of the universe can move through me. As it comes through, it heals and transforms me and everyone and everything around me.

This is true for each one of us. The more you are willing to trust and be yourself, the more you will live in the light. Everyone around you will benefit from your energy and being to trust and be more themselves. In turn, they become powerful channels for everyone in their sphere of influence. And so transformation spreads rapidly throughout the world.

—Shakti Gawain

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CA 94949, www.newworldlibrary.com

J. Frank Currier, Landscape, Sky Study with Bridge and

excerpted

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE

Every person who has known dissatisfaction, incompleteness, and frustration will some day learn that there is only one missing link in his entire chain of harmonious living. That is the practice of the presence of God—consciously, daily and hourly, abiding in some great spiritual truth of scripture, and it makes no difference which scripture: Christian, Hebrew, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, or Moslem.

♦ ♦ ♦

The secret of harmonious living is the development of spiritual consciousness. In that consciousness, fear and anxiety disappear, and life becomes meaningful with fulfillment as its keynote.

—Joel S. Goldsmith

from Practicing the Presence: The Inspirational Guide to Regaining Meaning and a Sense of Purpose by Joel S. Goldsmith, copyright © 1991. Used by permission of Harper San Francisco, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

Charles Herbert Moore, The Catskills in Spring

I will never leave you, nor forsake you. I will never leave you nor forsake you wherever you are or whatever you are—Hindu, Jew, Christian, Moslem, atheist. It is My nature to be the very heart and soul of your being. Neither your stupidities nor your sins can come between you and Me.

You may temporarily separate yourself from Me, that is, you may think you have separated yourself from Me, and you certainly can separate yourself from the benefit of my Presence, but that does not mean that I have left you. You will find that any moment, night or day, whether you make your bed in hell or in heaven, whether you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, at any time you like, you may turn and you will find that I am walking beside you. I am the everlasting arms underneath you. I am the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. I am that which sets a table before you in the wilderness. If you are hungry, I am the ravens that come bringing you food. I am the widow sharing a little cake and a cruse of oil.

I will never leave you. I will be manna to you in the desert experience. I will be that which opens the Red Sea for you, if no other way opens. I AM THAT which I AM, forever and forever. I have been That unto eternity and will be That, for I am I in the midst of you. Whithersoever thou goest, I will go.

—Joel S. Goldsmith

from Practicing the Presence: The Inspirational Guide to Regaining Meaning and a Sense of Purpose by Joel S. Goldsmith, copyright © 1991. Used by permission of Harper San Francisco, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.

excerpted

PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

*My God, since You
are with me, and since it
is Your will that I should
apply my mind to these
outward things, I pray that
You will give me the grace
to remain with You and
keep company with You.*

*But so that my work may
be better, Lord, work with
me; receive my work and
possess all my affections.*

—Brother Lawrence

from Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence, translated by Robert J. Edmonson © 1985 by The Community of Jesus, Inc. Used by permission of Paraclete Press. Rpt. in Weavings: Practicing the Presence of God, vol. 18, no. 1, January/February 2003.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

—Christianity

His mind becomes calm. His word and deed are calm. Such is the state of tranquility of one who has attained Nirvana through the realization of truth.

—Buddhism

He who has inner joy, who has inner gladness, has found the inner Light. He has become one with infinite peace.

—Hinduism

For them will be a Home of Peace with their Lord: He will be their Friend, because they practiced righteousness.

—Islam

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance to thee, and give thee peace.

—Judaism

Those whose hearts are in a state of calmness give forth a divine radiance by which they know truth.

—Taoism

excerpted

THE ART OF FORGIVENESS,
LOVINGKINDNESS, AND PEACE

May I and all beings
be free from pain and sorrow.
May I and all beings
be held in compassion.
May I and all beings
be reconciled.
May I and all beings
be at peace.

from The Art of Forgiveness, Lovingkindness, and Peace, by Jack Kornfield, New York: Bantam Books (an imprint of Random House, Inc.), 2002.

Alexander H. Wyant, Arkville Landscape