

FATHER WILLIAM'S MUSINGS 2009

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THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2009

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTES - RICHARD LAND, B.C. & RAINER MARIA RILKE



"I am glad that so much movement happens in this stillness."

"I do only want to advise you to keep growing quietly and seriously throughout your whole development; you cannot disturb it more rudely than by looking outward and expecting from outside replies to questions that only your inmost feeling in your most hushed hour can perhaps answer."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

Well, Happy 2009, Dear Friends!

I hope you have had wonderful holidays and have not been overly affected by the roller coaster ride of the material world around us. It certainly has been a disturbing year for a great many, and I am very, very sorry for their pain and turmoil.

But old Father William is finding a measure of peace despite the chaos so continually presented and magnified by the omnipresent media of our time, and I want to share a bit of what has been working for me. There is a caveat, however, and that is this - I was unable to find or even to glimpse this possibility for peace in the ambitions and stresses of my Second Age. It has taken me to well past 60 to begin, as my mentor and friend Elder Ed says, to "relax into participation" with the flow of the universe.

It's not that I didn't have the concept early on in Second Age. I've had that in spades going back as far as Ram Dass' "Be Here Now" in 1971. It took me another three decades plus to realize that understanding the concept didn't necessarily lead to "relaxing" into the experience; in fact, becoming excited about discovering another "more advanced" version of "being present" (TM, Gestalt Therapy, Psychosynthesis, Transpersonal Psychology, you name it, etc.) was my way to avoid being present.

My [Direction of Error](#) was intellectual. Given my upbringing and schooling, I really believed that if I could conceptualize something clearly enough, then I had done it. By 70 this is a hypothesis I have personally disproven.

I know some of you have set your e-mail to receive "Text Only" messages, and that means you'll not be able to see the cartoon from B.C. between the quotes from Land and Rilke. It has two panels. In the first one guy is blissed out sitting against a rock and another walking through says "Whatcha doing today?" The blissed out guy replies, "Nothing." In the next panel the second guy says, "You did that yesterday." The blissed out one answers, "I wasn't finished."

The B.C. cartoon is now my life, and I love it! I hope to never be finished "doing nothing" again because it makes possible "so much movement...in this stillness." And at 70, Rilke's words also make great sense to me:

"I do only want to advise you to keep growing quietly and seriously throughout your whole development; you cannot disturb it more rudely than by looking outward and expecting from outside replies to questions that only your inmost feeling in your most hushed hour can perhaps answer."

But words and intellect are only one modality for meaning. My career as a consultant made me recognize the need to communicate in as many modalities

as possible. I used charts, slides, games, films and the music of my life to help share meaning. I know it seems unlikely that corporate leaders would listen seriously to Linda Ronstadt or Kristofferson, but they did, and I often received very appreciative feedback for connecting the music with their struggles for personal and professional growth.

I now try to share my process of transformation into Third Age by doing a weekly radio show for WMRV in my hometown of Warren, Vermont (many thanks John, Robin and all the rest of you who made our station possible). My show is called "Father William's A-Musings", and I describe it as "a time when we take a little time out of our lives to make some meaning of our lives using the music of our lives." This week's show helped me recreate parts of my personal transformation from the "doing" of Second Age to the "being" of Third Age, and I want to share some of that here. We'll see if I can mix modalities successfully.

I've changed radically in the last few years. I used to be a person who loved his Second Age and couldn't imagine being "older" as a positive. That was a very different state than the Third Age I find myself in at 70. In these last five years my focus has changed dramatically from doing to be simply being, and I love it!

I now like to have my life empty, not only of activities, but of people as well. More and more I actually feel like I'm becoming a monk. Old friends laugh at the idea of me as a monk: "You a monk? Nonsense! You're one of most energetic, outgoing and even hyper people we've known."

And they are not inaccurate in their judgments. Most of my life has been incredibly oriented toward the external world, particularly in terms of seeking one intense experience after another (it's no accident I've had four wives and God knows how many careers). The Eagles' song "Take It to the Limit" describes much of my Second Age life:

All alone, at the end of the evening
And the bright lights have faded to blue
I was thinkin' 'bout a woman who might have loved me
I never knew.

You know I've always been a dreamer
Spent my life runnin' 'round.
And it's so hard to change
Can't seem to settle down.
But the dreams I've seen lately
Keep on turnin' out, and burnin' out, and turnin' out the same.

So put me on a highway,

And show me a sign.
And take it to the limit one more time.

You can spend all your time makin' money
And spend all your love makin' time.
If it all fell to pieces tomorrow, would you still be mine?
And when you're lookin' for your freedom
Nobody seems to care
And you can't find the door
Can't find it anywhere
When there's nothing to believe in
Still you're comin' back, and runnin' hack, and comin' back for more

Take it to the limit
Take it to the limit
Take it to the limit one more time

Don Henley, Glen Frey and the Eagles spoke to me in so many ways back in the 70's ("Tequilla Sunrise," "Desperado," "Hotel California," etc.), and their songs glorified seeking ecstasy and adventure on the edges of life. I lived this way for much of five decades, and the costs were sometimes pretty brutal for all. Even though I never wanted to cause or feel pain, it seemed like it came with the territory, and I accepted it.

That seems to have been what Don Henley and Glenn Frey did, too. When the Eagles broke up in 1980, Henley said they wouldn't get back together until "hell freezes over." But they did reunite in 1994, "Hell Freezes Over" was their first album - and the song "Learn To Be Still" was on it:

It's just another day in paradise
As you stumble to your bed
You'd give anything to silence
Those voices ringing in your head
You thought you could find happiness
Just over that green hill
You thought you would be satisfied
But you never will-
Learn to be still

We are like sheep without a shepherd
We don't know how to be alone
So we wander 'round this desert
And wind up following the wrong gods home
But the flock cries out for another

And they keep answering that bell
And one more starry-eyed messiah
Meets a violent farewell-
Learn to be still
Learn to be still

Now the flowers in your garden
They don't smell so sweet
Maybe you've forgotten
The heaven lying at your feet

There are so many contradictions
In all these messages we send
(We keep asking)
How do I get out of here
Where do I fit in?
Though the world is torn and shaken
Even if your heart is breakin'
It's waiting for you to awaken
And someday you will-
Learn to be still
Learn to be still

You just keep on runnin'
Keep on runnin'

Like Bob Seger, this old Father William spent a lot of time "runnin against the wind." I don't run much in any direction much; I have too much nothing - and being - to do.

So how does a "Take It to the Limit" addict "Learn to Be Still"? Slowly, and I'll share some of that journey next month...

Much love, FW

For more of Father William: <http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

If you'd like to hear the entire hour-long show, you can download it as an mp3 file at this link:

<http://wridol.audioacrobat.com/download/9e3d9291-e819-3977-5374-157cff00536a.mp3>

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTES

"Before Enlightenment chop wood carry water, after Enlightenment, chop wood carry water."

"If you understand, then things are just as they are. If you do not understand, then things are just as they are."

"But the greatest of these is love."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

February Greetings, Good Friends...

I imagine some of you looked at the quotes above and thought, "Oh cripes, here goes Father William out over the edge again." Maybe so. Then again, maybe not. Come along for the ride and see where we land.

In last month's Musings I described my transformation from Second to Third Age as a movement (in The Eagles' words) from "Taking It to the Limit" to

"Learning to Be Still", from mostly DOING to mostly BEING. Responses from two friends added these thoughts:

From Brother Richard: "Hey, FW - In January's Quotes you shared the great BC cartoon about doing 'nothing.' Remember 'Where Did You Go? Out. What Did You Do? Nothing'? That best-selling little book was about kids. Do you see a connection between our entry into the Third Age and our participation in the First Age? I do..."

From Elder Ed: "Just had a thought from your January Musings. 'Learning to be Still' has a purpose, which is: being still enables the 'relaxing into participation'..."

Ed's "relaxing into participation" means, among other things, letting go of my ego identity so I can merge with the larger flows of the universe. When I put this together with Richard's notion that Third Age includes a resurrection of elements from true childhood, I discover a new level of meaning to "and a little child shall lead them."

I know I'm stretching here, but it does feel good to this old body, mind and soul. I can always use more ways of connecting with what I call "The Larger" (please use whatever name works best for you), and Richard and Ed helped me see another. I'll try to describe what it means to me in a "how to" sort of way.

At 70, I still appreciate the external, physical world, but no longer find my major fulfillment out there, and I certainly did for a long time! These days I relax into fulfillment in almost everything - weeding flower beds, folding laundry, washing dishes, vacuuming carpets and so on. These used to be burdensome tasks I worked to avoid in Second Age because they seemed beneath the status my ego claimed for itself. No longer is this my attitude; today I seek out opportunities to enjoy them. This new perspective helped me choose the first quote for this month:

"Before Enlightenment, chop wood carry water; after Enlightenment, chop wood carry water."

I painfully and unsuccessfully pursued this thing called "Enlightenment" through most of my Second Age. Turns out it's no

more than a simple but profound change in basic attitude. But just because something is simple doesn't mean it's easy, as all who have sleeping difficulties well know. If, as Richard, Ed and I believe, this change in attitude is what changes our experience of everything, what's the process? In other words, what's the technology of "Enlightenment"?

Images immediately come to mind of painful journeys to mind-boggling gurus on mountaintops while enduring unending deprivation in excruciating postures. I admit that's a tongue-in-cheek exaggeration, but such serious quests are the stuff of Second Age, and necessarily so. How else could we move past the seduction of achievement which keeps feeding the ego's notion of its superior status? And until we do, how do we give up thinking we "should" be more than we are - physically, mentally or spiritually?

As long as I believed I "should" be something I wasn't (including being "Enlightened"), I couldn't "learn to be still" and "relax into participation" with the paradoxical fullness of my Third Age child-like maturity. I only began to do this when Third Age helped (maybe forced) me to know how ordinary and non-special I am. This realization changed my attitudes about what matters (everything) and what doesn't (everything). That's why I now find this second bit of Zen makes so much sense:

"If you understand, then things are just as they are. If you do not understand, then things are just as they are."

So how would I describe a technology of "enlightenment" that's working well for me? So far the path is looking like this...

- I both needed and enjoyed the quests of Second Age; they taught me much about how to relax into what fulfills me now;

- My physical changes of aging led me to a humility and maturity that was simply not possible earlier;

- My new humility and maturity lets me "be still" and "relax into participation" with the flows and depths of whatever is Larger;

- In my stillness and relaxation, I quite frequently appreciate "things just as they are" (whether I understand them or not);

- Appreciating so much has reawakened me to the oldest guidance I know: that loving everyone and everything is The Name of The Game.

Here's a beautiful way Christian tradition puts it:

Love is patient, love is kind.
Love is not proud. Love is not rude,
Love is not self seeking, Love is not easily angered,
Love keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil
but rejoices with the truth.
Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes
always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are
prophecies, they will cease; where there
are tongues, they will be stilled;
where there is knowledge, it will come to pass away.

For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
but when perfection comes,
the imperfect disappears.

When I was a child, I talked like a child,
I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.
When I became a man, I put childish ways
behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection;
then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part;
then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.

I CORINTHIANS 13: 4-13

And of course, I must end these musings with this disclaimer: I don't yet relax into love with nearly the consistency I hope for (especially with the damn ants in the kitchen), but, like Robert Frost, I still have "miles to go before I sleep"...

I hope these musings help you with your own.

Much Love, FW

PS: My current radio show accompanies these thoughts with a musical collage - you can listen here:

<http://www.audioacrobat.com/play/WgqxlyRQ>

For more of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - MARCH 2009

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTES - LEONARD COHEN & JONI MITCHELL

"Well, my friends are gone and my head is grey,
I ache in the places where I used to play..."

"We are stardust, we are golden,
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden..."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

Welcome to March, Good Friends...

The above are lyrics from the songs "Tower of Song" and "Woodstock," and they frame this month's Musings. You might want to begin by viewing Cohen's 2008 induction into The Rock & Roll Hall of Fame...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7IuCKfA0PM>

...and finish by watching Joni sing her classic:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuISB2ksnMM>

Amazing how time passes, isn't it? This summer is the 40th anniversary of the Woodstock gathering up on Max Yasgur's farm, and, whether you were for or against it, it remains a generational marker for most of us.

Once again this Old Father William is going to muse about the paradoxes of heart and mind, spirit and science, intangible and tangible. At 70, finding some ways to turn these EITHER/OR's into a BOTH/AND's are in my foreground much of the time. Seems to be the same for Leonard, Joni and many other Third Agers. In "Anthem" Leonard sings:

Ring the bells that still can ring.
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything.
That's how the light gets in.

In art like this I often find a glimpse of BOTH/AND's. It's precisely in the imperfections of the material world that the spirit shines through, and, to see its beauty, you must "forget your perfect offering." That can sound depressing. Recently a friend told me he hadn't been into Leonard because his music was too depressing. And another shared this recent quote from A Rob Ulin show with me:

Q: Aside from negativity, is there anything you are positive about?

A: I like Leonard Cohen.

But for me, Leonard's lyrics were liberating because they helped me know my disappointments in the world were not mine alone. Most importantly, they helped me know I wasn't crazy - that the world really could be a frighteningly ugly place. This was important to a young man who'd grown up reading about the perfect lives of Dick & Jane and believing my country always had the best interests of everyone at heart.

As the 60's and 70's unfolded, Leonard's music, among other influences, became a saving grace for this naïve soul. Without the support I could well have become a nut case (at least more of one than I am).

So what's the point, FW?

That, for all my talk about paradoxes, I don't cope well with their reality. That I still want to hold on to my hope of a "perfect offering" to be found on earth. That I want presidents, athletes, popes and bankers to be unflawed and infallible. That I may never get beyond my childish imprinting that simple good and bad, right and wrong and black and white truly existed and can be found again.

I doubt I'm alone here, especially among those of you also raised by "The Greatest Generation." Isn't this why so many of us resonated to Joni's "we've got to get ourselves back to the garden"? Because deep in our psyches we do believe such simple clarity once existed, was lost and can be found again?

Not that we can't, as Elder Ed puts it, "relax into participation" with the larger universe. But I doubt my rational mind can be a primary guide. Experiencing the larger connections seems to occur in subjective events that don't communicate or replicate easily, if at all. Often folks who try to share these with their community end up on a locked ward.

So how might we go about increasing our chances of experiencing personal connections with the greater energies of life?

My recipe for "relaxing into participation" in 2009 includes:

- lots of solitude,
- somewhat regular daily meditation,
- needing very little materially.

These three have given me a chance at another:

- living to my heart's values rather than the world's.

As Leonard put this one, "It's just self-respect that you're looking for in your work. You just keep on covering your own heart until you can find something in which you can locate your self-respect..."

These first four have come only with Third Age for me; I simply wasn't able to enjoy them in the busy-ness of my Second Age.

And there is also a fifth element I recommend highly. It's having a constant sense of humor about myself and everything else. Unlike the first four that emerged in my Third Age, humor has always been with me. It has been my salvation more times than I can count - especially about the most serious stuff! As Woody Allen said:

"Students achieving Oneness will move on to Twoness."

And so I have. Probably you have, too. And we might as well have a good time with it as long as we're here.

While I identify and empathize with Joni's call to "get ourselves back to the garden," I think forward is the direction we need to go, even if we can't see ahead. Again, from Leonard...

I met a man who lost his mind
In some lost place I had to find.
"Follow me," the wise man said,
But he walked behind...

I hope these Musings help you enjoy the rest of the newsletter as well. In "The Stump Theory" Gail Collins advances the interesting

perspective that "old is in." Then Barry Schwartz gives "the talk of his life" saying our present crisis is one of wisdom, not economics. And finally Tom Cox takes us on a fascinating time journey back to what may have been the origin of the "Garden of Eden" story - a very different version than I've been used to...

Much Love, FW

PS: My current radio mixes some of these thoughts with Leonard's early music - you can listen here:

<http://www.audioacrobat.com/play/WqKWh2RQ>

For more of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - APRIL 2009

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE - "THE SHACK" ON HOW HUMANITY LOST EDEN

"When you chose independence over relationship, you became a danger to each other. Others became objects to be manipulated or managed for your own happiness..."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

April Greetings, Good Friends...

I want to make clear this is not an "April Fool's" issue. I know I run risks in quoting from "The Shack" because of the controversy it has created in the Christian world where many are embracing it as true Christianity and others are damning it as heresy. I do not want to engage, or propose anyone else engage, in these civil wars.

But I do want to use "The Shack's" personally disturbing re-interpretation of humanity's original error - our "fall from grace" and consequent loss of "the garden" - as my focus for this month's Musings.

Let me tell you how this best-selling book (44 weeks at #1 on TNYT trade fiction list) came to me. I have a very bright, conservative friend in Texas, and we have compared our varying philosophical and political perspectives for decades now. While certainly not always agreeing, we do have great respect for each other. A few weeks ago he sent me this email:

"If you have not already read 'The Shack', you should know that I thought of you very often when reading it... I read it in its entirety. I seldom do that with fiction, as I am a slow reader, but this was masterfully done and so thought provoking..."

I'd not been aware of the book before, but got it easily even here in NZ, and would have read it twice except my lovely wife, Donna, absconded with it to Auckland (this is the lady who couldn't bring herself "to use the G-word" when we first met).

One of its ideas is causing me to deeply rethink my lifelong values of independence and individuality. See if you might find yourself in a similar quandary, especially in these tumultuous times.

"The Shack" offers a new interpretation, at least for me, of how we screwed up things way back "in the garden." It was in choosing to be independent of, rather than in relationship with, each other and the

universe (put God here if you like) that we created - and will continue to create - our myriad problems.

Perhaps some of you don't see this as such a big deal. But consider the impact on my conservative friend and me. Both of us have been deeply imprinted with the male archetype of independence. REAL MEN ARE NOT DEPENDENT - NO WAY, NO HOW! In my deepest psyche I have always tried to be like John Wayne. What if my choice of such independence - and isolation - is a tragic flaw?

I am not alone. This will require a huge re-conceiving of self for many of my generation, especially as we live longer and age beyond our physical abilities to be "self-sufficient". But if we can succeed in releasing our addiction to independence, we might well reach another stage in our psychological evolution:

FOUR STAGES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL GROWTH

As we grow in years, hopefully we also grow in maturity. The progression of this psychological growth underlies our movement from childhood to mature adult:

AS A CHILD my vulnerability makes me dependent on my parents, teachers and other adults. This infantile DEPENDENCE is immature over-reliance on the authority of others. It is not adult behavior.

AS AN ADOLESCENT my need to grow creates a counter-dependence toward those I must now break away from. COUNTER-DEPENDENCE means resisting all authority no matter how appropriate or helpful the authority might be. This is the opposite [Direction of Error](#) of dependence; it is also immature behavior (although as teen-agers we didn't see it that way).

AS A YOUNG ADULT my accumulated power and intelligence open up new possibilities for independent thought and action. This healthy INDEPENDENCE initiates my capacity for mature self-direction and is part of everyone's movement out of adolescence. But it is not the end-all and be-all of our psychological growth.

AS A MATURE ADULT my experience, maturity and wisdom guide my power and allow an inter-dependence that can truly move the mountains of the world. INTER-DEPENDENCE combines self-direction with cooperation, and results in the ability genuinely relate to others so we can mutually build a world good for all.

Sounds good, doesn't it? So why don't I do what seems so reasonable?

Because I am deeply, deeply programmed* to believe independence, individuality and self-sufficiency are "the right way to be." And in my "right way to be" comes "my right" to judge others who stray from the path of independence I'm so invested in.

But the paradox of judgment is another story for another time. Hope you enjoying the change of seasons wherever you are!

Much Love, FW

*If you'd like a look how our "deep, deep programming" occurs, check out:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/FW-GL%20Unconscious%201.htm>

For this month's radio show about FW's life's seasons:

<http://www.audioacrobat.com/play/Wz5PKgns>

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE - RUMI

“Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing
There is a field
I'll meet you there...”

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

May Greetings, Good Friends...

“Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing...” I am very grateful to Rod MacIver's piece (#3) for calling these words of Rumi's to mind. People have been reading and listening to them for nearly 800 years, and still religious and ideological wars continue to slaughter our brothers, sisters, children and parents. We are slow learners.

But May is not the month to be depressing, especially when spring has finally arrived in Vermont and the green fields vibrate with life. So let's go joyously looking for a few fields that are “out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing...”

Where might we find such fields?

How about when we hold an infant child? Do we bring judgments of right and wrong to the actions of that beautiful babe? I doubt it. Yes, we often get irritated when forced out of sleep late at night, but that frustration is not judgment, just tiredness. In the morning we'll wish we could have been more patient. While children are very, very young, we rarely club them with the hammer of right and wrong morality. But as they age, especially when they become teen-agers,

we may find ourselves bringing out that hammer quite often. Even so, if we work at it a bit, we can remember there were times when we could be in a field "beyond ideas of wrong-doing." These memories are essential if we're to find such fields again.

We can also find ourselves free of judgment in those early days of being in love. Of course this freedom, like all freedoms, has its paradox. On the up-side we are able to accept our partner as near-perfect; on the down-side we may miss some realities that can hurt us. It's all in our minds, isn't it? At one point I can see the person I love as pure and can forgive virtually all trespasses, and later, sometimes not very much later, I can see the same person as perfidious and deserving of the fires of damnation. Even though I can still remember I had the experience of being beyond judging, now that memory does not remind me to be accepting of and open to others; more likely it teaches me to be wary and self-protective, and my suspicion often elicits suspicion from others.

But this is no revelation. What is a cynic but a wounded idealist? When I'm young, naïve and inexperienced, I will open myself inappropriately to the world, and I will likely get hurt. Probably more than once. With enough hurts, I can flip-flop from idealism to cynicism, vow never again to be hurt and hold everyone at safe distance with my judgmentalness. As Paul Simon sang in "I Am a Rock":

I build walls,
A fortress deep and mighty,
That none may penetrate.
I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain.
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.
I am a rock,
I am an island.

Another possible "field beyond ideas of wrong-doing" can be found, as Rod MacIver does "sitting against a big old white pine..." Nature, and the sciences that describe it, are not known for allowing their perceptions to be swayed by moral judgments. What is, is. Whether one finds the realities of nature right or wrong seems beside the point. What is, is.

No matter how we bemoan the disturbing inconsistencies of fire, water, air and earth - and of human behavior - they happen. Judging them clouds our abilities to understand, appreciate and influence them to whatever degree we can.

I think this is what Rumi means when he so delightfully suggests we meet each other in a field "Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing." The same wisdom manifests itself in Reinhold Niebuhr's "The Serenity Prayer":

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

So not Rumi nor Rod nor Reinhold nor I are saying getting "out beyond" judgment means we won't act to make life better as we see it. We're just saying we know the causes we support are OUR causes, not "truth" handed down by some giver of moral absolutes. And we'd appreciate you recognizing the same for your causes. We all tend to act with more humaneness when we don't believe some higher power is giving us permission to be inhumane (which is what my last President and his administration did to America).

In writing this, I've learned many new things. One of them is that Niebuhr's poem was longer than I ever knew. Thought you might enjoy seeing the "unknown" rest of it. It seems wonderfully appropriate when I take "He, His and Him" to mean the Oneness that works for me...

Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him

Forever in the next.
Amen.

Much Love, FW

For more of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE - ROBERT BROWNING

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made..."

1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

June Greetings, Good Friends...

I know, I know. This newsletter is very late this month. I have excuses like traveling back from New Zealand, attending and over-

partying at daughter Kate's Master's graduation, selling and moving from our condo and setting up a home to welcome lovely Donna into. I am not good at most of these and would like to whine longer, but I doubt you'll buy much more. So onto what you may be interested in...

Having worked on my personal "Third Age Transformation" for the last eight years, I've come to accept my journey from Second Age to Third lies in recognizing, embracing and living a particular paradox. This entails developing a strong and whole ego so I can then reduce its role in my life. The details follow.

A major work of our Second Age is to complete a healthy development of the ego, that is, to have sufficient life success to feel we've done and been "enough" on whichever dimensions we have made important to ourselves. In my case, these included feeling appreciated as personally attractive and strong, feeling valued for my intelligence and wit, and feeling a part of long and loving relationships. Note the over-emphasis on "feeling" here. This is because it is what the ego "feels" or believes that creates its reality - and its sense of success.

You might want to take a moment to acknowledge the dimensions that are important to your ego, even if they're unattractive to you. I certainly had trouble owning my enormous needs for attention and applause, but, once I did, I could go after what I wanted much more directly.

I remember when this happened for me. I was teaching high school English, and I wanted the kids to think I was a fantastic teacher. Before I could admit this to myself, I was unconsciously over-rewarding the ones who flattered me and subtly punishing the ones who criticized. One day it hit me, and I said to the students, "You know what I really want? As each class ends, I want you all to rise to your feet applauding and saying things like, 'Oh, thank you, Mr. Idol, you've changed my life!'" Now owning up didn't make me stop wanting this, but, by turning it into a public joke, I gained a much greater degree of conscious choice about how much I'd let it manipulate me. And my admission gave us all permission for greater personal honesty.

So in Second Age my ego insisted on being "A Big Deal." Fortunately, I realized I could help guide its development by being aware of what it cried out for and helping it find healthy ways to get what it needed. As I turned 60, my ego had evolved enough, thank heaven, to let me open to the possibilities of Third Age.

But opening to possibilities is one thing; following the path of those possibilities is quite another and has taken old FW another eight years.

That's because my version of evolving into Third Age requires moving from my ego's "wanting to be recognized as so very, very special" to my Self's "relaxing into full participation in my total ordinariness." As you might guess, my ego is having some problems with this.

The Catch-22 is, of course, that the ego resists its relegation from being the "Big Deal Self" to only an agent serving the real Self. The strength of this resistance is directly proportionate to how much of ourselves we've put into "amounting to something" as teacher, consultant or ex-President. I certainly put a lot of myself into the many roles I played, and this is why my evolution from ego-identity to Self-identity is taking so long.

Recently I've noticed how many levels there are to this journey, and like peeling back the layers of an onion, there are often tears involved. I'm realizing any illusion of superiority occurring in any form is another grasping attempt by my ego to hold on to what it believes it had before. This nonsense includes feeling superior because I've become more "ordinary" or because...

"The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made..."

Comparisons, especially "best's," are superiority's bread and butter - take them all with a grain of salt, a sense of humor and a big dose of compassion for your struggling ego.

You'll find ways to think about all this in Richard Bach's delightful "Introduction to Illusions" (#2), Rod MacIver's recent issue of Heron Dance (#3) and an adaptation of Robert Gray's "Ericksonian Approaches

to the Ego-Self Axis" (#4). Each offers a different perspective on what letting go and relaxing into the mundane makes possible. Of course, the Oneness turns out to be both sublime and mundane (since Oneness = oneness) - it takes a great deal of spaciousness to accept such a reversal of Second Age reality...

Happy Early Summer, Father William

PS: As you travel this path to your true Self, it helps to remember these words from "Desiderata":

"Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should..."

For more of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE - MARY OLIVER

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

July Greetings, Good Friends...

We have just celebrated a very wet month including Independence Day here in Warren, Vermont, where the rain stopped just long enough for our parade to proceed and almost finish. There is a mythology about the powers that be not raining on our parade, and it definitely gained strength this year.

Perhaps because summer has yet to begin in our neck of the woods, I reread Mary Oliver's poem "The Summer Day" and it motivated me to think about what I might do with my "one wild and precious life" in my 70's. I'm finding guidance and support in many places, and I've included three in this newsletter.

The first is Rod MacIver's most recent "Heron Dance" newsletter. He has been documenting his very personal journey of the last few weeks and has helped me think more deeply about the paradox of BOTH "paddling faster than the current" AND making "an art form of relaxation."

Next, Bolton Anthony, founder of "Second Journey", describes how he is using his Third Age maturity to make a difference in the outer world, or, as he puts it, to "contribute in some small way to the 'coming of the Kingdom.'"

And in the third piece, Pico Iyer offers a glimpse into his choice of trading Rockefeller Center for a two-room apartment in Kyoto and living in "The Joy of Less."

Even though Rod's, Bolton's and Pico's life settings and choices are different to my own, I find echoes of myself in each of their musings. Personally I'm drawn inward toward greater relaxation into the mystery of existence, and as I spend more and more time in solitude, my mind and heart keep presenting me with hundreds of bits from my past to review and reconsider.

These come as distinct images in which I relive the situations and my behaviors in them. The vast majority of these reflections, while causing me a great deal of discomfort, are also proving very freeing.

The consistent emotions I experience are embarrassment and regret I have behaved so badly so often over the last sixty years. This is what causes the discomfort, and I wish I had the opportunity to apologize and ask forgiveness from so many. Writing these musings is a step in that direction.

But dwelling on past negatives is useful only to the extent it can help me be a better person now, and that's where the freeing part comes in, at least for me. As I relive and review these bits of my past, I have to recognize that these were not mistakes at the time. In the overwhelming number of instances, I actually thought I was being "cool"; what I see as very unattractive behaviors now were what I went consciously out of my way to do then. That's what happens when you've modeled yourself on John Wayne, Steve McQueen, James Dean and "The Wild One."

And it is these repeating realizations that are freeing me from that past.

Yes, they are uncomfortable, very uncomfortable, but they help me know and accept I'm a different and better person now than I was in my earlier life. As I see how my motivations and basic values have changed over the years, I take heart. At 71, this old Father William now knows for sure that "the best is yet to be" - and that this wonderful mystery of life can fulfill us forever if we just learn to relax into it. I recently read "Son of a Witch" by Greg Maguire in which the ancient Senior Maunt (read Mother Superior) reflects:

"Wisdom is not the understanding of mystery, she said to herself, not for the first time. Wisdom is accepting the mystery is beyond understanding. That's what makes it a mystery."

What's made it so hard to relax into acceptance is the 40's and 50's cultural brainwashing that led me to overvalue my Masculine and undervalue my Feminine aspects. I'm referring here to our psychological, not biological (female/ male), selves.

Perhaps some of you are readjusting the balance of your Masculine ("Make it happen") and Feminine ("Let it happen") selves as you move through Third Age. Rod, Bolton and Pico seem to be, too. Old Father William is still working - or, hopefully, not working - on it. And there are certainly no right answers because personal rebalancing depends on the conditioning you experienced in your life. For example, consider this excerpt from Bill Sadler's "The Third Age" about a surgeon named Barbara as she reflected on her life at fifty-four:

Barbara was very autonomous as a young adult and went through several transformations before she uncovered a fuller femininity after turning fifty..

"I'm changing and continually discovering things in myself that amaze me. One major thing I've discovered as a woman is a kind of balance of feminine and masculine elements within myself in a way I never knew possible. My journey has been to go to the edge, and as I do I find amazing dimensions to myself..."

"A major development in my midlife has been to become aware of my feminine side. Recovering a balance-between control and caring, being intellectual and emotional-is one way of viewing how I got out of the trap. I become a much more feeling person. I've realized that feelings have a very important part in medicine. You start with knowledge, but in your interaction with patients you need compassion. An emotional level of interaction is perhaps most important in treatment. By discovering my feminine side and expressing it in medicine and with friends, I've been experiencing inner movement, an awareness of being feminine and vulnerable."

Barbara revealed that by becoming a doctor, she had deliberately undergone an identity transformation, repressing feminine qualities and adding masculine ones:

"I used to be tougher than tough. I would never show emotions; I thought that would be a sign of weakness. Now I allow my emotions to show. The biggest risks for me are letting people see who I am. I

wanted to be well thought-of and would act to please people. I still want to be well-thought-of, but I'm more concerned to express how I feel as openly as honestly as possible..."

Barbara, a very successful woman in a male world inhibited her Feminine in order to succeed in that world. In her Third Age, she realized she needed to open to and develop her Feminine in order to claim her wholeness.

Do you have a personal story like this? I'd love to have the next newsletter be built on your thoughts - and there's only room for so much in it. But I do promise to respond personally to all who contribute and to post your messages on my blog. As you experience your personal maturing, how are you addressing your own Masculine/Feminine, Make It Happen/Let It Happen, Paddling/Relaxing, Be Tough/Be Feeling paradoxes?

Like Rod, Bolton and Pico, we live in a time where we can share ourselves, more honestly and openly than ever before. I'm enjoying my own internal learning and sharing process, and I hope this stimulates yours, too.

Until August, Father William

For more of FW:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE - ATUM O'KANE & CARL JUNG

"Spirit isn't found in concepts."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

August Greetings, Good Friends...

The rainy season continues here in Vermont and pessimistic friends are betting we'll skip summer entirely and go directly to fall. The Rays and Yanks both swept the Red Sox this week, and there have been many other stresses in the households I visit. Some believe rare astronomical phenomena are creating planetary-wide chaos. I listen but don't take sides in these discussions.

But I, too, am struggling with my versions of lethargy and mild depression. Of course I can invent rationales as I always do - like my being without a home again after having sold the condo - but these are just word games mostly.

It's pretty clear to Old Father William that, while his symptoms are manifesting emotionally, the causes lie in the spiritual domain. I am having a hard time currently feeling connected to larger levels in ways that nourish me and give meaning to life. My guess is that lots of us have been here more than once.

Still, this is a very difficult area to talk about because it triggers so many unpleasant experiences with the dark sides of religions and the anti-forces they engender (like communism, fascism and talk radio). So I'm going to try something both old and new for me. It's called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, and I've been familiar with this useful framework for at least four decades.

Simply put, Abraham Maslow's theory is that there are four different levels of needs that are hierarchical in power:

4. Status
3. Belonging
2. Security
1. Survival

These he called Deficiency-Motivated Needs (D-Needs) meaning they arise when we feel we lack them. The hierarchical part means the lower, more basic levels will take precedence over the higher needs. For example, I can be all caught up in who's going to get the corner office until I hear rumors of a massive layoff that may mean I won't have a job; then Status concerns are overwhelmed with Security Needs, and I forget all about office location. You can find a well done summary of Maslow's Hierarchy at:

<http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/maslow.html>

But it's what happens when our D-Needs feel well enough met that has always fascinated me. When we feel are reasonably safe right now (Survival) and also for the foreseeable future (Security) and feel enough connections (Belonging) and significance (Status), a whole new ball park of motivation appears. Maslow called the emergent new needs Being-Motivated Needs (B-Needs) and said these, when activated, would take us to the Self-Actualization of our full potential.

Many of us elders do feel our D-Needs are pretty well met (especially in the Belonging and Status categories), and we now get interested in "the something more" Maslow identified as Self-Actualization and Being.

What's new for FW after forty years is seeing this framework as uniting the physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of human evolution.

Because Maslow was a psychologist in the mid-twentieth century, he belonged to a fraternity that, in order to survive, had to continually prove it was "scientific." This was no easy task in those days and still isn't in many halls of academe. So for all the

D-Needs reasons, Abe presented his framework as safely scientific - and camouflaged the spiritual dimension in psychological jargon.

As a 50's Catholocized kid, FW was more than happy to leave the religious arena behind and immerse himself in the science of psychology. And this has served me well for all this time.

But now I want to engage more fully with what I can best call "the Being and Self-Actualizing Needs of Spirit"; Maslow's work offers me a new portal into this frontier, and I will be traveling with him in deeper ways than I understood before. This is necessarily a pioneering journey, and, while I'm glad to hear what other pioneers have found on their travels, I must to do the exploring, discovering and synthesizing for myself (it is my Self-Actualization, after all).

Even in my lethargy, I've found the resources that follow helpful on my journey. I hope you will, too, and if you have something to share from your travels, please send it on...

Happy Endless Summer, FW

For more of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE - KJB ACTS 9:18 & MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized."

"Pierce the veil of illusion that separates you from the world of infinite possibility..."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

September Greetings, Good Friends...

The end of summer here in the northern hemisphere is turning into a very interesting season for Old Father William. Lots happened in this last year to cause me to re-view my personal past, and looking from this Third Age perspective is requiring massive re-evaluation of many earlier actions. It is my "Falling Scales and Lifting Veils" time of life.

The two quotes above really do describe what I'm discovering and living now. Scales are falling from my eyes, and I am receiving sight in a baptism of new light. This is not an easy nor fun process! What I am recognizing, with the help of some very direct feedback from my children (thanks, all, I think), is how self-centered I've been when I thought I was being an amazingly cool guy. The more the scales fell, the more I realized these hadn't been isolated incidents, but my true way of being for more than fifty years. I am in an enormous recalibration of my ability to perceive, and this will likely take at least another half-century.

Fortunately, I am not alone. That's why quotes like the above have been around so long and so often repeated. I hope my repetition and sharing here may help others with their variations of "Third Age Transformation", too.

As I sought clarity and support, I came across Marianne Williamson's version of "piercing the veil of illusion," and that led me to her work with aging and her book, "The Age of Miracles." She says:

"The miracle of mid-life is that nothing that happened before this moment has any bearing on what's possible now, except that what you learn from it can be fuel for a magnificent future... mid-life doesn't have to feel like a cruise to the end of your life, so much as a cruise, at last, to the meaning of your life."

Marianne's work is offering me great help as I re-conceive myself, and I recommend you check out her four-minute video at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr5zhpgH12s>.

The hardest part of all this for me is that once my scales started falling, I couldn't stop the re-viewing. One after another the old scenes and actions came embarrassingly back and back again, and I just kept seeing over and over what an awful jerk I'd been when I thought I was being so cool. "Cool" was not just a word; it was an essential way of being to a generation who grew up trying to be John Wayne, Marlon Brando, and James Dean. To not be cool was a terrible failing, and so we always turned whatever we did, no matter how stupid or hurtful, into a story that made us look cool.

You see, being cool was never about being genuine - it was about looking good to others. I thought whatever stupid and unkind things I did could be transformed into being cool if only I could tell a story that made them seem so. This is "the why" of all those exaggerated, untrue and damaging sex tales told in locker rooms. Even worse, this is also "the why" of the gigantic abuses in Enron's power swindles, "enhanced interrogation techniques" and the global banking system. To see this kind of coolness glorified on a weekly basis, watch an episode of "Mad Men" (a very appropriate title, by the way).

And coolness, like all forms of deceit, builds itself into an eventually unsustainable house of cards that comes tumbling down at regular intervals. Did the crashes open my eyes? Not in those days when my ego was so committed to being cool. It just used the crashes to create even more fantastic stories - or to move on to a new school, a new job, a new relationship, a new philosophy. I became very skilled at using any new brand of personal or spiritual growth

as evidence of my increasing coolness. That's how bizarre my ego helped me be for all those decades. And, without the gifts of aging, I doubt I would have been capable of the changes I'm making now.

Aging gave me at least two crucial gifts. One is that I physically changed so the external world, especially on the dimensions of power, sexuality and status, just isn't that interesting or attractive any more. What used to seem so cool now seems mostly silly. This first gift has, of course, brought some depression along with it, but mainly it's served to cut me loose from mindless activity and give me space for reflection and learning.

Aging's second gift is harder to describe. It has broken my habit of wanting to be cool, of my ego just using the next life possibility into another means for its inflation. The result seems to be an emerging wholeness that genuinely includes both earthly ego and spiritual self in a positive and synergistic relationship. It's as though all of us in here have realized we're only a tiny part of whatever reality is, and we only want to play our tiny part - to understand our part, limit ourselves to it and play it as well as we can. We now collaborate rather than compete. It is a wonderful new world.

Even so, I carry a lot of baggage into this new world. My falling scales have shown me how many awful things I did and covered up with my coolness; my new sight has revealed my darkness as well as my light. It is not a pretty picture.

How do we move on? Accepting we did things we regret is essential and necessary, but dwelling on them so we sink into a pit of shame is neither; in fact, shame may lead us to behaving even more terribly than we did in the years of illusion. I repeat Marianne Williamson's advice:

"The miracle of mid-life is that nothing that happened before this moment has any bearing on what's possible now, except that what you learn from it can be fuel for a magnificent future... mid-life doesn't have to feel like a cruise to the end of your life, so much as a cruise, at last, to the meaning of your life."

Perhaps you will wish to engage and atone with someone you hurt. I have, and I'm glad I did. But going to extremes like "My Name Is Earl" does is TV production, not reasonable human behavior. So let the immaturities of your past be what they were - mistakes you have learned from and will not do again. After all, if you knew then what you know now, you wouldn't have done them then, would you?

Acceptance and forgiveness of self is one of the great possibilities of our expanding maturity, and, with it, who knows what joys and gifts we have yet to give?

Much love from another recovering human being,

Father William

PS: This month's last piece, BEYOND RELIGION: ALFRED BLOOM ON "TRUE ENTRUSTING", also is helping me a lot in my recovery program.

PPS: I'm planning to do a "Falling Scales & Lifting Veils" radio show next week; if you'd like a streaming link to it, send an email...

More of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THE CENTER FOR THIRD AGE NEWSLETTER - OCTOBER 2009

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MISSION OF "AWAKENING THE DREAMER, CHANGING THE DREAM"

"...to change the dream of the North...bringing forth an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and socially just human presence on Planet Earth."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

October Greetings, Good Friends...

Old Father William is still in Vermont and it snowed twice this week! We woke to the brilliant whiteness that, living in New Zealand for most of the year, I rarely see anymore. It was a perfect metaphor for a new level of positive clarity that came to me last week.

For years I've been struggling with my own cynicism - with a heart that closed down after many disappointments with idealistic causes I pursued. As a 40's and 50's kid, I believed America and its leaders, police and organizations were models truth and goodness. Of course there were exceptions like Joe McCarthy, but he got censured eventually.

My earliest disillusionment was the assassination of John Kennedy in 1963. This was followed by watching Birmingham Police Chief Bull Connor turn fire hoses and attack dogs on Civil Rights marchers. Then followed Viet Nam, the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, Kent State and many, many other personal disillusionments. Like Simon and Garfunkel's song, "I Am a Rock," I closed down, turning to "my books and my poetry to protect me," and while "hiding in my room, safe within my womb, I touch no one and no touches me."

The last time I remember tentatively opening up again was in the mid-80s. Inspired by John Denver's "It's About Time," Bob Geldorf's "This is the World Calling" and the incredible "We Are the World" event, I came out of "my womb" and tried again to believe goodness and truth might have a chance. Then I ran smack into Wall Street and

Gordon Gekko's mantra of "greed is good," and that was it for this middle-aged guy.

The 90's and 00's added to my disillusionment, peaking in the recent financial, automotive and health insurance bailouts and corruption. Even with the hopeful surprise of Obama's election, it seemed little can actually change for the better. I thought I would live out my years quietly and without engaging the outer world more than absolutely necessary.

But since last month's Musings I've been given an amazing gift that has inspired my life - and changed how I will live it in the future. This happened when I visited long-time friends Don Carew and Donna Mellen last week in Amherst. They turned me on to (and that is exactly the right phrase) to The Pachamama Alliance with Achuar peoples of Ecuador and Peru.

The Achuar are an indigenous dream culture who, so far, have been relatively unencroached on by Northern devastation of the rain forest. But their shamans dreamed that the Achuar way of life would not long remain safe from the North's dream of endless consumption. Their leaders realized their only hope was to help Northern peoples change their devastating dream to a new vision with more benign consequences for all. Some people in the North did respond, and, working together with the Achuar, The Pachamama Alliance was formed and created the "Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream" Symposium.

Now you may be wondering why old withdrawn "I Am a Rock" Father William would open himself to being disillusioned once again? I'll try to explain in a logical, hardheaded way - a way that might reach through your discouragement as it has through mine.

For my 25 years of organizational consulting, I watched my clients fail to synthesize the paradoxical, yet complementary, elements of "Visions & Systems." Visions show us what is worth doing, and Systems empower us to sustain efforts over time to actually get it done.

My corporate clients were generally very good at Systems and produced huge material achievements in the world, but way too often these Systems were not directed by Visions, and many of those results had, and are having, destructive impacts on our families, our neighborhoods and our planet. Clear-cutting the rain forests, polluting our living environment and creating a consumption-driven population are examples.

On the other hand, my non-profit clients were often so filled with the emotion of their causes that their Visions would never let effective Systems develop, and the result was generally frustration, disillusionment and cynicism. "We Are The World" communicated a beautiful Vision but wasn't able to build Systems to achieve that Vision in the long run.

Visions without Systems end in disillusionment and a reluctance to open to idealistic possibilities again; as an old saying puts it, "a cynic is a wounded idealist." Systems unattached to Visions do produce results, but frequently we are dismayed by the "unintended consequences" that accompany, and undermine, those achievements.

It is because I see a true synthesis of Visions and Systems in the Pachamama Alliance that I'm devoting so much of this newsletter to their efforts. I believe they've correctly identified a dysfunctional "dream" as the major cause of the ecological disasters, social injustices and spiritual vacuums that are so jeopardizing the future for all of us. I also believe Pachamama understands what needs to be done - "to change the dream of the North" - to make possible a healthy Vision that can bring about the changes in behavior we all need. And I believe they've designed and launched sustainable Systems - The "Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream" Symposiums - that will reliably achieve the needed change over time. I am very, very grateful for their work.

Now I know I can sound a little over the top this month, and some of you will be shaking your heads at my naiveté. Knowing this, I still stand by what I've written above - and you will have an easier time with my excitement if you'll watch this seven minute video:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoXJZ_3-J9w

You can also get more info in #2 and #3 below, but what I recommend most of all is that you see the full "Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream" video, and this you can do by taking part of a day to attend a Symposium in your area. The Symposium is the major part of the Systems that will help all this good stuff come about, and, if you're like me, you won't truly "get it" until you gift yourself with this experience.

To find a Symposium, go to:

http://awakeningthedreamer.org/component/option,com_events/task,map/

More of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE - MEISTER ECKHART

"If the only prayer you will ever say is thank you,
it will be enough."

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1. FATHER WILLIAM'S MONTHLY MUSINGS

November and Thanksgiving Greetings, Good Friends...

Old Father William has joyfully joined spring here in New Zealand, but not without a pang of loss for family and friends in the US where this is Thanksgiving week. Donna and I both feel Thanksgiving is the holiday closest to our hearts. Partly this is because it has remained relatively uncommercialized over time, but mostly because it is an occasion for gathering our loved ones together, preparing and sharing a glorious meal and pausing to feel gratitude for our blessings. It is one of the times when we all seem to offer the best in ourselves.

In the spirit of this season let me echo Meister Eckhart:

"If the only prayer you will ever say is thank you, it will be enough."

I also want suggest we all extend his wisdom beyond this season - or any season. The more I mature, the more I understand that giving thanks for all things at all times is the simplest way for me to "live the life I dream." That phrase comes from Judy Collins song, "The Life You Dream"...

There's a time that comes once every morning
When you choose the kind of day you will have
It comes in with the sun and you know you've begun
To live the life you dream
You can light all your candles to the dawn
And surrender yourself to the sunrise
You can make it wrong you can make it right
You can live the life you dream

Pray to Buddha pray to Krishna pray to Jesus
Or the shadow of the devil on your wall
Anyone you call...will come...

The night comes to you dressed in darkness

Descends on your body like a blessing
You can lie in its arms it will heal your heart
You can live the life you dream
You can wake in this vale of tears
You can laugh like a child again
You can make it right you can make it wrong
You can live the life you dream

What you see and you believe is not the answer
To anything that matters very much
Anything you touch...is gone

In the valleys you look for the mountains
In the mountains you search the rivers
You have no where to go, you are where you belong
You can live the life you dream
If you call him your master will find you
Seven bars on the gate will not hold him
Seven fires burning bright only give him delight
You can live the life you dream

All your treasure buys you nothing but the moment
All your poverty has lost you everything
Love will teach your dream...to sing

I love this song. If you haven't Judy sing it, please treat yourself. The message for me is profound, true and clear. There is a time every morning when I choose the kind of life I will live that day; I am responsible for how I will live each day. And whoever I call into it, Buddha, Krishna, Jesus or the devil on my wall, I will bring into my reality. What I can see, touch and buy is not the answer and is gone in a moment. My poverty, my searching for mountains, rivers and whatever else is not present, loses me everything. I am always where I belong, and when I give thanks for where I am and what is present, I do live the life I dream.

So giving thanks isn't something I do for somebody else; it's the most precious gift I can give myself. It usually also happens that my gratitude is a gift for those around me and the world as well, but choosing to be present, and thankful for what is present with me, is

much more than an altruistic act. It is how I survive and flourish in the world.

One of my most helpful teachers in this regard is Brother David Steindl-Rast and the worldwide Network for Grateful Living, an interactive website with thousands of participants daily from more than 243 countries. Here's a bit of what it says:

"Gratefulness is a universal principle that serves as the core inspiration for personal growth, cross-cultural understanding, interfaith dialogue, intergenerational respect, nonviolent conflict resolution, and ecological sustainability... The network "provides resources for living in the gentle power of gratefulness, which restores courage, reconciles relationships, and heals our Earth..."

The network truly is chock full of resources we can all use to deepen our thanks giving. Check it out at www.gratefulness.org.

So what do Judy Collins' song and Brother David's network have in common?

They are both eminently practical supports for living the lives we dream while we gently do our small parts in healing our world. I recommend trying a small experiment. For a month listen to Judy's song each morning before you get out of bed and, when you get to your computer, make your first priority reading of the network's "Word for the Day."* I guarantee you will be amazed at how easily and simply your life, and our world's, gets better.

So Happy Thanksgiving - this week and for the rest of your life...

Much love, Father William

*www.gratefulness.org/word/index.htm

More of Father William:

<http://www.fatherwilliam.org/>

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