A card on my kitchen counter reads: “Nothing happens, and nothing happens, and then everything happens.” An overwhelming “yes!” resounded within me the first time I read the card. But then, while fishing on the Kenai River near my home, I realized this isn’t really true.

Imagine this: four of us sit in a boat. We fish for Chinook “king” salmon. We wait ... we wait ... suddenly, a bite! Fish on! Action erupts, everything happens! Set the hook, pole tip up, no slack line, check drag, move with the fish, reel, let line go as a dance begins, fully engaging all the senses.

Preparation has already taken place: the right gear, bait, awakening early, perhaps even calculating the time of an incoming tide into the mouth of the river. To hook a Chinook salmon is quite a sacred dance. Especially if the “king” happens to be forty, fifty, or sixty plus pounds of a magnificent seven year fish that will fight against the urge to die—even though it is headed upstream to spawn or fertilize eggs, and die anyway, becoming nutrient for the river. The actual bite doesn't happen very often, and it is magical when it does. Yet, I am grateful for the entire experience of fishing—even if I step off the boat empty-handed. The bonus is a beautiful salmon to nourish everyone who gathers at my table.

Is it true that nothing happens until everything happens? No. I think the card on my counter is a fib. Just as a salmon is in constant movement, we too breathe and move beneath the surface of things. And then, in what sometimes appears as a surprise—even to us—everything happens. In fact, everything hums along all the time—perhaps just under our radar. We are always in fluid motion.

It is valuable to learn to listen to what is present all along—in the here and now of the present moment. In this expansive awareness, we can become grateful for just this, just this: whether it is in the preparation, waiting, action, struggle, or accomplishment. Each moment contains a wholeness of its own.

Can we grow or be hooked into gratefulness? Yes. I think it begins with appreciation for each moment of our lives—including all the uncertain times when it appears nothing happens! And so I ask: do you believe gratefulness is central to a life of authenticity and integrity that provides sustenance for us and others? I do. I’m grateful fishing helps teach me this fundamental truth. What does the card quote evoke in you?

—Pegge Bernecker
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Publisher: Spiritual Directors International
Executive Director: Liz Budd Ellmann, MDiv
Editor: Pegge Bernecker
Production Supervisor: Tobias Becker
Submissions: listen@sdiworld.org
Advertising: www.sdiworld.org

Listen is published four times a year (January, April, July, October). The names Spiritual Directors International™, SDIWorld™, and SDITM and its logo are trademarks of Spiritual Directors International, Inc.; all rights reserved. Opinions and programs represented in this publication are of the authors and advertisers and may not represent the opinions of Spiritual Directors International, the Coordinating Council, or the editors.

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Volume 3, Issue 4
Seeking spiritual direction? Go to www.sdiworld.org
Being grateful is really the only response worth making. Gratitude arises spontaneously when we experience reality rather than our self created and usually self focused version of what is real. Reality itself is a happy place, integrated and whole, dynamically so!

Perhaps we cannot change the suffering—world gone wrong—we see around us, except insofar as we change the way we look at the world. In fact, anyone can make that change at any moment of any day. We can choose to be happy, and in fact His Holiness the Dalai Lama considers this being happy to be the very point of life that lies within our grasp, with every breath.

This seems possible for me and for you when things are going well. However, when we are harmed or hurt by others or by circumstances, our orientation is often quite different, usually seeking who or what is responsible for our misery. Truth is, we are. The Buddha was really more a physician than a metaphysician, offering practical advice for healing what ails us, more than beliefs! He famously said, “if an arrow is sticking out of your side, don’t argue about where it came from or who made it; just pull it out.” We make our way to happiness not by fretting about it, but simply by finding the cause of our suffering, and then attending to it, as any doctor might do.

This approach honours both our own responsibility to act and also our intimate interconnection with all others. As Buddhists, we dedicate our prayers and actions on a daily basis, “for the benefit of all sentient beings” just as we freely acknowledge that all sentient beings “have been our mothers”, the most intimate connection we will ever know in this life.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama responds when questioned about how he remains happy, having suffered immense personal sorrow and loss in his life. Tibetans continue to be killed, and His Holiness has carried this burden since he was four years old. How does he remain happy? “It is my profession” he says, with a grin. May we cultivate seeing beyond the obvious, to this interconnected reality just out of sight.

—Sally Taylor is a spiritual practitioner within the Tibetan Buddhist Gelugpa tradition, and a student of Ven. Panchen Otrul Rinpoche. Her background and training is in religious and political studies, in horticulture, and she has lived and worked in Northern Ireland community for over thirty years. She presently is a member of the Coordinating Council of Spiritual Directors International. Her “home of the heart” remains the Pacific Northwest, USA, where she grew up. She is a mother of three glorious young adults, Christina, Ian, and Alex.
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People often ask me how Buddhists answer the question: “Does God exist?”

The other day I was walking along the river.

The wind was blowing. Suddenly I thought, Oh! The air really exists.

We know that the air is there, but unless the wind blows against our face, we are not aware of it. Here in the wind I was suddenly aware, yes it’s really there.

And the sun too. I was suddenly aware of the sun, shining through the bare trees.

Its warmth, its brightness, and all this completely free, completely gratuitous.

Simply there for us to enjoy.

And without my knowing it, completely spontaneously, my two hands came together, and I realized that I was making gassho.

And it occurred to me that this is all that matters:

that we can bow, take a deep bow. Just that. Just that.

– Rev. Eido Tai Shimano
Gratefulness

I am grateful for knowing
It’s not about me
To live in the now
To laugh it up with wine and bread
To be myself most of all

I am grateful for knowing
The orange tang of dawn’s hello
The crimson fire of dusk’s good-bye
The great white hope of first snow
The lilac scented days of spring’s eternal promise

I am grateful for knowing
That prayer cries out from the heart
That as I scuffle through leaves
Walk across sandy deserts and rocky beaches
You are my invisible forever companion

I am grateful for knowing
Your voice in classical music
Your smile in wrinkled foreheads
Your touch in the silky haired kitten’s back
Your enticing kiss in the first sip of morning coffee

I am grateful for knowing

— Donna Erickson Couch, Dana Point, California, USA

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Volume 3, Issue 4
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Question: "Am feeling very lost in regaining a spiritual connection & direction. Used to feel grounded in spirituality, living in the present and feeling grateful. Now, I desperately need connections with others, have very few positive friends. Any suggestions?"

Hoot Hoot: Thank you for e-mailing your question. First off, you are not alone! Asking this question means you can trust your inner longing and guidance for something more. Honor this time in your life. Start by finding a spiritual director or guide to companion you. If you need help to begin, resources are available to you on the Spiritual Directors International Web site. Go to www.sdiworld.org.

- Read “How do I find a spiritual director?”
- Search “Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors” an online, comprehensive, global listing of more than 5,000 spiritual directors and guides.
- Watch a YouTube video to learn how to find a spiritual director or guide. Click on the FREE Downloads Resource link to view YouTube videos produced by Spiritual Directors International.
- Participate in a FREE one hour teleconference, “How to Seek and Find a Spiritual Director” on November 10, 2009 at 12:00 EST; 5:00 GMT/UTC. To RSVP go to the Spiritual Directors International Outreach Events tab. Or simply search “Teleconference” on the Web site.

Finding a spiritual director is a very personal and spiritual quest. To aid in your discernment process it may be helpful for you to contact and interview two or three spiritual directors.

Blessings to you in this time of searching for what is significant in your life and the deep connections you long for.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org, or offer your question online at: http://bit.ly/AskOwl.

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