



Table of Contents

<i>1</i>	How It All Started	1
<i>2</i>	A Millennial Art	23
<i>3</i>	A Universe of Spiritual Laws	31
<i>4</i>	The Law of Positive Expectations	39
<i>5</i>	The Law of Right Returns	51
<i>6</i>	The Golden Rule	85
<i>7</i>	The Deeper Meaning of the Art of Blessing	109
<i>8</i>	The Law of Unconditional Love	117
<i>9</i>	The Law of Universal Harmony	135
<i>10</i>	Behind the Veil	157
<i>11</i>	Reverse the Appearances	177
<i>12</i>	Don't Forget the Postscript!	187
<i>13</i>	Blessing as a Spiritual Path	223
	Chapter Notes & Bibliography	249
	Blessings for Everyday Life	261
	A Note from the Author	282
	By purchasing this book, you have already started blessing	284



Introduction

This book is born of a spiritual experience that profoundly marked my life and enabled me to discover the deep meaning of the act of blessing. Far from being simply a ritual that punctuates religious ceremonies, the practice of blessing rests on spiritual laws that each one of us can discover so that we may live better and more fully.

This experience reinforced my intuition that these spiritual laws, described in the great spiritual teachings of humanity a long time ago, constitute the very basis of our living in the universe—often without our knowledge. They are as precise and efficient as the laws of the physical world. I have the conviction that the re-discovery of these laws could be one of the greatest breakthroughs of the next millennium. It would give an extraordinary impetus to the evolution of human consciousness, of individuals and nations.

I have not written these pages as a professional or a master in the field of spirituality or religion. For 35 years, I have been committed to the creation of a world

with a little more justice and compassion, a world that works for all (nature included). For many years, this commitment was lived out in the field of international development. More recently, it has been in the field of adult training I give for the elderly unemployed and those living on a minimal income, and through workshops on living more value-centered, holistic lives.

Very early in my career, an incident alerted me to the fact that it is useless to attempt to transform social, political, and economic structures if one does not also transform people's hearts. In the mid-sixties, I was working as a sociologist in one of the rare developing countries to have won its independence after a long, hard, and often ferocious war of liberation. The head of state of the country was a general who had imprisoned the president appointed at independence. All legal opposition was forbidden, but there existed clandestine opposition groups.

I was responsible for a team of interviewers undertaking a nationwide attitude survey. One of the interviewers had contacts with the opposition. He shared with me that a friend of his had been tortured in a police station exactly where his torturer had himself been tortured by the former colonial army.

I had come to this country out of political idealism, because it had undergone a "real" revolution.

Yes, the material structures of the administration, economy, and legal system had been overturned, but the hearts of those who ran the country had apparently not changed in the same measure.

This was the point of departure of a lifelong reflection that culminates, more than 33 years later, with this book. It never would have been written without two short sentences pronounced by Dr. Gerald G. Jampolsky, founder of the internationally known Center for Attitudinal Healing in Tiburon, California and author of the international bestseller Love is Letting Go of Fear. He uttered the first sentence in a lecture given with his wife, Diane Cirincione, at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, in the early nineties: “Each time I go to my center, it is to heal myself.” The second sentence, which appears in one of his books, relays the idea that one teaches what one most needs to learn.

My work has taught me that the unemployed begin to really listen when they discover the person talking to them has also experienced unemployment. One identifies more easily with someone who is struggling like oneself, and this realization was the final impetus to write this book. It is the work of an apprentice who shares it with other apprentices, in the spirit of the great Persian Sufi writer Farid Uddin Attar’s poem, “Mantic Uttair.” Attar describes a group of birds that decide to look for their king, the Simorg. After

many adventures they meet again, facing each other in a circle. They look at each other and lo, they discover that *they* are the Simorg. The king is in each one of them. The Kingdom is in each one of us.

How redundant to speak of living one's spirituality in everyday life! For either spirituality is lived in everyday life, in the most mundane circumstances—at the office, at the factory, while gardening or washing the car, in business or married life, while washing dishes, in suffering and joy—or it has no reason to exist. If the spiritual path is not lived in the everyday, where on earth will it be lived? Ashrams in the Himalayas and monasteries in Tuscany may be conducive to spiritual seeking, but that's not where the majority of us spend most of our time. Rabbi Hillel is reputed to have said, "If not you, who? If not now, when?"

What is appealing about the spiritual path, as the American spiritual teacher Ram Dass has stressed, is that everything is "grist for the mill." *Absolutely everything*—a traffic jam, an illness, a theft, a noisy neighbor, a flat tire—becomes an opportunity to learn, discover, progress, repent, rejoice, unveil, awaken, love more, and wonder. The smallest detail of life, every single encounter—be it with a saint or a snail—can sparkle with tender interest and become aglow with enchantment. That is the real excitement of the spiritual path, its beauty, depth, joy, and yes, its fun. Every single event

in life can become an opportunity for a silent “Yes, thank you.”

If you cannot live your spiritual path in the subway, in the middle of a street fight or when facing a major challenge, playing tennis or baseball, you might question its very use.

A brief comment on words. The French writer Georges Bernanos stated that “one of mankind’s greatest disgraces was to have to entrust something as precious and subtle as our thoughts to something as unstable and pliable as words.” A book that speaks of spirituality and transcendence necessarily mentions words such as *providence*, *God*, *Creator*, and so on. The term *God*, for instance, is only a word that probably corresponds to as many different conceptions as there are human beings. For me, there are immutable spiritual laws that govern the universe. These laws emanate from an unconditionally loving principle of harmony. Some will find it easier to call this principle *God*, while for others the very term could be offensive. Let us not get hung up on words, but rather use them as springboards to propel us toward that which is inexpressible. When I use a term such as *Love* with a capital in this book, it will refer to the governing divine Principle or God.

In Patton Boyle’s book *Screaming Hawk*, his fictional American Indian teacher, Flying Eagle, tells

him to listen to the silence between the words: “The truth comes in the silence between the words. It is grasped and experienced with the heart.” I hope that you, as a reader of this book, will attempt just that—to listen with the heart to the silence between the words. Listen to the echoes the words evoke in you. Please do not trip on these “unstable, plastic” symbols. Once more, no truth can be adequately contained in words. Even the most profound spiritual writings of humanity or the clearest explanations of scientists cannot constitute the truth. They are at best indicators. Gandhi exclaimed, “My life is my message.” Jesus said, “He that *doeth* the truth cometh to the light”—not the person who preaches or *writes about* it!

Another vitally important distinction is between spirituality and religion. Spirituality, which derives from the Latin *spiritus*, meaning “breath,” refers to an individual’s personal experience of the divine, to her or his spiritual path. Religion usually refers to a collective or group experience, to an organized system of beliefs and creeds, experienced through the medium of a certain institution or structure. One can be a fervent adherent of a given religion and be totally devoid of any true spirituality as expressed through qualities such as compassion and joy, forgiveness and inspiration. One can be a lifelong free thinker, agnostic or even atheist, and yet constantly live the values and qualities of the spirit.

One might say that religions are human attempts to define the indefinable. Individuals and groups often come to believe their definitions, which are only signposts, and forget the reality toward which these are pointing. Worse, they come to fight over the words on the signposts and forget where they are going!

Organized religion furnishes only *one* context through which eternal truths can be expressed. It resembles crutches: often necessary, but temporary at best. At the present stage of human history and collective level of consciousness, certain forms of organized religion are certainly useful and necessary. The great religions of the world have furnished societies with an ethical dimension indispensable to human progress. But who, if she or he has the choice, would not prefer to walk without crutches, or to spring from the diving board and swim? This is the reason that for many great spiritual teachings of humanity, truth resides first and foremost in demonstration, in the truth lived, in a state of consciousness, and not in dogmas, rituals, or sacred books.

My thanks go Candace Jagel, Bunny McBride, and Susan Remkus, for their most able editing and especially for weeding out my gallicisms.

I make mine the words of Dr. Larry Dossey, M.D., of the National Institutes of Health, a pioneer in

opening up medical thinking to spiritual healing, who once said, “I just try to tell my own truth and sing my own song coherently, hoping that good things will come of it. I hope others will join me in singing their own song, too.”

It is my hope that those who read this book will be inspired to practice the gentle art of blessing in their own unique way. Of one thing I am certain—it will unseal inner fountains of healing and bliss. Once they start to flow, they will grow with every sincere blessing.

Geneva, Switzerland, Easter 2003



Chapter 1

How It All Started

How do you stay spiritually centered in the middle of a noisy street or in a smoke-filled restaurant? In a packed subway with a drunkard shouting incoherently at you? How do you keep your spiritual poise during a transatlantic flight with the baby in the seat behind you crying its heart out? How do you keep your calm when someone insults you without reason? Or when a careless driver slams into the side of your new car? How does one feel love rather than pity in a refugee camp with hundreds of starving children pulling at your clothes? Or when the TV news bursts into your living room with pictures of the latest

massacre on the other side of the globe? Or when a dictator pours insult and abuse on your country?

This book attempts to show that “spirituality” is not a concept to be debated abstractly, but a transforming power that has meaning only if it is lived daily.



At one moment in my career, I had to make one of the most difficult decisions in my life: keep my job, which meant accepting a situation that violated the most elementary professional ethics, or quit. (I learned later that the people who put me in this situation were actively banking on my leaving!)

*So,
rather than commit moral hara-kiri,
I quit.*

In the following weeks, I developed a deep-seated and all-consuming resentment such as I had never experienced before against the people who had put me in this impossible situation. When I

awoke in the morning, my first thought was of them. As I showered, as I walked along the streets, as I went shopping or jogging, this resentment obsessed me, eating me up, draining my energy and robbing me of all peace. I was very literally being poisoned. I knew I was harming myself, but despite hours of meditation, prayer, and spiritual study, this obsession clung to me. I felt and behaved like a total victim!

Then one day, a statement in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount struck me as never before: "Bless those that curse you" (Matthew 5:44). Suddenly, everything became clear. This is what I had to do. Bless my former "persecutors." Right then and there, I started to bless them in every way imaginable: in their health and their joy, their finances and their work, their family relations and their peace, their abundance and their goodness. The ways to bless them were endless. By *blessing*, I mean wishing from the bottom of the heart, in total sincerity, the very best for that person—his or her complete fulfillment and deepest happiness. It is the most important dimension of blessing: a sincerity that comes from the heart. This is the power that transforms and heals, elevates and restores. It is the very antipode of a stereotyped

ritual. Spontaneous blessing is a flowing fountain that, like a mountain stream, cascades and sings. It expresses perpetual freshness and *morning*—defined as

*freshness,
openness,
gratitude,
inspiration,
newness,
alertness,
expectation of good,
wakefulness,
fresh beginning,
purity,
threshold,
(re)birth,
joy,
innocence,
wonder.*





I want to stress that at first, these blessings were a conscious decision activated by the will but born of a sincere spiritual intention to heal my thinking. The key factor was the intention. Slowly, the blessings moved from being an act of the will to an act of the heart—because the act of blessing comes essentially from the heart.

I blessed the persons concerned all day long: when brushing my teeth, jogging, on my way to the post office or supermarket, while washing dishes and before falling asleep. I blessed them individually and silently. This continued for quite a few years.

After a few months of this practice of blessing, one day, quite spontaneously, I started blessing people in the street, on the bus, at the post office, or when I stood in lines. At the beginning of this wonderful discovery, I would sometimes walk the whole length of a plane or train just for the joy of silently blessing the travelers—unreservedly and unconditionally. This “gentle art of blessing” became a silent song, the driving power of my spir-

itual life, a bit like the cantus firmus of a Bach cantate. The stronger the basic melody, the more the counterpoint can develop and expand. Little by little, blessing people became one of the greatest joys of my life—and it still is now, after many years of practice. I have found it to be one of the most efficient ways of staying spiritually centered and of freeing my thoughts from negativity, criticism, or judgment.

I never received any roses from my former employer, nor even the slightest expression of regret. Rather, I have received roses from life. By the armful.



Thanks to this gentle art, I started having rather amazing experiences. For example, I organized a benefit concert on World Food Day (October 16), the proceeds of which were to be sent to several peasant-farmer groups in Southern Senegal. An Afro-Caribbean orchestra managed by a friend of mine was offering its services free of charge for the concert, which had been advertised both on the radio and in local newspapers.

The technician of the large college hall where the concert was to be held showed, for no apparent reason, immense hostility toward the project from the start. He wanted nothing to do with it. We even had to bring in a second technician to handle the sound system and lighting.

Two hours before the concert, the first technician took nearly all the microphones off the stage. My Cameroonain friend (who directed the orchestra) was categorical: impossible to have only two mikes for a ten person orchestra with vocalists! So we went to see the technician. Right from the beginning of our discussion, he maintained his hostility. My immediate initial reaction was anger, but just as quickly I knew anger would not heal the situation. And the public was to arrive in less than two hours! So as the technician argued with my friend, I silently started blessing him: in his goodness, his abundance and his integrity, his health and his relationships...in every way I could imagine. Suddenly, between two sentences, his attitude changed completely. Where a few seconds earlier we had seen a hate-filled expression, suddenly a beautiful smile appeared. He went to his lab, came back with a pile of mikes, recommended the best ones to my friend, and wished us a wonderful evening.

On another occasion, I was finishing a book chronicling my research on grassroots development in Africa, which had involved visiting over a hundred villages all over the continent. I had undertaken this research as an act of faith, with the desire to correct the erroneous, negative picture of Africa most people have. I trusted that if I wrote a good book, I would find a publisher.

As I was concluding the writing, I met a person who had experience in publishing in France. We became instant friends, and he suggested I send him the finished manuscript, offering to forward it to a friend in a good publishing house. Once finished, I phoned to say I was about to send him the manuscript. I also mentioned that I had a literary agent, as I hoped to publish the book in other languages, too. The minute I mentioned the term “literary agent,” he exploded with the most vulgar expletives. “As long as you have an agent, don’t count on me,” he said, slamming down the phone. Taken aback, I thought he must have had a most painful experience with a literary agent.

Because I didn’t want to keep in mind a negative picture of my new friend, every time he crossed my mind in the following days, I blessed him.

About ten days later, he called, as if nothing had happened, to suggest that I tell my agent to send the manuscript to a certain gentleman who was both a good friend of his and of the director of a publishing house. He would write to this person and recommend my book.

The end result was that the book was accepted immediately for publication by an excellent publisher. My agent told me that in twenty years in this field, she had never seen a book published so quickly. At the last minute, the publishing house even advanced the date of publication so that the book could appear in time for an international book fair. My friend was able to obtain a preface for the book by a leading European politician, who was highly respected for his knowledge of Africa. I could not have dreamed for more!

One day, about seven months after starting the practice of blessing, something happened that took me completely by surprise. I was preparing a talk on the theme “Healing the world” for an international youth meeting in Zürich, Switzerland. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by an inspiration such as I had never felt before. I felt literally like a scribe under dictation, so much so that my hand

had difficulty keeping up with the ideas that flowed into my mind. The result was the following.

The Gentle Art of Blessing

On awakening, bless this day, for it is already full of unseen good which your blessings will call forth, for to bless is to acknowledge the unlimited good that is embedded in the very texture of the universe and awaiting each and all.



On passing people in the street, on the bus, in places of work and play, bless them. The peace of your blessing will companion them on their way, and its aura will be a light on their path.



On meeting people and talking to them, bless them in their health, their work, their joy, their relationship to the universe, themselves and others. Bless

them in their abundance and their finances, bless them in every conceivable way, for such blessings not only sow seeds of healing but one day will spring forth as flowers in the waste places of your own life.



As you walk, bless the city in which you live, its government and teachers, its nurses and street sweepers, its children and bankers, its priests and prostitutes. The minute anyone expresses the least aggression or unkindness to you, respond with a blessing: Bless them totally, sincerely, joyfully—for such blessings are a shield that protects them from the ignorance of their misdeed and deflects the arrow that was aimed at you.



To bless means to wish, unconditionally and from the deepest chamber of your heart, unrestricted good for others and events; it means to hallow, to hold in reverence, to behold with awe that which is always a gift from the Creator. He who is hallowed by your blessing is set aside, consecrated, holy, whole. To bless is to invoke divine care upon, to speak or think gratefully for, to confer happiness upon, although we