

# In the Presence of the Other

## En présence de l'autre

Sermon By Rev. Diane Rollert, Sunday 9 February, 2020 Paris

In Buddhism, presence means being present to this very moment. It's about the impermanence of being.

*Comme les bouddhistes expliquent, on est dans l'instant présent, et puis c'est parti. On arrive à l'instant d'après et c'est fini. Encore et encore avec chaque seconde de conscience qui passe. C'est dur de rester présent.*

It's hard to stay present. It takes a lifetime of practice.

*Parfois, je peux vivre dans le présent.*

When I am able to live in the present, those are moments I really cherish — afterwards, when I think about it. That's the challenge with mindfulness. How do you let go of the constant narrative in your head, to simply be in the moment without thinking about it?

*Comme est-ce qu'on peut être dans l'instant présent sans y penser ?*

*Ensuite, il y a l'idée de Dieu, ou d'une puissance supérieure, qui nous appelle à reconnaître la présence divine en tout.*

I also struggle with this idea of God, or some higher power, calling us to recognize the divine presence in everything.

I yearn for deep spiritual connection, and some periods of my life are more spiritually connected than others. I'm a minister, and yet I live with doubt. Je cherche la foi, mais elle n'est pas toujours là pour moi.

*Le souffle de la pleine conscience et le souffle de la création sont entrelacés.*

The breath of mindfulness and the breath of creation are intertwined. It's easy to overlook both, to forget to breathe, to forget to be present to what is inside us or outside us.

*On oublie souvent de remarquer combien tout peut être lumineux, dans le miraculeux et le mondain.*

We can often forget to notice the miraculous even in the face of loss and sadness, even when we want to remake the world into something better.

*Dans la Torah, il y a ce passage mystérieux dans le livre de la Genèse que les gens appellent Jacob luttant avec l'ange.*

In the Torah, there's Jacob wrestling with the angel, a passage I have always loved. It's evening when Jacob and his family cross a river on their way to Canaan, to be reconciled with Jacob's estranged brother Esau. For unexplained reasons, Jacob tells his family to travel ahead without him. The passage reads (NRSV Gen 32:24-31):

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.

*Jacob demeura seul. Alors un homme luttait avec lui jusqu'au lever de l'aurore. Voyant qu'il ne pouvait le vaincre, cet homme le frappa à l'emboîture de la hanche; et l'emboîture de la hanche de Jacob se démit pendant qu'il luttait avec lui.*

Then he [the man] said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me."

*Il dit: Laisse-moi aller, car l'aurore se lève. Et Jacob répondit: Je ne te laisserai point aller, que tu ne m'aies béni.*

So he [the man] said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob."

Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with divine and humans beings, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him.

So Jacob called the place Peniel (The Face of God), saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved."

Jacob appela ce lieu du nom de Peniel: car, dit-il, j'ai vu Dieu face à face, et mon âme a été sauvée.

The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

*Il y a quelque chose dans cette histoire ancienne qui résonne en moi.* We don't know if Jacob has really wrestled with God or, as many say, with an angel. What we do know is that he has struggled overnight, he has faced something powerful and he has been changed and renamed — and he's survived.

*Est-ce que Jacob a lutté avec Dieu, avec un ange, avec lui même ? On ne sait pas. Mais il a fait face à quelque chose de puissant. Il a été changé et renommé, et il a survécu.*

*Je sais que j'ai lutté avec mes propres anges.*

Yes, I've wrestled with angels. but I'm not talking about angels with wings, or with strangers appearing at the banks of a river who may or may not be God. I'm talking about changes in thinking or feeling, changes in beliefs, changes in the course of our lives that test us. Sometimes we struggle. We're faced with a loss, or we find ourselves forced to change our assumptions about who we were meant to be, or what we are now called to do. Sometimes our bodies respond, giving us messages we've refused to hear.

*Parfois, nous nous débattons. Parfois, notre corps réagit, nous donnant des messages que nous avons refusé d'entendre. Puis, à un moment donné, le soleil se lève et quelque chose a changé.*

Then, the sun rises. We've lost some part of ourselves, but we've also been transformed. A new purpose lies ahead, even if we don't see it yet.

*Je lutte pour être présent à mon souffle et à la présence de l'Autre, de la sacrée, de la sainte, dans ma vie. C'est souvent difficile à trouver les mots pour l'expliquer.*

I wrestle with being present to my breath and to the presence of the holy Other in my life. It's not that my breath isn't there or that I don't experience a sense of transcendence in each day. It's that I sometimes get so caught up in thinking about what's ahead that I lose the very moment I'm in. We don't ever get to reclaim those moments. They are gone. All we can do is centre ourselves in the next moment.

*On ne récupère jamais les moments transcendant dans nos vies. Ils sont partis le moment qu'ils sont expérimentés. Tout ce que nous pouvons faire, c'est nous centrer sur l'instant d'après.*

*Je veux partager avec vous ma propre pratique spirituelle alors que j'essaie d'être présent à mon propre souffle et à tout ce qui est lumineux et sacré.*

Most Sunday mornings, I awake early to write a prayer as my final preparation for our worship service in Montreal. I call them prayers. You could also call them meditations or poems. Perhaps this is my deepest and most consistent spiritual practice. Some mornings I know that I've been wrestling with the angels in my dreams. The words arrive mysteriously, without effort. They are the presence of something other than me, the presence of breath, of spirit, that sends the words flowing through my fingers as I open my heart. I never know if they are the words that need to be heard that morning. I simply offer them as honestly as I can in gratitude to all of you, as you share these moments of breath, being and searching with me.

So let me end this reflection with a prayer I wrote almost seven years ago, the midway point in my ministry in Montreal. The wrestling continues. As 13th century mystic Rumi wrote, and we sang earlier, "Though you've broken your vows a thousand times, come yet again come."

*"Bien que tu aies rompu tes voeux mille fois, reviens encore une fois."*

*Voici ma prière :*

### **There Are Days, January 2013**

God,  
There are days, weeks, months,  
when I am not sure what I believe anymore.  
Doubt is something that wells up inside me  
as big as a God-sized hole.

This faith of questioning  
is not easy,  
too nebulous at times,  
too easily shamed by fear of the illogical,  
too tied to the rational.  
Yet I love reason,  
the simple beauty of logic,  
perfect numbers  
held in the spiralling of a rose.

Still I thirst for the luminous connection  
to everything,  
to this place I hold,  
small on this spinning planet,  
to every atom,  
every element,  
every star.

Who am I to ask for answers  
when I can feel so humbled  
by rivers, forests, oceans,  
and the great throng of humanity,  
complex and beyond my comprehension.

*Certains jours, j'ai simplement envie d'avoir la certitude  
de savoir que tout ira bien.*

*La passion du prophète  
prêchant l'amour depuis le sommet de la montagne.*

*L'équanimité du Bouddha.  
Les nombreux bras de Shiva.  
L'immensité du Grand Esprit  
qui jette la lumière  
sur un chemin obscurci.*

*Il y a tant de noms  
pour ce qui ne pourra jamais être nommé.*

There are so many names  
for what can never truly be named.  
So, then,  
I must name what I can:  
The gratitude we share.  
The brief glimmers of understanding  
we see in each other's eyes.  
The warmth of gathering on a cold winter's morning.  
You, God, Universe,  
embracing me  
with all my questions.

*Toutes ces choses  
m'embrassant  
avec toutes mes questions.*

Amen. Blessed Be. Béni soit-il. Namasté.