

Daily Meditation 4-27-26

More Experiences of the Spiritual & Sensual Found in Indigenous Prayer

Good morning.

It's a special privilege, a blessing to share with you today, one of my favorite ceremonies and one of my favorite poems by M.C. Richards, who underwent this ceremony. So I want to give a shout-out to two very close friends of mine, both of whom are passed on now. Sister Jose Hobday, a Seneca woman and Franciscan sister who was on my faculty both at ICCS and UCS for many years. We were friends for many years, over 20 years. Because it is she who taught courses on Native American ritual in our programs, and taught us many rituals, and taught me many rituals. She introduced me to the Four Paths for the Four Directions, for example. And this very special ritual from indigenous people of Southern Arizona, when we shared it with M.C. Richards, obviously lit a fire: it gave birth to this marvelous poem that I share with you in today's meditation.

And M.C. was on our faculty also, in both schools for over 20 years, and I felt very close to both of them. Both of them taught me so much. And obviously it was a beautiful thing to see them interacting on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of her book, *Centering*, where, among other things, we shared this ritual and doused her with baskets of flowers, even as we threw them at one another.

But I'd like to share with you a few teachings from M.C. This is from her book, *Imagine Inventing Yellow*. I just love that title for a book. It's from a short poem of hers, actually. And she said it came to her when she encountered this one flower that was yellow. And I remember whenever M.C. and I would go walking and we traveled together not only in the Bay Area, but also in Australia, where she was part of our faculty doing a week-long seminar there, and also in Ireland, when she was part of a workshop we did there.

And one thing that really struck me was when she'd walk in the woods, she knew so many flowers by their name, so many flowers. And she wasn't showing off, but she'd say, Look, here is and here is and here is. It's as if she had memorized the names of these flowers because they were her friends. She was so close to them that she never forgot a name of a flower, that I know of. She could identify every flower we ever saw together. It's amazing. So the fact that this one flower, seeing this one yellow flower, moved her to utter this amazing statement: "Imagine Inventing Yellow." That alone tells you a lot about her. And she wrote poems on rhubarb, she wrote poems on carrots, she wrote poems on her favorite goat.

And so everything that moved her, and we're discussing the role of the sensual and spirituality. And she says, *Imagine Inventing Yellow* is a book of poems — this is a collection of many of her poems — celebrating “what imagination means.” What imagination means. Then she kind of answers her own question:

Imagination means singing to a wide invisible audience. A wide invisible audience. Imagination reaches so many more people than concepts do. It means receptivity to the creative unconscious, the Macrocosmic Mind. Macrocosmic mind. I have one painting in my home here, where she paints the story of the universe. It has three flowers opening up. But she was very interested in the New Cosmology. It means receptivity to the creative unconscious, the Macrocosmic Mind, artistic mind.

So for her, the artistic mind is the macrocosmic mind, and the creative unconscious. *It makes, she says, erotic philosophers of us. Erotic philosophers of us. So there you have another language for the spiritual and the sensual: erotic. As we imagine the world in images that make whole.* And of course, I have often quoted the Book of Wisdom that says, “This is Eros: to love life.”

So “erotic” is not a term that pornographers own and have a trademark on. We should take it back, those interested in spirituality, because that's what wisdom is: to love life, and that's what Eros means. She goes on: *To imagine is to give birth to: to embody the spirit in word and picture and behavior.*

Now, one course that M.C. taught with us was Clay As Meditation. And I remember in our workshop in Australia, I took that course from her. One of her practices was, she had this big chunk of clay. And when I mean “big,” she put us all on one big table, and we were instructed to make one piece. So all of us together created this kind of like a big oval of clay, and worked on it with our hands and so forth, with her coaching. And it was a marvelous experience of community, everyone working on the same piece of clay. And I might add, no one asking what political party you were, or what religion you were, etc., etc.

And to return to art and clay and the Earth, Mother Earth, is a spiritual practice that is very, I think, useful for these rugged times we're living in now. She says, *The world would change when we can imagine it differently, and, like artists, do the work of creating new social forms.* So notice, she goes directly from imagination, spirit and word and picture and behavior, to creating, imagining new social forms. So she writes about moral imagination and how all art brings that alive: moral imagination, *where together we find our ways, out of dead ends, out of detours, out of trouble, out of institutions that*

are no longer fulfilling their roles. And we have the courage, collectively, and imagination, collectively, to give birth to new ones.

And then the next paragraph, it's a new new idea of hers, if you will. A new paragraph. She says, *Beholding is also a way of imagining.* Beholding is also a way of imagining. *And when heart and throat open, song arises, as simple as breathing. Behold, as spring comes, a God falling into life.*

And then she invokes the poem about "Pelted By Beauty," the very poem that we're meditating on here today. And she also cites herself: *How shall we love before we've lost everything?* This is a poem she wrote while in Western Australia. *Here is the imaginative faculty of seeing through, into the unnamable deep within every name, so that even a one liner resonates with what is not said.* There is an alchemy of Eros in the line that she wrote: *A black swan has a red mouth. Imagining, she says, is participating in.*

And so her whole life, her whole work, is just one of many books and her many paintings, her poetry. She taught a course with us, not just on clay, but another one on words and poems. And she would have the students create their own, make their own book with pages that they sewed together, and color, and so forth. And in that book, they would keep their poetic thoughts, they would keep as thoughts. And she was very, very beloved as a teacher, as was Sister Jose Hobday, who I want to talk about and share some of her teachings in our daily meditations too. Because the two of them, as you can tell by this poem we're meditating on today about the pelting ceremony, together they were a very dynamic duo.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.