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- *Sharing your spiritual journey as with an upturned palm*

You are all bathed in the Light.

You are all warmed by the Light.

You are all healed by the Light.

You are all nurtured by the Light.

It is by this Light that each of you and all people live. It is not by a wish for the Light, but rather by its very presence that your lives are given meaning, that your lives are given direction, a context. You are guided, you are comforted, you are taught through the Light. You are given wisdom through the Light. Of course, the Light of which we speak is the Light of God or Allah or Yahweh or any designation that implies the centrality of All That Is. The labels are meaningless. Only the Light remains constant.

Your lives are filled with the opportunities that accompany you on your journeys, but they are also filled by the potential belonging to your path when your path encounters, accompanies, crosses, mirrors the path of another. Your question about a response to another on a different path is central to your understanding of what it means to serve as a hand of God. When paths intersect, you have a choice. The choice is never clear cut, but the choice is always to be active in the intersection or passive. Is it best to be there, to simply be, listening, or is it appropriate to do, to say, to suggest, to imply, to urge?

Both responses are entirely appropriate, but not necessarily at the same moment in time as you identify that to be. There are many times when what is required of God is your presence, just listening and just being. But there are other intersections, other encounters, where what is appropriate is to say in loving terms something of your own journey. You are picking up a pebble that belongs to your path and offering it to another. It is offered as a gift, never as a weapon. It is offered to share, not to control. It is offered in love; it is not offered to dictate. Each of you experiences such encounters wherein you question which choice must be made. It is here that prayer begins and hope steps back. You pray for insight; you don't merely hope you do the right thing.

If a pebble from the path is offered with the palm up, the hand reflects the light above it. If the pebble is offered in a fist, it is offered in darkness. All gifts to another must be offered with the palm facing upward, illuminated and warmed by light. When the palm is up, another also has a choice to look or to accept what is offered, what is lifted up, what is presented with nothing being hidden.

And so it is in your interactions with others. With prayer, if you feel it is appropriate to share where you are, you offer that with your palms up. You offer that as an offering, not with an insistence of "here, take this." The image of Christ on the cross is an image of the palms outward. It is not with the palms hidden. What is offered of oneself is never something that is imposed or forced. When you provide a gift to

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another, it is really offered in the same manner, for with the palms up, with your offering out of love and a desire to share, you allow the recipient of your concerns to accept or not to accept. The choice belongs to the other. It is not somehow placed in the hand of another.

Much of what each of you wishes to share can be easily rejected by others, but you do not share where you are on your journey with an expectation of what another will do or think or say, and you do not make such an offering of yourself out of fear, because when your upturned hands are offered, there is nothing you can do defensively. You are showing vulnerability for you are not grasping anything. If you are motivated to share a part of your journey with another, that motivation cannot be characterized by fear: “What if another does not accept what I offer? What if this impacts a friendship or other relationship?” Such an offering cannot be made defensively and in fear. The sharing of your own journey, the essence of your journey, can only be done with faith and vulnerability—faith in what it is you offer, and vulnerability in allowing that offering to be accepted or rejected. Part of your journeys involves this kind of sharing.

If you believe firmly and yet that belief is never translated into something that is active, the belief exists only in private. If you believe something very strongly, you shouldn't shy away from opportunities that are given to you for sharing. Likewise, you shouldn't be aggressive in imposing what you believe upon the lives of others.

This analogy of sharing with another, with an outstretched hand whose palm is up reflecting the light, is precisely what it means to be loving, for all that is evidence of being loving reflects light from somewhere else. It is not closed, it is not self-contained. It is open and entirely vulnerable. That is what being loving is—not fearing rejection and not dictating an end in itself. This vulnerability in life negates all power associated with ego, because ego is all about self and not about others.

You can give to another because you think you are fulfilling your responsibility. That sense of fulfillment is really a self-driven motivation. There are many who give to others because they feel they're required to give to others, and they are meeting an expectation, they're meeting a responsibility. Although such a gift may benefit another, it is not given in love. It is given for the sake of the giver, for the pretense of giving only for the sake of another. The receiver benefits either way, but the benefits are far more profound for both when what is offered is selfless.

This selfless quality rejects fear of being refused. This selfless quality rejects the feeling of personal growth because of the act of giving. There is no self when being loving. When being loved, you are the recipient of that selfless love from another.

You are asked on your journey to be loving, and you can be loving in small increments. You do not need to expect great results, publicly recognized results. You offer, you present the gift from your path because you feel it is appropriate to share. In the end, what you give is not really given away. It is merely shared.

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The paths that you follow have many opportunities to shadow another path or to intersect. That is the nature of your journeys, and it is those intersections with others that provide genuine warmth that belongs to acting in a nonjudgmental, loving and selfless way. Without those intersections, you pursue your paths in a kind of vacuum. You know where you're going, but in so doing, you are losing the benefit of the scenery and aroma and warmth of the journey. All of those belong to the journey as do the challenges, the crises, the pain, the suffering, the doubts, the disillusionment, the anger—all have a place on the path.

As two paths converge, they converge as they are approaching the same goals. You do not converge with a path that is 180 degrees different from your direction, for there is no soul that is moving away from God. All souls move toward God, and as your journey continues, you encounter more paths. As adults, you are much more aware of the potential of these spiritual journeys than you were many years ago as children. You were aware of others, of course, but you were not aware of the real potential that belonged to those opportunities of interaction. You are the hands of God, but the hands must work together. Praying for peace does not work when that prayer is always contained in a shell. Praying for peace, praying for what you believe in is really an opening of your spiritual vision to what accompanies you on your path, and it is that vision and your response to that vision that helps bring about what it is you seek.

There are those, of course, who choose to sequester their own lives in a state of constant prayer, and we affirm its value but we also affirm the importance of recognizing "why that prayer, why that prayerful life direction?" It is in order to effect change. One doesn't merely pray for peace in the abstract. One prays for those who are empowered to bring about conditions leading to peace. Peace does not just happen. It happens because of the commitment of others. So even one whose life is devoted to prayer prays for the actions that bring about the intended results.

There is room for prayer and there is room for action. There is room for listening. There is room for commitment. In some situations prayer is what is specifically needed. In other situations it is the actions toward which the prayer is directed that are so central. If you pray for insight, for an understanding of the meaning of and the potential held within an encounter, you will do what is right. There is no doubt. You may not see its benefit, and your efforts may be greeted with rejection as you interpret it. But your efforts are never in vain, for what is rejection but a response that is different from what you expected or hoped or intended? You have no idea what your impact on others is. The responses you get are not the end of the energy. They're just the first wave of that energy. There is much that lies beyond what you know of another.

We are not suggesting that you must proselytize every belief that you hold close, for that is often done in a spirit of convincing others of your correctness. But sharing where you are in your own journey is not a matter of changing another's belief, but rather providing additional context for their beliefs. The additional context that you

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provide is the same as your heightened awareness of what accompanies you on your own path. It gives your path more character, more presence, more impact. It is part of your own experience, and so the sharing of your beliefs becomes a part of another's path. It is indeed sharing; it is never a debate. There is no winner or loser. There is no one whose ideas prevail. No thoughts are subjugated in the presence of others. The context is enriched and it is in that loving enrichment that the growth continues.

You are God's hands, as all human beings are, but you also are part of God's Light. As you pray for guidance, your light is joined with God's Light, and together the paths that you experience and those others come to know, their own paths, are given brilliance and clarity.

You are bathed in this Light. Rejoice in the brilliance! Rejoice in its warmth! Rejoice in your opportunities to give with an open hand that reflects and is warmed from the Light above!

Amen.