

# Lenten Meditation

Source: Wild Mercy by Mirabai Starr, chapter 5

## A Meditation In Finding Community: Connecting to God and Our Neighbors

So far, this life has been fraught with losses, rife with disappointments, heavy with heartache. There have been untimely deaths of loved ones who seem to be about to cross the threshold into a beautiful and interesting life, not out of it. Perhaps there has been a serious health diagnosis that changed the way you navigate space, relate to food, and see yourself. You may have had love affairs that once contained all the seeds of your joy and then withered before your eyes. There may have been hands on your body that had no right to be there, making you mistrust the hands you really wanted on your body. You may have felt betrayals by colleagues or cousins, financial ruin, or debilitated addictions.

Now sit quietly and breathe into the pain of your losses.

When you breathe into the pain of your losses, you detect the presence of a smoldering Ember you thought had been snuffed out years ago, but there it is fragrant and warm. If you blew on it now it would burst into flame. It is longing for God. You don't even believe in God anymore, not as a personified entity that grant wishes and smacks you down, and yet this burning yearning has never really gone away. In your broken open state you remember what it feels like to feel separate from the ONE, to want union, to want it with every fiber of your brain. This longing confounds you and you don't know what to do with it, but don't press it back down.

{Here is a story about a mustard seed to help you breathe into the pain of your losses. It is about how Buddha, a feminine mystic in a male body, helped a young woman move from the illusion of separation to interdependence and divine union. It's about how we can take refuge in the human experience, how there's power in that truth.}

### THE MUSTARD SEED

During the lifetime of the Buddha, there was a young mother named Kisa Gotami, who went crazy with grief when her child died. Kisa careened through the streets of her village, begging everyone in her path to give her the medicine that would bring her child back to life, but there is no cure for death. Her neighbors were sympathetic, though they had no access to such a magical potion. If they had, their own love ones would still be alive. Yet their dead remain dead.

Finally, someone encouraged Kisa to make a pilgrimage to the Buddha and ask him to restore her son's life and so she did. Carrying the body of her child in her arms, Kisa made her way to the forest where the awakened one was teaching the dharma. When the distraught young woman broke into the clearing and dropped to her knees at the feet of the master, he suspended his discourse and gave her his full attention. "Please great one. They told me you could bring my baby back to life." The Buddha's eyes filled with tears (as they were wont to do whenever he beheld the pain of the world) and then he closed them for a long moment. "Try this," he said, opening his eyes again. "Return to your village, gather a mustard seed from every household that has not been touched by death and with these seeds, I will concoct the remedy that will bring your son back to life."

Muted with anticipation, Kisa shifted the burden of her child's body from one shoulder to the other and raced back to her village, she knocked on every door, but everywhere she went whoever greeted her at the door, was compelled to admit that while they would have gladly contributed to her cause, they did not meet the Buddha's only criteria, for someone they had loved had also died. When Kisa had knocked on the last door at the outskirts of the village and learned that the inhabitants of that house, too, have been touched by death, her fractured heart cracked all the way open. She lay her baby's corpse on the ground beside her, and she prostrated herself in the dirt. She wept and she screamed and she tore her sari and clawed her own breast.

Exhausted she grew still and then she got it. What breaks our heart is also, what connects us (to God and our neighbors). The exquisite and impermanence of the phenomenal world, our longing to keep what we love the same forever and our desire for that which we can't stand, to go away and never come back. It is the same way for everyone.

Acceptance means being with things as they are, not turning away and not trying to shape them to our will. This renders it possible to make our pain an offering of love. This blesses all ground as sacred ground.

**{Sometime this week, sit in a quiet space with your losses and perhaps failings. Imagine yourself taking them and lovingly placing them on an altar as a sacrifice to God. Allow God to accept your offerings and return community and connection in their place.}**