

## Ideas to Ponder

### Honoring the Gill Inside You

by Mark Nepo

A simple fish nosing its way along the bottom is in itself a profound teacher, and like the deepest teachers, it doesn't even know it is teaching. Yet in its tiny, efficient gill lives the mystery of how to live as a spirit on Earth.

As we all know, by swimming, the smallest fish takes in water, and its gill turns that water into the air by which it lives. Though there are biological details that explain the mechanics of this, it is, in essence, a mystery.

The question is, what in us is our gill? Our heart, our mind, our spirit, a mix of all three? Whatever it is, like the smallest fish, we must turn water into air in order to live, which for us means turning our experience into something that can sustain us. It means turning pain into wonder, heartache into joy.

Nothing else matters, and just like fish we must keep swimming to stay alive. We must keep swimming through the days. We cannot stop the flow of experience or the need to take it in. Rather, all our efforts must go into learning the secret of the gill, the secret of transforming what we go through into air.

So, what is your gill? For me, it is my heart, and love becomes the unseeable trail I leave behind. But whatever it might be for you, it is more important to swim through the days and honor the gill inside you than to figure out how it all works.

-- Mark Nepo, *Simple as a Fish, The Book of Awakening*

## The Dalai Lama on Compassion



My message is the practice of compassion, love and kindness. These things are very useful in our daily life, and also for the whole of human society these practices can be very important.

Basically, universal responsibility is the feeling for other people's suffering just as we feel our own. It is the realization that even our enemy is motivated by the quest for happiness. We must recognize that all beings want the same thing we want. This is the way to achieve a true understanding, unfettered by artificial consideration.

At the heart of Buddhist philosophy is the notion of compassion for others. It should be noted that the compassion encouraged by Mahayana Buddhism is not the usual love one has for friends or family. The love being advocated here is the kind one can have even for another who has done one harm. Developing a kind heart does not always involve any of the sentimental religiosity normally associated with it. It is not just for people who believe in religions; it is for everyone who considers himself or herself to be a member of the human family, and thus sees things in accordingly large terms.

Excerpt from His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (2006)

## Unforgiveness

You're likely to experience many losses at this time - losses regarding the way you know yourself and the person who harmed you, losses regarding the way you think about people and the world you live in. Whatever is gone or changed has to be acknowledged and grieved.

Some of you are experts at anger but don't feel sadness. For you, anger is easier to access and leaves you feeling righteous and safe. Often, however, anger doesn't tell the whole story, or even the most important part. As James Baldwin wrote, 'I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with the pain.'....

With Acceptance, you learn to let go of this reflexive white rage--this blind need to wound or get even. You realize that though revenge may give voice to your pain, it will not douse your inflamed thoughts or feelings, or restore your place in the world. In the end, you'll find that your wound remains unhealed, and that stoking your anger has brought you neither peace nor resolution. .... If you want your life back, you need to take care not to become so focused on punishing the offender that you ignore how this process punishes you.

Excerpts from *How Can I Forgive You? The Courage to Forgive, the Freedom Not to* (2004) by Janis Abrahms Spring, PhD

