

## Third Session: Letting Go of Fear, Cynicism and Controlling the Outcome

### Cynicism

You are sure the world will disappoint you and let you down, so you declare yourself disappointed and let down first.

#### Ways to Shift

1. Notice this in yourself.
2. Actively look for what is good and life-giving.
3. Practice gratitude.
4. Breathe fully.
5. Be mindful. Stay in the moment.
6. Play
7. Limit your news consumption. Engage with it mindfully.
8. Dare to be vulnerable. Strong back, Soft front.
9. Spend more time with life-giving people.
10. Lean into the best qualities of those around you.

#### Retrain our Negativity Bias

“Making a desired state into a trait, an enduring quality of our being, requires two basic steps. The first is to ‘have the experience,’ either by recognizing it when it arises spontaneously or by purposely eliciting it with a resource anchor. The second is to offer our full, sustained, and immersed attention to that positive state and to the self-sense that arises with it.” (Brach 101)

### Fear

“When fear is pushing us outside our window of tolerance and we are feeling overwhelmed, *our immediate need is to access a sense of safety.*” (Brach 99)

#### **What can you do for yourself to create some sense of safety?**

“Our habitual ways of saying no – of resisting or avoiding our experience – create more suffering.... Our mind says no by immediately assuming that something is wrong, finding something or someone to blame, and trying to eliminate the problem. Our body says no by tensing or numbing; our heart says no by becoming defensive or closing down. Meanwhile, our behaviors say no when we lash out or withdraw or become preoccupied.” (Brach 19-20)

## **R.A.I.N.**

**Recognize:** You don't have to search. Simply become still and notice what is going on. *What is happening inside me?* Center this in your sensations and emotions, not only thoughts.

**Allow:** Let this be. Let the thoughts and emotions you are experiencing simply be there and unfold. Even the desires to analyze or fix. Let that be. *Can I be with this?*

**Investigate:** Bring a gentle, curious and kind attention to the experience. Rather than thinking about what is going on, keep bringing your questions to your body, awakening to what is happening there. *What is the worst part of this; what most wants my attention? What is emotion does this bring up? How can I describe these feelings? Does this remind me of another experience? What would this most vulnerable part want to say? What does this part most need?*

**Nurture:** Befriend your inner life through words, touch, images or energy. Offer loving care inward.

*After the RAIN: shift from doing to being.* Relax and be within the peace you have opened up. Stay here before rushing back into the doing.

**Tara Brach. *Radical Compassion: Learning to Love Yourself and Your World with the Practice of RAIN.* New York: Viking, 2019.**

## 1 John Highlights: Love and Fear

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Whoever says I am in the light while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness. Whoever loves a brother or sister, lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling.

See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us.

Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.

Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist.

We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts our fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ...Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one – to those who sin is not mortal... I do not say that you should pray about that.

We know that we are God's children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.

Are you willing to wait and watch?  
To not withdraw your  
affections too soon?

Can you fall in love with the  
exquisite ache in your arms  
knowing the hatching it holds?

Can you stay not knowing  
how broad those wings will  
become, or how they will fly  
awkwardly at first,  
then soar above you

until you have become the sky  
and all that remains is  
your tiny shadow  
swooping across the earth?'

from  
*The Soul's Slow Reopening:  
12 Celtic Practices for  
Seeking the Sacred*  
by Christine Valter Painter

## The practice of encircling

In the Celtic monastic tradition, a lorica is a type of prayer seeking protection, invoking the power of God to safeguard us against darker forces. The word *lorica* means “shield” and would originally have been a Druidic prayer engraved by soldiers on shields and breastplates as they went into battle. The biblical inspiration may come from Ephesians 6:14, which refers to putting on the breastplate of righteousness. The roots of this prayer may extend back to the time of the Druids, as many of these Celtic practices do.

In her book *Holy Companions: Spiritual Practices from the Celtic Saints*, Mary Earle writes that the tradition of the breastplate prayer is closely tied to St. Patrick. “A lorica prayer allows one to call on the presence of Christ, in whom ‘all things hold together’ (Col 1:17).”<sup>1</sup>

Likely the prayer is rooted in the precarious sense we often have of our own existence. Travelers would have especially faced dangers at night from thieves or wild animals, when only fire and prayer would have been their protection. People are faced with the realities of illness, war, and poverty. Every culture seems to have a sense of the conflict between powers of goodness and evil.

This fundamental struggle is an archetypal one and often at the root of our feeling divided from ourselves. We see some energies within us as bad and so suppress them, while others we value and so uplift. In our current times, there is much talk of building walls to keep out the “other,” yet we forget that the “other” already dwells within us in the form of our shadows.

Most often the dark forces we battle with on a daily basis are within our own hearts. This was what prompted many of the desert and Celtic monks to flee to the wilderness, to have a place free of other distraction to do battle with these interior energies.

While battle may be a metaphor many of us feel uncomfortable with, we must acknowledge that this interior conflict rages on. Each of us has a shadow side that we fear to examine; we each have an ego-centered dimension that loves to live in illusion and thrives from striving and accomplishment. When we deny these parts of ourselves, they manifest in various forms such as fear, depression, addiction, despair, anxiety, and relationships built on dysfunction. We see these on a cultural scale as well.

These can be powerful prayers when we acknowledge our own places of woundedness and ask for protection from the inner struggles we all face. It becomes an unhealthy practice when we see all the evil forces as “out there” and don’t claim our own shadow work. This is rooted in a profound sense of our fragility as human beings.

You are probably most familiar with the lorica prayer attributed to St. Patrick:

I arise today through the strength of heaven;  
light of sun, radiance of moon,  
splendor of fire, speed of lightning,  
swiftness of wind, depth of the sea,  
stability of earth, firmness of rock.  
I arise today through God’s strength to pilot me,  
God’s eye to look before me,  
God’s wisdom to guide me,  
God’s way to lie before me,  
God’s shield to protect me  
from all who shall wish me ill,  
afar and a-near,  
alone and in a multitude,  
against every cruel, merciless power  
that may oppose my body and soul.  
Christ with me, Christ before me,  
Christ behind me, Christ in me,

Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down,  
Christ when I arise, Christ to shield me,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me,  
I arise today.<sup>2</sup>

This breastplate prayer names the presence of Christ in all directions as a shield against harm and a reminder of the divine indwelling. These kinds of encircling prayers were quite common in the Irish and Celtic tradition, and they remind the one who calls upon them that God is present everywhere.

Similarly, this lorica of St. Fursa asks that God encircle the one who is being blessed:

May the yoke of the Law of God be on this shoulder.  
May the coming of the Holy Spirit be on this head.  
May the sign of Christ be on this forehead.  
May the hearing of the Holy Spirit be in these.<sup>3</sup>

This prayer, attributed to St. Fursa of the eighth century, is an act of surrender to God’s faithful watch. The monk is calling upon divine boundaries and protection to be embodied in his very being.

## Encircling and Discernment

Often in church communities, the word “no” is looked down upon. There can be pressure to accept invitations and requests to help as a sacrifice. Women in particular are often taught that taking care of oneself is a selfish act.

Creating strong and healthy boundaries is an essential part of this encircling prayer, and we need protection from forces that might drain us of our energy and leave us too depleted to do the work that keeps us feeling most alive. Imagine praying over your calendar and asking God to encircle you and guide you to what could be left off the schedule to give you more time.

Other times, boundaries are needed with unhealthy relationships. Perhaps we have a coworker who is toxic or a relative who is always critical, never offering anything supportive to say. Perhaps a friendship has come to an end because we are moving in different directions in our lives and we realize that we need to conserve our energy for those who truly nourish us. Consider if there are people in your life whom you could step back from or, in the case of a coworker, ask for God's assistance and protection when dealing with that person.

Even the daily news can be a source of onslaught to our sensitive energies. I think this is true now more than ever. We can easily become overwhelmed by all the terrible things happening in the world. The encircling prayer can help us to discern what is ours to respond to and what we can simply grieve.

When we are in discernment about next steps in our lives, no is as vital as yes. Knowing where we do not want to put our energy and attention is as important as where we do want to direct them.

## The Call of St. Patrick

Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and the most well-known of all the Irish saints. He was born in 390 either near England's west coast or in Wales. When he was about sixteen years old, he was captured by pirates and taken to Ireland, where he lived as a slave for six years. He endured many hardships, including hunger, thirst, and cold under the rule of a cruel pagan king.

It was during his enslavement, while spending long hours in solitude tending sheep, that he had a spiritual awakening. Through the prompting of dreams and other voices, Patrick was able to escape and return back home again. He set out for Gaul to learn theology and prepare himself for his future ministry. After many years passed, he had another dream in which he heard the Irish people calling out to him to return to the land of his enslavement.

*Patrick* means "one who frees hostages," and when he returned to Ireland, he was very vocal in his opposition to slavery.

He returned there in 432 and spent the rest of his life preaching the message of Christianity and helping establish the Christian

Church in Ireland. There is a great deal of evidence that Patrick was not the one to bring Christianity to Ireland, that it had already begun to flower, but certainly he was instrumental in its continued growth.

I find his story intriguing. Here was a man enslaved, who escaped by divine intervention, and then heard the call to return to the land of his slavery—and he went willingly. He must have experienced more than his share of discomfort at the thought.

There are churches founded by Patrick in the area around Galway. One of my favorite sites is Inchoigill island on Lough Corrib, just a few miles north of us. Legend tells us that Patrick was banished here for a time by local Druids. The name of the place means "island of the stranger." The island is now uninhabited, but there is a stone church at the site where Patrick's fifth-century wooden church would have been, as well as a marker stone where his nephew and navigator is buried; it is one of the oldest Christian markers we have. There is a later twelfth-century church nearby as well.

Seeking out this strangeness and exile was at the heart of the monastic call. In going to the places that make us feel uncomfortable and staying with our experience rather than running away, they cracked themselves open to receive the Spirit in new ways.

But in this seeking out of strangeness and risk, one does long for a sense of protection or safety within the arms of the divine. As we explored at the start of this chapter, St. Patrick's lorica prayer was one type of prayer to invoke this protection and a reminder of the sacred presence always with us already.

Call upon St. Patrick to support you in finding protection from harmful energies and elements. Ask him to encircle you with God's loving presence.



## Scripture Reflection by John Valters Painter

### *Lectio Divina*

You who live in the shelter of the Most High,  
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,  
will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress;  
my God, in whom I trust."  
For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler  
and from the deadly pestilence;  
he will cover you with his pinions,  
and under his wings you will find refuge;  
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.  
You will not fear the terror of the night,  
or the arrow that flies by day,  
or the pestilence that stalks in darkness,  
or the destruction that wastes at noonday.

—Psalm 91:1-6

### *Biblical Context*

Tradition teaches that King David is the sole author of the book of Psalms. Modern scholarship puts considerable doubt on this notion due to language, historical context, and other reasons. I prefer to think of the psalms as inspired by David and not get into who wrote which specific psalm. It's a debate better left to those with more experience in this particular area of biblical studies than I have.

Regardless of the actual author of Psalm 91, it is written by one who has sought shelter in the Temple under God's protection. The Chosen People believed the Ark of the Covenant to be God's throne and the Temple to be God's dwelling place on earth. Where else would one seek sanctuary, other than within the protective walls of God's house?

Despite the cold, hard stone of the actual structure itself, the feeling is one of the loving embrace of a parent. This overconfidence in the protective walls of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem, rather than adherence to the covenant within, is ultimately disastrous during the Babylonian invasion, but the psalmist has faith that no harm will befall him or her.

### *Personal Reflection*

There is something very comforting about being surrounded. Infants love to be wrapped up. Special coats or tight-fitting shirts soothe dogs with anxiety. And I don't know about you, but even when it is very hot at night, I find it difficult to get comfortable and sleep if I don't at least have a bedsheet in which to curl up.

Sometimes we need the reassurance of walls or blankets or the presence of others to feel safe.

I know Christine and I feel very safe in our new home. We're on the top floor of an apartment building with a front door that is not right on the street. Delivery people with our actual address and detailed instructions have difficulty finding us. I think it unlikely a burglar could be bothered to find us. However, this means friends and invited guests have difficulty locating us as well.

That's one of the great conundrums of life: the only way to completely protect ourselves from life is to block it out completely, which is no life at all. And so despite the inconvenience and our reluctance, we venture out to help bring people into our comfy nests. In fact, the only reason they are comfy nests is because they include our circle of friends.

And so while Christine and I feel very fortunate to have a lovely new home, what makes it a true blessing are the friends who grace it with their presence. We are encircled by a wall of love that does not block out the world, because it is of the world. It is made up of family and friends who support us and challenge us. It is the Communion of Saints embodied. Each and every one of them is a gift from God who, together, encircle and protect us.



## The Practice of Encircling or Encompassing

The word *caim* comes from the Irish Gaelic meaning “protection” or “encompassing,” and is a prayer similar in function to the *lorica*, used to invoke divine protection or the care of a saint. It is an invisible circle drawn around oneself and one’s body to serve as a reminder of God’s protection and the presence of love and safety even in difficult times. It is a way to pray physically and integrate this with the heart’s longings. Philip Sheldrake writes that “such protective prayers of blessing for boundaries, whether of places or around individuals, were quite common in the Celtic tradition. They are almost certainly adaptations of pre-Christian rites. Although the forms differed, such prayers often involved blessings and signs of protection being made to all four quarters of the world, then to the earth and finally to the skies above.”<sup>4</sup>

In praying a *caim*, extend the right index finger toward the ground, and then turn slowly clockwise (or sunwise), facing all four directions and drawing an imaginary circle, which creates the protective enclosure. Turning sunwise is essential, as it shows you are moving in harmony with cosmic forces rather than against them. You acknowledge that you are encircled already by creation not of your own making, moving in its own rhythms and seasons.

You can pause at each of the four directions and ask the spirit or energy of that direction to help support you in this protection. Once you complete the circle, the circle travels with you. (This prayer was often said before embarking on pilgrimage.)

You can extend this circle beyond yourself and include your family, your community, your country, the earth. It is an intentional act of calling forth protection for the whole community you are a part of. This is one of the earliest known *caim* prayers, attributed to St. Columcille: “Bless to me the sky that is above me. Bless to me the ground that is beneath me. Bless to me the friends who are around

me. Bless to me the love of the Three, deep within me and encircling me. Amen.”<sup>5</sup>

These prayers are not an attempt to manipulate God to provide protection. The purpose is more to remember the continual presence of the divine in every direction—north, east, south, and west—as well as within, between, beneath, and above. We receive that protection when we bring it consciously into our lives, when we step with intention into this encircling presence of God. We draw on the sacred energy to help us face the fears within and around us.

We know the directions were sacred and vital to the Celtic monks because all of their churches in Ireland were built with an east-west orientation. The altar always faces the east window because this is the direction of the dawn and the Resurrection. Often there would be high crosses outside the church in each of the four directions to mark out the sanctuary space and draw a circle of protection around the building and those praying in it.

## Photography Exploration: Images of God in Every Direction

You are invited to go on a contemplative walk with camera in hand again. Begin by centering yourself. Bring your awareness into your heart center and go out with an openness to receive what comes. Invite you to pause regularly on your walk when something shimmers or you feel moved to linger for a moment. You can receive that moment with your camera, but then turn a quarter-turn to the right, receive a photo there; then make another quarter-turn, and receive a photo; one final quarter turn, and one more photo there.

What do you discover when you look for the divine presence in every direction? We are sometimes so captivated by what is in front of us that we miss what is to the side of or behind us. Spend some time with these images and see what you notice and discover.

## Writing Exploration: *Lorica* Prayer

Read over St. Patrick’s *lorica* prayer again, and write your own prayer of encircling and shielding that reminds you of the divine presence without and around you at all moments. Write about how



you discover the divine in each direction—east, south, west, north, skywards, earthwards, within. From what do you need protection in your life right now? Include this in your prayer.

## Closing Blessing

I offer you a poem I wrote inspired by the story of St. Patrick climbing the holy mountain and spending forty days there in prayer, a time I imagine there must have been much discomfort as well as revelation. He sought God up high and knew God down low as well.

What have you been discovering about your own need for boundaries and a sacred no?

## HOLY MOUNTAIN

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I want to climb the holy mountain  
ascend over weight of stone  
and force of gravity, follow the  
rise of a wide and cracked earth  
toward eternal sky,  
take measured steps across the sharp path,  
rest often to catch my heavy breath.

I want to hear the silence of stone and stars,  
lie back on granite's steep rise  
face to silver sky's glittering points  
where I can taste the galaxies  
on my tongue, communion of fire,  
then stand on the summit and  
look out at the laboring world.

I want to witness Earth's slow turning  
with early light brushing over me,  
a hundred hues  
of grey, pink, gold,  
speckles of Jackson Pollock light,

then ribbons of mist floating  
like white streamers of surrender.

I want to look back down the trail  
as if over my past, forgive a thousand tiny  
and tremendous transgressions  
because now all that matters  
is how small I feel under the sky;  
even the sparrow hawk takes no notice of me,  
how enlarged I feel by knowing this smallness.

I want to be like St. Patrick,  
climb the holy mountain full of  
promise and direction and knowing,  
forty days of fasting aloft among clouds

until my body no longer hungers  
and something inside is satisfied  
and my restless heart says here,  
no longer dreaming of other peaks.<sup>6</sup>

# MANIFESTO OF THE BRAVE AND BROKENHEARTED

*There is no greater threat to the critics  
and cynics and fearmongers  
Than those of us who are willing to fall  
Because we have learned how to rise.*

*With skinned knees and bruised hearts;  
We choose owning our stories of struggle,  
Over hiding, over hustling, over pretending.*

*When we deny our stories, they define us.  
When we run from struggle, we are never free.  
So we turn toward truth and look it in the eye.*

*We will not be characters in our stories.  
Not villains, not victims, not even heroes.*

*We are the authors of our lives.  
We write our own daring endings.*

*We craft love from heartbreak,  
Compassion from shame,  
Grace from disappointment,  
Courage from failure.*

*Showing up is our power.  
Story is our way home. Truth is our song.  
We are the brave and brokenhearted.  
We are rising strong.*

*-Brené Brown*  
**#RISING STRONG**