

Sacred Gifts: A New Year's Day Meditation Story
By Rev. Donna Miller Watelet

I wake well before dawn. The quiet and the chill bring my attention inward as I breathe deeply and slowly, awakening my body for the journey ahead. I dress quietly in several layers of warm clothes, leaving my family to sleep and dream as I prepare myself.

I brew aromatic green tea. As I pour it steaming hot into my thermos, the earthy smell of it clears my head. I smile, enjoying the smell and the warmth. Boots, long coat, hat, scarf, double gloves and I'm ready. Picking up my thermos and my backpack I head out.

I breathe deeply the crisp air of the sleepy earth's winter. Starting the car is almost an assault to my keenly aware senses. My excitement about what is to come brings me to a clear level of consciousness. I look forward to this with great joy each year. It is the morning of the first day of the New Year. I spend it outside, honoring the past year's gifts and welcoming the treasures of the coming year as it dawns, with great gratitude and heartfelt celebration.

I slowly drive the streets of the sleeping village, alone on the roads. Pulling into the park, I wonder as I do every year whether I will meet anyone this time. I rarely do. Being with people for my chosen work makes this experience very unique. I remove the key from the ignition and only earth sounds remain. Picking up my tea and my backpack, I head across the field in front of me.

The snow crunches under my boots, impossibly loud to my uncluttered ears. Though it is still dark out I don't need a light. Even at the dark of the moon, the snow glows bright enough to light my way, and I am very grateful for that. Whispering through the trees I hear the sound of the creek's flowing water. I love the sight, sound and smell of fresh water. They are, for me, one of the Mother's most beautiful gifts. Clearing my mind and soothing my heart, they carry my soul to the deepest of places both near and far.

By the time I reach the old broken dam, the sound of the creek has gradually risen to a pleasant roar. The winter water made of former ice and snow, rush over the broken concrete slabs making a beautiful, babbling waterfall. I walk out onto the dam and place my backpack and tea as close to the falling water as I can before I sit.

I take a deep breath, exhale and close my eyes. My breathing stays slow and deep as I relax my body, mind and soul. Then my breath slows and becomes quiet. I watch my breath flow in and out, gently and peacefully for a while. Then, I begin the remembering...

First, I celebrate the fruits of last year's meditation. Then come the stories of the rest of this past year. Bit by bit they unfold. Imagines, sounds, sensations and even smells arise and fall away. I revisit the path I walked, the seasons gradually turning as I notice joys, challenges, pain, and pleasure, the lessons of the past from which I may yet learn. After the last few most recent weeks and days pass in review, I quietly give thanks for my life.

Breathing deeply, I reawaken my body and slowly open my eyes, gently searching around me for any gifts that the waking world may have to offer me on this dawning day, the first of this new year. Light is just beginning to arrive. I open my tea and fill my nose, my lungs and finally my mouth and belly with its warmth and healing goodness. As I sip my tea and look around me, shapes appear from out of the dark between the bright spots of snow, the rocks and trees emerging to greet me. I smile, oh so deeply and tears come to my eyes. I am so blessed by this world. As the sun rises, it sends light softened by clouds to bring the water to life for my eyes as well as my ears.

The dance of the currents and waves are music to my soul. Broken ice slabs move like gentle giants, slow and unhurried as they try to break free of the snags and catches in the dam's pool-like basin. Smaller ice boats dance in circles as the eddies catch and carry them in shifting cycles of movement around the basin. Then they finally break free and rush down the creek away from their captivity, like a story of recurring challenges surmounted. I am inspired.

The birds begin to awaken and sing loud enough for me to hear them over the water's din. My eyes are pulled to the sky and I see a small flock go by. How many. Eight. Eight symbolizes the place in things where new patterns become well-established ones. I feel ready for these visions of commitment and clarity. They seem to fit into the ever-shifting mosaic of my life. Though it will require openhearted awareness to take full advantage of them.

The world is fully lit now, awake. I stand, place my palms together against my heart and gather myself. Then raising my arms and my smile to the sky, I give thanks and offer deep, loving appreciation to All That Is, as my arms open, then circle out and down. My arms come to rest at my sides and I look around me once more before leaving, drinking in this great goodness so freely given, returning love for the gift of my quenched thirst. This year's adventures are just beginning and I am full-filled with the promise and potential they hold for me. It is up to me what becomes of what I am given here today.

May I waken with each dawn to remember these sacred gifts,
and to use them wisely and well.