



*Skyline, Spring - 2019*

# Earthlines

By Diane Pendola

## *Meaning of Mercy*

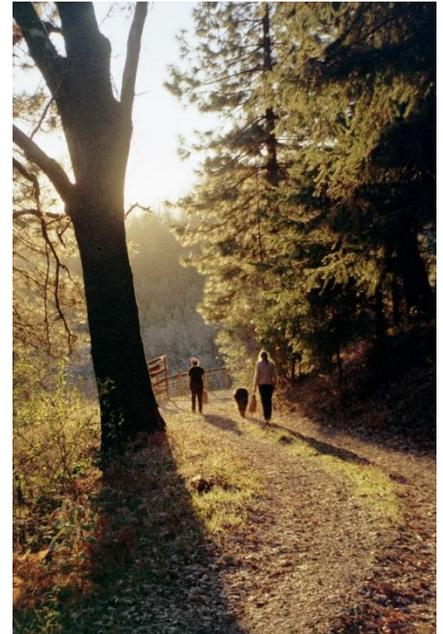
*“Go and learn the meaning of this:  
I require mercy not sacrifice”*

*Hosea 6:6  
Matthew 9:13*

Working now with incarcerated women for thirty years, and with Lifers for nearly ten, I am learning something about the meaning of Mercy.

First, there is the “going,” as in “Go and learn the meaning of this....” It is a journey. It’s not like I can tie mercy up with a bow after a year or two of intellectual inquiry or of spiritual override of my own anger or revenge. Mercy is not something I can master, like I might eventually master algebra or carpentry. Actually, Mercy is its own Master, teaching me the art of surrender to its living, breathing, pulse of love at the center of our shared human reality. Mercy teaches me how to be merciful to myself, thus finding within my self a mirror to all the broken wounded others who are not separate from me, but kin.

I see the “going” as the journey of a lifetime. Maybe my choice to work in prisons was an intuition that, inside their walls, I might learn the difference between mercy and sacrifice. Perhaps part of me knew that I could learn about the hidden corners and prison cells of my own psyche by intimate contact with the imprisoning bars of another. Possibly I perceived that I might come to a visceral experience of our common brokenness and mutual need for forgiveness: for mercy.



III

And I have learned! From the prisoners I have learned mercy. I have learned of the longing of the human heart for forgiveness, for tenderness and for the chance to begin again. But from the system I have learned about sacrifice, about our willingness as a society to sacrifice others rather than to look into our interior dungeons so we might confront our personal demons, and console our own vulnerable and abandoned innocence.

Sacrifice has been a strategy for coping with the dark side of our human natures since antiquity. Through the centuries, up to our own time, certain marginalized segments of our communities have functioned as scapegoats, carriers of our disowned shadows and communal guilt. Perhaps this human desire for scapegoating is the exact subject of the Divine directive:

*Go and learn the meaning of this: what I require is mercy not sacrifice.*

This has been a long “going” over the arc of our human evolution. But I am convinced that we are journeying into the Heart of Mercy with each new dawn and with even the smallest act of love.



II

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*“Nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands.”*  
e e cummings

Heart of God

Substance so fine  
like invisible hands of light,

un-doing every wrong,  
re-weaving broken threads into mandalas of throbbing life.

Heart of God drumming in every cell,  
in the soft throat of every song.

Fragrance released by blossoming apple, tender rose,  
neither one nor two but the sweet relation  
between---

wind moving primal waters,  
love agitating human hearts.

Heart of God,  
desiring Being from Non-being,  
Some-thing from No-thing,

both nested in your primordial beating  
before the beginning.

Heart of God, You are Mercy,  
mercy at the moment of awakening Buddha,  
knowing ourselves as much dark as light,

forgiving threads now unknotted and  
holding rivers of compassion,

flowing freely to every saint and sinner  
without discrimination.

Heart of God, eternal waters,  
quenching fires of separation and longing,

your merciful, merciful hands  
upon our wounded land.



III

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EE Cummings quote from poem entitled: “Somewhere I have Never Traveled, Gladly Beyond”

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