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 Arlington Street Church  
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## Simply Living

(a homily before a dharma talk by Lama Surya Das)

Author Thomas Moore was taking questions on a lecture when a woman in the audience said, “I used to look for meaning everywhere, but from now on, I'm just going to live with what is.”<sup>1</sup>

I am struck by her resignation: I'm not going to look for meaning. Resignation is different from acceptance – the difference between hopelessness and hopefulness. And I hear her giving up on imagination: I'm not going to look for meaning, not going to look “among the garbage and the flowers”<sup>2</sup> for all the richness and aching complexity that is *life*.

Thomas Moore says that this so-called “living with what is,” sleepwalking through our days without the spiritual stretch for depth, is basically steeling ourselves against life. In other words – and here's where I'm going with this – we can say, “I'm just going to live in the moment,” but until we both live in it *and* sound its meaning, we are living a very shallow life – Henry David Thoreau would say a desperate life. “The mass of men,” he wrote, “live lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation.”<sup>3</sup>

“I went to the woods,” Henry Thoreau says, “because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life; living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary.”<sup>4</sup>

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1 Thomas Moore, *Original Self*, p. 41

2 Leonard Cohen, *Suzanne*

3 Henry David Thoreau, “Economy,” in *Walden*

4 Thoreau, “What I Lived For,” in *Walden*

When we show up in the present – raising our hands, saying “here!,” present and accounted for, *all in* – when we *really* show up, we are living on purpose: eager, longing, to deeply engage and be engaged by life, by all its promise and possibility. Remember Zorba the Greek? “... I married,” he says. “Wife, children, house, everything. *The full catastrophe.*”<sup>5</sup> At best, we don't avoid life's complexity; we just do our best not to add to the mess. Thomas Moore writes, “[B]eing present is not the same as trying to be present.”<sup>6</sup> Let's give up *trying* to catch our breath and simply breathe. Breathe in. Breathe out. To be present is to live “the full catastrophe” ... to simply live. Allow the meaning to surface.

Lama Surya Das' new book, *Living in Buddha Standard Time: Awakening to the Infinite Possibilities of Now*, speaks to the possibility of cultivating spaciousness in our harried lives. In a chapter entitled *Creating Space in the Pace*, he gives these two teachings:

The first is the *Shuni Mudra*, holding the tip of your middle finger and thumb together. “This is a classic hand gesture ... for cultivating patience,” he writes. “These fingers are associated with the lung meridian and the heart ... meridian, respectively, and will harmonize your breathing, circulation, and ... energy flow. This works anywhere, anytime...” Let's try that, if you'd like. Hold the tip of your middle finger and thumb together, and rest your hands in your lap. Breathe in. Breathe out. The *Shuni Mudra*.

The second teaching you can try this week, and let me know how it goes. This practice is called “Pick the Longest Line at the Checkout Counter.” “That way,” Lama Surya Das writes, “you won't be disappointed. And to your surprise, you may find that it moves more quickly than the lines around you. Smile at the frustrated customers ... who picked the shortest one ... (that used to be you!). By just walking to the back of the longest line, you can transform ... [your] perception of time.... While you're waiting for something else to happen, your life is still your life.”<sup>7</sup>

Simply live.

Beloved spiritual companions, may we practice not resignation but deep engagement with all of life's complexity, *all in* for the present, and strive not to add to the

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5 Nikos Kazantzakis, *Zorba the Greek*

6 Moore, *op cit*, p. 42

7 Lama Surya Das, *Buddha Standard Time*, p. 143-144

mess of the full catastrophe. Especially when we are time-starved, may we live deliberately, live on purpose – sounding our lives for meaning, transforming desperation to hope – and so bring a blessing to our overwrought days. Breathe in. Breathe out. Simply live.