

Care for the Caregiver

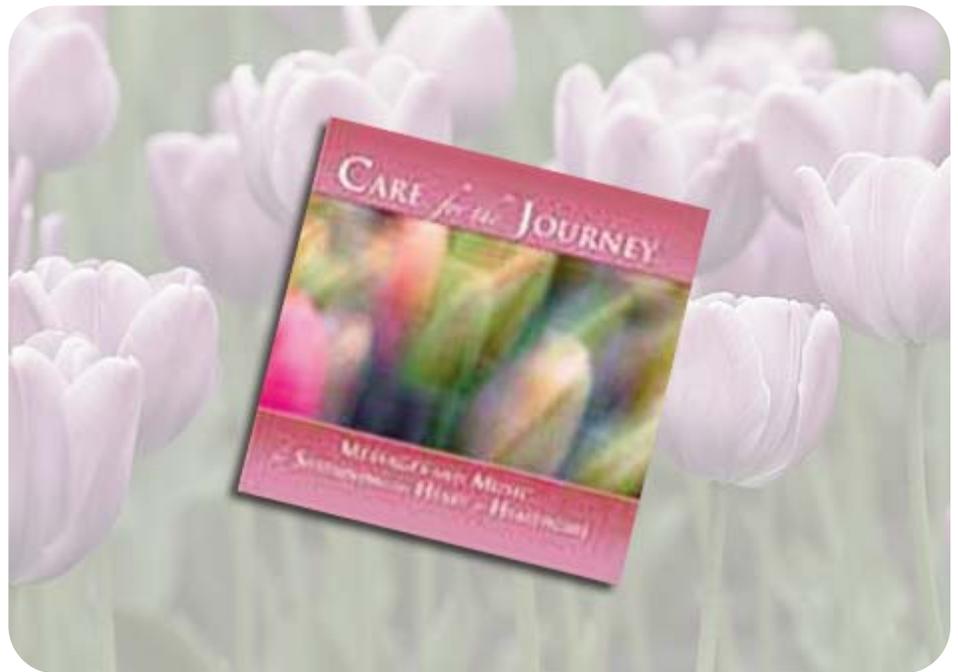
Lee Raven

I received a little gift recently from my friends, Sue Ezra and Terry Reed, co-founders of Beyond Ordinary Nursing (www.integrativemagery.com). We had spent a few inspiring days together this past fall in California meeting fellow health practitioners from all over the country who had gathered at AGI's annual imagery conference (www.academyforguidedimagery.com).

Inspired and tired at the end of the conference, we were parting ways to go home, when Sue handed me a CD. It had a lovely dusty-rose cover with out-of-focus tulips, entitled, "Care for the Journey". I gladly put it in my bag, and gave hugs all around, feeling grateful for this treat to look forward to as I headed back into "real" life. Little did I know!

It must have been weeks later, driving to my office to see a client, that I found myself very much in need of grounded energy in order to fully be with my client. I had all too swiftly gotten caught up in life's demands, and there were a few curveballs thrown in—a very ill family member, a new, very young client dying from cancer, my teens navigating a flurry of new crises, the need to build the new Board of Directors for Imagery International before the holidays, and the obligations of the holiday season looming—I was feeling pretty fragmented.

In times before, I'd found it helpful to leave a bit early for appointments—to drive with deliberate calm listening to chants (Krishna Das, *Live on Earth*, audio CD) on the way. Even better was to sing the chants—there was something about using low notes, resonating in throat and chest, that seemed to center and ground me. Sometimes I would simply find my own resonant low note and chant a



series of *Om*'s, or *Om Mani Padme Hum*'s, as I made my way closer and closer to the place of peace my clients deserved from me.

This day, though, I needed something outside my usual routine—something different, something to shake up my perspective. I remembered the Care for the Journey CD (www.companionarts.org) and slipped it in the player.

I hadn't read the insert, so I had no idea who the first speaker was. Her voice had a quality that immediately drew me in and made me listen intently. She spoke so slowly and so meaningfully that I knew that exquisite care had been taken with crafting each word. "Every individual who carries a call to healing is a person who carries a great heart, and generosity of spirit."

One sentence and I felt my chest and breathing relax into that gift. Pearls of wisdom kept falling. "When can I trust the healing presence that I

bring?" was followed by a recitation of a Central American indigenous people's Healing Prayer that allowed me to flow into it. And, "Healing doesn't take place in the fast lane..." captured the obvious truth so clearly. She led me to and through many more perspectives that my spirit truly needed to rest with. It was only later that I realized that the voice belonged to a Wise Woman I'd admired for years—Angeles Arrien.

I recognized with a smile the second voice—Rachel Naomi Remen. Not only had I had the privilege of hearing her in person on several occasions, I was in the midst of rereading her two books, *Kitchen Table Wisdom* and *My Grandfather's Blessings*, for the third time. As I read, I would hear her voice speaking the words.

The CD was something new for me though: "Being whole doesn't mean *being more than* [italics added] who you are at this very moment. It means *being* who you are at this very

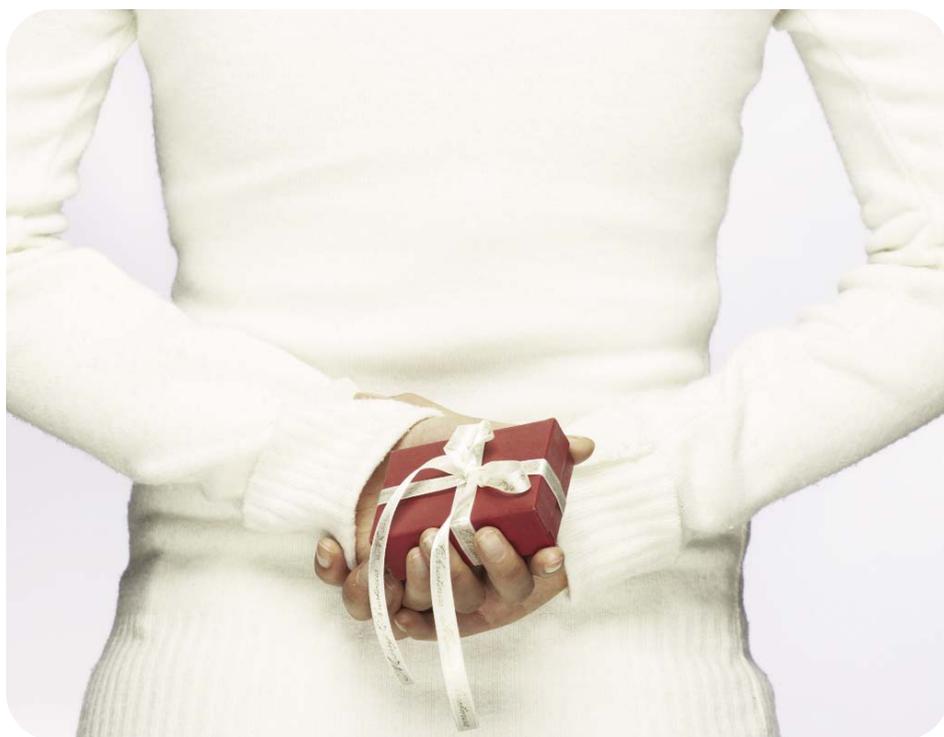
moment. It means accepting the parts of yourself that used to make you ashamed or feel small. These are the parts that will allow you to connect to other people. Allow you to own your own strength.”

Each sentence struck new depth, new resonance. And perhaps the perfectionist in you, like the one in me, will resonate with—“There is something in us, something in our training that says only perfect is good enough. This is an absolute setup for burning out. Each one of us, you and me, we’re already enough. We’re already exactly what is needed.”

So in 12 minutes, all the time I had before my appointment, I’d been transformed from revved-up and scattered, to calm, grounded and curious. What a wonderful state to be in when greeting my next client! So much more relaxed, present and self-knowing—a feeling that was not forced or needfully contrived—but as real as rain.

That CD instantly became, and remains, my constant companion for centering when on my way to sessions. I have my favorite speakers, of course, and some others that I tend to skip over for now. But even though I have heard some of the passages countless times, I never fail to hear something new, or to understand a message at a deeper level. I may find a completely new perspective on a lesson already learned, depending on which challenges have recently crossed my path. This CD is truly a gift that keeps on giving.

Years ago, just as I was beginning to learn about Imagery work, I left hospital nursing after two disastrous assignments. The last straw in Critical Care came after “Work Redesign”, a pitiful euphemism for overloading RNs (experienced or not) with two to three times the safe number of patients, and staffing the rest of the unit with terrified, untrained nurses from other floors. You can imagine how little time this



left for forging even brief human connections with the patients who so desperately needed them. (I needed them, too, I realized.) I stayed as long as I could for my patients’ sakes, but in the end the stress overwhelmed my own health. So, out of the frying pan.... I chose the very ego-feeding proposition of helping to create a brand new surgical unit, the first of its kind in the country. Our tiny shoe-string crew struggled mightily in the beginning to make a go of it, and we succeeded against all expectations. But all too soon the job became focused exclusively on the perpetual race to “process” more and more patients faster and faster to increase profits. Our “success” came at the price of 11-hour days, 5 days a week, no mistakes, no lunch and no breaks. And who WERE all those people who came through our doors surrendering their lives into our hands? I hardly knew.

So here we are a decade later, and at last I can see and feel the many visionaries who are addressing the need to sustain the *heart* of healthcare. So many know that true

healing requires our time, care and rich attention—the gift of ourselves—in the hospital as well as out of it. We also know that “stewarding the mysteries” of health and illness is more important than “stewarding the technology.” The Wounded Nurse part in me is so relieved, so grateful.

For any of us who are called to offer healing in any capacity, *Care for the Journey* is a blessing and source of renewal. Its messages and music are a healing balm for challenging times. It’s an instant energetic connection to others who feel the same deep desire to address the spirit along with the body. It’s a clarion call to enfold the sacred in our offerings. It’s an embracing of our connection to the ancient wisdom of all those who came before us—the medicine men and women, shamans, herbalists, seers, and sages of distant times.

This little gift looms larger than I imagined. Thank you.

Lee