



25 Main Street, P.O. Box 61, Grand Bend, Ontario N0M 1T0 * (519) 238-2402
huronshoresunitedchurch@gmail.com * www.huronshoresunitedchurch.com

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The Voice in Your Head

“My help comes from God, the maker of heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:1

Dear Ones,

My kids are pretty certain that I am crazy. One of the pieces of evidence that they like to hold up is my use of prayer cards throughout my house. Technically they aren't “prayer” cards, since they are rooted in the Buddhist tradition, in which there is nothing like what we understand as prayer. However, for me, I use them to root myself deeply in the present moment – which, of course, is always a God moment.

Sitting on a stand on my bathroom sink is a little collection of these cards, slightly larger than playing cards. Once a week or so, I change the card, bringing a fresh invitation to the fore. Today I was greeted with

Washing our hands. Water flows over these hands. May I use them skillfully to preserve our precious planet.

It's a beautiful prayer, isn't it? Like all the others, it was written by Thich Nhat Hahn, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, meditation teacher and Nobel Peace Prize winner. And my prayer guide. He invites us to breathe in slowly, thinking the first line. Then breathe out slowly, reciting the second line.

“When the gathas are finished, continue your activity, and you will find that your mindfulness has increased. When we drive, road signs help us find our way. We “see” the last sign until the next one appears. Practicing with gathas is the same. When we practice well, the gathas are with us continuously, and we live our whole day in awareness.”

I have the prayer cards in several locations in my house. You would think that after years of using these cards I would have them memorized, but oddly, I do not. Each time I read them, they take root again. Some of them are sort of funny:

Cleaning the Bathroom. How wonderful it is to scrub and clean. Day by day, the heart and mind grow clearer.

I don't know about you – but I seldom think how wonderful it is to clean the toilet... but I am trying!

My very favourite never fails to bring a smile to my face:

Washing Feet. Peace and joy in each toe - my own peace and joy. My feet walk gently on the earth. Peace is every step.

Somehow it makes me think of my toes as dear little creatures in my care and protection – like little “piggies”, if you ever played that toe-tickling game with a little child. I grin like a crazy fool when I pray this one.

Which might be why my kids think I have a screw loose. It isn't part of our culture to be deeply present in each moment, or to set the mind and heart deliberately on gratitude and compassion.

But all you have to do is try. Take the thoughts in your head – that endless stream of commentary that never goes away – and gently turn them in a good direction, as if they were beautiful Clydesdale horses, just waiting for your touch on the reins. Turn your thoughts to beauty, appreciation, acceptance, forbearance and joy. It really will change how you live in each moment.

Drinking Tea This cup of tea in my two hands, mindfulness held perfectly. My mind and body dwell in the very here and now.

Grace to you, and peace,

Kate

katecrawfordmn@gmail.com

PS. If you would like to read all of the gathas, or use them yourself, you can find the list here:
<https://beherenownetwork.com/thich-nhat-hanhs-gathas/>

*"Our relationship with God and each other strengthens us, and helps make the world a better place.
We welcome and include **everyone** into congregational life."*