

Cheselyn Amato – Statement of Purpose
February 13, 2012

All of my work – in all the forms it takes – is in honor of the human spirit and the ever-present opportunity to choose love. It is not any given medium per se that I love; what I love is the spiritual possibility that any medium carries, and so I remain open to, pay attention to, and sometimes look for spiritual resonance wherever it resides. That resonance is sometimes simply on the surface and obvious, and sometimes it is to be drawn out and revealed. There are all sorts of nuances here. I make the work to be used directly as an aesthetic conduit/vehicle tool/aid for active spirituality and spiritual action, to activate spiritual engagement.

My visual work is driven by a passion to represent awe, sublimity and delight, so I create spectacles of a variety of sorts – all that glitters, light, color, treasure, awakening through the senses – to embody and facilitate – as iteration and reiteration – beauty, joy, love, hope, compassion, generosity, mercy, forgiveness, redemption, happiness, celebration, and renewal. At last, I wish to reveal in a primary way that living and dying, life and death, exist in a powerful dance of interpenetration and dependence that can be experienced as a sacred fluidity.

All that I do – as an artist, a person, a mother, sister, daughter, friend, citizen, teacher, advisor, guide, light worker, spiritual care provider, lay pastoral guide – is motivated by the awe, joy and delight that I experience as well as desolation and terror too. These experiences can and do initiate gratitude which I believe to be the key component to meaningful transformation, healing and renewal both every day and at key junctures in each of our lives.

I have tended to want to only embody the light and ascension, but sometimes whether I want to or not, and now becoming increasingly interested in and called to, and compelled to do, I also give form to the darkness, to the places into which we descend that are devoid, empty, terrorizing – when we feel abandoned or have been abandoned by meaning or have ourselves abandoned our own centers. My own life has been a dynamic experience - of extreme swings at times - between the apperception of presence and absence, of imminence and withdrawal. I hope that my work, whether of light or darkness is more or less dominant in it at any given time, never leaves out an inkling of the love that is and that is always possible.

This is a time along my spiritual path to add a new spoke to the hub of my spiritual wheel that drives the journey. It has become clear that this is a time to do concrete spiritual care work directly with people in crisis who are experiencing loss, grief, personal illness, sickness of loved ones, etc. in the form of hospice/hospital/healthcare spiritual care, providing direct service to people who are sick and/or grieving.

I have been working hard in my own life to become equally capable to the best of my ability of both living and dying. What I mean is that perhaps because of certain proclivity to fear both living and dying in certain ways, my path to date has been much about

learning how to liberate myself from the fear of life and living fully, and from expecting or anticipating dying and death to be only tragedy and sorrow, tragic and sorrowful, as something to be feared, that ends the life that is too scary to begin because of death itself.

Well, you know what, I have gone a far, far way down a road that has brought me to a place of peace and rest, where I have embraced the contradiction, and keeps dissolving more and more. My skills to be a ferrywoman helping people cross the river when they need to - to help people make transitions successfully - have been developed by a wide variety of experiences over the expanse of my life to date from the mystical revelation that I experienced during the dying of a pigeon I encountered on the sidewalk when I was a freshman in college to the recent death of my beloved father. I feel more equipped than I have ever been to stand at the side of others and assist them.

My teachers include my own personal process of learning how to travel between dimensions, a story that includes so very many anecdotes and episodes, from the dying pigeon on the sidewalk, from the experience of my beloved dad's dying just about a year ago, the dying that we did with him together, my mother, my brother, myself and the care givers around us, from the incredible revelation I had because of the experience of all the care providers we had to usher him from one world to the other, because of the recent passing of my dearest friend and spiritual teacher/mentor/guide, because of the death of my 26-year marriage this year, and because of the knowledge I have gained from living and dying enough times during this life time to know how resilient our souls are, and how much we are loved.

So the fear of living and the fear of dying – when did I know I had it? Mom and dad going at night – crying because I thought they wouldn't come back. The Holocaust and the movie, *Night and Fog*, by Alain Resnais that I saw at the age of 16, the rising up of the mystical way of Torah from out of me as if from nowhere, but knowing exactly that it was a given and affirmed and confirmed by being able to receive the revelation, and ecstatically so, what icing on the cake! It came to me as the form of the Tree of Life visually, and of the correlative form in other traditions like chakras, an archetype that came to me via deep focused concentration on the human body and the interconnectedness of all parts – mental, emotional and physical. I found out that via committed and devoted meditation on the human body we can arrive at the archetypes. Intense personal, specific, deductive action/practice leads to universal, collective, shared, inductive overarching principle.

That death is an extension of life, part of life, not to be feared, the other side of life like two faces of a coin when I witnessed the dying and death of a pigeon as a college student at Brown University in Providence, RI. Walking along, I came upon a pigeon wobbling around in circles and to and fro a bit. I didn't feel comfortable trying to pick it up to take it somewhere for help, so I stayed with the bird, I felt that it was only right to do; I wanted to, I needed to. And, so we were together. I didn't know what the symptoms meant, but instinctively, I think I knew that a significant transition was taking place. Then the time came, when the behavior changed, and in that moment, the wings crossed and closed over the body of the bird, and the dying bird died, and I saw the soul of the bird

pass out of its body, in real time to my eyes, the wings, like time-lapse photography, like the physiology of afterimages, like the tail of a comet, like the echo of a sound in a cave, like the residual appearance of the path of a dancing flashlight in the dark, so in the time it took for the those wings to cross over, so the apparition of the soul rejoining spirit effervesced. I could see the soul leaving. The body of the bird was left as a perfect egg, the wings so seamlessly seated around the trunk to be invisible, the head tucked in as well, all is one.

Out of body experiences, particularly at near death experiences of loved ones.

The heart in the sky yesterday.

The apropos-ness and synchronicity of this week's Torah portion, Yitro, and the attending Haftorah commentary, Isaiah (6-7:30 and 9:5, 6). The stump remaining, after all has been laid to waste and made desolate, is the sacred seed.

The existence of revelation, ecstasy, synchronicity and synergy, experience of meaningfulness, of being found, experiencing identity, culture, belonging, place and home...

The existence of silence, pause, reflection, gap, withdrawal, absence, limbo, holding pattern, being anywhere, not somewhere, but not being nowhere, when identity, culture, belonging, place and home are waffling and flitting about, tenuous and where commitment and devotion to what, who, when, where, how will not settle, where why comes and goes without pattern, without warning, without pointing to what is next...

The existence of loss, sadness, sorrow, grief, loneliness, fear, terror, isolation, desolation, exile, pain, suffering, experience of meaninglessness, of being lost, experiencing the loss or absence of identity, culture, belonging, place, home...

In of all of these conditions – these environments – of being and becoming, the sacred seed resides equally, and can and will grow all the same.

The opportunity therefore is that we have choice regardless of which condition is in residence, and there is a form of gratitude possible within every condition that triggers the seed to release growth, to become growing.

Just yesterday, as I was contemplating and reflecting on some of the challenges I have experienced in regard to loving, poked by a slightly insistent melancholy about its fledgling state, about my missing of the mark more than I like to see, suddenly there in the clouds, the shape of a heart, yes, right there, on Interstate 80, there for me, and it traveled with me down the road quite a way, and well, I really wanted a picture of it, and so I did that thing you shouldn't do which was to kind of fumble with my phone to get into camera mood, and I kind of pointed, and the camera was shaking around, and I thought, oh gosh, let go of documenting it, you artist you...but guess what, when I got

home, I discovered that somehow, the image was there, the camera captured it, go figure. Oh yes, go figure. Thank you very much.

The splitting of my husband and myself, our separating, is like the episode in Isaiah of Yitro's haftorah in which the landscape has been rendered one of stumps, all is desolation and a wasteland, but the stumps, as much as they are proof of damage done, they are also what is left, and it is to what is left that spawns in us the spark of life again. Death reveals and gives birth to the spark of life.

The more recent experiences of my life have encouraged me to become far more grounded in concrete life lived every day, and the specific real people in it. I have been exercising care with devotion and industry more than I have ever known, and I am grateful for this opportunity, for being able to become a better, fuller more human human being. My capacity to stay in the world of action is growing every day, my ability to serve in a direct, concrete way is getting stronger every day. That is why I want to become a student again to nurture and develop the seed that is now growing and making itself visible.

All three - (Tefillah) Prayer, (Teshuvah) Return//Repentance, and (Tzedakah) Compassion/Charity – lead us back to gratitude, to mindfulness, to noticing what is good, and thus to the will and desire to live, we receive fearlessness when it is time, and prudence when it is time as well.

Omen.

