

# The Uplifting Spirit

**Sanford Baran:** To begin our time together I wanted to play for you an audio soundscape that I produced last week that provides a surround for Alan Hammond's poem, *The Eternal Presence*. [Listen to the soundscape](#) (It runs about 12 and a half minutes)

*This planet's life I am,  
Speaking through this little form into the realm of humankind.  
Ho, little people who read these words,  
Know ye not the One with whom ye speak?  
I am He larger than any man,  
Larger than all parts and capacities of everything upon this world,  
For I am the One whose body this earth is,  
This planet's life I am.  
Before man was, I am.  
In every moment, every place,  
Through the days and settlements of man,  
I was.  
Present was I in human form,  
Witness of every event, both so-called mighty  
And those completely unrecorded, unremembered, now unknown.  
No human thought, or feeling, aspiration, sorrow,  
No plan or action, whether large or small, was made outside My  
presence,  
For I experienced all.  
Before man was, I am.  
When man is gone, I am.  
This word now uttered through this form,  
Will pass anon.  
Posterity does not need immortal words  
For I shall speak what's necessary then.  
But in this present moment of My experience  
I utter words of love and life and joy.  
This is a wondrous time, a wondrous place;*

*But on time moves, all outer clothing changes—  
 And I shall be present loving, living, thrilling  
 Then, as now.  
 If any read these words I spake,  
 Remember you wrote them then  
 As now you read!  
 For we are one, eternally.  
 This planet's life I am.*

**Kate Isaacs:** I don't speak very often to this group, but when I do, I usually spend a lot of time preparing. Often I'll meditate on a theme all week, scribbling notes when things occur to me, to find the flow of what I want to say. Then I spend a few hours of quiet time before I speak to let it all coalesce.

This time was different. Eight of us just spent the weekend together, and it was decided that I would speak this morning. The rich, creative field that formed among us is moving through me in such a way that it's raising up things to say without the need for hours of preparation. What I want to talk about, in fact, are some of the qualities of this collective creative space.

The eight of us had a wonderful time together, and I was reflecting on what made that experience possible. I began to think about some of the other group "containers" in my life—a moms' group I belong to, a women's circle that meets monthly, an anti-racism group for white women that I helped to convene recently...they all have some of the same qualities as our group this weekend. Each of these groups enables the individuals to develop and to contribute to a shared creative endeavor.

One of the most important qualities of a creative group is that it's a shame-free zone, in the sense that we are not shaming ourselves and we're not shaming anyone else. That doesn't mean people don't feel shame sometimes. But we aren't participating in the *act* of shaming, and we're not staying trapped in our own shame if we experience it. And in this context, we can really speak the truth to each other. Sometimes the truth is hard to hear. And sometimes the truth points to the egoic things that we're doing that are not very comfortable to look at. But that's different from shaming and being shamed.

I learned a lesson about shame in a spiritual community I belonged to a long time ago. I will remember this moment for the rest of my life, because it was a big learning experience for me about how shame can stop learning. I was sitting with a group of about ten people at a large, round table, and I was making some point, over and over again in a vehement way. I don't even remember what it was, but I do remember that I couldn't let it go. The group was trying to move

on but I wasn't letting them. Finally, one of the men in the group turned to me and he said, you know, you're doing this thing and you keep doing it. You're not letting it go. He did me the great favor of being very clear and direct, but not shaming at all. He simply held up a mirror in front of me.

I looked around at everyone's faces and they were all looking at me. Up to that moment, I hadn't stopped to notice the impact I was having on everyone else. I looked at their faces. I asked, "Does everyone else see that too?" Every head around that table nodded. In that moment I saw what I'd been doing, and I just about dissolved into the carpet, into a puddle of shame.

That moment created an acute crisis for a day or so, as I sobbed with the shame of seeing ugly habits inside myself, and the embarrassment of having them outed in front of everyone. It's taken me years, but I realize now that everything is out there for everybody to see already. There's no hiding anything. We all have our personality knots. There's no point in dwelling in shame for too long. Instead, we can decide to love the truth more than anything, take responsibility for our impact on others and make amends when needed, and just keep untangling our knots whenever we discover them.

I think that the movement around examining race and racism right now is very much trying to point us in this direction. In the words of a popular writer and researcher, Brené Brown, "It's more important to get it right than to be right." There's no need for shame when I know what I'm committed to is opening to more truth and more love all the time. That's all that really matters. We can generate creative containers for ourselves and others by making that commitment to growing and learning. There's no need for shame. We're all learning all the time.

Another thing that's really important for a creative field is a shared commitment to something bigger. In every developmental context, whether it's a group about anti-racism or a spiritual community, there is a commitment to something bigger, beyond the individual, which pulls us all forward.

This commitment was so palpable at our local elementary school where our son just started kindergarten. On his first day the whole family walked him to school—my husband and me, his younger brother, and our two dogs. We got there early, before anyone else had arrived.

Standing in front of the entrance of the school was the principal and a large group of staff and teachers. They were talking about the morning logistics. It was complicated, with a lot of moving parts. They'd staggered the start times for different grades and assigned each grade a designated entrance. Cars were directed to specific parking areas for dropping kids off and picking them up. There were a lot of details to manage.

What we saw was their joy. You could see the smiles coming from underneath their masks. They finished up talking about the logistics, and then the principal shouted, "Let's DO

this!” with a victory fist in the air. Off they went to their various stations. That first day of school was wildly joyous. You could feel it everywhere in everyone.

In schools, there is commitment to something bigger, to encompassing our children safely and supporting them to learn and grow. This year, in particular, I think we all have a much greater appreciation for the dedication and immense hard work from everyone who makes it possible for our children to attend school—the teachers and administrators, the janitors, the school bus drivers. Perhaps we have taken some of these people for granted in the past. But we are seeing now how important they are in the lives of our children, and in keeping our society and economy running.

This brings me to the last point about containers, which is how important it is to offer respect and appreciation for each individual in the collective. For our weekend, we started off with a process in which each of us was asked to say a few words about what we felt was our unique creative focus. Then we were invited to listen to what everyone else saw in us. By the end of that session I can say that for myself, and I think for everybody, there was such a deep level of appreciation and respect among us. The root of the word respect is to see, to truly see another and to truly appreciate who they are.

I learned about Sanford, which you can hear in the musical presentation he put together, that he is an adventurer, and he has an irreverent sense of humor. He's always pushing the edge of adventure. I knew that about Sanford, but I don't think I *really* knew it until this weekend. And I'm so grateful to be on the ride with an adventurer such as he is.

Anybody who is a parent knows that the container we create for our children is their most important one. We design their first surround and their most important surround, which sets the pattern for their entire lives. Recently, I learned some parenting tips from a well-respected child psychologist whose approach is called Attunement Parenting. Attunement Parenting comprises five behaviors that parents are advised to do with their children. Of these, the most important one is called “labeled praise.” For instance, “I really love the red and green colors you put together like that in your drawing.” Or, “I see how you just helped your little brother get a drink. I love seeing what a helpful person you are in this house.”

The praise is very specific. The child knows you're paying attention and giving them the energy of your appreciation. Just the act of noticing what's right in an individual (and saying it out loud when the moment calls for it) is the single most important thing you can do with a child, or with anyone, to create that uplifting spirit where each one can grow into their greatest creative potential.

**Joyce Krantz:** Well, I feel so blessed to be in the company of such accomplished women who gathered this weekend. And I love the perception, the care, the awareness of the spaces they occupy and the people in them. For Kate, she has a busy household, two young, lively boys to care for as well as a career and her husband's career, and a very large world. And Nikki Pohl, who is a professor, and head of her department at the University of Indiana, exploring new ways to reconfigure their space to operate safely in the new Covid landscape we are in. What a job!

Somebody used the analogy that this pandemic is like assembling a plane in mid-flight—trying to get all the parts together, to understand the direction and information coming in from many different, ever-changing sources. It looks this way. It looks that way. To be resilient and alert in a time of great change that is uprooting lives, is the challenge before us. But it is a wonderful challenge that causes us to pause and reflect on what is really important. As we recently considered, silence allows us an opportunity to look anew at our circumstances and how we can be the blessing; how we can continue to create; how we can continue to love; and how we can continue to move in an upward direction of restoring our world in a way that makes sense; that's not insane and that reflects our oneness. The beautiful poem of Alan's, "Eternal Presence," which we began with, is a very large perspective of who we are. The human ego shouts its objections from a very limited earth-bound view but the truth is we are far more wondrous. And that is the job that we're about—to lift awareness of that identity, to uplift.

I was in a store the other day. Upon entering, I was aware that the sales clerk behind the counter, who seemed to be the one in charge, was disturbed. I could feel her stress. I could feel her fatigue. She wasn't eager to help me, in fact it felt like I was an imposition on her day, like she probably would've been happier if I wasn't there. Not the greatest welcome for customers. Nevertheless, I went about what I was doing and thought how can I change this? How can I help? Is there something that I could do to uplift her day? As I'm standing at the register, I said, "You know, these are interesting times. I can imagine that it is quite stressful on you." She replied, "Oh, you wouldn't believe it. I have to wipe down everything when customers come and go, keeping track of so many details." I said, "I really appreciate the extra mile you're taking here. It must be difficult, but we'll all get through this together. Won't we?" She looked at me and half smiled and I could feel the room lift a little. She actually stood a little taller and her gruff demeanor softened as she continued to make eye contact with me. It may seem like an insignificant moment, but it isn't. In each moment we have the ability to touch the world and to transform it.

Our time together in our recent gathering was generative. As Kate described, we came together in a spirit of appreciation. And all of you were part of that time too, as we read the

mailing list and brought each of you into our awareness. We are all part of this focus of upliftment.

There's a little animal in the ocean called a larvacean. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Center has been studying this deep-sea creature off the California coast for a while. Recently an engineer designed a submersible camera that could scan the inside of these amazing little architects in their habitat. They are about the size of a fist, squishy tadpole-like, almost translucent in color and surrounded by a three-foot balloon of mucous which they have created to trap food and carbon dioxide. It is an astonishing and elegant filtering system. When these “mucous palaces” can no longer hold any more debris, the larvacean releases the palace and it sinks to the bottom of the ocean entrapping its contents. And new palaces are made. One of these little creatures can filter 40 to 80 liters per hour of the carbon emissions in the ocean. And with the large numbers there in the Monterey Bay, about 500 Olympic-sized swimming pools are being filtered in an hour. That's pretty astonishing—a recently discovered divine technology that has been assisting this planet for who knows how long.

I think of our hearts as a divine technology for purification, too. Our hearts are like filtering systems that as we perceive atmospheres such as distress or fear, as we sit with them, and allow the natural expression of love to flow through, it is filtering and changing and lifting our circumstances.

I would just offer a word of appreciation for our collective online gatherings every two weeks. It may take different forms. We'll see. We have some very creative people who are perceiving other ways we can all connect and provide a focus of leadership and identity that is higher than the noise and disturbance in the world. Like the larvaceans, let all the debris settle to the bottom of the ocean as we allow the beautiful truth from Alan’s poem to resonate with us, “But in this present moment of my experience, I utter words of love and life and joy. This is a wondrous time, a wondrous place.”

***September 13, 2020***

Sanford Baran: [sanbar0805@comcast.net](mailto:sanbar0805@comcast.net)

Kate Isaacs: [kisaacs@mit.edu](mailto:kisaacs@mit.edu)

Joyce Krantz: [crown300@msn.com](mailto:crown300@msn.com)

## **Pre-Service Music**

*Favorite Color*

Composed by Joni Mitchell and performed by Christina Friis