

## 2018 Life Clara Barton

We are coming to the end of our 12 powers. Next week you get a break with Guest Speaker Mike Holliday. Then we have two more powers: Renunciation and Order. We'll end with kind of fall colors—Russet and Olive Green. When we talk about the 12 Powers, we are talking about aspects of our divine power that were identified by Unity co-founder Charles Fillmore. There is no scientific evidence or way to dissect out each power. It is merely a way to understand the activity of divine power in and through each of us.

But today we explore the power of LIFE! The power of life, the color of red! Life is one of those powers we feel we have sort of an understanding of. I mean, the opposite of life is death—correct? Well, only in the manifest world of duality. And we have to remember that while the manifest world is what we are most familiar with, these powers have their origin and ideal nature in the **absolute** plane of Spirit. There is the divine nature of life; and then there is the nature of life as we see it expressed in the world and in our bodies and in our human experience of life. In the absolute, there is no opposite of life, no absence of life. Often, when we talk about the power of life we forget there is an origin and nature beyond the experience of life on earth.

A familiar bible verse, attributed to Jesus, says, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” This appears in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of John and is in the context of several explanations Jesus offers comparing himself to both “the gate” and “the shepherd”. Every time Jesus tries to re-phrase it, his Jewish audience says they don't understand or they consider his speech coming from demons. Jesus attempts to offer counsel on protecting the sheep from thieves who come to kill and destroy; who sneak in not through the gate and try to lead the sheep. The simple metaphysics of this analogy point us to look to our spiritual nature as the gate or path to living a better life. For me, the expressions of the divine power of life in and through me, arise from the idea of “abundant life”. To have life abundantly is to feel the power of **vitality!**

How many of us are alive without *feeling alive*? The blood circulates, we breathe, we eat and yet we go through the motions of most days without feeling there is anything sacred or precious or powerful about the activity of life within us. Sometimes we turn to the outer to try to generate feelings of aliveness. Thrill seekers, extreme sports and dare-devils are descriptions of trying to generate the sense of vitality through physical activities that shock our bodies into the production of adrenaline and cortisol. How many of us really want to live on a roller coaster?

A different path to vitality is to become mindful of each breath and the sensations we experience. To feel the breeze on our skin and the power in our legs and arms as we move awakens us to the vitality of life. Music and dance awakens us to the vitality of life. Changing seasons alter our physical sensations by shifts in temperature, sunlight and visual surroundings. There are tastes for each season and we anticipate both the new and the familiar. To be vitally alive is to be fully present to the experience of our physical self. And to what is ours to do. I have discovered that people I would describe as vitally alive have a sense of purpose and passion about what is possible for them to do. Not content to sit on the sidelines, no matter what their age, they engage in life rather than watching life pass by. The way they engage in life is not necessarily participating in extreme sports but with great intention, loving and giving and using their gifts to the fullest. The way you live your life is a demonstration of the power of *vitality*.

To have life abundantly includes the power of life expressing as **healing**. Jesus teaches and talks a lot about healing. He ties healing to faith or our connection to the divinity within. Just as you would not, if you really thought about it, define your **life** as just your body, healing is not *just* about your body. Life on earth includes our thoughts and feelings, our relationships, and our activities. If we consider “healing” as a “return to wholeness”, then healing is an activity that impacts our bodies expressing health; our thoughts about the wholeness and worth of our being-ness; a feeling of connection in our relationships and a sense of purpose in our activities. Abundant life is a sense of “loving the skin we’re in” as my friend Rev Patty Williamson says and it is also healthy relationships, believing in ourselves and doing the powerful work only we can accomplish. Healing is being able to see what is not working and then taking action to move in the direction of wholeness. We cannot heal what we refuse to see as less than whole, less than a full expression of our divinity. We cannot heal racial divide until we see the ways we live divided and become willing to move our consciousness in the direction of wholeness. We cannot heal climate change and extinction of species until we see the ways we destroy and kill our earth and determine that different actions on our part are called for. We cannot heal ourselves until we take a look at the ways our lives are not working and see that the change we need doesn’t happen outside us but must be activated within us in order for wholeness to express. Healing **is** available as an expression of the divine Life which is the essence of our being and it will **still** always be up to us to activate in. Healing begins not with a pill or a class or a professional; healing begins in our mind.

To have life abundantly is to claim the ever renewing nature of divine life. What exactly does that mean? First, I'm going to myth bust here and it's good that you are seated. We have frequently been told that our bodies replace all our cells every seven years so we are "made new" every so often. That is sort of incorrect. Every kind of cell has its own life span. Skin cells live about 2-3 weeks while colon cells last only 4 days. Red blood cells last about 4 months while white blood cells last a year. Sperm cells last a brief 3 days but brain cells are meant to last a lifetime. Nerve cells have some power of regeneration and repair but it is slow. So if we are not getting a new body every 7 years or so, what is Rev Joy talking about with the "renewing nature of divine life"?

Today is the first day of your new life! A new life can happen every time you desire to shift consciousness and begin anew. We can choose a life free of addiction; a life in service to a greater good; a life in which we commit to living in love. We can also begin a life of addiction; a life in a prison of our own making; a life committed to hate and division. The new life we create is up to us. Life expressing as renewal is also the cycle of birth, death and return to life beyond the veil. Giving birth and creating new manifestations of life is evidence of the renewing nature of divine life. Seeds take root, grow, and produce new seeds for the next harvest.

So all of this leads me to Clarissa Harlowe Barton. Clara was born on Christmas day, 1821 in Oxford Massachusetts. She worked in the patent office in Washington D.C. when the Civil War erupted. Initially she joined others in gathering bandages and supplies as soldiers filled the city but she soon realized there was a greater need to be on the field of action. The vitality of life called her to wade onto the battlefields and nurture and supply the soldiers in their time of greatest need. She drove wagons of supplies into the battle, sometimes arriving late at night. After she appeared one night just as the field surgeon was feeling most overwhelmed she became known as the "angel of the battlefield". She tended wounds of individual soldiers and also saw the need for healing in our nation. Certainly the move from office to battlefield was a new life for Clara and the beginning of a period of change and growth. When the war ended, Clara went to Europe for rest. There she learned of the Red Cross organization based in Geneva, Switzerland. The organization called for international agreements to protect the sick and wounded during times of war and the formation of national entities to provide voluntary aid on a neutral basis. Clara determined that the United States should participate in the Red Cross. She contacted people she had worked with during the civil war, including Frederick Douglas.

She founded the American Red Cross in 1881. Douglas served on her first board. Barton was nearly 60 at the time. With a sense of vitality and knowing the importance of healing, she committed herself to the work of leading this new organization until 1904 when she resigned. There was criticism of her leadership style and concerns about her age but some of us might call it “retired” at the age of 83. She died April 12, 1912 at her home in Glen Echo Maryland.

Barton advocated not only for a new system of volunteer services but for the Geneva Treaty agreement. In 1877 Rutherford Hayes rejected it as an “entanglement”. Garfield was supportive but was assassinated before he could sign. Finally, in 1882 Garfield’s successor, Chester Arthur signed the treaty and Congress ratified it. The Red Cross responded to early disasters like a forest fire in Michigan 1881. Barton took 50 volunteers to the damn break in Johnstown PA in 1884 that took the lives of over 2,000. In 1892 Barton organized aid for Russians suffering from famine. The Red Cross began as primarily a source of aid during wartime and certainly that was where Barton first saw the need. But she became a strong advocate in the International Red Cross to expand to responding to natural disasters.

Barton had a charisma that elicited support whenever she called for support; whether it was financial or volunteers. She rose early and worked late into the night. She was said to be somewhat vain about her appearance, particularly her hair, although she did not consider herself a pretty woman. She liked dashes of bold color on her clothing, especially red. “It’s my color,” she once said.

When physical life seems at its weakest ebb; in times of war and disaster, Barton responded to the call with vitality. She re-invented and renewed her life as clerk, teacher, nurse, advocate and leader. Her call and the work of the Red Cross is healing, physical and psychological wounds. She called people together across the wounding lines of race, social standing and economics for a common good. The Red Cross is known for responding “at the speed of life”. When disaster strikes there is no time for forming a plan or waiting until there is an evaluation. Life keeps happening!

A young woman I love very much is a regional response coordinator for the Red Cross. She is based in Cincinnati now and so I texted her after the bank shooting to make sure she was ok. The Red Cross provided canteen support to the police working the active crime scene and sent grief counselors to the candlelight vigil.

She has deployed internationally for tsunami and hurricane relief. She has a huge heart and a brilliant mind and she applies them both for a greater good. She embodies the principles of unselfishly responding to the needs of life, which is the legacy of Clara Barton.

Clara Barton said, “I have an almost complete disregard of precedent, and a faith in the possibility of something better. It irritates me to be told how things have always been done. I defy the tyranny of precedent. I go for anything new that might improve the past.”

Life is for living here and now! Living life abundantly is to allow vitality to animate our awareness and invigorate our activities. An abundant life reveals and heals the wounds we discover in ourselves and in our world. And Life is ever renewing, giving us new opportunities, new beginnings and new vistas to explore.

**Divine Life expresses through me as vitality, healing and renewal.**