

The Art of Living: Spiritual Meditations on *Theo of Golden*

Session 2

October 13, 2026

- spiritual meditations
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He was dressed fashionably: a handsome cashmere blazer, olive-green trousers, and cream-colored linen shirt. Minnette had half expected to meet a frail, bent, cane-bearing old man, a pale, sleepy-eyed relic. Instead, she was met by a spry, bright-eyed soul of medium height and portly build who stood solidly on his own two feet. He had a faint stoop to his shoulders but otherwise no pronounced signs of age.

Gray-white hair, receding but full, was combed back but not fussed over, giving him an aura worthy of the description “distinguished.” He was clean-shaven.

His skin, tan and healthy, hinted that he might be a man who had spent considerable time outdoors. Full eyebrows, nicely trimmed, tapered into smile lines that were etched into the corners of his eyes. He wore a subtle cologne, something only a woman would notice, and presented himself, in general, as a man well-cared-for but not obsessed with his appearance. He was obviously old but a “young old,” in a way that would almost make a younger soul look forward to seniority. – AGING “the hardest work we do” – GRIEF

- p. 31 | “They stepped toward the bench. He waited for her to sit first, and then they sat, angled slightly toward each other. The fountain exhaled a silver mist, like fairy dust, as the first bestowal began. The first of many.” – *Could it be?*
- p. 33

“You said in your letter that you’re a newcomer here. Are you here to stay? Do you have family here?”

The old man paused and squinted with a tilt of the head. “I’m not so sure. But I’m happy to be here for now, and I like the town very much. Have you lived here all your life?”

It would occur to Minnette later that Theo had artfully evaded her inquiry and somehow kept the conversation focused on her. He was a flurry of questions, all very appropriate and asked in a tone of genuine interest. His eyes were fixed on hers, unwandering, and he leaned toward her in a way that suggested total presence.

- p. 35

Theo removed the paper from Minnette’s portrait and held it upright on his knees.

“There is something in these eyes that remind me of a girl I knew many years ago, long before you were born. A girl I knew in Spain. I loved her very much, but I was a foolish young man, and I lost her. She was very beautiful, very intelligent, and very brave. It has been a long time, more than half a century, but still, after all these years, I have never forgotten her, and when I saw your eyes, all this,” Theo moved his fingers tenderly across the portrait, in a caress, on the eyelids, the brow, the cheekbone, “I was reminded of her. And I was so pleased to recall that memory.”

Theo chuckled. “Does it embarrass you to hear an old man who you barely know talking about being in love? I should bite my tongue. But even old men have young memories.”

- p. 37

“When I was a little girl, my parents split up. I was too young to know what was going on, but I’ve heard it was pretty ugly. I come from a long line of blue blood. Do you know that term? It means we’ve been here a long time, respectable, connected, all that. When my parents’ battle was over, my mother moved to Europe, and I’ve hardly seen her since then. And my father is a very, very difficult man.” She closed her eyes and shook her head. “Being a dad is not his forte. He’s all money, all the time. He still lives here, and I still see him occasionally, and we sort of talk, but it’s all business stuff. Very transactional. You’ve said more fatherly things to me in a half hour than he’s said to me my whole life.”

She paused and took a calming breath. “But I was really fortunate. I was raised here in Golden by my grandmother and grandfather on my dad’s side, not too far from here, down in the Boughery District. They’ve both passed away, but I was very close to my grandmother. I called her ‘Gammy.’ She was a saint, sort of like the woman you loved in Spain. She enjoyed books and flowers and birds.”

- p. 39 – Minnette Prentis | “I’ve kept the sad part of my life a well-hidden secret, but I’ve hated myself a little bit every day since then.”
- p. 39 | “Minnette closed her eyes and lowered her head, then leaned into Theo’s shoulder.”
- p. 40

“Theo, on an entirely different note, get this. You might be interested in knowing my father’s name. His first name is Pearce. His last name is Glissen. Pearce Glissen.”

Theo squinted, his brow furrowed. There *was* something familiar about that name, but what?

“My dad is the brother of the artist who did this portrait. Asher Glissen and Pearce Glissen.

The artist is my uncle Asher. No two brothers in the history of the world could be more different than they are. I still can’t believe they both came from Gammy.”

Theo droned a long “so-o-o” as he processed Minnette’s revelation. “So, Asher the artist and Pearce, your dad, are brothers. And their mother, Gammy, raised you.”

- p. 44 | “The following day, Theo sat beside the river reliving his meeting with Minnette. His ‘silly idea’ began to solidify in his mind as a calling, a mission.”
- p. 52 – Mr. Ponder | “His office building, inside and out, was a picture of refinement and order, a stark antithesis to Tony’s bookshop. Theo, to his credit, would prove to be as comfortable in one as he was in the other.”
 - broad minded // tolerant
 - Allen Levi | “This man can love lots of people unlike himself. I wonder if I could do the same thing.”
- p. 64 | “As Mr. Ponder’s tenant, Theo was asked to honor a number of small reasonable requests: proper upkeep of the premises, immediate notification concerning problems or appliance malfunctions, cautious use of the balcony (and particularly, no children; the original railing, still in place, was eighteen inches below present-day safety code).…”

- pp. 74-75

Theo did read the book Tony gave him at their first meeting. It was there he learned about the oak tree in the Promenade, one in particular. Those trees were, and ever would be, haunting reminders of grim moments and dark stains in Golden's history.

The oak nearest the Chalice, on the southeast side of the tree, had a scar on its trunk, eight feet above the ground, that bore the unmistakable shape of an eye.

Some of the older Black folk in the city called it "the Eye of God."

It harkened back to a time, still alive in their ancient memories, when public executions took place in the median, and hangings – unspeakable injustices – were carried out on the strong limbs of those trees. Crowds came shamelessly, in the broad light of day, to witness and even celebrate those lynchings.

One old soul, who had actually been alive to witness such barbarism, once offered her belief about the three in an interview with the local evening news.

"God sees. The Eye o' God sees. The Lawd God sees it all. He keepin' sco'. That's why the grass don't grow up under dem trees."

And they swear that, at times, the Eye of God weeps. Others say it's just rainwater and tannin. But those old-timers brook no dissent.

- pp. 87-88 – the balcony | "He found in such moments the chance to draw upon memory and recall scenes from his long, storied life. He never knew, when he was alone like this, whose face from childhood, which town from adulthood, which agony or ecstasy from his past, or which hope for the future would assert itself in his thoughts."

- p. 98-100

One morning, just days after Tita's burial, Theo woke before sunrise, dressed, left the house, and began walking. He had no route in mind and no destination. He told no one of his departure. He did not return home until that evening. His friends, in the interim, had worried themselves sick, fearing the worst.

"I have been walking" was all the explanation he gave in response to their questions and scoldings. It was a truthful answer. His walk that day, and for the many that followed, was simply a way to save himself from drowning in guilt and regret.

Springtime came early that year. Some said it was the longest spring France had ever known. And like a blind animal moving instinctively toward a mother's scent, Theo left the oppressive walls of his villa early each morning to be in the presence of the season's beauty. Even in his darkest hour, he was drawn, if unconsciously, to space and verdure and color.

And so, he walked. And walked.

Every day.

As if his life depended on it, he walked. Alone.

Tirelessly.

Desperately.

The large plot of land that surrounded Theo's home outside of Paris was laced with a labyrinth of trails that ran through forest and field. Beyond his own property were miles and miles of hillside and country that he was free to roam. Some days, his lone figure was seen at such long distances apart that locals assumed he must be hitchhiking or driving from one spot to another. But not so. His walking was driven by fear and hope, fear of the thoughts that would catch him if he sat still and hope that he might somehow walk himself into a stupor or oblivion or, better, into the place where he would find Tita.

Pursued or pursuing, he walked.

Bedraggled, unkempt, inconsolable, he walked. Furious, frightened, fitful, he walked.

At day's end, he would return to the damnable emptiness of his home and, if fortunate, collapse from exhaustion. The temptation to drink or drug himself into sleep was never strong enough to overcome his remembrance of what that power had already taken from him. He would not grant it the pleasure of a third casualty even if, quite strongly, he longed to escape the world.

Eventually the dark spell broke.

After weeks of walking, the beauty that had surrounded him, beauty to which grief had temporarily numbed him, became consciously present again.

It was evening. The girth of lush fields, the scent of turned soil, the color of innumerable blossoms, and the cool air of April conspired against the death and darkness that he carried into their midst. His first lucid thought – “this is lovely” – felt like a betrayal of his daughter. He tried to stifle it with the argument that, in her absence, goodness was no longer possible in the world.

But then the appearances of additional co-conspirators, a little boy and girl on bicycles, laughing as they tried to outpace a playful dog, struck him with the inescapable recognition that life would and must go on, even if altogether new and subject to a grief that would be present with every step. Theo stopped to let the thought take firmer hold.

He *wanted* it to prevail. He was tired.

So...grievously...tired.

- p. 102

Looking back on that moment, he realized that, in the time between the quarter hour before sunset and the first star of dusk, somehow under the spell of that April evening in France, his splintered soul had begun to heal. It would happen in fits and starts. It would be a healing that would never, at least in this life, be total or final. But it was the moment when the fever broke for him. – C.S. Lewis

And the moment when heaven took possession of his soul.

A host of faint recollections – words from his mother, the Story he had been taught from the priest, fragments of music, images of the Christ that he had pondered in museums around the world, books he had read – all converged in the beauty of that riverside moment and coalesced into a name, a hope, a Love that changed him forever.

- p. 115

“Asher, thank you for letting me come by. I see now that you do more than portraits.”

Asher shrugged. “I try. Portraits have definitely been my bread and butter over the years, and I’m always honored when somebody asks me to do one for them. I love the challenge of drawing faces. Plus, I have a wife and daughter and a mortgage and all that, and portraits pay the bills. But I like to always have something I’m working on for the sheer pleasure of being creative. That one,” Asher pointed to the river scene on the easel, “is my present diversion. Ones like that usually don’t sell, but they pay me in other ways. They help keep me in love with what I do.”

- p. 119

Asher looked at the old man. “Theo, I get the impression you’ve thought about this before. What do you think makes for good art?”

Theo rested his chin on his right thumb and placed a bent index finger over his bottom lip.

“Yes, I *have* thought about it. In fact, I’ve thought about it a great deal. And I’ve asked others about it. But I don’t know if I have an answer either. Other than this. It might not make a lot of

sense, but for anything to be good, truly good, there must be love in it. I'm not even sure I know fully what that means, but the older I get, the more I believe it. There must be love for the gift itself, love for the subject being depicted or the story being told, and love for the audience. Whether the art is sculpture, farming, teaching lawmaking, medicine, music, or raising a child, if love is not in it – at the very heart of it – it might be skillful, marketable, or popular but I doubt it is truly good. Nothing is what it's supposed to be if love is not at the core.”

- Michael Leunig, *A Common Prayer* “‘Love one another and you will be happy.’ It’s as simple and as difficult as that. There is no other way. Amen.”