

JUSTIN  
McROBERTS

SCOTT  
ERICKSON

*honest  
prayers  
for  
dark  
seasons*

IN  
THE

LOW



“I can offer no higher compliment than this: Someone I love dearly picked up this book during a stretch of pressing darkness, and it helped them. Thank you for making something that helps to lift the darkness. I’d like to hand this beautiful book out left and right.”

**Shauna Niequist**, author of *I Guess I Haven’t Learned That Yet*

“As someone who has wanted to end it all in her own season of depression, and who accompanies many others in theirs, *In the Low* is the gift I’ve longed for. Too many words, attempts to fix, and ‘helpful’ prayers bruise and bind souls needing support and salve. *In the Low*’s words and images lean into each other in a structure of support, reminding readers of the tender and terrible gift of being human, and point toward the One who makes all this humaning have meaning, after all. I will be reaching for this resource for years to come.”

**Tara Owens**, executive director, Anam Cara Ministries, spiritual director, and author of *Embracing the Body*

“Depression has a way of turning prayer into a foreign language, leaving us stammering in the dark for words we once spoke with ease. *In the Low* gives voice to those struck speechless by despair, honoring the sacred truth that faith often speaks through the shadows. McRoberts and Erickson grant us permission to bring our whole selves—including our deepest pain—and lay them before the Divine. I can’t recommend this book highly enough for all who need to be reminded that God meets us not despite our darkness but within it.”

**Jonathan Merritt**, columnist and author of *Learning to Speak God from Scratch*

“*In the Low* acts as a companion to our seasons of melancholy without rushing us to ‘fix’ anything. It meets us where we are, as we are. This book resonates deeply within my angsty artist heart, and I’m so grateful it exists in the world.”

**Jess Janz**, poet and founder of Dinner with Strangers

“I’ve heard someone describe art and poetry as ‘language in service of the Unsayable.’ There’s nothing like finding those kinds of words in seasons when they’re so often absent—let alone paired with images so capable of stoking ashes into awe. I felt seen and loved (at the same time?!) in these pages. I found words my spirit has only been able to groan (I even caught her dancing with the Low). Scott and Justin created a hand to hold in the valley, and I’m grateful to the both of them for how warm it is.”

**Levi The Poet**, spoken word artist

“If you have experienced depression, or if you are close to someone who is in that low place right now, you know that well-meaning friends, family members, and clergy often say things that make you feel worse. As I read the honest, simple prayers in this book and let the clear and powerful

illustrations do their work on me, I felt: ‘This will help, not hurt. This will help make things better, not worse.’ You will treasure this book, I predict, and come back to it again and again.”

**Brian D. McLaren**, author of *Faith After Doubt* and *Life After Doom*

“*In the Low* is an accompaniment for the places inside that deserve to be known, the wordless places that need words, the dark and diffuse places that need form and shape. In being met in the Low we can come to find how these places not only are part of being human but are full of treasures.”

**Dr. Hillary L. McBride**, psychologist, podcast host, author, and mother

“We don’t need prescriptive answers; we don’t need anyone to explain away the pain that can’t be rationalized to begin with. We only need companions who fully see us and know us where we are, in order to get through the night. *In the Low* is that sort of wise companion—a warm, tender, desperately needed book that doesn’t speak *about* the ache but from *inside of it*. This is the rare work of ‘spirituality’ that is not abstract, detached, clichéd, or avoidant but instead gives us the language to speak the unspeakable.”

**Jonathan Martin**, author of *How to Survive a Shipwreck* and *The Road Away from God*

“This is not your mother’s prayer book, though it did make me cry! *In the Low* is both simple and subversive, inviting us not simply into peace but fuller personhood. Inside the pages of this foxy book, Scott Erickson and Justin McRoberts have created space to be welcomed home into the wholeness that isn’t actually lost on your lowest days.”

**K.J. Ramsey**, licensed therapist and author of *The Book of Common Courage*

“This book is not a cure, nor a map to a brighter shore, but a quiet companion for the journey. In a world heavy with worry and shadowed by the ache of futility, it speaks not to fix but to witness. Its art, poetry, and prayers sit gently beside us, holding space for the weight we carry. It shines a subtle light—not to banish the dark but to illuminate it, revealing the fragile beauty in being. Here is a tender guide, not to answers but to the shared humanity of searching, waiting, and finding meaning in the in-between.”

**David Gungor**, *The Brilliance*

“*In the Low* gives us permission to name the ache in our hearts without rushing to fix it. What a relief to discover honest prayers and art that offer a flicker of hope for the dark nights of the soul. These pages create space to stop pretending everything is fine and instead invite us to rest in the sacred mystery of a God who stays, even when we’re at our lowest. I’m grateful for this book. I only wish I had it sooner.”

**Kayla Craig**, author of *Every Season Sacred* and *To Light Their Way* and creator of Liturgies for Parents

“One of the most difficult parts of dwelling in a season of depression can be the feelings of isolation and loneliness that come with it. Through this book, Justin and Scott offer us words, images, and their own selves in ways that give us a sense of companions who see us, know us, and care. In my experience, that can make all the difference. Thank God for this offering and for these two faithful and prophetic friends.”

**Donna Hatasaki**, senior director of spiritual formation, Young Life

“Dark seasons aren’t optional—they’re the price of admission for being human. When my ticket gets pulled, this is the book I’ll always keep by my side. Its combination of simple words and reflective images makes it the perfect companion for navigating the Lows that inevitably find us all.”

**Brit Barron**, author of *Should You Still Talk to Grandma?*

“If the purpose of *In the Low* was to create an honest and hopeful collection of words and images, then mission accomplished. Erickson and McRoberts have truly given us a helpful companion to carry as we slow down and sit with what life has become.”

**Tanner Olson**, author and poet

“This book is a poignant and powerful guide through our deepest seasons of longing and grief, darkness and despair. These words and images offer a simple but stunning hope when our own prayers and imaginations fall short.”

**Jay and Katherine Wolf**, authors of *Hope Heals*, *Suffer Strong*, and *Treasures in the Dark*

“Justin McRoberts and Scott Erickson have created a beautiful collection of word and image prayers for those of us trudging through the Low places. This work humanizes the dark seasons of life without being sentimental or prescriptive. I highly recommend this book to anyone who needs a bit of companionship through the hard work of healing and reconnection.”

**Stephen Roach**, host of *Makers and Mystics* podcast and founder of The Breath & The Clay creative arts collective

“*In the Low* is a companion that offers the rare precision of accurately naming where you are while not leaving you by yourself. As a therapist, I’m always looking for books that combine humanity, compassion, and hope—books that will make us feel less alone. This is that book, and I will be recommending it often.”

**Monica DiCristina**, MA, LPC, therapist and author of *Your Pain Has a Name*

“No one plans to be in the Low, but life has a way of ushering us there nonetheless. And speaking as someone who’s spent time there, I know how paralyzing it can be to make decisions while in those depths. My advice? Get a copy of *In the Low* before you need it—it’s precisely the kind of

normalizing, affirming, and healing companion you'll be grateful to have when the Low finds you."

**Colby Martin**, author of *Unclobber* and *The Shift*

"Have you ever felt hugged by a book? If not, get ready, because this is that book. In this breathtaking volume, Scott and Justin offer us a tremendous tool that, I suspect, we'll end up using on a regular basis. Their art and words are a balm for my oft weary soul and a reminder that it's okay to not be okay. Friends, be prepared to read this book more than once."

**Nick Laparra**, podcast host of *Let's Give a Damn*

"I'm in a dark season again. So many are. Sometimes I DO need words when I have none, and I DO need images when my own screen is blank. I found the unutterable prayers of my heart in these pages. I needed a resource that is real and raw about my shadow times yet counterintuitively offers glimmers of hope rather than stealing it. Many thanks, friends!"

**Bradley Jersak, PhD**, principal of St Stephen's University

"There is nothing out there like this book. It is a must-buy. In my own seasons of Low I do not have the energy to read thousands of lofty words—I just need a hopeful image, a heartfelt thought, or words from a friend. This book gives you all three. Buy it for everyone you know because it is not if we will have a Low season but when. This book will lift you up when you need it."

**Katie Quesada**, storytelling consultant

"Any and every page of this work is a lifeline for the depth of depression and a direct line to the divine. You will find the concise brevity you need as light piercing the fog, one line and one brushstroke at a time."

**J. S. Park**, hospital chaplain and author of *As Long As You Need: Permission to Grieve*

"Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. Sometimes a thousand words can't express what can be said in a picture. This book, a unified gift of prayers and pictures, brilliantly strikes the heart more profoundly than a thousand books alone could do on the subject."

**Mike Donehey**, musician and author of *Grace in the Gray*

"*In the Low* offers a deeply human, prayerful companion for those seasons of inner turmoil. This book is not just a guide—it is an invitation to reconnect with the sacred conversations we are already having, often unnoticed, within ourselves. Through powerful words and images, the authors encourage us to stop striving for 'better' or 'fixed' and instead to slow down and listen deeply to the Divine presence who is always with us, even in our lowest moments."

**Pete Wilson**, life coach and author of *Plan B: What Do You Do When God Doesn't Show Up the Way You Thought He Would?*



# IN THE LOW

honest prayers for dark seasons

**Justin McRoberts  
& Scott Erickson**



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To you, dear reader.

All of this is just noise  
if not for the ongoing work  
happening within you.

Thank you for the chance  
to be a part of this hidden unfolding;  
the quiet alchemy of your becoming.

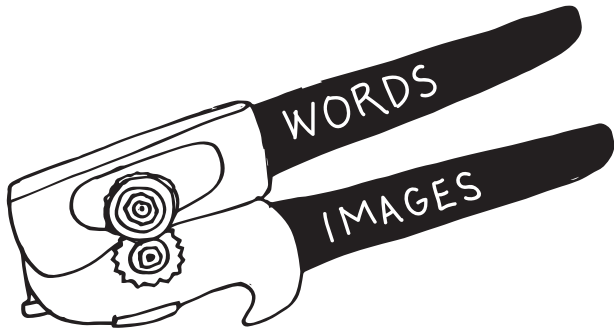
## Before You Begin . . .

In the same way our other books are prayerful companions, this book is also a prayerful companion, one specifically designed for times and seasons of depression and anxiety.

Just as spiritual practices are less about adding things and more about removing what's in the way, prayer is not about getting God's attention but about *awakening to the voice and work of God that is already in our lives*. In our first book together, Scott and I featured a tuna can being opened by a can opener to help understand what's happening.<sup>1</sup>

Words and images are not prayers, themselves. Not really. They are excavation tools with which to get to the ever-present, ongoing interior conversation we are already having with the Divine. When we hear someone speak a prayer or read Scripture or sing a song that makes us say “Yes,” “Amen,” or even just “Hmm,” what we are experiencing is the excavation tool of the words exhuming the deep prayer already within us. Words and images point to the deeper conversation that often gets lost in the noise, fear, and ego of human life. So, while our original book efforts came in response to many friends saying they struggle with prayer, we like to say that nobody is actually bad at prayer because everyone is already praying. Instead, what we can be bad at is paying attention to our insides, where prayer is already happening.

Also in our previous books, we have offered a mantra of sorts, saying “We pray because we're human, not because we're religious.”



With this third tandem volume, we're adding this:

**“We spend time in the Low because we are human, not because we're broken.”**

Just as we consider prayer an expression of humanity, we have experienced being Low as an aspect of that same humanity.

The work herein is deeply shaped by two other works, one of which we highly recommend and the other we will introduce to you over the course of the book. First, Johann Hari's *Lost Connections* helped us recontextualize our experience of depression and anxiety, removing it from the often frustrating, unsavory narrative in which “something is wrong with my head.” Instead, Hari suggests there might be a fair bit askew in the world *around* our heads too. Without dismissing the chemical and clinical components of depression and anxiety, *Lost Connections* freed us to recognize that living with depression and anxiety is a human experience in an oftentimes inhumane world. And while the Low can be wildly complex, it is wild and complex in many of the same ways being human is always wild and complex.

Hari points at nine primary connections, without which our mental health suffers and even withers. He calls them “The Nine Causes of Depression and Anxiety”:

- Disconnection from Meaningful Work
- Disconnection from Other People
- Disconnection from Meaningful Values
- Disconnection from Childhood Trauma
- Disconnection from Status and Respect
- Disconnection from the Natural World
- Disconnection from a Hopeful or Secure Future
- Disconnection due to Genes
- Disconnection due to Brain Changes<sup>2</sup>

We were moved to create prayers in response to these categories, with the exception of Hari's chapter on causes eight and nine, focused on genes and brain changes. We feel it's more appropriate for us to point toward caring, brilliant friends who work in the clinical field, addressing these disconnections—friends like Dr. Hillary McBride and authors K.J. Ramsey and Dr. Curt Thompson. Please read and follow their work.

In the end, we organized our book into five sections rather than Hari's nine, beginning with a section entitled "Where I Am Today." We assume that if you're picking up this book, something isn't working for you where you are right now. The four other sections that follow deal with the past, our intertwined existence, the things we deeply care about, and the future or what's ahead of us.

Regardless of the order these categories appear, please approach this volume the same way we've invited you to approach the previous two.

**You do not have to read in sequential order.**

**Spend time with the prayer that is speaking the most to you.**

This is a collection of helpful words and images for the season you're in, not a sequence of pages you need to be in a hurry to finish. Our suggestion is to stop with the prayer that is excavating that deep place in you the most. Spend time with what is trying to catch your attention.

The two questions at the heart of this book are,

"If being in the Low is part of how I exist, how do I do that?"

"How do I live and feel whole when I am also feeling pressed down, shaken, and run over?"

And that's what makes Mary Mrozowski's Welcoming Prayer the second formative work surrounding this book.

The Welcoming Prayer, as taught by Contemplative Outreach (a community founded, in part, by Mary Mrozowski), is an embodied movement that begins with noticing sensation in one's body, welcoming what one experiences as an opportunity to consent to God's presence, and finally letting go by praying, "I let go of my desire for security, affection, and control and embrace this moment as it is."

For the purposes of this book, we're offering a simplified version of the prayer, more suitable for this book's format.<sup>3</sup> You'll find this prayer repeated at the beginning of each section. Think of it as an invitation to pause and ready your heart to receive what you might find in you along the way:

*Welcome, welcome, welcome.*

*I welcome everything that comes to me today, because I know it's for my healing.*

*I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations, and conditions.*

*I let go of my desire for power and control.*

*I let go of my desire for affection, esteem, approval, and pleasure.*

*I let go of my desire for survival and security.*

*I let go of my desire to change any situation, condition, person or myself.*

*I open to the love and presence of God and God's action within.*

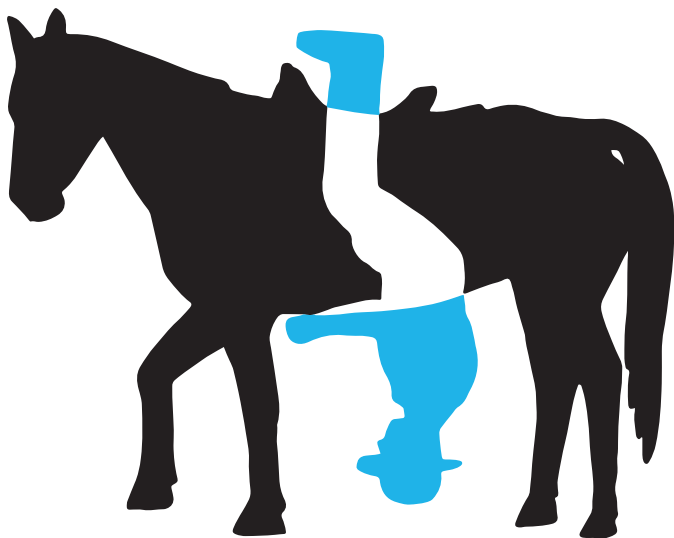
*Amen.*

It's important to note that at no point does the prayer ask us to welcome the hurtful circumstances, abuses, or specific acts of

violence that can undo us. Instead, we are invited to welcome God's presence to and with us *in* our experiences. We are also welcoming the way our souls respond to hurtful circumstances, abuses, and violence.

We don't have to ask our souls to "keep it down" when we're suffering. We also don't have to gloss over our experiences with some kind of reasoned explanation. Instead, the Welcoming Prayer offers a way to say what is vulnerably true of us and count *that* as prayer. We also don't need to *do* something about what we've experienced. You and I get to simply be where we are, as we are, which makes the Welcoming Prayer a generous partner to this book—a book that seeks to be a companion to each of us when we've been knocked off our horse, as it were.

Speaking of being knocked off one's horse . . . (Terrible segue, I know. But go with me. It'll be worth it.)



The man we've come to call the apostle Paul saw his life as Saul undone and fundamentally changed in a flash. While I don't resonate with the speed and immediacy of his experience, I do find a significant number of parallels between Saul's moment and his short season afterward and my experiences in the Low. For one thing, while Saul was lying on the ground after falling off his horse, the people he'd been traveling with were utterly confounded.

The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. (Acts 9:7)

Been there? When people near you didn't see or hear or understand the things you were seeing and feeling (the very things that were knocking you off your horse)? I have too. And I was abundantly thankful for anyone willing to kindly companion me in that moment and through the following season. I didn't need anyone to understand or ask me to explain; I couldn't explain and I didn't understand.

Also like Saul, I needed someone to wait through my blindness and disorientation and maybe be willing to feed me when my hunger returned. I resonated with Saul living long days without the ability to accurately see the journey he was on or the steps he was taking in it. Eventually, the people who sat with Saul long enough got to share in the restoration of his sight, the recovery of his appetite, *and* the first few steps of his next season, a season in which he'd become an entirely new person with a different name.

We'd like this book to be that kind of companion for you.

Beloved, we've read the statistics about depression and anxiety and a plethora of other mental health crises. You probably have too. We don't know what to make of those statistics or how to

read the upward trends. We can't make sense of it, and, to be honest, we don't really want to. Instead, because we've been there and will likely be there again, we'd rather say something like this:

Being here  
In The Low  
is part of  
being human.

That doesn't change the fact  
that being here  
is hard.  
We know it is.

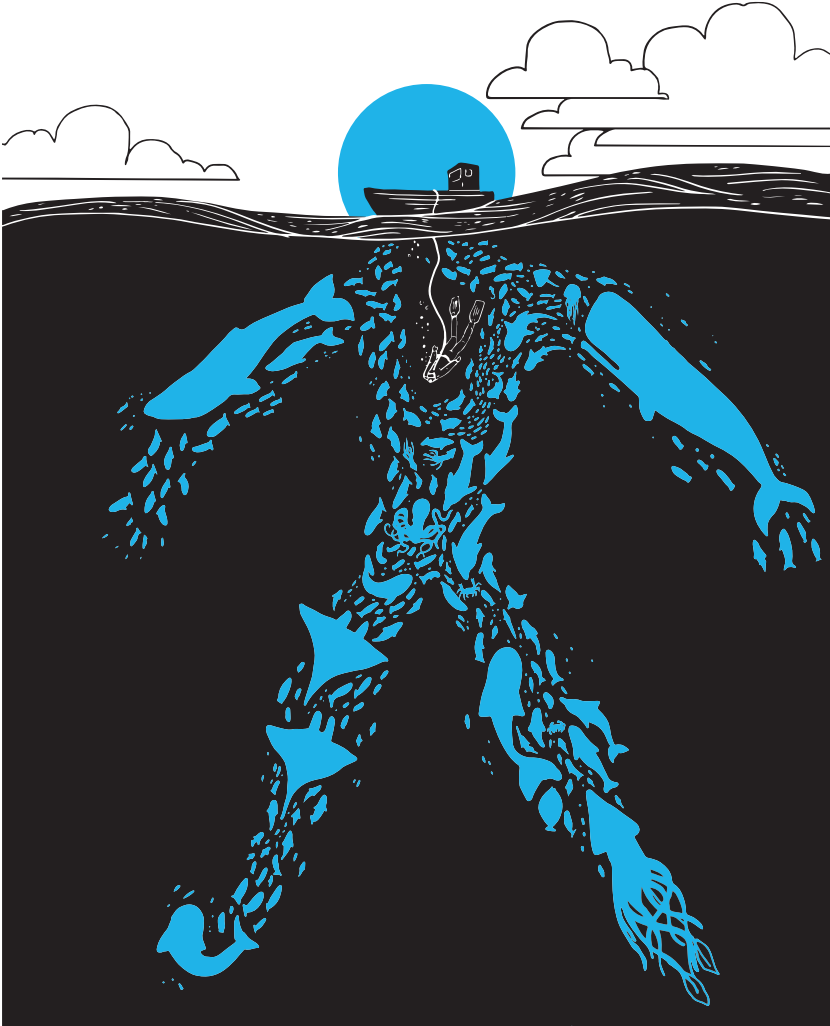
So, while our Lows  
might be  
different from yours,  
please know we've been there too.

And, if you'll have us,  
we'd like to join you,  
as friends  
and prayerful companions.

# Reconnecting to **Where I Am Today**

Perhaps this Low  
is simply a normal response  
to the parts of life  
we don't understand.

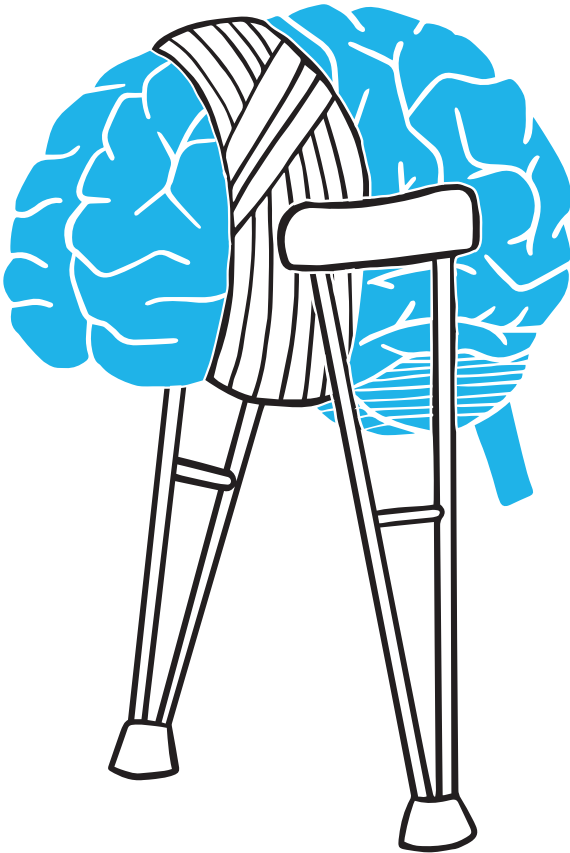
May this Low  
mean a humble entrance  
into parts of me and my world  
I'm being invited  
to know.



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I'm here again.  
This is taking so long.  
I want to be further along.  
I want to be better.

May the slowness of Your work in me  
be a sign it will last.  
Reassure me I am not just getting better,  
I am becoming Whole.



I feel so lost.  
And it is the most devastating feeling

To be lost  
From You.  
From me.  
From everybody and everything.

Thankfully  
You knew we would all come to this moment,  
so you gave us the gift of Lost Stories.

The shepherd leaves the 99 to find the one lost sheep.  
The woman cleans her entire house looking for the  
lost coin.  
The father throws a party when the lost son  
is finally returned to his seat at the family table.

I am lost.  
But not to You.  
I'm lost to me.  
Lost to the self that doesn't work anymore.

May I see my lost-ness  
not as a sign of being forgotten,  
but a necessary preamble  
to the celebration of my belonging.



Maybe the feeling  
of giving up on myself  
just means I haven't found  
the Self  
You invited me to be.

In this Low,  
give me the Light of Grace  
as I walk the dark path  
toward accepting the gift  
of my incarnation.



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Hating myself  
means living divided.  
Living divided  
means living lonely.

Living lonely  
leaves me  
in the Low.

May I grow in the capacity and desire  
to embrace sadness and darkness  
as aspects of my Whole Person  
rather than only problems to be solved.

Teach me to be Whole.



The Teacher says  
“Everyone who drinks  
the water I give them  
will never thirst again.”

O, to be a wellspring;  
to see light and life  
pour over, in joy and laughter,  
from the depths of my being.

For now, I will settle  
for knowing I am thirsty  
and receiving my thirst  
as a sign I am alive.



I do not want  
to simply understand myself,  
though there is so much  
I do not understand.

Help me learn myself  
with curiosity and patience,  
particularly when  
I do not understand what I see.

Help me learn myself  
in a way that  
is an investment  
in the mystery of my becoming.

Help me learn myself  
in a way that  
transcends understanding.

Help me, in fact, to love myself.

