



## Begin Where You Are: Messages of Meaning

BETTY BLAND

Raleigh, N.C.: Bedford Books, 2023. 210 pp., paper, \$16.

As a result of a near death experience, Betty Bland made a critical choice as a young woman to come back to this life and live a life of service to others. Life brought her challenges, joys, defeats, and successes, taking her deeper and deeper into her spiritual journey and leading her eventually to serve as president of the TSA.

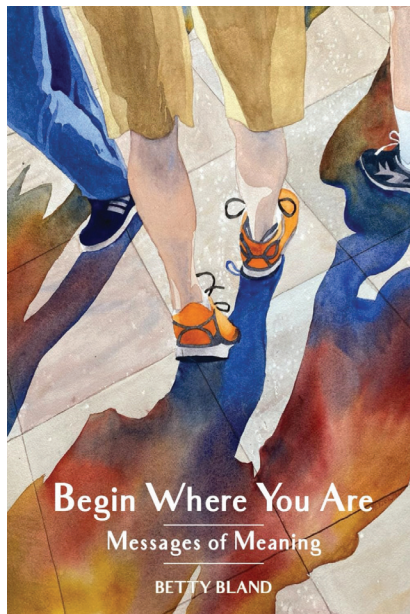
Part of the journey was studying and integrating Theosophical ways of living. Her book describes how she made meaning of all this and how important it was for her to share this wisdom with others. She writes with beauty, humor, simplicity, and a fine intelligence.

Betty speaks to the spirit within us. Chapter by chapter, she encourages all of us in our personal lives—and many of us as Theosophists—to “not just keep your nose in a book studying, but to live outwardly, get involved and make what you do count.”

An example of her delightful humor is telling us the secret of life given to her by a spunky earthworm: “Keep wriggling.” This earthworm did not give up but kept wriggling until someone helped him back to his life in the grass. This advice will save your life.

This book needs to be read many times to keep from missing all the words of wisdom embedded in every chapter. Noted in the following paragraphs are key threads that I felt were a particular invitation to choose your pathways in life wisely.

Betty writes that often we are looking for a guidebook or map to guide us in our life journey. We find the writings of Theosophy, and it opens an exciting and new world of understanding, one far grander and more meaningful than we had previously thought. She invites us to use the knowledge and insight gained for practical work in the world through acts of altruism. She cautions us not to get caught in self-absorption through our studies but to balance our



lives with service and meditation. If our study is to be useful, she adds, every new understanding should help us discern the real from the unreal.

In another chapter, Betty encourages us to look each day for moments of joy, self-forgetfulness, forgiveness, loving-kindness, or any elevated quality. In order to become the peace that we all long for, it is important to immerse ourselves in what will nurture and encourage it.

As Betty notes, “Our consciousness is sticky; things get caught in there, usually in unintended ways. Our minds believe and hold on to what they are fed on a daily basis. And the longer we chew on an idea, the tighter it sticks. It is not easy but we do have the ability to determine the character of our steady diet.”

Another powerful statement in her book reflects a political poster she saw in Germany. It depicted a patch of cracked asphalt with a triumphant blade of green grass pushing its way through into the sunlight. The statement was, “Green breaks through.” Betty describes this powerful image as a metaphor for the spiritual power that is trapped beneath the surface of our minds, waiting for the moment to break forth.

She goes on to say, “Committed intensity and pure intention, aligned

with the universal good, bring the waters of unfoldment into the cracks of our consciousness, allowing the spiritual power to blossom forth against all odds.”

Betty also addresses a subject with which many of us struggle: are our helpful intentions for others really helpful? Here is her guidance: “If we don’t say the right words or know the most helpful hopes for the person for whom we are praying, we send a caring vibration through the universe that is carried on the wings of intentionality to help. The power of energy and support gently envelops the targeted recipient with the strength to reassert the natural impulse to wholeness and order. So don’t hesitate to participate.” She encourages us to “tune in to an open, caring concern for your friends, enemies, and strangers all over the world, and nourish those little blades of hope springing up and penetrating the darkness.” She mentions a friend who became willing to receive her prayers for him, saying, “Its strength has the power to break the ravaging darkness of the struggles of life and convert it to the greening pastures of hope.”

Throughout the book, Betty shares quotes from H.P. Blavatsky that serve as examples of wisdom. She offers what she has learned throughout her life as inspiration and an invitation to embrace the following charge: “We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological, and religious boundaries. Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and peaceful global community.”

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