

DANIEL  
O'LEARY

the  
heavenly  
habit

From the  
international bestseller of  
THE HAPPINESS HABIT  
and  
THE HEALING HABIT



DANIEL  
O'LEARY

the  
heavenly  
habit



  
garratt  
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*Dedicated to Maura, Micheál and my special  
friends who, in one way or another, always find  
and practice 'the heavenly habit'.*



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Painting 'Christ of St John of The Cross' by Salvador Dali, 1951.

Photograph from Kelvingrove art Gallery and Museum on page 42

Painting 'Hope' by George Frederic Watts and workshop, via

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IN THEIR OWN WORDS



## INTRODUCTION



This small book is not about Heaven; it is about Earth. Nor is it about angels; it is about mortals. It offers a key to discovering the beautiful in the most unexpected places. We hope it will brighten your life with a new and thoughtful way of considering everything, especially people, events and experiences you regard as definitely 'bad news'. The heavenly habit is that of looking at something, especially anything negative or unpleasant, in such a way that it surrenders its secret to you – the hidden goodness it carries. The old wisdom behind this belief, and it is infused into the pages of this book, is that everything has a meaning, a reason, a message – but we must search for it in a mindful, patient and positive way.

Too often we unwisely prejudge events and people at their face value. Life becomes more interesting to us, and we become more interesting to other people when we search below the negative superficialities of each day, learning something from everything, and acquiring more curious and creative minds. Developing 'the heavenly habit' of glimpsing the gold in the lead of our shadows brings the most significant transformation – personal and universal. There is a crack in every darkness – that's how the light gets in and out. And you need the darkness to discover the light. It is called the paradox of life. We are all living in it. And in there somewhere, is what we call happiness.

There is a helpful process to finding the light in the darkness. The wonderful gift of imagination plays a central role in transforming the negative into the positive, in moving from a cramped, closed and unhealthy place in your head and heart into a more free, open and delightful space. One special key to the transformation of what keeps us trapped is to visualise what we hope for, to make it present now, to feel it with our senses, to imagine ourselves being in that wonderful world of letting go of resentment, regrets or whatever our prison may be, of being free to fly. Beyond just thinking about something one desires, it is another huge step forward to be able to somehow pre-experience it, even for a moment. It is, for instance, one thing for a teacher to discuss and draw pictures, with children, of a sunny day; it is another thing entirely when they sit near the window and actually feel the warmth of the sun on their faces.

This kind of process applies to how we make the journey into the light in all 26 'habits' of the book. See the growing and healing in your thoughts and emotions as already happening. Try to become aware, in your senses, of that new freedom in your patterns of perception. This is how your goals are already becoming part of you. Know that they will be enfleshed in you when you always keep your heart open to those life-changing experiences. All great traditional wisdom knows that 'secret'. Imagine what you deeply desire for your health of heart and soul as already yours, as belonging to you, as now in your possession. And feel its presence becoming part of you.

Deepest thanks to those generous souls who accepted the challenge to help us understand those journeys from darkness to light – Adrian Scott, Brenda Pike, Christine Crabtree, Judy Roblin, Maria Bennett, Maggie Jackson, Martina Lehane Sheehan, Michael McCarthy and Theresa Wall. They have written from their hearts and in their own creative ways. Some are shy, some are apprehensive – never having been in print before, and all are brave and trusting. And just as each one is writing their reflections from where they happen to be in their own searching just now, so too each one of us, the readers, receive it from our own particular experiences and understanding of the astonishing mystery of our lives today. Deepest thanks for the work of Margaret Siberry, Martin and Maria Bennett, Andrew and Marita Thompson, Celia Sparkes, Anne Harding and Aine Moynihan; also for the guidance of Garry O’Sullivan, Michael Brennan and Alba Esteban of Columba Press.



## THREE POEMS



Something of the theme of this small book is caught up by the following three poems. The first is an extract from Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem "There alway, alway something sings":

*... It is not only in the rose, it is not only in the bird,  
not only where the rainbow glows,  
nor in the song of woman heard.  
But in the darkest, meanest things  
there alway, alway, something sings.*

*'Tis not in highest stars alone, nor in the cups of  
budding flowers,  
nor in the red-breast's mellow tone,  
nor in the bow that smiles in showers:  
but in the mud and scum of things,  
there alway, alway, something sings.*

(RALPH WALDO EMERSON – 1803–1882.

THE COMPLETE WORKS 1904, VOL IX. POEMS)

The second reflective poem "The Guest House" also catches the spirit of this book. It is written by the wonderful Persian poet Rumi:

*This human being is a guest-house;  
every morning a new arrival;*

*a joy, a depression, a meanness –  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of all your furniture;  
still treat each guest honourably.  
He may be clearing you out for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice –  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.*

*(JALALUDDIN RUMI, RUMI – SELECTED POEMS, TRANS  
COLEMAN BARKS WITH JOHN MOYNCE, A. J. ARBERRY,  
REYNOLD NICHOLSON: PENGUIN BOOKS, 2004.)*

The third poem, 'The Quilt' (unpublished), is something I wrote to help me understand the complexity of our lives, especially how the light and darkness of our experiences are intertwined. It may help us to explore more deeply the mystery of our being.

*As they say it does  
Just before I died, like a small ocean  
my life flattened into a wavy  
patchwork quilt*

*Just before they went glassy, as they say they do  
my eyes suddenly saw everything clearly  
and at the completion of the last stitch  
they understood the whole complex interweaving*

*My darkest times were now the brightest patches  
and the 'sinful' pieces held them all together.  
The weakest patterns came from my proudest  
moments  
and my deeds of goodness  
were the most threadbare of all*

*The finest colours, I learned  
were mixed at twilight, without permission;  
and the shapes of beauty, only now so clear,  
were drawn with my left hand –  
wild and pagan*

*And then I saw a shy and shining thread of gold  
(and remembered telling it in confession) —  
a moment that was unknowingly divine ...  
And as they say it does, a secret was revealed to me –  
the light in the dark of mystery*





## ALPHABET OF ANGELS



A – Anxiety to Peace: MICHAEL MCCARTHY

B – Bitterness to Contentment: DANIEL O'LEARY

C – Criticism to Praise: CHRISTINE CRABTREE

D – Darkness to Light: CHRISTINE CRABTREE

E – Envy to Rejoicing: MARTINA LEHANE SHEEHAN

F – Fear to Bravery: MARIA BENNETT

G – Grief to Acceptance: BRENDA PIKE

H – Hatred to Freedom: MAGGIE JACKSON

I – Idleness to Passion: MARTINA LEHANE SHEEHAN

J – Judgement to Appreciation: BRENDA PIKE

K – Kitsch to Authentic: JUDY ROBLIN

L – Loss to Growth: BRENDA PIKE

M – Miserly to Magnanimous: THERESA WALL

N – Negative to Enthusiastic: DANIEL O'LEARY

O – Over-cautious to Risking: DANIEL O'LEARY

P – Pity to Empathy: MARTINA LEHANE SHEEHAN

Q – Quaking to Leading: DANIEL O'LEARY

R – Rejection to Belonging: MAGGIE JACKSON

S – Stressed-out to Break-through: ADRIAN SCOTT

T – Timid to Confident: MARIA BENNETT

U – Undeserving to Blessed: ADRIAN SCOTT

V – Vindictive to Forgiving: ADRIAN SCOTT

W – Wounded to Healer: MAGGIE JACKSON

X – X-rated to Gold Star: JUDY ROBLIN

Y – You, the False Self – to You, the True Self:  
DANIEL O'LEARY

Z – Zero to Zenith: JUDY ROBLIN





# A

## ANXIETY TO PEACE

Most people, most days, carry anxiety of some kind. Young and old, at all levels of society, are admitting to panic attacks, fits of depression and significant degrees of stress. The amount of prescribed medication has doubled in ten years. Mindfulness apps and ‘talking therapies’ are in huge demand. Much of our anxiety lies below our conscious awareness. It is a silent destroyer of happiness. It corrodes our inner peace. From within our fragile spirit this darkness emerges. Sometimes it is triggered by our own inner and fearful insecurity, sometimes for other reasons: there is no escaping the 24/7 disturbing media news that bombards our homes and hearts. Even the strong-minded, positive and successful people are not immune. People long to be free from their mental prisons. Michael McCarthy remembers a beautiful moment of grace.

Michael writes: In 2012 I spent three months as Writer in Residence in the unit for stroke and dementia at Tal-laght Hospital, Dublin. The fruit of the residency was a poetry collection called *The Healing Station*, named after a set of sculptures in the hospital chapel by the artist Anna Duncan depicting six healing miracles from St Luke’s Gospel.

The title was a metaphor for what happened daily in the hospital, the dedication of staff in the face of tiny increments of improvement. I learned to watch for small moments of epiphany. The incident here occurred the day before I was invited to contribute to this publication.

*Taking Communion to Jennifer*

*I find her in good form.  
We chat awhile, then move on to prayer.  
Today her responses are clear and immediate.  
As we make our way through the Our Father  
I sense a presence in the space behind me.  
Concentrating on the moment, I continue:  
Lord I am not worthy that you should enter  
Under my roof ... As she receives the host  
A warm breath caresses the back of my neck.  
Turning, I see an elderly resident in slippers,  
Her face stricken. A single sob escapes from her.  
Placing a hand on her forehead I say the blessing.  
Her full-on smile radiates down the length of my arm.  
Something is unlocked in us.*

MICHAEL MCCARTHY



**Amazing Grace! Nothing is beautiful or imaginative enough to do justice to the heavenly habit of a transforming grace - the grace that finds light in the darkest soul. In this little book, 10 artists offer their best efforts to capture the experience of that blessing in their own lives.**

DANIEL O'LEARY, ma (uk), ma (ca), a priest of the Diocese of Leeds, England, is a writer and speaker. He has worked as parish pastor and college lecturer for 50 years. Author of many books, his most recent are 'The Healing Habit' and 'An Astonishing Secret'. He also writes for The Tablet and The Furrow. The main aim of all his work is to reveal the astonishing meaning of Incarnation, and how it transforms the quality of our daily lives. Creation itself is called 'the First Incarnation'. He himself still struggles with each passing day to stay authentic and free!



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