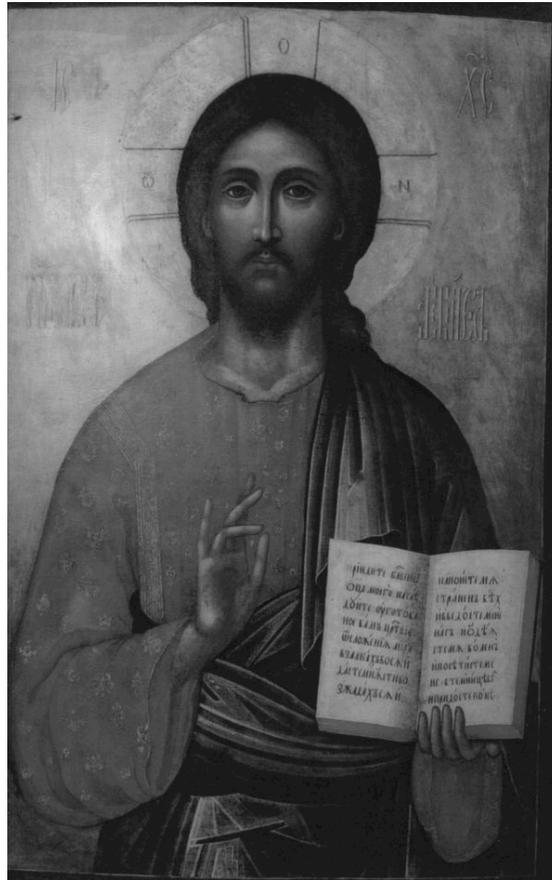


Yeshua-Our Heart's Desire



Christian Meditation- *Cultivating a Daily Practice* *in Prayer of the Heart* *by William Ryan*

****Starting and Sustaining a Daily Practice in Prayer of the Heart****



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I.	Section One- Breathing Yeshua in Silence and Interior Communion	p.3
II.	Section Two-Consecration to the Heart of Christ in Daily Prayer of the Heart Practice	p.8
III.	Section Three- The Practice of Divine Reading- Lectio Divina	p.10
IV.	Section Four- Listening to the Heartbeat of God in Creation	p.11
V.	Section Five - Section Five- Cultivating Yeshua's Secret Garden Within- Integration of Prayer of the Heart in a Rule of Life	p.12

Section One- Breathing Yeshua in Silence and Interior Communion

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Our inner spiritual work turns on the tension of the mind's compulsion for control and the freedom of the heart's willingness to open and surrender in love. We can learn to breathe and both receive and give ourselves in love to the "I AM," who is Love, who offers Itself to us eternally. Our mind agendas always fall short and are filled with faulty assumptions. In every moment the one thing we can do is "sit and breathe." In contemplative Buddhism this has long been the mantra. In Christianity this "I AM" in life is revealed to us with fiercely personal intensity in the face of Yeshua and oceanically in the universal Heart of Christ. (In this work the Aramaic form of Christ, *Yeshua*, is used instead of the anglicized version of *Yeshua*.) In contemplative Christianity and the tradition of the Prayer of the Heart the one thing, the central thing, we can always do, is "***sit and breathe Yeshua.***" To sit and breathe Yeshua is to sit and inhale in receptive presence and adoration, and to exhale in the self-offering Agape that is Christ. To breathe Yeshua is to unite our life with His life in us, each moment of life. This is not an ideal to aspire to, but a practice to be actualized and lived.

In the Christian tradition this practice of uniting ourselves with the inner Life of Christ in prayer word and breath comes to us from the desert fathers and mothers of early Christianity. In his book on Christian Contemplation Brian Taylor speaks of this development in Christianity:

"However, at some point these desert contemplatives began to use the name of Yeshua as their invocation. In the fourth century text, *The Life of Anthony*, by Athanasius of Alexandria, there was already a practice of invoking Christ in a repetitive prayer, even linking the breath to its repetition, as if the one who prayed was actually breathing Yeshua: 'Anthony called his two companions...and said to them, "Always breath Christ.'" (Taylor, p.73)

We know this practice as the Prayer of the Heart. When Christianity was a vital movement and not yet an institution, the ancients of the early centuries fled the towns and cities of North Africa and the Middle East to realize the simplicity and singled hearted life of the Kingdom to which Yeshua invites us in the Gospel. The Good News proclaimed by Yeshua is that God is accessible to all, and our call in this life is to become wholly accessible to God. Hence there is something we must do to become single hearted; to live a life wholly consecrated to God.

From this desire for the singular, undivided life came the word "monos" and the creation of the monastic life. The early men and women monastics were intent on realizing a life consecrated to union in Christ. They lived as hermits and as cenobites, or in communities. They gathered around teachers or guides who were called "abba" or "amma", spiritual father or mother. The desert ammas and abbas sought to give their lives completely to prayer both in solitude and silence, and in activity, and to guide others to the same singular life of the Heart.

The term that the ancients used for this inner transforming work of union with Christ was "Purification of the Heart." They did not intend that the Heart or spiritual center was unclean, but rather that our life, our will and consciousness, needs to be undivided or purified in its orientation to the singular purpose of the Heart, which is communion with God in Christ. Therefore the goal is to be undivided, wholly committed, fully consecrated to Christ in all things.

Like all of us the ammas and abbas realized that the primary impediment to the undivided life is the divided attachments and culturally conditioned purposes of the mind. When they went into the desert seeking simplicity and commitment they brought their mind and its incessant thoughts and traffic with them. Therefore to be fully given and to rest in communion with Christ in the Heart they realized they must find a freedom from the mind's tyranny. These seekers formulated a simple schema in their prayer life. They understood that a person thinks about God in the prayer of the mind; a person speaks to God with the prayer of the lips; and a person experiences God in the silence and interior communion of the prayer of the heart. To assist in this process of anchoring in the Heart or spiritual center they understood that using a prayer word in alignment with breath was most efficacious. They chose a word or phrase from the scriptures. And for many the most powerful word of all was the name of the Redeemer Christ, Yeshua. Over time for many in Eastern Christianity the form of the Prayer of the Heart most commonly known has been the Yeshua Prayer. An expanded form of the Yeshua prayer ("Lord Yeshua, Have Mercy.") was used by many based on the Gospel exclamation of Bartimaeus, the blind man. "Yeshua, Son of David, have mercy on me."(Mark 10:47) Various forms of the Yeshua prayer have been used through the centuries, but the simplest and most easily aligned with the breath is the holy name of Yeshua. Again Brian Taylor speaks of this ancient tradition of inner communion with Christ:

"This rich and focused tradition is perhaps the only specific, practical teaching about contemplative prayer in all of Christendom that has been handed down faithfully and precisely from master to disciple, remaining intact over sixteen hundred years. In this sense, the Yeshua Prayer/Prayer of the Heart tradition is more akin to the way in which Buddhist or Hindu meditation is handed down from generation to generation than it is to anything comparable in the West.

The use of the Yeshua Prayer and the teachings about contemplation that surrounded it spread from master to disciple through the deserts of Egypt, and then came into prominence in the sixth century at the well-known and ancient monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, established by Emperor Justinian I in 527. In the fourteenth century the center of the Yeshua Prayer movement moved to Mt. Athos, Greece.

...In our day, Mt. Athos and to a lesser degree, St. Catherine's of Sinai, continue as centers of practice of the Yeshua Prayer."

Prayer of the Heart was understood then and now to be the way we anchor our attention and our intention, or will, fully in the Heart of Christ. This practice takes place during formal times of prayer in silence and sitting. The Prayer of the Heart is a practice that is ceaseless. It takes place throughout the day in the midst of activity, with a habitual and ongoing return to the name of Yeshua in moment to moment presence and self-offering love, in all that we do, in our natural inhalation and exhalation of the breath. This way

the invitation to a life of ceaseless prayer from Yeshua and the apostle Paul is seen as both possible and desirable for all.

We have an expression of reassurance in our culture when a person is fearful; we say "Breathe easy." When we are in the middle of life, breath is a way that we re-orient to abiding in the present moment when our consciousness has been captivated by memories of painful past or a dreaded imagined future. When we can root and ground in the present moment we can live where God lives, in the present eternal moment.

"In the seventh century, John Climacus advised: 'Let your calling to mind of Yeshua be continually combined with your breathing and you will know the meaning of silence.' " (Taylor, p.73)

Indeed to breathe is to breathe Life, and a powerful word for God in the Jewish tradition is Ruach, or Life-Breath. To breathe fully with attention and intention is to participation in the flow of the Spirit God who is our true Life. This is our antidote to the mind's compulsion for control and fixation with past pain and future possibility. To breathe Ruach, or Life- Breath, is to breathe Yeshua, and to root and ground in what is real and true. Actualizing this Truth of the Christ Life is much beyond any relaxation technique.

When I breathe Yeshua I participate in the Spirit of God with full attention and intention. Yeshua is the gift of God (as He proclaimed to the woman at the well). If we open to receive Him, He is given to us infinitely as gift, without expectation. And the Life of God becomes as a spring of Living Water welling up within us. In my in-breath I bow ceaselessly in the *attention* of presence and adoration. In my out-breath I offer ceaselessly in love with hands extended, with the *intention* of being poured out in all that I am and all that I am given. To breathe Yeshua is to continually say "yes" to receive Him, and to say "yes" to our self-gift of Love in the offering to Him of our own life and humanity. ***I breathe in Yeshua; I breathe out Yeshua. I breathe in the gift of God's Life; I breathe out in love-offering the gift of my own life in God. In my breath I sink into and abide in communion in the Heart of Christ. In this inner communion with Christ I touch the Kingdom and the Kingdom touches me.***

Silent Sitting Practice -

The method of this practice is simple. This path of faithfulness and trust is the hard and narrow way, calling us to reach deeply and to take refuge in the Heart of Christ in every circumstance and in every challenge. In human relationships when we seek intimacy with the one we love, we give our ***full presence***, letting no thing intrude into our encounter, be it our own thoughts or external noise or distraction. And in this space of encounter we give ourselves to our ***desire to be fully given in love*** to Yeshua, our heart's desire, where we find the peace and joy of inner communion in the Heart of Christ. To cultivate this sanctuary space of encounter in silence and consecration the ancients called "Hesychia" there are external and internal disciplines we must cultivate. These are some helpful guidelines to those disciplines:

The Guidelines of Formal Prayer of the Heart Practice:

1. **Setting-** Set aside a sacred space where you are not likely to be interrupted, a place consecrated to your desire for communion with Christ.

2. **Time-** Choose a time which is most conducive to silent prayer, when you are alert and not likely to be interrupted. For most that is early morning and early evening.
3. **Body Posture-** Sit with a straight back, where minimal effort is required to sit straight and be alert. For some a chair is best, for others, a prayer bench or cushion. Let the hands be folded in your lap, or resting on the thighs upward or facing down.
4. **Breath-** Breathing should be relaxed not forced. We should let it be deep and abdominal, relaxing the tensions in the chest and abdomen. Let the out-breath be released slowly.
5. **Preparation-** Choose a short prayer phrase of consecration to prepare for your entry into silence: "O Christ, I give myself completely to you." "O Yeshua, You are my Refuge."
6. **Length of Prayer Session-** 25-30 minutes is best with walking contemplation in between more than one session. Allow for a gentle transition from the prayer session, usually with a spoken vow of practice and devotional prayers or lectio divina.

The Method:

1. **Prayer Word-** Choose a word, which touches you and which expresses best your desire to be one with Christ. It may be a short sound, word, or phrase. For many the fitting prayer word is the name of *Yeshua*, or a form of the Yeshua prayer ("Lord Yeshua, have mercy"). Repeat it continuously, returning to the prayer word synchronized with your breath. If it is more than one syllable or word, then synchronize the repeating of the word or phrase with the in-breath and out-breath. Let this prayer word or phrase be the anchor of returning to your single desire for communion with Christ.
2. **Observing the Mind- Abiding in the Heart of Christ-** Observe the arising of thoughts, and release from all the traffic of the mind, thoughts, desires, commentaries, judgments. Observe them arise and release them while you return to abiding in the Heart in your prayer word and breath. Continually release from involvement with thoughts and return to your holy word. Continually "release and return," to be present to Yeshua in loving attention and self-offering, through the anchor of your word or phrase. It is an ongoing process of "release and return" in the natural rhythm of your breathing. In this process we become increasingly absorbed in the Heart of Christ in the interior movements of presence/adoration and in our self-offering in love.

Summary of Guidelines and Method:

Over time we cultivate a capacity, not to stop thought and emotion, but to release from them, and abide in an interior communion in the Heart of Christ that is beneath and beyond the mind and its activity. We come to experience that we have thoughts, but we are not our thoughts. We have a freedom to find our refuge in the Heart of Christ alone, whether in our silent prayer practice, or whether in the ceaseless prayer of daily life and

activity. We come to know that our true home is the Heart of Christ, the Kingdom of God within us. John of Gaza, an early practitioner of the Prayer of the Heart said, “The cell in which he (the monk) is enclosed, for the sake of the name of Yeshua, is a sanctuary, for it contains the dwelling place of God.” (Ware, p.92) Our true home, our monk's cell, is the Heart of Christ, and our practice is one of ceaseless refuge in the Heart of Christ.

Prayer of the Heart is a practice of ongoing metanoia or conversion. No matter how far I have wandered down a dead end street, no matter how badly I have erred in straying or causing harm to self or others, ***I can still breathe Yeshua, and take my singular refuge in Inner Communion with Christ. I touch Reality; I touch who I am; I touch who God is; I am one with the Divine Beloved in the Heart of Christ.***

Section Two-Consecration to the Heart of Christ in Daily Prayer of the Heart Practice-

The Christification of our Lives. A central theme of Eastern Christianity is that the life's journey is the divinization of our humanity in Christ. The Praxis of Prayer of the Heart is the actualization of this mystery. Essential to this process is the way we consecrate the space, the activity, and the motivation of our daily human life. We liturgically celebrate this consecration and Christification of our humanity in the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, in sacred time and space we liturgically enact at the altar and Eucharistic table, the movements of the self-offering of our humanity in Christ, and the receiving of the Self-Offering of Divine Life in Christ.

Consecration of Time: To consecrate time is to make it holy, to set it aside as sacred offering. On a practice level, this means we set aside, or consecrate, time at intervals in the day to give ourselves to formal practice. For most this means the time in the early morning, just after rising, before the activities and responsibilities of the day began to ask our attention. At this early hour we give our first attention and responsibility to the vertical relationship with God alone, in solitude, silence, and interiority. This consecrated time of refuge in the Heart of Christ in interior silence and communion *is a pivot point for daily life.*

It is recommended in the early morning we set aside at least a half hour of silent sitting prayer of the heart time in addition to the devotional, intercessory, and lectio divina prayer we may practice. A similar amount of time in the evening is recommended. For some an evening prayer session may be difficult because of the demands of family. In that event it is recommended that two periods of sitting practice be integrated in one's life in the morning time.

Consecration of Space: In our homes too often we provide space only for what we regard as utilitarian purposes or the habit patterns and cultivated distraction of our lives. It is a vital necessity in the spiritual life to set aside space that is dedicated to the life of inner communion with Christ. The qualities of this space are quiet, reverence, and symbols which hold the Heart of Christ ever before us as our refuge and home.

In our sacred space the placement of an altar is recommended. In the mystical Christian tradition the altar as symbolic and liturgical point of contact between human and Divine is a primary way of establishing sacred space. The altar is also the symbol in Judeo-Christian tradition of the Eternal wedding feast of union between God and Creation. In the Prayer of the Heart practice many people place icons or symbols of Christ on the altar, to help us connect with our purpose and motivations for entering sacred space. There are many powerful versions of the icon of Christ Pantocrator which symbolically point to the Heart of Christ and Mind of Christ in the Torah or sacred scripture. For some a Christ candle or light, representing the Light of Christ in our own Heart is also a central expression of our interiority of communion in Christ. This sanctuary of sacred space, which we reverence with silence, respect, and devotional movements and gestures of

bowing and respect becomes our daily space of encounter and renewal of the practice of refuge in the Heart of Christ.

Consecration of Intention: Many motivations can be heard in this culture for undertaking contemplation or meditative prayer. In the Prayer of the Heart practice there is only one motivation, to be fully united and given in love to God in all things. This motivation is already present within us. It can remain unrealized and un-lived, however, unless we continually consecrate our motivation in our practice. We renew our motivation daily in prayerful expression and as we purify our will to be wholly given to our singular desire to be one with God in all things. ***This is the actualization of the Great Commandment of love. Yeshua invites us to love God with our whole, undivided humanity.***

A short prayer of consecration to be invoked at the beginning of our silent sitting prayer time can assist in this purpose. In this prayer of consecration we connect our consciousness and will with the deeper "willingness" of the Heart. Each time we recite it in sincerity of purpose we are making an ever-deepening commitment to give ourselves over in entirety to the Love of God. We enact the deep willingness and desire of our outstretched hands that continually bow, open, and offer, and cling to nothing.

Some examples of a prayer of consecration of intention might be: *"Lord Yeshua, I give myself to You."* *"O Beloved Yeshua, I take refuge in You alone."* It is helpful for us to find the language that best expresses this inner intention in a personal way. This may require some listening and attunement, trying on language that fits for each person. This prayer of consecration may not only be invoked at the beginning of our prayer period each time, but also at intervals during the day when we need to "bring yourself back". It is recommended to habitually bring the prayer word as a continual and ongoing anchor throughout all activity in my life. But at intervals in the day, one may take a short pause or breather, settling in deep breathing, and invoke the prayer of consecration.

Another form of consecration of Intention is a daily recitation of a "Vow of Practice." This is recited at the end of the first prayer period of the day. An example of a "Vow of Practice" might be: ***"O Beloved Yeshua, this day I vow to love you in all things."*** ***"Heart of Christ, this day I vow to take refuge always in you."*** ***"O Beloved, I will love you in all my being, in all my doing. I will love my neighbor as myself."*** This vow of practice then becomes the basis of our recollection at the end of the day. The inner desire and willingness, to offer ourselves, our humanity, to be wholly united in love with the Self-Giving Life of Christ in us, is at the root of our own Christification.

In this way in ceaseless Prayer of the Heart I participate in the receiving and offering of Divine Life which is at the heart of existence. In 'Breathing Yeshua' I open myself to the divinization or Christification of my humanity. I receive the gift of God, who is Christ, into my own humanity, and I offer in love the totality of my human life in Christ to the Abba, the Source of Life. Participation then in Divine Life, the Living Water of the Life of Christ, is one ***continual flow of endless bowing in adoration, endless offering in love.***

Section Three-The Practice of Divine Reading in Scripture- Lectio Divina

“Yeshua Christ, the Word which came out of Silence.” - St. Ignatius of Antioch
“God spoke one Word in silence from all eternity and He spoke it in silence, and it is in silence that we hear It.” –John of the Cross

Lectio Divina and Prayer of the Heart- The transformation of one’s life may be seen as the transition from living life from the mind, the thoughts, the emotions and the instincts to living life fully from the Heart, the Center of our being, the place of the Indwelling God. In the Heart Christ can come fully alive in us, so that “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal. 2:20) Lectio Divina is the formalized movement from the mind and conceptual reflection on scripture to listening and experiencing the Presence of Christ in the Heart.

There are four interior movements of Lectio Divina or Divine Reading:

1. **Reading**-(Lectio)- We begin by choosing a scriptural text. The choice is an intuitive one, or it may be the lectionary readings for the day or week. We read the text slowly to ourselves, listening carefully to each word. At this level we listen deeply to the written word of God, listening to those words or phrases in the reading which seem to speak to us in a special way. This is a receptive way of reading and listening, open to receive, as the parable of the seed falling on fertile ground.
2. **Reflecting** (meditatio)- We read the scriptural text again a second time. In this movement we are listening to an interior reflection to the word or phrase which speaks to us. How is it touching us within? We are listening receptively rather than analyzing or interpreting, asking the question, in what way God touching us, speaking to us about our own life. It is important to remember that this is not Bible study or objective interpretation, or a theological study, but a personal reflection to the Living Word of God speaking to us through the written word. It is a deeper movement toward listening and pondering in our interior life.
3. **Responding** (oratio)- We listen again a third time to the scriptural text as it speaks to us. This time in the third movement of Lectio we allow a spontaneous prayer to arise in response to the listening and reflecting. How do we open in our desire in response God’s word? How do we open in our longing for the Living Word of God, Christ, to flame up within us? In what way do we respond to the call to be transformed in God’s Love? What are the inner responses of praise, gratitude, contrition, or new commitment? We may express this response in words and in human emotion and verbal prayer.
4. **Resting in God** (contemplatio) We listen again to the words of the text, moving into interior silence and communion. This is the movement into intimacy beyond words and concepts. This is the movement into pure Faith or Trust. Here we rest in the Heart of Christ alone and seek no other thing. Here we anchor in the Heart, in the Center of our being, where the living Spirit of Christ dwells. We move beyond the mediation of words and thoughts, into pure Presence and Adoration, into pure self-giving Love. This longing, this desire, this commitment to take refuge, to rest in Love of Christ alone, rather than our own thoughts, emotions, agendas, and inclinations, is the movement into pure Prayer of the Heart or contemplation. Through this process of Lectio Divina, or Divine Reading/Listening, the textual Word of God has been the bridge to abiding in Christ, the Living Word of God in our own heart.

Section Four: The Practice of Lectio of God's Word in Creation

John Scotus Eriugena, from the ninth century Celtic Christian tradition, taught that God speaks to us from two books, the little book of scripture and the larger book of creation, whose sacred text is as vast as the universe. The Eternal Heart pulses in all creation. The brightness of His celestial sky is reflected in a dewdrop. God smiles in the depths of the darkest ocean. By listening deeply with the heart we hear the heart of God beating in all Creation. This is the foundation of Celtic and Mystical Christianity.

Prayer of the Heart- It is not with the mind, or the intellect we hear the Living Word, but it is in the Heart we open to listen and experience the Word of God in Scripture and in the Incarnate Word in all Creation. Divine listening to the Word of God in Creation asks an exquisite receptivity and attunement to Divine Presence in each moment to what is before us. This receptivity is made possible in our self-consecration to God in releasing from the traffic of the mind, and offering ourselves to God in love in each moment. We give ourselves to an interior movement of ***inward bowing*** in adoration and reverence to the divine Beloved in the world, in all things. We give ourselves in ***inward offering*** to the Lord of Creation who breathes His Life into the World, whose Life is Love.

The interior movements of the Lectio of Creation may be described as follows:

1. **Reading/Listening**(Lectio)- We choose a natural place to which we are drawn. We release from all mental activity and imagination. We listen deeply to the living word of God in the presence of life and beauty around us. **We bow inwardly in adoration and Faith** to the manifestation of God in Creation before us. We listen deeply for how we are touched inwardly. In this openness we become the fertile ground receiving the seed of God's Love.
2. **Reflecting** (meditatio)- We may now ponder how God is speaking to us in this moment. It is a deeper movement toward reflecting and pondering in the heart. We may or may not find language which expresses how we are touched in God's communication in nature, in the trees and grass and creatures around us.
3. **Responding** (oratio)- The third movement in this Lectio of Creation is to respond as we are moved, affectively, in words or wordless prayer. How are we opened in our longing for God in the sky, wind, water, and birds? In what way do we respond to the communication of God's Love in this moment through this natural world? With praise, gratitude, contrition, new commitment? How do we best express this response?
4. **Resting in God** (contemplatio) This is the movement into intimacy beyond words and concepts. We rest in God's Presence in this moment, within us and in the natural world around us. We move beyond the mediation of words and thoughts, into pure Presence, pure adoration, pure Love. This is a movement of complete offering of self, all of one's humanity, one's desire, one's life and being. This is an act of consecration of one's being, of being given in every aspect of one's being and consciousness to the love of God. This interior movement of consecration is the movement into pure Prayer of the Heart or contemplation.

The life of prayer is a circle with of interior silence and communion within both stillness and activity. In this rhythm of prayer and life we bring forth a growing willingness to participate in ceaseless adoration, ceaseless offering, ceaseless consecration of one's entire life and being to the love of God in the transmission of Divine Life in the communion of all Creation.

Section Five- Cultivating Yeshua's Secret Garden Within-Integration of Prayer of the Heart in a Rule of Life

To unify our life utterly with Christ we must make commitments that are incarnated in daily praxis or actualization. In other words it isn't enough to have lovely thoughts or intentions about our life of Refuge in the Heart of Christ. We must ****do**** something to deepen our daily gift of self in love to the Beloved Yeshua. This is especially true for those who follow the Way of the Heart. The most sublime illumination or unitive experiences can become only pleasant memories if we do not consecrate our life and commitment, moment to moment, to the living Truth of those experiences. This consecrated life takes expression in making every act of attention one of adoration of Christ in the present moment, and every choice of self giving love to Christ. St. Benedict in his Rule says "Prefer nothing to Christ." We must make each moment of life in the Prayer of the Heart a choice for singular Refuge in the Heart of Christ. Yeshua must be our breath, Yeshua must be our life, and Yeshua must become in the course of a lifetime our home and sole refuge. From the monastic tradition we solemnize and incarnate this commitment in a personal Rule of Life.

What is a Rule of Life? - Marjorie Thompson, in her book on Christian Spiritual Disciplines, *Soul Feast*, says: "A rule of life is a pattern of spiritual disciplines which provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. When we speak of patterns in our life, we mean attitudes, behaviors, or elements that are routine, regular, repeated. It is meant to help us establish a rhythm of daily living, a basic order within which new freedoms can grow. A rule of life, like a trellis, curbs our tendency to wander and supports our frail efforts to grow spiritually." (Thompson. p.138)

Why do we need a Rule of Life? - The spiritual journey in Prayer of the Heart starts with the insight that Christ alone is our heart's desire, and it is only when communion with Yeshua is the wellspring of every action, every choice, and every goal, that we find completion and essential happiness and peace in life. At the same time the Prayer of the Heart tradition acknowledges the tremendous resistance in the ego-self to the life of transformation. Life long conversion takes us from private self seeking and the impulses of our misdirected desires, to bringing Christ at the center of all we do, "To prefer nothing to Christ." Spiritual maturation therefore requires commitment, and commitment requires discipline, the capacity and willingness to be faithful, moment to moment, and day by day, to our practices of relational life and refuge in Christ. This goal of growing intimacy and realization that for us Yeshua is both personal and oceanic presence of the Divine Beloved, is to be realized through the life of ceaseless Prayer of the Heart, in all things, in all moments of life. The Rule of Life is a commitment to ceaseless prayer, ceaseless communion in Christ.

Our Personal Covenant of Refuge in the Heart of Christ

Consecrated Silent Communion- To cultivate this communion we need established, consecrated times of the day which we set aside for the central relationship in our life,

from which all relationships spring. The nature of that time of silent communion in formal sitting practice can be restful and restoring, but its essence is our self-giving to Christ. We keep watch with Christ and wait on His Presence, and open to His love. We breathe Yeshua and it is enough.

Consecrated Reading and Reflection- We need to also give time to reading and reflecting about the Christ who is our heart's desire. The practice of Lectio Divina comes to us from the ancients as a way of moving from the textual word of God with the mind to the Living Word of Christ in interior silence. We should make of this a Holy Leisure, which is restoring and enriching.

Consecrated Contrition and Conversion- Contrition and Conversion are ceaseless practice. Therefore it is essential to set times of gazing in the mirror of self-reflection and recollection each day. This is usually best done in the evening at prayer time in conjunction with our evening Prayer of the Heart. We do this not to judge or condemn or deem any part of our humanity unworthy. Rather we do this so that we can be willing to look honestly and nakedly at all those elements in our life, in our actions, in our ethics, in our inner and outer life, which are not in harmony with interior communion with God. We stand naked and hold before the merciful eyes of Christ in all of our humanity, with all of the dark places in our mind and consciousness that need His love and truth to be healed. We look closely for those aspects of our daily life, which lead us from our deepest intention of refuge in Christ or worse, bring injury to our intimacy with Him. This daily practice brings the utter freedom of contrition, forgiveness, and release from all that impedes the love of Christ in our life. In Yeshua the grace of conversion is always being offered. We can only make ourselves accessible to it.

Consecrated Service/Work- The praxis of our love of Yeshua extends to all of our community, to all beings, to all Creation, to love and serve Christ in the world around us. Each of us will do this uniquely with our own gifts. Without making vows of service of some kind, our Covenant of Communion with God is incomplete and defies the purpose of Prayer of the Heart, which is to bring forth the God-life of Agape into the world. This is true whether our service is peeling potatoes, weeding the garden, caring for our families, ministering to the sick, or cleaning up the polluted waterways in our community. In consecrated work practice we bring the fullness of our presence to the service before us, and do all we do as offering to the love of Christ. We do consecrated work practice in the great tradition of Brother Lawrence and the practice of the Presence of God, and in the Benedictine monastic rule of prayer in work. This service is the praxis of Ceaseless Prayer of the Heart in the service of Christ in all Creation.

Community Devotional Prayer and Liturgical Practice- We do not come to God alone. "Where two or three are gathered" in Yeshua we find Him there. This may be more readily attainable for some than others. We may need to be creative and flexible in finding our community of practice in Prayer of the Heart, whether local or long distance. We include the community of those who walk with us presently on the Prayer of the Heart path and the wisdom of those who have walked before. We enter the stream of God's Love with other followers of the Way of the Heart in the eternal Present.

Accountability- Vows of Practice- It is good to share our Rule of Life with at least one trusted soul friend or spiritual mentor. It is good to ask that person to pray for you, to help us to be faithful to our covenant of Refuge in Christ a friend in the spirit with whom we can discuss our covenant and daily practice from time to time.

Our "Rule of Life" or " Personal Covenant with Christ" are vows of relational practice. Our Vows of Practice are akin to marriage or friendship vows. They are serious commitments. At the same time we must cultivate the humility to accept that we will fail in our faithfulness at times. *Yet we must not give into discouragement, but as in a marriage or deep friendship, return to our practice, our singular desire to give ourselves to the Love of Christ and find no refuge in any other thing. This singular desire, to "prefer nothing to Christ" is our life and the core of our vows of practice.*

Our Wholehearted Yes to Christ-

Despite the value of having a formalized commitment to the "whole cloth" of daily practice and the disciplines that sustain it, we should never lose sight of the utter simplicity of this practice. Everything we do in our life, in our Prayer of the Heart practice, is at the service of this one central desire to respond to the invitation of Yeshua, "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you a place to rest your heart. (Matt. 11:28)" And we respond in the words from Brother Roger of the Taizé community: "One day you understood that, without your being aware of it, a 'yes' had already been inscribed in your innermost depths. And so you chose to go forward in the footsteps of Christ. . . . so you are led to the audacity of a 'yes' that lasts until your dying breath." (*No Great Love*)To be fully offered, fully given in love to Yeshua, our heart's desire, is the completion and fulfillment of the Christian path of consecrated life.

Suggested Further Reading

1. Ryan, William, *The Beloved is My Refuge- A Guide to Consecrated Life in Prayer of the Heart*. Avalon Counseling, 2003
2. Hall, Thelma, *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina*. Paulist Press
3. Jager, Willigis. *Contemplation-A Christian Path*. Missouri: Liguori,1994
4. Main, John. *The Heart of Creation*. New York, New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989
5. Main, John. *Moment of Christ- the Path of Meditation*, New York, Continuum Publishing, 1999
6. Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer*. New York: Image Books,1996
7. Jager, Willigis. *Contemplation-A Christian Path*. Missouri: Liguori,1994
8. Taylor, Brian. *Becoming Christ- Transformation Through Contemplation*, Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 2002

