

The Beloved Is My Refuge- A Guide to Consecrated



Life in Prayer of the Heart

by William Ryan

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A Guide to Consecrated
Life in Prayer of the Heart**



Dedication

This small work of teaching is dedicated to the memory of Marguerite Porete, author of the *Mirror of Simple Souls*, who was executed in the town square of Paris on June 1, 1310 as a heretic. We honor her and all the other followers of the Way of the Heart, past and present, who have been persecuted by societal authority, religious and political. These liberators and teachers of the life of the Spirit have had the courage to assert this simple truth of the invitation of Jesus in their own lives:

**** God is Love, the I AM who is eternal Self-Offering without expectation or condition. God is accessible to all who seek. Love is the ever open gateway to God****

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The Beloved is My Refuge- A Guide to Consecrated Life in Prayer of the Heart

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I wish to thank my life partner, and spouse, Jeanette Ryan, whose Zen Buddhist practice is wise and expansive enough to see and appreciate and support the efforts of a man who "loves Jesus" and wants to share that love.

I give deep vows of gratitude and acknowledgment of the riches of the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition I received for many years through the now deceased Rev. Roshi Jiyu Margaret Kennett and Rev. Roshi Daizui Douglas MacPhillamay of Shasta Abbey and the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives. Paradoxically, it was through their teaching, mentoring, and support, that I came to know, not only of the teachings of the Buddha Dharma, but also of the Way of the Heart in the Christian mystical tradition.

With deep bows of love I express my gratitude and reverence for the mentoring and soul friending I received from wise spiritual Elders, an Abba and Amma in the best expression of the monastic spiritual tradition, Bernard McVeigh O.C.S.O. and Antoinette Traeger O.S.B. They transmitted to me the riches of the ancient desert ammas and abbats and the male and female face of Christ. Their offering and empowerment of teaching, example, and encouragement to this bumbling lay Christian man is another manifestation of the infinite mercy and boundless humor of God

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Introduction



In April 1970 the fog was lifting from a long winter in the medieval city of Pavia, in the Po Valley of Lombardy in Northern Italy. I was facing a crisis of despair in my short 21-year-old life. After weeks of depression and obsessive despairing thoughts, I had been close to ending my life. I cried out for help. The help came immediately in the form of a remembrance of inner communion with God I experienced as a small child of four and five. Specifically the memory was of times when I went out to the tall grass behind my grandmother's empty chicken house, and hidden in the grass, seated on the ground, would close my eyes. There I encountered intimately in a secret inner space, a Loving Presence. This was long before any formal religious education; and I only thought of this Presence as a secret companion of my own. I would sit for a time in utter silence beyond thought and just ****be**** with this Presence. At the moment of this remembrance, in the middle of this desperation at age twenty one, I immediately went within to the same still point within my own heart, and, as before, encountered this Loving Presence. The depression and despairing thoughts lifted and I felt I had come home after a perilous journey of wandering and being lost.

Uplifted, exuberant, and sensing my life redeemed, I looked for some way to make this experience of inner communion, a life long disciplined commitment. The first person I encountered after this life changing conversion was a young counter-culture student from Berkeley, someone who might have been called a "hippie" in those days. He spoke about the practice of Zen meditation. His description seemed very much like what I had experienced in this "remembrance." I resolved to seek a teacher of Zen practice. Not long after this I returned to my home in Oregon and began from book instruction to undertake the practice of zazen, meditation in the Soto Zen tradition. It was a practice of simple sitting, going within, with awareness and attention to breath and observation of thoughts. My early days were of sporadic and undisciplined practice, like most beginners. By the time I found a teacher in Dec. 1971 I had established a daily practice.

Margaret Jiyu Kennett, a teacher or roshi, in the Soto Zen tradition established a monastery for training in the practice of Soto Zen meditation in Mt. Shasta, California. She was an English woman who had been a professional liturgical musician, playing the organ in the high cathedrals of England. She converted to Buddhism and in the early 1960s was invited to Japan to study with the teacher and abbot (Chisan Koho Zenji) of Sojiji, a training temple in the Soto Zen school, established centuries earlier by the great master Keizan Zenji near the ancient city of Yokahama. Many of Roshi Kennett's earliest students of Zen were members of the American military in Japan. As there were some doubts about acceptance of a female master in the Buddhist societies in England, she elected to come to California to teach. She arrived initially in the bay area of San Francisco and later with her first core of students established Shasta Abbey in 1970 at the foot of Mt. Shasta in Northern California. A description of Shasta Abbey and Roshi Jiyu Kennett's teaching approach is documented in the book, *Meetings with Remarkable Women-Buddhist Teachers in America*, by Lenore Friedman. Jiyu Kennett has authored several books: *Zen is Eternal Life* (initially published under the title *Selling Water by the River*), *How to Grow a Lotus Blossom*, *The Book of Life*, and other works.

Shasta Abbey was a dynamic and disciplined monastic training temple. Over a period of years I participated in sesshins (intensive retreats) and periods of training at the monastery. In addition to being steeped in the teachings of Roshi Kennett I was mentored by one of her closest students, Roshi Daizui (Doug) MacPhillamay. Doug MacPhillamay, besides being a monk, was also a clinical psychologist and for a time served as a colleague with me in a community mental health clinic. A great gift of my Zen training was the growing experience of the actualization of inner communion as a twenty four-hour practice in daily life, which the Zennists call mindfulness, or "every-moment meditation." Another great gift was that Roshi Kennett possessed a deep knowledge of the Christian Contemplative tradition. In her desire to integrate East and West and to use language that was accessible to the Christian-educated students, she used many texts and teachers from the Christian mystical tradition in her teaching. Those teachers included Meister Eckhart, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, and Teresa of Avila. *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *Ascent of Mt. Carmel* were among the many Christian sources on the official reading list. Unlike many Zen teachers she was unashamed in making theistic reference to both the oceanic sense of the Divine, as Dharmakaya, but also as "God," the intensely personal Divine Beloved. Roshi Kennett had given me the remarkable gift of making the Christianity of my youth and early seminary days at Mt. Angel Abbey in Oregon, accessible through the mystical dimension of spiritual practice and experience I was learning in Zen.

By 1984 the impact of my son's death due to Leukemia, and other life crises had taken their toll, and the self I had been began to unravel. Circumstances and grace allowed me to undertake what I had long desired, a sabbatical from professional life to undertake an extended intensive personal retreat. This decision was supported by my wife as she began to engage in a period of post-graduate education in her professional field. I became a hermit house-husband. My days were devoted to taking care of the house, cooking and cleaning, and looking after my daughter in grade school. I spent the middle of my days alone in silence and hours of meditation, freed from the responsibilities of making a

living and maintaining a career. I was free to give myself wholly to contemplative practice and unitive life in God. And both in long distance and in person I was receiving guidance from my mentor Daizui MacPhillamay. I also spent four weeks of intensive practice at Shasta Abbey during this year-and-a-half period. This process culminated in a deconstruction of my life long self-system. This unravelling became a wholly Life-giving process of "falling apart" into the hands of God, a surrender into a unitive experience of the universal Divine Life, Light and Fire, which sustains and births all that is. This unitive experience was both oceanic and intensely personal. In the middle of this experience I received a penetrating visitation of Christ which was both astonishing and unsettling. This was unsettling because I saw myself to that point firmly on a Buddhist path. The forms and disciplines of practice in which I had been taught and guided, instead, had led me instead to the fullness of the promise of an intensely personal and loving God that my early Christian roots had given me. In this paradox through my practice of Zen and the experience of enlightenment I was led to integrate my Christian roots. I brought with me a new understanding of God, the Beloved One, revealed and disclosed in the Logos, the Christos, in the world of human beings and all Creation.

In 1986 I returned to my mental health counseling career with the necessity of making a living and resuming a more normal life of involvement in the world and supporting my family. This was not an easy transition, as I was still in a "soft shell" stage of integrating this year and a half of intense practice and intimacy with the Divine. It was my intention to be open to how I might connect again with the Christian spiritual tradition as we moved to the Portland, Oregon area. Again the grace of the Divine Beloved brought me to those who would lead me on a salvific path.

At an interreligious dialogue conference I met a wonderfully loving and gifted man, Rev. Roy Coulter, an Episcopal priest with broad knowledge of religious traditions and the Christian mystic tradition. He directed to me to Abbot Bernard McVeigh, a Cistercian monk at a monastery near Portland, Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey. Bernard had been active in the East-West dialogue and had become a practitioner of Christian Zen. He had been initiated into Christian Zen practice in 1970 by William Johnston S.J. (author of *Christian Zen*). Later Bernard studied with Roshi Robert Aitken and Willigis Jager O.S.B., a German Benedictine abbot who had trained in the East (author of *The Way of Contemplation, Contemplation-a Christian Path, and Search for the Meaning of Life*). Bernard had gathered around him since the 1970s a group of lay women and men who were students of the contemplative way. Among those he mentored were also some in religious life, such as, Greg Mayers (*Listen to the Desert*) and Pat Hawk, of the Redemptorist Order, who trained with Willigis Jager and became Christian Contemplative teachers in their own right and co-directors of "The Contemplative Path" a retreat center and contemplative ministry.

In Zen tradition there is great emphasis on the concept of *transmission*. Vertical and horizontal transmissions are a way of describing an ongoing and essential action in the spiritual life, the way the Divine touches and penetrates our human consciousness in solitude or through others. I can say without hesitation that the first encounter with Bernard was the occasion of a direct transmission of Christ through this amazing and

gentle human person. I came to the Abbey on the first Saturday of the month in the winter of 1987. Bernard led a group of lay people called the "First Saturday Contemplatives." The group would gather from 9 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. for a series of 25-minute meditation periods with a five minute walking meditation in between each session. At 10:30 A.M. Bernard would join the group and participate in a session of meditation with us, followed by a contemplative Eucharist at 11 A.M. The contemplative Eucharist was a touching, intimate experience of the mass I had never known before in my life. We sat in a circle on the floor in a bare room. The altar was a coffee table. Those in the circle shared the liturgy of the Word. Bernard gave a short homily on contemplative practice, followed by the Eucharistic liturgy and the passing from hand to hand of the Eucharistic elements of bread and wine. The group broke for lunch and had soft casual conversation, sharing the news and passage of life since the last meeting.

At the end of the day Bernard rejoined us and had intended to have some private spiritual direction sessions with some from the group. He extended his hand warmly to me. As he was leaving the room, he paused at the door, and turned toward me. In a moment when time stopped, a brilliant light of tenderness went out from his eyes and penetrated my heart. Something inside me in a bow of recognition, said "those are the eyes of Christ." He smiled and turned to leave after welcoming me to the group. I was forever changed by that transmission. Over the next ten years Bernard, in the spirit of Benedictine hospitality, made himself accessible to me as contemplative teacher, mentor, and spiritual guide. I went on an intensive retreat with him every summer for a week with our community of lay and religious contemplatives, led by Greg Mayers and Pat Hawk.

In 1996 Bernard encouraged me to begin teaching and guiding others, sharing from my own growth in contemplative practice. In the same year I formed a partnership with another follower of the Way of the Heart, Sharon Cooper, a United Methodist spiritual director from Alaska. We began to partner in leading retreats and workshops in contemplative prayer in Oregon, Alaska, and Washington. For a time I trained in the Centering Prayer approach under the guidance of Thomas Keating, but eventually left the Contemplative Outreach organization finding it not compatible with my own understanding and approach to practice. Sharon Cooper and I formed an organization called Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest in 1997 to be an umbrella for our work in teaching and providing guidance to groups and individuals in Prayer of the Heart practice. We began to use the language of Prayer of the Heart to describe this practice. Prayer of the Heart is a descriptive term of the practice that both comes from the earliest desert tradition and includes many approaches to the ancient practice of Inner Communion with God in the heart.

Since 1999 the C.M.P.N. ministry has extended to a partnership with the Benedictine sister who was my mentor in spiritual direction, Sr. Antoinette Traeger O.S.B. We have led an annual series of retreats, workshops, and practice days at Shalom Prayer Center in Mt. Angel, Oregon, called "Prayer of the Heart Companions." These soul friending and partnering relationships with Antoinette Traeger and Sharon Cooper have been wonderful experiences of walking together in the most beautiful way possible on the Emmaus road

of the heart, where the One we seek is the One who walks with us. And our hearts
do burn as we recognize Him.

In 1997 Bernard died. On the day of his funeral he appeared to me in spirit and vision and in his customary fashion of saying good bye, put his hand to his lips in a kiss and extended his hand forward, palm open to me as his gesture of love. Bernard's kiss remains with me, and to the end of my days. I know in the heart of God he continues to share his actualization of inner communion in God with me and all he has touched, indeed with the whole of Creation in the communion of saints.

Bill Ryan - Feb. 22, 2003

Theme I- A Theology of Unitive Love and Consecrated Life

-Chapter 1-



Unitive Love- Liberating Our Hidden Singular Desire

For those who undertake the ancient practice of Inner Communion with God, we want to frame the teaching of Prayer of the Heart in the context of a living stream of women and men like you and me. We have been brought through grace to seek and actualize the experience of Inner Communion with the Divine in the Heart. This experience is always fresh and alive, and is a God-given capacity we each have and can uncover within ourselves. Nevertheless we also learn from those who have gone before. While we release from doctrinal debate and theological speculation, it is helpful and necessary to articulate a theology that explains the human journey, and why we undertake the Way of the Heart. We need to know what our Prayer of the Heart practice is, and why we do it. The mystic traditions of Eastern and Western Christianity help us connect and validate our search with the longing and insight of those who have gone before.

Life in God- Our Essential Belonging

"All philosophical abstractions and scholarly definitions of the meaning of life are simply elaborations on the experience of belonging." David Steindl-Rast OSB,
Speaking of Silence

"We search for meaning, we search for belonging, and that takes us inevitably to the God-territory...One of these crossroads is the discovery that belonging is mutual. If we belong to God, God belongs to us." Fritjof Capra -*Belonging to the Universe*

The Cross

We all start where we are, with the life experience that has brought us where we are, with the knots of separateness, and with the longing for Divine Life within us, to which we are just beginning to awaken. In the Christian Gospel, Jesus invites us to the oneness of

abiding in the Kingdom, the state of our innate union and relational life in God in the Heart. Jesus invites us to pick up our cross daily and follow him in order to enter and abide in the Kingdom. A central symbol in Christianity, the cross, is the symbol of our own particular and unique form of the wound of separateness and all that results from it. The cross is also the symbol of our relational life in God, the melding together of the human and the divine in our own life. We cannot run from ourselves, the life experiences we have been given. We cannot run from the dilemmas and suffering which life brings. Neither should we run from our rightful inheritance of child of God. Life experience and the tradition teaches us to practice with this wound of separateness in a way that brings us to healing and to the fullness of participation of Life in God. ***The practice of deep contemplation in Prayer of the Heart, brought fully into the conditions of life, is the dynamic of transformation, of letting the cross be the means of our uniting our will and humanity utterly with the Life of God.***

The Teaching of Jesus- God is Accessible

Jesus is the revelation, the disclosure of God, the face of God turned toward humanity and brings us to the awareness of the wound of separateness and the way to its healing. In the first statement of his public ministry Jesus invites us to participate in this deeper Life in God. "The Kingdom of God is very near, change the direction of your life." (Mark 1:15) Jesus is the One who manifests the Way into God. He expresses in his life the practice of this intimate union with God through self-giving, self-emptying love in all that he does. This practice of presence and agape is the living out, the actualization or praxis of the inner life of the Trinity. Jesus teaches us that the Kingdom of God is accessible in our own Heart, "The Kingdom of God is within." (Luke 17:1) ***The Prayer of the Heart is the intentional actualization of liberating and being fully given to this singular and deepest longing of the heart.***

Yet the gateway to the Kingdom, Jesus teaches us, is love, it is this same deepest desire of our Heart, the longing of Unitive Love. The way we rest and abide in our Heart, and live from the Heart is to possess the singular trust of a child, to release from self-seeking absorption and give ourselves to this singular simple desire of unitive love. In Prayer of the Heart we are present to God, as God is present to us; and we give ourselves to God as God gives Himself to us. Jesus said that his mission was to bring us to the fullness of conscious and intentional participation in Divine Life, "I came that they may have Life, and have it fully." (John 10:10) When our deepest desire of unitive love is liberated and unfettered and we give our life to it, then we are accessible to the fullness of Divine Life given without condition to us.

Prayer of the Heart- an Uncovering of Divine Life Within

Our life in God is not something imposed from the outside. It is symbolized well in the Orthodox archetype and icon of Mary, the Theotokos. We are God bearers and God-birthers. Life in God is here and now, it is a bringing forth of Divine Life, which lies nascent within us, ready to be birthed, ready to be made incarnate in us, in our own humanity. The living Word, the Logos, the Eternal Christos is ready and seeking to be born and live in us. Meister Eckhart stated: "Christ's Birth is always happening. And yet, if it doesn't happen in me, how can it help me? Everything depends on that?" (Mitchell,

The Enlightened Mind, p. 114) The object and goal of following Christ is to become Christ, to birth Christ in our own humanity. It becomes possible with our wholehearted self-gift, in the same way as Mary of Nazareth. "Let it be so with me, according to your Word." (Luke 1:30) We are opened to the movement of the God-Life in us, a spring of "Living Water"(John 4:10), in the words of Jesus to the woman at the well. The Living Water of Trinitarian Life rises up within us, if we allow it, if we give ourselves to our deepest longing for oneness with this Deeper Life of unitive Love. Through a prayer practice of self-offering to God beyond words and concepts we participate in Divine Life "in Spirit and Truth"(John 4:23), as promised by Jesus to the Samaritan woman.

The Goal of Human Life

In Eastern Orthodox mysticism, the goal of humanity is to become divinized, to participate fully in Divine Trinitarian Life. The Camaldolese monk of our time, Bruno Barnhardt, asserts clearly in his book, *The Second Simplicity*, "***The central Mystery of Christianity, from our human perspective, is the mystery of divinization. God became human so that human persons might become God.***"(Barnhart, p.116) He intends that ***the Christ event is the disclosure and doorway to full participation in the God's own relational Life of the Trinity.*** Jesus promises us this awakening and participation in John 14:20: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father and I will love them and reveal myself to them. " In this statement Jesus proclaims this deeper life of Unitive Love in God is a potential within us to be brought forth and actualized in our own human life.

The Wound of Separateness

We are born with this inheritance and intuitive knowledge of the Unitive Life of God as our Source. Yet in the course of our human journey we have a consciousness of ourselves as apart, and alone, cut off from the flow of Divine Life. We have in our humanity the capacity to experience both the eternal and the transitory dimension of life. In our confusion and sense of separateness we try to make our way through this life, seeking a Promised Land of our own making. We wander like the Israelites in the desert of our own illusion and despair. And like them we construct golden calves, constructs of our ego-mind, to worship and to follow. The more we seek these misdirections, the greater our futility, desperation and despair. This is the land of the human condition, the land of duality.

We can explore more what the mystical tradition has taught concerning this. What human beings on the Way of the Heart throughout time have reported experientially is that healing the wound of separateness, and the uncovering of essential belonging and unity with God and Creation, is the nature and fruit of the contemplative journey of transformation. We uncover an experiential knowledge, or "gnosis" of what we already knew deep in our own spirit. The memory of the Garden of Genesis is within each of us. Yet in order to live and survive, we leave behind our primal childhood intuition in order to form a separate self-system, an ego-self, which is a capable vehicle in this life for our survival and to fulfill the tasks of human life. Through maturation in the Prayer of the

Heart we have growing insight that the vehicle we travel in, the ego-self, creation of our own mind, is not the source and grounding of our true identity. Rather the Heart, the Inner Sanctuary of God's own Life within us, is the locus of the holy ground of our being and God's being within us.

" When God grows up for us. no longer are we two separate beings who interact across the distance that we imagine between two beings. We are now related to God as the body is to breath. Essentially we are one... We live right now in eternity, at one with Being, and with all other beings." Brian Taylor- *Setting the Gospel Free*

Our Life Experience- Where We Start

Our cross of spiritual suffering in life then, is our posture or disposition toward Life. Our cross we carry is the unique configuration and paradox of separateness in our own human life and history. Yet our temporal human condition is animated and held in eternity in our unconditioned life of the Heart in God. The fundamental transition in life then is from the outlook of - God apart from life, -towards -God in life. ***To be intimate with God is to be intimate with all of life.*** The spiritual journey and contemplative practice is the transition in living from one disposition to another, and the awakening and the full participation of our human life in harmony with the true spirit or Heart. This is the state which St. Paul describes where "God is all in all." (1 CO 15:28)

This human life is impermanent and ruled by forces much larger than we are, and life circumstances are not subject to our own personal will. There is no security, there is no control, and our power to love and nurture by ourselves alone is futile. The self-made survival system of the mind, which we call "I," or ego, is a pack of cards, ready to fold when confronted by the reality of loss, impermanence, and death. We are loathe to confront this truth, a truth which flies in our face in both little and big ways every moment of life.

Our intuition of human fragility, impermanence, and of loss is there from the beginning, pushed to a tiny dark corner of the mind out of fear and misdirected desires for security. Parallel to this we experience, in varying degrees, another intuition, that of a wholeness, a persistent Presence, a deeper Life, which we also push down and away, afraid to trust It. We are often more afraid not to trust the voices of our acculturation in the human condition. Those who may follow the "still, small voice" within and give themselves to this voice of Eternity, are themselves pointed to as examples of failure, madness, or ultimate humiliation. This is our only original sin, that we come to full self-consciousness in our adult life without knowing our essential oneness with God. ***We are already in God. God is fully accessible to us; we are not accessible to God. This is the crux of the human condition. This is the central tension that fuels the spiritual journey.***

The Childhood Intuition of God

Many of us, when we are young children, have encounters, often profound, of this Deeper Life and Presence, which religion calls God, or Buddha nature, or Creator Spirit. This Life is both an Oceanic and intensely personal Ultimate Reality whom Christ knew

intimately as Abba, his “Papa.” In the course of childhood and adolescence the pervasive social conditioning and familial experience of acculturation often invalidates, overpowers, and covers over a once strong childhood intuition. We believe ourselves expelled from the garden of walking with the Beloved. Our fading intuitive memory of the “Garden” (Genesis) of the Beloved, or the “Inner Room” of relationship with our Abba, (Mathew 6:6) is distrusted and forgotten, pushed away in favor of the learned requirements of social and physical survival, and our illusions of self sufficiency. We no longer find our true identity in our secret garden of belonging and companioning, as child of God. In our coming to adult age, we increasingly identify with the vehicle of our passage in this life, this psychophysical being and the assumed identities of ego-mind and personality, which we have taken on to clothe and protect us in human society.

The Human Condition

Thus we come to adult life, almost without exception, locked in the isolation of our separateness, thrown on the frail devices of our own private personal survival system for our security. We become convinced we must pry loose from other equally fragile humans the essential love we need for our sustenance. We are persuaded we must either dominate or submit to others to possess personal power or guarantee survival. All the while our commitment to religion too often becomes a creed of “looking out for number one” where we worship the idols of our own misdirected pursuits for private personal fulfillment. We easily reduce religion to a series of quid pro quo arrangements to cushion and protect our vulnerable existence and to ensure that it continues on in a semi- satisfactory fashion into the next life.

In short, we try to squeeze from our loved ones, our family and friends, our jobs, our bodies, our emotions, our life circumstances, the essential love, security, and empowerment that the indwelling, all-dwelling Life, we call God, alone can give us. We are left with an experience of frustration, confusion, despair, and isolation. This is the human condition.

Branch of the Vine

We are contingent beings, we are the branches of the Vine (John 15:1). Our life arises from a Life deeper than our own, and most of us live, believe, and act without the awareness, without the willing and wholehearted participation of our entire humanity in that simple and central Truth. There are moments when this Truth breaks through, moments when the childhood intuition of Unitive Love and Life becomes the only blazing Reality there is, and every other layered conception is seen for the illusion it is. These breakthroughs often happen in time of outward crisis, either from life circumstance and loss- or the inner crisis in the eroding of the walls of separateness and illusory self sufficiency which surround our own Heart.

Melding of Human and Divine

The human calling is to live out fully the deeper Life of God in this incarnate impermanent state- to abide in both the human and divine realms in harmony. One of the ancient images of Christ is that of the mandorla figure with a Christ image in the center. The mandorla is an almond shape, where two circles intersect; these are the circles of

human and divine. Christ is the realization of this unity of relational Life in God. In our own lives the goal of the spiritual journey is to dwell in this same center, in this same Unity of Divine Love, to bring together the vertical and the horizontal relationship of life in God. This relational life in God is expressed beautifully in the universal symbol of the cross in a circle, which some may recognize as the Celtic cross. All are invited to the praxis (actualization) of Inner Communion with Divine. We can bring this praxis to fullness in solitude, in the vertical relationship, and in the horizontal dimension of relational life in Creation, made one and brought together in the circle of Unitive Love. We participate fully in this relational life of the Divine most fully, most consciously, and most intentionally, in the Prayer of the Heart, the ancient Practice of Inner Communion with God.

Sacred Scripture- The Story of Our Journey in God

Revelation- Sacred Texts -

Many have used Sacred Scripture to create an external prescription, an imposed external religious reality to supplant or intrude upon an already life-giving inner reality of God. Such a vision of scripture does violence to our spiritual nature. The mystics and many scripture scholars invite us instead to understand scripture as a metaphorical and mythical lens through which we can see, understand, and learn through interior processes, the nature of our life in God. The Bible, Old and New Testament, tells us about the redemptive story of the Jewish and Christian people. It can only be valid to our own spiritual life, if it opens us to our own story, the story of our own relational, redemptive and resurrection life in God.

Old Testament-

The Book of Genesis and the Wisdom books, speak to us metaphorically of the primordial unity of the uncreated God-Life, from which our own human life arises, in the ongoing Creation Story. The Light and Fire of God, the Life-Breath of God, are metaphors in the Old Testament for the Life of God poured out into Creation, and into our own life. This Light and Life-Breath of God is the original essence that mystics say, is uncovered and lived in the contemplative human journey. Our essential life, the Life of the Universe is the God-life. The Genesis story speaks of our intuition or memory of God, and original intimacy in God from which we come and to which we return. The expulsion from the garden story in Genesis points to our experience of the wound of separateness and alienation as we grow developmentally and develop an ego consciousness of a self, as separate from God and the world around us.

The Wisdom Books speak to us of God's Life and Spirit in the World. God is the Beloved who seeks to unite with us passionately and fiercely in the Song of Solomon. In the Wisdom of Solomon we see the action of the Creative Spirit of Sophia, playful and free Presence of God in the world. In the Exodus story, in the books of Isaiah and the Hebrew prophets we see the liberation story, the rhythms of loss, wandering, misdirection, metanoia, and forgiveness expressed in the same patterns which are played out in our own lives. We see the glory and revelation of the Fire of the God-Life in the Burning Bush of Sinai, the "I AM" of Ultimate Reality on the mountain top. In a more gentle way we see in the wanderings of the Jewish people in Exodus, the Divine Presence of the

Shekinah, settling on the people and guiding and reassuring them on their way. In the mystic tradition it is understood that the Promised Land is not some other place. The Holy of Holies and the Temple of God are not to be found in geography or history, but rather in the sanctuary of our own Heart.

New Testament-

In the Gospel of John we have a poetic expression of the mystical understanding of the Divine Life and Energy, (Logos/Word) made manifest in all of Creation through the mystical Christ.

(John 1:1) "In the beginning was the Word, and through Him all things were made. And what has come into being in him was Life, and the Life was the Light of the people"

It is in the uniting of our own human life with this original uncreated Light of God in Christ that we are made whole and unified in God. In the New Testament text we continue this revelation of our own story in Jesus and his followers. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is the Paschal Mystery of our own crucifixion, our own resurrection, our own transformation or metamorphosis of divinization. His story is our story. Each of us has a crucifixion story. Each of us must face loss and death in a thousand ways. Each of us can, if we are willing, live the Risen Life while still in this life. Each of us can open to receive the Fire of God's Spirit in the Pentecost of the movement of God's Life in our own humanity.

The central teaching of Jesus in his preaching and sayings, is that of the proclamation of the Kingdom and the primacy of Love. He teaches us that the Kingdom of God, the United State, which Jesus himself experiences with his Abba, the Source, is also our inheritance. He teaches us that the way into the Kingdom is Agape, or self-giving love. Life as a continual offering to the Father and service to Creation is expressed in the Great Commandment, or the "Shema" of the Hebrew Torah. Jesus tells us this "in this is the whole law and the prophets", the complete summation of Divine Revelation to the Hebrew people, and to us.

Self-giving Love, or Agape, is both the practice and the fruit of relational Life in God.

This practice is utterly accessible in our own Heart, without the mediation of external temples or institutions. Jesus teaches us in Matt. 6:6 that through practice of the prayer of the inner chamber of our own heart, we come to an actualization of this inner communion with the Father in Christ and the Spirit. This teaching of the primacy of Love is continued in the letters of Paul and John in the New Testament. The apostle John tells us in his first letter 4:16, "God is love and those who abide in Love abide in God and God abides in them, because as He is, so are we in this world."

In the mystical contemplative tradition the scriptures are not about record keeping of historical events but a metaphoric finger pointing to eternal realities which are present here and now. The early monastics stated "The monk's cell is the furnace of Babylon, in which the three children found the Son of God: it is the pillar of cloud, from which God spoke to Moses." (Ware.p.92) The Divine Presence of the Shekinah is here and now in

every day practice in the activity and stillness of present life. The Coptic hermit, Abuna Matta al- Maskin stated: "Jerusalem the Holy is right here, in and around these caves; for what else is my cave except where my Savior Christ was born; what else is my cave but the place where my Savior Christ was take to rest, what else is my cave but the place where He most gloriously rose again from the dead. Jerusalem is here, right here and all the spiritual riches of the Holy City are found in this 'wadi.' (cell)." (Ware, p.92)

Our Personal Bible- Our Sacred Story-

The Canonical Old and New Testament only have value if they are about our own life, if we can see our own sacred story symbolized in the universal sacred story. In our own story there is Genesis and Exodus; we experience original unity and birth and we are inevitably thrown into exile, wandering and desolation. We may discover redemption, coming home, and transcendence are the fulfillment of human life. Eventually we must study and live the bible of our own life to grow spiritually.

In the bible of my own life the early childhood years were filled with insecurity and change, confusion and pain. In the midst of this I was given an intuition of a "home" that no one would take from me, despite our constant moves. This intuition validated in the times as a small child when I went inward to discover a wonderful presence, a "Shekinah" of Divine Presence in the Heart. In the middle of a crisis at age 21 when I was at risk of taking my own life, and cried out for help, the memory of Inner Communion arose in me, and God's salvific Presence of Love in the Heart drew me to Itself .

This was the beginning of my resurrection life as an adult. This resurrection life lived from the Heart, is one of harmonizing, divinizing this same humanity from the inside out. To bring forth Agape, and follow the Great Commandment of Jesus, the Shema' of the Torah, is not an ideal to be imposed, but the praxis of the Heart, the fulfillment of our own sacred story of grace. In every age, in every tradition, the truth of relational Life in God in the Heart can be realized. This is how the living tradition of the Prayer of the Heart, or Christian Contemplation, is born anew. Each of us uncovers again, in every generation, that God alone is our heart's desire. And the nature of God is Unitive Love. ***The gateway to God is the liberation of our singular love for God. This is the essence of the Prayer of the Heart. This makes us accessible to God's Love for us, and God's gift of Self to us.***

- Chapter 2- The Mystical Tradition of the Prayer of the Heart-



As in my own story, each individual and generation of seekers comes to the practice of Inner Communion with God in its own way. Like us the ancients, the fathers and mothers of the Desert Tradition, have come to the Way of the Heart. In my own case I came from the age of dissolution and upheaval of the 1960s and early 1970s when there was a search for individual meaning and deeper meditative experience. The context of this was the critique of society and the disillusionment of the Vietnam War. At the same time an encounter with Eastern religion in our culture had brought a tremendous challenge and opportunity for those seeking depth and mysticism in life. The rationalism of the European Age of Enlightenment was being revealed as empty of meaning and life. The encounter with Hinduism and Buddhism was causing many Christians to rediscover the depths of their own tradition of the Prayer of the Heart.

Prayer of the Heart and the Desert Tradition-

In the case of the early desert monastics the age of martyrdom was coming to an end. At the same time the dissolution, decadence, and crumbling of the Roman Empire and its values brought a drive to seek a simplicity and singleness of heart as taught in the sayings of Jesus.

The earliest roots of the Contemplative tradition are the Gospels and the prayer life of Jesus, who went into silence and solitude to be in inner communion with his Abba. He spoke of abiding in the Kingdom within. He invites us when we pray to go to our private "inner chamber" (Matt. 6:6) and lock the door, and there pray with the same Abba with whom He finds communion.

One of the strengths of the Christian tradition is that we have in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and His sayings and stories, in the Gospel tradition, a view of the possibilities of human development. We have a vision of a God of Love from whom we are inseparable. We are taught we can open ourselves to unifying all of our life, all of our

being in this God. Through the Way of the Heart we can actualize in our life an immense capacity to express the Divine Life of Love. Sometimes though we have not always been sure how to walk the path, the "narrow way" (Matt 7:14) of which Jesus speaks, to make this kind of transformation a reality. Each generation has tried to articulate and understand this "Way."

When we speak of teachers of the Prayer of the Heart, we are reminded that we are a part of an ancient tradition that hearkens back to the earliest communities of Christianity in the deserts of Africa and the Middle East. It may help us to reflect on that tradition of the Desert Mothers and Fathers as the earliest attempts of Christians to live out the Gospel in the most sincere and radical sense, to become good, as God is Goodness, and to learn to love fully as Jesus loves.

The development of desert monasticism takes place in the historical context of the Council of Nicea, the end of the age of martyrdom, and the movement into the desert, particularly in upper and lower Egypt by Christians seeking solace from corrupt times, and oppressive taxation and social upheaval. Three primary models of monasticism flourished from the third to the sixth centuries in three geographic areas. (Hatch, p.2) In Lower Egypt the eremitic monastic life sprang into being, and is represented best by Anthony the Great, a Copt, who left an affluent life to be alone as a hermit in the desert. His life was chronicled by Athanasius in *Life of Anthony*. The eremitic approach emphasized individualism and solitude, with loose gatherings around spiritual masters or abbas.

The second model took place in Nitria and Scetis, West of the Nile Delta where there were small loose groupings of monks living together under the direction of an "abba" or Elder. These groupings were called "sketes" or "lavras". This is the area from where John Cassian gathered his accounts of desert practice, and wrote his *Conferences*. These monks were more learned, as there were academic centers close by; and it was here that Abba Evagrius Ponticus wrote his works, *Praktikos*, and *Chapters on Prayer*. The third form of monasticism developed in Upper Egypt. This style emphasized the cenobite or communal life of prayer and work more commonly known in the West. This form was exemplified by the community of Tabennsi led by the Abba Pachomius (290-347 A.D.). Other forms of monasticism flourished in Syria, Asia Minor and Gaza in Palestine.

It is from these desert regions that the sayings of the Desert Fathers documented in the *Apophthegmata* and *Philokalia* originate. The monks of this area lived in extreme simplicity and poverty, devoting themselves to a life of prayer and manual work, such as weaving baskets, always living a bare subsistence life.

The goal of all this way of life, was to create the best conditions to live out the Christian Gospel and to make possible the kind of transformation which Jesus called for. The monks of this period made certain assumptions. Not unlike our present times, they asserted there was tremendous spiritual suffering in need of healing in the human condition, as manifested in their societies. Therefore to make oneself most fully

accessible to God and transformation in the Holy Spirit, some form of solitude and physical separation from the influences of the habitual patterns of mind and behavior, reinforced by human society, was desirable.

John Cassian is one of the desert abbas who wrote most prolifically to document this period of time in his works *Institutes* and *Conferences*. His teacher was the great abba, Evagrius Ponticus, whose teachings come to us in his *Pratikos* on prayer. The contemplative writer, Willigis Jager OSB says, "... for Cassian the chief capacity of knowing or experiencing is 'cor' (heart). Heart is the spark of the soul with which we not only experience our true divine life but which is this divine life." (Jager, *Search...*, p.97) In the desert tradition it is the movement of prayer of the mind, to prayer of the lips, to prayer of the heart, that we move from thinking about and speaking to God, to experiencing inner communion and abiding in God. Therefore the goal of this life of simplicity and singled heartedness, is "purity" of the heart, or a life that is completely undivided and total in commitment to God in the heart. The origin of the term, "monastic" or "monastery," comes from the "monos," which means 'single.'

Cassian and the other abbas and ammas of this period taught that the way to be free to give ourselves entirely to this transformative process was to cultivate a way of prayer which involved liberation from the bondage of habitual thoughts and attachments, or addictions. They recommended using word and breath as a means of cultivating this heightened awareness of God and self surrender in love to God. In Cassian, in John Climacus, (*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*) and others we see the instruction of choosing a prayer word, such as a word or phrase from scripture, or the name of Jesus, as a way of gathering awareness and intention to give ourselves in love to God. In this way the seeker unites his/her will and awareness wholly with God in the Heart.

Praxis- Ceaseless Prayer

One of the great gifts of the desert tradition was the understanding that prayer is not separate from life. The ancients lived in a single room, which was called their cell, and there they wove rope and simple cloth to sell to support themselves. Their work was done in interior silence and the cultivation of doing all for the love of God. Many taught to use their prayer word in the middle of activity. Thus they had an understanding of Prayer of the Heart or contemplation as being ceaseless, an ongoing return to inner communion with God and release from the habitual patterns of thought. The deepening of this release led to a state of liberation from thoughts and the passions or habitual compulsions, which they called "apatheia." This state is one of utter stillness and inner quiet in God.

The Desert tradition teaches that the goal of life is to bring the outer life in harmony with the inner life of prayer. The inner and outer life find their grounding always in the heart. St. Theophan the Recluse stated, "The hands at work the mind and heart at prayer..." (Ware, p.80) This inner prayer which goes on all the time was often called the "remembrance of God." Prayer was seen as one of awakening to an inner truth or knowledge which is already known, but only forgotten temporarily. Continual prayer, of abiding in inner communion with God, is seen then as an innate and implicit state that is returned to at all times in the course of a day. St. Isaac the Syrian went further to say that

this ongoing state of prayer is experienced as the Spirit of God praying through you. ... "the Spirit will constantly pray in him. Then, neither, when he sleeps, nor when he awakes... will prayer be cut off from his soul.. the perfumes of prayer will breathe in his heart spontaneously." (Ware, p.83) And St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, said: " Let us work with our body and pray with our soul. Let our outer self perform physical work, and let the inner self be consecrated wholly and completely to the service of God and never flag in the spiritual work of inner prayer." (Ware, p.85)

Hesychasm- the Eastern Tradition of Prayer of the Heart-

In Eastern Christianity, Orthodox and Coptic, the tradition of the Prayer of the Heart took its own course, and has continued to the present in monastic settings. In desert monasticism it was understood that a condition of interior silence and liberation from thought was necessary to listen to God and to abide in God in the Heart. Therefore this condition, called hesychia, was cultivated. Literally "hesychia" means refraining from speech, but the meaning was extended to mean interior quiet as well. For the practitioner the cell, or place of prayer and sanctuary, was the meeting place between God and the human soul. It further became understood that the true cell was interior, the interior quiet in which we encounter God in the Heart. Therefore Prayer of the Heart was a continual inward return to the Heart which was re-established daily in the use of prayer word and breath. This was stated by St. Basil, "he (the devotee) returns into himself and so returning inwards, he ascends to God." (Ware, p.93) The hesychast is then seen as one who actualizes Christ's words, "the kingdom of God is within you."

Essential to this interior silence was seen the laying aside of thoughts, St. Gregory of Sinai stated, "the hesychasts who are content to pray to God alone with their heart and to abstain from thoughts." (Ware, p.97) In the hesychast and the Prayer of the Heart, the scripture phrase of the psalmist 'Be still and know that I am God' is actualized. Over time more and more emphasis was placed on the use of various combinations of the name of Jesus or the Jesus prayer in the Eastern tradition. Thus in many Eastern monasteries the Prayer of the Heart has been used synonymously with the term "the Jesus Prayer," although the Prayer of the Heart tradition is inclusive of many approaches of breath, prayer word, and loving presence to God. In Eastern monasticism there has been an unbroken chain of practice of the Prayer of the Heart. Mt. Athos and the monastery of St. Catherine of Sinai are prominent examples. Lay participation in this practice has been extensive and is documented in the book "The Way of the Pilgrim."

Prayer of the Heart- Contemplative Prayer in the West-

The foundations of the Prayer of the Heart were laid in the desert tradition. Gregory the Great extolled Contemplation as "the knowledge of God infused by love." However, it remained to be rediscovered again and again in Western Christianity as a praxis to be realized in each age. In Benedictine monasticism contemplation was mainly taught as the interior movement into silence and wordless prayer in the practice of Lectio Divina.

It remained until the Middle ages when Prayer of the Heart would again experience a new flowering in the West. A primary movement that served as an impetus was the movement of the Beguines. The Beguines were communities of single women who

sprang up across the Europe. In an age when there were few possibilities for women without the dowry for marriage or for admission to a religious order, women began to band together in communities of prayer and charitable service. They were called Beguines. They offered a possibility of spiritual development and freedom not available otherwise to women of the period. From this movement was a flowering of mystical awakening and prayer, characterized in the letters, poetry, and other writings of such women as Mechtild of Madeburg, and Hadewich of Antwerp. Marguerite Porete, author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was herself persecuted and eventually burned at the stake in the square of Paris in the year 1310. Her work was burned and declared heretical. Eventually, fearful of the power of these women, church and political authorities persecuted and suppressed this movement and their writings. It is only in recent decades that this important spiritual movement has come to be rediscovered in its timeless depth and wisdom.

It is said that the Beguines were a major force in the inspiration of the Rhineland mystics and other contemplative practitioners of the medieval period whose writings have survived. These include Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, and Jan Van Ruysbroek whose works express a high degree of mystical awakening and articulated a practice of contemplative prayer which continues to inspire and instruct students of the Way to this day. In England parallel to this were mystics and contemplative teachers, such as Richard of St. Victor, Richard Rolle, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which remains a classic source of instruction in Prayer of the Heart to this day.

Later in Spain in the 16th century, in the unique Carmelite monastic tradition, two great mystics emerge who were themselves friends in the spirit, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. In their poetry and lyrical writing, rather than their scholastic commentary, we find the highest expressions of mystical prayer and union in their simplicity. John of the Cross defines the process of contemplation as the "loving attentiveness" to God. He gives a beautiful landscape of contemplative transformation in God in the works *Ascent of Mt. Carmel* and *The Living Flame of Love*. Teresa of Avila speaks of the "four waters" of prayer, and defines in lyrical metaphor the development of the transfigured self in transformative union with God in the *Interior Castle*.

The Reformation and Counter-reformation, with the emphasis on doctrinal correctness, with their historical wars and persecution, were times of suppression of the contemplative tradition. Despite this we have some stunning examples of depth of experience and teaching in contemplation.

Madame Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717) was a lay woman in France who for seven years was imprisoned in the Bastille for her spiritual teaching and writing. Her works survive to this day and are now widely read and published. She articulated a practice of what she calls "Inner Prayer" as accessible for all lay people. Her assertion that all are called to "Inner Prayer" remains a source of encouragement to lay contemplatives today. Her work, *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, was read by John Wesley and other important spiritual leaders after her. A friend and mentor of Jeanne Guyon, Bishop Francis Fenelon

of France, also wrote and taught prolifically of the Prayer of the Heart and was likewise discredited and attacked. Michael Molinos, a Spanish priest, who wrote a treatise on contemplation, *The Spiritual Guide*, was arrested and brought before the Inquisition in 1685 and denounced as a "quietist." He was condemned to life in prison and died there in 1696. Another contemplative mystic and physician in Germany, Angelus Silesius (1624-1677) wrote poetically of the mystical life of contemplation and experienced economic hardship and rejection for his efforts. George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, is notable in the Reformist tradition for his mystical teachings of the "Inner Light" and silent prayer, and likewise suffered persecution in his time.

Modern Teachers and Writers of the Contemplative Way -

The effect of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and the reaction to this period, the rationalist Age of Enlightenment, had the effect of submerging the mystical traditions of Prayer of the Heart in the West until the 20th century.

In the 20th century industrial age, the dominant intellectual philosophy of the Enlightenment and the patterns of institutional religious authority began to lose their hold in society. A new hunger for authentic mystical experience and connection to God surfaced, in the midst of the widespread anomie and alienation produced by wars and the lack of rootedness in modern industrial and consumer societies.

Writers and teachers of Christian mysticism began to emerge in the West. Among these were women, such as, the Anglican teacher and mystic, Evelyn Underhill, and the French woman, Simone Weil. In addition, the Quaker mystic of great depth, Thomas Kelly, articulated in the language of his own tradition a praxis of contemplation in stillness and in activity in his book of essays, *A Testament of Devotion*. In the 1960s and 70s the dialogue with the East intensified which was initiated in large part by Thomas Merton, a prolific writer and American Cistercian monk who met an untimely death in 1968 at a Buddhist- Christian conference in Bangkok, Thailand. His writings on the contemplative life made the practice and tradition accessible beyond monastery walls. His treatise, *Contemplative Prayer*, is considered a primary modern source. A group of Cistercian monks in Spencer, Massachusetts were influenced in the 1970s by contact with a Zen teacher from Los Angeles, Sasaki Roshi, who led retreats at their monastery. They were likewise moved by the challenge of so many young people abandoning Christianity to seek Eastern meditation practice. They decided to formulate a modern method of contemplative prayer, called Centering Prayer, based on the teachings of the *Cloud of Unknowing*. William Menninger OCSO, Basil Pennington OCSO, and Thomas Keating OCSO each began to teach and write on this form of practice.

Other expressions of contemplative practice have emerged in recent years. Thomas Hand S.J., Willigis Jager OSB, a Benedictine abbot, and his students in the Redemptorist Order, Gregory Mayers (*Listen to the Desert*) and Pat Hawk, began to teach vital forms of contemplation inspired by their contact with meditation teachers in the Zen tradition. An English Benedictine monk, John Main OSB, founded a form of contemplative practice, which he called Christian Meditation, and began to teach in Canada and the United States. Inspired by his contact with a Hindu meditation teacher and his formation

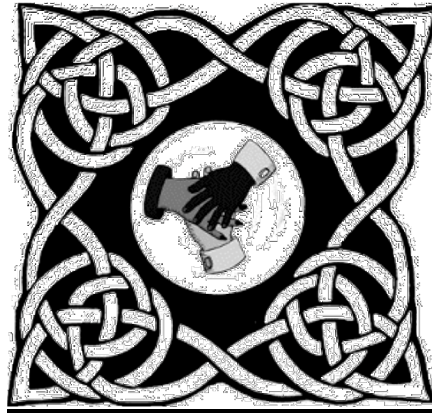
in the Benedictine path of prayer, he founded a movement called The World Community of Christian Meditation. Mary Jo Meadows and Kevin Culligan of the Carmelite tradition, and Robert Kennedy, a Jesuit priest, adapted the meditation methods of Vipassana and Zen Buddhism to the intentionality of the practice of Christian Contemplation.

In more recent years lay leaders are emerging in sharing the path of the Heart and articulating once again the utter simplicity and joy of contemplation as accessible to all. The ancient tradition of Prayer of the Heart is coming alive again in Western Christianity as a practice for all who desire Inner Communion with God. And the ancient prayer of the Torah, which Jesus taught as the core of the spiritual life in bringing forth self-giving love, is expressed and brought to fulfillment in our own lives as the Praxis of the Prayer of the Heart.

“ Hear O Israel, the Lord, our God is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is the greatest commandment.” (Mark 12:29)

-Chapter 3-

Communion with God in Creation- **The Horizontal Dimension of Relational Life in God**



"Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus of Nazareth

The Immanence of God- Our Greater Self

Too often the commandment of loving our neighbor has been seen as an ideal to live up to, rather than a relational reality, to be embraced and lived. Not long ago, when camping in the mountains with my wife and dog, a great teaching was given to me in a joyful moment. I walked out into the mountain meadow where we were camped. It was a transition moment between sunset and twilight. My dog, Roxie, walked next to me. I stopped for a moment to gaze on the grass, the stream, and the forested mountain on the other side of the meadow. In the stillness, in one moment, all became transparent, a radiant Fire and Presence shone through everything. A wordless voice spoke clearly, "In all this I give Myself to you."

In this Radiant Life which permeates and encompasses Creation we find the one Self in which we are one with all creatures, one with all beings, all things, animate and inanimate. A great tragedy of Christianity and most religions is that only the transcendent dimension of the Divine has been emphasized. Only the vertical relationship has been valued, to the exclusion of the immanent and horizontal relationship. It is in the horizontal relationship with all Creation that we learn to be in communion, to serve, and to express, to actualize the Divine. Both the vertical and the horizontal relationships are necessary for a complete spirituality. In the following is a beautiful articulation of this wisdom:

"Meditation... is returning to your own center and finding that it is the gateway to the Center of all." (Main, p.29) John Main OSB- *The Heart of Creation*

Here John Main states clearly that intimacy with God within ourselves leads to an intimacy with all of Creation. Saints and mystics of all traditions throughout time have

taught this. However, our religious education too often has taught us that Creation is an object apart from us and from God, here for our use alone, to dispose of, as we wish. We have been taught that God is outside of life. The mystical unitive realization reveals that all of life, all of Creation and God is Subject, expressed poetically in the words of St. Paul " In Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28) In reality, what we do to Creation, we, in fact, do to God, and ourselves. Science is now teaching us that we participate in a web of life, of which we are a cell, a wave in the ocean. All of life is an organism. Quantum physics tells us that what happens in one corner of the universe, a thought, a movement, an act of will, affects it all. Our lack of concern and unitive awareness for this web of life now endangers all of life on this planet. When we sit in silence, we ground and connect in this One Self, the Divine Beloved. And it opens us to receptive presence and service to the One Self, the Divine Beloved in all of activity and life.

John of the Cross spoke of this intimacy with the natural world this way in poetry:

" My Beloved is the mountains,
and lonely wooded valleys.
Strange islands,
And resounding rivers.
The whistling of love-stirring breezes,
The tranquil night.
At the time of the rising dawn,
Silent music,
Sounding Solitude,
The supper that refreshes and deepens love."
- John of the Cross-"The Spiritual Cantic" (Kavanaugh, p.714)

These "meadow moments" I described, and which John of the Cross paints in his poetry, are sometimes called epiphanies, special revelations. More accurately they are glimpses of a Reality which is true all the time. Our capacity to perceive this Reality may change with how still we are within, or how open we may be through crisis or a leap of faith. Nevertheless these glimpses are a manifestation of a true Essence in which all of life participates:

The Glory (Presence) of God in Creation-
" The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil" Gerard Manley Hopkins

Some Christians, because of the influence of the teachings of Augustine in the institutional church, have believed these insights to be heretical or illusory. But even the great theologian, Thomas Aquinas, said "Each creature is a witness to God's power and omnipotence; and its beauty is a witness to divine wisdom. Every creature participates in some way in the Divine Essence." (Fox, Coming... p.75) Aquinas and other mystics and teachers, pronounce that all creation is "theophany", manifestation of the Divine. St. Paul's proclamation that in God, that we "live, and move, and have our being" is true of

all beings. As our practice of Inner Communion in prayer deepens, we become increasingly sensitive to the Divine Christos in all of life, and increasingly aware and desirous to love, serve and harmonize our own life and actions with the Divine Essence in Creation. "In Him were created all things in heaven and on earth: everything visible and invisible." (Colossians 1:16) Through the Prayer of the Heart we uncover these truths as lived Reality rather than doctrinal or theological assertion.

The Celtic Mystic Tradition-

Creation as the veiled Presence or Glory of God is a foundation of the spirituality of the Celtic Christian tradition. Celtic Christianity flourished in a portion of the British Isles, which is present day Ireland, Scotland and Wales. St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland in the third century. It found fertile ground there in the indigenous nature mysticism of the Celts. With the decay and decline of the Roman Empire this indigenous form of Christianity was allowed to flower, developing its own non-hierarchical forms and expressions independently of the Roman church until the 12th Century. The successive waves of Viking invasion eroded Celtic Christian life. And the signing of a Papal Bull by Pope Adrian IV in 1155 A.D. giving the English king, Henry II, dominion over Ireland and the British Isles brought the demise of the Celtic tradition when the Roman church was given exclusive religious sovereignty. (Lyttleton's "Life of Henry II." vol. v. p. 371.)

Celtic Monasticism-

Perhaps one of the best examples of the spiritual teachings and practices of Celtic monasticism is **Brigid of Kildare**. Brigid of Kildare was named after the Goddess Brigid, a goddess of fertility She was born in 453. Her feast day is celebrated on the same day as the goddess. Her mother was a slave woman; her father was a pagan chieftain. Her mother was sold and Brigid followed her mother. A foster father who was a Druid priest adopted her. She apprenticed to him in the nature mysticism of the Druids. She was drawn, however, to the gentleness of her mother's religion, Christianity, and converted as an adult. She founded one of the first communities of nuns In Ireland. According to legend when she was consecrated by the bishop, Nell, the nephew of Patrick, he mistakenly read the ritual words for consecrating a bishop. According to the legend, he said, "It is the will of God, let it stand."

Brigid soon assumed leadership of a thriving monastic community as abbess. In Ireland during these centuries the Roman system of hierarchical church guidance, with division of governance into dioceses was not adopted. Instead the rural tribal life gathered around decentralized monasteries in a pattern congruent with Celtic culture. Through Brigid's governance as abbess women were seen as equals in the community and she started monastic schools for education of girls as well as boys. She exercised effective powers of a bishop and is believed in oral tradition, along with other prominent women abbesses to follow, to have presided over the Eucharist and the sacraments. (Cahill, p.175) Brigid started a tradition of dual monasteries, men and women, living side by side. She governed over both monasteries and appointed a male co-adjutor to administer the men's community. Brigid is credited with bringing into her practice and her teaching a respect for the sacredness of all creation. She brought sacred liturgical celebration into the

agrarian life with an active participation in the rhythms and blessings of planting and harvest, as manifestations of God's ever-fruitful Presence. In the folk prayers and songs of this day, she is the patroness of harvest and herding, and agrarian life. Like the monks and hermits of her time, Brigid sought the forest for times of solitude and contemplative prayer, to rediscover grounding in God. The solitary monks and hermits were sometimes called the "green martyrs" (Cahill, p.172) of the time.

The Celtic conception of monastery was to embrace the larger community around as a natural network of familial life. The agrarian population and fields were located next to the monastery. As abbess and spiritual leader Brigid was a friend of the poor and carried from the fruits of her inner life a passion for justice. She enacted land reforms to help the poor and brought changes in law and custom to uphold justice for women. She was a leader in seeking education for girls and founded a monastery school for children that educated boys and girls. At the time of her death in 525 A.D. Brigid of Kildare was mother abbess to over 13,000 nuns and monks, and shepherdess to many more good people of Ireland. She was a spiritual leader and wisdom teacher of her time and ours.

Columba, Brigid, and Columcille are considered the three great spiritual teachers of the Celtic monastic tradition, teaching that Creation is not the enemy of God, but the body of God. They taught a relational model rather than performance model of spiritual life in God. ***In this vision of Christianity the goal and highest value is communion in relational life rather than accomplishment and advancement.***

The Celtic Wisdom teachers bring to us the tradition of the Anam Cara ("dear soul or soul friend"). They uphold the value of the horizontal transmission, that we come to God, in community, in compassionate and spiritual friendship. Soul-friending, as a non-hierarchical spiritual friendship, is the basis of spiritual guidance and companioning in Celtic spirituality. God the Beloved, then is seen as the Divine Anam Cara, the Soul Friend, who keeps us ever in Her heart,

There are two primary representative theologians from the Celtic tradition who articulate the relational Creation model of spirituality. Their teachings stand in marked contrast to the historical development of the theology of Roman institutional religion. They offer an alternative view of Christianity from the Augustinian view of the cosmos and his articulation of the doctrine of original sin, which have so inordinately influenced Western Christianity.

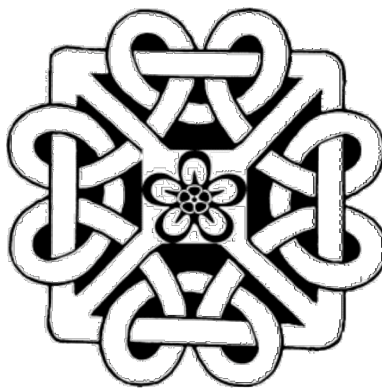
Augustine-

Augustine of Hippo was a Roman aristocrat born in 354 at a time of an aging and decaying empire. By his own confessions he led an early life of sexual addiction and exploitation of women. He experienced a conversion to Christianity, the religion of his mother, and became a priest and eventually a bishop. He was a learned man and wrote prolifically and engaged in the doctrinal debates of his time, gaining a pre-eminent influence over the thought of the Roman Church which was fast filling the vacuum of secular Roman authority and government. His thought was influenced by two philosophical trends of the time. The first was Manicheism, a prominent force in the

Mediterranean, which taught that the world is a struggle between external forces of good and evil, light and darkness. In this thought evil is seen in absolute terms, and that history is a growing polarity between these opposites. The other influence was neo-Platonism, based on the thought of Plato, that the physical world is a shadow or imperfect reflection of a spiritual realm. (Cahill, p. 51) The fundamental conflict in this thought is the opposition between the spiritual realm and a fallen or flawed material world.

The merging of these influences and Augustine's own personal history of addiction became articulated into a doctrine of original sin. In this doctrine Augustine taught that humanity and the created world are fallen and depraved. They are forever apart from God except through the expiation of the sacrifice of Christ and the redemption offered through baptism and the institutional church, needed to mediate and repair the vast gulf between God and fallen humanity. He taught that the image of God in humans has been destroyed and is fully absent by sin and awaits the redemption of baptism to be restored. (Newell, p.14) He teaches in his book "City of God" that history leads to a final process of polarization between those who are of the flesh or the material order and those who are of the spiritual order. This theological and doctrinal construct, which reinforced the necessity and authority of institutional religion as intermediary in personal salvation, was largely adopted by the Roman institutional church and has influenced Western Christianity to the present day.

Teachings of Celtic Spiritual Theology-



“The presence of God's spirit in all living things is what makes them beautiful....” -
Pelagius

Pelagius-

In the Fourth Century a Celtic Welsh monk by the name of Pelagius (Morgan or Morien in Welsh) emerged as a teacher and theologian for a spiritual view which affirms Creation rather than denigrates it. He has falsely been labeled as a heretic, condemned for a supposed teaching that humanity can save itself without grace. This is a false rendering of his teaching. (Newell, p. 8) Instead what Pelagius taught is that the Image of God (Imago Dei) is the deepest dimension of our being. God's wisdom and Life is innate and born within us in the womb. It is in the words of St. John the Evangelist, "the true light that enlightens everyone coming into the world." (John 1:9) The presence of sin is a force external to our true nature and may cover or hide our true nature, but does not

defile or destroy it. Pelagius says therefore that the teaching of the good news of the Gospel is about uncovering the hidden truth of the Life of God within us. (Newell, p.15) This teaching was distorted by the enemies of Pelagius, such as Augustine, to mean salvation without grace by human effort alone, something he never intended.

Around 380 A.D. Pelagius came to Rome where his views and writings became known. He was initially well received. His writings contained the prevalent themes of the Celtic tradition. He wrote of the importance of seeking a "soul friend" or "anam cara" to whom one can reveal the inner life. He also began to articulate the themes of the goodness of Creation and the doctrine of God's Immanence or Indwelling in Creation. "When God pronounced that His Creation was good, it was not only that his hand had fashioned every creature; it was his Breath had brought every creature to life... The presence of God's spirit in all living things is what makes them beautiful; and if we look with God's eyes, nothing on earth is ugly." (Newell, p.11) This is a diametrically different starting point in the spiritual life than that of Augustine. Augustine has a starting point of depravity and separation, while Pelagius begins with original goodness and Divine Indwelling. The role of religion therefore is very different. In the former, the institutional church, mediating divine grace and redemption, is the sole means of salvation. In the latter, salvation is the awakening to and uncovering of God's Presence and Indwelling as Reality which is already present. In this view the role of religion is to support and companion humans in their journey of unfolding a Divine Life already within them. The Pelagian understanding of the Great Commandment of loving one's neighbor is not a prescription therefore, but a disclosure of the reality of Unitive Love. In the words of Pelagius, "So when our love is directed toward an animal or even a tree, we are participating in the fullness of God's love." (Newell, p. 11)

Pelagius taught further that humans are not saved by belief or adherence to the Scripture but by their response to the example and teachings of Jesus. "Thus it is not what you believe that matters; it is how you respond with your heart and your actions. It is not believing in Christ that matters; it is becoming like Him." Hence transformation in the love of Christ is the essence of salvation.

The teachings of Pelagius were increasingly perceived as dangerous by the institutional church. One criticism was his assertion in the equality of women. (Recall that in the early church, there were many who did not even believe that women had souls.) This equality was based on a second assertion that was seen as more dangerous, that the image of God is within every newborn child and contains the original unsullied goodness and Life of God and that the sexual dimension of procreation is good. (Newell, p. 14) (In contrast Augustine taught that humans were conceived in sin in the sexual act.) Pelagius taught that the process of divine redemption is best understood in terms of "setting free, releasing what we essentially are" (Newell, p. 15). This was deemed dangerous and an undermining of the institutional authority of the Roman Church. For this reason Pelagius came under increasing attack, led by Augustine, and was eventually excommunicated and driven from Rome. In fear for his life he fled back to Wales and lived out his life in relative obscurity in a monastery.

John Scotus Eriugena-

John Scotus Eriugena was a second major teacher who articulated the themes of Celtic mysticism. John Scotus Eriugena was an Irish philosopher of the ninth century, not under an ecclesiastical structure. He taught that God is the "Life Force within all things... Therefore every visible and invisible creature can be called a theophany." (Newell, p. 35) He taught that both Scripture and Creation are the Word of God. Through the letters of Scripture and the species of creature the Eternal Light is revealed." (Newell, p. 35) Eriugena taught that the "Word through whom all things were made" in the Gospel of John is the "Word that is at the heart of life, and from which all that is comes forth." (Newell, p. 35)

The teachings of Eriugena were parallel to Pelagius. Drawing from Genesis and from the Gospel of John he asserted that the original Light of God is at the heart of life. In the beginning of Creation we see this Light flowing out from God into all Creation. In John the Evangelist Eriugena points to the poetic opening of the Gospel where John speaks of the "Light of Life," and the Light that enlightens everyone coming into the world, and the affirmation that nothing has life apart from this Light. He asserts that what is deepest and truest and eternal in humans and all creation is this Light of God, which is an emanation or out-pouring of God's Love. In his teaching he states that God is in all things, is Himself the Essence of what life is. Therefore the world is not only good but is an external incarnate manifestation of God. (Newell, p. 35) The visible comes forth from the Invisible and Unmanifested. He teaches us that God is in essence, unity and simplicity, an underlying Life, which is manifested in the multiplicity and complexity of Creation, where all possibilities are brought forth.

Eriugena did not see matter as opposed to spirit but rather the manifestation of spirit, infused with spirit. He wrote that God's divine goodness is "the Essence of the whole universe and its substance." (Newell, p. 36) In his view nothing in creation is essentially evil. On the contrary we commit evil acts when we act in conflict with our own true nature. Therefore like the apostle John, who laid his head on the breast of Christ, we attune ourselves to God by listening for the heart and essence of God in all things in our spiritual life on earth. The only "fall" of humans has been the loss of the "true beholding of the light from the inner eyes." (Newell, p. 37) In his view the function of grace is to restore our inner capacity to behold the Light of God and to bring it forth in our own human life. After his death John Scotus Eriugena was declared heretical and many of his writings suppressed. His primary work "Periphesyon" was condemned by the pope in 1225.

The Creation Mysticism of Medieval and Modern Mystics-

The teachings of the Celtic mystics and later mystics in the Christian tradition arose, not from cultural transmission alone, but from the arising of mystic illumination and insight when human beings listen deeply and cultivate inner vision into the true nature of Creation and the Indwelling Life-breath of God in all things. Although inspired and encouraged by those who have gone before, it is the individual awakening which brings

this insight forth anew with each seeker, each generation, despite the resistance from the secular and religious culture of the times.

The following statements are examples of this awakening from early Christian times, medieval, to modern mystics, Christian and Native American:

"Christ Exists in all things that are." Gregory of Nazianzus

"Divinity is the enfolding and unfolding of everything that is. Divinity is in all things in such a way that all things are in divinity." Nicholas of Cusa

"God created things in such a way that they are not outside himself as ignorant people falsely imagine. Rather all creatures flow outward, but nonetheless remain within God." Meister Eckhart

"The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw - and knew I saw- all things in God and God in all things." Mechtilde of Magdeburg

"The Incarnation accomplished the following; That God became human and that humans became God and sharers in the divine nature." Thomas Aquinas

"The Earth, its life am I,
the Earth, its feet are my feet.
the Earth, its legs are my legs.
the Earth its body is my body.
the earth, its thoughts are my thoughts,
the Earth is speech is my speech." Navajo chant

(Fox, Coming. p.75)(Fox, Original. P.88)

"Over every living thing which is to spring up, to grow, to flower, to ripen during the day, say again these words, 'This is my Body'.... No visible tremor marks this transformation; and yet mysteriously and in very truth, the touch of the supersubstantial Word, the immense host which is the universe is made flesh. Through your incarnation, my God, all matter is henceforth incarnate." - *Mass of the World*, Teilhard de Chardin (20th c.)

"Life, which we may call God, the Absolute, the Ultimate, Reality,
True Being, and so forth,
permeates and expresses Self in everything.
This True Being is the heart of our existence.
God is the Being out of which we live;
God is the being that lives in us and through us.
We are God's form of expression."
- *Contemplation-a Christian Path*-Willigis Jager O.S.B. (20th c.)

The living tradition of Creation mysticism continues and grows in our time. The awakening of the mystic tradition has melded with our growing awareness of the global, ecological crisis and interdependence in the common web of life. Our respect and reverence for Creation has also been enriched by the integration of the Wisdom traditions of Asian and native peoples. The more we are attuned to our true nature, and uncover the Original Essence, Life-Breath and Light of God within us through Prayer of the Heart, the deeper our longing, the more expanded our compassionate concern for who our neighbor truly is. Our neighbor, whom we learn to love and serve in the Great Commandment of the Torah and of Jesus, is the whole of the Universe, the Mystical and Incarnate Body of Christ. This is so because the Universe is our Self, one unity, one body in God, in created and sustained, in and through Christ, the Living Word.

A spiritual elder, mystic, and teacher of our times, Thomas Hand S.J., proclaimed to me on retreat in 1997:

" The God experience is awakening to Oneness and fully accepting and living the consequences."

A mystic of the Native American tradition, a shaman of the Oglala Sioux nation, Black Elk, received the following vision when he was nine years old, before the coming of European people to his land. His vision speaks poetically of the Oneness in which we all "live, move, and have our being," our Oneness in a Circle of Unitive Love transcending religious denomination, history, ethnicity, species or form:

" I was still on my bay horse, and once more I felt the riders of the west, the north, the east, the south, behind me in formation, as before and we were going east. I looked ahead and saw the mountains there with rocks and forests on them, and from the mountains flashed all colors upward to the heavens. Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for ***I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like One Being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one Circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.***" (Neihardt, p.33)

Theme II- Consecration in Silence Through Prayer of the Heart

-Chapter 4-



Prayer of the Heart- Communion with God in Interior Silence

Relational Life in God-The Vertical Transmission

In the first chapter we spoke of the "what" and the "why" of the practice of Prayer of the Heart. In this section we are going to begin to speak of the "how." In this chapter we will introduce the basics of formal sitting Prayer of the Heart practice. In Chapter 5-7 we will expand on diverse aspects of the formal sitting practice.

Remember that when we speak of the word "practice" we do not mean "repetition". Rather what we mean is the Greek word "praxis" which means "to actualize" or "make real." The Prayer of the Heart is to "actualize" or "make real" our relationship of inner communion with God. The symbol of the Celtic cross, with the cross in the circle of unitive love is one symbol in the tradition of relational life in God. The **vertical axis** of the cross is our intimate life in God alone, in interior solitude. The **horizontal axis** is our life in God in human relationships and Creation. Together they comprise life in the circle of Unitive Love, participation in Divine Life. In Christianity we have come to understand the nature of the Life of God in relational terms, as Trinity. The Ultimate Mystery which we call God is the Trinitarian Life, God the unmanifested Source, God the Living Word in Christ and Creation, and God, the activity of Love in Creation, as Spirit.

Jesus defined his mission among humans as the full participation in this Life of the Trinity. "I have come that they may have Life, and have it fully." (John 10:10) In this section we are going to speak of the formal praxis of Prayer of the Heart in the vertical transmission of Divine Life in Inner Communion with God deep in our own Heart.

The Heart- the Locus of Relationship- Entering and Abiding in the Kingdom-

In the Judeo-Christian tradition the Heart is the terminology for the center of our being. In the mind we may think of God, with our lips we may speak to God, in the heart resides the flame of God's Life within us, God's Presence and Image, the Life of our spirit. Therefore it is through disengagement with the activity of the mind and entering into silence and interiority of the heart that we encounter our true being and God's True Being within us. Jesus call this space of the encounter with God in prayer as the "Inner Chamber." (Mathew 6:6) "When you wish to prayer, go to your inner chamber." Jesus proclaimed this state of communion with God in the Heart as accessible to all, inviting them to enter the "kingdom within." (Luke 17:21)

The necessary condition of this prayer is the cultivation of interior silence, or what the ancient desert Christians called "hesychia." (Ware, p.98) "Jesus Christ, the Word which came out of Silence." - St. Ignatius of Antioch (Ware, p.89) The cultivation of hesychia involves a practice of turning the will and attention toward God, while releasing from all thoughts and activity of the mind, even thoughts and concepts of God, in order to open to God, as God is, in the Heart. The ancient monastics taught that we think of God in concepts and images in the prayer of the mind; we speak to God in the prayer of the lips; and we experience and abide in God in the prayer of the Heart beyond all thought and images.

The measure of this prayer is faithfulness. ("Ask and you shall receive, knock and it shall be opened." (Mathew 7:7) The essence of this prayer is the fulfillment of the Great Commandment of Jesus to "love God with all of our heart" in deepening surrender and trust. In the Heart we find where our true life is to be found, where are true identity as child and offspring of God is rooted. This is the holy space of Divine Life of Presence, which the author of the "Cloud of Unknowing" called the essential or "naked being."

In the beginning we may come to only experience fleeting moments of the Life of God in our own Heart. Over time, as our practice deepens, Divine Life is the singular and true Life that we live, and our biological and human life is seen as a means to incarnate and live out the deeper life of the Heart.

The Spiritual Faculties of the Heart-

While we try to describe the interior movements of the Prayer of the Heart it is important to start with the utter simplicity of it. We are simply letting go of every other thing, to be fully present and fully given in love to God, the Beloved of our Heart, in inner silence and communion. All other explanations are an amplification of being fully given to this singular intention. When we actualize these interior movements in the cultivation of human relationships, we give the gift of our full attention or presence to the one we love, and we give the gift of ourselves to the one we love. The same is true in our relationship with the Divine.

In human beings the spiritual faculties which define us as human are that of **awareness and will**. When they are developed to their highest potential, they actualize "Presence" and "Self-giving Love" or Agape. These are properties or capacities of our Heart. It is with these faculties that we come to liberate the Life of God within us, a potential to bring forth, that which Genesis calls the "**Image of God**". ***This is the ontological truth to which we are born.*** Through the action of orienting awareness and will completely to God we come to participation in God's healing and creative love in our life. This praxis, or "actualization," is what makes us accessible to the Life of God. This praxis of Prayer of the Heart then makes possible the transformation in which we actualize the "**Likeness of God**" in our own humanity, uniquely in each person through the action of grace. This is the redemptive spiritual truth that we can choose in our own life. Without the alignment of awareness and will with the flow of Divine Life in the vertical transmission, God's image, or Life in the Spirit, remains locked within us, and we remain in the darkness of our illusion of separateness and self absorption. This condition of separateness is the source of all the resistance or opposition to God's Life in us and the resultant suffering to self and others.

The powers of presence and self-giving love of our spiritual nature are gifts of God, revelations of God's own nature, which is Itself Presence and Self-giving Love. In the course of a lifetime of Prayer of the Heart practice we open to a deepening participation in ***God's own nature of Presence and Agape.*** When our spiritual nature is awakened, our very breath becomes pure prayer, in the receptivity of presence and the release and self surrender to agape.

Presence-

Jesus says in the Gospel, when we give our full awareness, or see with the single, undivided vision (Matt. 6:22) and live single hearted, that is, to give ourselves fully to the love of God with all our heart (Matt. 23:7), we are fully entering the Kingdom and there we find our true home.

Jesus therefore defines for us that the fullness of God's Life of Unitive Love is to be found through our undivided practice. We give ourselves to this praxis of **presence** to the flow of Divine Life in us and simultaneously release from all that impedes it. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus assures us that the "kingdom is very near" and invites us to repent, or change the direction we seek for happiness. (Mark 1:15) He invites us to cease looking somewhere else other than the kingdom of God in the Heart for fullness and completion. When we change direction in this way, the Kingdom is "at hand" or utterly accessible. ***To give ourselves to Presence is to let go of the traffic of the mind and the pull to live out of the past, and to let go of the anxiety and expectation of a self-seeking future, which is never here. To give ourselves to Presence is to make an ongoing act of Faith that God is the fullness of eternal Presence in the Eternal here and now, and there is no other direction to seek or wander.*** This requires an observing awareness of the mind, and where it wanders. It also requires a willingness to continually release from the leading of the mind's traffic and pull, and returning home to presence and communion with God in the deepest intentionality of the Heart, which is Agape.

Self-Giving Love-

The revelation of the Christian Mystery in Christ is that the Abba, -the Source of All that is- is Unitive Love. God is a Love which is Self-giving, which pours Itself out into beings and Creation without expectation and condition. This Source of Life is present and lives in us, and is at the center of our own life. To align our will and humanity with this Deeper Life is to allow God to express God's nature in our own nature. Thus at the center of Christian relational life, as Jesus has proclaimed in the Shema,' is our continual willingness to give ourselves and everything in our humanity over to this Deeper Life, this Self Giving Love, that God is, and become one with the flow of Divine Life in us. ***In the Prayer of the Heart praxis we give ourselves to the Love of God in silence and activity, in all circumstances of life in a continuous act of self-offering.***

*****If there is one image which best represents the Prayer of the Heart it is open hands stretched outward, hands that are receptive and empty to receive, and hands that cease to cling but continually offer the gift of self to the One Self in which we all belong. *****
The locus of this continual receptive presence and offering of self in love to God, is the Heart. ***If we were to give these two interior movements words of presence and agape, they would say the following: "I am here completely for you, Beloved. I give myself to You without reservation."***

Actualization of Presence and Self -Giving Love in Silent Sitting Practice-

In the Gospels Jesus invites us to see with the single eye and love with the single heart. The way we cultivate this natural movement is simple but difficult, because of our conditioning and mis-directions of attention and will. We bring the capacity of the heart of pure awareness beneath and beyond the ongoing traffic of the mind. We give ourselves to just "seeing" and being present to what is before us, in our sitting and active contemplation. In the same moment we bring the capacity of the heart's willingness to love beneath and beyond all the reactions and defense mechanisms of the ego-self. ***This practice of presence and self-offering we cultivate initially in our sitting quiet prayer time. Over time we bring this interior movement and expression of loving presence to all we do in life. This is the fulfillment of the great commandment of Jesus.***

Inner Communion- Intimate Encounter

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 communicate our ***desire to be fully given in love*** to the beloved we are with, and the desire to be one with that person. The same is true of our practice of the intimacy of inner communion with the Divine Beloved.

To help establish us in this discipline of inner communion in God in the beginning we need guidelines of practice. ***For intimate encounter we need the interior disciplines of prayer to dispose the human faculties so that we can give and receive the gift of***

presence and unitive love with the Divine Beloved. In the Christian tradition the use of prayer word and breath has been helpful in formal sitting practice as well as in daily life.

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 deeper communion with God.
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 Lord, I give myself completely to you.” “O God, You are my Refuge.” “O Beloved, in You alone I find peace.”
6. **Length of Prayer Session-** 25-30 minutes is best with walking contemplation (see chapter 13) in between more than one session. Allow for a gentle transition from the prayer session.

The Method:

1. Prayer Word- Choose a word, which touches you and which expresses best your desire to be one with God, to give yourself to God. It may be a short sound, word, or phrase. It may be the name of Jesus, or a form of the Jesus prayer. Repeat it continuously, returning to the prayer word. It can be a short word such as "Peace," or "Love," or "Spirit," or "Home." If you choose a one-syllable word, it is recommended to continually repeat it or return to it on the out-breath. If it is more than one syllable then synchronize the repeating of the word with the in-breath and out-breath. Let this prayer word be your anchor of returning to your single desire for communion with God. Observe and release from all the traffic of the mind, thoughts, desires, commentaries, judgments. Observe them arise and release them to go on. Continually release from involvement with thoughts and return to your holy word. Continually "release and return," to be present to God in your desire and self-offering, in the anchor of your word or phrase. It is an ongoing process of "release and return" in the natural rhythm of your breathing. Willigis Jager OSB, the Benedictine contemplative says, "The purpose of combining use of a word with breathing is to absorb one's consciousness so that one forgets everything, including one's self. A clear, pure attentiveness increasingly prevails." (Jager, *The Way*... p.12)

2. Prayer Breath- Follow the same method as use of a prayer word. Only let the breath alone be your anchor, to release and return to the giving over of yourself God's Presence within you. In just being with and observing your breath there is a continual return to your desire to be one with God. The in-breath is the opening and receptivity to God in the

movement of receptive presence; the out-breath expresses the interior movement of the will in self-offering to God. That is the essence of the sacred breath as Prayer of the Heart. For many, the breath is the simplest and most complete expression of prayer and anchor in the process of continually returning "home" to inner communion in God.

3. Loving Presence- For some, using the breath or a word as anchor or focus, may seem a distraction, an intrusion, or unnecessary. Just abiding, sitting in the Presence of God with loving presence is complete and enough. They may wish to simply follow the method of St. John of the Cross of a "loving attention upon God" in one's interior intention. This may be anchor enough for many. This does not involve visualization, but is simply the giving of one's self completely in desire and inner disposition, a devoted intention of loving presence to God in the Heart, as we trust in Faith in God's giving of Self in loving presence to us.

Synthesis-Breath and Word, a Jesus prayer: A suggested way to bring together the essential elements of this practice would be to choose a prayer word, Jesus, or possibly the Hebrew name of Jesus, Yeshuah. On the in-breath repeated inwardly "Yesh" on the out-breath, slowly repeat "Uuuu-Ahhhh" while slowly exhaling. Similarly we repeat the syllable, "Jeee," on the in-breath and "susss" on the out-breath. Another example might be the word "Yah-weh." On the in-breath the first syllable "Yah" is repeated, and on the out-breath, the movement of release to self-giving love is aligned with the syllable "weh." The exhalation should be slow and gradual, as if water were allowed to go through a narrow entrance slowly. In this synthesis of Heart Prayer word, breath, and loving presence, we bring together the harmony of breath, presence and intentionality of self-offering. We unite receptive presence, and the interior turning towards communion with God. For many, a version of the prayer word of the holy name of Jesus is the fullest expression of God's Presence and Self -Gift to us in the praxis of Prayer of the Heart. Some may prefer forms of the longer Jesus Prayer phrase, aligned with breath.

Summary:

Each of these three methods is a valid form of the Prayer of the Heart. Each of them involves a process of deepening presence and self-offering in love to God, through the process of "release and return" from all thoughts and mental and emotional activity. And we return continuously to the prayer practice of presence and abandoning ourselves to the love of God. Over time we cultivate a capacity, not to stop thoughts, but to release from them, and abide in an interior communion in God's Presence that is us beneath and beyond thoughts. We come to experience that we have thoughts, but we are not our thoughts. We have a freedom to find our refuge in God alone, through presence and agape, whether in our silent prayer practice, or whether in the ceaseless prayer of daily life. We come to know that our true home is our own heart, the Kingdom of God within us, and the dwelling place of God, our monk's cell of prayer. 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 Jesus, is a sanctuary, for it contains the dwelling place of God." (Ware, p.92)

The Best Place to Pray-

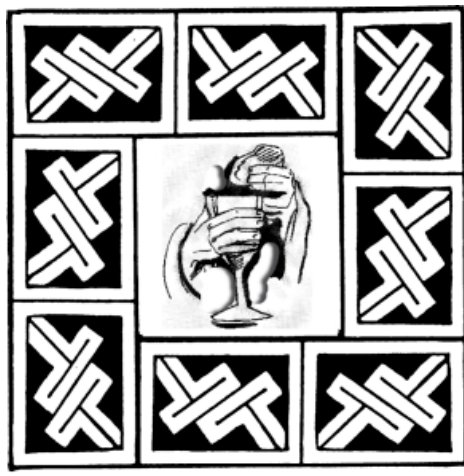
" I asked an old monk, "How do I get over the habit of judging people?"

He answered, "When I was your age, I was wondering where would be the best place to go to pray. Well, I asked Jesus that question. His answer was, 'Why don't you go into the Heart of my Father?' So I did. I went into the Heart of the Father, and all these years that's where I've prayed. Now I see everyone as my own child. How can I judge anyone?"

(Theophane, p. 18)

-Chapter 5 -

Consecration in Silent Prayer of the Heart



Prayer of the Heart Praxis- The Christification of our Lives. - In Chapter 1 we made reference to the spiritual theme of Eastern Christianity, the divinization of humanity. This is based on the teaching that the central mystery of Christianity is this: In Jesus, the fullness of God appears in human form, so that humans might bring forth God in their own humanity and become 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 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. There is both form and formlessness (emptiness) in this consecration and transfiguration, Word made flesh. All of life is Eucharist in our participation in Divine Life. Such is the nature of our practice.

Consecration of Time: To consecrate time is to make it holy, to set it aside as sacred offering. This is not to say that there is time that is not holy. Rather, to make time sacred is to enter into the sacred dimension of time, which is already present; to recognize and participate in what is already true and holy. ***When we release from every other thing, then the sacred and eternal dimension of time, or timelessness, reveals itself.*** In our formal sitting practice we set aside sacred time to enter into the sacred dimension of inner communion with God in the Heart. The ontological reality of this communion is already true. In our practice we "actualize" it, enter into it, with presence and unitive love. We participate in this communion and in the sacred dimension of time, consciously and intentionally, that is, with our full awareness and will.

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. The vertical relationship is the central relationship from which all others spring. It is the pivot point of the horizontal relationship with God in all other beings, in all Creation. Therefore the ***consecration of sacred time, 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.

In the morning when the body is rested, before the mind has had a chance to be overly stimulated and drawn to the mental tasks of the day, is a receptive time. Morning is a time when we may be more accessible to Presence, the presence we bring to the Beloved, and the Presence of the Beloved to us. We are also likely to be more accessible at that hour to our singular devotion of self-gift to the Divine, and equally receptive to the Self-gift of the Beloved to us. Eternity is always present in the Present, yet we are not always present to Eternity. In the evening the consecration of time allows for us to prepare for a peaceful rest and relinquishment of activity to the surrender of sleep in the embrace of God. To enter into sacred time is to enter into this timelessness, into Eternity.

Consecration of time is a gift to ourselves and the Beloved. To avail ourselves of this gift, we need to create and protect a sanctuary of sacred space.

Consecration of Space: Again we do not make space sacred, rather we allow the sacredness of space to emerge when we let go of every other thing, so that sacred space is empty and receptive to the Presence and Love of God. 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 God. The qualities of this space are quiet, reverence, and symbols which hold sacred our own Heart and inner being and the Life that animates it.

I recommend in our sacred space the placement of an altar. 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. For some a Christ candle or light, representing the Light of Christ in our own Heart is also a central expression of our interiority. I also like to put pictures on my altar, of loved ones and spiritual teachers who participate with me in this act of communion in the Divine, who have supported me in the singular life of Love in Christ.

I prepare myself to enter this space by bowing, by reverent movements, and not allowing any intrusion of sound or activity. With prayerful expressions of the body, hands held upward in offering, hands joined together in reverent adoration, I participate in sacred space. This is holy ground and we symbolically or literally take off our shoes and walk humbly. The ringing of a clear sound of the gong, or lighting of incense to mark the beginning and end of the prayer session may also be a way of honoring of sacred space. In loving intimate relationships protected space is essential. This is even more so for the Divine relationship. ***For all of us an essential requirement to enter and experience the exquisite sensitivity of the Love of God is the creation of sanctuary.*** Consecration of space makes this possible. Sacred space is safe space, or sanctuary, space where we can give ourselves deeply and fully to the Beloved, the motivation of our practice.

Consecration of Intention: I have heard in our culture many motivations for undertaking meditation and spiritual practice. They can include such things as health, peace of mind, psychological stability, even worldly success and wealth. In the Prayer of the Heart practice there is only one motivation; it is the same motivation which was revealed and lived in Jesus. His teaching of the beatitudes stands as a beacon of light in what the true motivations of the spiritual life are. Private personal fulfillment is revealed as an illusory dead end. The paradox of the Gospel teaches it is in our letting go, and release from private self seeking of any kind that we open to the fullness of God's Being in all things. This motivation is already present within us. It can remain unrealized and unlived, however, unless we continually consecrate our motivation in our practice. The ancients called this consecration the "purification of the heart". I don't prefer that term because I believe it can lead people to believe that the heart is not already pure. It is our humanity, in its imagination, emotions, and thought, or consciousness, which is divided. The purification it needs is to be single and made whole in the life of the Heart. Therefore the practice of purity or consecration of intention is the critical aspect of this practice. ***This is the actualization of the Great Commandment of love. Jesus invites us to love God with our whole, undivided humanity.***

The consecration of intention then is best understood as incremental and life-long in development. Just as in our prayer practice we "release and return", so it is also in the consecration of intention. We use the prayer word in ceaseless repetition as our anchor. 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 receive and offer and cling to nothing.

Some examples of a prayer of consecration of intention might be: *"O Lord, I give myself to You."* *"O Beloved, I take refuge in You alone."* It is helpful for us to find the language that best expresses this inner intentionality 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". I bring my

prayer word as a continual and ongoing anchor throughout all activity in my life. But at intervals in the day, I take a short pause or breather, settle myself 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. My vow of practice is a form of the Great Commandment. I recommend those who adopt a daily vow of practice, as another liturgical expression of consecrating intentionality, that it take a form of the Great Commandment. I will share with you my daily vow of practice as one example.

*"How great and wondrous is Your Love O Holy One!
formless, yet embracing every Treasure, I vow to bring forth Your Life within me,
that I may help all living beings.
I will love You, Beloved,
with whole heart, my whole mind,
and my whole spirit, and my whole strength.
I will love the Cosmos as myself, for we are One.
O Beloved, Make me a vessel of Your compassion."*

This vow of practice then becomes the basis of our recollection of the day, called the "examen of consciousness," which is recommended in the early evening.

The inner desire and willingness, to offer ourselves, our humanity, to be wholly given in love to God is at the root of the kenosis of Christ and our own Christification. In this self-offering and presence to God we are made accessible to God's encompassing healing and love. We are transformed into a vessel of God's own Life in the world. This praxis, or actualization, in silence and stillness becomes the springboard or pivot point for praxis in activity and daily life. The consecration of time, space, and intentionality are the fertile conditions of the cultivation of inner communion with God in the vertical transmission and the living out of it in the horizontal transmission in daily life.

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-Chapter 6-

Observing the Mind- Abiding in the Heart



Prayer of the Heart and Thoughts-

It is a striking experience when one sits down to practice Prayer of the Heart for the first time. Having been given the instructions to let go of thinking, the practitioner notices just how many thoughts, just how much chatter or traffic of the mind there really is. One of the first mistakes that the practitioner of contemplative prayer makes, is to think that one must try to stop all that traffic of the mind. Thoughts are a problem only when we give our self-identification, energy, and will to them. There is a qualitative difference between “having” thoughts, and “being” thoughts”. We have thoughts, we are **not** our thoughts.

Early Christian seekers of God found that interior silence was a necessary condition in which to open to God’s Presence. To cultivate that interior silence we need not to try to shut off thoughts, but to seek freedom from the slavery of our own thoughts. Abba Ammonas was asked, " What is the narrow and hard way?" He replied, "The narrow and hard way is this, to control (release from) your thoughts, and to strip yourself of your own (self) will, for the sake of God. This is also the meaning of the saying, 'Lo we have left everything and followed you.' " (Hatch, p.4)

The Inner Movement of Attention to Presence-

It has been noted that Eastern, especially Buddhist, meditation disciplines cultivate awareness or attention, and that Western Christian meditation disciplines emphasize the cultivation of self -surrender or intention. One is an orientation of awareness to the Divine, the other is an orientation of the will, or willingness, to the Divine. ***It is my own experiential finding, and that of many seekers, that a complete practice must, of necessity, have both movements.***

We are accustomed to the belief in Western culture that thinking is the highest expression of the human state. We have been acculturated in the cultural and intellectual inheritance of the European Age of Enlightenment with its dictum from Descartes, " I think, therefore I am." And one of the distinguishing aspects of human beings is the development of a large brain and an increased capacity for higher cognitive functions.

We have come to understand through neurological studies that mentation, or cognitive ability, is directly linked to cerebral functioning. P.E.T. electromagnetic imaging is able to identify which areas of the brain are active at any one time.

When it comes to the spiritual life, we are equally accustomed to believing that awareness, even spiritual awareness, is connected with thinking about spiritual things, or is only possible with thought. Hence the quality of religious practice is often conjectured to be related to believing the right things, adhering to the right concepts, or having the right thoughts or images of God. We have had protracted conflict throughout Western history about which religious concepts and images are the "right" ones. ***We have suffered greatly from missing the insight that real spiritual growth happens through the cultivation of spiritual attentiveness rather than adherence to entrenched conceptual beliefs.***

The mystic traditions, on the other hand, teach us that awareness and awakening is a spiritual faculty, an innate power of the spirit, which is not a function of the quality or quantity of our cerebral mentation. Instead we are speaking of a "state" of abiding our human consciousness in the Divine Consciousness of Presence and Love. In the beginning we may experience this innate capacity of spiritual awareness as the exercise of the "witness" position of attention, which neutrally observes the arising of thoughts, feelings, and images of the mind. In our contemplative practice, this is an essential first step. In contrast to some other contemporary approaches to a Christian contemplative practice that may emphasize "intention" solely, in the Prayer of the Heart practice we teach both "attention" and "intention" as linked interior movements in the life of prayer. In the prior chapter on sitting practice of Prayer of the Heart the following statement was given about attention:

"To give ourselves to Presence is to make an ongoing act of Faith that God is the fullness of eternal Presence here and now and there is no other direction to seek or wander. This means, of necessity, an observing awareness of the mind, and where it wanders, and the willingness to continually release from the leading of its traffic and pull, returning home to presence and communion with God and the deepest intentionality of the Heart, which is Agape."

Hence in order to release from the traffic of the mind, it is a prerequisite to "see" or to witness what arises from the mind. In this "seeing" an important premise of Faith is that we are not our thoughts, we are not our mind, or its products. For many that is a revelation, since we are so accustomed in this culture to seeing the seat of our identity and personhood in the mind, or the head. (Having worked therapeutically with so many human beings whose brains are compromised from degenerative illness or stroke, or who are developmentally disabled, I have seen that this belief has tragic consequences, and compounds suffering many times over in our society.) Therefore to 'see' or to 'witness' is just to see, with neutrality, to observe the mind and its traffic. ***Liberation from the mind requires us to be able to observe it first. And to abide in Presence, to abide in the Heart, requires liberation from the mind. This is what the ancients meant when they spoke of cultivating the interior space of stillness or state of "hesychia." They did not mean***

trying to shut off the mind. They meant observing and releasing, or detaching, from the mind.

Thoughts are not a problem. It is our self-attachment to thoughts that creates bondage. This bondage then leads to the process of obsession and compulsion, and the multitude of addictions in life which lead to what we call in religion, sin, or volition and behavior that are injurious to love. This is the process that Jesus described when he spoke of the act of sin taking place first in thoughts. (Matt. 15:19) ***Having thoughts is not a problem; self attaching and binding ourselves to our thoughts is what creates impediments in the spiritual life.***

Attention and Silent Prayer of the Heart Practice-

One might ask then, how is this interior movement from attention to Presence made into praxis, or actualization? The first is the willingness to see our mind and its contents as "stuff." One of my spiritual directees put this very nicely when she came to the realization that her thoughts were of no great importance in her sitting, and they were neither good nor bad of themselves. She noted they just were "there" and she had come to see them as "phenomena." (Naturally when thoughts are acted upon in volition and behavior, they then become good or bad in their motivation and consequences.) So experiencing attention as "witness" creates an interior experience of growing space between the mind traffic and the seat of awareness, a dynamic of dis-identification with the mind traffic. This is a precondition to the freedom and spaciousness of interior peace and communion.

The growing space allows for us to "sink" into a quiet in which the mind traffic goes on in either great or little degrees. We experience it subjectively as having no interior impact. It just "washes over us" as if it were a leaf carried by the breeze. The traffic of the mind can be turbulent or relatively calm, but it matters not to the contemplative practitioner. We remain anchored in our practice of just "seeing" thoughts from a growing center of calm, as if it were the eye of a hurricane that remains calm in the center. This space is what the ancients of Eastern Christianity called "hesychia." In this interior spaciousness of hesychia, made possible through kenosis, our practice of attention allows us to open the door of Presence. In Presence there is just the Eternal Present, a state where God always lives. At times we may subjectively experience this same timelessness in our sitting, but that, again, is not a measure of our sitting practice. ***Our human practice of presence makes the Divine state of Presence accessible to us and we begin to live our life where God lives, in the present Eternal moment.***

The movement from attention to Presence is not a sudden one. It is one of seeing thoughts, images, and feelings, and "release and return" to Presence. This interior movement of "release and return" is a re-enactment of the parable of the prodigal child, repeated endlessly in the course of a lifetime. In Faith we return home and the door is always open; the arms of the Beloved are always wide. "Home," Interior Communion in the Heart, and Divine Presence, then becomes our new ongoing orientation. The deeper our commitment to this practice, the more the resistances may arise. The ego-mind fears and resists kenosis. Simultaneously our awareness grows of the powerfully constructed

mental habit patterns of a lifetime. We may have counter -attacks of thoughts that try to create doubt about our practice or to create discouragement. These encrusted habit patterns are the organization of the separate-self system. They die only slowly. They die, not from frontal attack, but from starvation. The more we release our will from them, the more they begin to crumble. The more they crumble, the more we see them for what they are. These are illusions of thought, which keep us in bondage to perceptions of separateness. They carry with them the rationalizations, justifications, and the self-protective defense mechanisms we thought we required to survive in this life.

The Prayer of the Heart is the way to liberation from enslavement to thoughts and compulsions, based on fear. ***When we are truly "Home" in Eternal Presence, in our inner communion in God in the Heart, then the fear driven, home-made mental formulations and habit patterns of a lifetime cease to have their hold on us. They eventually dissipate and dissolve. The energy we have given to maintain them is available to us, so that we may more fully and deeply give over our humanity to the power of God's Love, living and moving through us.*** In the next chapter we will speak more about this liberation process, what the tradition has taught, and how we can integrate this praxis in our own life dilemmas.

-Chapter 7-

Consecration of Mind and Emotion- Liberation from Thoughts and Compulsions



An important insight of the ancient Prayer of the Heart monastics, was their discovery, a vital one, that self-attachment to our thoughts impedes deeper growth in our freedom of communion in God. Our capacity to live out the Gospel fully is hampered because of our entrapment in habitual patterns of thinking and behaving based on separateness and self-absorption. The ancients concluded that we can find freedom in interior silence, the same freedom of which Paul spoke of in Romans (8:21), to fully live out our true inheritance of the freedom of children of God. In this freedom of dwelling in the Heart, in the Spirit of God, we are liberated to bring forth Agape, and to release from the bondage of habitual thoughts and compulsions. Control of thoughts, liberation from thoughts, in the desert tradition was understood as the doorway to the freedom of abiding in God's Presence in the Heart.

Evagrius Ponticus

A teacher of enormous wisdom and capacity to articulate the contemplative way is Evagrius Ponticus (4th c.). He lays out three elements of the contemplative spiritual life in the work *The Pratikos and Chapters on Prayer*: The first is "pratique" or how to let go of useless thoughts. The second is kataphatic reflection on the Creator in His Creation, the incarnational aspect of spiritual reflection. And third, is the imageless contemplation of God Himself, or pure prayer. This is the essential apophatic dimension of Prayer of the Heart. (Hatch, p.9-10)

Eight Categories of Thoughts

Amplifying on the statement of Jesus that sin or evil starts with our thoughts, Evagrius categorizes 8 types of thoughts: those of desire - gluttony, concupiscence, avarice, and those of aversion - sadness, anger, vainglory, and pride. (Hatch, p.10) The eighth is acedia, or listlessness, which is considered by some spiritual guides the most serious kind of thought of all, because it involves the temptation to give up the spiritual journey. This

description of the kinds of thoughts was an attempt, not to prescribe, but to describe what is a developmental process of liberation for serious followers of the Way of Jesus. Note that the inner work with these thought categories starts with the more instinctually based drives, and leads to conversion of those habitual patterns based on the inclinations and obsessions of egoic absorption.

Evagrius recognizes that the obstacles to the fullest awareness of God, of being at peace in God, begin with self-attachment to thoughts. These attachments pull us away from our own spiritual center, or Heart, where we experience our abiding and rootedness in God. By learning to not attach to thoughts, by not giving attention and will to thoughts, they lose their power over us. Over time we began to reach in degrees the state of "apatheia" (not to be confused with apathy) which is the state of calm or peace found in freedom from the passions and restlessness. (Funk, p. 25) Those who practice the Prayer of the Heart gain freedom by letting thoughts rise and fall without giving them the power of volition. This is an insight which is key to the understanding the way to peace and freedom.

For Evagrius this praxis is the doorway, and the only doorway to the full exercise of Faith, radical self-gift to God's Presence and Love. This same practice is also rooted in a great psychological and spiritual insight. Spiritual freedom from sin and entanglement in harmful emotional states arises from this interior freedom from thought and compulsion. And the more we cultivate awareness of thought, the more we can make choices about our thoughts. When we give volition, or choice, to thought, there are consequences for good or ill. When our choice is in utter harmony with the deepest intentionality of the Heart, we bring forth goodness. In our sitting practice we release from thoughts and abide in the Heart. In the midst of life we also observe the mind and abide in the Heart. But in activity in the middle of life we must choose. Choosing and acting on some thoughts leads us to peace and harmony in communion with God within. Acting on other thoughts leads us from peace and towards further disharmony and dissonance from our own Heart. As Prayer of the Heart practice deepens we taste the state of pure being in God which is below, above, and beyond thought. We learn to act in harmony with this unitive state of Inner Communion.

The third progression of this practice advocated by Evagrius is the contemplation of God, or pure prayer. This is the apophatic way of imageless prayer, which the first two practices prepare us for. It is ultimately the letting go of all self-attachment to thoughts in order to prepare oneself as a vessel to receive God's Presence and Self-Gift, which is Agape. "Now this apatheia has a child called agape." (Ponticus, p. 14) "Agape is the progeny of apatheia. Apatheia is the very flower of asceticism." (Ponticus, p.36) "Happy is the spirit that attains to perfect formlessness at the time of prayer. ... Happy is the spirit that attains to complete unconsciousness (detachment from) of all sensible experience at the time of prayer" - Evagrius Ponticus. (Ponticus, p. 75)

John Cassian

John Cassian in his accounts of Egyptian monasticism in "Conference Ten" details the use of a prayer formula as a device to focus the concentration in prayer and be free of involvement with thoughts. He describes how the desert monastics incorporated a word or phrase from scripture as their prayer word. This student of Evagrius, and desert monastic, John Cassian (4-5th c.), has written of three renunciations which are asked of us to make this journey into freedom in the Prayer of the Heart. Writing of this in her own book, *Thoughts Matter*, Margaret Funk describes these commitments: "First we must renounce our former way of life and move closer to our heart's desire, toward the interior life. Second, we must do the inner work(of asceticism) by renouncing our mindless thoughts. This renunciation is particularly difficult because we have little control over our thoughts. Third and finally, we must renounce our own images of God so that we can enter into contemplation of God as God." (Funk, p.21) This conversion of life is the choice of each person. Ongoing conversion is necessary to realign one's external life around a new interior orientation in which all of one's desires are focused on the one desire of the Heart, which is God. (See Chapter 9 for further elaboration of the three renunciations.)

Eastern Christian Monasticism

Following Cassian there were further developments in thought about prayer in the desert tradition. Perhaps the most important development from this period, which continues in the Eastern Orthodox tradition to this present day, was the development of the Jesus prayer as a potent and omnipresent form of the Prayer of the Heart and "remembrance of God." It was believed the power of the word, "Jesus," in itself had a powerful purifying and salvific effect. Indeed to the present day for followers of Christ, the prayer word, "Jesus", has a unifying effect on our "givenness" to the love of Christ, and gives grace-filled assistance in letting go of disturbing thoughts.

St. Isaiah the Solitary, a desert monastic of Palestine, proclaimed the practice of the remembrance of God as an awakening or uncovering of the Divine Presence that dwells within in the Heart. (Hatch, p.15) He asserted that attachment to thoughts is an obstacle to this full realization. This Eastern tradition of desert prayer is articulated well by John Climacus, a monk living near Sinai around 600 A.D. He advocated a prayer of one phrase, called a monologitos, a single word in which we anchor ourselves in an ongoing remembrance of and surrender to God, in the Prayer of the Heart. He added the dimension of harmonizing the prayer with the breathing. In his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* he gives the major dimensions of Eastern Orthodox contemplative practice. (Hatch, p.27) The practice goes as follows and one step leads to another:

(1) Stillness of thoughts (apothesis) and (2) the remembrance of Jesus united in breathing, leading to stillness (hesychia). The initial phase is the laying aside of distractions in the practice of the monologitos. The middle phase is the concentration on what is being said. And the conclusion is the "rapture in the Lord." The result of this practice is the conversion of all desire into the one desire, God. "I have known hesychasts whose flaming urge for God was limitless. They generated fire by fire, love by love, desire by desire." (John Climacus) (Hatch, p.27) The use of the Jesus prayer, in its short and longer

forms, as one form of this Prayer of the Heart undergoes further development to the very present in the Eastern tradition.

The Linking of Thought and Compulsion

Philotheus of Sinai, in his writings on Prayer of the Heart in the *Philokalia* (Kadloubovsky, p.338-339), beautifully articulates the psychology of thoughts, sin, and addictions. He describes the ability of the will and spirit to resist or let go of thought, and thereby find greater freedom. He explains the process of entrapment in thoughts as follows: (1) *impact* - the first stage when the thought or image is produced in the mind, (2) *coupling* - when the mind engages with volition the thought or image, and attachment rather than detachment results, (3) *merging together* - the volitional and active involvement or identification with the thought or image in choice, (4) *captivity* - the image or thought becomes activated in an active choice toward action with dependence or complete involvement in the thought or image in a way that is disharmonious with attunement to God. This process, while seemingly complex in explanation, is rather simple, often unconscious, and every day in its action.

Desire, Aversion, and Compulsion

One example might be the following: Joe Blokes, walks down the street on a warm day. He sees a young child with an ice cream cone. The thought of an ice cream cone makes a quick *impact*. The more he thinks of it, the thought of the ice cream mingles with volition and desire. This is *coupling*. He begins to intentionally dwell in his imagination on the desire for an ice cream cone. He connects the thought with all the other associations of memory with eating ice cream. The more he dwells on it, the greater is his attachment and desire. This is *merging together*. In the stage of *captivity* he is so attached, identified and personally invested in the idea of getting an ice cream cone, it moves from being a possibility to a "must." *The thought has moved from desire to compulsion*. Joe may then alter his destination so that he heads for the closest ice cream counter.

Another example can illustrate this linking of thought with aversion, or negative desire, and the compulsions that follow. Our same fellow, Joe Blokes, is walking down the street. He passes by a young man who appears to be a member of another ethnic group. He has a thought of fear connected with the man and his image and physical characteristics. This is *impact*. The more he considers it, the thought of the man mingles with thoughts and feelings of aversion and dislike. This is *coupling*. He begins to bring to mind many of the preconceptions and prejudices about persons of that ethnic group. This is *merging together*. Finally he succumbs to angry and discriminatory thoughts about the man and resolves he will not trust or be around such people. This is *captivity*.

In both of these instances Joe Blokes has lost his capacity to be in the present, with the fullest intention of the Heart. He is captive of the bondage of his thoughts, their past associations, and future expectations, and the compulsion to act on either desire or aversion.

These insights are consistent with cognitive/affective and cognitive/behavioral theories of the present day. The Prayer of the Heart teachers through time have asserted that an

interior practice of detachment from thought, letting go of thinking, and grounding in interior silence and Presence will allow the person to be truly free of this captivity to thought and compulsion. In the example above we can see that the way to intervene in this process to prevent the captivity of compulsion is to "witness" the arising of the thought before it merges with desire and before we give our volition or will. In "seeing" we can therefore release or detach from the thoughts and desires before they gain momentum and take us somewhere we don't wish to go, somewhere that is out of harmony with our heart and our interior practice of Inner Communion with God.

Ancient Teaching- Present Day Teaching

This essential teaching from the ancients, validated through the centuries, has been brought to us in our present age. The teaching asserts there is a simple but often difficult path of liberation from the addictive patterns of our own habitual patterns of mind. We can follow a disciplined path which will bring us to deepest peace, joy, and full transformation in God, by praying in silence and stillness in the very center of our own being, in Inner Communion of the Heart. We can cultivate this process with a simple grounding in a prayer word or phrase, which is our inner movement of presence and self-giving love to God. This simple praxis becomes the means of transformation from entrapment in the activity and addictions of the mind, towards an ever-present abiding in the essence of the Heart. Over time our intention of Agape, to give ourselves in all things to the Love of God, is liberated through the Prayer of the Heart. And this single life of communion in the Heart pervades all of prayer, all of our life, leading to complete abandonment to God. In the end the fruits of this transformation in God lead us to ever increasing capacity to fulfill and live out in, our own human life, the great commandment of Love which Jesus taught as the core of His Gospel, to love God with all our Heart.

Silent Prayer of the Heart Practice and Thoughts

This simple practice of the inner life of communion with God is one of continual witness and release from the mind and abiding in the Heart. This is the process of divinization, by which we give over our life and our humanity to the I AM at the center of our being, in the Heart. Over time we can be freed from orienting our life around the construct of separateness of the ego-mind. The habitual mental formations that hold the separate-self system together dissolve and die from lack of feeding. As the glue of the fears and obsessions of separateness erodes and disappears, the original fears and illusions that constructed them in our lifetime, also fade and disappear. In their fading, there may be releases of memory, emotion, and attachment, which are simply allowed to arise and fade.

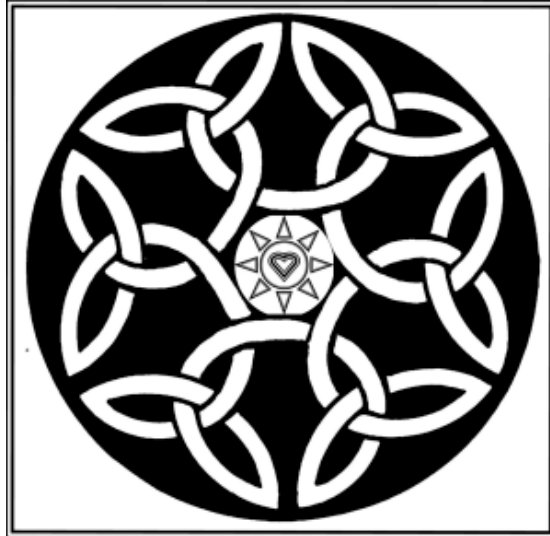
When we continually offer, give over all that arises in our consciousness, to the Love and Will of God, then the glue of separateness weakens and gives way to the Unitive Love of God. ***The open hands which continually empty and offer - thoughts, emotion, images, energies - they are the same hands which are empty to receive and to express the Love of God.*** We shall explore further in our next two chapters how this praxis leads to liberation from habitual patterns in the midst of activity and daily life in Ceaseless Prayer.

Becoming Fire-**When asked about what a monk should do after a person was cleansed of thoughts Abba Joseph said, holding up his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire, "Why not be changed totally into fire?" (Philokalila)**

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Theme III- Consecration of Daily Life

-Chapter 8-



Consecration of Every Moment- Ceaseless Prayer- Prayer of the Heart in Activity of Daily Life

“ Watch and pray, lest you fall into temptation.” (Matt. 26:41)
“Pray without ceasing.” (I Thessalonians 5:17)

" The Eucharist is a celebration of the experience of God's life within us. In Christian theology God is Giver. Therefore God can be called Father, Mother, Life-Giver. Giver of all Things. Everything that comes to us is a gift from the Ultimate Giver, whom the Bible calls God. The ultimate gift is the Son, our true, God-given self. God is manifest now; the unmanifest is made manifest. The Word comes out of silence, and Son gives himself back to the Father in thanksgiving. But the spirit of thanksgiving is God's own Spirit, the Holy Spirit. ...Prayer itself is God's life within us, God's great dance. When we allow that Life to come to ever greater fullness, we become more and more alive and we begin to live the life of prayer. It is no longer prayer within one's life, but a life that is itself prayer." - David Steindl-Rast - *Speaking of Silence* (p.29)

Spiritual Life is Relational Life in the Trinity.

In this selection from Brother David Steindl-Rast we see an understanding frequently expressed by those on the way of the Prayer of the Heart. Prayer is participation in the very Life of God, relational life in the Trinity. The nature of God, the Trinity, can be described as relational Love, which asks nothing. Our completion as human and spiritual beings is to come to a full participation in this self-giving, self-emptying, unitive Love, through the capacities of our own heart, or spirit, which are presence and self-giving love.

The cross in the circle of Unitive Love is an expression of our participation in Trinitarian Life. In our teaching on the formal sitting practice of Prayer of the Heart in silence we emphasized the praxis of the vertical axis of Inner Communion with God in solitude, - the first part of the Great Commandment of Jesus, as loving God with all your heart. The horizontal axis of the relationship is equally important in the actualization of communion in God. " You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mark 12:29) This is so because all of Creation is one Self in God. When we love Creation and the beings of Creation we are loving the one Self in which we are one in God. This is participation in the horizontal axis of the relational Life of God in activity and Creation.

Emmanuel- "God With Us"

The Christian Revelation of Jesus as Emmanuel is that God is with us and we may share in this intimate Life of the Trinity in a conscious and intentional way in this life and in the fullness of the next life. Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection is a disclosure and opening to full participation in the intimate Trinitarian Life.

St. Paul- "God is All in all."

Paul spoke of this loving relationship with all creation in First Corinthians (15:28) where he describes the state of being of the human spirit and consciousness "that God may be God in All." Paul expresses here an active participation in the relational Life of God in all activity, in all Creation.

The Russian writer Dostoyevski expresses this relational life of Love exquisitely in the following quote from *The Brothers Karamazov*:

" Love all of God's creation,
the whole and every grain of sand of it.
Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.
Love the animals, love the plants, love everything.
If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things.
Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day.
And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all embracing love."

Ceaseless Prayer and The Prayer of the Heart Tradition

Paul taught that the practice of prayer reaches its completion in a "state" of ceaseless prayer.

(I Thess.5: 17) The experience of those who have gone before in the Christian mystic tradition is that the life of inner prayer is not separate from life. In the Prayer of the Heart we harmonize our own individual human life with Divine Life. This is the reality to which Jesus pointed when he invited us to enter and abide in the Kingdom of God. We are given an understanding of prayer whose essence is not words, but a state of communion that pervades all of our humanity, and all of our human life. In this state all of our life becomes prayer.

For a time a great debate carried on regarding the words of Paul in the early desert tradition. An ascetic movement in Syria and the Middle East, called the Messalians,

taught and practiced the view that "ceaseless prayer" meant literally speaking prayers. This form of prayer was seen as outward verbal expression that should go on in Christian communities twenty-four hours a day. Hence their communities were made up of "spiritual elites" whose sole activity was the recitation of verbal prayers in shifts, even at night. Their material needs were supported by "ordinary" believers. (Ware, p.76)

A certain Abba Lucius challenged this notion of prayer and said, "I shall show you how I work with my hands and at the same time pray without ceasing... So I continue all the day working and praying.... and in this way I earn more or less sixteen pence; and out of them I leave two at the door and I spend the rest on food. Whoever finds those two pennies prays for me... and thus by the grace of God there is fulfilled in me the command, 'Pray without Ceasing.' " (Ware, p.79) Here we have in Abba Lucius an example of prayer both as presence and loving service. In Lucius we also see the use of short prayer words or phrases as a means of anchoring in attention and intention. John Cassian in his writings went on to advocate a prayer phrase that is repeated inwardly throughout the day as an anchor of presence and love in God.

In Cassian and others we see that the repetition of prayer word or phrase is carried habitually in all of active life and stillness. In this way the practitioner seeks to carry his prayer with him throughout his daily tasks, dwelling in two realms at once, the outer and inner. The prayer then carries on two kinds of activity, visible work- manual or intellectual, and inner work, or interior communion in God as a pivot point for all of outward activity. The teachings of many other teachers in the desert tradition on Ceaseless prayer are documented in previous chapters.

In Abba Macarius we have a description of this praxis as a "remembrance of God." He says, "Christians ought at all times to preserve the remembrance of God, in order that they may also show love to the Lord, not only when they go into the place of prayer, but that also when they are walking, talking, or eating, they may preserve the remembrance of God and a sense of love and yearning towards him." (Ware, p. 81) This insight has been carried on in more recent times in the West by such teachers as Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (17th c.), Jeanne Guyon (17th c) and the Quaker mystic, Thomas Kelly (20th c).

The ancients then began to understand inner prayer, not so much as explicit activity, but as an implicit state to which one could intentionally return. This interior movement was experienced as ongoing over time. St. Basil the Great in his Homily on the Martyr Julitta says: "This is how you pray continually- not by offering prayer in words -but by joining yourself to God through your whole way of life, so that your life becomes one continuous and uninterrupted prayer." (Ware, p.82) This understanding became in Eastern Christianity the basis for the teaching on the Prayer of the Heart as ceaseless prayer, and the divisions of prayer into the prayer of the mind, the lips, and the prayer of the Heart. In the words of Bishop Kallistos Ware " True Prayer of the Heart is no longer just something that we recite but it is a part of ourselves, just as the drawing of breath, or the beating of the heart is part of ourselves." (Ware, p.83) It grows inwardly and draws us ever deeper into the Heart and the abiding place of God's Spirit. Bishop Ware states that

this is the rightful inheritance of all children of God who are willing, "Any of us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, can come to do the same. The Kingdom of God is within each of us. To pray is quite simply, to enter into this inner Kingdom of God of our Heart, and there to stand before God, conscious of His Indwelling Presence; to 'pray without ceasing' is to do this constantly. The door is before us and the key is in our hands." (Ware, p.86)

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection- "Practice of the Presence"

"My set times of prayer are exactly like the rest of the day to me. They are but a continuation of the same exercise of being in God's Presence." Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection- *Letters*- (17th c)

Brother Lawrence was a simple monk in a French Carmelite monastery. In his day there was a class distinction between laboring monks and the choir monks who came from upper classes. He made the assertion that he could not aspire to the higher forms of prayer but as a cook's helper in the kitchen he could give of himself to each activity totally, in his presence to it, and his love for God in all tasks. Thus chopping the onions, or stirring the soup, or washing the pots and pans, became for him "the practice of the Presence of God."

- The secret of Brother Lawrence's wisdom is this simplicity -To do all we do in every day life being utterly given to the love of God. This is the essence of our own life in prayer.

In the writings of Jeanne Guyon (imprisoned for her teachings in the Bastille in France) we find someone who gives a profound and articulate teaching in the practice of "Inner Prayer" going on ceaselessly in the middle of all activity. She states in her book *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ*, "A continuous inner act of abiding begins to take place within you. What do I mean by this continuous inner abiding? To be continuously turned deep inside simply means that, having turned within to God- by a direct act- you have remained in His Presence. You already abide with Him in the chambers of your spirit. The only time you need to make a point of turning again is when your abiding is interrupted for some reason." (Guyon. p. 110)

The modern Quaker mystic, Thomas Kelly, (1893-1941) teaches us, "Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, to which we may continuously return. ...An inner secret turning to God can be made fairly steady after weeks and months and years of practice and lapses and failure and returns. ...At first the practice of inward prayer is a process of alternation-of attention between outer things and the Inner Light. Preoccupation with either brings the loss of the other. ***Yet what is sought is not alternation, but simultaneity, worship undergirding every moment, living prayer, the continuous current and background off all moments of life.***" ("The Light Within"-*Testament of Devotion*) (Kelly, p.13)

Each of these God seekers in the tradition of Prayer of the Heart, through grace and experience, has penetrated a simple wisdom teaching of Jesus. This wisdom is that we are each a child of God, and we can realize and live our relational life of oneness with God, both in silence and stillness, and in the consecration of each moment of life. We

actualize this communion through and with our humanity, and in service to all incarnate Creation.

Every Moment Practice- Presence and Self-Giving Love

The Practice of Ceaseless Prayer is not a technique that suddenly makes everything clearer and more peaceful. It is a life long movement toward living life from the Center, the Heart, rather than the surface of ordinary consciousness, which is often driven by unconscious motivations.

Presence/Awareness

In the silent, sitting practice of Prayer of the Heart we open in receptivity and give ourselves in love to God in the very rhythm of our breathing. We do this with our prayer word and breath, releasing from involvement with thoughts and commentaries in the mind. This willingness to release and return to presence and self-offering to God is the essence of the practice, the inward turning, toward Inner Communion. We experience and actualize this Inner Communion also in the Practice of Ceaseless Prayer in daily life. Within each moment, within each activity, we open to presence to all we are doing, receptively present to each act, observing what we do comes from a grounding of motivation, and returning to the deeper motivation of agape in all we do. ***John of the Cross stated the simplicity of prayer: It is "Loving Presence to God." This same Loving Presence to God in all that is before us is equally true in the midst of activity.***

Motivations

In the human condition our motivations are often fear based. They are driven by the compulsions of the ego to enhance and protect our misdirected drives for control, affection, and security. Through the practice of vigilant presence we continually open to see our hidden motivations of the mind, honestly, as they are, however twisted and misdirected. Through vigilant presence we become aware of the inner disharmony between the motivations of the mind and the deeper intention of the Heart. Through the continual opening to presence, we accept the pain of this disharmony and learn from it, returning to agape as our deepest motivation.

Offering Ourselves in Love- Our Deepest Intention of the Heart

The revelation of Christ is that God's motivation in all things is love. Our deepest longing and intention in the Heart is the same. Thus we give ourselves to a continual return to a singular desire to love- love God, love creation, and love our neighbor in all things. This is the practice of Ceaseless Prayer. This is much more than a mental discipline; this is a continual remembrance of God, and a return to communion in God in all things. We release from everything that is not of the love of God, including the thoughts, defensive reactions, fear driven motivations, and compulsions which impede the flow of God's Life through our own life. Just as we give ourselves in love to God in our sitting practice, that we do also in the middle of activity. It is not an emotion, but an every-moment willingness to give ourselves, to consecrate ourselves, in love to God in all activities, in the same simplicity of Brother Lawrence. ***This deepening act of willingness to abide in God's Presence and to be given in love to God is the essence of ceaseless prayer.***

Everyday Life Lived from the Heart- the Center of Our Being

“In Scetis, a brother went to see Abba Moses and begged him for a word. And the old man said: ‘Go sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.’ Philokalia

Our cell is both the Kingdom of the Heart within, and ordinary life. To enter Loving Presence, to be present in love in all we do, is the essence of Life lived from the Heart. In this practice we cultivate awareness and self-surrender, seeing life with the “single eye” and loving with the “single heart.” When we find ourselves caught up in fear driven illusions with the beliefs and thoughts of the mind which drive them, we *simply return to being present to the work and activity and relationships before us, and the desire to do all for the love of God and one another. That is it; that is all of it.*

Ceaseless Prayer- Vigilant Practice

Ceaseless prayer is transforming, yet it is a life long inward turning of the will towards the Love of God, and the turning of awareness, toward ceaseless, vigilant presence. This developmental practice requires the effort of paying attention, of being vigilant to our own reactions and thought patterns, and gently continually faithfully choosing to respond from a deeper place within us, to love and to serve in all things. The daily silent, sitting practice of Prayer of the Heart helps to establish us in this deeper place of inner communion, so that we can continually return to it in daily life, and find our home in it each moment of life. Our prayer word can be an anchor for us to faithfully return to in the middle of life, to reconnect to the sanctuary of the heart, to what the Quaker mystic Thomas Kelly called the “Inner Sanctuary.”

Faithfulness- The Nature of Discipline

We will often find our attention wandering. Therefore we gently return in all activity, continually, to the arms of the Beloved who welcomes the wandering prodigal child back home. This ceaseless willingness to return home, no matter what, no matter how badly we've "blown it," how far we have been misdirected, how far we've wandered, is the basic practice, and life-long movement. The return to ceaseless prayer is facilitated if we find a few places in the day of external quiet when we can re-establish our interior stillness and an inward turning to interior communion.

Ceaseless Consecration

If we find a pause in the course of our day to be still and recommit ourselves to consecration of intention, we may more readily and firmly return to our practice. A restatement of our prayer of consecration may include an expression as this: " O God, take my life and make it Yours." The habitual anchoring in our inner consecration to ceaseless prayer may be also strengthened by the ongoing interior repetition of our prayer word and breath. This is the practice of the ancients of a “remembrance of God,” an awakening moment to moment from forgetfulness to faithfulness and consecration in our inner communion with God in the middle of life. Contemplation takes place therefore in sitting, eating, working, and in our relating with loved ones and friends.

Ceaseless Prayer- Ceaseless Inward Bowing, Ceaseless Inward Offering

In this practice of consecration of every moment, we bow in adoration: we bow in our consecration to God's love; we bow in reverence for the essence of Life within and around us; we bow in self-surrender to what is greater than our own ego mind. We bow also in releasing from the bondage of ego- mind, freed for the consecration and communion of the unitive love. ***We give ourselves to endless offering with open hands.*** We offer our humanity, our thoughts, our emotions, our effort. Following Jesus we offer our wholly consecrated self in each moment and in our last breath to the Abba: "Into your hands, Father, I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Thomas Kelly describes this experience and practice of ceaseless prayer exquisitely in the "Light Within," from his *Testament of Devotion*:

"We pray, and yet it is not we who pray, but a Greater who prays in us. Something of our punctiform selfhood is weakened, but never lost. All we can say is, Prayer is taking place, and I am given to be in the orbit. In holy hush we bow in Eternity, and know the Divine Concern tenderly enwrapping us and all things within His persuading love. He works and prays and seeks His own through us, in exquisite, energizing life."(Kelly, p.18)

Work Practice

Work is the bringing into activity of the interior stillness (hesychia) we have cultivated in our sitting practice. Work can be the full expression of our interior life of Inner Communion with God into activity. Through work we participate in the creative life of God in the world and we serve God in our human community and all Creation in love. Work, and all activity, is the place where the fullest dimension of our contemplation is actualized incarnationally. Our interior life meets all conditions of life in the world in this practice of ceaseless prayer. In work we bring our practice of presence (awareness/seeing) and willingness (loving-kindness) to everything we do. In work the inner and the outer life of relational communion can become one, vertical and horizontal relationship intersect in the service of love.

Praxis

1. Consecration of Presence in activity- Bring all of our attention to the task before us. Our prayer word can be an anchor to bring us back to the present moment. Let us not to do more than one task at a time. When we find our attention wandering, being preoccupied in thoughts, we just bring ourselves gently back to the awareness of what is before us. In the beginning we bring this practice to bear on those manual household activities that we may find "boring" or repetitive. Later we may find it increasingly possible with more complex activities, including human interactions.

2. Consecration of Willingness to Love -Return to the interior love of God, the practice of the Great Commandment of "loving God with all our being" in all things. With vigilant practice of awareness we are willing to "see" our hidden motivations. We release from all motivations except to love God and God's Creation with all of our being in the task in which we are occupied. We are wholehearted in giving ourselves to what

we do. We don't make Love happen; through willingness we stretch to allow Love to be expressed in ourselves. Willingness is the primary quality in this praxis.

3. Release and Return to Our Deepest Intention- Whenever we find ourselves over-identified or captivated with thoughts, motivations, and the roles we take on in life, we let go. We give them over to God in ceaseless offering to God in all we do. It is a continual process of release and return, a process of growing interior freedom to give ourselves over wholeheartedly to what is essential within us. Being grounded thus in the Heart we come to experientially know ourselves and God more deeply at the center of our being, and live life from that base of commitment. ***We unite ourselves utterly with the Life and Will of God, which is Love.*** This is the practice and realization of the Great commandment. This is consecrated life in God. In this way God's Life becomes indistinguishable from our own. Again Thomas Kelly the 20th Century Quaker mystic states this beautifully:

“Here the autonomy of the
inner life becomes complete and we are joyfully prayed through, by a Seeking Life that
flows through us into the world..” (Kelly, p. 18)

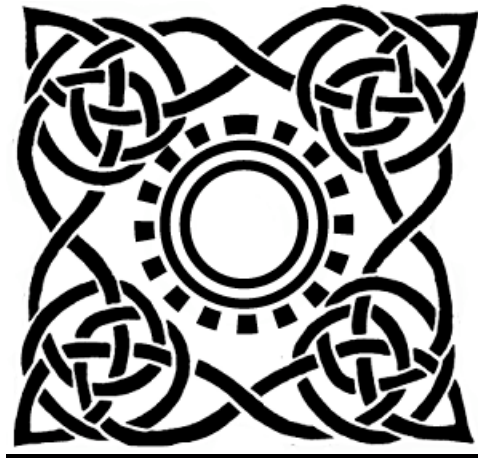
Prayer-

O Beloved be with us as we remember and live the following holy
wisdom: Leading the openhanded life,
the hand that releases is ready to receive the
gift of the next moment and each gift is impermanent.
The human journey is such an interesting thing..
Our being is rooted in the Absolute and Eternal.
. Our doing is manifested in the temporal and phenomenal world of impermanence.
To bring them together to express the Essential and Holy
in the relative,
in the moment to moment circumstances we meet.
This is our work in this life, to abide in Your Kingdom, fully alive in You,
loving and serving Your Creation in the world. Amen

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-Chapter 9-

Consecration of Mind in Daily Life- Opening to the Mind of Christ



“ One of the fathers said: just as it is impossible to see your face in troubled water, so also the soul, unless it is clear of alien thoughts, is not able to pray to God contemplation” -
Philokalia

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.”
(1 Phil 2:5)

The Practice of Kenosis- Prayer of the Heart and Thoughts- We have presented in previous chapters that the teaching Prayer of the Heart involves a practice of "observing the mind and abiding in the heart." We have focused on this aspect of practice in our sitting silent practice. This process and interior movement of emptying and opening to Presence and Agape must grow and expand into all of active life if we are to become fully accessible to God's Love and grace. Prayer of the Heart is not apart from life. An essential aspect of ceaseless prayer is our capacity to release from identification with thoughts and their associated emotional content and continually anchor and abide in the Heart. In so doing we abide in the deeper Intentionality of the Heart which is agape, the Life of God within us. *The practice of emptying, or kenosis, is the process by which the "same mind" of Christ Jesus becomes our own.* This is a mind of receptive Presence, with an utter willingness to be given to God in all things in love. This kenosis of release and self-surrender must deepen so that our communion with God can grow. This inner work of prayer takes an ongoing effort on our part to "make straight the way" of the Lord; that is, to make our own life and humanity utterly accessible to God's Life and grace, by releasing from every attachment and misdirection that impedes. *Kenosis is the way in which our human mind becomes consecrated and infused with the consciousness of Christ.*

Vigilant Awareness of thoughts -For those on the spiritual journey, ethical training and the practice of vigilant awareness of monitoring behavior and the thought motivations behind them are at the core of transformational inner work in every day life. In this practice we discover the truth which Jesus proclaimed in the Gospel, that the commission of sin, the inner decision to do harmful acts and the motivations behind them, hidden, misguided, and twisted, starts with thought. Commission of sin gains momentum with volition, our intention, to give life and will to the thought. We may also discover that merely having the thoughts, in itself, is not evil or bad. Rather it is the act of choice, or giving our volition to thoughts, that leads to evil or harmful consequences. Because harmful thoughts are based on our entrenched illusory consciousness of separateness rather than communion, they are the source of suffering.

If we are to become truly “good” as God is good (or more appropriately to let God's goodness manifest through our humanity), we must learn to become aware of thoughts, to see them as only thoughts, and release our attachment to them. In doing this we learn to give our life and will to only those thoughts that manifest the intention of the Heart, and communion in God. The more traditional way of expressing this in the Christian tradition is to “surrender to God's will and lay down (ego) self-will.” *As this self-giving /self-surrender progresses, we actually uncover the stunning reality that our deepest will or Intentionality is God's Intentionality. What we truly desire deep in the Heart, to be given in love, is the same desire as God's desire? They both proceed from the Source. Everything else is misdirection or distortion based on illusion.*

What the desert monks discovered, is something that modern psychotherapy has also discovered, (only without the spiritual framework) that awareness/observation of thoughts may well lead to a process of change. The direction of this change is beyond self-absorption, to clear the obstacles that are in the way of unitive relationship with God and one another. After all, is it not in the pull and compulsion of hidden thoughts in our unconscious mind, day to day, which leads to the harm and obstruction of love in everyday life and relationships? What the desert mothers and fathers discovered (and what those on the Way of the Prayer of the Heart discover, to the present day) is that the *full praxis of Prayer of the Heart is what purifies, and transforms this relationship with the mind, so that it is at the service of the Heart, the spiritual center. In this redemptive state the interior harmony of the human being is restored, and all of our faculties are aligned around the Life of God rising up within us, as "Living Water." This Living Water suffuses all of our humanity -including and especially, our human mind and consciousness - and flows out into our daily life.*

Conversion of Life and Transformation- In our previous presentation on liberation from thoughts and compulsions we spoke of the teachings of Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, Philotheus of Sinai, and others in the desert tradition. A student of Evagrius and desert monk of the fifth century, John Cassian has written of three renunciations that are asked of us to make this journey into freedom in the Prayer of the Heart. The spiritual journey is a life-long harmonization of our humanity around the Life of God within us. Therefore there are important choices and commitments which we must make in this realignment. There must be no conflict between the inner and the outer life, as our inner

communion with God deepens. The life we lead must fully express this communion. For this is the goal of the spiritual journey. This conversion of life happens when all human desires are gathered and brought home to find their completion and fulfillment in the one desire of the Heart, which is God. When this happens, the faculties of the mind, body, and psyche, are freed to fulfill their purpose in life, to incarnate and manifest the fullness of God's Love and Life in the world. To make this real, there are some things in life to which we must say "no" and some to which we must give a resounding "yes." This process of alignment can be expressed in the following inner commitments, which were introduced earlier in Chapter 7 as the three renunciations taught by John Cassian.

The First Commitment is the redirecting of one's external life to be in alignment with the Heart's desire. This does not allow for divided lives, or conflicted directions. Being single and undivided in the choice of life, the choice of calling, is essential in this renunciation.

The Second Commitment is the redirecting of our interior life, that all of our thoughts and intentions be completely aligned with the One Intention, which is God's Intention of Agape. This is what leads to the complete abandonment of self in silence, to a deep listening to the voice of the Beloved in ceaseless prayer.

The Third Commitment occurs when, having aligned the external and internal life with union with God, we then renounce our attachment to even the thoughts and symbols of God. (Although they may have sustained us up to this point.) We do this in order to directly experience the unmediated Reality of God's own Life within us. (This does not mean we have to rid ourselves of religious symbols, rather it means we give up our attachment to them as mediators of the actual experience of God.) This third commitment is the fruit of many years of practice and transformation. It takes us into a darkness where we know not, where the props of our religious life are knocked out from under us, in order that we may open completely to the freedom of inner communion in God unmediated by external supports, symbols, and structures.

Interior Freedom to Choose Thoughts- Thoughts arise and go on. Thoughts go on, if we do not give our volition to them. This is a very important statement. When we give our will to thoughts, they become desires. Desires that are given volition or choice, become "passions" or obsessions. When we give our will to good thoughts they become virtues in us. When we give our will to bad thoughts, they become bad passions and habits of action, or compulsions, within us, which sometimes become harmful sins. The acting out of these bad passions move us into active harmful behaviors. Attaching or clinging to thoughts creates either desire or aversion. The desires or aversions (negative desire) create motivations, motivations which are given volition, create habitual passions, which lead to the willful acting out of behaviors, reinforcing a repeating cycle of harmful behavior. The glue that holds these habitual patterns together is that of a "separate -self" consciousness, acting on its perceived, illusory isolated self-interest.

Conversion of the sensory/ and ego/pride dimensions of our humanity -The theory about thoughts suggests there is a systematic order in which we bring about conversion of

our inner life of mind and will, starting with the sensory and instinctual, moving to the transformation of ego and pride. Evagrius Ponticus categorized these eight kinds of thoughts in this kind of hierarchy. Yet all our spiritual battles are fought not in an orderly manner, but in the unfolding inner and outer journey of life. The struggle, the dynamic of the inner and outer journey then ** is** the path. The content of this struggle is the raw material of our conversion and transformation.

Practice with Thoughts in the Middle of Life- The Inner Work of Awareness and Surrender-

In the practice of Prayer of the Heart with thoughts we are continually releasing our will from the motivations of the ego-mind and its creations. And we give our selves to the deeper motivation of the love of God in all things. In this way we are always bringing our humanity, our human consciousness in harmony with God. This kenosis, opening to God with self-relinquishment, in utter self-surrender, is the way in which the Mind of Christ becomes our own.

1. **The first movement**-As thoughts arise in daily life, through vigilant prayerful presence/awareness we first observe and detach from the thought and its hidden motivation. *In the beginning we may first become aware of a subtle dissonance or disturbance between the hidden motivation of the mind and a deeper intention of the heart to loving kindness. This inner disturbance is a sign to be vigilant and look for the arising of this thought and to release from it sooner in the process before it gains momentum.* The sooner we can learn to "not go there", as the conventional saying goes, the sooner the thought loses momentum and the power over our will. The train of thought then loses the power to lead us somewhere we truly don't want to go. As time goes on, and as we have learned from the painful consequences of such lines of thinking, we are able to release and liberate ourselves earlier on in the chain of thought, feeling, and behavior, until the habitual thought pattern seems to lose its hold on us altogether.

2. **The second movement** is giving over all of our humanity- thought, perception, and emotion- in love and trust to God. We do this within the situation as best we can. The deeper intention of our heart is to unite ourselves to the Love and Life of God in every activity of daily life. We do not have to shoulder the burdens of harmful thoughts, emotions, reactions, and life situations that seem to provoke them. We can give them over in entirety as offering to the love and healing of God. This is a true exercise of Faith.

3. **The third movement** is to redirect our willingness to be present in loving intention to the conditions of life, to redirect our will to creating a new thought which is in harmony with our deepest intention to love in the situation we find ourselves. This process may happen in a split second or over a period of days or weeks, through inner prayerful discernment. The condition of inner quiet, or hesychia, is necessary to this interior communion and listening. There may be times when we must be willing to take a pause or time out so that obsession and compulsion may quiet and have less influence over us.

The Grace of Ongoing Contrition and Conversion- When we have made a mistake, or been captive of a harmful thought, and possibly even acted on it, we should not spend time in self condemnation. That only reinforces our illusions and knots of separateness,

and the ideas of "building up a good self" vs. "condemning or punishing a bad self." Rather, we bow inwardly in sorrow and with gratitude that God has shown us the way out of harm. We return to our practice of inner communion, holding on to no condemnation of self or other, opening to, and expressing contrition in the moment. Contrition and conversion are the way to freedom in this transformative life. Forgiveness is the gift of freedom to receive each moment with gratitude, hanging on to nothing. With gratitude we receive Divine Life rising up each new moment anew within us.

Remember this: We don't have control over which thoughts arise in our minds. And we shouldn't judge or condemn ourselves for them. We do have a choice whether to "go there" or not. We have a choice whether to attach and cling to the thought as "me" and give our will and power of choice to it. We do also have a choice to release from the thought and abide in the heart, to observe the mind, and to give our will and life to the deeper Life of God within us, moment to moment, in the middle of life and relationships. The Heart then becomes the pivot point, from which we do the dance of God's Love.

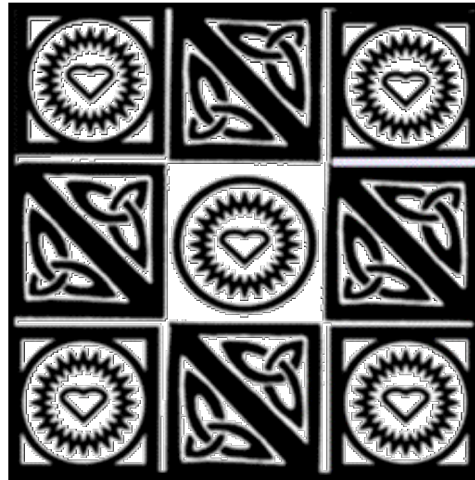
Receiving the Mind of Christ

The knot of separateness of the ego-mind unravels in our acts of love and willingness in daily life. We deprive of food and fuel the habitual mental formations that are the prison bars of the ego-self. These mental formations, which define us as separate from God and the world, wither and die in time with our practice. And our capacity to be accessible as a vehicle for the flow of God's outpouring Love into us and into the world grows exponentially. Transformation can only happen when we allow the Unitive Love of God to melt the glue of separateness and open us to our true state as child of God. Child of God is our true nature. We are innately a child of God who is one with God and God in Creation.

*****The melting of this glue, the unraveling of this knot of ego-mind, is the most astounding and liberating experience of a human lifetime. This melting happens in the fire of Consecration, as we continually empty and offer with open hands all of our humanity, even our most damaged, distorted, and twisted thoughts and emotions to the healing Unitive Love of God. In this actualization of kenosis, as we deepen our abiding in the Heart of Christ, our own human mind becomes opened, infused, and one in the Mind of Christ. *****

Theme IV- Consecrated Movements of Transformation

-Chapter10-



Consecration of Relationships- the Praxis of Loving

"Love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

" 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."
(Mark 12:29)

Christian spirituality- In the wisdom teachings of Jesus he affirms that the life of the spirit is Relational Life in both the horizontal and vertical dimension, and that the essence of this Life is self-giving Love. We are wrongly accustomed to thinking only of the vertical relationship of communion with God alone as the singular focus of the spiritual life. In the Gospel story cited above we know Jesus was asked, ' What is most important thing in the spiritual life?' In his response he cited this passage from the Torah, and affirmed that this life of Relational Love is not only the most important thing, it is the whole of the spiritual life. He puts the two dimensions together and inseparable, since the One Self in which we find unity with our neighbor, or the whole of Creation, is God. We love our neighbor as our self, because we exist in the One Self, which is God. To Love God with all our being must include, of necessity, loving all of God in Creation. The vertical and the horizontal relationship are inseparable. The praxis of Prayer of the Heart therefore must embrace the entirety of our human life and relationships. Nothing is excluded.

Human Life - Human life and development in the life cycle can be seen as a movement from self-absorption to self-transcendence. We can experience the maturation of our life development as a movement from self-seeking to self-giving love. Our capacity to love

is transformed from narcissism to what Christians call Agape, or what the Buddhists call Metta', or loving kindness. The Christian writer, M. Scott Peck, asserts that the whole purpose of the human journey is to be a training ground for love. ***This is the purpose of living, for which all humans are loved into existence- to share, to participate in, and to bestow Divine Love on all beings. To bring forth Agape in our own human life is therefore the central purpose of the Way of the Heart.*** This transformative process will happen, not outside of, but through our life circumstances, through our relationships with our loved ones, our friends, all of humanity we encounter, and all beings of Creation with whom we share life. This is the horizontal transmission of God's own Life and Self. This is relational life in the Communion of the Beloved.

Prayer of the Heart in the Vertical Relationship-

We have an understanding of the practice of Prayer of the Heart as listening, anchoring and abiding, intentionally centering one's own human life and consciousness on the Kingdom of God within in the Heart. We do this in our formal times of silence and solitude in the inner chamber of the Heart. Jesus himself "drew apart" often to commune in silence and aloneness with the Abba of his Heart. In this drawing apart we re-establish our ongoing experience and intentionality of inner communion with God. We cultivate a reservoir of interior silence where we can listen and attune ourselves to God's Life within us in a way that extends into daily life and relationships. There in daily life we equally deepen our capacity to be present to God, as God is Presence to us, we open to give ourselves more completely in love as God, who is Love, gives Himself to us. A complete practice must bring both of these capacities to fullness not only in stillness and silence, but also in the middle of human life. It is not enough to encounter God on the mountaintop alone. We must express and incarnate this state of communion with God in our human relationships and all of active life.

Prayer of the Heart in the Horizontal Relationship-

Prayer of the Heart practice is not limited to set aside times of formal sitting. To live the fullness of the "Shema" of the teaching of Jesus we must devote ourselves to "ceaseless prayer." Therefore to bring the Prayer of the Heart practice to all the conditions of life is an ongoing turning towards attunement and harmonization of our humanity to Divine Life. This is a process of Christification of our humanity so that all of our human life, motivations, and behavior is infused and centered in the Christlife. In this interior transformation the center of the self becomes the I AM of God rather than the little "I" of the human ego. Our human relationships are not therefore impediments or obstacles to deeper relationship in God, but they are the means of expressing the Life of God within us, and learning to give ourselves more fully, to be fully "given," fully "offered," in our response to God's Self-offering. Our relationships are the means of our inner redemptive work in God. Through our relationships we "incarnate" and bring Divine Love to human expression.

Attachments and the Pain of Loving-

Human relationships are characterized by forming bonds or attachments, which must inevitably be released. In the beginning of nearly every human relationship there is a self-seeking motivation. We experience this powerfully in our adult lives, in our familial life

with our spouses and children. In personal friendships outside the family we may experience a parallel development.

Attachments are not bad. They are the means by which we enter into love and are willing to allow ourselves be transformed so that God's Loving is expressed in our own loving. Through our attachment we learn to release slowly over time from self-absorbed motivations and cultivate tender concern and love for the well being of that person apart from any self-seeking. We learn over time and grow in maturation, into a deepening ****willingness**** to give of ourselves without expectation, without insistence or demand for a return, out of a singular commitment to the well being of the other.

In each of our stories is pain and loss and the realization each of us comes to, 'if you love, you will experience pain; attachment is inevitable.' And the more deeply we love, the more deeply we can be hurt. In the life of Jesus we see a human being who loved beautifully, and suffered pain and attachment in his loving. His tears and hurt in the Gospel stories are clear, at the death of Lazarus, at the faithlessness of his followers and friends, at the betrayal of Judas and others. Yet his revelation in the Christian mystery is the primacy of love. Jesus taught that essence of human life is to be found in the Great Commandment, and he also taught that acceptance of the pain of loving is the way to Life. Through the initial attachment in loving we come to transcend and move beyond selfish attachment and actualize Agape, the Life of God, in our human loving.

The Praxis of Relationships- A Mirror to help us See and Release-

Relationships are a mirror in which we see all of our impediments to loving. In this mirror, in the faces of our loved ones, we are shown our self-protective defense mechanisms, our selfishness, and the armor around our hearts. We see the classic psychological ego-defense mechanisms of denial, repression, rationalization, projection, and all the myriad ways they protect our illusory sense of self. In the mirror of our loved ones we see the wounds we carry in this existence and the ways we protect ourselves from further pain, with the result we often behave in modes of reactivity that resist and injure love. Our loved ones mirror to us all the ways we do not manifest or express God. They show us those aspects of our living and behaving that are in disharmony with our interior communion in God. The way we hurt one another is expression of our self-seeking attachment. The way we heal and enter into communion is expression of self-giving love. The way we react and retaliate to the hurts we receive is an expression of our defense of a separate self. The way we let go of our reactions and are willing to love in the middle of them, to reach beyond them, is the way we break out of the prison of the ego-self.

Spousal Relationship-

The spousal human relationship is one that begins with intense emotional and sexual attachment. This is necessary to form the familial bond that makes child rearing and the further development of familial life possible. In the beginning there is great self-absorption and self-seeking in the initial phase of this relationship. We seek completion in someone who will be our sexual partner and meet the many emotional needs we bring into a relationship, conscious and unconscious. In the beginning we rarely "see" our

spousal partner for who they are, independently of our own needs and projections. In time the "honeymoon" is over and the illusions of our projections and desires fall away. We begin to awaken to the reality that our loving has been narcissistic. We slowly realize this other human being is not in this world to serve our every need, and that real love involves a capacity to see, appreciate, reverence, and give of ourselves to another for the sake of Love and not the sake of attachment or emotional need alone. The challenges and sometime hardships of life together call forth greater love and selflessness if the relationship is to grow.

Our capacity to hurt each other is something we come to understand. Cycles of hurt, anger, forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation occur in every growing marriage. Every hurt, and every authentic attempt to heal it, calls for more capacity for self-giving love. For those who practice the Prayer of the Heart in ceaseless prayer, the spousal relationship must itself become prayer. We learn to "see" our thoughts and interactions, their disharmony with our inner being and our intentionality to self-giving love. We return to "presence" to our loved one, and our willingness to give ourselves to them in love, after every departure, every failing, every misdirection. Often it is in the hurts and disappointments that we find the impetus to the inner movement to return to presence and loving-kindness. Increasingly we are able to "see" our habitual pattern before it gains momentum and causes injury to the spousal love. Increasingly we are able to cease from reacting to hurt and disappointment and return to our inner willingness to love.

Relationships with Our Children-

Raising children can be one of the more ascetic contemplative practices a human being can undertake. It calls forth in us a selfless love we never thought possible. One practicing contemplative I knew spoke of child rearing as an attempt to "walk on snow without leaving footprints." Our life with children begins with the most profound attachment that exists in our humanity. Unless interrupted, in most cases we attach to our infant children in a powerful way that brings us to a point of shifting our life's energies and our will around a new priority. This is nature's way of enhancing the survival of the child. We think more of our child's safety and well being than anything else. This attachment, instinctually based, is necessary and good to support the life of the child until they move into adulthood. We love them in a way that we would gladly lay our own lives down for their sake. And, at the same time, our children do not reciprocate in the same way, this love.

More than any other relationship, our children teach us to love without expectation. If we mature in our love, we come to love them as they are in life, not as we might expect or wish them to be. Love's completion is accomplished in their leaving us and not needing us. The attachment, which was so strong in the beginning of this relationship, must diminish as we learn to let go, as our children go into adult life and make their own life. Children are the teachers of love's way, of self-giving and release from self-seeking. At any stage of this process, we are inevitably going to injure love. This is a given. In the Way of the Heart, we can learn to "see" the injuries as they happen. We can open to accept the consequences of them in ourselves and in our children. Through contrition we return to being present to our children in the best way we can, and to give of ourselves to

them in love, the best way we can. Over time, they teach us greater willingness and greater trust in the Love of God in all things, as we face our inadequacies, and the wounded humanity we carry in familial life. We know that our own private self-created version of love is not sufficient. We come to trust that we can make ourselves accessible to a Love that encompasses all, including our wounded humanity, and that of our loved ones. Nothing can bring us up short more quickly than the pain we see in the eyes of our children and the extent to which we may have given or received injury to the love between us. Ceaseless prayer in relationship gives us a way to return and restore our communion in God with our loved ones.

Friendship Relationships-

In a similar way our relationships with friends may start with great attachment, even an infatuation of sorts, that, at long last, 'we have found someone who truly understands and accepts us perfectly.' This is an attribution and a wish projected on a human being that is never totally true. Such a perfect love, understanding, and acceptance is an experience we can only find in our relationship with God. Over time as we come to know our friends as they are, and work through the cycles of misunderstanding, hurt, and reconciliation, we may come to love them less selfishly and to "see" them more clearly in their uniqueness of gifts and life experience. In this way we grow more receptively present and more willing to give of ourselves in love to them of our time, and our good will and understanding. We grow to desire their well being above any expectation we have of them for ourselves. We can come to see our dear friends as vehicles and mirrors of God's understanding, as God's faithful presence, and as God's companioning of us.

Ceaseless Prayer in Relationships-

In the moment to moment life of each day is where our Inner Communion with God is actualized in praxis. The essential interior movements are the same as our sitting practice, but expressed differently. The only gifts we have to give our loved ones are these same movements of our practice: the gift of presence, and the gift of self-offering love.

Releasing from Reactivity- Returning to our Deepest Intention-

Non-reactivity is a necessary condition to bring the Way of the Heart into relationships. I came of age in a time when there was great cultural permission to act out afflictive emotions and to indulge and justify the thinking that perpetuated them. I have come to understand there is a middle way between repression and suppression of emotions, and the other extreme of indulgent acting out. Prayer of the Heart teaches us a third way, in which we allow emotions, even afflictive ones, to arise and pass through us and out, without identifying with them, or self-attaching to them. In this freedom of interior stillness we have the spaciousness and liberation to choose and anchor in our deepest intention, which is loving-kindness. We do this through the continual inner disciplines and praxis of observing the mind and abiding in the Heart. In our sitting we learn to observe habitual thoughts and their associated emotions, we allow them to arise and go on, without becoming entangled or compelled. We return to loving presence.

In the middle of human interactional life we observe the mind do its 'stuff.' And we have the freedom to release from entanglement, to choose not to react, and to return to being

present in the most loving, the kindest way we can. We learn to respond to hurt, disappointment, or frustration with presence and the intentionality of loving kindness. That same loving kindness extends equally to ourselves with firmness and empowerment, as we do not allow abusive behavior to be directed towards us or others. The growing capacity to not react, will untangle the knots of our spiritual life, and make the wounds of existence accessible to God's Love when we cease from the necessity of defending or retaliating. We may find the memories of these wounds, and the mistaken reasons for our holding on to them, rising in our consciousness and available to be given over and offered to the Light of God. ***The more these knots unwind, the more accessible our humanity is to the infusion and action of the Grace of God which pours forth when there is receptive space.***

Prayer of the Heart- Open Handed Living-

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."
(John 15:13)

It is helpful to invoke again the metaphor of ***the open hand, which receives the gift of life, the gifts of relationships and friendships, in work and in family.*** In the freedom of this deeper Life then we release with the open hand these gifts given to us, we offer them to the Beloved. The impermanence of life is the plowed and cultivated ground that allows us to grow in our freedom to love. This ongoing awareness of impermanence brings us to live life in the Eternal Present, which is where God lives.

The Freedom of Contrition-

Forgiveness-When we love we are inevitably disappointed. We are inevitably hurt. And the people we love frequently mirror back to us the selfish and self-seeking aspects of our love. All of these are opportunities to move into Agape, to give ourselves to a love that seeks nothing. We learn that to love in this way is to forgive, and to receive the sometimes critical and humbling communications of our loved ones without needing to defend or rationalize. For example, when we are harsh or reactive or demanding with a spouse or loved one, we can receive the critical feedback, spoken or unspoken in a way that we are free to return to presence and loving-kindness. Self-condemnation, or self-rationalization and defense, only keeps it all knotted up and in continued bondage. Receiving critical feedback helps us to find the freedom of not defending a self based on illusion, a self we have to build up in order to be loveable. And we come to find that when we are, just as we are, that genuine love and communion are possible. Forgiveness is always a process of letting go in compassion for oneself and others. As a process it always requires patience and cannot be forced.

Actualization of Agape in Relationships-

Listen to the Desert (Gregory Meyers) - "At some point in one's fidelity to the practice, and in an unknown manner, one quite effortlessly transcends the barriers of self to discover what already always is. That is only that. And in the Christian tradition the unknowable 'That' is called Love. Then one knows by a mysterious 'unknowing' that great truth expressed in Saint John's first letter, 'God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them, because as he is, so are we in this world.' " (1 Jn.4: 16)

(John 15: 8-15)- **The Invitation of Christ to Abide in His Love**

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; *abide in my love*. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept the Father's commandments and abide in His love. I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ...This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing., but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."

-Chapter 11-

Consecration of the Transfigured Self- Tranformative Movements in Prayer of the Heart Practice



**"Through Christ, with Christ and In Christ..
our humanity is consecrated
and transfigured in the Beloved
thus entering the stream of the Beloved's Life
with full awareness and self giving;
thus we sit at the Everlasting Banquet
of Eternal Life."-**

from Agape Liturgy (Sharon K. Cooper and Bill Ryan)

Becoming Eucharist- Living the Wedding Banquet of Unitive Love

In the Judeo-Christian Tradition the core Mystery of Existence, the marriage of the Divine and the Incarnate world, is represented in the eternal wedding banquet, the marriage of God and Creation. This spiritual marriage of the fullness of participation in Divine Life, while in the human state, is the banquet to which all are invited in this life. The Prayer of the Heart is the actualization of this participation. In the Eucharistic liturgy the Divine Beloved Gives Itself freely, Uncreated Essence, Divine Life, to humans. And humans give freely of their humanity to the Divine that it may be consecrated, lifted up, and made one and wholly the Bread and Wine, Flesh and Blood of Christ. This Mystery of participation in Divine Life is both the goal and the journey of the Prayer of the Heart. We become accessible to the fullest participation in this Mystery of Trinitarian Life in the ongoing process of being fully *given*, fully gift to the Beloved, as the Beloved is fully gift, in Christ, to us. ***To be fully given we must be willing to give up every motivation for private personal fulfillment***, so that every impediment to this state of abiding in the Divine (Presence) and self-gift in love (Agape) is released. This is a dynamic and living developmental process that is life long. Every idea that this is a static state of being, at which one arrives, must be discarded. There are transformational movements along the

way that involve a purification of our motivation, and a growing commitment to those interior movements that ground us in Divine Essence.

New Wineskins

In Mathew 14:17 Jesus tells us-" Neither is new wine put into old wineskins, but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." Jesus is reminding us here that if we wish to take the Way of the Heart, our human life, our human self, the mind, personality, and our ego-self must be changed to be a receptive and whole vessel of God's Life and Love. The human self must become a lit lamp of the Light of Christ in the world. Hence the reconstitution and polishing of this lamp is the actualization of this practice. This must of necessity involve death and new life, enactment of the Paschal Mystery of Christ's Death and Resurrection in our life. In this process our humanity becomes a transfigured vessel.

The human spiritual journey in Eastern Christianity is seen as Divinization, or Christification, St. Paul in Galatians (2:20) says-

"I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

In the Prayer of the Heart the transformational journey is one which takes place from the inside out. We start with the premise the Christ is already within us, but it is through our complete givenness to God that the nascent Christ Life within us at the center, becomes the vital Life that animates our humanity. Our ego-self is supplanted with Christ as the hub and center of gravity around which our humanity lives, and moves and loves. The goal of the Christian life is not merely to be a follower of Christ but to become Christ, each in the uniqueness of the vessel of our human self.

When our human capacities of attention and intention, or will, are developed and purified, they become the spiritual capacities of the Heart, which are the interior movements of receptive Presence, and Agape. The journey into darkness is necessary for this development and purification to take place. We think of these passages as "darkness" because they are states in which we consciously give up the control and the mental "knowing" of the mind and the ego-self. This takes great trust and great willingness to keep on going because it is a frontal assault on the ego's compulsion to be in control. ***The ego-mind resists kenosis, and kenosis is at the heart of the Christian participation in the Paschal Mystery in Prayer of the Heart.***

The Ego- Our Homemade Survival System

"Happy are you who are reviled and persecuted and all manner of things said against you falsely for my sake." Matt 5:11

Jesus proclaimed it was a blessing when the ego-self is undermined as that is the gateway to happiness when we can truly let go. Yet the ego is our homemade survival system in the world. It is necessary to have a healthy ego to survive in the world. It is our platform in the world. Without one we would not have a sense of self with appropriate limits and boundaries and judgement to maintain our life in human society. However, without exception, the ego comes to adult formation based on the illusion of separateness. Its center of gravity is itself. Nearly all actions, even and especially those seen as religious or self-giving are, in reality, self-seeking in some degree. Most people tend towards two

extremes of self-seeking survival and fulfillment: Co-dependency- wrapping oneself around others and encouraging their dependency for the sake of one's own survival, or Isolated Self Sufficiency- maintaining the illusion of invulnerability and not needing anyone for the sake of control and dominance over others. Frequently there is an acculturation along gender lines to these extremes. To move towards communion with God and Creation is to leave behind both of those postures. This knot of separateness in the self system must unravel and die if we are to be Christ-bearers and Christ-birthers. The separate self-ego is caught in a double bind that must be resolved. It is like the branch that thinks it is tree. Its life and existence arises from a greater Life and Existence. Time, impermanence, and grace come crashing in on this illusion.

The Paradox of Interior Solitude

In the inner quiet and solitude the ego self is deprived of the feeding of its substance and cement. The anxieties that hold it together are diminished. The authentic hunger for communion begins to be fed in our growing intimacy with God and resting in our true spirit. Through this inward solitude we began to find the true healing of our loneliness and isolation which the separate self has brought. We begin to have openings of melting into communion with God and one another.

The Way of the Cross-the Unraveling of Separateness

" If anyone wants to come to me, let him take up his cross, forget himself and follow me." Matt 16:24

To open to the pain of our humanity, to our vulnerability and need for God is a difficult path. We must lay down the walls we have built around the Heart; we must be willing to disarm ourselves of the weapons of ego defense and protection. The ego will resist this.

The desert Elder, Amma Syncletica speaks to this in her saying from the Philokalia, " In the beginning there are those who struggle and labor to come near to God. But after that, there is indescribable joy. It is just like building a fire: at first its smoky and your eyes water, but later you get the desired result. Thus we ought to light the divine fire in ourselves with tears and effort."

The ego responds by sabotaging our spiritual practice and effort in any number of ways, discouragement, avoidance, and distraction. The ego may even attempt to co-opt the valid insights and growth in our practice and transformation. But there are no short cuts to the purification, which comes both from within and without. ***(It is important to understand that purification is not getting rid of the "unholy", rather it is releasing from everything that is not essential in our Life in God. It is simplification.)***

There are many kinds of darkness in the Prayer of the Heart journey. John of the Cross has often been pointed to as defining "stages" of transformation in the "Nights" of the spiritual journey. I think this is a mistake. Every transformative journey is different and unique and arises out of the suffering and the circumstances of our historical life in this world. With each person who follows the Way of the Heart there is a unique manifestation of the Paschal Mystery of Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection.

We should consider these realities of the human spiritual journey:

*We cannot avoid the human consciousness of felt expulsion from our own garden of the Beloved.

*We cannot avoid the wound of separateness.

*We cannot avoid injury to our fragile humanity.

*The wounds of existence are inevitable. What we do with them is not.

*Jesus came to tell us that what hurts us can be the Way to Resurrection.

*Living the Paschal Mystery- Our mistakes and our injuries, the way we have been hurt, the way we have hurt others is the Way.

"Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24)

Passages in Darkness-

" In the beginning Love satisfies us.

When Love first spoke to me of love-

How I laughed at Her in return!

But then she made me like the hazel trees,

Which blossom early in the *season of darkness*,

And bear fruit slowly." - Hadewich of Antwerp (13th c.) (Hirshfield, p.100)

-Darkness of Crisis - Here the usual supports are no longer present; fears and insecurity arise. We find the purification of giving our attention to what is enduring and eternal within us, rather than relying solely on external supports.

- Darkness of Emotional Pain- In this passage we experience the affliction of the emotional and psychological pain of losses, of hurt, of disappointment, or emotional deprivation arising from our life. We are willing to give ourselves to resting and anchoring in God's Presence, while being present in the same moment to our humanity and its suffering in acceptance and peace.

- Darkness of the Arising of Unresolved Trauma and Knots from the Unconscious. - The purification of the Way of the Prayer of the Heart opens and makes accessible to grace every aspect of our humanity, including and especially our own body, psyche, and consciousness and the knots they carry. Then the Life-giving Presence of God can suffuse and penetrate this vehicle of our life's journey. In this purification of presence we learn to anchor in Divine Presence and release and give over to God all that we have endured and experienced in life.

- Darkness of the Temptation of Despair- The temptation of despair comes to all. 'Why not give up? Why try? Why hope?' This temptation is a form of avoidance of the unavoidable pain of living, of being incarnate life. If we go into despair there is no more pain of disappointment, no need to keep going in the midst of doubt, or in the midst of trial or the fear of what may come, including failure. Jesus was not immune from the darkness of this temptation. Most of the time this temptation comes in subtler forms of

despair, such as, giving our life to comfort alone, unwillingness to stretch and try, unwillingness to give more deeply and completely of all that we are, a holding back, or avoidance. Thus despair is an attack on our willingness to give ourselves utterly in Love to God, to exercise and express God's own Life of Agape within us, which is the essence of Christian spiritual life. The temptation of despair, therefore, is a purification or deepening and simplifying our core intentionality of self-gift in all things to God. The depth of our practice in liberation from thoughts and emotion will sustain us in allowing such temptations to arise and go on, while we continually return and anchor in our interior practice of kenosis and communion. We discover anew, with renewed ardor, the fire of our singular desire for God. We discover and reach more deeply each time to a greater willingness to abandon ourselves to his one refuge and no other.

- Darkness of Aridity- Aridity in the spiritual life comes when the previously held spiritual consolations of joy, peace, and contentment are no longer present. Instead we find only an inner emptiness. We receive nothing in return for our effort. The ego finds this state frightening and barren. Its motivations and seeking find no reward. It becomes resistive and anxious and seeks to sabotage the process, bringing doubts to our determined Faith. Yet this emptiness and space is essential that our inner movement and motivation of self giving Love is being purified of any selfish motivation. We are now in a growing state of freedom in this emptiness where we can stretch to love for love's sake; we give over all of our life, our being, and our humanity to God without condition, without compensation, without consolation. We learn to reach deeply to do this, not for any reward, but because there is nothing else to do in life. Our life's purpose is to express God's essence of Love in our own deepening willingness, a willingness that seeks nothing external, not even "feeling good." In this emptiness the ego-mind is starved of its fuel. The cement of separateness and craving weakens. In this emptiness the state of receptivity and spaciousness opens and expands in which God can pour into us, God's own Spirit of Love, and suffuse our humanity.

- Darkness of Unknowing- The author of the Cloud of Unknowing says, "Do not suppose that because I have spoken of darkness and a cloud I have in mind the clouds you see in an overcast sky or the darkness of your house when your candle fails. ...when I speak of darkness, I mean the absence of knowledge.. You cannot understand it with your mind's eye (intellect). If you are unable to understand something or you have forgotten it, are you not in the dark as regards this thing? You cannot see it with your mind's eye. I have not said, 'cloud", but 'cloud of unknowing.' For it is a darkness of unknowing that lies between you and your God." (Johnston, p. 52-53)

It is in this darkness of unknowing that we learn to "give up" in the positive sense. Deep in our being we have the growing intuition that our mind cannot help us. We have a faith-filled intuition of Divine Life that we had forgotten. In this darkness of unknowing we are giving ourselves over to God without the previous consolation of image, concept, or the projected ideas of God we create. Instead we open to an even greater willingness to encounter and be given to the Life and Mystery we previously called God. Now we have no name for this Life that encompasses our life. We do this for Love's sake, and in the utter trust that there is no other path to healing the wound of our separateness and finding

the completion of being, utterly home in God's being, who is the essence of our own being. We step into this darkness with trust alone, and know there is no other refuge to take.

- **Darkness of Pure Faith-** St. John of the Cross called this darkness the "invisible ladder" by which we ascend to God. It is the way "self giving Love" is actualized without any object of our faith, only pure Trust. Trust makes possible the interior movement of being completely and utterly given, this moment, and the next and the next, a lifetime of continual offering, without any expectation of external support or solace. It is enough. It is complete. This is the pathway through the barrier of separateness in the 'Darkness of Unknowing.'

God Must Overflow Into Your Humanity When You Are Ready

The mystic, Meister Eckhart, says again of this state of prayer, and growing receptivity and emptiness:

"God must act and pour Himself into you (your humanity) the moment he finds you ready. Don't imagine that God can be compared to an earthly carpenter, who acts or doesn't act, as he wishes, who can will to do something or leave it undone, according to his pleasure. It is not that way with God: where and when God finds you ready (receptive and open) he must act and overflow into you, just as when the air is clear and pure, the sun must overflow into it and cannot refrain from doing that."

- This amazing statement tells us that God's very nature is such that It must Pour Its Essence of Love into us when we are ready, receptive, and willing.

Kenosis- In this process of kenosis we die to what we are not, in order to live fully in the essence of our true nature as child of God. -

".... and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.." (Matt. 10:39)

The moment comes in our journey when the walls of self come down, and only God remains.

"The unitive knowledge of God in love is not a knowledge of an object by a subject, but a far different and transcendent kind of knowledge in which the created "self" which we are seems to disappear in God and to know Him alone. In passive purification then the self undergoes a kind of emptying and an apparent destruction, until, reduced to emptiness, it no longer knows itself apart from God." - Thomas Merton (Merton, p.75-76)

In Ascent of Mt. Carmel John of the Cross states it this way, " In this nakedness the spirit finds its rest." (Kavanaugh & Rodriguez, p.67)

Jesus spoke of this experience in this way: (John 12:19) "In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. **On that day** you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you."

"**On that day....**" the self that we have known and has been familiar to us disappears and is gone. For a brief moment in time there is only God, and no self. The truth proclaimed by the author of The Cloud of Unknowing is realized-our true being is God's being. Our

true spirit is God's Spirit. The walls of separateness have come down. There is only One Being, One Love, One Life. We are no longer subject and object in our relationship with God. There is only the "I AM" of the Fire in the burning bush of our humanity.

There may be a brief time in this transformational movement when some form of sanctuary is necessary, when the person is best nurtured in a protected setting of quiet and peace for a short period. The structures of self-ego, psyche, and personality can temporarily be released, let go, and be allowed to de-construct. We "fall apart" in a totally positive sense of self-surrender to the Beloved. These impermanent objects of our identity may be reduced to ashes for a time so that we can experience the fullness and freedom of our true nature and our innate unity with God in the Wedding feast. When the functions of ego-mind, personality, and psyche are needed again, they are reconstituted in a newer Risen life, organized around a new Center. We begin to recover a sense of self, which is no longer based on separateness, but is a unique and individual expression of this One Life.

These vessels of our humanity, our psycho-physical being, are then seen in the light of their true nature, not who we are, but the vessel of our life in God. They are the temporal incarnate means of our spiritual passage in this human life. This period of sanctuary from worldly responsibilities may take time, several days, weeks, or even months. The period of re-emergence into the world of human society and familial life may be a "soft shell" period where great effort is needed to limit exposure for a time to the harsher elements of human life and interaction. We need this time and space to fully assimilate this resurrection experience of the Light and Fire of God in our human life and humanity. In time our capacity to function again in the world will be restored and enlivened with the fullness of desire to bring the compassion and mercy of God in service to all of life, to all beings. In this emergence into ordinary life our true identity is confirmed and sealed, unalterable. We are children of God, forever.

Ego- Self as Servant

In this transformation the ego-self, the psyche, and personality are relativized. They become the clothes we wear, rather than who we are. The mind and human faculties, over time, become servants of the Heart. . The structure of the ego becomes porous and flexible rather than solid and rigid. The ego-self is no longer the center of gravity in our life. Rather the "I AM" of the Christos is our center and assumes the natural center of gravity around which our life and humanity is oriented in harmony. In this new risen life in God our humanity and its faculties find a state of greater peace and harmony, being the servant of God, rather than trying to assume the seat of control and dominion itself

Becoming Butterflies- The Life Long Transforming Union

The illumination of unitive experience in spiritual development is not the end, but rather, the beginning of the spiritual journey in Prayer of the Heart. ***It takes a lifetime of transforming union for our humanity to be wholly consecrated and "given". And this precious work always remains unfinished. Our capacity for error remains as long as we are in the human state.*** Our humility in human vulnerability must be ever seen and accepted. The process of our participation in Divinization is the essence of practice,

rather than the attainment of a spiritual goal. In this process we actualize, or bring to praxis, the Great Commandment of Jesus and the Torah, which brings fullness and fruition to life's purpose.

Eastern Orthodoxy represents this transfiguration with the symbol of the butterfly, whose potential is realized from life in the darkness of the cocoon. Indeed we can only begin to "soar" in the Spirit as we become consciously porous, in harmony with the Life of the Trinity moving through us. We fly on the Wind of the Life-Breath of the Spirit. We rise up from our true ontological identity as Imago Dei, or image or child of God. The Likeness of God in our unique humanity must be transfigured in the course of a lifetime by the radiant Life of Christ emerging within us. Julian of Norwich described the life of the transforming union, not as a finality, but as a process of "oneing" ... "the sweet and secret working of the Holy Spirit" (Prevallet, p. 3) in us.

In this new belonging and life long growth in God we can come to possess an unshakeable groundedness and joy (unshaken even in the impermanence of human life) in the state of abiding in the eternal dimension of Trinitarian Life. Jesus described it in this way:

(John 14:23) "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

Fruits of the Spirit

The outward evidence of this transfiguration or metamorphosis may not be entirely clear to us. Life may seem even more "normal" than ever, which is as it should be. But the Fruits of the Spirit, of which St. Paul spoke of in Galatians, (Gal. 5:22) begin to manifest in daily life in ways that are gentle but clear to those in our lives.

Charity- Outpouring Love, which is the life of the Trinity. This growth in Love leads to complete self-gift to God and compassionate presence and love for others. Charity leads to a growing capacity to love and serve one's neighbor, all Creation, as we recognize the Divine Presence in every living thing. We are able to move beyond our likes and dislikes to be present to those whom we like and dislike, to love as Jesus has loved us, because God's own nature is flowing through us. This is the gift of Prayer of the Heart.

Joy- Experience of the welling up of the Living water of the Divine Presence within us. Gratitude is enough.

Peace -Contentment that comes from being fully rooted in God. In the deepest sense, all is well; God is enough.

Meekness - The quality of kindness which accepts the limitations of others and ourselves.

Faithfulness. - The freedom of daily offering of ourselves to God and to others out of love and compassion.

Gentleness - The experience of conscious participation in the flow of God's Life, which is firm, but gentle, and sustaining.

Goodness- The affirmation of our sense of oneness with one another and all Creation. Goodness is the expression of this oneness.

Patience - Abiding in the security of God's faithfulness to us. In patience is the confidence of God's love.

Self control - The natural fruit of our learning to rest in God alone without the previous grasping for external objects to bring us happiness. We seek, not domination of our will over emotions, rather the alignment of our will with God's continual love and presence in our life.

Prayer of the Heart is actualization of Ceaseless Prayer, Ceaseless Conversion, and Ceaseless Communion-

****Receiving and Living the Gift of God**

- God's Own Life, God's Own Spirit, The Life of Agape**

Jesus invites us in his conversation with the woman at the well: “ *If you knew the gift of God* and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink’ you would have asked him and *he would have given you living water*. The woman said to him, 'Sir you have no bucket and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob who gave us the well and with his sons and flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water I will give will never be thirsty. *The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water gushing up in eternal life.*' ” (John 4:9)

**Thus, We Awaken as the Beloved-
Becoming Eucharist, Our Humanity is Transfigured**
(poetry of St. Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022)
(Mitchell, The Enlightened Heart, p.38)

**“We awaken in Christ's body,
As Christ awakens in our bodies,
and my poor hand is Christ.
He enters my foot and is infinitely me.**

**I move my hand, and wonderfully
my hand becomes Christ, becomes all of Him
(for God is indivisibly whole seamless in God's Nature)**

**I move my foot and at once he appears like a flash of
lightning.
Do my words seems blasphemous? -- Then open your
heart to Him.**

**and let yourself receive the One who is opening so
deeply. For if we genuinely love Him,
we wake up inside Christ's body.**

**Where all our body, all over, every hidden part of it,
is realized in joy as Him,
and He makes us, utterly real.**

**and everything that is hurt, everything that seemed to us dark,
harsh, shameful, maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged, is in Him
transformed
and recognized as whole, as lovely;
and radiant in His light.
We awaken as the Beloved
in every last part of our body.”**

Theme V- Consecrated Commitment to the Way of the Heart

-Chapter 12-



Guard of the Heart -

The practice of Guard of the Heart comes to us from the ancient desert tradition. It is, however, a graced capacity which, like the ancients, we also can develop in our journey in the Prayer of the Heart. Guard of the Heart is the way in which we consciously protect, reverence, and cherish our inner being and the spring of Living Water of Divine Life, which flows forth from it into the world and into our humanity. To be spiritually adult and mature means we learn to respond intentionally to the invitation of Jesus to be fully present ****in**** the world of human society and culture, while not ****of**** that world of human culture and society which is based on illusion and separateness.

Accepting Vulnerability

Many, like myself, have been drawn in to contemplative practice when they encountered the truth of the vulnerability of their own humanity. This is a truth that can draw us into God. Like many, I wrongly believed in earlier days of my journey that the contemplative way would help me escape from my vulnerability and insecurity. Instead, on the Way of the Heart, we learn to bring our vulnerability to the embrace of the Beloved One, in whom all belonging, all safety, and all security is to be found. Grounding in the indestructible Life and Presence of God within brings a wondrous peace and experience of safety, regardless of the external threat. The paradox which Jesus proclaims again and again throughout the Gospels, and succinctly in the teaching of the beatitudes, is that standing naked and undefended before and in God is where the true spirit finds its home, security, and rest.

Armor Around the Heart

When we come into the world as vulnerable infant, corporeal, and psychological beings, we are exposed to the entire range of cruelty, insecurity, trauma, and abandonment in the human condition. We must of necessity learn forms of protection of our psyche and inner being. In varying degrees in early life we do not experience conditions of love and safety, nor of reverence and respect for our spiritual nature. Therefore we develop layers of

armor of hiddenness and protection around our own Hearts. The tragedy, however, may be that the same self-constructed armor which protects our innermost being, the sanctuary of the Most High, may be the armor that keeps us in a state of unconscious ignorance and alienation. This armor fuels separateness from our own Hearts and our interior communion with God. As we are drawn more deeply into inner oneness with God, our capacity to trust and abide in God's Love is deepened. With this deepening and in our day to day decisions and inner work we extend our willingness to give ourselves to the Love of God in all things. The armor surrounding the Heart weakens and dissolves. The glue of fear and illusion that hold it together melt and dissipate over time, making this liberation and expansion of the Heart possible.

The Sensitivity of God

When the walls come down, our human person is accessible to the Light and Love of God in a new way that can be blinding and brilliant. We experience a capacity for joy and love we never thought possible. We also discover that this newfound openness and receptivity to the Life of God makes us exquisitely sensitive to the world. Anything and everything, within us and around us, in the way of thoughts, speech, and actions that are disharmonious, unkind, cruel, or violent will cause us sudden and sharp interior pain. We begin to experience that this exquisite sensitivity arises from the Life of God flowing through us, springing forth from the Heart and infusing all our humanity. What gives brings us joy therefore, also brings us a growing sensitivity and pain to all that is disharmonious with the Life of God within. Without the prior filters or protections, we must therefore be consciously present and a guardian of our own Heart through grace.

Guard of the Heart in Daily Practice

What does this mean for us in our daily practice? We cannot avoid the pain of the world. Certainly Jesus in his own life showed his embrace of the pain of human life. However, he shows us a new way to be ****with**** the pain of human life, the way of refuge in our Beloved, the Abba, and the Abba's Self-Giving Love. Our Prayer of the Heart practice shows us we do have choices and consequences in our life. The following considerations should be made in practicing Guard of the Heart:

*We can choose not to deliberately expose ourselves to entertainment, to social situations, to personalities which are violent, cruel, and disrespectful of the sacred, or any influence which might stimulate us towards anger, fear, or hardness of heart in response.

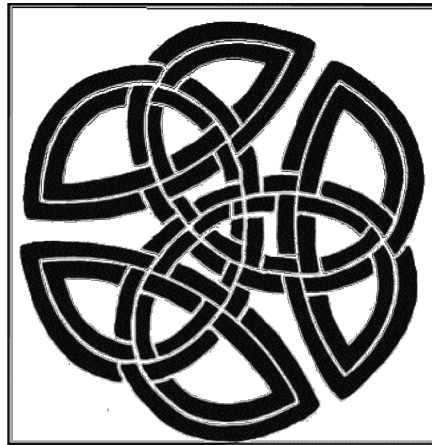
*We can practice a vigilant awareness towards those same influences in our own mind and personality, and not allow them to gain ascendancy or be acted out, but continually offer our humanity, our human responses to be transformed in the love of God.

*Sometimes we cannot escape the presence and influences of particularly negative or destructive people. In such cases invoking the protection of God, through the name of Jesus or other prayer phrase, may help us to take refuge in the "shadow of His wings." An example might be: "Lord Jesus, You are my refuge and my protection." Some may visualize a shield or circle of the Light of God around themselves. A visualization of

Christ, or the Cross, or other symbol of the Divine may also help us be accessible to this protection.

In this, as in all instances, we are giving over the truth of our human vulnerability to the ultimate security and protection of the One who is the sole Refuge in our life.

-Chapter 13-



Walking Contemplation

In both East and West there is a tradition of extending contemplative practice into movement. There is a practical and wisdom purpose to this. The practical reason stems from the need for the body to move after 30-40 minutes of formal sitting practice. Practitioners throughout the ages have found that a slow walk synchronized with breath is the best way to continue formal contemplation.

In daily practice it is often advised to have more than one period of sitting, especially in the morning, in order to intensify practice and to bring a greater experience of interior quiet and communion. In order to allow the body to move and at the same time to extend that same interiority into movement without interruption, the practitioner is advised to have a five minute period of walking contemplation. The area of walking should usually be in the same space as the sitting practice in order to minimize disruption. In most cases a circular walk around the meditation space is suggested.

When arising from sitting it is appropriate to bow to the altar standing in front of your seat in gratitude and veneration of the Beloved within and without. The hands are held together over the heart. The right hand is prayerfully cupped in the left hand. The prayer word and breath continue to be engaged in repetition and attention. The eyes are held in a soft diffuse gaze on the floor in front. Approximately one step is taken for each breath, so that walking, breathing, and prayer word are in harmony. The interior movement of observing the mind, abiding in the Heart in self-offering to the Beloved is continued.

The walking contemplation practice continues in a circular movement for approximately five minutes. At the end of that time the practitioner returns to the seat of meditation, bows to the altar and resumes the next period of formal sitting practice. The period of movement has allowed the body to move enough that another period of sitting practice is now possible. At the same time the essential inner movements of prayer practice have not been interrupted.

Walking contemplation is also appropriately done in a group. The ending of the sitting period is signaled by the ringing of a bell or gong. If the group is seated in a circle with an altar in the middle, the group, at the leader's cue, rises and bows to the middle towards the altar, once again in veneration of the Christ within and in their midst. They then move to the back of their seats on the outside of the circle and facing a common direction, begin their walking contemplation. It is important that each person maintain an equal arm's distance behind the other so the group movement doesn't get congested and can maintain the harmony and rhythm of the practice. At the end of the walking period the participants then arrive back at their seats and stand with hands folded over the heart until all are facing inward. They bow together, as before, and resume their second sitting period of Prayer of the Heart practice. We will speak more about this rhythm in the intensive retreat experience.

In addition to the practical value of providing an opportunity to move between formal periods of sitting, walking contemplation extends an experience of interior practice into activity. This contemplative walking can be done for extended periods outside or inside as a practice in itself. Such practice in a natural outdoor setting can be most expansive and rich. It cultivates the essential disposition that interior silence and communion is not apart from any activity in life.

-Chapter 14-

Immersion in Prayer of the Heart Practice- The Intensive Retreat

When espoused lovers wish to grow in their relationship, they take time away from the usual patterns and activities of their life to deepen their love and commitment to one another. They may have a candle lit dinner together or a weekend retreat of uninterrupted time together. They let go of everything else in order to be accessible and receptive to the self-offering of their beloved, and to give themselves more fully to their desire of communion with their beloved. This consecration of space and time is even more true in the spiritual life and our deepening life of communion with the Beloved of our hearts. Like espoused human lovers we find a sanctuary of protected space where we can rest in the presence of God and in that consecrated space find our home and belonging in God's embrace. The Prayer of the Heart practice is built on the teaching of Jesus that God is always accessible to us, but we are not always accessible to God. To become open in this way, an intensive Prayer of the Heart retreat experience is vital to deepening and maturing in our capacity to be wholly given to the Beloved and taking our practice and commitment to Inner Communion with God to a new and deeper level.

Retreat Environment

The intensive retreat experience can be undertaken in a retreat house if that is a place where silence and sanctuary are respected. Some persons may not live close to such a facility, or they may not have the financial resources to pay for such a service. Therefore the retreat sanctuary environment must be one of their own creative endeavor. One can make one's own home or other suitable residence a retreat sanctuary. The essential elements of this are relative exterior quiet, although even the steady noise from a somewhat busy street need not interfere. The ability to forgo answering phones and turning them off is important. Noise from a television, radio, or stereo must also be eliminated. The interior of the residence must have a sanctuary of silence. Others who enter the space, such as family members, must be willing supporters of this retreat, even if they are not active participants. There must be a meditation space where formal sitting practice is entered. The space should be consecrated with the presence of an altar and appropriate symbols. It should also be private. Having an external space with relative quiet, such as a yard or garden where manual work practice can be conducted, is also a helpful addition to this retreat sanctuary.

Retreat Structure

In this consecrated time and space with the Beloved, we give ourselves to our longing to be one with the Beloved. We do this primarily in many periods immersion in formal sitting practice. Periods of formal Prayer of the Heart practice are done in series of two or three periods of 25-30 minutes each. Walking practice is done between each period of sitting practice in increments of five minutes each. In the morning and evening it is appropriate at the end of the sitting practice to have individual devotional, intercessory, and liturgical prayer of one's choosing, as well. One or two periods of lectio divina practice is advisable in the daily schedule. It is good to start the day early, at 5 or 6 AM, as that is the time when contemplation is fresh and alive. At least 3 to four hours of

formal silent practice is advised at intervals through the day. The remainder of the day should be interspersed with manual work practice, including the necessities of meal preparation and clean up. It is advised to have multiple rest periods so that the knotted places in the body, mind, and psyche can release their tensions. Our intensive time of immersion with the Beloved is a healing time when old wounds and the armor around them may surface. In our accessibility to God's love these wounds can be brought to healing and the armor is allowed to dissolve. The intensive retreat experience can be from two days to a week. A longer time should only be taken by practitioners with many years of experience or under the guidance of such an experienced practitioner with appropriate training in leading others. Earlier in my life I undertook a year and a half intensive retreat experience to great benefit, but only after many years of practice and with the guidance of a skilled and wise mentor.

Individual and Group Retreat

The intensive retreat experience can be done individually or in a group. A group retreat should only be led by a mature retreat leader with many years' experience. The advantage of the group experience is the group support and structure, together with opportunities for individual interviews for guidance and processing of the prayer experience. The individual experience can be a creative experience, with the advantage of privacy and with an intentional structure and schedule which flows from the individual's own interiority. If possible, either should be done with appropriate guidance from an experienced practitioner.

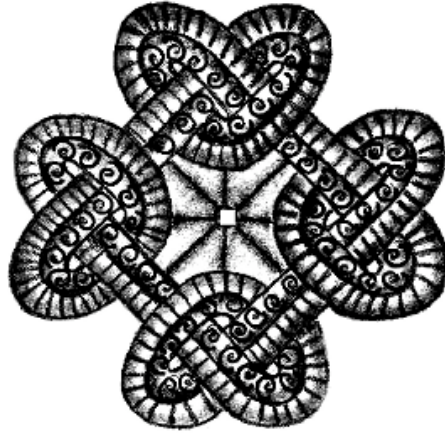
Guidance

Spiritual direction guidance from a trained contemplative teacher is often hard to find. However, as the Prayer of the Heart tradition comes back to life in the West, more and more teachers, particularly those of lay background will emerge to provide this teaching and guidance. Any practitioner who seeks guidance should only do so from those who share the same practice, and who have many more years experience. Such a teacher or guide, should themselves also have been the recipient of training from an experienced contemplative teacher. This choice on the part of the practitioner should always be a careful one and one which is brought to the Beloved in the interior silence and sanctuary of one's own practice.

-Chapter 15-

Vows of Practice-Rule of Life

Our Personal Covenant with the Beloved in Prayer of the Heart-



(Original Graphic by Janie Sohmer)

“ O, Begin! Fix some part off every day for private exercises.. Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days. Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer.” John Wesley (Thompson, p.145)

" Tighten to nothing the circle that is the world's things. Then the naked Circle can grow wide, enlarging, embracing all." Hadewich of Antwerp (Hirshfield, p.108)

Our Personal Covenant with God- In the Judeo Christian tradition the commitment to a relationship with God that is already innate and ontological, must be made conscious and intentional. In the same way a love relationship which is spousal in nature must in its maturation involve formal commitment and daily structure in order to be sustained. 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 in God. We must ****do**** something to deepen our daily gift of self in love to the Beloved. We must continually be **present** to the One who is Presence to us. 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 give life and commitment, moment to moment, to the living Truth of those experiences. One way of formalizing this personal covenant with the Beloved in the ancient monastic tradition of Prayer of the Heart is the formulation of a personal Rule of Life. This is not to be confused with the Rule of Life which religious communities or orders take on themselves.

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 God alone is our heart’s desire, and it is only when communion with God 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 that there is tremendous resistance in the ego-self of each person to the life long transformation of moving from private self seeking and the impulses of our misdirected desires, to bringing God at the center of all we do. Spiritual maturation therefore requires commitment, and commitment requires discipline, the capacity and willingness to be faithful, moment to moment, and day by day.

The purpose of the Rule of Life is to express in words, in commitment, in a daily map of life, the deepest intention of one’s life. This intention is to “walk humbly with God.”(Micah 6:8) This intention is to become a human vessel of the Beloved’s own Life and presence in the world and to bring forth and manifest this Unitive Life in compassionate service. This goal of growing intimacy and realization that the Beloved is All, 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 the Beloved.

Cultivation in the Garden of the Beloved-

As spiritual beings, humans may be compared to plants. The secret garden of our life in the Beloved needs to be watered and nurtured; it must be directed with supports, like a climbing tomato or bean plant needs a trellis or pole. Air and light and fertile ground are needed. A rule of life is a way of bringing together all those elements that will consecrate, nourish, protect, and sustain our life in God.

Elements of a Rule of Life:

The elements of a Rule of Life are the means of cultivating and expressing the garden of this relationship of communion with God.

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 should be restful and restoring, but also giving. The essential need of those consecrated times is faithfulness. This is the watering of the garden.

Consecrated Reading and Reflection- We need to also give time to reading and reflecting about the God who is our heart’s desire. We should make of this a Holy Leisure, which is restoring and enriching. This is the fertilizing of the garden.

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

each day. We do this not to judge or condemn or deem any part of our humanity unworthy. Rather we do this so that we 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 look closely for those aspects of our daily life which lead us from our deepest intention of love, or worse, bring injury to this intimacy with God. This daily practice brings the freedom of contrition and release from all that impedes the love of God in our life. The grace of conversion is always being offered. We can only make ourselves accessible to it. This is the weeding and the tilling of the soil of our garden.

Consecrated Service/Work- The praxis of self-giving Love extends to all of our community, to all beings, to all Creation, -to love and serve God 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, ministering to the sick or cleaning up the polluted waterways in our community. This service is the praxis of Ceaseless Prayer and the growing of the fruit of the garden.

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

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 you to be faithful to your covenant and with whom you can discuss your covenant from time to time. This is the sharing of our garden with our soul friend, or Anam Cara.

Our "Rule of Life" or " Personal Covenant with God" are vows of practice. Our Vows of Practice are akin to marriage 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, return to our practice, our singular desire to give ourselves to Love. This singular desire is our life and the core of our vows of practice.***

The Simplicity of this Great Interior Work-

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, this singular intention which Jesus proclaimed in the Great Commandment. All disciplines and practices are at the service of

this great work to which all humanity is called. The author of The *Cloud of Unknowing* states it beautifully in this way:

"For I tell you this, one loving blind desire for God alone is more valuable in itself, more pleasing to God and to the saints, more beneficial to your own growth, and more helpful to your friends, both living and dead, than anything else you can do." (Johnston, p. 60)

Dedication to our Singular Desire

I have dedicated this book of Prayer of the Heart in memory to honor Marguerite Porete and others like her throughout the centuries who have given themselves so totally to this singular desire of Unitive Love. She expresses this desire of consecrated love, which is both ours and our Beloved's deepest desire, in these poetic words:

**" Beloved, what do you want of me?
I contain all that was, and that is, and shall be,
I am filled with the All.
Take of me all you please-
if you want all of myself, I'll not say no.
Tell me, beloved, what you want of me-
I am Love, who am filled with the all:
what you want,
we want, beloved-
tell us your desire nakedly." Marguerite Porete (14th c.)
(Hirshfield. p.98)**

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Prayer of the Heart Resources

Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest-

(www.PrayerofTheHeart.com)

Mission Statement:

"We offer teaching and support in contemplative spiritual practice to churches, small faith communities, and individuals who seek intimate relationship with God in the ancient Christian tradition of Prayer of the Heart. We express the fruits of this practice through service which welcomes the whole human family without exception into the Unitive love of God."

Bill Ryan and Sharon K. Cooper work together as a team of spiritual directors in a variety of settings in Alaska, Oregon, and the Pacific Northwest. They transmit the practice of the Prayer of the Heart to all who seek and respond to the hunger for Inner Communion with God.

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Sharon K. Cooper, M.A. - Spiritual Director and Co-Director of Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest.

Shalom Prayer Center- Shalom Prayer Center is a retreat center located in Mt. Angel, Oregon, a program of Our Lady of Angels Benedictine Monastery. Bill Ryan and Sr. Antoinette Traeger O.S.B. offer there an annual program of teaching and retreat experience called "Prayer of the Heart Companions." (<http://www.open.org/~shalom/>)

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(Carol Joselyn- Director of Bethany House of Prayer Retreat Center- Fort Dodge, Iowa)

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"As one on a spiritual journey beyond anything I ever could have imagined, I have found great insight and wisdom in Bill Ryan's words. Drawing not only from his broad knowledge of the contemplative tradition's teachings but also from years of personal contemplative practice and spiritual direction experience, Bill offers, in this book, gentle guidance and thoughtful discussion which is descriptive and challenging, as well as immensely encouraging. Written with clarity and understanding from his own surrendered heart and depth of practice, this book will serve as a valuable guide to both novice and those who have been on a contemplative path in their journey with God for some time." - Jean Woessner

"I believe the greatest gift one person can give another is to walk with them on their spiritual journey. As a lay person I searched for ten years to find a spiritual teacher with Bill Ryan's abilities and personal experience. I have deep gratitude and appreciation for Bill's sharing his experience, wisdom, knowledge, and guidance in the Prayer of The Heart course. I consider Bill an Elder and a spiritual friend in the Prayer of The Heart practice." - Susanne Wilmoth,

About the Author

Bill Ryan. is a clinical counselor and spiritual director. Bill has 30 years experience in clinical counseling. Through his private practice in Avalon Counseling Bill offers counseling and spiritual direction services to those who wish to make contemplative prayer or meditation the center of their life. Bill provides his writings and audio recordings of contemplative spiritual practice through this center.

Bill has undergone formation in contemplative spiritual practice for over three decades. His initial training came through Shasta Abbey, a Zen monastery in the Soto tradition. He has been mentored by Rev. Bernard McVeigh O.C.S.O, former abbot of Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey. He has also studied with Pat Hawk and Greg Mayers, members of the Redemptorist Order and co-directors of The Contemplative Path, a program for formation in Contemplative practice. Bill has also trained in providing spiritual direction for those on the contemplative way through Shalom Prayer Center, under the direction of Sr. Antoinette Traeger O.S.B. Bill and Antoinette partner together in offering "Prayer of the Heart Companions," an annual program of spiritual direction and teaching in Prayer of the Heart practice at Shalom Prayer Center located in Mt. Angel, Oregon, at the Benedictine monastery of Our Lady of Angels.

Bill is a member in Seven Thunders, a contemplative community affiliated with Rev. Pat Hawk and his contemplative ministry, grounded in the teachings of Willigis Jager O.S.B., author of *Contemplation-a Christian Path*.

Bill has been active for ten years in a ministry of contemplative guidance and teaching through Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest in partnership with Sharon K. Cooper. Bill is also the author of ***Breathing Yeshua- Christian Meditation in the Way of the Heart***.