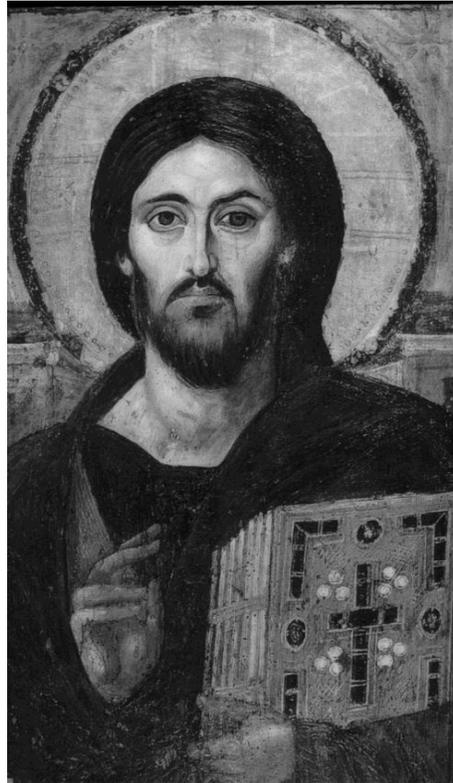


# *Breathing Yeshua*



## *-Christian Meditation in the Way of the Heart*

*by William Ryan*

## Introduction

A hermit friend of mine who lives and hikes in the hill country of the Southeast United States says often, "We are not human beings on a spiritual journey; rather we are spiritual beings on a human journey." I awakened to this truth in the midst of a spiritual/existential crisis in 1970. I chose to live and walk the human journey as a spiritual being. Since that time I have reflected on both the common ground and the uniqueness of the spiritual paths of the peoples of this earth. I have concluded that the mystical paths of the world's great wisdom traditions all arise from the Heart, or spiritual center in each of us. In the same breath I know now that the "Way" for me is Yeshua the Christ. (Throughout this work I use more frequently the Aramaic term, "Yeshua," for the Christian Savior instead of the more conventional term of Greek origin, "Jesus.") I have reflected on these questions: "How do I understand Yeshua as Lord and Redeemer? How do I enter and live the Mystery of Christ?" Perhaps I wonder these things because my own contemplative journey as a young man started in another tradition, in Soto Zen Buddhism.

In my early twenties I looked hard for a meditation practice. I couldn't find it in Christianity. I did find a most excellent Zen meditation teacher, Rev. Roshi Margaret Jiyu Kennett, who possessed a vast knowledge of a parallel, but little known, tradition of meditation practice in the Christian tradition of contemplation and Prayer of the Heart. She introduced me to the Christian Contemplative tradition. Now, after more than 34 years of practice, most of it in my recovered Christianity, grace moves me to articulate what is unique in the Christian path of meditation. Other traditions sit in silent meditation. Seekers in other traditions come to a profound experience of the Divine and express it in terms in harmony with their history and culture. What is unique in the Christian Way of the Heart? Who is Christ is to us?

Some in the Christian tradition declare that it is simply enough to hold a cognitive belief in the historical and personal Jesus in order to follow this path. Just "believing" in Jesus is enough; and this qualifies as "saved by Faith" from an anticipated damnation. Somehow just signing on to the "winning team" doesn't inspire. Our response to the Christ of Faith for me must be a true engagement in a life of deepening commitment and surrender. In the Gospel of Matthew Yeshua asks Peter, "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15) That question never ceases to pierce me to the core. A verbal response never satisfies; I can only live the question. The real response is the life I live, the truth I manifest in my own life. For to find and live the truth of my being is to bring forth and live the truth of Christ's Being.

We, like the peoples of the time when Yeshua walked, have wrongly believed that there is a great gulf between humans and the Divine, between God and Creation. Yeshua revealed in His words and in His nature that God is a Waterfall of Infinite Love and Mercy pouring out into the world as total gift without expectation. The only obstacle to God is us, our fear of being opened, of being fully willing to receive the gift of the God-Life and in trust to give ourselves and our humanity wholly and completely in return to the One Life. The ancients of Eastern Christianity called this the path of "Theosis," of Divinization, becoming the Christos.

I believe that Yeshua came to say that in Himself the God of Mystery is fully accessible. "My true nature is that gift. The I AM in me is what I offer." He proclaims the promise that to abide in the Kingdom is to open our humanity to be the vessel of this gift of Himself. He assures us that in Him we may find the Way and the Truth to approach and abide in the great Mystery of the Ocean of Divine Being He calls Abba. In our personal devotional love of Yeshua the transcendent Abba becomes accessible and intimate. In the love of Yeshua we enter the universal Heart of Christ, Heart of the Abba, the Deathless, the Eternal. When we close ourselves off from unitive Divine Love, then we live in the darkness of despair and separateness. Yeshua says in the

Gospel of John, "I AM the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness." (John 8:12) The "amazing grace," of the path, is that we have in human form and life, in the Yeshua of history and present intimate Presence, a full expression and ever present revelation of the I AM of the Source of all existence.

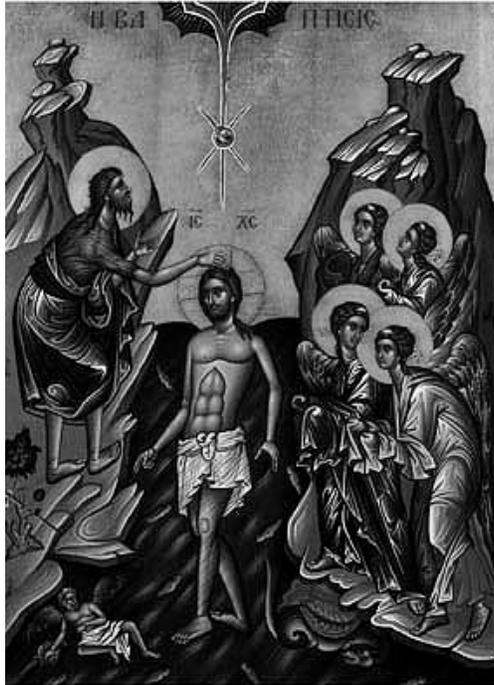
In the Gospel of John Yeshua affirms that His Life is our true life. "In a little while the world will not see me but you will see me. Because I live, you also live." (John 14:20) Yeshua promises us that we will know and share His union with the Abba. "On that day, you will know that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you." "On that day" can be any day. That day can be this moment. Yeshua used the term Abba in a patriarchal society to tell us that we are the offspring of the Divine Beloved and we are as intimately close as child is to intimate parent, father or mother, flesh of flesh, spirit of Spirit. He says that the person who has looked on His face has looked on the face of the Abba. We are invited by Yeshua to enter into devotional love with Him, to touch Him, to gaze upon His face and to be touched by Him. "Abide in me" He whispers to each of us. "Let me be your doorway to the Source, the Transcendent Reality that holds the universe into being." In the person of Yeshua we find our heart's desire, a perfect love, a perfect sanctuary, a place where we can rest and heal always. In the Heart of Christ we enter the Heart of God, the Heart of Unitive Love in all Creation.

In the practice of Prayer of the Heart in uniting breath and holy name through "Breathing Yeshua," we thereby consecrate ourselves in devotional love to Him, and we offer ourselves into the limitless Life of His Heart. This consecrated love to Him becomes the means, the doorway into the wordless, imageless Mystery of Trinitarian Life, which Buddhists call "Sunyata." This is the movement from the cataphatic human expression into the apophatic formless spaciousness of God's Mystery. Personal Love in Yeshua takes us into the Oceanic Love of the Trinity that encompasses all things. "We will come to them and make our home in them." (John 14:23) ***Love in Yeshua is the unique core of the Christian Path. Love is the path, Love is the journey, and Love is the fulfillment. Breathing Yeshua is the simple way of communion with Christ in Prayer of the Heart.***

The contemplative writer, Brian Taylor summarizes beautifully the ancient praxis of Breathing Yeshua in the Way of the Heart this way:

*"For contemplatives, the use of The Jesus Prayer may be one of the most ancient, consistently taught, simplest, most direct, and powerful ways of accessing Christ's transformative power in prayer. It calls upon us only to be present, to open our hearts to God, and to observe those personal obstacles that arise to stand in the way of that openness. By using the name of Jesus, it encapsulates everything we know, believe, love, and hope about Him, who is both the human face of God as well as our human potential. But rather than thinking about Jesus or our relationship to him, the Jesus Prayer brings us into His very presence. And in this nearness, He lives His life through us and takes us into the glory of God."*

(Taylor, p. 75-76)



## Dedication

This work is dedicated in gratitude to those Spiritual Elders who have companioned me in this journey into the Christ Mystery. I wish to bow therefore in fervent gratitude to Antoinette Traeger O.S.B. and Bernard McVeigh O.C.S.O., female and male monastics of our time, who have transmitted to me the best of the desert mothers and fathers. Above all they have taught me the Way of Christ is Love, in their daily practice of prayer, service, and relationship. I know I am forever united with them in the Heart of Christ.

## Acknowledgements

The development of this teaching and my personal growth the Way of the Heart has been nourished by the loving contributions and support of my partners in ministry, Sharon K. Cooper, Dorothy Pulka O.S. B., and Antoinette Traeger O.S.B. I thank my spouse, Jeanette Ryan, for the many years of her patient support and encouragement.

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## ***-Chapter One-***



### ***Breathing Yeshua***

Sr. Antoinette Traeger O.S.B. exclaimed with determination, "The only thing I could do was sit and breathe." Antoinette Traeger, a partner in Prayer of the Heart ministry and an 80 year old monastic spiritual elder, spoke a simple and deep wisdom in response to a challenging moment in her life. Sometimes in life we realize to sit and breathe, to be with the experiences of life with wholehearted presence and loving intention, is all we can do; and it is sufficient and complete. My wife, Jeanette, a Zen meditation practitioner, has a calligraphy on her wall "***Sit and Breathe***" to remind her in a similar way of her spiritual practice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Like all of us the ammas and abbas realized that the primary impediment to the undivided life is the divided attachments and culturally conditioned purposes of the mind. When they went into the desert seeking simplicity and commitment, they brought their mind and its incessant thoughts and traffic with them. Therefore to be fully given and to rest in communion with Christ in the Heart they realized they must find a freedom from the mind's tyranny. These seekers formulated a simple schema in their prayer life. They understood that a person thinks about God in the prayer of the mind; a person speaks to God with the prayer of the lips; and a person experiences God in the silence and interior communion of the prayer of the heart. To assist in this process of anchoring in the Heart or spiritual center they understood that using a prayer word in alignment with breath was most efficacious. They chose a word or phrase from the scriptures. And for many the

most powerful word of all was the name of the Redeemer Christ, Jesus, or Yeshua. Over time for many in Eastern Christianity the form of the Prayer of the Heart most commonly known was the Jesus Prayer. An expanded form of the Jesus prayer ("Lord Jesus, Have Mercy.") was used by many based on the Gospel exclamation of Bartimaeus, the blind man. "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me."(Mark 10:47) Various forms of the Jesus prayer have been used through the centuries, but the simplest and most easily aligned with the breath is the holy name of Jesus or Yeshua. Again Brian Taylor speaks of this ancient tradition of inner communion with Christ:

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

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

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

Prayer of the Heart was understood then and now to be the way we anchor our attention (awareness) and our intention (will), fully in the Heart of Christ. This practice takes place during formal times of prayer in silence and sitting. The Prayer of the Heart is also a practice that is ceaseless. It takes place throughout the day, in the midst of activity, with a habitual and ongoing return to the name of Yeshua in moment to moment presence and self-offering love, in all that we do, in our natural inhalation and exhalation of the breath. This way the invitation to a life of ceaseless prayer from Yeshua and the apostle Paul is seen as both possible and desirable for all. All who breathe can breathe Yeshua.

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

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

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

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

### **Silent Sitting Practice -**

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

#### ***The Guidelines of Formal Prayer of the Heart Practice:***

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

### **The Method:**

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

### **Summary of Guidelines and Method:**

Over time we cultivate a capacity, not to stop thought and emotion, but to release from them, and abide in an interior communion in the Heart of Christ that is beneath and beyond the mind and its activity. We come to experience that we have thoughts, but we are not our thoughts. We have a freedom to find our refuge in the Heart of Christ alone, whether in our silent prayer practice, or whether in the ceaseless prayer of daily life and activity. We come to know that our true home is the Heart of Christ, the Kingdom of God within us. John of Gaza, an early practitioner of the Prayer of the Heart said, "The cell in which he (the monk) is enclosed, for the sake of the name of Jesus, is a sanctuary, for it contains the dwelling place of God." (Ware, p.92) Our true home, our monk's cell, is the Heart of Christ, and our practice is one of ceaseless refuge in the Heart of Christ.

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

## ***-Chapter Two-***



### **Christ the Master**

Icons are wonderful ways in the Christian tradition of communicating spiritual realities without the mediation of conceptual thought, using visual image instead. To gaze upon the icon without analysis or discursive thought can be a way to receive a more direct intuitive contemplative communication. In a recent retreat I used two icons written by Brother Claude OSB of Mt. Angel, Abbey in Oregon. One of the icons is a representation of the ancient Christ Pantocrator image and illustrates Christ pointing with his right hand to the heart and holding the Torah in his left. Together the gestures speak of the origin of spiritual authority, Divine Love in the Heart of Christ.

The Heart in the tradition speaks to what is essential, what is the true Spirit within us, the life of God within us. And for us it is the Heart of Christ who manifests the Heart of the Divine. For Christians the Heart of Christ is the anchor and source of authority. The Heart of Christ is the Life of the Master, and it is the Heart of Christ that guides us and holds us accountable to the authority of Love. In relational life all of us need to be held accountable to an authority that is higher than our own ego, and we need a Life and Power that is ultimately trustworthy. In the spiritual life we need to find our only sure guidance and a refuge to which we can fully surrender. Certainly if we've lived long enough we have learned through bitter experience and error that our own ego-mind is not a very good guide in life. We also need a personal experience of God to encourage and support us and open us to the power of love in the spiritual life. Both of those aspects of Christ the Master and Christ the Companion are manifested in my altar icons and are central to the Christocentric character of Prayer of the Heart practice.

## **Breathing Yeshua- Actualizing Christ**

I'd like to share some thoughts with you about Prayer of the Heart practice and these aspects of who Christ is in our journey into God. I'll start with a basic understanding of what the language of Prayer of the Heart practice is. Practice here means "praxis" and that means to actualize, to express what is real, what is ontologically real, to actualize it in our humanity and in our human life. So the Prayer of the Heart practice is an actualization of the essential truth of our human life and its ontological unity with Divine Life. It's very important to think beyond any notion that this is a kind of method or technique. Prayer of the Heart practice is an actualization, manifesting and making real, what is already a hidden truth. Prayer of the Heart is a Way, a path, and we are people of the Way. Whatever we do as method is simply a "way" to become accessible to what is, to the "Isness" of the "I AM." For Christians Yeshua the Christ is this Way.

For a Christian the Divine mystery is revealed both in the personal and the individual historical Yeshua and in the risen and mystical universal Christ. The nature of God is both intensely personal and intimate, and oceanic and all encompassing. Both are true. We are human and in a human face we find the ultimate mystery approachable. In Christ our mistaken illusion of a barrier disappears and we enter into the life of the Trinity, the Christ life, consciously and intentionally in this human life. Our praxis of the Prayer of the Heart, therefore, is uniting our life utterly with the life of Christ so that our humanity is wholly infused and alive in Christ, a state of complete and utter receptivity and self-gift in love. This is the consecrated life that Yeshua reveals to us and invites us to. The Prayer of the Heart is the actualization then of this consecrated life of communion in Christ. It's not just sitting down in silence for 25 minutes once or twice a day. It's every moment and every breath of every day.

The next question may be, "That's well and good, but how do we live this life, how do we make it real?" One way to express this directly and without abstraction or analysis is maybe to hold our two hands out in front of us. When we do this, the palms are outward and upward, open and empty, and they release everything in their grasp. They are ready to receive the gift of God's own self, the Christ life. They are ready to offer in Christ our human life. This simple expression, this simple metaphor, this simple actualization, is the meaning of our existence. It is the meaning of the Eucharist that we celebrate ritually. This is the ontological reality we live, and we can live this reality consciously and intentionally in the praxis of Prayer of the Heart.

Prayer is this same release into Divine Reality and the receiving of the Divine Reality into our life. Like the woman at the well we are invited to awaken and to receive the gift of God and all we must do is open and receive. Yeshua said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, 'give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (John 4:10) In the personal Yeshua we can approach the Giver and in His Life, the Life of the Christos, we are given the Gift of God. The universal and oceanic Living Water rises up within us, and infuses our human life. Yeshua says again, "I am the true vine and my Father is the vine grower. Abide in me as I abide in you. I am the vine and you are the branches." (John 15:1) We are one, one

plant, one being in Christ. The teaching here, in this and in all the metaphors we use in Christianity about the mystical body of Christ, is that each one of us possesses the potential to be a unique expression of the Life of Christ.

### **The Nature of Our Surrender**

The teachings of Yeshua are simple but hard, and that's why He called it the "narrow path," because most avoid it. The ego-mind resists this level of trust, this level of kenotic self-emptying, this level of release from self-absorption and control. In many different kaleidoscopic ways, Yeshua keeps pointing to a central truth. He proclaims: "Follow me... Give up everything..... Become as a child.. " He invites us to become simple, naïve, trusting. "Love God with all of your being. Love your neighbor as yourself." In the Beatitudes Yeshua challenges us that in our letting go, in the diminutions of our ego-self and its layered attachments, we truly become free.

In His example and His teaching He invites us to become gentle and release from self-absorption. What He exhorts us to do is to follow Him, to let Him be the Master of our heart, and will, and help us relinquish from the bondage of the ego-mind. We are taught it is in our self-giving, in the relinquishment of the ego-mind, the consecration of our self to Christ, that we find ourselves and uncover our real freedom. Yeshua invites us to come to Him and release from our heavy burdens.

There are the trials of life of just surviving. However, the biggest portion of our burden is our own self-absorption and all the fear that arises. Yeshua says that uniting with Him is the way we lay our burden of separateness down. "Take my yoke (union) upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart." He whispers to us that we will find rest, a rest that comes from letting go. "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:30) Yeshua gives us a warm and intimate invitation. At the same time there is a caution there, that yoke or union with Him is also a discipline. It is a discipline to be accessible to God, to be given to Christ. That inner work of kenosis has to happen. To find this interior freedom an unburdening of self has to happen.

### **Spiritual Authority**

An essential task to even begin on a spiritual path and to stay faithful is to acknowledge and accept there is an authority, a Reality, a Life that is higher than our own ego-mind. There is a Will to which our own private, personal will is accountable. There is a Love to which we bow and give endless adoration and trust. Without this we can go nowhere. Without adoration and trust our ego becomes a god unto itself, and we become entrapped in a life of hopeless idolatry and self-absorption. This consciousness of separateness and self-idolatry is the source of suffering and every evil in the world. The consciousness of self-absorption without limits and without submission and without accountability is what the modern consumer-prosperity-culture holds as an ideal. And it will bring only misery, evil, and suffering for all.

In the letters of Paul are frequent references to the teaching that Christ is Lord. We have to remember what a revolutionary statement that was in a time when only Caesar was deemed Lord. To embark on the consecrated transformed life we must continually choose

a greater Life, a greater Love as sovereign over our life. ***For those who are on the Way of the Heart the Divine Beloved in the Person and Life of Christ must become the true Master.*** How do we let Christ be the Master in our daily practice? This is the important question we ask ourselves. His invitation is that we will find ultimate freedom, joy, and belonging in his yoke. And of course the other meaning of yoke is "joining" or "union." It is the yoke of self-relinquishment, the relinquishment of the ego-mind, and all its self pre-occupation, fear and grasping. The hand that offers in love cannot open when it is clenched.

### **Kenosis**

St. Paul spoke of this Life of Christ within us as the "Great Kenosis." (Phil. 2:6) Kenosis is the hand that opens, releases, extends, and offers. In our praxis of the kenosis of Christ we learn to lay down our weapons of self-defense and separateness. We may recognize them as our frequent rationalization, our reactive criticism of others, our avoidance of seeing the truth of our self-absorbed thoughts and actions. In kenosis we find the freedom to dwell in the Heart of Christ and find our belonging. In kenosis we find we are free and at peace, to receive criticism, to receive disappointment, and even to receive failure. In the freedom of kenosis we are free lay down our life, especially the habitual patterns of our conditioning. We are free to relinquish the life long conditioning, mental formations, and habit patterns that feed our self-absorption, and prevent us from opening to the Unconditioned Life of Christ that is our true Life.

### **The Open Handed Life**

In the beatitudes Yeshua invites us to cease from grasping, to live the freedom of the open handed life so that we can receive mercy, peace, and fullness of life. When the hand releases from everything, only Essence remains. And to open to Essence is to open to Christ and bring to our own life the reality Paul described in Galatians: "I live, not I, but Christ lives in me." Christ is the Master who invites us to "Lose your life, so that you can find your (real) life." (Matt. 10:39)

In our practice of Prayer of the Heart we continually ask, "How do I let go of grasping, how do I release from the compulsions of the ego-mind?" This release into the freedom of Christ begins with our "cultivation of attention," to see when we are grasping with the mind, insisting on our rights, our opinions, insisting that our agenda in life be the first and only priority? This means seeing the thought forms in our minds and seeing the ego-self attach to them. And in each moment of consecration we learn to release our humanity, our human thoughts, our human desires, and our human attachments, to the will of the Master. ***This consecrated attention becomes Presence and Adoration.*** Equally we bring our cultivation of intention to each moment of life. We release from all motivations but one, our heart's desire to be one with and to ceaselessly offer all that we are in love and self-gift to the Master, Yeshua, our Beloved.

### **Endless Conversion to the Master**

The life of open-handed offering to Christ is a life of endless, ceaseless conversion. In this offering we find an interior act of willingness to see the injuries we may inflict on our own souls and on those nearby. This ceaseless conversion leads us to return to Christ

the Master to say "You know that I love you, help me to follow you." To receive and accept our sorrow and let it be the means of continual conversion is our yoking and "oneing" with Christ.

In the Christian path of meditation or contemplative prayer, unlike some other traditions, the only real master, the only true guru, the only teacher, is Christ. This offers a tremendous safety to us. Tragic things happen in any religious tradition when persons surrender themselves in misplaced Faith to flawed human beings. Terrible injury can happen. Some persons are very skilled, trained, and holy teachers but no human being is without failing. When Christ is our sole master and sovereign over our hearts, master of the soul, when Christ is our singular teacher, when Christ is our only true guide, then we have the genuine safety to fully give ourselves in trust. Teachers in the Christian contemplative tradition can be companions on this road to Emmaus. They can encourage and point us back to the light of Christ in our own hearts. Christ alone is the Master. Together we know that the One we seek is the One who walks with us. And we may often only know his Presence in the burning of our hearts. It is enough. To give oneself ceaselessly and without reservation to Him is the joy of coming Home, to our singular Refuge, our singular Joy, our singular Trust.

## *-Chapter Three-*



### **Christ the Companion**

Paul Romans 8:38-39 " *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God, in Christ Jesus, our Lord.*"

#### **The Way of Devotional Love**

It is a great support to have a spiritual director or a contemplative teacher who helps us be accountable to develop a daily spiritual practice in our life, to keep showing up day in and day out. The truth is any relationship withers if we don't give the gift of our time and the fullness of our attention and our intention. If we really want to develop a friendship or a love relationship, what do we do? We spend time. We make a point to "clear the deck" and everything else is placed out of the way. We create a sanctuary of consecrated space where we can just be with our beloved or our friend. What we intend is this: "I'm just here. I just want to receive you and give you the gift of my self, my presence." This self-giving with God, is the communion we long for. In the same moment this total presence and gift of self requires a letting go in total trust. In the previous chapter we

discussed this word in the tradition for letting go, we call it "kenosis." Kenosis makes us present and ready to walk with Christ, our life-long companion.

We have become a culture that is involved in narcissism to the nth degree. In this consumer society we have come to worship the delusion that completion in life comes through a kind of private, personal fulfillment of possession or taking what we think we need from outside of ourselves. " If I just have this, if I just have that, if I just have the right relationship, if I just have the right job I'm going to be fulfilled." So one's life becomes a frenzy of getting the right kind of things, or the right kind of relationship, or the right kind of experiences. And heaven help anyone who gets my way! That's self-absorption, that's narcissism; and that kind of pure self-idolatry is the source of every evil in the world.

The spiritual author M. Scott Peck has called evil malignant narcissism. What Yeshua is asking is just the opposite, not private, personal fulfillment, not self-fulfillment, but self-transcendence through self-giving love. He invites us to go beyond the confines of this self, this illusion of a separate self. We do this self-release and self-offering with these empty hands. The hands that grasp so tightly must unclench and release from the things that we cling to as God substitutes for our private, personal fulfillment. Instead, Yeshua says, "Come, enter into the stream of Divine life beyond the confines of our self-made self." This is the Realm of His Heart, the Kingdom of His all- encompassing Love. In doing this we don't lose our true self. We find our true self, we find our true spirit in the Heart of Christ. In this self-offering the hand opens and offers all that we are in love, making us ever receptive, present, able to receive the gift of God, God's own Self in Christ, our life companion. If we are frightened and grasping, if we're holding on, if we're self absorbed, we're not there. We're not accessible. And to be accessible to God's Self -Giving is the whole purpose of a spiritual practice.

In retreats I frequently place on an altar another icon drawn by Brother Claude. In the icon Yeshua is seated, extending his arms around the beloved disciple, John. John is extending his hands forward in a gesture of offering to Christ. A blue color of divinity extends from Christ's mantle and envelopes the shades of it around the apostle, John. The blue of divinity and red of humanity become intertwined in this embrace. The icon expresses a delightful intimacy. Often in the Celtic tradition the apostle John is the apostle who is seen as possessing the authority of Christ because he listens and hears the Heart of Christ, his head on the Savior's chest. The beloved disciple is a symbol of ourselves who walk and live in the embrace of Yeshua. In this image we see our opening to receive Christ's divinity and the self-offering of our humanity. Our self-emptying makes us receptive and accessible to receive the fullness of Christ, and to give the fullness of our life to Him. This is a life of companionship and intimacy with Him.

### **A Life of Companionship and Communion with Christ**

#### **Prayer of Consecration**

In the Hindu tradition there is a stream of spiritual practice called Bhakti Yoga. Yoga means connection or communion and Bhakti Yoga is the devotional practice of

communion with the Divine. Devotional self-giving love for Christ is a powerful aspect of Prayer of the Heart. There are different ways of cultivating devotional love. Among them is a daily prayer of consecration. The Prayer of Consecration is a way that you express in words, your love commitment daily to Christ. The essence of the prayer in your own words is "I love you, Yeshua, and I give myself to you." This is not unlike the love commitments we renew with our loved ones when we say, "I love you." The words that you would use must be your words coming from your own heart and your own experience through your own expression. It is both powerful and transforming at the very beginning of the day as you sit down to do your silent Prayer of the Heart, to say, "O, Beloved, Christ, I give myself to you. Take my life and make it yours." It establishes us in our intention of devotional love. This praxis connects our Heart's desire to its true completion in Yeshua. To find intervals throughout the day where we can repeat that prayer re-anchors us in that intention. Returning to our Prayer of Consecration grounds us again in our very motivation for living. "Why am I here? What am I doing? What is all of this for anyway?" When we are in full harmony with our central purpose, our life becomes powerful and purposeful. Our practice pulls us out of the unconscious inclination of the mind where we coast along the lines of least resistance and comfort; and it re-anchors us in aliveness in the Heart of Christ.

### **The Holy Name of the Beloved**

Human beings have had a practice across traditions of a reciting the name of the Beloved One. This is especially true in the monotheistic traditions, Christian, Jewish, and Moslem. In the Christian tradition we personalize the name of the Holy One using the name of Jesus or Yeshua. When you are really in love with someone in a relationship, powerfully in love, the name of the one you love is powerful. It connects you. So invoking the name of your beloved brings up the desire that you have to be one with him/her, to give yourself in love. For that reason the ancients discovered that communion with Christ and transformation in Christ arose through invoking the name of Yeshua in silent prayer and in the midst of activity throughout the day. This invocation synchronized with breath became a central expression of Prayer of the Heart. It can find liturgical and joyful expression in chanting in groups or alone as well.

### **Icon Gazing**

Another way to cultivate devotional love is icon gazing. Icon gazing is not intended to be a way to engage the imagination and think wonderful thoughts about Christ. Rather it is a way to let go of the imagination and receptively receive the self-communication that Christ offers to you through the icon. Icon gazing is an intuitive, receptive process, and naturally the communication will not be experienced the same for any two people. We use the visual image of Yeshua to go beyond image to the transcendent experience of the mystical Christ. In the Gospel Mary of Magdala, upon encountering the risen Christ, says, "Master." She is admonished to not cling to the form or the image. Yeshua says, "Do not cling to me." He seems to be saying to Mary and to us, "Who I am is much deeper and truer than this form." The mystery of Christ is much bigger than our ideas of Christ, our images of Christ. The mystery of Christ is Divine Life itself. Therefore in this practice, like Mary of Magdala, we release from emotion and imagination to a sacred and empty receptivity to receive Christ's self-communication to us through the icon.

### **Conversation with Christ**

Another form of daily companionship is our inner conversation with Yeshua. Sometimes it takes the form of words. Often it is a wordless conversation. We share the experience and the challenge of our daily life with Christ. We know we have a place of unconditional acceptance and wisdom where our life is brought daily and offered.

### **Sanctuary and Protection in Christ**

All of us need to find inner safety and protection when we feel at risk, physically or spiritually vulnerable. How we find ultimate security when life is filled with threat or risk is an essential interior movement in the spiritual life. How we find protection from temptation and spiritual fears is how we take refuge in Christ our Companion. Prayer of the Heart is the growing discovery of the experience of inner sanctuary and protection in Christ. All of us have the need to experience protection because the world is often a difficult and dangerous place and there are forces and experiences that are injurious to our spiritual nature. Some prayers in the ancient Celtic folk tradition express this protection in Christ in that they are encircling prayers. They speak of being encircled and shielded in the love of Christ. Here is one about shielding others:

*May those without shelter be under your guarding this day, O Christ.  
May the wandering find places of welcome  
O, Son of the tears of the wounds of the piercings  
May your cross this day be shielding them*

Here is an encircling prayer of protection for oneself:

*My Christ, my love, my encircler  
Be near me, each day, each night, each light, each dark  
Be near me; uphold me, my treasure, my truth*

These kind of prayers or just invoking the name of Yeshua or a short prayer of protection, such as, "O, Yeshua, you are my refuge and my strength. O, Yeshua, shield me from harm." are excellent forms of guard of the heart practice. Guard of the heart describes an ancient practice of protection of our spiritual center. When we do spiritual practice of inner transformation in Prayer of the Heart in many ways we become much more sensitive to the world around us. We become more open to people around us, to the feelings, the thoughts, the energies around us. Thus we have to take more responsibility to take care of our spiritual nature and to protect the heart from what is negative, intrusive, or violent. **Guard of the Heart** (Ryan, p. 84) is a needed aspect of Prayer of the Heart practice, and prayers of protection with Christ, our ceaseless Companion, are an essential aspect of our daily practice.

### **Restoration and Consolation in Christ**

Yeshua said, "Abide in me." In other words, "Rest in me. I am your refuge. I am the one who will restore you." So give restoration time with Christ each day, of letting everything else go to be with Christ to restore your soul. For some lighting a candle and reclining on the floor in your prayer space with the intention, "I want to be with you, I need to be with you," will bring the peace and healing we need for the day, a peace the world cannot give.

### **Inner guidance with Christ**

Most of us think that we have to know what we ought to be doing in our lives. We have to be in charge and competent all the time. We think we ought to be "on top of it" and we push our agenda about what is supposed to happen. If we really want to be open to receive guidance, particularly spiritual guidance, we have to have something the Zen people call, "don't know" mind. A "don't know" mindset means that you accept you really don't know. If you don't know, that means you are open to be surprised. It means you're willing to let go of your agenda and surrender to the love and will of Christ. I saw an older lady in her mid-eighties not long ago who thought she might be close to death. Later she was told that maybe she wasn't close to death because her cardiac surgery was successful. She said, "Darn it, I don't know what to do. I thought I was preparing for death and now it looks like it's not going to happen. What am I supposed to do?" So I started talking to her about "don't know mind" and she thought that was just great. When we really want guidance, we ask because we don't know. We ask from receptivity, from trust. Yeshua said, "Seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you, ask and you shall receive." (Matt. 7:7) He didn't suggest we ask and take the advice when it compares favorably with what you already have in mind. So letting go of our agenda, letting go of our expectations is difficult inner work because of the mind's compulsion for control. The fullness of trust and refuge in the One in whom we abide and find our true Life is a different direction, a direction that takes us to surrender and Home.

### **Communion with Christ the Life-Long Companion**

In this companionship the great, great blessing is that we are never alone. We are never abandoned; we are never unloved; we are never rejected. Christ is the Faithful companion who says, "I am with you always." (Matt. 28:20) No exceptions exist here. He promises, "I am with you always." Personal intimacy with Christ alone opens us to intimacy with Christ in all Creation. "All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being was Life and the Life was the light of the people." (John 1:3-5) It doesn't get any more intimate than this. Gregory of Nazianzus says, "Christ exists in all things that are." (Ryan, p.31) When we are personally intimate with Christ, we are in communion with Christ in all things.

Laurence Freeman O.S.B. the great teacher of Christian meditation says this about union with Christ in a lifetime of companionship, "The Kingdom which Jesus taught and embodied in *his relationship with us liberates us from individuality as separateness into individuality as indivisibility*. In the Kingdom we pass from psychological isolation to spiritual union. It is the end of individual history as we imagine it. The breaching of the wall of the ego is an eschatological moment and end of time and an entry into

timelessness. But we experience it in time and therefore it changes the way we live in time. ***The sorrow inherent in knowing myself as being only and forever just 'me' yields to welcoming a new identity gained in a sharing of being.*** On one side of the wall of the ego, individuality means merely separateness. On the other side the meaning changes to union. All relationships from the most intimate to the most impersonal are transformed by breaking through the wall of the ego. .... Here, through this aperture in our egoism, at this frontier of our identity, where the question, 'who am I?' becomes a pure experience of Reality." (Freeman, p. 235)

We recognize the presence of the risen Christ is the experience of our true identity. That unitive experience of awakening to the risen Life of Yeshua as one's own Life is an experience of being always home. Wonderfully this experience of oneness with Christ is summarized in St. Paul to the Galatians (3:29): "You are all one person in Christ Jesus." Joyfully, amazingly, we are never alone.

## -Chapter Four-



### **Bringing Forth the Mind of Christ**

#### **From Self Consciousness to Christ Consciousness**

Talking about Prayer of the Heart is always audacious because we are trying to find language for a practice that makes us accessible to a Reality beyond words. The practice itself is not a concept. It is not a technology that produces results. You experience it by doing it. A simple gesture or a hand expression can best express the life of consecration more so than a thousand words. We bring our hands together in bowing adoration, we extend our hands open before us in love and self-offering. In this is the totality of our life of communion in God.

*To bring forth the mind of Christ, the totality of Prayer of the Heart is expressed in the inner movement of bowing and offering. Whether we are in silence or in daily life activity, this is what we do ceaselessly in Prayer of the Heart. There is little over which we have control in life. Yet we can bow endlessly and offer ceaselessly.* This we can always do whether we feel it or not. It can be, it must be, an act of continual willingness to bow in presence and adoration and to offer in love and self-giving. To do this is to receive and to bring forth in our own consciousness, the Mind of Christ Jesus in the same way St. Paul proclaims in his letter to the Ephesians, “Let the same Mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.” In our present world, change will only happen when Christians are able to bring forth the Mind of Christ in their own life and in their humanity. This must of necessity involve the practice of kenosis, or self-emptying, so that Christ can live fully in us, the goal of Christian life.

Christ consciousness is the human mind transformed in the unitive love of Christ. In the Prayer of the Heart we learn to abide in the heart of Christ while our human mind and consciousness is so infused and transformed in this communion that our consciousness or soul becomes the vessel of the Mind of Christ. This is the work of a lifetime. Over time transformative grace infuses our own human mind with the Consciousness of Christ. We embark on a lifetime of transition from self-consciousness, from self-absorption, to Christ-consciousness, Christ-absorption. Our life in the Way of the Heart is, as the mystics describe poetically and lyrically, to be thus absorbed. We lose ourselves in the abyss of Christ. *Yeshua promises if we lose ourselves in Him, we will find ourselves, our true Spirit, our true identity, our true Mind. Thus is the nature of transformation in Prayer of the Heart.*

In recent years there has been an explosion of research and knowledge on the workings of the human mind. In this work when we talk about mind, we're not just talking about the biological mechanisms of the mind, of the brain, and perceptual and cognitive apparatus. When we speak of the mind in the spiritual sense, we're talking about consciousness, the totality of the extent of our awakening and awareness of ourselves and the world. We are speaking of soul. Consciousness inclines us to respond in certain ways or not respond in other ways. If we look around us it is all too apparent that human consciousness in the world is broken and afflicted by the human condition. Yeshua and the great teachers of spiritual traditions say the way we experience the world, ourselves, and others is filtered and flawed, and results in unneeded suffering. When we have a soul, or consciousness, that is based on absorption in a separate self, suffering and evil is perpetuated. When we have a soul based on awakening to unitive love and communion with the entire universe in God, we perpetuate love and grace. Our consciousness is affected by the conditioning and influences in our society of consumerism, addiction, and pervasive self-absorption. Those who "have" never have enough. More is always required and demanded. As a result so many persons in our culture draw themselves into a life of frenzy where their true priorities of the heart are forgotten. They complain there is never enough time and that they are over-stressed with the requirements of getting all the things they need and the experiences they hunger for, and they must work excessively to pay for it all.

### **The Shrunken Self-Centered Soul- Source of Evil, Source of Suffering**

Therefore we must look in this mind, in our consciousness, to understand the origins of spiritual suffering. We're accustomed to looking around and proclaiming that the problem with our personal suffering is "out there," when the source of spiritual suffering is to be found in our own consciousness. Yeshua Himself said that the source of sin, the source of spiritual suffering, begins in the mind and in our thoughts. He asks us to look in our own mind where the source of sin and cruelty in the world find their origin. In our mind is to be found the engine and motivation of endless wars and endless injustices that fuel war. Intractable injustice occurs in a world where some have too much and most don't have enough to meet basic needs.

To be a mystic is to also be a prophet. Those two modes of being are not disconnected. Yeshua is the supreme mystic and prophet who confronts the world with His unitive vision and asks us to look at our self absorbed viewpoints. He calls us to leap from our

private self preoccupation, as if to say, "In your separateness you have forgotten who you are. Find yourself in Me. I am the Heart of Creation."

In the United States two percent of the world consume seventy percent of the essential resources of the world. Yet we are a society fueled by fears of the affluent not having enough, while too many of us genuinely go without essential needs. We're organized around a consciousness of desiring more, needing more, seeking more, with worry and haste that makes family life, marital life and spiritual life nearly impossible. We fight wars over the control of resources to make possible this way of life, a way of life that is unsustainable and only causes more suffering. Communally and individually, we injure those in the way of our compulsions and we grasp at perceived wrongs and the desire to retaliate.

Violence therefore is a product of the mind, both personally and collectively. We might ask, how can this be? We are ontologically in our being already united with God, already children of God in our true spirit, the mystics have proclaimed throughout time. So what is the problem? Why do we suffer spiritually and morally, and why do we create suffering for others? This is a vital question to consider. If we look closely at the condition of human consciousness, is it not a pervasive state of self-consciousness, a prison of self-absorption for nearly all? In this instance we are speaking of the illusory self, the separate self, the mind of separateness and isolation. This is the mind that creates sin and suffering. It is the mind that creates an idolatry and worship of the self-created self. ***To worship and build a life devoted to this separate self is a blasphemy and desecration of our essential belonging in the universal Circle of the Divine Beloved, the "Allaha," or essential Unity we call God, the Abba from Whom all things arise.***

### **Purification of the Heart- The Singular Life**

The Gospel of Thomas says, "Many are standing at the door, but only those who are singular will enter the place of union." (Logion 75) The gift of the Abrahamic Faiths is the gift of monotheism. God is One. There is one God and we are one in the one God. All existence proceeds from the one God. Thomas Merton says that all evil, all sins come from a betrayal of the first commandment of Moses. All sins in some sense are forms of idolatry in that we seek outside of God for what God alone can give. The Judaic tradition understands sin as "missing the mark." Yeshua proclaims to us that to find completion in life seek all in God, and give all to God, our Source. He invokes the Torah in proclaiming the great commandment of Love in the Shema', "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is One." Yeshua says (paraphrase) "You shall give all of your being in love to the One God." He is telling us to do what we most want to do, to be given to this singular desire, our heart's desire. What we desire most deeply within us in our own hearts is to give ourselves to the love of God in entirety. ***In Yeshua we find our heart's desire.***

We may ask, what keeps us from being singular or undivided, from attaining what the ancients of the desert called "purity of heart"? I trained for a number of years in the Zen Buddhist tradition. The Buddhist religion offers important wisdom teachings to the world and among them is its analysis of consciousness. The first Noble Truth in Buddhism is the existence of spiritual suffering. And the second noble truth of the

Buddha is that the sources of suffering are craving. The historical Buddha wasn't talking about physiological cravings; he was talking about misdirected spiritual craving or longing. The craving outside of the Divine Oneness, that is, craving or seeking outside of God, and our oneness in God causes spiritual suffering. This craving arises, he said, from the illusion of a separate self.

In Christian terms we would understand that illusion as the sense of alienation or that we are cut off or separated from God. The Garden of Eden story in Genesis speaks to this experience of feeling expelled or apart from God. In Christianity we think about religion and spirituality in relational terms. Too often we project onto religion our own human relationships that are so broken themselves. Therefore we project upon God this dysfunctional parent who we must please and appease so we can avoid getting punished and cut off and condemned. The trust and surrender to be wholly given and singular in our consecration to God escape us. We remain too often locked into the separateness and the misdirections, the addictions, which afflict our society. Hence we are inclined to seek outside of God, what God alone can give. In the words of the Country and Western song, we are always "looking for love in all the wrong places."

The historical Buddha also said, in connection with this craving that human beings are locked into something that in Sanskrit he called "tanha." Tanha means the seeking for private personal fulfillment. The emphasis here is on "**private personal** fulfillment," the idea that somehow we can through our own devices and our own self-sufficiency be fulfilled. Even more so we adhere to the consciousness that there is an isolated self, that can be fulfilled. If we think about how pervasive that idea is in the world and in our own minds, it is startling. Too frequently we even use religion for a kind of private, personal fulfillment. We look solely for what comforts or consoles the ego, what will "make me happy" and give me a sense of proprietorship over God. We may try to "cut our own deal" with God in exchange for our private consolation. This is the broken afflicted soul that Christ came to heal in us. The Way of the Heart is not about "self fulfillment;" it's about self-transcendence, freedom from the tyranny of the small ego-self and coming home to the Heart of Christ. Yeshua said that evil or sin begins in the mind. So there must be a transformation of mind or consciousness. What is the nature of that transformation and how do we actualize it in our spiritual practice? That's what we need to focus on.

The teaching of Yeshua and St. Paul and the desert monastics is that the work of life is to bring forth the Mind of Christ in our own soul. To transform our own soul, our own consciousness, in the Mind of Christ, is a lifetime of givenness to the Heart of Christ in the consecrated ceaseless practice of inner communion with Christ. ***Christ consciousness is the mind of compassion, not the mind of self-fulfillment; the mind of communion, not the mind of self-isolation or self-absorption. The Mind of Christ is "Agape," self-offering Love, not self-seeking desire or consuming, grasping attachment.***

### **Awakening In Christ**

The Way of the Heart therefore must come through self-emptying, self-kenosis, a paradox for our culture. In the Gospel Yeshua promises that the relinquishment of this separate self is the way to awaken and leap into the One Self, that is Allaha, that is Elohim, that is Yahweh; the One Self from Whom all life, all existence, all Creation arise. *Yeshua the Christ is the personal point of contact, the revelation of this One Self in which "we live and move and have our being." Communion with Christ is communion with the Abba, the Allaha, with the Oneness That Is.*

This awakened living out of the state of communion with Christ is the state of being in the Kingdom. While we often think of it as an intensely personal state, it is also intensely oceanic. When Yeshua was asked, "Where is the Kingdom?" He used an Aramaic word that means both "within" and "among", as both are true. So, it would be a mistake to say, "The Kingdom of God is only 'within' me." It would be more in harmony with the Gospel to say we are in the Kingdom and the Kingdom is in us. So in Christ may we wake up! Wake up! Wake up to the Kingdom!

### **Actualizing the Kenosis of Christ**

Kenosis is a term from the Greek, which Paul used in Ephesians to refer to the life and spiritual development of Yeshua and therefore ourselves. And the risen Christ continues to actualize kenosis within us if we are willing. In our release from the consciousness of a separate self we offer ourselves in totality, our life, our humanity, all of our consciousness, into the essential Unity which Yeshua knew intimately as Abba. *In the Way of the Heart we understand kenosis as ceaseless bowing and ceaseless offering. Kenosis is not self-negation. It is self-offering and self-surrender in Love in our communion in Christ.*

### **Ego-Mind**

There is nothing wrong with this little self that we have, but it's not who we are. It's a fragile little thing and we need to take care of it. We'd all be in big trouble if we didn't have an ego in this world. It's a vehicle. It helps us get along. God made us to have an ego. It helps us to survive. We need to care for it, but it must be a servant and not the master. To awaken in Christ is to uncover our true Master and our True identity.

Ego-mind, is a necessary construct, a creation of our brain we need in order to have a self in the world. Without an ego, we have no sense of boundaries. This boundary, however, is arbitrary and is shaped by history and circumstance. It is inventively formed into the shape of psyche and personality but this is no eternal soul, this ego. We are inclined spiritualize our ego and turn it into eternal soul. It is not our true identity, it is not who we are. Thank God. Our true spirit or heart lies hidden in the bosom of Christ within us. Our true spirit is the Imago Dei, the fire of Divine Life, within us, waiting to flame up in us and expressed in this human life as lit candles of the Light of Christ.

### **Mind like Water**

In this practice of endless bowing it is vital to cultivate the practice of attention. The Zen people talk about this practice of attention and wakefulness as "mind like water." Water

flows. It doesn't attach to anything. It moves around all obstacles and it doesn't attach. It keeps on flowing. That is the quality of mind; the quality of attention that we want to have in both our formal sitting practice and in our daily practice. The mind of prayer, the mind or consciousness of kenosis, we might say, is the mind of the water of spirit, the water of presence, terms that have been used in the Christian tradition. Water of Presence is the innate quality of Divine life, which emanates from deep within us. When we open to it, we are accessible to it. We make ourselves accessible to it, first of all through our sitting practice of abiding in the heart and observing the mind. ***In our observing the mind and the actions and reactions of the mind, we observe the thought forms which our human minds create and the organization of the ego self. In learning to see it we find freedom to release and abide in the depths of Christ in the heart.***

### **Why We Practice**

A participant at a Prayer of the Heart retreat asked once, "Why? Why are we doing this practice?" A good question. Why are we? Since we are already children of God, why bother with all of this? Very important. Those who have walked in this Way of the Heart say we do it because Christ wants to live in us. Christ wants to be fully alive in us, and we are happiest when that happens. And we are most alive and most human when we consecrate our lives to that transformation.

In order for that to happen, it takes a praxis, or a liberation from the transitory self-created self, in order for Christ to live in us fully. ***So the real work of soul-making is the work of transformation of consciousness, realizing and receiving in our own human consciousness, the Mind of Christ. The praxis must begin with a core commitment of a consecration of our entire will and humanity – and that is the inner work to be done.***

Therefore to do this practice is to continually release from every attachment and misdirection of our attention and will, to return to our true Home in the Heart of Christ in our own heart. This Christians know and understand as communion with Christ. In this self-transcendence and freedom of self-release we must bow to the One who is Home and who is greater than the little self. ***Ceaseless bowing is the healing balm to the wound of separateness and the compulsions of the ego-mind. Ceaseless bowing requires us to be awake in Christ's Presence. Ceaseless bowing takes us to the inner tabernacle of adoration.***

In the icon of Christ in Gethsemane His prayer posture is one of being awake while his friends sleep. At a moment when his own human self might want to run away from the horrors and fears that await him, He is awake. He is fully there. He is open and trembling, and frail and fragile, just as we are. Yet, isn't it often in a crisis that we are most alive, most awake, most in the middle of life, most attending and accessible to what's happening?

In our Prayer of the Heart sitting practice of observing the mind and abiding in the heart we give our attention fully to presence. We let go of the traffic of the mind to live out of the past and to let go of the anxiety of a self-seeking future which is never here. We give ourselves to presence to make an ongoing act of bowing in Faith and adoration that God

is the fullness of Presence in the eternal here and now. Therefore liberation from the mind requires us to be able to observe at first. That's why it is so important. Attention, wakefulness! "Be awake!" Yeshua says, "Be awake! "You know neither the day nor the hour. Be awake. Keep your lamps trimmed so that you don't miss the bridegroom." In Him we find true liberation from the unconsciousness and dormancy of the ego-mind.

### **The Sin of Unconsciousness**

Humanity's great sin is that we are not conscious, we are not awake to the way things really are. We are too often reacting from the habitual and unconscious patterns that come to us from our own past. If we consider all the horrific things that happen in the world, they are the acting out of unconscious and old patterns. Sadly we are acting out too often the past patterns of cruelty and violence. If we look in our families and ourselves, the things that happen that are cruel, that are uncaring, they are the unconscious acting out of old patterns. Too often we have chosen not to be awake.

To be awake is to see the ego-mind and find freedom from it. We do this in cultivating an interior space of quiet or a state of called hesychia. This is the state of interior silence that we create in our sitting practice. It is the necessary base from which we bring our practice into daily life. Without this interior stillness we are easily caught up in all of the painful actions and reactions of relationships that happen in the middle of life. ***Daily silent prayer of inner communion with Christ is essential for this freedom and transformation. Without our daily practice inner silence, the quiet dissipates and we are drawn into habitual patterns of reaction. Things come at us and we react unconsciously rather than connecting with the reservoir of interior peace and communion with Christ in the heart. The Life of Christ within us allows us to be at peace and to respond with the intention of love and gentleness, kindness and wisdom.***

The growing space of our silent prayer practice allows us to sink into a quiet in which the busy mind goes on, either in greater or littler degrees, but we experience it subjectively as having no interior impact. It 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. Of course, when I say that, we're all somewhere in a continuum of interior quiet. Sometimes we're there and sometimes we're not there, but we can always come back. Metanoia is always possible. Returning as the prodigal child is always possible a million times in the course of a day to this interior space of hesychia.

***We don't have to be identified with our pain and our reactions and our wounds and our unfinished business. We don't have to be captivated by the compulsions and the defenses that go with it. In so doing, we can actually make a choice to cease from injuring the relational life between ourselves and others. That is a huge choice. In that choice we break the cycles of habitual violence and habitual pain that occur in human consciousness in society. It all starts with our inner bowing and releasing, and in that inner peace and space we are able to receive the Mind of Christ.***

## **Ceaseless Bowing**

When we speak of endless bowing in Prayer of the Heart, we are not just speaking of the physical posture involved in bowing, but rather the interior movement. Certainly physical bowing in the privacy of our prayer practice is desired and appropriate. Maybe we even should do it more often in the middle of life. More outward bowing in Christian life and practice would help us to recognize the holy Presence of Christ in ourselves, in others, and in the world around us. Perhaps as time goes on bowing can become a more appropriate expression of our interior life in Christian community. Bowing is acknowledging inwardly in reverence the truth of every situation, giving reverence and surrendering, giving homage to the One who transcends and the One who is our refuge in every situation. It is the praxis of the first and the greatest commandment in every situation in life. Bowing releases us from our identification with the limits of the ego-mind and the little self and engages us with our life of communion with Christ. In this spaciousness and emptiness we are released from our involvement in the confines of the habitual patterns of the mind traffic and re-enter again and again this great spaciousness of Christ's Presence.

Bowing is the perfect practice of monotheism, of taking refuge in the Holy One of existence in every circumstance of life. That means bowing in our relationships, inwardly bowing to the people in our life whom we too often de-sacralize. In our routinized patterns of life we forget who we are and who they are. We forget that that Christ, Holy One, is present and alive in them and in us. If we were to inwardly bow to our spouse, if we were to bow to our children, to our friends, how our practice of reverent love might grow towards them!

We can bow in the middle of conflict. In the middle of conflict with our loved ones or strangers, we become the most angry and the most hurtful. At that moment bowing cuts through the self-absorbed concern and *into the greater concern*, which is the Love of Christ that encompasses us all. We can connect within that spaciousness and the greater concern to not injure love. *In that moment of bowing the whole conflict, the whole interaction, can shift in you and in the person with whom you are in conflict.*

The issue is not whether to be in conflict, but how to be in conflict. We can bow to the greater concern and Presence of Christ in that circumstance. This doesn't mean we ignore our genuine need, but so often what gets addressed and pursued as genuine need really isn't. Rather it's what I "want" in order to be comfortable, and that's different than what I truly need. When a conflict is escalating, is precisely the moment when inwardly bowing may lead conflict to de-escalate when the other in the conflict senses respect and concern.

We bow in our Holy Leisure receiving in gratitude, receiving without grasping, the pleasures of life and leisure that come our way, the time that is given us. Sometimes we bow in our fear. Fear is the most dangerous of all because, when we are given to fear, we contract, we defend, and sometimes we attack. "Pre-emptive war" takes place on many,

many levels in our world. We bow to the deeper refuge who is Christ in our hearts and the fear loses its power over us.

We can bow in our injuries. We need not deny our pain but we also need not hold onto and nurture the sense of injury and identify with victimization. We bow in such a way that we respect both the hurt and the need for healing. All of us have desires to retaliate when we are hurt or injured, and we may bow in such a way that we release our grasp from a desire to hurt in return. We can also bow when we find ourselves in guilt and shame from wrongs committed and thereby release from preoccupation so that it doesn't keep us from living fully into the present. True contrition releases us from guilt and shame. True contrition and conversion, true sorrow helps us awaken and open to the Life of Christ ever arising anew as the Living Water in the eternal moment. We bow in sorrow and the freedom of contrition; we bow in the peace of forgiveness.

To bow in gratitude in our need and in our human fragility is valuable practice. Our need is always great and our nothingness is always present with us. In those moments when we are most aware and most in touch with our need and our emptiness are the moments when we may be most accessible to all that God wants to give us of God's self. In nothingness we realize both our lack of expectation or entitlement, and our need. In the nothingness of our kenosis we realize that all is gift, and we are receptive and open to God's Self-Gift in Christ.

Over time our human mind becomes more and more a servant of this greater spaciousness, freedom, and Love that is the Mind of Christ. Less and less we are consumed by the ego-mind's compulsion to be a master and God unto itself. Our human mind is really happier and its inherent insecurity healed, when it is the servant rather than the master. When we realize the real false god that we too often worship, we can then throw down the tyranny of the altars we have built to our ego's obsession for control.

In the spaciousness of endless bowing the space for Christ's Agape to be born and to live in us becomes not only possible but inevitable. Endless bowing leads to endless adoration and endless offering and endless consecration. Meister Eckhart says this about the moment of our spacious receptivity, "God must act and pour himself into you 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, 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." (Mitchell, *The Enlightened Mind*, p. 114) It's an astounding statement. It goes against all of what many of us have been taught about the nature of God. But what Eckhart says is the nature of God is self-giving, over-flowing love Whose nature is to give of Itself to all creatures, all beings. When they are ready to receive there is no whim of choice. Simply, God must give of God's Self. The gift of God's Self for Christians is Christ. Christ is ready always to pour into our human mind and consciousness. In my years as a spiritual director I've found that statement to be proven true again and again and again.

## **Ceaseless Offering**

***Ceaseless bowing and Ceaseless Offering are not separate and distinct interior movements, but together make the praxis of communion with Christ in silence and in activity.*** The inner work of prayer takes an ongoing effort on our part to make straight the way of the Lord. We make our life and humanity utterly accessible to God's life and grace by releasing from every attachment and misdirection that impedes. In our bowing endlessly and releasing from our self-attachment to thoughts we prepare ourselves to be a vessel to receive God's presence and Self-gift in Christ. This praxis leads to what the desert abba, Evagrius, called the state of "apatheia." (not to be confused with apathy) Apatheia is a state of freedom from compulsion. Evagrius Ponticus of the fourth century says in his *Pratikos on Prayer*, "Now this apatheia has a child, and the child is called agape. Agape is the progeny of apatheia. Apatheia is the very flower of Asceticism." (Ponticus, p.14) This spaciousness, this receptivity is the condition in which the Agape of Christ arises within us. Apatheia is one way of stating the quality of openness, which makes love possible.

Bowing and offering go together. We bow in adoration, in love, in reverence for the essence of life and love in Christ who is greater than our ego-self. And we offer in love. We bow and we offer. Our offering is our humanity, our thoughts, our emotions, our efforts, our failings. Most of all, the consecrated self is our offering. Our ceaseless prayer is "Into you I commend my spirit, into you I commend my life. "

We offer control. The serenity prayer of Alcoholics Anonymous is a wonderful prayer. It has great, great wisdom. Control is the thing we have the most trouble really giving up. It's ego's greatest obsession, and greatest compulsion. The truth is we have no control, the most difficult thing to accept because the ego-mind stakes its security on having control. Our journey into the Heart of Christ takes us from the tyranny of the ego's compulsions for control to finding ultimate security in Christ alone. This alone will heal our fear and give us true security.

What we can choose to do at all times is to offer ourselves in an act of consecration in Christ to the One in whom every condition, every circumstance, every wounded and broken and dimension of life is not beyond redemption and healing. This we can always do, when we can do nothing else. In every circumstance we can "Breathe Yeshua." This offering includes especially our own broken and wounded minds and psyches. There is not one among us who isn't wounded and broken in some way. No dark place in our own psyche and our own consciousness is beyond redemption. Those are the places in the most need of offering to the Light and Healing touch of Christ. They are the places we're most ashamed of, most afraid to look at, where there is the most pain.

What holds us back too often from our offering is the judgment of unworthiness. If your own child were to offer a cut or wound or a place that was in need of healing, would you turn away? Of course not. Such self-judgements of unworthiness hold us back from making our complete human self an offering.

In our daily practice there are many ways we make this offering. Our silent prayer is an offering, a gift of self in each breath and invocation of the name of Yeshua. In our devotional prayer we offer ourselves. In our intercessory prayer, we offer the people, the loved ones, the situations in life; we offer them all to the Holy One in Christ because we know we have no control. We fear and we worry about what will happen and what will become of them. We worry and fear for our country and the world and the people in places of violence. There's nothing we can do except offer all beings and all conditions to the mercy of Christ. When I do intercessory prayer, I say hardly anything. I simply hold that situation before the Love and Healing Mercy of Christ with this intention, "Here, I offer this to You. I give it all to Your Greater Concern and Healing Love."

In our daily practice we make the offering of consecrated space, time and intention in our homes and daily lives. In daily life we can make the offering of doing what we do with full presence (bowing) and with love (offering), whether it be eating, whether it be conversation, whether it be service, whether it be walking, whether it be washing your hands. Each act is done as presence, as adoration, and as offering in the love of Christ. That is where the practice meets the road.

***In every circumstance we know that we can't always fix things; we can't always change them. We can always and in every moment of life do the best we can in love and make that our offering. We place it on the altar and find peace that it is enough, because it is enough. That is the practice of pure Faith. This is "Breathing Yeshua" each moment of life, trusting that doing the very best we can in love is enough.*** I didn't really understand this central truth until the day arrived when had to confront my own rage and helplessness with my dying son's illness. There was nothing I could do to stop his suffering. There was nothing I could do to change the outcome. But there was one thing I could do. I could do the best I could to just walk with him in those last days and be the best father I could be, and love him the best I could, and that was enough. That is "Breathing Yeshua."

***That offering is "the little way" of Terese of Lieseux, it is "the little way" of Lawrence of the Resurrection, it is "the little way" of our Buddhist brother, Thich Nach Hanh. They have all taught us that this is the wisdom of living. The little offering of loving kindness each moment is how we release from our ego's agenda and its bondage and return to the Mind of Christ. In this way we awaken and find ourselves in the Heart of Christ and that find we were never outside of Christ. We find that our own body is Christ's body.***

Let me share a reading of St. Simeon of the tenth century who came into that same insight:

(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."*

## *-Chapter Five-*



### **Christ the Way**

#### **Yeshua the Christ**

Many of us are aware of our deep longing and need for God but may be confused about the way to God. In the Christian tradition we are given both the personal Yeshua as gift of God's own Self, the disclosure of the human hands and face of God, and the universal Heart of Christ as the ocean of God's Love and Mercy.

In the season of Advent, in particular, we make a special effort to return to the essence of our spiritual life, to make straight the way of the Lord. We return to what is simple and what is truest in our tradition. The great simplicity and wisdom for Christians is this: Christ is the Way. The Prayer of the Heart is the "way" by which we enter into communion in Christ. The Prayer of the Heart, Breathing Yeshua, is the way by which we become consecrated to Him, the way we unite our lives with the Life of Christ. Prayer of the Heart in Breathing Yeshua is the way by which we become accessible and given to Christ who is our Way.

In Prayer of the Heart the deeply intense personal love we experience in Yeshua becomes the means for uniting ourselves, uniting our humanity fully, with the universal, mystical and risen Christ. The scriptures and the theologians and the mystics affirm the more we

enter the mystery of Christ, the more our experience of Christ becomes limitless, and infinite. We discover that Christ is much bigger than our conception. The entry point may become intensely personal, and it opens to include all that is. That is the wonder of it.

In this book I want to share some teaching and practice in how we can follow and unite ourselves utterly with the One who is Agape, the Way of self-giving love. To be fully given, fully consecrated to the love of Christ in all things, in all aspects of our humanity, is the essence of Prayer of the Heart. To follow Christ is to become Christ, and that is the transformative calling of all Christians. I've often held the question in my life, as many seekers do, "Who really is Christ?" I've been one who has lived the interfaith dialogue. I live it in my marriage and in my earliest years of contemplative practice I practiced in the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition; so I have an understanding of how other traditions approach contemplative practice. But there was something that called me back into my tradition, and that is the experience of Christ. There is a common ground of unitive Divine Life that the contemplative wisdom traditions of the world share. However, the experience of the personal Yeshua drawing us into the Life of the universal mystical and Risen Christ defines the uniqueness of the Christian contemplative path that I call *the Way of the Heart*. And I have wanted to explore and articulate this uniqueness. In an important time of interfaith dialogue and understanding it is vital to have insight into the areas of common ground shared with other Faith tradition while equally being able to express the unique gift of one's own tradition to the world. *That unique gift in the Christian path, is not just the teaching, but the One who imparts Himself as the path.*

Some years ago I was in the spiritual direction training program at a Benedictine Center (Shalom Prayer Center, Our Lady of Angels Monastery, Mt. Angel, Oregon). We were just beginning a two-year journey together of training and formation in spiritual direction. As we often do in such a group, I looked around at the faces before me and wondered, "Now who am I really going to connect with here? Who am I going to have common ground with?" What actually developed over the two years was a surprise to me. By the end of the two years, the companions in the group with whom I bonded the most were of evangelical tradition. Since that hasn't been my background at all, it was a curious phenomenon. I found a spirit in them and their "way" of approaching Christian spirituality that touched me. I come from a liturgical tradition where, in my view, the doctrinal teaching is more expansive. Nevertheless what touched a chord of love and understanding in me was the singular devotion to the person of Jesus. I found this simplicity and wholehearted devotion to a personal Jesus was their gift to me. It opened me in ways I hadn't anticipated. And isn't that the way it often is! We are continually surprised and turned upside down by grace. When we overcome our own xenophobia and befriend the stranger they gift us.

### **Yeshua- the Doorway In**

We know there are prominent teachings that come to us from scripture about Jesus being the Way. Among those are from the Gospel of John. He says, "I am The Way, The Truth and The Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you will know me, you will know the Father also. From now on, do you not know Him and have you

not seen Him?" (John 14:6) Of course, some take this as an exclusion clause but I don't. Having undergone years of training in the contemplative practice of another tradition I know from experience that awakening to the Infinite is not the exclusive franchise of any religion. Rather, I understand the words of John's Gospel as an invitation to enter the Heart of the Abba (Source of all Life) through the Heart of Yeshua and the intimately personal love and redemption He offers us as disclosure and gate to the Infinite. Yeshua says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show me the Father? Do you not believe that the Father is in me and I am in the Father?" (John 14:9-10)

When Yeshua wasn't using the term "**Abba**," which means "papa" for God, He used the Aramaic term "**Allaha**," the essential unity from Whom all life comes. He personalized the universal *Allaha* into *Abba*, or *Papa*. Biblical scholars say this must have been a source of shock and scandal to the people of his time. They were shocked and even angered that Yeshua might presume this intimate, personal relationship with the transcendent Divinity who is so beyond us. The Jews dared not utter or write the name of Yahweh, or "I AM", and instead used other terms, such as Allaha, Adonai, or Lord. ("Allaha" has the same root word as other Abrahamic Faiths as the Hebraic "Ela," "Elohim," or the Islamic term, "Allah") Yet the daring disclosure of the Gospel of Yeshua is that the transcendent Unity and Source of everything is Love, and is intensely concerned and in relationship with every human being, every being, every thing that is. This intense loving concern, this gift of self-giving love or Agape, is the divine disclosure in Yeshua. The Gospel teaches us that we are so intimate in our belonging that Yeshua invites us to address Allaha, or the Source of all Life as parent. ( Being a patriarchal society, the Source would be seen as "Abba." but "Amma" could equally be true in a more matriarchal society.)

In his ministry Yeshua in the Gospels tells us again and again how He is the Way, how communion with Him is the way in to the Abba. Yeshua begins his ministry with the startling announcement of what he calls the Good News. (It took me a long time to discover out what the good news was in Christianity because the oppressive fear based indoctrination I received as a youngster wasn't really very good news.) Yeshua proclaims: "The Kingdom of God is very near. Repent." (Mark 1:15) He teaches that God (Allaha) is accessible to us, here and now. Change the direction we seek for happiness. So the Life's journey is for us to become accessible to God. In other words, Yeshua is saying, "Allaha is always offering Himself in love to each one of us." Our spiritual task is to receive this gift of God's own Self to each one of us. By the end of His historical ministry Yeshua tells us in the Gospel of John that by uniting ourselves utterly with Himself, personal emanation and human face of the God of Mystery, we become equally one with the Abba. He whispers to us, "Come close to me, Come close to the Abba."

In the Christian path we understand the Divine as relationship. Christ is the *Way* into relationship, in the way we open in our totality to receive Christ's gift of Himself, and in the way we offer ourselves in trust and in love to Him. In this process we uncover who we are. We find our home, we find our belonging, and we find our true identity. In Breathing Yeshua we actualize this opening and offering in self-gift in communion with Christ, a communion of mutual giving and receiving of the gift of self in love. The

experience of relational life in communion with Christ is both intensely personal and intimate, and oceanic and inclusive. Some Christians will talk about the experience of salvation as a moment in time where they experienced a conversion of giving their life to Christ. This can be a powerful and transformative moment. The mistake can be that one might see this as an historical event that happens one time and one time only. The practice of the Way of the Heart is an ongoing conversion, an ongoing giving of one's self to Christ, and receiving Christ's self-gift of Love. This is why Prayer of the Heart is called *Consecrated Life, an ongoing act of consecration*.

### **Salvation through Communion with Christ**

Salvation can rightly be thought of as healing. In fact it comes from the same root word as "salve," a healing ointment. Salvation is a healing of the wound of our separateness, a re-ordering of our person, of body, soul and spirit, a restoration of our belonging in God. Our being is restored with God at the center in the true Heart or Spirit, rather than the separate-self ego at the center. The wound of this separateness, the wound of this false consciousness comes when our spirit remains dormant and unawakened. Our true spirit in Christ can remain locked away and hidden from awareness, covered over by the conditioning of the mind. So there is something we must do in order to become accessible and given to this relationship of awakened rootedness in Christ.

Being given to Christ is not a single moment, but a lifetime of moments, connected by the actualization of our deepest longing to be given because this is what we most desire. It's what brings us to silent prayer retreats and to seek teachers of prayer and spiritual formation. *It takes deep, desire -deep longing for Christ- to take off an entire day, or weekend, or week long silent retreat, sit down and to refrain from talking, to release from the traffic of the mind again and again in order to just be present in givenness, in love, in adoration, to Yeshua, our Heart's desire*. This longing is so powerful; and the more we feed it, the more we give ourselves to that longing, the more powerful it becomes. *For the author of The Cloud of Unknowing this desire is the doorway in, and it is the singular desire that brings us to healing communion in Christ*. When we do this consecration, then salvation happens. This transformative discipline and practice is what the ancients call "purity of heart". They called it so because it was the "undivided heart", because nothing else is allowed to intrude upon or impede our deepest desire to be One with Christ. In this consecration Christ becomes fully alive in our soul and lives through our humanity, the goal of the Christian life.

### **The Eucharist of Our Life in Christ**

In the Eucharistic liturgy we have the act of consecration, where the elements of bread and wine are consecrated and offered. The elements are made holy, are divinized and made a vessel of Christ's Presence. Such is our life. When we awaken spiritually, our life is Eucharist. In the Christian path of the Way of the Heart we give ourselves to the act of consecration and receiving God's Self-Gift in Christ. The Eucharist is the liturgical enactment of that mystery of human existence, the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of the Resurrection, enacted again and again and again in the Eucharistic liturgy. What is asked of us is just our willingness to be surrendered to our deep desire to be given to Christ and porous to Divine grace. Sometimes we can be so taken with the

beginning act of conversion that we think, "Oh, this is the end, this is such a great thing, we've got it made. We've arrived. We can just be on power glide from here on out." Proceeding with this premise is a guarantee for a great fall. The first conversion is only the beginning of a process, a lifetime practice of contrition, conversion, and consecration.

### **Calling on the Name of Yeshua**

Yeshua is the personal face of God turned towards us. Yeshua tells us, "Receive me, receive me in your humanity. Live me in your human life each moment. I am accessible to you in the most personal and the most intimate way." In John's Gospel He says, "I will not abandon you, I will not leave you orphaned. My spirit will be within you. Because I live, you will live." (John 14:8) That's a wonderful promise, isn't it? "Because I live, you will live." He promises us "Your true life is My life," so let it be, let it happen, let it take place within you. Receive me because I want to give myself to you."

When we want to be close to someone, really close, when we want to really be in their presence, the first thing we often do is think of their name, isn't it? In the Judeo-Christian tradition to be called by name means a condition of intimacy and the scriptures speak again and again about being called by name by the living Lord. So it is also the reason why we choose a name as our prayer word in Prayer of the Heart. Scripture invites us to call upon the name of the Lord. That very act then makes us accessible to the Divine. The Lord is already here, so it's not as though the Lord is around the block or somewhere and you're whistling, saying, "Hey, over here!" Yeshua is already here and ready to offer Himself, and *\*is\** offering Himself. ***By invoking the name of Yeshua, the name of the Lord, we are given to God and our longing for God, we make ourselves accessible. This is Breathing Yeshua. Returning again and again and again to the name of our Beloved makes us accessible to the Beloved.*** The name of Yeshua and breath become our anchor in the middle of life so that we are not overwhelmed by the culture we live in and the culture we carry around in your mind.

In the Abrahamic Faiths prayer takes place in the invocation of the name of the Holy One. In the Prayer of the Heart, the name of Yeshua, the personal manifestation of the Holy One, the Christos, the Risen One of our heart is our anchor and the One in whom our self-offering is continually expressed. In Breathing Yeshua, every breath, every invocation of the Holy Name, carries with it in our intention of self-offering. "Here I am, I am yours."

In human relationships, isn't that what we do when we are really in relationship and in union with another human being? We say, "Here I am – I am yours, I give myself to you." How much more it is in the relationship with Christ! "Here I am, I join my life with your life. We are not separate. Your life is my true life." Thomas Merton says that to find who you truly are, to find your true heart and your true spirit within you, is to find Christ. In our practice of breathing Yeshua, we breathe and give ourselves to the reality of the Living One within us, who is our true Life, and we receive the gift of God, the Living Water of Christ, who suffuses our humanity from within— this is the receptive interior movement of our life in Christ. We are all like Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala, who receive and heal in His presence and say: "Yeshua is enough! The fullness

of my Heart's desire is here and now in Yeshua." There is no magic; there is no technique. There is just this opening in utter trust to receive the One who continually offers Himself. This opening to the personal and intimate love that Yeshua gives in Himself, opens us to the Universal Heart of Christ that embraces the Universe and all Creation. Those who have gone before us in the Way of the Heart say it this way in this reading from Brian Taylor's book, *Becoming Christ* :

"In this sense the Jesus Prayer becomes a way in which we become Christ, or He becomes us. For Jesus' name itself has an energy, a force to it that invokes all that Jesus is. Through the use of Jesus' name, His being soaks into our being; we become more like Him. In this regard the ninth century monk Hesychius of Sinai wrote:

***'The more the rain falls on the earth, the softer it makes it; similarly, the more we call upon Christ's holy Name, the greater the rejoicing and exultation it brings to the earth of our heart'. (quoted by Clement, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 241)***

But this is not all. Just as Jesus was attuned to all God's children and to all of life, the repeated invocation of his holy name moves us into a similar harmony with other people, with all creation. The author of *The Way of A Pilgrim* described how he was affected by this saturation in the name of Jesus, how he began to take on Jesus' own perspective, Jesus' own life:

***Everybody was kind to me, it was as though everyone loved me...The trees, the grass, the birds, the earth, the air, the light seemed to be telling me that they existed for man's sake, that they witnessed to the love of God for man, that everything proved the love of God for man, that all things prayer to God and sang his praise....I felt a burning love for Jesus and for all God's creatures. "*** (The Way of A Pilgrim, trans. R.M. French, p. 85) (Brian C. Taylor p. 71-72)

***In the Celtic Christian tradition the daily prayers of practice and songs of the people reminded and grounded them in an every day life rooted in the personal and Universal Christ. In His face, His hands, and His Heart the Lord God of all things is brought near and ever present, in the all-encompassing circle of ceaseless loving concern and protection:***

#### **Celtic Daily Prayer**

*Christ as a light, illumine and guide me*

*Christ as a shield overshadow me*

*Christ under me*

*Christ over me*

*Christ beside me*

*On my left and my right*

*This day be within and without me*

*Lowly and meek, yet all powerful  
Be in the heart of each to whom I speak  
And the mouth of each who speaks unto me  
This day be within and without me  
Lowly and meek, yet all powerful  
Christ as a light  
Christ as a shield  
Christ beside me  
On my left and on my right.*

**Celtic Blessing:**

*May the peace of the Lord, Christ go with you. Wherever He may send you, may He guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm. May He bring you home, rejoicing at the wonders he has shown you. May He bring you home, rejoicing, once again into our doors.*

**Jesu Who Ought to be Praised**

(Celtic Prayer from *The Carmine Gaedelica*)

*It were as easy for Jesu  
To renew the withered tree  
As to wither the new  
Were it His will so to do.  
Jesu! Jesu !  
Jesu! meet it were to praise Him.  
There is no plant in the ground  
But is full of His virtue,  
There is no form in the strand  
But is full of His blessing.*

*There is no life in the sea,  
There is no creature in the firmament,  
There is no bird on the wing,  
There is no star in the sky,  
There is nothing beneath the sun,  
But proclaims His goodness.  
Jesu! Jesu !  
Jesu! meet it were to praise Him.*

## *-Chapter Six-*



### **Finding Our True Home and Healing Sanctuary in Christ**

*"Come to me, all you who are heavy burdened and I will give you rest....Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.; for I am gentle and humble of heart and you will find rest for your souls." Matt. 11:28*

Our invitation from Yeshua is to find our home, our root, our rest in Him. All of us at some time in this world of impermanence ask the question, "Where is our true home?" In my own story early in my life we had to move often as a consequence of great financial insecurity. My mother says that I often asked as young child, "Is that where we are going to live?" This same insecurity carried into adult life. I have longed to find the home and sanctuary where I can always rest, where I can always belong, where I can always have worth and dignity, where I can always have safety and security, where I can we always know who I truly am and live that truth. For me the answer to these questions is at the core of the Christian mystery. The Heart of Christ is an ontological reality already within

us. The Heart of Christ is a truth to be discovered and lived. His Invitation is to live our lives consciously and intentionally in his Heart. In the Gospel of John He says "Abide in my love." I take Him at His word that His heart is my home, and I can dwell there in a sanctuary that is neither conditional nor temporary. So much of the way we live is conditional, dependent on external circumstances for getting along or making a living. We make the necessary adjustments and negotiations in order to survive, in order to have some semblance of safety and security in this life, in order to be acceptable. That set of arrangements is necessary. The problem arises when we believe the set of arrangements and adjustments we make and the face we show to the world that we call "self" is who we are, is our true abode. ***We are wandering pilgrims in this life without a home until we discover and anchor our lives in the Heart of Christ.***

Yeshua tells us that union in Him is the promise of the Way of the Heart. (John 14:20) "On that Day you will know that I am in my Father and my Father in me, and you in me and I in you." Today, each day, can be "that day." Christ is the central Reality of our inner Life. Unitive Life in Christ is an ontological truth which we are invited to live, to make real in our humanity. In John 15:5, Yeshua says, "I am the vine you are the branches." In this passage we see that the fullness of Christ, the Pleroma of the Word made Flesh, has the potential to be realized in our human person. This is not another human arrangement, another negotiated relationship, another "deal" we work out for our benefit. It is simply the way things are; it is not earned but pure gift. The heart of our own heart is the Heart of Christ, waiting to be fully incarnate in our human person, Christ consciousness brought forth in our own human consciousness as we spoke of in Chapter Four.

John 1:1- *"In the beginning was the Word.. all things came into being through Him... What has come into being is Life and the Life is the Light of all people. "* In this passage the Gospel says again that the ontological truth of our being is that we come into life in Christ and whether we are awakened to it or not, He is our true Light. Thomas Kelly, in his beautiful essay, "The Light Within" says that our inner Light is Christ. And in the Way of the Heart we come to express His Light, not in spite of, but through all of our wounds and brokenness, through the raw material of our incarnate humanity. We become the vessel and the lit flame of the Light of Christ. In this way we bring the totality of our life experiences, need, and vulnerability to the Divine Christos, the Life of our Heart, and in the love of Christ it is redeemed and brought to the fullness of life's true purpose.

In our interior life of communion with Christ He draws all things unto Himself. Life experienced in our humanity is brought into the Light and Redemptive Love of Christ, and transformed. Our humanity is not to be rejected or disdained or shamed, but brought to the altar as the broken bread to be lifted up and consecrated. What was knotted is set free, what was twisted is made straight, what was injured is healed. All is redeemed, and brought to its rightful purpose in the Heart of Christ. We experience then in our transformative spiritual practice, an interior circulation, an alchemy of Love, where all is brought to its rightful purpose in the Heart of Christ. What was seen before as deficit becomes strength. So many persons have discovered that what brought them down and injured them and others in life becomes redeemed strength. In the moment when we say

'yes' to Christ, and make of our humanity an offering, it becomes the moment of transformation. We bow and we offer ceaselessly.

### **Christ Our Safety and Security**

In my own early life there was great insecurity and a life of being moved from place to place and at times periods of homelessness. And it is this wound of insecurity that has been the engine of my own spiritual journey to find a Home where I wouldn't have to leave, where I would always be welcome, where I would eternally belong. All of us need a place of ultimate safety and healing to abide and take refuge. Yeshua says that His Heart is our true home. And I believe Him. When we stop relying on the conditional survival adjustments and arrangements as the source of our ultimate Faith, and instead anchor our life ultimately in the unconditioned Love of Christ, then we begin to experience true Home, and true Peace and true Love. We can continue to live in the conditional world but we can stop making compromises with the primacy of the Love of Christ and the truth of our communion in Him. When we do this we find the courage to bring forth what is truest and best in us as gift to the world.

The purpose of a silent immersion retreat in Prayer of the Heart is to settle in to a deep place of interior safety and sanctuary in Christ. In this place of safety, in this sanctuary in our own heart, we become accessible to communion with Christ. We open and release the knotted and wounded aspects of our life. Intensive experience with Prayer of the Heart practice opens us and makes us accessible to the Heart and Love of Christ in a deeper way than we thought possible. In the Prayer of the Heart intensive retreat we come to release from the worries, wounds, and confusion of our life to abide and heal in the Heart of Christ.

What is abiding? One way to see this might be as "anchoring" in both our attention and intention in the core and ground of Ultimate Reality, rather than being carried along in the confusion and distraction of what is "normal" consciousness for most people. Abiding in Christ is also "anchoring" in our practice. In order to be accessible to this "anchoring" in Christ as our true home and reality we do our praxis of Breathing Yeshua, bowing in presence and adoration, and offering in love to Christ. In the Way of the Heart this grounding and anchoring happens through the "Invocation of the Holy Name," to come Home, again and again. For Christians the name of the Holy One is Yeshua, the face of God turned towards us. The ancients of the desert called this continual return the praxis of the "Remembrance" of God.

The need for salvation arises from our homelessness, and our wandering and seeking in all the wrong places. The practice is to look for love in the right place, and home is right here, right now, within us. The Good News is that God in Christ is accessible to us, The only impediment to our always being Home in communion with Christ is our receptivity, our being accessible. As God is pure gift then the real issue is being accessible. "I am here, I am ready for You, to receive You, to 'live' Your Life in mine." To be accessible we offer all that we are, all that we have lived, all that we intend and will to be, in the praxis of attention/adoration and intention/self-giving love.

We make our self-offering without exception, without shame, without self-judgement, and in utter trust. The Gospel stories teach us metaphorically that being accessible to Yeshua involves stretching and reaching beyond the familiar patterns and known limits. ***Healing in the Gospel stories must involve stretching out the hand in trust, asking to be being "lowered through the roof" in utter humility. And we reach out like the hemorrhaging woman to touch the garment.***

These acts of Faith, and not magic, Yeshua tells us, are what makes the healing possible. And so it is in Faith we are accessible to Him and His touch within us. In a retreat space or in the consecrated space of our daily practice we enter into an act of giveness and trust where unconditioned Life is offered to us. We make ourselves accessible by stepping out of known and familiar patterns of the mind traffic and the arrangements it has made, to anchor into the Mystery of communion in Christ in our own Heart. ***Like the paralytic lowered through the roof to be healed, we lower ourselves into intimacy with Christ in our own hearts in the interior quiet of Breathing Yeshua, and we receive the touch of healing Love. In His touch we find our home, in His touch we find our healing.***

In this exercise of pure Faith we open to transformative healing, and our life's salvation in Christ. The healing of fear brings forth courageous Love. The healing of shame and unworthiness brings forth the dignity and reverence of Love. The healing of isolation and rejection brings forth the communion and belonging of Love. The healing of spiritual blindness brings forth the clarity and awakening of Love. The healing of a divided life brings forth wholehearted and consecrated Love.

### **My Healed Journey with Dad**

The journey I have walked with my father the last 20 years has been blessed by this same healing touch of Christ. My father and I started out badly in life. He returned from World War II a deeply damaged young man who had undergone the worst of combat and the turmoil of an alcoholic upbringing. Being terribly injured by a drunk driver and in a hospital for several months didn't help in his prognosis for having a happy family life. My mother and father divorced when I was two years old. The father I knew growing up was not someone I wanted to be with. Through grace, religious Faith, and Alcoholics Anonymous he began to do the inner work necessary to be a man capable of love. With the inner work I was doing in contemplative prayer practice we found a way to walk together and discover the love we could have as father and son in later life. In April 2004 I was at his bedside and he passed from this life into the joy of Christ. He had told me that his greatest happiness would be to see Yeshua face to face. I was graced to be present when that moment happened and I felt his joy.

Our journey of healing began when we decided to have an annual retreat together at the Trappist Monastery of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Oregon. It was the monastery where my spiritual mentor, Abbot Bernard McVeigh O.C.S.O. resided. In the years that followed my father and I grew to become best friends and shared the love that two men who are good friends can have. This love and healing only became possible out of the growing experience of abiding in Christ and bringing our wounds to the Love that heals all and redeems all. Sometimes an entire redemptive movement of Christ's healing touch

in a life can be best summed up in a moment. I wrote a poem in 1994 to describe such a moment.

### **Walking down Abbey Road**

by William Ryan

*Two men tread the silence and communion along Abbey Road.  
Their vaped breath rises toward a grey winter sky.  
This way they come now eight years,  
when the sun slants just so.*

*They have held and heard,  
each the other moan,  
and lanced the festering wounds of grief.  
One foot bathes in wellspring of Living Water within,  
the other wrenches in pain.  
One father crying out for the son he lost in divorce,  
the other, the boy he lost in the wasting of leukemia.  
It will never be.*

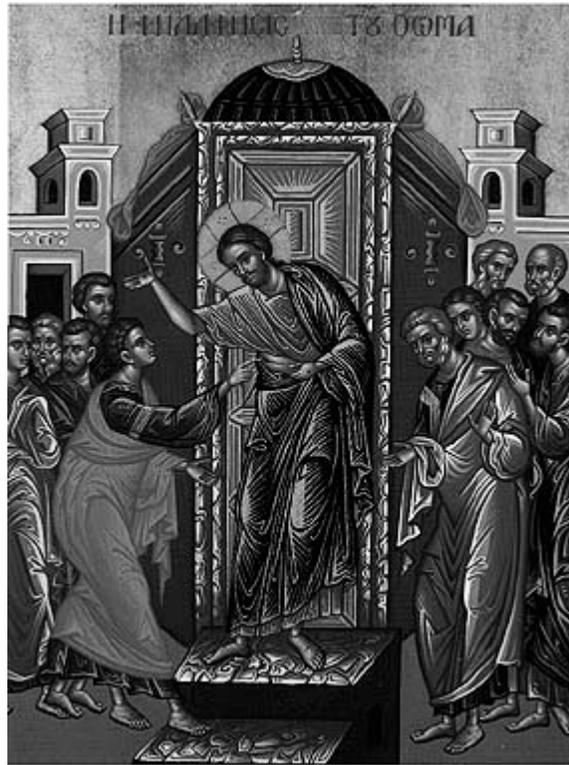
*The one man injured his mind,  
lost his innocence,  
and his soul was bloodied,  
in the killing of Bloody Nose ridge,  
on that distant Palau island, Pelilu.  
Alcoholism took the rest, almost.  
The other, now grey too, recovers from wounds,  
a casualty of the suicides,  
broken lives and suffering of  
the psychiatric trenches.*

*Father and son no more,  
Now two old friends,  
telling tales of love and passion,  
round the corner and ascend the hill  
of Guadalupe.*

*They stride arm over shoulder.  
The winter ray strikes through the clouds  
the outstretched white marble arms  
of welcoming Savior.  
He beckons all, takes all unto Himself.*

*The Living Spring breaks through the weary crust,  
In timelessness, can it be any other way?  
" All will be well, All be well,  
And all manner of things will be well?"*

## *-Chapter Seven-*



### **Healing in the Heart of Christ**

*"O Christ, you are united to every being without exception. Still more, risen from the dead, you come to heal the secret wound of our soul. And for each of us there opens the gates of an infinite goodness of heart. Through such love, little by little our soul is changed."  
( Brother Roger of Taize, *No Greater Love*)*

#### **Healer of our Soul**

In the previous chapter we focused on Prayer of the Heart as the way we come to find an interior space of sanctuary to heal in Christ. We must not equate spiritual healing with psychological or physical healing. To heal spiritually is to heal the soul. Here it is important to distinguish between "soul" and the true "spirit" within us. Many of the mystics will speak of the spirit as that which remains hidden in Christ, ever whole and untouched by sin and the conditioning of human life and society. The true spirit is our true Heart, the center of our being, the sanctuary of Christ's Heart within us, and dwelling place of the Trinity. The true spirit is the Imago Dei within us and source of our ontological union with God. ***The soul is the spiritual consciousness of the human being. The soul is the fruit and creation of our passage in this life and the medium where we do our inner work of transformation.*** Spiritual practice is soul making and soul

transforming. While the spirit remains ever whole, the soul is subject to the injuries of life and the deadening of moral blindness if we turn away from the Beloved's voice within us. Such moral and spiritual death leaves a soul bound in separateness and locked in a dungeon of self-absorption, inaccessible to communion with the Divine. The soul, transformed and infused with the love of Christ, is the gift we make to God in the life's spiritual journey. The true spirit already rests in its belonging in God. Our spiritual work in this life is to bring forth a soul that is transparent, shining, and aflame with the Light of Christ, in harmony with the true spirit.

In the inner work of Prayer of the Heart we bring the wounds and dark spaces of our soul to the healing touch of Christ. We open every dark corner of the soul to the Light and Love of Christ to be offered to His limitless Love. Some wounds we bear impede us from this profound act of trust. Among them are fear, rejection, and shame. A little child will not trust a doctor or nurse to touch an injured area if they are afraid. Persons will not allow themselves to be seen unclothed or speak their secret hurts if they are ashamed or expect rejection or negative judgement. We must be willing to be naked to fully receive the unconditional love of Christ in our communion with Him and thus be healed. We will not bring the wounds of our soul for healing if we wish to look away, or if we are convinced we can heal them by other means. Such is the impact of spiritual blindness and a divided life. If we remain isolated and hidden from the Love of Christ, neither can we become transparent before Him in our willingness to offer our souls to be healed in His Heart.

***But the central wound of our soul and source of every spiritual ill is the wound of separateness. For Christians Christ is the healing balm for this injury, freeing us to live our human life fully united with His Life in every moment of life.***

***In the silent communion of our Prayer of the Heart practice and in the midst of daily life we lift up in offering each moment, in each breath, in each invocation to Yeshua, our wounds as they appear and are revealed. We offer them to the One whose Love encompasses all and brings all to Resurrection in Him. The wounds of our soul become transformed into spiritual strength in the Heart of Christ.***

## ***-Chapter Eight-***



### **Healing from Fear**

*"A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up saying, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no Faith?' " Mark 4:35-41*

In this passage from the Gospel of Mark we have a central story of fear and Faith, danger and safety. In this story as the followers of Yeshua believe they are on the verge of annihilation, Yeshua awakens in the middle of the storm. They voice their fear and their dismay by saying, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" How often has that been our own complaint! We are in the middle of crisis and disaster and sometimes even in anger question God's concern for us. In this story the relaxed Yeshua calms the storm and says, "Peace, be still!" He then challenges his friends by saying, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no Faith?" I should say when I have heard this Gospel passage my own response has been, "Well, that's fine for you to say! You're Jesus and I'm just exploded and on the receiving end of whatever life brings me." ***The question I ponder here is what it is to be vulnerable in life and at the same time to live from a place of profound interior peace and courage.***

Each of us carries within us amazing levels of dread. And as we grow in our practice we may gain some awareness of how deep the fear runs in us. Sometimes our immature Faith among Christians can be based on a misplaced idea of insurance. We may unconsciously "cut a deal" with God that if we can just be "right" with Him, then the misfortunes that befall other people won't happen to us. We see people emerge from a life-threatening situation and they piously proclaim that their Faith saved them, that they were saved from death or injury by God because of their religious Faith. Nothing could

be further from the truth. That belief is magical thinking and not religious Faith. The practice of authentic Faith helps us be **\*\*with\*\*** the tragedies and traumas of real life, it does not protect us from them. Faith helps us to recover and to find a well of peace and security when losses befall us.

### **Live in the World-Abide in Christ**

When we sit down in our silent practice of communion with Christ, we breathe Yeshua. We observe first hand the onslaught of mental obsession that leads to behavioral compulsions to "save" us from harm's way. The ego-mind develops such habits to try to guarantee us a false sense of control. And we believe if we have just the right strategy, we can have control over events in my life. These whirlwinds of obsession are like the storm in our practice of interior silence. They only are stilled at Yeshua's hand and His healing touch to connect us with real interior safety, not a false escape from life's problems and traumas. For neither Yeshua nor his followers escaped the afflictions and tragedies of life. Rather His promise to us is not that we will not escape from the pain and misfortune of life, but we will find refuge in His peace and His unfailing love in the middle of all that afflicts us. Yeshua says to us in the Gospels that we can live in the depths of life in such a way that we have a foot in both worlds, the realm of impermanence and vulnerability, and in the realm of peace and ultimate safety in Him.

When I speak of dread I have to remember my own dread as a parent that one of my children might die. This is a fear that came true for me as I had to face the loss of my young son from Leukemia. I experienced at that time the paradox of the beatitudes, that when we grieve, when we accept our vulnerability in Faith, is the moment when we can have a foot in both worlds, the world of human fragility and the Kingdom of God, and that there is no separation. To experience both simultaneously is not a contradiction, but it is where our Prayer of the Heart practice takes us. We can breathe Yeshua, be anchored in the Heart of Christ, while still experiencing the fullness of the human journey in both joy and sorrow.

### **Acceptance of Vulnerability- the Path to Healing and Compassion**

Yeshua does not deny the reality that the human journey is filled with attachment, risk, and loss. He warns us the rain falls equally on the just and unjust. To lead the loving life is to accept it, and be with it with inner peace and security. In the Christian path we understand that this peace and security arises from our communion with Christ. And like Sr. Antoinette, the Benedictine Amma, we may realize there is not much in life over which we have control, but we can always "sit and breathe Yeshua," be grounded in Him and therefore be present with every human experience the best way we can, in the most loving way we can. Brother Roger of Taize says of our "Yes" to Christ. "This "Yes," leaves you exposed, there is no other way." (*Brother Roger, p. 46*)

There are many fears we carry in life, existential, spiritual, and psychological. I have worked for 34 years as clinical counselor. Much of my work has involved helping people manage or cope with psychological fears. As long as we are human we will have psychological fear, and there may be times when we are overcome with them. Our vulnerabilities do not go away. We are called in the spiritual life to find our ultimate

security and safety where it can be found but not escape the human state. In my early life the range of financial, physical, and emotional insecurities which affected me so deeply, later in life were the fuel of my spiritual seeking for a true source of security.

It is important to distinguish in our discussion the differences between those fears that are natural attributes of our humanity and therefore assist in our survival, and those fears that impede our spiritual growth. We have a natural fight-or-flight reaction in response a perceived threat to our survival or that of our loved ones. Natural fears can be activating and helpful. These fears exist on the psycho-physical level. Fears of physical death are natural and help us stay alive. Fears of violence help us to mobilize our resources to stay safe. Fears of physical pain help us to seek medical help or take care of our bodies and not take undue risks. Fears of social rejection and humiliation may help us avoid undue psychological risks. And I have seen in my professional work how often old age and disability trigger a natural fear of dependence on others. And as we reflect about fear on the spiritual level we must confront our fears of annihilation and abandonment. To be consumed in the grip of these fears is to be paralyzed in our capacity to open and surrender to the One Life that enfolds and sustains our life.

We can learn to find peace and acceptance with our mortality and the impermanent nature of human life. We can open to a deeper Life in Christ where we can always rest and find our safety. In the Way of the Heart we can find our ultimate love and acceptance and never fear that we are alone, separate, or abandoned in this universe. When we breathe Yeshua in this sanctuary in the Heart of Christ, these fears subside and heal, and we find the place of our abiding.

Our culture does not help us with these fears. Rather it seeks to avoid or distract us from facing them. Death is a taboo subject. Yet confronting our fears of non-being will lead us to seek for the connection with the Source of Being. The poor, the vulnerable, the dependent, are seen as unworthy and a burden to those who see themselves as self-sufficient. Yet our compassionate connection to the vulnerability in our selves and others opens us to love all beings more deeply. Too often we may be overcome by fear, but spiritual practice is not an antidote to ward off the range of fears humans are heir too. Yet human fragility and vulnerability and the fears that arise from them can be the doorway to finding true healing and safety in the touch and love of our practice of communion with Christ.

### **Rooted in Christ**

The Prayer of the Heart does not take away our vulnerability. Rather it roots us in an acceptance of our vulnerability and the healing of our fears in a way that we open to love instead of "circling the wagons" in self-absorption. The praxis of Breathing Yeshua roots us, moment to moment, in our communion in the Heart of Christ. A question we can always ask ourselves as fears arise in the middle of life? Am I taking refuge or seeking safety in a relationship, in an attachment to a situation, a person, an outcome, a circumstance, a role, an identity, a habit pattern, that cannot truly give to me the ultimate peace and security that every human being needs?

In the Christian journey being rooted in Christ is the sole source of the "peace that surpasses all understanding." Refuge in Christ, a continual return, is a praxis, an actualization of our ontological belonging in Him. In His Heart we find the only relief from our preoccupation with control, and release from the mind and its obsessions and compulsions.

Being rooted in Christ we learn to be fully present in the circumstances, persons, relationships, tragedies, joys, and all outcomes and experiences with the equanimity and love only oneness in Christ can give. This makes possible a kind of living I would never have thought possible. Each circumstance, each relationship, is a gift, a means to open us more deeply to this deeper Refuge. We can return to our grounding in Christ with our prayer of consecration at intervals of the day, and the ceaseless return to our prayer word in Breathing Yeshua. The ego-mind wants to create other refuges, and will easily bring us back into the habit patterns of worrying. Yeshua keeps telling us in the Gospels, "Don't worry!" And He reminds us it won't get us anywhere anyway. The obsession of worry won't deliver the power and control over external things our ego-mind seeks.

In our practice each day we come to realize that Christ is our Beloved, the true spouse, companion, and friend who never abandons us. In the practice of Refuge in His Heart, we come to fulfill the purpose for His coming into the world that He promised in John 10:10, "I came that you might share in My Life, and share in It fully." His Life is limitless, Divine Life, the Life of Love, the Life that births and sustains the Universe, Life that cannot be taken from us, Life that is indestructible and transcends all fear.

***For me the question from my earliest life has always been "Where is my true Home?"  
I know now that Yeshua is my true Home.***

## **-Chapter Nine-**



### **Healing from Shame and Unworthiness**

*"One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a sinner, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee's house brought an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself if this man were a prophet he would have known what kind of woman this is who is touching him-that she is a sinner. Jesus spoke up..." Luke 7:36-40)*

The central wound of our soul, our spiritual consciousness, is the illusion that we are separate, cut off from God. *Separateness is the central knot of our spiritual suffering* and while it may manifest in a unique form in each of us, it is the unraveling of this knot that is the dynamic of the life's spiritual journey. The illusion of separateness is the only original sin. All the other spiritual wounds we carry are some aspect or manifestation of separateness. And we offer and bring them all into healing through our practice of deepening communion with Christ. Christ came to heal that wound. And He comes into our life to heal that wound in each of us.

Shame and unworthiness are part of the weave of the knot of separateness. The Gospel story of Luke here speaks to this fabric and how we break free from both the internal and external aspects of this injurious bondage. In this story in Luke's Gospel a woman reputed to be of loose sexual morals approaches Yeshua in the house of a respected man and anoints Him with oil. She ministers to Yeshua by washing and wiping his feet with her tears and hair. The woman is condemned by the men in the house, and Yeshua is condemned for permitting her presence and touch. (An important footnote here is that the object of shame here is a woman. It is noteworthy that one doesn't see the men with whom this woman has presumably slept, so often the case throughout history.) Those with power decide who is to be shamed and who are not. In the story Yeshua turns the criticism back to the men of power and high state and points to the real source of dignity and worth in us, our power to choose loving kindness in serving others. In this story and many others in the Gospels Yeshua confronted the powerful of his time on this point, and paid for it with his life.

Every reading of this story brings me to a deeper respect for this woman. She has pointed the way to healing and freedom for all of us. Her only difference from us is that she has been "caught" or publicly reviled. She has been willing to look and to see how her misdirected needs have been injurious. She has brought her real need to the One in whom she can find completion. In her act of adoration of His Presence and her act of self-giving love in service to him she finds the path to redemption and resurrection. The shaming and judgements of others no longer matter. Would that all of us could find such healing release from the darkness of our shame and awaken to such joy in our life! In Christ she has uncovered a worth and dignity that was never lost.

### **Christ the Source of Our Dignity and Worth**

All of us are that woman. All of us sin. We sin when we "miss the target," when we misdirect our true needs and desires. Shame and unworthiness is a mistaken judgement against our person, based on the illusion of separateness. We have worth and dignity from our nature as children of God. We are the offspring of the Most High. We partake in the divine nature. ***Our worthiness is established from our very being (spirit) in God. Our consciousness and behavior are what is in question. It is a mistake to confuse who we are with what we do.*** "You are flawed, you are broken, you are rejected, you are unacceptable, you are unlovable;" rather than, "What you did was injurious or destructive." Shame is a method of control, which works by withdrawing love and respect to exact control in the family or in the community. Shame as method of parenting or social control, reinforces the spiritual wound of unworthiness and separateness. The effect of shaming on the soul is that we are led to hide our brokenness, to hide our sins. We heal spiritually when we bring our sins and dark places to conscious examination and insight, to open to healing grace through contrition and conversion, and thereby bring them to the Light of the mercy and love of Christ. In the darkness and the hidden places of the soul festering wounds and sickness remain unhealed because of shame and unworthiness.

If the human race were serious about true change we would eliminate child abuse and especially the abusive words of shaming and unworthiness that parents use on children.

Hidden sins and hidden wrongs are with us all. In shame based secrecy families are filled with them: "Don't tell about this," or "You don't want people to know." How often the crime of child abuse, battering, and sexual abuse is hidden under the injunction of shame and the fear of being seen and judged by others.

### **Healing Our Dark Places**

Moral salvation is the re-ordering of our instinctual and mental life around the spiritual center of the heart and therefore the Heart of Christ. Yeshua says that unitive Love is the moral foundation of all human life. If our instinctual life, sexuality, and otherwise is hidden in shame, then there is no possibility of the integration of human sexuality or other aspects of our humanity into the moral realm of the Heart of Love. The transformative journey in Prayer of the Heart is the uncovering of the dark broken places in our soul, in our consciousness, that desperately need the Light of Christ and the healing of His Love. When we are in the grip of shame, we hide these places and are afraid to trust them to His merciful touch. The great failings we see in religious people, well-intentioned people around us, in religious communities, in family life, in public life often occur in secret. When the hidden places in the soul go unhealed and unconverted, these inclinations reach up and "bite" us. They are acted out, and result in injurious/sinful and addictive patterns of behavior. Such behaviors result when well intentioned people try to create a idealized persona deserving of social approval, while being unwilling to look into the darkness of their own soul. To be willing to uncover and reveal our dark places, and to lift them up in humble acceptance, surrendering them fully in love to the Heart of Christ is the real inner work to be done. Too few religious people are willing to do it. The woman who sits at the feet of Yeshua in communion with him in utter trust and receptivity, is a model and inspiration for all of us.

### **God's Self-Giving Love is Not Earned**

In contrast with the values of our culture the Gospel teaches the primacy of unconditional love and mercy. In our culture we decide who is worthy and unworthy based on wealth and class. Poverty has always been a sin, especially in our current national culture. We hear too often from the pulpit and talk-radio that the poor are poor because of moral degradation. We hear that the blessings and comforts of life are earned by our "rightness" with God according to the theologies of abundance. Even though the society we live in has adopted a theology where the rich are blessed and the poor are cursed, it is not so in the Gospel. And it is not so in our spiritual life. The parables of the prodigal child and the laborers in the vineyard, reveal to us that God's Self-Giving is not earned, it is pure gift. We must simply be willing, receptive, and open to receive His Gift of Self. In Yeshua we know God's gift of Self. In Yeshua we are "oned" in God. In Yeshua we live the Risen Life of Love.

Life is developmental learning; without mistakes we don't learn. Without self-examination we do not learn from the consequences of our errors and grow and become transformed. It is in crisis that we open and receive the grace of contrition, tears, and conversion. We don't allow communion with Christ if our consciousness is ruled by shame. The woman who anoints Yeshua with the oil of her love, has broken free of shame to find communion with her Beloved. In her liberated act she says, " I don't care, I

don't care any more about the judgements of these people. I only care about giving myself in love to the One who has given Himself to me in love so deeply." Communion with Christ has healed her shame and restored her dignity and self worth. Her desire to be one with her Beloved, is also our desire. And we can pray that we should be so fully consecrated and given to the love of Christ, our Beloved.

### **Ceaseless Contrition and Conversion- The Road to Freedom**

Ceaseless contrition and conversion is the way to freedom. The stunning reality is the Life of God rises up within us anew each moment. We can break free of past conditions, past wrongs, past injuries. Yeshua invites us with this astounding Good News to enter the limitless mercy of His Heart. His message is that it doesn't matter what we have done before. It doesn't matter what prison we are in of our own making or that the culture has made for us. All of us are free, liberated from all past conditions, to choose His love and communion in His Heart in the present moment.

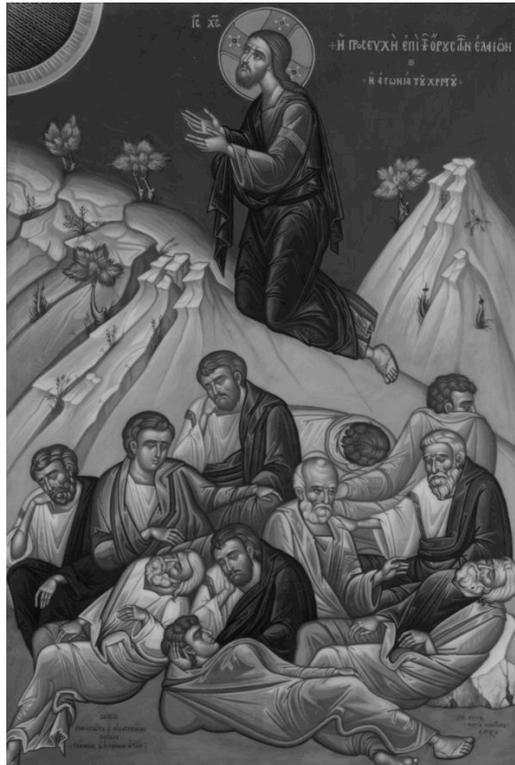
***In our practice of Prayer of the Heart, we can breathe Yeshua; we can give ourselves in innocence and joy to the communion of love with the One who gives us our worth and dignity. It is pure gift, already given to receive. We possess it already. In his touch we discover it again and again.***

St. Symeon the New Theologian spoke of it this way.

*"Where all our person, 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."*

(Mitchell, *The Enlightened Heart*, p.38)

## ***-Chapter Ten-***



### **Healing from the Wounds of Invalidation and Rejection**

**(Mark 2:23, Mark 3:1, Luke 4:16-31)**

In the above Scriptural references we have three examples where Yeshua is seeking to offer his gifts to the community. In each case leaders in his Faith community, his religious tradition, not only don't understand or appreciate him, but are led to reject and even defame or kill him.

In the first example the passage from the Gospel of Mark narrates the story of how Jesus with his disciples out of hunger pick the heads of grain from a field on the Sabbath. Jesus is criticized by religious leaders for breaking the Sabbath. In response He cites the example of David taking the altar bread from the temple for himself and his men when he was hungry. He then makes a statement that is stunning for his time: "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath... The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." For affirming this truth Jesus receives great criticism and rejection.

In a second instance also from Mark's Gospel Jesus heals a man with a withered hand, also on the Sabbath. In this case the text notes that the Pharisees decide they must destroy Him, suggesting once again that involvement with one's Faith community can be a risky

venture. For this healing act of mercy Jesus is judged a threat to the community and marked for death.

In a third passage from the Gospel of Luke we see the story of Jesus returning to preach in his home region of Galilee and his village of Nazareth. He goes to the synagogue on the Sabbath and is invited to preach. Preaching from a text of Isaiah he reads, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor." He stuns them by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled" and confronts them with the continuing injustice in their own community. The narrative goes on to say that all in the synagogue were filled with rage and drove him to the brow of the hill where they might "hurl him to his death." It's clear from the story this was a "close call" for Jesus and that participation in one's Faith community is too often the path to rejection. I know of no one in ministry who has not experienced in some measure this rejection, isolation, and invalidation. The hurt of such rejection runs deep when our most cherished spiritual gifts are held in contempt by those we wish to serve.

### **Our True Acceptance and Validation**

Among our deepest desires is the desire for validation from others. All of us want to be truly seen, understood, and appreciated for who we are. We seek this in our family of origin. We seek this in the families of our creation and choice in adult life. We seek it in our families of Faith and work, and in the myriad roles we enact in life. And we never fully receive it. We have a longing to share our gifts of service with those in our life, and too often both gift and the giver are not understood, nor appreciated.

Yeshua invites us to a journey of completion of our heart's desire: "Be complete (perfect) as your Heavenly Father is complete." (Matt. 5:48) He invites us to find that completion in Himself. Only in our journey of completion and fulfillment in communion with Christ do we truly find our self-offering fully received. Only in this communion with Christ within we walk through the doorway to communion with Christ in community. The spiritual life is a process of integrating the inner life of the Heart with the outer life of service and activity in the marketplace and activity of human communities.

### **The Inner and Outer Journey**

Our values, gifts, and service arise from inner life in Christ. Yet these same fruits of life in Christ are nearly always in conflict with values of the marketplace and the culture. Our church and family communities, our own attitudes, are in large part influenced by the culture and values of the societal marketplace. From the beginning of our socialization as a child we are taught to "Seek first our self interest, or the self interest of the institutions in which we participate. Life is about 'ME' and not 'WE.'" That is the pre-eminent value of our society. To express our inner life in Christ brings inevitable rejection and conflict, and in grace the formation over time of a prophetic voice. Inevitably this prophetic voice may bring risk to your person and your standing in the community. And Yeshua warns us, "A prophet in his own town is never recognized." (Luke 4:24) Our time of being hurled over the cliff of rejection and hostility may come. In the life of the contemplative the prophetic voice is inevitably linked our inner life in Christ. To be in communion with Christ is to be in communion with, and stand with, the poor and the powerless, and to

confront the cruelty of human society. The Zen practitioner might say that is the "koan" of our life. The Christian would say that is the cross we carry, in bringing together and making one, the inner and the outer journey.

Breathing Yeshua, the practice of Prayer of the Heart, is not relegated to isolated times of silence. How we meet the world with the fullness of our practice in relationships, in activity, in service, in community is also and equally Breathing Yeshua. In the exercise of peace and justice we exercise the fruits of our practice of Breathing Yeshua in daily life. Yet too often we seek to fill the "holes" of felt incompleteness and inadequacy through relationships with others, through roles we create, and through identities and expectations we form in communities. We mistakenly look for validation and completion in these things with resultant hurt, disappointment, and grasping. Like the original followers of Christ we must find our truth and say to Him, "To whom shall we go, You alone have the words of Life?" (John 6:68) "Yeshua, you alone are our salvation, our healing, our completion."

### **Seek First the Kingdom**

In much of our life when we seek understanding, validation, support, and appreciation from others, we receive instead rejection, misunderstanding, and at times, even abuse. The result can be a profound bitterness, hurt, and isolation. *Even the best of marriages, friendships, and Faith communities will always fall short in meeting our desire and need for validation and understanding. We seek for completion too often where we can never receive it. This can bring doubt and even despair into our life of Faith. Neither are we able to give to our loved ones and relationships what they truly need and seek. God alone can satisfy the desire of our Heart.*

What is the resolution for those on the Way of the Heart? My spiritual mentor Abbot Bernard McVeigh, was one of the most loving, validating, accepting, appreciating, people I have known. Yet he was forever saying, "Don't look 'out there' for what you seek? " He reminded me often that our inner life of communion in Christ is hidden. At best we can only share the fruits of it. In our life in Christ alone will we find the understanding, appreciation, validation, and ultimately the Love we desire and need to find completion and wholeness in life. *No marriage, friendship, community, or work role will ever satisfy our deepest desire. Yeshua alone is our heart's desire.*

Many of us "burn out" in our marriages. Many of those in my profession of mental health and human services "burn out." This depleted state arises so often because we come to the encounter of marriage and work with empty cups. We are not fed, we are not validated within; we are not nourished by our inner spiritual life. Many of us may find ourselves at a stage after years of marriage disappointed or hurt or feeling betrayed because our spouse isn't giving us what we need. We can feel discouraged and empty in our work because it isn't giving us what we need. Many of those I have know in religious ministry have "burned out" and either left or remain in their roles of service empty, deprived, and betrayed.

Much of our hurt, much of our sense of being misunderstood, much of our sense of abandonment by others is related to seeking from them something they can never give us, nor can we ever give them. ***When we cease to try to squeeze from others what they can't give us, we are on the path to purification of the Heart, that is, directing our true and essential desire and need to our life of communion with Christ.*** And this will help us endure and "ride out" the inevitable injuries we will suffer in marriages, our work, and especially in the work of religious ministry where the wounds can be so grievous. Religious or Faith communities, because they are so close to what is essential in life, have great capacity to inflict injury and harm. What gets us through these injuries and storms in life is our practice of Breathing Yeshua and directing our deepest need for validation and acceptance in Him alone. ***He alone knows us; He alone loves us without reservation; He alone receives us into Himself in totality.***

### **Let Christ Be Everything**

The ancients of the desert taught the answer in their praxis of ***purification of the Heart.*** The desert ammas and abbas have taught if we want to find peace and wholeness in life we must ***unify our desire, gather all desires for fulfillment into One Desire, and Consecrate our self to it fully.*** Above all, we are cautioned to stop looking for validation in places where we won't find it. When we take our deepest need to our life in Christ, then we find we can be more present, more giving, more accepting, more appreciative of the existence of the loved ones, the work, the Faith community in our life. We encounter them with a cup that is full; we see the people and relationships in our life in their blessing, for what they are, apart from what they might or might not give us. ***We see Christ in them in their unique ways, and we bow in presence, in adoration of Christ before us; and we give of ourselves in love and service to Christ in them.***

Others are not in this world to meet our every need. We are all here to love one another, not to seek those things Christ alone can give. The hidden life of Communion in Christ sets us free, to live a life where in the words of St. Paul, "*God is All, in all.*" (1 CO 15:28) and we are free to love, and to experience life in such a way as expressed in the poetic blessings of the Celtic saints,

***"Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ under our feet, Christ over us, Christ within us, let all around us be Christ."***

## *-Chapter Eleven-*



### **Healing from Spiritual Blindness**

One of the most vital healings that must take place in our journey of transformation is the healing of spiritual blindness. The ancient Celtic hymn, "Be Thou My Vision" is an invocation and prayer for that healing. We ask that Christ be our eyes, Christ be our vision, that we come to see life and the world through the eyes of Christ.

One way that we come to this healing is that we \*ask\* for healed sight. In the story of Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46) we have an example of the healing of a physical sight, but with intimations of the opening and awakening to spiritual sight. This story has been used as a source for the longer form of the Jesus Prayer in the Prayer of the Heart tradition. ("Jesus, son of David, have mercy.") In the story Bartimaeus has an intuition of "seeing" and of the One who can help him "see." In his helplessness and Faith, he trusts the One who is greater than his own personal powers. He receives his physical sight, but we may read into the story that he has regained also his spiritual sight of the remembrance of God as the Source of life and wholeness. The awakening to the unified inner vision of Faith is the real healing and the occasion of the healing of his physical limit.

Another way we come to the healing of our spiritual sight is through life crisis. Crisis happens. In such a crisis our usual patterns are rendered helpless; we are "knocked from our high horse." In the Acts of the Apostles there is a dramatic account of such an event in Paul's awakening from blocked spiritual vision. (Acts 9:1) Paul has become a violent and brutal man, consumed and possessed by the demon of his arrogance and grandiose self-righteousness. He is possessed with an obsession for control to the degree he is willing to commit murder. His killing and persecution of others stems from a self-

absorbed conviction and grandiosity that he alone possesses truth and no one may live, no one may be acceptable, who is not inside the circle of his pride. Paul is brought low; his physical vision is lost entirely. His spiritual blindness is metaphorically revealed in physical blindness. But he cannot open to spiritual vision until he experiences the crisis of his helplessness, and the healing of it in surrender to Christ. He must look outside the pride of own self-creation for help and resolution. His encounter with Christ as a lightning bolt knocking him to the ground becomes his salvation. Only then is he willing to look beyond himself and his pride for help, and the scales eventually do fall from his eyes.

Paul's pre-conversion behavior may be a good example of what we are now seeing in our times as a symptom of the death throes of tribal ethnic religion, with the rise of militant fundamentalist and violent religious movements in nearly every continent and religion in the world, including our own. This mythic membership, tribal level of consciousness, as it is called by Ken Wilber in his books, (*Anatomy of Consciousness, The Atman Project*) is marked by the preoccupation of the believer with the question of who is in or out of "my particular circle," rather than the awakening to the Circle that encompasses us all. It has been thought the violence of 9/11 was an attempt to incite global war between the Abrahamic Faiths, and to some extent it has succeeded. In the long run we shall hope it will fail and result in greater desire for communion and understanding. Yet all of us are capable of Paul's exclusion, fear, and violence. Today all of us should hear Christ calling to us, like Paul, "Why are you persecuting me?"

For us what is the awakening of spiritual vision? What are the scales on our eyes? They are the filters of vision created by the self-made self. To be healed we must move from a self-absorbed narcissistic vision to a unitive Christocentric awareness of Love. Our beliefs and schemes will not heal our vision. Only the experience of the healing touch of Christ in our practice will heal our vision. John Main speaks the Way of the Heart in the praxis of Christian meditation in this way: "*Meditation is returning to your own center, and finding that it is the gateway to the Center of all.*" (Main, *The Heart of Creation*, p.29) When we find oneness in the Heart of Christ, our Center, we live in the awareness of our oneness with all things. St. Gregory of Nazianzus says it this way, "Christ exists in all things that are." (Ryan, p. 31) The healing of spiritual blindness is the awakening to Oneness in Christ. It is the means by which the filters of vision of my self, my tribe, my gender, my opinions, my church, my culture, my language, my country, and my world are dismantled. I can then open to the Mystery of Christ who embraces all, and draws all unto Himself. This is our true awakening from spiritual blindness. "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 Madeburg (Ryan, p.31)

The mind is the source of filters to our vision; the Heart is the seat of true spiritual "seeing" or awareness. Only by learning to observe the mind and disengage from its tyranny can we really let the heart expand and open to unitive love in Prayer of the Heart. Hadewich of Antwerp (12c.) says of this release from the mind's filters: "Tighten to nothing the circle that is the world's things. Let the naked circle expand to encompass All." (Hirshfield, p.100) The "naked circle" is the circle of Christ in the Heart. Our vision

is one of either smaller and smaller circles, or larger and larger ones, until our vision is healed and opens to the Circle of the universal Heart of Christ which encompasses All.

Even the insight of Christians of the Mystery of Christ is always a limited one. Christ is not the exclusive property of those who call themselves Christians or of the Christian churches. Thank God for that! ***Christ, His Life, His love, His wisdom, communion with Him is accessible to all, regardless of what name they call Him, or under what concept His Reality is known. He is not an exclusion clause, but the Heart of the Universe, the Heart of God.***

It is good to recognize the markers of our blindness, the fear, judgement, and rejection of the stranger. Our xenophobia, putting what the mind doesn't grasp outside the circle of Christ, that is our adversary with whom we struggle. We must recognize our grasping the comfortable and familiar "isms" and ideologies. We must be vigilant in seeing the "log" in our own eyes. Those "logs" are described aptly in the psychological defense mechanisms of rationalization, repression, projection, and denial. We can cultivate the dismantling and release of these ego filters in our practice of Breathing Yeshua. In our practice of the kenosis of Christ we bow and offer ceaselessly in our moments of helplessness, in our willingness to loosen the grasping hand of control, to yield our insistence on the world being the way we think it should be. In this disposition we can find ourselves healed both in the intuitive trust of Bartimaeus and in the yielding and helpless surrender of Paul. We can be healed to the Christ Vision of Unitive Love. A spiritual elder, mystic, and teacher of our times, Thomas Hand S.J. spoke this simple truth of the unitive vision of Christ in a contemplative talk in 1997 at Shalom Prayer Center. "The God experience is awakening to Oneness and fully accepting and living the consequences."

The world in which we live, all Creation, is translucent, filled and shining with the Glory of Christ. Because of blocked spiritual vision most of us don't see it. But we can be surprised. We can be opened to this glory unexpectedly. My lightning moment, being knocked off my high horse, or perhaps more appropriately, cut off at the knees, was the occasion of the sickness and death of my son. At the time of his cremation with my wife and my spiritual mentor, Doug, I sat in silent meditation in the crematorium. Within me was a great struggle as waves of anger, bitterness, and despair passed through my mind. The challenge of emptying and releasing was great. At a certain point when it seemed nothing was left, a peace arose in me of calm and quiet. Looking at one another that it was time, we rose together and left the room and walked outside into the light of a September day in late morning. The morning mist was lifting. I looked around at the trees and the brown hills of late summer. For just a moment the physical world suddenly disappeared and there remained a pure Radiance shining through everything, a Life, a Presence of Fire and Love. A wordless communication spoke from this Fire, "He is my beloved child, he is forever one with me and one with you." The Radiant Life has never left me and I have never left It. At that moment the scales fell for me and the circle of the Light of Christ became my vision.

The monk, Thomas Merton, describes such a moment of the healing of his spiritual blindness. He had long wrestled with his sense of isolation from the world, and his desire to find a unitive vision to reconcile the life of the solitary hermit monastic with the life of compassionate concern for the world.

"In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I was theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness. The whole illusion of a separate holy existence is a dream. ... Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other." (Merton, *Confessions of a Guilty Bystander* )

In this moment Merton finds the healing of his spiritual vision, where a thunderbolt on the corner of Fourth and Walnut takes him into the unitive vision of Christ, seeing the world and all beings with the Lumen Christi, Light of Christ. We can be surprised and our vision healed in the Glory of Christ, on a street corner in Louisville, or at a crematorium in Portland, Oregon.

## *-Chapter Twelve-*



### **Healing from a Divided Life**

*“ 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)*

Throughout the Gospels Yeshua challenges us to be complete, to be undivided, to be wholehearted in our life of consecration to God. The first and primary of these is his invocation of the Jewish 'Shema'. And He affirms that to be given in love to God in entirety is the whole of the law and scriptures, including the love of neighbor. Other examples include the story of the rich young man (Matt. 19:16) who comes to Him seeking the truth of salvation. He tells the young man that he cannot hold back. He must give it **all** to be one with God. In the teaching of God and Mammon (Matt 6:24) Yeshua tells us we must choose between our misdirected desire for wealth and security and our true desire for God. We cannot do both, we cannot lead a divided life and still enter the Kingdom of unitive love. We cannot have God and god substitutes. We cannot worship God and idols of our construction. In the story of Martha and Mary(Luke 10:38) Yeshua admonishes Martha, not because she is serving by doing manual work, but because she is creating a duality in herself and is divided in what she is doing, and therefore envious and resentful. The "better part" that Mary has chosen is her undivided devotion, a devotional love that can be undivided in both activity and stillness.

One of the most intriguing narratives of the mystical life of communion in Christ is the story of the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well:

John 4:6- "It was about noon.... A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Yeshua said to her, "Give me a drink." The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?".. Yeshua answered her, "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?" Yeshua 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."

What is the point of this story? Yeshua is telling us lyrically and metaphorically, 'If you want to come to completion in me, then give yourself entirely, and stop looking around for substitutes in different sizes and shapes of "buckets."

### **The True Spouse and the Living Spring**

Beatrice Bruteau, the contemplative writer, gives a wonderful exegesis of this encounter. (Bruteau, "*Living Prayer*", July-Aug. 1995) She begins by noting that in the scriptures when the scene is dramatically introduced as "high noon" and has related incongruities (i.e. a single woman coming to get water alone at noon, speaking with a strange man), these are a distinctive red flags that what is coming in the narrative is not about historical record but is rather revelation of Mystery. High noon is the hour of tension when Truth is revealed. The facts of the story are stated in paradoxical fashion to set the stage for the revelation to follow. There are multi levels of meaning. A conversation about drinking water turns into a conversation about Ultimate Reality and mystical union. Buckets, wells, and springs are metaphors for the Inner life of the Divine. The Samaritan woman is "us." Like her we have undergone levels of failed or false espousal in our life. All of us have gone through the espousals of our soul or spiritual consciousness in the six levels of attachment and are seeking a liberation at last in the One who invites us Home, the One who is the Gift of God

In the course of a lifetime we espouse ourselves to what we think will bring us completion. The levels of espousal in our life are the spiritual developmental journey. Bruteau suggests this developmental process is analogous to the Eastern chakra system. Christ is both the true Spouse, the Beloved, who brings us to the final liberation, and the Font of Living Water of the "I AM" who flows freely within us poured out in eternal Self-giving Love. We can at long last give up our wandering and seeking and be Home in the life of inner Communion in Christ.

We might ask ourselves what are the false substitutes, the buckets, to which we have espoused ourselves? What must we do to be free to unite with the true Spouse? So often a seeker begins the journey asking "How can I fit a spiritual practice into my life?" As the journey progress the entirety of our life, all of our human development, physical, relational, affective, intellect, and intuition are integrated into a whole and holy offering of self in communion in Christ. ***This is the consecrated life. This is the real meaning of Healing or Salvation, the assimilation of our complete humanity, will and consciousness, into Christ, our True Spouse.***

Our inner work then is to let Christ unite and heal our life heal of inner divisions. In doing this we must confront and free ourselves from what the Buddhist teacher, Joseph Goldstein, calls, "*If Only Mind*." Our mind thinks, "If only this were different, if only I had this bucket, If only I had this relationship. If only I had this role. If only these conditions were different." Much of our life we spend in "bucket consciousness": Love is limited, God is limited, and my own devices and strategies are my refuge." The only espousal then is to the objects of desire, my god substitutes, my self-created "buckets."

By contrast our practice must take us toward Living Spring consciousness: "Love is limitless and the Source is within me. Divine Life, the Living Water of Christ, is beyond my control yet I can open and be accessible to It." Entering the practice of Christ's kenosis of self emptying and self-offering, I become an empty and receptive vessel of the Living Spring of Christ's Spirit to suffuse my humanity and pour out into the world.

To expand and deepen the life of daily practice we begin by having sacred space for our prayer practice, our space of intimate communion with the Spouse. We invoke a prayer of consecrated intention before our silent prayer and at intervals in the day. (How different our world would be if every home had this sacred space at the center!) We return and anchor ceaselessly in our prayer word of Breathing Yeshua. If we are espousing ourselves to the Beloved, we call the Beloved by name and bring ourselves to the Beloved's Presence. This we do in Breathing Yeshua endlessly. And we do this in every activity of life, consecrated eating, sleeping, relating, work, ***all of life, in activity and rest, becomes bowing in adoration and self-offering in love.*** In our self-offering we learn gradually to release from self-preoccupation and to become the clear and empty vessel of the Living Water of Christ. In us He rises to offer His Life of Love into the world in kindness, service, and life of inner communion expressed and actualized in every moment.

***This is the true worship of God in Spirit and Truth Yeshua foretold to the Samaritan woman. This is the Mystery of the Eucharist in Christ's gift of Self to us as the Bread of Life, and our self-offering to Christ in the transformative consecration of the elements of our humanity. In this way our life's journey in following Christ is to become Christ, the consecrated bread and wine of our humanity. In this way our life is consummated in the true espousal with Christ and we fulfill the words of the Song of Solomon: "My Beloved is mine and I am His."***

*"Through Christ, with Christ and In Christ..  
our humanity is lifted up  
and consecrated in the Beloved;  
thus entering the stream of the Beloved's Life  
in adoration and self giving;  
we sit at the Wedding Feast of Eternal Life."  
(Ryan, p.74)*

## *-Chapter Thirteen-*



### **Christ our Resurrection and Life**

*"Wherever you are on earth, you wish to perceive the Mystery that lies at the Heart of your heart.. 'Why be afraid? I, Jesus, am here; I am the Christ. I loved you first... In you have I set my joy!*

*..Recognized or not, the Risen Christ remains close to every person, even those unaware of Him. He remains there in secret."*

*(Brother Roger of Taizé, No Deeper Love)*

#### **Paschal Mystery**

In the Lenten Liturgy we celebrate the Paschal Mystery of Christ. In my childhood years the only thing I understood was that Easter was a time for dressing up in fine clothes and families to take pictures. I never made the connection very well between the death and resurrection of Jesus and real life. So I've been reflecting on that every since. Yet in the Christian tradition we teach the death and resurrection of Jesus as the pivot point of Christian life. If this is only historic event, how can this be central to our own spiritual life?

I have come to understand the Paschal Mystery of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, is the mystery of *\*our\** life and all existence. We celebrate this mystery in the

spring of the year when there is the rising of new Life. In the spring the new life arises out of the death and transformation of the old life.

The rising of new life arises out of death, and the relinquishment of all that has gone before. New life is the developmental fulfillment of the life cycle. The butterfly in Easter Christianity is a potent symbol of transfiguration and transfiguration. The caterpillar dies as it was before, and leaves behind the husk of its former existence so the butterfly can spread its wings and leave the bounds of earth. The old life has to be cleared away, so that there is space and room, for the new life to emerge. The season of winter is this phase in the rhythm of the seasons, so that spring can burst forth.

For us the meaning of resurrection, the invitation to join Christ in the Risen Life is not just about the resurrection at the end of physical life or the end of time. Resurrection is the potential that awaits us here and now to live the Risen Life of Christ in our own. In the tradition of Eastern Christianity we realize the goal of human life is Christification, to bring forth and manifest the Life of the Risen One fully in our own human life, in the uniqueness of our own journey and life development. Easter and Resurrection therefore are what we live more than just what we believe.

Resurrection is not something we do alone or of ourselves. It is the something we participate in; it is the way we unite our life to the Life of Christ in the way of the Cross, in the many deaths of self relinquishment and kenosis. We face these transformative movements most clearly in time of trial and loss. Living the Resurrection is the way we die to the former life we lived, and are given to the consecration of the Risen Life of Christ coming alive in our own life.

### **Gethsemane and Easter**

Two visual representations of the Paschal Mystery are the icons of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane and the icon of Resurrection called Anastassis (raising up). The first shows the self-offering and surrender of Christ, while the disciples sleep. They show all those resistances in our humanity that don't want to face the truth of the way life is in our vulnerability and impermanence. These sleeping apostles in us resist by being unawake or unconscious or distracted. The Christ of Gethsemane is a vulnerable Christ, and we are not different. The self-offering of Christ, the kenosis of Christ, is what makes the second movement of Rising possible. And so it is also in our own practice of Breathing Yeshua each moment, releasing and offering. In our opening in the Heart and in the space of our surrender to Christ we are then joined to His Rising. We are lifted up and out of the deadness and stagnation of our habitual patterns, as represented by the Christ figure reaching into the underworld and lifting up the figures of Adam and Eve in the Anastassis icon. The discarded keys and locks in the icon represent the unbinding of our chained and oppressed condition. Christ is the liberator who frees us from death to live His Life.

Resurrection is a life long process of living out the Paschal Mystery. Gethsemane is part of the process, Golgotha is part of the process, and Easter is the fulfillment of the process in each of our lives. Years ago in presenting a hospice workshop a pastor invited to participate made the comment: "There are too many Christians who want the

Resurrection and are unwilling to accept the crucifixion." In other words we come to participate in the Risen Life of Christ through our equal participation in His crucifixion in our own life.

Yeshua poses that same question to each of us when he says, " Can you drink the cup which I am to drink?" Our invitation is to drink fully the cup of our life and death, and to allow all those experiences of joy and sorrow to be the means of our redemptive, transformative work. (Mathew 20-21).

In the garden of Gethsemane we are presented with the vision of a Yeshua in his vulnerability. He is a human who sees the losses he faces, the pain of complete desolation, of abandonment, of aloneness, of not only the loss of his own biological life, but also the loss of the experience of union with the Source that all humans experience. In the Garden of our Gethesemane again and again our own human will cringes before the onslaughts to our vulnerability. In moments of crisis we come face to face with the physical and psychological vulnerability that is our humanity. Like Yeshua we may say, "Let this cup pass from me" We just don't want it. "Make it go away." The ego says, "I didn't bargain for this." And our time of trial arises as fear and despair grips us in small or big ways. The life of Faith can take us deeper.

Yet true freedom from fear only is resolved only when we give over our vulnerability in sheer gift of love and trust. Like Yeshua we have the capacity to loosen the fist of our hand and hold it out empty and offering our own humanity and emptiness to the Beloved. This giving, this choice, isn't one we make by ourselves It is our union with Christ that allows us to make that gift in Him. Christ chooses in us when we say, "I choose You. Let Your will be mine in this moment forward." Then we begin to move in freedom to accept that our life suffering and circumstances are the cross on which we can be fully given in love and transformed. The cross of "what gets in the way, becomes the Way." In this way we are united with the Cross of Christ in every moment, and every circumstance of life. This is the heart of Prayer of the Heart, to be fully given in love in Christ.

*Luke 9:23- "If you want to become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, those who lose their live, for my sake will save it."* It is in this emptying and relinquishment of all those things that we have identified with in this life, all our ideas of success and failure that we release from our false identity; we lose our life and therein find our True Life who is Christ. We must make room, make space, and give a whole hearted "yes" for Him to live in us.

*"Unless a Grain of Wheat fall to the earth and die, it cannot bear fruit."* (John 12:24)  
Falling is not a bad thing in the Gospel. The culture deems falling as failure. Yet falling is inevitable in life. The real question in our practice is how do we fall and what do we do when we fall. Can we learn to fall in self-relinquishment to Christ? Can we learn to keep going in our walk with Christ when we fall? Can we let our falls be the occasion of our deepening self-gift to Christ? Are we willing to take the next step in our falling?

Yeshua says: “ *Be not afraid .. I am with you always.* ” (Matt. 28) This is the promise that we are never alone in our journey. And it may be in our falling that we are most accessible to Yeshua, most aware of our need and His presence as our Faithful companion in this life.

### **Our Daily Cross**

How do we take up our cross daily, when do we do this? In our practice of Prayer of the Heart both in stillness and in the middle of life we cultivate the interior movements of presence and adoration. In our adoration we bow in self-offering love to Christ who is our Life. In the ceaseless invocation of the name of Yeshua we unite our human life to the Life of the Risen One and we enter the life of Resurrection.

Our cross of human vulnerability and impermanence, our cross of separateness, are the raw material of our daily bowing in adoration and self-offering in love. All of us, without exception come through life wounded, especially in the earlier years when we are most vulnerable and least defended. Our wounds, the wounds we often deny and run away from, can be seen as the sacred wounds of Christ. We may have hidden them in shame, or in fear. The way we defend our wounds and protect ourselves from further harm may keep us from loving more deeply. Yet it is these very wounds that are the way of our salvation. *If we look closely in our journey, it is the way that we have been hurt or injured in life and our search for healing and strength that become our Way into Christ.* For me the early injuries of insecurity and isolation, became the fuel for my finding true sanctuary and true belonging in the Heart of Christ.

The main purpose of God's redemptive work is that we may be restored to a life of participation in His Life in Christ. *Hence true redemption, true salvation, is the healing of the soul's capacity to receive and manifest the love of Christ, present within us from the beginning.*

### **Our Sacred Wounds**

Our Wounds in the Paschal Mystery are the means of our redemption and opening to the Risen Life of Christ. Think of those times in your life when you are brought closest to your wounds, to your vulnerability as a human being. They are times of crisis, when the habitual patterns don't work, when the usual supports aren't present. They are a time of trial when the temptation is to dig a hole and climb into it, or lash out in anger or self-defense and fear. This is the moment when the cross of Christ is our redemptive path. In this moment when we allow Christ to choose, and say "yes"- that we are given in love, given in trust to love more deeply, more fully, more completely. That is a Resurrection moment. The beatitudes teach us that Resurrection happens only in our vulnerability when we really exercise Faith to take refuge in Christ. When things are going well, when the mind and psyche feel secure, we are comfortable in our habitual patterns and old husks. When things fall apart, through grace, the self of separateness can fall apart into the life of communion with Christ. *Holding it together isn't always a good thing. When we fall apart into the arms of Christ, that is a good thing indeed and we break free from our husks into butterfly glory and flight.*

The moment of trial, of doubt, in a relationship, in a human encounter, in helplessness can be the moment of death and resurrection. (And isn't what we fear the most helplessness?) Can I do this? Can I drink this cup? Can I give myself without reservation to the love of God in even this? That is our Garden of Gethesemane.

Think of your Cross in life, and the carrying of it, as the particular way we bring the wounds of our human soul, and the knot of separateness again and again to the healing and restoration of God. Christ is the One who carries the cross in us, the One who unravels the knots of isolation and separateness. He is the One who opens us to the choice of self offering in Him; and His love, again and again, ceaselessly opens us to Himself in the course of a life time.

Think of those choices you have made, when it was most dark, when you were most in trial, most in crisis. Think of when you were most willing to reach out with empty hands and ask for help in making the choice for what is most good, most loving, and most healing, regardless of the cost. ***In each moment, in the darkest moment, this is the cross of Christ which brings us to the death of the cocoon of our self absorption and into the flight of freedom to Love, as we are called to, as we were loved into existence to do.***

In my marriage, in my life as a father, as a counselor to the emotionally and mentally afflicted, as a spiritual director, I have grown the most in love when I had to reach with empty hands and a sense of helplessness and inadequacy. I have opened the most when I asked for help to give of myself in love, the best I could. This is the opening to the Risen Life of Christ, coming alive in me and you. This is our death to the habit patterns and dead mental formations that keep us locked in bondage. The times of my seeming failure and helplessness, the death of my self-sufficiency and separateness, then become the opening to consecration in the Risen Christ. Brother Roger of Taize tells us about the nature of this Resurrection in Christ: " *When Christ asks you, 'For you, who am I? Suppose you were to reply; 'Christ Jesus, You are the One who loves me into life that has no end.'* " ( Brother Roger, p. 37)

Jesus said, " *I am the Resurrection and the Life, those who believe in me, though they die, will live.*"( John 11:25) The way we come to that realization is through our humanity. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians (I CO 1:23) said that he came to proclaim neither the law of the Jews nor the wisdom of the Greeks but Christ crucified. No high minded philosophy will bring us to oneness with Christ, but only the cross of our life experience, if we let grace happen. He was talking to people about what is real, that life is tough, and you can't realize goodness by making rules or expounding lofty ideals; rather you come to love's completion through the hard things in life. M. Scott Peck said that life is a school for loving. And so it is in our relationships, they are a dimension of the cross, the school of our life, where we learn to love, fully and deeply

## **Stations of the Cross**

One of the important devotional practices of my childhood was the stations of the cross. At some level in my earlier life they made a deep impact because I understood they are not about history, but about the mystery of living for you and me. Christ crucified is about our living and our crucifixion as well.

**Jesus is condemned-** We are condemned when the hurts and injustices of life, and when our losses and vulnerabilities catch up to us. Things may come our way that we think we don't deserve. Our diminishments, the works we have wrought, the relationships that have disappointed or hurt us, they condemn us as well. What we had placed our hope and security in vainly, condemns us. Impermanence and death intrude and condemn us. We are mocked and humiliated by the judgements of the culture around us and by our apparent failures.

**Jesus receives and accepts the cross-** We accept what life has brought us, and let it be the means of our transformation to learn to love as best we can, to learn to let Christ give Himself in us as best we can. We accept the unavoidable and let it transform us, rather than give in to blind resignation.

**Jesus falls the first time, the second, and the third-** We fall, we fail, we don't live up to what is best and deepest in us, Our weakness is revealed. The fall to the ground is acceptance of our humanity, our limitations. We learn a great wisdom, the acceptance, and above all, the faithfulness of getting up again and again and going on. When we fall seven times, the important thing is the eighth time we get up.

**Jesus receives help-** We are not self sufficient and separate, Christ carries our cross with and in us, and others walk with us on this journey of transformation in His love. We are never entirely alone or abandoned as Christ continually offers Himself as our companion.

**Jesus is stripped of his garments-** We are stripped and naked in our defenses before God, and our utter and complete dependence on Him. Our life arises in God, and remains ever one in God. The paradox is that in our nakedness we discover our essence in God and our ultimate security.

**Jesus is Crucified-** Yeshua is nailed to the cross of his death- We are nailed to the cross of our own losses, our own wounded humanity, and radical need for God

**Jesus gives up His Life-** We give up the life we have known in self-offering to God. The prayer of consecration of Yeshua is our prayer- "Into Your Hands, Abba, I commend my Spirit." For me this is the last chant, the last mantra of the day. And in the official office of the monastic tradition of Compline it is also the last chant of the day. It is the daily commitment that we give up the life we have known that Christ can live in us. And in our surrender the stone of our own separate-self life rolls away and the life of Christ rises to live fully in us. In that moment we are offered up, as the host in the Eucharistic liturgy, and are united in the offering of Christ.

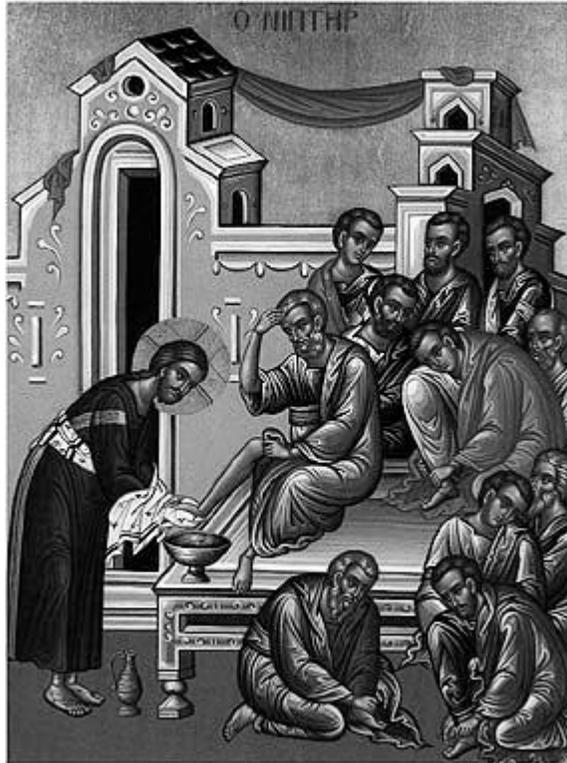
### **Resurrection Life in Ordinary Life**

As we deepen our practice in the Way of the Heart we come to live Resurrection in ordinary daily life. We experience not just crucifixion but the glory and joy of the Risen Life of Christ. Our Resurrection becomes our journey of singular refuge in Christ alone.

We find extraordinary joy in the ordinary life of walking with others, it is the road to Emmaus, eating, drinking, cooking the fish for others. We find joy in breaking bread; we sail on the sea of Galilee with Yeshua in the everyday lives of service. Resurrection life is sailing with Yeshua in this way, in the ordinary life of ours. True enlightenment and mystic union leads to this state, of living ordinary life with exquisite and extraordinary joy and love. Resurrection leads not to separation but joining fully the unitive life of humanity and all Creation. In us Christ can love and serve our loved ones, our community, and the created world of all things around us. It is a life of consecrated love and concern for all things. The true measure of a life then is agape, unitive love, and its measure is the tender concern we bring to all we do.

The transforming union is the birthing of Agape, self-offering love, the journey that began in exile and alienation takes us back into community. *The Way of the Cross takes us to the Golgotha of our lives, and from there to the empty tomb. Resurrection takes us on the road to Emmaus where we walk with others. Resurrection takes us on to the sea of Galilee and sailing with Jesus and our brothers and sisters, back into community, back into service and finding the Christ at the center of our own heart, equally in the world and in others. It is the work of the Risen Christ, His Resurrection and Life in us, coming to fruition in our life.*

## ***-Chapter Fourteen-***



### **Serving Christ in the Way of the Heart**

#### **Contemplative Life-Active life**

I grew up in a time when religious educators made a false distinction between the "active life" and the "contemplative life." A person seeking to live the contemplative life had to enter a cloister and never be heard from again. The active life was one of outward humanitarian service, a domestic married life, a life of involvement in the world, whereas, the contemplative life was seen as outside of the "world." Nothing could be further from the truth.

To live the contemplative life is to enter into the depths of the world through a growing and expanding communion with Christ in all things. This communion with Christ leads us to love and serve Christ in the world, and not to try to leave the world. A beautiful picture, was given to my spiritual friend and partner in ministry, Sr. Antoinette Traeger. The picture presents three images of an expanding heart, and is based on a phrase from the Benedictine Rule, "With Hearts Expanded." This image speaks directly to the life and practice of Breathing Yeshua and is placed in prominence in the prayer room at Shalom Prayer Center. This is a life where the Heart expands in communion with Christ to encompass all of life. There is no place, no time, no condition where we do not breathe Yeshua, and serve Yeshua in our consecrated love. The mystics and teachers of the great

spiritual traditions teach an important truth. *The end of the spiritual journey in this life is not the mountain-top, but it is the return and service to the world.*

My father, who recently died two days after Easter at the age of 79, was a recovering alcoholic. In the last twenty years of life in grace he and I had a healed relationship. My father had been deeply wounded and broken by both the disease of alcoholism and the violence of combat in World War II. As he grew and healed in recovery he found his calling was to be a healer, especially to veterans who had suffered like him from the violence of war and addiction to alcohol and other drugs. In the latter years of his life he was an alcohol counselor and community leader.

My father's name was Bill, like mine. Dad told me that a turning point for him in his ministry to the alcohol addicted happened early in his career as an alcohol counselor. On a visit to Portland, Oregon he stopped for a conference at the Hooper Detox Center. On this occasion he was ascending the stairs to enter the building. Leaving the building at the same moment was an older man on whose face was etched the ravages of many years of alcohol dependence. For a just a brief moment Dad said there was radiance that shown from the man's face and he could see the glorified face of Christ in this man. The Gospel words of Christ came to Dad: "I was hungry and you fed me, I was homeless and you sheltered me, I was drunk and sick and abandoned and you took care of me."

From that moment on there was never any doubt in my father that this was that path of service for him. The love of Christ became the prime motivation of my father's life, and he knew that same love took him into the middle of life, into the depths of serving his Beloved in other human beings."

### **Compassionate Service- the Fruit of Resurrection**

We, who venerate the liturgy and sacrament of the Eucharist, as we mature in the spiritual life, come to a deeper understanding of Eucharist. We are the human elements of bread and wine, lifted up and consecrated in adoration and self-offering to God. We are consecrated and transformed into the living incarnate Christ in human form and community. We become the broken Bread of Christ's Life given to the world, in this human life. We become the consecrated wine of Christ's Love offered to the world. Like St. Paul we are "... poured out as a libation." (Phil. 2:1)

Our practice takes us to a living out of the Eucharist of the Risen Christ of Easter. And if we give ourselves to this Mercy then we become accessible to the grace that transforms our human wounds and brokenness into consecrated humanity, the vessel of Christ's Self-Giving to the world. For Bill, my father, his wounds became his sacred wounds, and the means of his serving Christ in the world through what he called his "apostolate" of healing with the alcohol and drug afflicted.

In my own life my parents divorced early in my childhood. My earliest years brought great instability, episodic poverty, and constant change and upheaval. This life inflicted wounds of insecurity and emotional turmoil. Grace led me as a young child to turn inward to find the source of inner stability and safety, to find my refuge in the Presence in my own Heart within. My sacred wounds through grace had led me to find a path to

resurrection. Early in my life's journey my inclination was to try to avoid life's vulnerabilities. In the course of time and the transformative love of Christ I began to move from a life of avoidance and escape from the world to growing engagement, service, and communion with the world. One of my choices in my early twenties was to seek a career in mental health counseling, a sure avenue of immersion in human suffering. In the life of Breathing Yeshua we find, each of us, a way to actualize our own Prayer of the Heart apostolate. Our growing experience of personal communion with Yeshua bears fruit as we find a way to have a life of service and belonging in the Universal Christ in humanity and all Creation. Thus our practice brings a life long development of expanding the Heart, moving from our rigid and tightly circumscribed circle of the egoic self to the universal circle of Christ that encompasses all. In this way we become His broken bread given to feed the world.

The mystics teach the inner and outer journey are one. To discover the truth of one's being is to discover the Inner Christ, but this is just the beginning. Thomas Kelley, the Quaker mystic of the 20th century says:

" Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continually return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself.

In this Center of Creation all things are ours, and we are Christ's and Christ is God's. We are owned beings, ready to run and not be weary and to walk and not faint. The Inner Light, the Inward Christ, is no mere doctrine, belonging peculiarly to a small religious fellowship, to be accepted or rejected as a mere belief. It is the living Center of Reference for all Christian souls and Christian groups - yes, and of non-Christian groups as well - who seriously mean to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. He is the center and source of action, not the endpoint of thought. He is the locus of commitment, not a problem for debate. Practice comes first in religion, not theory or dogma. And Christian practice is not exhausted in outward deeds. These are the fruits, not the roots. A practicing Christian must above all be one who practices the perpetual return of the soul into the inner sanctuary, who brings the world into its Light and who brings the Light (of Christ) into the world with all its turmoil and its fitfulness and re-creates it after the pattern seen on the Mount." ( Kelly, "The Light Within," *A Testament of Devotion*, p.8)

With my own inclinations of the introvert, afraid to be fully in the world, my spiritual journey in many ways started as a retreat from the world. I wanted to find a way to be safe and invulnerable in the world. So what did I do? Paradoxically in grace I chose to be a parent and to be immersed in the suffering of the human condition as a mental health counselor. When I threw myself into the thick of life, and chose to have children, a little voice said, "You are going to be hurt more than you ever thought possible." And the voice was right. So where my inward journey of contemplation took me was a vocation of compassionate service as a mental health counselor and the relational life of husband and father. It became like the Zen koan, the Christian paradox, the Christian cross of love and responsibility. In my own way, I was trying to answer Yeshua's invitation, "If you want to follow me, pick up your cross daily." For me the curse of a painful fear of the world and desire to escape it led to a gift of sensitivity and empathy, and a vocation to the healing of others. What had been deficit over the past 30 years has become strength, and hopefully a gift poured out to others.

Breathing Yeshua in the healing process of counseling has been my daily practice, my daily service. To be with others in distress means full attention, a quality of presence, and a reverence for boundaries that recognizes the sacred Christ in another. It means the

capacity to empty self of self, to release from any and every agenda, and to take full responsibility to release from the projections and defense mechanisms of the ego-mind. This practice involves the kenosis of the humility of Christ, to learn from failure and mistakes, to learn from the stories and experience of others, to learn from the suffering of others, and above all, to learn to be with my own helplessness.

To Breathe Yeshua in this service of Christ means confronting the evil of self-absorption both in oneself and in those who are being helped as it presents in the helping relationship. Many who came to me in my earlier professional years had committed crimes and compassion meant shining a light on their narcissism. To work in the field of mental health is to learn from life and death, suicide and tragic sudden death, disease and aging. Breathing Yeshua becomes the ground of our security, the sanctuary of our earthly consolation, the font of our service of loving-kindness.

### **The Cross of Responsibility**

The life of following Yeshua is one of accepting responsibility, of acknowledging we are here with work to do. ***For what are we responsible? Just this, to offer the best of ourselves in love.*** To do this we must relinquish every presumption of control, and do the best we can in love, and know it is enough. We offer it daily on the altar of our consecration to Christ, and it is enough. In truth we are responsible also for the ***consecration of attention which grows into presence and adoration to Christ in all things.*** We are responsible for the depth and ***consecration of our intention, which grows into self-offering love. So that Christ can serve others in us, we get ourselves out of the way. We ceaselessly offer and release all outcomes to the Mercy of God.***

In this process an important question to keep asking is this: "Who is helping? Who is serving? Who is being helped?" In this way we remind ourselves we participate in a flow of Divine love and mercy that encompasses all and is vaster and deeper than any personal agenda or compulsion for achievement that may intrude. Subject and object, actor and action, disappear into the Oneness of God's Love and Mercy. We are participants in the Circle of Christ's Mercy.

### **Breathing Yeshua in the Praxis of Helping-**

The same essential practice of Breathing Yeshua in Prayer of the Heart applies to every form of helping, every form of service. We breathe Yeshua in service to our loved ones at home, to the most vulnerable and marginalized, or to the larger community in the form of work-livelihood we have taken. In this integration of Prayer of the Heart into activity and service we uncover utter simplicity:

**-The first movement:** Be there, fully with the gift of Presence and Adoration to Christ who is there.

**-The second movement:** Be there in the most loving, the most kind way we can be, releasing from every agenda and attachment to any outcome, offering our best effort to Christ who is there.

-**Trust** that whatever skills we possess or require will be accessible to us in the middle of our service.

Prayer of the Heart practice in the middle of life leads us to a continual process of inward bowing and inward offering of self to the Christ we encounter every day. It is enough to recognize, be present, and be given in love, to the Christ in another and to offer without expectation. Outcomes are not ours to decide. ***We can participate in the flow of Divine Compassion in the most loving way, just doing the very best we can to bring forth Agape, Christ's Self-Offering to the world. This is the goal of all life.***

Transformation happens in the middle of service, in the middle of relationships, with every choice we make to bring our thoughts, our emotions, and our behavior into harmony with a growing interior union with Christ. Through ceaseless practice we align our humanity, our life, and consciousness into this greater communion, into the Great Circle of the Divine where we find our belonging. ***We do this inner work of transformation in the middle of Life, in ceaseless bowing in adoration to the Christ before us, in ceaseless offering in love to the Christ among us.***

#### **Climbing the Mountain to Live and Serve in the World-**

In my own journey I spent a year and a half in an extended personal retreat. I took a sabbatical from the "normal pattern" to be a hermit devoted to contemplation, while still in familial life, to rest and heal in the depths of communion in God. (I did domestic work and child-care for my wife and daughter.) My rest from the outer responsibilities of life helped me unravel into the Mercy of God and unitive experience. My mistaken desire at the end of this time was to try to build a fence around the heaven I had found.

God's Providence brought me from the mountaintop back into daily human life, where my first job was at Dammasch State Hospital in Oregon. I found myself immersed in the world of chronic and acute mental illness, of profound human suffering. My second professional position made me a geriatric mental health specialist where I was, and still am, immersed in the world of disease, old age, disability and death. I found that fences around the Mercy of God don't work.

#### **Bringing the Practice into Every Aspect of Life**

I learned Brother Lawrence's simple wisdom applies to every circumstance. No form of service is unworthy, every form of service is service to Christ, and can become prayer when done with the full attention of presence and adoration, and the full intention of self-giving love. Washing the dishes, chopping the onions, sweeping the floors, cleaning the toilets, treating the mental and emotional distress of others, are all worthy service.

Thus service to Christ is a manifestation of praying without ceasing, expanding the Heart of Breathing Yeshua. When we live the compassionate life of service, it is the Spirit of Christ who brings compassionate help, healing and presence through us.

Thomas Kelly says this of our ceaseless prayer, "*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. Here all human initiative has passed into acquiescence, and He works and prays and seeks His own through us, in exquisite, energizing life. 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 of human beings.*"

\*\* This "Seeking Life" is Christ's Life, serving all beings.\*\*

### **Serving Christ in Peace and Justice**

As our hearts expand in the life of Breathing Yeshua we find they expand to include also a prophetic voice for peace and justice. This can be the most frightening development of all. When Yeshua says, "Blessed are you when you are persecuted and reviled for my sake," it hardly makes us feel at ease. Yet the most needed expressions of service to Christ are for the most poor and the most afflicted.

I previously spoke about Thomas Merton's koan of being a monk while being of compassionate service in the world. What Merton discovered was that in his writing he was called to hold accountable to the Gospel of Christ the American society around him and its abandonment of the poor, its refusal to change the injustice of racism, and its obsession with military and violent solutions in the world of foreign affairs. (Are we called to any less in our time?) At the corner of 4th and Walnut Merton discovered there is no difference between the life of inner communion with Christ and serving and opening in compassion to Christ suffering in the world. He proclaimed that the gate of Heaven is everywhere and there is no such thing as an isolated life alone with God. For Merton contemplative life and prayer, and service in peace and justice are a seamless garment.

Merton understood the whole purpose why we seek solitude as monk or layperson is so that we might leap into and live eternally in the unitive Circle of Christ. In describing Christian Meditation John Main says that we meditate in order to enter the gateway to the Center of All. So our movement in the practice of Breathing Yeshua is to break free from the constricted isolated circle of self absorption and live into the circle that encompasses all humanity, all Creation, God's circle of Eternal Love. In this way we live truly a life of the prayer of St. Patrick's breastplate-"*Christ before us, Christ behind us, Christ under our feet, Christ beneath us, Christ within us, Christ all around us.*"

### **Confronting the Evil of Selfishness**

Helder Camara was a Roman Catholic Cardinal in Brazil in the latter part of the 20th century. He believed that the Christian life must of necessity involve confronting the source of evil, which is selfishness, both in oneself and in the society in which we live. "The true root of evil is selfishness. Mankind can only get out of its present explosive situation when it realizes that selfishness is international. It dominates the relationships between individuals, groups, and countries." (Camara, *The Desert is Fertile*, p. 34)

Fr. Camara said that in global affairs evil is asserting national self-interest over the concern for the well being of all. In the case of our consumer culture, the frenetic drive to consume and buy over every other concern is an injury to Christ. Wholesale abandonment of the poor, and the vulnerable, for the sake of consumption beyond need is wrong and sinful. A consuming country where 2% of the population consumes 2/3 of the world's vital resources, while many within its own borders go without basic needs, is unjust and sinful. Violent war as a first choice rather than a last choice seems too often policy of the United States and is a sin against life and peace. For Fr. Camara the root of all of this evil is the false center, and salvation is to find ourselves in God's center. And for Christians the way to liberation from the little center into the Center of All is the Heart of Christ and service to Christ in the world.

*"Lord save me from the false center.  
In particular defend me  
from self-centeredness." (Camara, P. 7)*

We are called, each of us, to a consecrated life, a life of risk and givenness. In his book ***No Greater Love*** Brother Roger of Christ's call, *"You open for me the way of risk. You are expecting from me not just a few crumbs, but the whole of my existence. You are praying within me, day and night...simply calling you by the name of Jesus fills the empty places in my heart."* (Brother Roger, P. 37 ) ***We are called without exception to break out of the isolated life of self-centeredness to lead lives of service in peace and justice. In Breathing Yeshua we call on His name and take refuge in His Heart.***

### **The Pain of Unitive Love**

Societal culture exists in the world of separateness, a world of illusory small circles. A well-known Sufi story speaks of a master who offers the student who has reached some attainment of enlightenment the option of drinking the potion of forgetfulness. In the story the student finds that the unitive life is one that is hard and brings him continual pain and conflict with the human condition. He complains that living in the world in the unitive state is too painful. In the story he elects to drink the potion of separateness and forgetfulness again rather than face the pain and risk of the unitive life. Too many of us drink the potion. And the world of television offers us a drink of that potion each day.

To live fully alive is to be open to the pain of cruelty and the suffering of all living beings and to accept that suffering as Christ's suffering. ***The life of Breathing Yeshua is a life of the expanded heart. The expanded heart is the open heart and a heart that sees and hears and receives a suffering humanity. Living the Life of union with Christ is a difficult life, and it is the only Real Life. The paradox we discover is this: the expanded heart opens us to pain and opens us to joy. They are inseparable.***

Unitive Life in Christ is a life devoted to peace and justice. The monotheistic traditions all use terms for God with a common root, Allaha- (Christian- the word Jesus used for God), Allah (Moslem), Ela (Jewish). They all mean the essential unity from which all things arise. This Unity is the realization of communion with Christ. The invitation of the Gospel is to enter the Realm or Essential Unity of God and live it fully.

In my father's story he saw the face of Christ in the drunk. Through grace my Dad came to see Christ in himself and he saw his life was about being Christ and serving Christ in the world. In his life he served Christ as an alcohol counselor, and in his later years as the prophetic voice of conscience and the moral authority of a spiritual elder and community leader, advocating for the drug and alcohol afflicted in his community. In that capacity he was often a "thorn" in the side of the city fathers and mothers. Yet he knew to live the fullness of the Christian spiritual journey is to live a life of the 12 step commitment to compassionate service. This service springs from the 11th step, that is, seeking conscious communion with God through prayer and meditation and all the healing and conversion that has come from the steps that precede.

### **Speaking the Prophetic Voice of Christ**

We are all invited to come to the mountain to experience oneness with the Transfigured Christ, and to live the return or full expression of that union in the Risen Life of Christ in the world. The mountaintop and the world are inseparable. The developmental journey of life leads us in the latter phase to become a spiritual elder. In that phase of our development we come to express the prophetic voice of Christ in the larger community. Our spiritual journey does not stop at the mountaintop. The lesson of the transfiguration story in the Gospel is "Don't try to stay on the mountaintop. Don't build stagnant tents. Rather bring the mountaintop of union with Christ into all of life." The lesson of the resurrection story in the encounter with Mary of Magdala is the same. She is one who experienced a profound and transforming communion with Christ. Instead Yeshua says to her and to us, "Don't cling to me." (your idea or image of me) He commands that we live and express the Risen Christ beyond image and form, His Essence as Universal Christ in the world. He invites us instead to see Him and serve Him in the "least of these." "As I have done to you, so you must do for one another." "Love one another as I have loved you." John 13:16,15:9

We are called to stand with the powerless in the paradoxical invitation of Yeshua, "Blessed (Happy) are you when you are reviled for my sake." To stand with Christ in those who are injured by violence and by the injustice of poverty and want is to live the fullness of union with Christ. These are the crosses, the paradoxes of the Gospel of Christ. By being in conflict with the culture in which we live we find happiness and live in Truth. Being in conflict, fighting the adversaries of selfishness, cruelty and abandonment, for the sake of the love of Christ is our path to happiness. Again the inner work is to lay down the self-absorbed life, for the sake of the consecrated life in Christ. And this becomes the true measure of our life.

Like my father we may alienate some of the "principalities and powers" of the communities in which we find ourselves, especially those who pride themselves on being good Christians. And like my father, Bill, we will seek to live the truth that "What you have done to the least of these, you have done to me." These are the words he spoke in public when the city and county government were making the decision to abandon the drug and alcohol afflicted and close down a detox treatment center in his city. Fighting this fight, while still **\*\*being\*\*** peace, justice, and compassion, is difficult practice.

Brother Roger of Taize speaks to us of this vital way to live life in Christ:

*"But God is not an indifferent witness to human affliction; God suffers with the innocent victim of incomprehensible trials; God suffers with each person. That is a pain that God experiences, a suffering felt by Christ. Are you afraid of your fear? A communion with Christ gives you the courage you needed for a commitment to make the earth a place fit to live in, so that the most destitute, those most overwhelmed by injustice, are not forgotten. "* (Brother Roger - p.15)

## *-Chapter Fifteen-*



### **Our True Refuge**

*"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the Vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." John 15:4*

Throughout Christianity in the East and West there is a recurring theme in religious iconography of the Heart of Christ presented with the hand pointing to the heart or divine Fire arising from the Heart of Christ. This symbolism points to the centrality of the heart in Christianity. Even more important is the insight proclaimed that the Heart of the Universal Risen Christ is the refuge, home, and locus of our life's completion. For the seeker this insight becomes the core of the journey in the Way of the Heart.

For those on this journey the questions we must continually ask ourselves in each moment of life is, "Where is our true Refuge?" To what do we give our life, unreservedly

and without question? What is the hub around which the wheel of our life turns, the center of gravity where our life is anchored?" St. Benedict teaches us in his timeless monastic *Rule* that the center of life and the core wisdom of spiritual praxis is this: "*Prefer nothing to Christ.*"

Salvation is correctly understood as healing, as an anointing salve or balm of the soul. This spiritual healing happens when our human life and consciousness is realigned, re-ordered around the Essence of our life, rather than the peripheral and all too deluded consciousness of our ego-minds. Our human journey is one of going from "dis-membering" to "re-membering." Re-membering is to recover what was lost or make whole what was separate. Hence in the Middle East the practice of contemplation has often been named the "Re-membrance of God."

### **Conditioned and Unconditioned Life**

In the Gospel of Thomas (logion 7) Yeshua says, "A lion eaten by a human being is blessed as it changes to human form, but a human being devoured by a lion is cursed as a lion becomes human." Our life's transformation turns on the choice between having our humanity infused and alive in the Heart of Christ or consumed and overwhelmed by the inclinations of the ego-mind and our instinctual life. Therefore the real journey is the divinization of our humanity with its biological instincts, and consciousness. Through grace the earthen clay of our humanity can become servant of the spiritual center or Heart, and therefore sacred vessel of the Living God's own life, the Body of Christ. The Limitless Unconditioned Life of Christ is our True Life. ***We were born to live His Life in ours.***

As we go through life eventually we begin to understand that there are some things in life that just don't last. Impermanence is linked to every aspect of our incarnate lives. And yet in the Gospels Yeshua asks us to go beyond the impermanent appearances of things. We walk in two worlds, the world of conditioned impermanent life and loss, and the world of spirit and the Divine Eternal. He warns us, (paraphrase) "Don't put great value in what moth and worm can destroy. Look for the pearl of great price, and put your trust in what endures, give up everything else if you really want to give yourself to Me. If you want to find your Life, you must lose the life of illusion." ***The habit patterns of a lifetime must be relinquished.*** We must find freedom and detachment with even the most treasured of our familial relationships. Yeshua invites us to find our home and full refuge in ***That which does not fail, His Own Heart.***

The ego-mind sees all this detachment as diminishment and loss. The Heart sees it as freedom, as finding our way Home. To choose Refuge in the Heart of Christ is to find our Home, our True Identity, who we truly are. For as Paul says in Colossians (2:9-10) "*It is in Christ that the complete being of the Godhead dwells embodied and in Him you have been brought to completion.*"

### **Salvation Practice**

One way of understanding the process of salvation in our lives is to continually ask ourselves in every life dilemma, in every choice we make, in every moment, "Where is

our true Refuge? In what are we seeking safety, fulfillment, and completion?' This is not always easy to know, as the ego-mind is so skillful at co-opting even our most sincere intentions.

***The practice of Christian Meditation, or Prayer of the Heart, therefore, is the practice of continually seeking refuge in the Heart of Christ.*** Christian theologians have stated that salvation is the process of conforming our individual will to the will of God. Mystical Christianity has understood salvation to be the full surrender of the self to God in a process of "uniting our human life and consciousness with Divine Life and Consciousness." We can define this process of surrender as finding our true Home and Refuge in the One Life of our belonging, and learning that every other refuge, really isn't a refuge. We need no longer "look for love in all the wrong places."

One of the metaphors Yeshua gives to us in the Gospel is the story of the prodigal child. This wonderful story of limitless love and mercy depicts the theme of leaving home and finding home. The story takes us into the human cycle of dissipation of Essence and being restored to Essence. We are brought into the universal human journey of lostness, separateness, estrangement, and the journey home to rediscover and abide in the true Parentage and the Home of our true belonging. To find our true refuge is to come home to the Heart of Christ again and again. In Breathing Yeshua this is what we actualize.

Salvation practice is the practice of the singular commandment of Yeshua who says that everything in the tradition, in the law, and in the prophets is to be found in the Love of God and neighbor. We find our capacity for divine Love in the Heart of Christ. Yeshua says that this great commandment is the only commandment, seeking any kind of completion in life outside of the Love of God is only a blind alley and results in our experience of being lost and isolated. The Cistercian monk and mystic writer Thomas Merton said similarly that there is only one commandment. All the other commandments are just elaborations; therefore all sins are a form of idolatry, of seeking outside of God what God alone can give. God alone is our refuge and Source of completion.

The core of the Christian Mystery is that we have a doorway, an entrance into the Heart of God. Christ is the revelation of the Heart of God and the doorway in. In the person of Yeshua God becomes fully accessible to us; and in our refuge in the universal Heart of Christ we become accessible and divinized in the God of Mystery. ***This God of Mystery, the Life of Allaha, the Essential Unity from Whom all things arise flows through us as the life-giving blood in our veins.***

### **Leaping into the Great Circle of the Heart of Christ-**

For Christians this process of divinization happens in a life consecrated in Christ. Through our devotional love for the personal Yeshua we enter into the universal Christ who is the Great Circle of our belonging in our practice of Refuge in the Heart of Christ. As we find our refuge and belonging in Him, we are, in the words of Paul- "... one person in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) We are the One person" in whom all things are made, and all things have their being." (John 1:3)

To take refuge in the Heart of Christ is an actualization of this Mystery in every difficult circumstance in Life. And is it not in crisis, when the ground is shifting, when our established patterns no longer work, that we make those leaps of Refuge in His Heart? Fear arises and we can do nothing about that. We can find a way to be with fear, so that it doesn't control us, so that we can choose our true refuge in the middle of fear. These are the true moments of conversion and opening. In that moment of choice when we take refuge we become servant and companion with the Eternal One in our own Hearts, within and among us." Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, will my servant be." (John 12:26)

Meeting the every day dilemmas of life with our practice of Refuge in the Heart of Christ takes us from the life of limits and conditions and impermanence into Limitless Life. Such a moment came in my work one day as a geriatric mental health clinician when I was called to consult in the case of a woman in a nursing home who was rapidly declining from depression. When I arrived she was already dying from onset of pneumonia. There was nothing I could do as a professional, and there was nothing anyone could do at this stage to prevent her death. I reached for the Limitless in that situation and asked her if she was afraid. She said "yes," and I took her hand and talked with her for while. I prayed with her and in my interior prayer offered my own communion with the Heart of Christ to this woman. I had nothing to give but the quality of my presence and practice of refuge in the love and Heart of Christ. And it was enough; it was sufficient.

***The practice of Refuge in the Heart of Christ comes with meeting the every day dilemmas of life, releasing from the mind's compulsion for control and being given to the Heart's willingness to love. That is the ground of our transformation, those are the moments of our conversion.*** Such dilemmas happen when:

We risk disapproval and rejection for the sake of truth.

We risk emotional insecurity and safety for the sake of love and compassion.

We risk temporal security in things for the greater security of belonging in Christ.

We challenge the culture and risk attack and persecution around us for the sake of the integrity of Christ's Love.

***In such moments our own thoughts and emotions will fail us.*** If we take our refuge in the mental and emotional patterns of a lifetime, they will fail us and draw us back into the same dead ends. We will remain trapped in our habitual patterns of fear and illusions of control. Such a moment came for me when I held the body of my dead child when he died from Leukemia, and the opening to leap into the Limitless was given me. The limit of death for us is often the greatest limit. To take refuge in the Limitless Heart of Christ in such a moment is our sole refuge.

In such moments we are called to lay down our life of refuge in pleasant feelings and the addictive patterns and behaviors which feed them. We lay down the compulsion to re-create them again and again where they lead us, far from finding true security and fullness.

In such moments our self defense patterns and protective mechanisms will lead us to react in ways that may create harm or injury, or at best greater rationalizations of our habitual patterns. And we are called into the new life of forgiveness and open handed offering. We release into the freedom of the present moment where our humanity is offered in love to the One who is Limitless Life.

In those moments fears arise and our only strength is the rootedness of our Praxis of Refuge in the Heart of Christ. We learn to ride out the fear. Like Yeshua we may say, "Let this cup pass" but let our prayer be "my sole Refuge is Your Heart O Christ." In those moments the strength of our consecrated presence and self-offering, our practice of Refuge in the Heart of Christ, is our anchor and carries us through the emotional storms of anger or fear, and He quiets the storm, saying "Fear not."

In all of this we are never alone, never abandoned. Yeshua makes us this promise: *"Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. **But take courage; I have overcome the world.**"* John 16:32 Yeshua, the Christ, who is unconditional Life and Love, has overcome all conditions and His Heart is our Refuge.

Even as we confront death, our death or the death of our loved ones, in our Refuge in the Heart of the Deathless One we touch Eternity, and Eternity touches us, We come home to Eternal Life as our True Life, a Life that is indestructible, deathless, unchanging. This is the Life that Yeshua came to give us His very own Life, His very Own Heart. *"I came that they should have Life, and have it abundantly."* (John 10:10)

He shares his Life of Love with us without reservation: *"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 so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."* (John 15:9-11)

**Our sole and essential commandment from Yeshua is to take refuge, to abide ever in His Love. This is the ceaseless practice of Prayer of the Heart.**

Brother Roger of Taize speaks of our act of commitment, our consecrated "Yes" to Christ in this way:

*"One day you understood this, that without your being aware of it, a yes had already been inscribed in your innermost depths. And so you chose to go forward in the footsteps of Christ, a choice no one can make for another. In silence and in the presence of Christ, you heard Him say, "Come, follow me: I will give you a place to rest your heart. And so you are led to that audacity of a yes that lasts until your dying breath."* ( Brother Roger, p.46)

### **Our Yes to Christ**

Our "Yes" to Christ comes when we drop the little circle of our prisons of separateness and leap into the universal circle that is the Heart of Christ. An important leap for me occurred on the occasion of the crisis of the terminal illness of my infant son. In August 1980 I found myself walking the corridor of the Dohrenbecher pediatric unit of Oregon

Health Sciences Center. My son had been diagnosed with acute myelocytic leukemia and he had been started on aggressive chemotherapy that was quickly poisoning his little one year old body. I pulled a small red wagon behind me where he sat upright with an IV bottle attached running the chemotherapy poison into the arm I had held and kissed so many times. In a state of mental torment my mind flooded with a thousand crazy thoughts stirring anger and fear. A fantasy gripped me of scooping up my beloved little boy and running out of the hospital to Mexico where he could be treated and cured without torture, and with a hope this doctor and this hospital didn't offer. The oncologists cold voice still cut like a knife, promising no more than a couple of "good" years if my boy went into remission.

Every evening after dinner at this time, a caravan of young children with terminal illness trooped around and around. In defiance of their condition they pedaled tricycles, pulled wagons, and little toys on strings. I was in that caravan and fighting it, telling myself again and again, "My boy, Carlo, isn't one of them. He's not going to die." The inner struggle reached a point of paralyzed tension and I pulled the wagon over to an alcove in the corridor. I was in torment. Sinking into my meditation practice to find a whisper of quiet and peace, I heard the Beloved's voice. He said, "Look into his eyes." I turned to look into my beloved son's eyes. They were very clear and peaceful. They spoke a simple and clear question, " Will you walk with me through this, or are you going to run away from it?" There are a millions ways to run away.

The whole question was made clear and the answer was a resounding "yes." There was nothing I could do to save my son from death. But I could choose to walk with him and love him the best I could. To avoid and resist the fact of his illness and probable death would be abandonment. To love is to hurt; to love is to be in the fullness of Life. A joy beyond description rose up in me and I knew nothing could take this "yes" from me. I rejoined the circle of ill and dying children and knew Carlo and I were and always will be in that circle of children. It is the circle of the Heart of Christ and we can leap there with every step in this life. The Heart of Christ is the Heart of God, is the Heart of the Universe. There is our home and belonging.

### **Heart of Christ- Heart of All Existence**

When we leap into this Circle, we awaken to the Mystery of Existence, "*God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son.*"(John 3:16) The truth of Christ as God's gift of His own Self to us becomes true. The Living Word does truly become Flesh and dwells among and within us. The Allaha, Source of All, pours out Its own Essence of Self-Giving Love in Christ to us. From this Source we are loved into existence. In becoming conscious creation in the Heart of Christ the Redeemer, in the Spirit, we become gift and self-offering to enter the Mystery of the Abba who has birthed us and receives us home Unto Himself. This is the Trinitarian Mystery of Love, the Circle that encompasses all Circles.

Isaiah 55:10- "*For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goes out from my mouth; it*

*shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it."*

In loving Yeshua we become fully whole and human in form and flesh; in the Heart of Christ we open to the oceanic and universal Heart of Being Itself who transcends all form and substance. This is the rhythm of the cataphatic and apophatic, form and formlessness, in the spiritual journey of each day. We are all the Word of God in Christ.

Celtic Christianity has offered us a resolution of the dualism that has pervaded so much of the Christian world. The Celtic Christians in the time of their development independent from the Roman church drew on indigenous mysticism and folk wisdom. They understood clearly that the Christ of history and scripture is also the Christ of their hearts, the Christ that is the Light of all Creation before Creation came into being. "The Christ who is with His people in the quiet of the windless sea, is with them in the midst of the wild wintry storm. The Christ who is within, at the center of their spirit, is the Christ who is to be looked for in friend and stranger, Christ at the heart of all life." (Newell, p. 26) In Celtic Christianity therefore we not only believe that Christ is the Light of the world in some abstract sense but that true salvation and spiritual path in the words of Celtic theologian, John Scotus Eriugena, is "the true beholding of the Light from the inner eyes." (Newell, p. 37) This vision of the universal and personal Christ as Heart and Light of the world, is articulated further in the scientific mind and mystical vision of the Jesuit philosopher and anthropologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. De Chardin sees a universe moving toward an Omega point where the fullness of the Light of Christ is manifested in all incarnate creation. This cosmic, universal Christ De Chardin proclaims, is the true pantocrator (ruler of the universe) depicted in the icons of Eastern Christianity (see cover of this book). "Glorious Lord Christ, the divine influence secretly diffused and active in the depths of matter, and the dazzling center, where all the innumerable fibers of the multiple meet; power as implacable as the world and as warm as life; You whose forehead is of the whiteness of snow, whose eyes are of fire, and whose feet are brighter than molten gold; you whose hands imprison the stars; You who are the first and the last, the living and the dead and the risen again; You who gather into your exuberant Unity every beauty, every affinity, every energy, every mode of existence; it is You to whom my being cried out with a desire as vast as the universe, 'In truth you are my Lord and my God.' " (De Chardin, p. 132)

### **Dissolving into the Heart of Christ**

In 1987 I received a teaching that I will only attempt to live for the remainder of my days. On one of those occasions of exasperation that nearly everyone encounters on the journey I asked a question in prayer, pointed in the Divine's direction, yet hardly expecting an answer: " Oh, what's the matter with my life anyway?" The answer came in the form of a vision and an experience. The first part was vision: I found myself walking along a long dirt road. There were countless numbers of persons walking alone or together on this road. I found myself walking behind three companions. The middle one stopped and turned to face me. He was Yeshua. His eyes of compassion pierced me through and through and He reached to touch me in the heart. He leaned forward and whispered to me, "There's an empty place here, Bill." At His touch a lightning bolt surged through me and the vision changed to formless, imageless, unmediated experience. The "I" of Bill,

dissolved into the Heart of Christ, and in this dissolution came a union with the Heart of Christ within all things, "the One in whom all things came into being."

It is hard to know whether any time lapsed. When the "I" of Bill came back to awareness, there was just astonishment and joy. In the years that have passed I have come to realize, knowing or not, we are all on the road to Emmaus. **The One we seek is the One who walks with us. We recognize Him in the burning of our hearts, and the ancient practice of Breathing Yeshua, in the ceaseless bowing and ceaseless offering of ourselves to Him in love.**

***Beloved Yeshua, You are My Heart's Desire, I take refuge only and always in Your Heart."***

In the Way of the Heart the universal and oceanic Heart of Christ is our heart's desire and true refuge and encompasses all of existence.

***Col. 1:15 "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all Creation; for in Him all things in Heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible... All things have been created through Him and for Him. He Himself is before all things and in Him all things hold together."***

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## Supplement A-Consecration to the Heart of Christ in Daily Practice-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Supplement B-The Practice of Divine Reading- Lectio Divina**

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

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

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

**1. Reading-(Lectio)**- We begin by choosing a scriptural text. The choice is an intuitive one, or it may be the lectionary readings for the day or week. We read the text slowly to ourselves, listening carefully to each word. At this level we listen deeply to the written word of God, listening to those words or phrases in the reading that seem to speak to us in a special way. This is a receptive way of reading and listening, open to receive, as the parable of the seed falling on fertile ground.

**2. Reflecting (meditatio)**- We read the scriptural text again a second time. In this movement we are listening to an interior reflection to the word or phrase which speaks to us. How is it touching us within? We are listening receptively rather than analyzing or interpreting, asking the question, in what way God touching us, speaking to us about our own life. It is important to remember that this is not Bible study or objective interpretation, or a theological study, but a personal reflection to the Living Word of God speaking to us through the written word. It is a deeper movement toward listening and pondering in our interior life.

**3. Responding (oratio)**- We listen again a third time to the scriptural text as it speaks to us. This time in the third movement of Lectio we allow a spontaneous prayer to arise in response to the listening and reflecting. How do we open in our desire in response God’s word? How do we open in our longing for the Living Word of God, Christ, to flame up within us? In what way do we respond to the call to be transformed in God’s Love? What are the inner responses of praise, gratitude, contrition, or new commitment? We may express this response in words and in human emotion and verbal prayer.

**4. Resting in God (contemplatio)** We listen again to the words of the text, moving into interior silence and communion. This is a movement into intimacy beyond words and concepts. This is a movement into pure Faith or Trust. Here we rest in the Heart of Christ alone and seek no other thing. Here we anchor in the Heart, in the Center of our being, where the living Spirit of Christ dwells. We move beyond the mediation of words and thoughts, into pure Presence and Adoration, into pure self-giving Love. This longing, this desire, this commitment to take refuge, to rest in Love of Christ alone, rather than our own thoughts, emotions, agendas, and inclinations, is the movement into pure Prayer of the Heart or contemplation. Through this process of Lectio Divina, or Divine Reading/Listening, the textual Word of God has been the bridge to abiding in Christ, the Living Word of God in our own heart.

## **Supplement C- Integration of Prayer of the Heart in a Rule of Life**

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

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

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

### **Our Personal Covenant with Christ in the Way of the Heart**

**Consecrated Silent Communion-** To cultivate this communion we need established, consecrated times of the day which we set aside for the central relationship in our life, from which all relationships spring. The nature of that time of silent communion in formal sitting practice can be restful and restoring, but its essence is our self-giving to

Christ. We keep watch with Christ and wait on His Presence, and open to His love. We breathe Yeshua and it is enough.

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

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

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

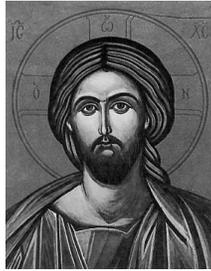
**Community Prayer and Liturgical Practice-** We do not come to God alone. "Where two or three are gathered" in Yeshua we find Him there. This may be more readily attainable for some than others. We may need to be creative and flexible in finding our community of practice in Prayer of the Heart, whether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

**Accountability- Vows of Practice-** It is good to share our Rule of Life with at least one trusted soul friend or spiritual mentor. It is good to ask that person to pray for you, to help us to be faithful to our covenant of Refuge in Christ a friend in the spirit with whom we can discuss our covenant and daily practice from time to time. Having an experienced guide or teacher in Prayer of the Heart is a blessing indeed if such a person is nearby.

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

### **Our Wholehearted Yes to Christ**

Despite the value of having a formalized commitment to the "whole cloth" of daily practice and the disciplines that sustain it, we should never lose sight of the utter simplicity of this practice. Everything we do in our life, in our Prayer of the Heart practice, is at the service of this one central desire to respond to the invitation of Yeshua, to abide always in Him, in His Love. To be fully offered, fully given in love to Yeshua, our heart's desire, is the completion and fulfillment of the Christian path of consecrated life.



## **Prayer of the Heart Resources**

**Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest-** ([www.PrayerofTheHeart.com](http://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 and contemplative teachers serving throughout Alaska 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.

**Testimonial from a Sister House of Prayer:**

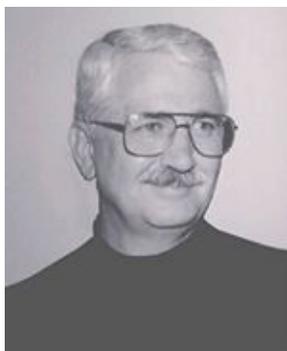
"It has been five years since I first connected with Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest. I am finding it possible to bring to our people in the Midwest, the Prayer of the Heart experience through my connections with Bill Ryan and Sharon Cooper. I am expanding my own ministry to include the teachings and prayer experience. I also hope in the future to offer some retreat setting experiences. My personal prayer life continues to deepen as I surrender more and more to the practice and teachings. In gratitude: Carol Joselyn, Director of Bethany House of Prayer – Fort Dodge, Iowa "

**Alaska Anam Cara House** - The house is located on the historic Douglas Island across the Gastineau Channel from downtown Juneau. The picturesque and natural waterfront views of the mountains, waterfalls, and the majestic waters of the channel provide a restful and hospitable environment. The bedroom and private bath accommodations for \*retreatants\* are adequate for one or two persons at a time. Persons who visit the Alaska Anam Cara House in Juneau, Alaska must have a long term consecrated commitment to a contemplative prayer practice. Preferably they should have a year or more experience with a qualified resident teacher. Sharon, the director, is a practitioner and teacher of Prayer of the Heart practice. Donations for the time of stay at the Alaska Anam Cara House are not required but appreciated.

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, Sr. Antoinette Traeger O.S.B., and Sr. Dorothy Pulka O.S.B. offer an annual program of teaching and retreat experience called "*Prayer of the Heart Companions*." ([www.open.org/~shalom/](http://www.open.org/~shalom/))

**Purchase of recorded and written teachings on Prayer of the Heart Practice available at:**  
[www.Avalon-Counseling.com](http://www.Avalon-Counseling.com)



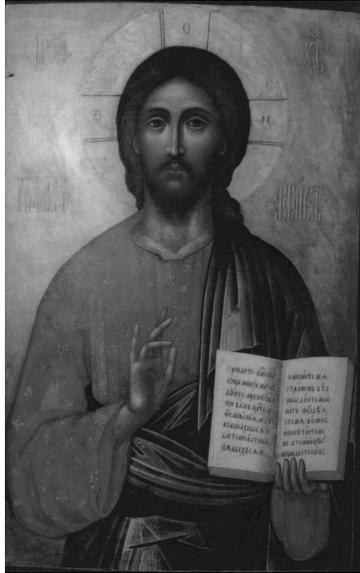
### **About the Author**

Bill Ryan is a clinical counselor and contemplative teacher and guide. Bill has 30 years experience in clinical counseling. He currently works in the field of mental health counseling in the Portland, Oregon area. Through his private practice in Avalon Counseling Center Bill offers counseling and spiritual direction services. Through Avalon Counseling and Spiritual Resources ([www.Avalon-Counseling.com](http://www.Avalon-Counseling.com)) Bill leads trainings and workshops in the area of spirituality and psychology as an important dimension of his private practice. Bill provides his teachings in book form or audio recordings of contemplative spiritual practice through this center and website.

Bill has been in formation in contemplative spiritual practice for over three decades. His initial training came through Shasta Abbey, a Zen monastery in the Soto tradition where he trained under Roshi Margaret Jiyu Kennett and her disciple, Roshi Douglas Daizui MacPhillamay. He has been mentored by Rev. Bernard McVeigh O.C.S.O, former abbot of Our Lady of Guadalupe Trappist Abbey. He has also trained with Pat Hawk and Greg Mayers, members of the Redemptorist Order and co-founders of The Contemplative Path, and with Thomas Keating O.C.S.O. of St. Benedict's Abbey and founder of Contemplative Outreach. 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 Sr. Antoinette partner together in offering "Prayer of the Heart Companions," an annual program of retreats, 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. For those persons with extensive experience in Prayer of the Heart practice and with interest and potential to become teachers and guides to others, Bill offers a two-year apprenticeship training program.

Bill has been active for eight years in a ministry of contemplative guidance and teaching through a private non-profit organization he co-founded in partnership with Sharon K. Cooper, Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest. Bill is a member of Sts. Peter and Paul Episcopal Church in Portland, Oregon.

Bill is the author of *The Beloved is My Refuge- a Guide to Consecrated Life in Prayer of the Heart*. He has also written several articles on contemplative practice in Prayer of the Heart and other aspects of contemplative growth and spirituality.



**Diane G. - Student Apprentice**

"As someone who has walked a sometimes rocky spiritual path I have been blessed to have William Ryan as my spiritual mentor and friend for several years. His depth of knowledge and the depth of his Prayer of the Heart practice continue to be an inspiration to me in my spiritual journey. Bill exemplifies the teacher who "breathes Yeshua" consistently and who gives freely and generously of his time, energy and compassionate presence to assist others in doing the same."

**Selena K. - Student Apprentice**

I experience Bill Ryan as a living **YES!**

**Yes** is his commitment of a daily practice of Prayer of the Heart.

**Yes** is his willingness to grow into his full humanity accepting the totality of himself.

**Yes** is his openness to the transforming process of living a consecrated life preferring nothing to Christ.

**Yes** is he a light for so many of us, embracing us in the lightness of the joy of Christ's Love.

Humbly and lovingly Bill Ryan guides us into the fullness of our individual uniqueness as a loving child of our God.

For the blessing of Bill Ryan in my life, I truly give thanks.

Amen and amen.

**Sr. Dorothy O.S.B. - Student Apprentice**

"It has been a great gift and blessing to be mentored by Bill Ryan in the Prayer of the Heart ministry. His gift of knowledge in both Eastern and Western spirituality brings a depth; and his ministry from the heart provides a holistic experience. God is present in every moment: we become accessible as we are fully given to the Beloved."