



THE MARK

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A Contemplative Christian Community
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The Silence That Is God's Presence

by Tim Cook

When I was a boy my family took vacations out West every summer. One year as we were heading for Yellowstone, we were driving across the vast prairies of Western Nebraska and as evening drew near we were still over 100 miles from the state park where we had planned to camp. Since our map showed no other possibilities for camping, Dad decided to try driving straight through, even though he was worn out from driving all day. That prospect worried Mom, but it worried her a lot less than the only seeming alternative, which was to sleep in the car on the shoulder of the road. We were all feeling a bit tense as we drove on in the gathering twilight. Then, an unexpected road sign appeared in the headlights. It pointed down a dirt road to a recreation area 4 miles away. Even though it wasn't on the map, Dad decided to chance it, so we drove on through the now pitch black open prairie over a rutted washboard dirt road that looked like it was going nowhere. When we finally reached the place, we found a brand new campground next to an enormous, newly finished reservoir. It was utterly deserted; we were the only ones there. Mom did not like the stark isolation at all and I wasn't sure how I felt about it, but Dad was exhausted so we decided to stay.

When we shut down the engine, turned off the headlights and stepped out of the car, we were all stunned by what we heard. Nothing!

We heard absolutely nothing! There were no roads nearby, no planes overhead, no bird or animal sounds of any sort. It was so totally silent that we could actually hear silence. The stars felt so close we could almost touch them and they were certainly magnificent to see, but it was the profound depth of infinite silence that touched all our hearts with unspeakable wonder. This grand silence was not simply the absence of sound; it was an actual presence that was so powerful and attractive that none of us wanted to speak. We were mostly silent, speechless, as we set up our tent in that palpable, silent presence.

That 10 year old boy could never have imagined how essential that silence would be to the man he was to become, but I am still powerfully drawn to it today. In fact, it has become the single most important aspect of my life, because it is where I meet God. I have learned to listen for it, to hear it and appreciate it even in the midst of a busy day in an urban life. That fathomless silence is the absolutely alive and full to overflowing background from which all things and beings emerge and to which all return.

As my life unfolded through my teenage years and into young adulthood I grew further and further distant from that silence. Loud music, fast paced entertainment and a busy life drew me into an endless momentum that I became

afraid to stop. I became afraid of silences. They felt threatening and disturbing. I turned on my television, my stereo or my radio the first thing every morning and they were the last things turned off at night. Sometimes I felt so lonely and afraid of my loneliness that I even kept the radio on while I slept. Silent pauses in conversation felt agonizing and embarrassing. I felt an overpowering need to keep thinking, speaking or hearing sounds. I did not know what actual threat seemed to be in the silence and I did not want to find out. Silence was forbidden territory for my mind; it felt like it would kill me. But it was actually my fast-paced life that was killing me, and when it almost did and I called out for help, God was there waiting to lead me back to the silent home that had moved me so deeply many years before and from which I and all of us originally emerged and to which all of us eventually return.

If there is anything scary about the great silence it is that it seems empty and we are afraid that we will lose ourselves in it. But it's really just the opposite. Far from losing ourselves we find them in the silence, and far from being empty the vast silence is actually the very fullness of existence itself. It just takes a moment of clear self observation to prove this to ourselves. Observe closely and notice that just before and just after each thought and word there is silence. Before and between each note and sound of music there

is silence. Every created thing rises from the fullness of silence and returns to it. The silence is the constant and ever present background that supports, sustains and gives meaning to all the facts of existence. Astonishingly, we find endless joy, infinite trust and peace that passes understanding when we learn the graceful art of abiding in the great silence. We never find these in the busy world because they are not there.

I now understand why, for thousands of years, women and men who sought the deep meanings of life have sought out and founded communities and monasteries where silence was the basis of daily life. They were not running away from the cities. They were running toward the touch of God which they had discovered was the meaning of life. And they were not, as I once thought, selfish; far from it, because these people have discovered that when they enter the great silence they are praying with and for all of humanity. They are the specialized organs and cells of the Body of Christ, who hold the truth for all of us.

The most silent of all the monastic orders that I am aware of are the Carthusians. Those of us who saw the movie, *Into Great Silence*, got a rare peek into the profound world of these servants of the human race. Here is what one anonymous Carthusian had to say about silence:

“Silence and memory go well in hand. We know that silence is not void, but on the contrary by its very nature a fullness; but a plenitude in which our thoughts are made known. Speech that is the result of bustle and noise is bound to be superficial. The seat

of silence should be the depths of our being, and that ‘being’ only offers something true and profound when it comes from that silence, and is its expression.

That is why the world’s speech — conversations, the press and so on — is so fatuous and wearying, instead of being restful and beneficial. That is why, on the other hand, in Charterhouse one experiences such peace. There, everything emanates from the calm depths of the soul, where all is recollected and silent. That is where God abides and where we infallibly find Him, if we abide there too. Not everyone, obviously because of the circumstances of their lives, can experience that same recollection that exists in a

Charterhouse, but they must not be afraid to set aside as far as possible at least some moments, however short, for recollection, and to give some time to Him Who is within them. It is in that silence that He speaks to us, and bids us listen to Him.”

In her landmark book, *The Path To No-Self, Life At The Center*, our friend Bernadette Roberts, a contemporary contemplative, speaking from her own experience, summarizes the findings of the great contemplatives of all time and invites us to join them.

“... it is as if we had come upon an interior treasure so great that everything outside holds no value for us; we desire nothing because we already possess everything. We are

continued on page 4

Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey. Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of *Lectio Divina*.

One principle will appear in these pages each month.

26th Guideline



Contemplative prayer,
in the traditional sense of the term,
is the dynamic that initiates,
accompanies and brings the process of transformation to completion.

utterly content within ourselves and need nothing outside ourselves — the inner treasure is sufficient unto itself. No experience in life has the depths of this center; it is a depth that belongs to God alone; it is His domain that remains untouchable to all outside. At this level, only God can touch or affect us. When living at this level becomes a habit of soul — when nothing can draw us out — then there is no division remaining; all is conformed to this inner silence....


...once the deepest center of being opens to us, its silence becomes increasingly accessible as a refuge of peace. We are subtly lured into this center by infusions of joy and love which increase our desire to remain in this dimension. In itself, this dimension is both a conscious awareness and a subtle feeling of deep interior space, a space so deep it seems at times to go through our being and out — beyond our self. As we acclimate to living in the center we lose the old habit of being swayed by thought and feeling because they can no longer draw us out, disturb our peace, or reach to this deeper dimension. Thus, the process of learning to live at the center is the process of unification and transformation, otherwise known in contemplative literature as 'transforming union'. It means we are losing the old ways of acting and responding in order to learn how to live at the center in

union with God.”

We were created for this very union. It is the meaning of life and our lives. Anything less falls vastly short of the mark and is in the end totally without the deep satisfaction our souls are yearning for. And because we were made for this union, God has given us an unfailing way to come to it. Our church was founded on the very methods that provide a way of access to the graceful gifts that God is always offering to everyone. CCH is a monastery without walls, a community that offers the gifts that lead to the healing silence for people who wish to remain in the world but who do not wish to remain *of it*. Here we teach two mutually supporting methods for healing ourselves from the madness that ensues from living as though we were separate from God. The Work offers us tools to use during the busy and active parts of our daily lives; tools that help us stay free from the subtle seductions of our

ordinary thoughts and feelings. Centering Prayer gives us a profound means of entering the silence of God. Together they offer each of us access to the deeper life that we all hunger for.

Since we are all products of our busy and noisy Western culture it may seem strange to us at first that silence could be so attractive. But anyone of us who enters will find the very same thing as all the beings who have entered before. We find to our delight and amazement that we can personally “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

Listen between the words, between the thoughts and between all the sounds. It is like the paper that is behind and which unites and makes possible all the letters and words on the page you are now holding. The silence is the ocean of being in which we are now and always arising. Right now, listen, really LISTEN to the great silence and it will become the touch of God's Presence. 

SEEDS:

... a hopeless struggle

The tragedy of a life centered on “things,” on the grasping and manipulation of objects, is that such a life closes the ego upon itself as though it were an end in itself, and throws it into a hopeless struggle with other perverse and hostile selves competing together for the possessions which will give them power and satisfaction. Instead of being “open to the world” such minds are in fact closed to it and their titanic efforts to build the world according to their own desires are doomed in the end by the ambiguity and destructiveness that are in them. They seem to be light, but they battle together in impenetrable moral darkness.

by Thomas Merton

Originally published in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, p 82

Which Identity?

by Barbara Cook

Many years ago, Tim shared a true story about a homeless woman in Florida who lived from food she picked out of dumpsters. She ended up in a hospital and since she had no ID they ran a search on her. It turned out that she was a long-missing member of a European royal family. When the family was contacted they were shocked and relieved because she had been missing for so many years they had assumed she was dead. The family immediately came to Florida and claimed her. They paid her bills, dressed her, groomed her and took her home with them, where they helped her recover her identity as their family member and wealthy royal princess. What an amazing story! She'd lost her entire identity from a bump on the head or whatever and was living on the streets, eating out of garbage cans while, in reality, she was by birth of royal blood. Once they found out about her, the family didn't hesitate a moment to come to her rescue. They reclaimed her even before she had any idea of her true identity. Just imagine her rediscovery of being a royal daughter and learning that she wasn't destined to remain a street person eating out of the trash?

Her story reminds me of Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. It's our story, too. We are the children of the King of the Universe, the God

of gods. Through Jesus we have already been given the Mind of Christ. Now just stop for a moment and see if you can actually take that in. Can we realize that it is not something that was just happening 2000 years ago but that it is referring to all humanity and that it is our personal story right now? Most of us have forgotten our child of God Identity. We are acting like a beggar or like the Prodigal Son, feeling like outcasts and stuck working in the pig muck. Can we, like the Prodigal, remember the blessings in our Father's house and long to return home?

Our Father has made a way for each of us to begin that journey of return. And even if it seems like we are still a long way from the home we yearn for, we'll feel the blessed assurance of God's love, protection and identity from the moment we turn our intention and attention toward him and away from the far country of our exile. He will progressively renew our identity until we feel fully rooted in His royal family, aware that we are His own and not independently arising selves. He will reveal to us that, through Christ, we are one with Him and with the entire human family.

The true identity of the European princess remained true even while she had forgotten it and was living as if it were not true, and also during the process of

rediscovering it. It's the same for us. Whether we've been living like it or not we've always been God's very own and we remain so during the process of recovering that identity. For the princess, that would have meant dressing the part, donning the royal jewels, acting like a royal in mannerisms, and conversing with her peers in a more refined way. For us it might be beginning, as St. Paul suggests, to put on the Mind of Christ, the already given mind in which we know by faith that we are one with God, our Abba, our daddy. In that Mind we learn to live with confidence in the Father and we partake of the royal treasures of love, generosity, wisdom, compassion, self giving, peace and joy.

Centering Prayer gives us the perfect way to relax and release our assumed, false identity twice a day, so that our real Identity can come forth. Participating in Centering Prayer retreats provides us extended time to rest in our papa's castle and it accelerates our acceptance of our true Identity as we share in deepest intimacy with God. The prayer initiates the letting go and unloading of the unconscious burdens of our false selves and allows more space for our child of God selves to grow.

Now is a marvelous time to remember ourselves and to put on the Mind of Christ both as

individuals and as members of our community. Not only will we be reclaimed, but as we add our portion, the whole human family will have more of a child of God consciousness in it. This is a good moment for each of us to do some

honest self-observation to see just which Identity we are using, and to ask ourselves if it is the one we would consciously choose. The Mind of Christ has been given to everyone. God gives those who believe it the right to be children of God. ☉

Comments by Centering Prayer Retreatants Re: November Commuter Retreat

“The commuter retreat is valuable because it demonstrates how to weave ‘endless praying’ into everyday life.”

“I experienced balance between time in the silence, meals, walks, lectio divina, and the videos. The hospitality was excellent and fed me on many levels.”

“I really enjoyed going ‘till 7:00pm on Sunday. It was beautiful to end the day with Vespers in the dark, then to begin early the next morning. Even though I went home at night I felt like I was still connected to the retreat.”

“This is just what I needed. I want to hear all of Father Keating’s talks. The Lectio Divina sessions were very rich and insightful. Thank you for making this possible for me.”

“It was wonderful – and a really wonderful practice of carrying the silence into our daily lives. The sits and home life seemed closer and the juxtaposition wasn’t as jarring as after longer retreats.”

“I’d consider a full 3 day commuter retreat- Sat-Mon. These days in this sacred space is heavenly (Saturday 1/2 day was close to what I envision).”

“My first centering prayer retreat... I do sit twice a day...this was just perfect for me. I got quiet without just falling out or away.”

The next commuter retreat will be held February 13-14 at CCH. The hours are 7:45 am-5:15 pm on Saturday, and 8 am-5:30 pm on Sunday. The cost is \$100 and preregistration is required. Please sign up in the office.

CCH Bookstore

Year of Mercy
February

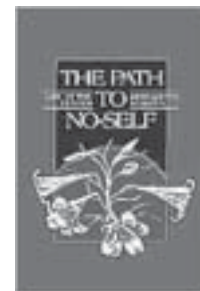
Community Reading
The Naked Now
By Richard Rohr



Bread & Wine
Readings for Lent & Easter



Path to No Self
By Bernadette Roberts



For peaceful, contemplative browsing
Visit CCH Bookstore & Library

Open Monday-Friday
8:30-3:30
Sunday 9:00-10:00
11:30-12:30



LENT

The parable of the Prodigal Son is not just about the Prodigal Son.

It is about two prodigal sons. The elder brother ... thought that he could guarantee his share of the inheritance by earning it.

But salvation, the sublime inheritance that is the central point of this parable, cannot be earned; it can only be received.

The divine inheritance is the banquet of the Father's love.

The Prodigal Son accepted the invitation to the banquet.

The Elder Son refused. He did not understand that the divine inheritance consists in participating in the Father's love, a love whose only condition is that we accept it as a gift.

... The parable invites us to consider our own value system. Lent is about repentance, about letting go of our false value systems in order to open to the values of the Gospel.

The chief point of this parable is the invitation to each of us (whichever son you wish to identify with) to recognize the reign of God is sheer gift.

... Actually, there is no inheritance; there is only stewardship for what has been freely given. As stewards, we have an obligation to share with others the mercy we have freely received.

This is the value system that shook the conventional piety of the people of Jesus' time to its roots. `

~ Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

February Calendar

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

2-Day Commuter Centering Prayer Retreat

Feb 13 7:45am-5:15pm

Feb 14 8am-5:30pm

Lessons In Truth

Wednesdays 7:30-9pm

Ash Wednesday Service

Feb 17 12noon

Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30pm

Feb 2 Sacred Chanting

Feb 16 Gurdjieff Music

Community Workday

Feb 27 9am-12noon

Weekly

Prayer Circle

Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch

Wednesdays 12noon

Mid-Week Communion Service

Wednesdays 6-7pm

Introduction to the Work Class

Thursdays 7:30pm

Daily

Weekday Centering Prayer Service

M-F 7-7:35am in Theosis Chapel



Reconciliation by Brain Graham

I affirm... In Him all things hold together...and through Him reconcile all things.
Colossians 1: 17 , 20

I pray... 'My refuge and my strength; in You alone will I trust.' For You deliver me from the webs of fear, from all that separates and divides.
Psalm 91

The 91st Psalm speaks of God delivering us “from the webs of fear/ from all that separates and divides.” What often comes to mind for me when I think of webs of fear and division is politics, or rather what passes for political discourse these days on radio, cable television or online discussion boards. I have squandered many precious moments caught up in these webs of fear and division through engaging in heated discussions and feeling intense animosity towards those whose views were most opposite to the view I think of as ‘mine.’ Although I could sometimes acknowledge that my attention had been swept up in the heat of the moment, for a long time it always seemed that fear-mongering and division were being spewed out by the ‘other’ side in these political battles, whereas ‘my’ side seemed innocent, virtuous and infallible. I could hardly see that there was any need for reconciliation in matters of politics—it seemed that I was simply right and they were

not only wrong, but causing all the trouble.

None of this changed when I began the spiritual journey. For many years my spiritual practice seemed to furnish yet another justification for taking these political views as righteous and true. It seemed to me my politics were all about unity and justice, much like Christ, whereas the other side’s politics seemed to be about fear, division, separation—anything but Christ.

I remained blind to the fact that when I identified with these political views, I was not in Christ at all. The fact that I felt such anger about the opposite viewpoint might have been a clue, but I didn’t get it at all. Because I now had a spiritual overlay to place on top of these beliefs, I remained blind to the separation and fear that they were generating within me.

Last year when ‘my’ candidate won office my sense of jubilation turned out to be very short lived. To

my dismay the ‘other’ side did not collapse in a whimper of defeat or suddenly change their ways, but only seemed to get louder, stronger, more energized. Even worse, they attacked relentlessly, criticizing and distorting the truth. My resistance to this only sent me deeper into Hell. The perfect peace and joy I thought political victory would bring seemed ruined by all those fear-mongering forces of division on the ‘other’ side of the political fence.

Finally, deflated and exhausted by the failure of my efforts to wrestle happiness from the world, I became ready to receive mercy. I never thought to pray for reconciliation exactly, because I didn’t comprehend that this had anything to do with my suffering around politics. But it didn’t matter; God knew exactly what I needed and now that I was willing to listen, He brought me lessons in reconciliation in a way that took all this pain and suffering I was feeling and turned it into a lesson book just for me.

And so one day while driving in the countryside I happened upon an evangelical radio station. I decided to listen in, hoping to get a good laugh and feed my sense of spiritual superiority. But then I heard a small still inner voice instructing me to find the part of myself that could hear the preacher's message. This seemed impossible at first. All I could hear were my own objections to his message, my clear convictions that this radio preacher had it all completely wrong. But then suddenly a different part of myself came into focus, a part that brought back vague childhood memories. Through this part, I found that I could not only hear the radio preacher, but my being was actually moved to tears by his words.

The Work teaches that we are like houses divided, with acceptable and unacceptable parts, and we project the unacceptable parts of ourselves onto others. As I listened to this radio preacher I was amazed at how differently I took in his message once I brought this little unacceptable fragment back into my awareness. Even though I could only hold this awareness for a few seconds, it was enough. Without realizing it then, I had made a baby step toward reconciliation.

In the months that followed this experience, I gradually found that my old hostility toward fundamentalist religions was losing its charge. Before long I found myself restoring old personal relationships that had been broken years earlier over

disagreements of faith. I felt I could understand them now, and they were just fine.

This lesson involving the radio preacher paved the way for reconciliation in the even thornier matter of politics. Shortly after that experience, I was visiting my parents when suddenly the conversation veered into a heated political discussion. I blurted out a charged political statement as though it were the truth and my parents immediately reacted with shocking force. As I sat between them, silent, I could see that in my silence a wall of defenses was being constructed to marginalize them, to make them wrong, to protect something in me from the opposing viewpoint they represented. But again I heard a small inner voice telling me to look deeper in my own self and find the part that agreed with them.

Just as with the radio preacher, this seemed completely impossible at first. My brain was coming up with justification after justification - they were just parroting what they heard on the news; they were victims of all the fear and division being pumped in by those evil folks on the 'other' side; they were just being mechanical; they were just ignorant. But after a few moments of earnestly seeking, I unearthed another rejected fragment of myself that, like the one before, seemed very young. It became clear in that moment that these defenses and the sharp pangs of rage I felt listening to my parents were the very things keeping me

from seeing this unaccepted part of myself. The more I identified with this anger, the more convinced I was that my parents were wrong and I was right. But in this lesson, this brief moment of insight, I could see how the game worked. The fear, separation and division that seemed to be over there in my parents, was actually in me. It was generated by the thoughts that I had bought into. Once I could see the rejected part of myself, those webs of fear, anger and division could not help but dissolve. I lost the feeling that I was right, and suddenly was humbled into realizing that I truly don't know anything—I just let go of the urgent need to be right. I felt I could see my parents clearly, and that neither they nor I truly had anything to do with these political views. We were all reconciled, though I hadn't said a word.

But it wasn't me doing the reconciling. From the Work, I understand that my attention went from something small—the part of myself that like the Pharisee thanks God that I am not like those 'publicans over there—to something much bigger, the part of myself that *is* the publican, that knows he is a sinner and asks for mercy. In the aftermath of this experience, the firm views I had on political matters started turning to mush. This experience of feeling the Christ within myself and my parents simultaneously, while we appeared to be engaged in a heated political

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argument, was just like peeking behind a curtain of fear and separation and seeing my parents and I behind it, perfectly held and loved by Christ to exactly the same degree.

What God seems to be showing me through these lessons is that whenever my sense of identity is based on separation or division (the 'religious right' vs. the 'liberal left', for example), I am not in Christ. It doesn't matter how strongly I feel justified in my beliefs, or how many good reasons there may be for agreeing with me. When I'm experiencing anger, fear or division, my sense of identity is not with Christ. I can't experience God's mercy because I'm attending to defending and justifying my particular views of how things are, of how things ought to be. When I simply remember God, as the prayer goes, I can receive mercy, which momentarily relieves me of the unconscious need to project these rejected parts of myself onto others. In this wondrous place of reconciliation, I am beginning to appreciate the absolute necessity for there to be an opposite to my own preferred point of view, and let go of the need to put my attention on just one side or the other. I can let go of my programs for happiness that make demands on others, on the future, on God Himself. I begin to get that I really don't know, and find peace and joy in that. As I do, compassionate understanding and a sense of unity in Christ, replaces division and fear. This is reconciliation. This is mercy. ☺

Dear Tim and Barbara,

Driving toward CCH Monday morning for the commuter retreat, my attention was caught by a brightly colored blue and orange truck with an appealing colorful sun logo on its side. I didn't realize that my wish for lightness of being in the face of personal difficulties and dislikes was about to be realized. And since signing up for the retreat Friday morning, my plate had been piled high with the latter. Leaving behind my children and husband who had picked this particular weekend to explode an emotional tinderbox involving sports, commitment and competition, then a sleepless night, symptoms of a bladder infection, a sick child, allergies... but, sitting in pain through your Sunday talk I was able to apply it to myself, and I took these excuses away from my false personality and turned them around and said, "No, these are not why I should go home; these are why I must stay."

My car caught up to this pretty truck and I read the words that will never leave me. Radiant Plumbing: they said so much to me in regards to my wish. My imagery of the plumbing world is not pretty. It's a dirty, stinky job, and always something is broken. Radiant? In the bowels of a building, how can plumbing be radiant? Then again, the end product of poor plumbing is not something anybody wants to put up with, either. The image of the Lord flushing me out and putting me back in good working order was tender and direct and funny.

As I move back into my life and feel the sticky spots, now they are met with a smile as I know in faith that it is only my Dear Plumber at work for me down in those pipes, probably an old hairball. There is such gratitude for a Father that would do this for me, and I have a taste for how much I want this job done, how incapable I am of navigating the mess and maze of pipe (what do I know about plumbing?!), and how willing I am to trust this to the Guy who knows what to do and is happy for the work.

And this happened on the commute part of the commuter retreat, after spending the evening and morning in a household with pain and fear swirling around (from the tinderbox). I am a big fan of these commuter retreats!

Donna Barton




The Work

So many unhappy things left lying about and rotting..

In the Work, relationship is important. Work relationship is impossible without external considering. In general we must approach one another through the medium of the Work. The Work and its teachings must lie between you and the other person. You must look at one another through the common window of the Work. You must be related through the common valuation of the Work – but quite *practically* – by working. When two people in the Work quarrel, they have a great deal of work to do. They may not be ready for it, in which case sore places will be made, just as in life. They may refuse to work on themselves or in connection with one another: they then will both internally consider, both think they are owed, both think that the other should apologize. Of course if you do not work on yourself and just live and do nothing extra, the Work cannot become Third Force for you. Third Force is relating force. In this case life will be Third Force and life divides, whereas the Work should unite. Life divides because in life people do not understand one another. They have no common basis, no common language. But in the Work there is a common basis and people can begin to speak a common language and so to understand one another. But ten

times more external considering is necessary in the Work than in life – and of quite a different quality, because the Work is the relating force. If two people in the Work quarrel, and are ready to work and wish to, then both of them will do so from themselves – not by meeting and talking it over – but simply as part of the Work itself. Each will put himself in the other's position and each see himself from the other person's viewpoint. External considering is very good work. It is not about whether you were right or the other person. It increases consciousness. It includes the first and second lines of work.

If you base your existence on internal considering, you will end your lives as most people do. Your lives, then, are all one-sided, undealt with, undigested, so many unhappy things just left lying about, and rotting, so to speak, in the past, so many violent or bitter feelings, so many places to which one has become glued down by past identifying. All this is certainly due to not giving oneself the First Conscious Shock, to not letting life fall on the Work in one. I think one can see so often how internal considering has spoiled life and what a terrible form of identifying it is. It is really like looking at life the wrong way round. And people who can only internally consider and feel

that others should be different, take hold of one another so wrongly that they accumulate between one another, as it were, a mass of heavy, dense, negative material, to which they get fastened, and which they will not give up. But external considering is utterly different. It cleanses you. It frees you. It joins together what is missing by making you see the other side and realize the effect of what you do. It cancels all the feeling of being owed by bringing together the debit and credit sides of the accounts. An hour of external considering will free you from the effects of weeks of internal considering. And the more you can see yourself by observation, at the moment, and the more you can see the kind of person you have been all your life, the more will you be able to externally consider rightly. But remember that external considering can only begin, in its practical application, with putting yourself in the other person's place, and looking out, as it were, of the other person's mind and consciousness at yourself as he sees you. So do not think that external considering is merely doing something for the other person. 

Page 267-268, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, by Maurice Nicoll. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Introduction to the Work* classes held every Thursday at 7:30 pm at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

CRT - A Path to Compassion

by Bonita Griffith

Most religions promote various methods to assist their followers in moving consciousness from their head to their heart, all designed to awaken compassion.

At The Church of Conscious Harmony, a small group of contemplatives have organized with the intention of pursuing this Path of Compassion.

Working against our very human tendency of seeking what we want, what we need, in the silence we ask: How can I serve? In listening for the answer, we slow down our inner being, quieting the incessant activity of our heads, allowing our heart center to open and expand. We call ourselves the Contemplative Response Team (CRT).

Some of the most common ancient practices used to awaken compassion are:

Reflection: Remembering the many kindnesses of others to us can diminish the voices of our inner critic. For example, reflecting on the love our mothers extended, the sacrifices they made to give and sustain our lives. This is a way of warming our hearts.

Breath work: Breathing consciously, slowly and deeply, we begin to lower our pulse and blood pressure, allowing the mind to become quiet and the heart to soften.

Mantras and Chants: From time immemorial, chants such as "OM" and repetition of the rosary have helped open our heart center.

Devotions and the Sacraments:

These practices in all faiths help us surrender to divine influences. As the heart opens, confession and forgiveness happens.

Meditation and Centering Prayer: This is our church community's preferred method for letting go of our self-centeredness, and moving us to our true, heart-filled Selves. The fruit of this practice will always lead to compassionate service.

All of us come into the world with an inborn desire to serve, to help one another. Often this innate instinct gets sabotaged. Our authentic path of service comes when we thoroughly examine the false personality to reveal our hidden motives of self-love and consciously work against them. Carl Jung said, "Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart." Vigilance in this practice creates a gentle, open heart.

Conscious Contemplative Service, in the company of like-minded brothers and sisters, is the natural Path to Compassion. It is a path our planet is desperately hungering for, a path we foster and support in this community.

There will be a CRT training session at CCH from 12 – 3pm, February 27th. This will be followed by monthly formation meetings.

If you have been practicing Centering Prayer for two years and would like to join us, please register in the office. Please call Bonita Griffith at 261-3515 with any questions about CRT. ☸



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