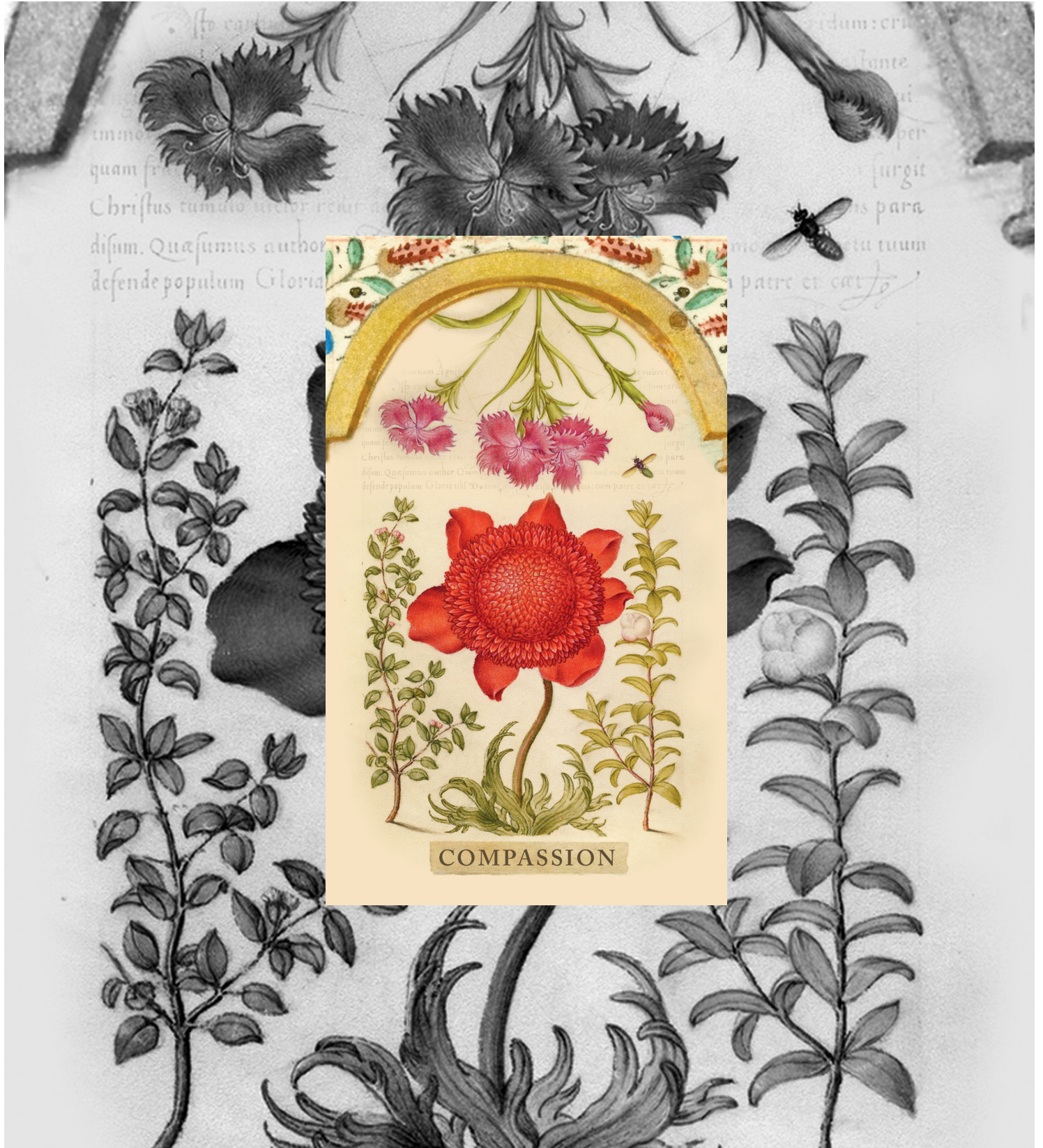


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THE MARK

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COMPASSION

NOTICING CHRIST. WHO IS THAT THERE? WHO IS THIS HERE?

BY TIM COOK

My first pilgrimage to India introduced me to an experience of poverty and human misery that words about it can't even come close to expressing. On every corner people were begging for alms. Lot of them were horribly scarred from birth defects and lost limbs or missing their eyes, fingers or noses from the ravages of leprosy. It was very difficult to see them, to take them in. Something in me really didn't want to look. They followed me as I walked in the markets, raising their hands toward me pleading for "baksheesh," the Urdu word for alms. When my taxi would halt at an intersection, they would come to the windows beseeching me with gestures for help. Often dressed in rags, their desperation was all too clear. Though government billboards asked tourists not to support them, I could not help but give them something of the abundant supply that God gives me.

It soon became evident that I was going to run out of money long before India ran out of people

begging for help. I tried buying fruit and simple packets of crackers to share with them. But I knew it would never be enough. Here I was, a prosperous Westerner, carrying lots of very expensive photographic gear, yet nearly overcome with the feeling of my utter helplessness to help these utterly helpless human beings. Eventually, after going through a couple of virtual stampedes of impoverished people who saw me giving alms to others, I realized that I was actually causing more trouble for everyone. I knew I would have to surrender my attempts to help.

Choosing to create boundaries instead of giving baksheesh did not stop the pleading that followed me everywhere. I still heard the desperation in their voices. I still saw their faces and looked into their eyes. It aroused a form of personal suffering in me that I had never experienced before. I felt extremely embarrassed by my abundance and I didn't know how to respond to them or my feeling of shame. So I just looked away.

I tried to ignore them and not make eye contact. I steeled myself to their cries, looked straight ahead, ignoring their faces and feeling nearly overwhelmed by the extreme tension that held my gut tight and the hardening feeling of my heart. I had no idea how to deal with this painful dilemma, so my instinct just closed down while I was near them. They were suffering and I was suffering too.

The same confrontation with this painful reality was waiting for me again when Barbara and I made our first pilgrimage to India together. But this time a new possibility came into play that changed everything for me. Barbara simply spoke to them, looked into their eyes and acted like we were friends. She understood the limits of our physical capacity to help. But she didn't let that stop her from sharing our common humanity and in the process, retaining our own open hearts. Most of these fellow humans we encountered spoke no English and we spoke no Urdu but I saw

how she connected with them and often shared smiles and sometimes even laughter. I was amazed and did my best to follow her lead.

Long years of self-observation of my thoughts, feelings and internal sensations has clearly revealed that whenever I encounter or notice human suffering that I can't relieve, I am instinctively inclined to look away, to avoid noticing these painful revelations of the human condition. This act of automatic denial inevitably leads to a repeat experience of the diminished fullness of my own life that I experienced on my first trip to India. A closed-in consciousness and a shut-down heart are not a fully-human experience. I have noticed that I suffer and die spiritually when I am unwilling to look at and feel the suffering of my fellow humans. Experience has shown me that to truly experience my personal humanity, I must notice the personal suffering of others too. Like me, they have names, stories, wishes, hopes, dreams and

the need to be acknowledged and understood. I may be helpless to relieve their suffering, but I can **see** them and I can **feel** their plight.

The first-half of my life was spent largely attempting to have a good time, avoid suffering and to just get-by without too much trouble. I avoided, as much as possible, noticing the great suffering of humanity. War, poverty, famine, injustice, violence, oppression and crime were just too painful to consider and I was just too helpless to stop it. Alcohol, sports and women were my pre-occupations, until everything fell apart and I became vulnerable and a little open. My mom, who was devoted to serving others, spoke clearly to me from her view of the world, "It's time you start thinking about someone else for a change." That sorely-needed change began to take place in my life gradually, yet increasingly, as Christ made Himself known to me through my own desperation and my cries for help.

Now, after, over 40 years of

daily spiritual practice and study I have learned that there is absolutely no private life. All are One. We, all human beings, are in this together and each of us remains literally incomplete without a feeling for all the so-called "others." Barb and I are learning to purposely take awareness of the plight of all humans into our consciousness. We spent four entire days at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, taking in as much as we could of the horrors visited on humans by other humans, trying to feel the humanity even of those who violated the humanity of others and their own. We watch documentaries on the Soviet Gulag and the East German police state. We try to stay aware of the plight of refugees all over the world. We watch documentaries on the World Wars and the invention and use of inconceivably destructive atomic weapons. We read about decadent Rome, the antiquities of Josephus and the violent imposition of the Pax Romana on the Jewish nation, as well as the Biblical

descriptions of the violent seizure of those same lands from those who lived there before the Jewish people themselves. We watch documentaries on the historic slaughter and continuing poverty at Wounded Knee, slavery, injustice, the mine wars, Vietnam, Neo-Nazis, terrorists and the countless other horrors that something in our consciousness would rather not know. The list could go on and on, but I know you get the picture.

I now understand that in order to be fully human and to experience our own deepest humanity, we must know and recognize the whole situation. Through Christ, I have discovered that we can bear to know it. Of course noticing the continuous suffering of the entire human race is more than uncomfortable; but it is real and in sharing in it, we become real. Just recall some of what Paul wrote in his letters to the new Christians in Galatia, *In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ* (Gal 3:29 *The Message*). And to the Romans, *We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with Him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with Him!* (Rom 8:17 *The Message*) And

to the people of faith in Corinth he wrote, *He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, He brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.* (2 Cor 1:4-5 *The Message*).

But we don't need to turn to history or the news for our opportunities to look Christ in the eye and share our common humanity with Him through noticing the plight of seeming "others." He is standing on the corners of cities throughout our country, holding a scrawled sign, asking for alms. I am sometimes able to keep my heart open and increasingly able to meet these "friends-for-a-moment" in the space of our common humanity and our shared cosmic helplessness. When I have nothing to give, I am at least able to share a smile and a word of blessing. Sometimes I'm even able to feel a bit of God's joy at this strange, unlikely, unifying encounter – to feel the reality of the inspired words of Mother Theresa, "Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love." Occasionally my eyes make a straight-through connection to someone's eyes and I am graced to see, actually **see** what she meant by: "What a beautiful day to meet

Christ, Christ in the poor, Christ in the homeless, Christ in the dying; the touch of Him in this distressing disguise brings me great joy and peace."

Mother Theresa also spoke directly to us: "The greatest disease in the West today is not TB or leprosy; it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. We can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for loneliness, despair, and hopelessness is love. There are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread, but there are many more dying for a little love. The poverty in the West is a different kind of poverty – it is not only a poverty of loneliness, but also of spirituality. There's a hunger for love, as there is a hunger for God."

One day a friend and I were driving in Austin and I stopped to give a greeting and alms to a man holding a crude sign. As the traffic signal changed and we pulled away, my friend spoke with a feeling of relief, "There but for the grace of God go I." Immediately recalling the words of Christ, *What you do for the least of these you do for me...* I was able to respond in Truth, from my own experience, "No, there go I." There is no private self, no separation whatever. We are all in this together. Knowing the Truth begins with noticing Him in every disguise. 🕒

WE ARE CHRIST BEARERS

BY BARBARA COOK

Each of us was created in the image and likeness of God. That means that we each have a basic core of goodness in us; yet until we begin to cultivate this inner Truth, we remain ignorant of this goodness, the image and likeness of God in ourselves and others. All of us will always remain, as we were created, in God's image, but our historic loveless use of our free-will has covered over His likeness with a loveless false-self. The invitation that we have been given through the life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is to return to God's loving likeness. In His ascension, Christ radiated His likeness into every living thing including you and me. Through that explosion of Divine, unifying light, He joined us in our human condition and opened the way for us to join Him in the self-transcending, loving fullness of human possibility.

Through our ongoing practice of Centering Prayer, we are gradually dying to our over-identification with our false,

separate-self sense, so that our awareness of the presence of the Divine Indwelling can grow. Through Christ, we receive our divine inheritance that includes love, faith, hope, joy, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, council, patience and fortitude. We join St. Paul in knowing *Now not I live, but Christ lives in me.* These gifts and fruits of the Spirit are our divine birthright.

I have been pondering the contemplative Christian ideas of Bernadette Roberts for over 30 years. She teaches, from her own experience, that in Christ, we lose our separate self-identity. At first, even though I knew that in the Gospels Christ calls us to accept His life beyond the personal false-self, I couldn't even begin to imagine life without a self. I felt like I was at an impasse in that regard. But one day, as I was pondering the ideas she has shared throughout the years, something clicked. I suddenly felt everything I had known as myself drop away. My circumstances remained totally



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ordinary and I was still in the midst of doing my errands with no outward changes. But now I was experiencing a lightness of being and a sense of complete freedom from the usual judging and evaluating that had always been covering my mind like a cloudy film. What remained was simply an open, interested awareness that filled me with a feeling of awe and wonder. For a few hours, I was graced to see some of what Bernadette has been sharing with us for all these years. I was given a clear glimpse of how life can look when the limiting lens of the false-self drops away. Even though that liberating experience was not permanent, it inspired and encouraged me in my continuing pilgrimage into the selfless Christ. Through the blessing of this graceful peek through the veil of mind, I can clearly see the need for the evolution of man into Christ. That gifting experience showed me beyond any doubt that we are not less without a self, but infinitely more. I felt so much more alive, and best of all, less wrapped up in my tiny world and more available for the simple, ordinary interactions that make up daily life.

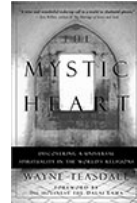
Centering Prayer is leading us

and empowering us to gradually release our identification with our worldly, false-self mind. Regular, committed practice helps us open to full participation in the evolutionary unfolding of Christ in the human family. It provides us with a means to contribute to humanity's return to God's loving likeness. Daily practice empowers us to increasingly get out of our own way and to solve some of the personal problems caused by self-centeredness and our myopic vision.

In Centering Prayer, we are progressively becoming free from identification with our limited selves and opening to God's right here, right now Presence and His transforming Grace. We are people who have been gifted with the opportunity to participate in His divine plan for human evolution. We are becoming Christ bearers. We don't know if we'll see the completion of this great process in our lifetime or not; but by participating, we are doing our part in bringing it into manifestation. Our children and their children's children will be blessed by our work of prayer – work that frees us one-by-one to be bearers of Christ in God's loving likeness. ☸

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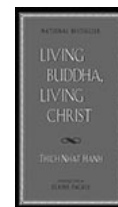
SUGGESTED TITLES FOR SEPTEMBER



The Mystic Heart
by Wayne Teasdale



Contemplation in Action
by Richard Rohr



Living Buddha, Living Christ
by Thich Nhat Hanh



Contemplation in a World of Action
by Thomas Merton

Bookstore and Library Hours
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon



I find joy in Your testimonies ... Glory to God forever! Psalm 119:14

ANNUAL AIM: COMMUNION

COMPASSION BY SHANNON HAAS

A human being
is part of the whole,
called by us 'Universe';
a part limited in time and space.

One experiences oneself ...
as something separated
from the rest –
a kind of optical delusion
of one's consciousness. ...
Our task must be
to free ourselves
from this prison
by widening our circle
of compassion to embrace
all living creatures
and the whole of nature
in its beauty.

Albert Einstein,
"Letter of 1950," *New York Times*
March 29, 1972

The divine calls us all into being out of itself.
We are meant for it: That is the point of the spiritual journey.
The journey puts us on the road to realizing and actualizing
who we really are in our ultimate being ... and awakening to
and developing compassion, sensitivity and love.

Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart*

Over the years, I have noticed through self-observation that simple acts of compassion can change a moment, a day, a week, a lifetime. Through self-inquiry, I see that compassion has a way of melting my most engrained stories, judgements, acting out, and personality preferences. Over the years, I've learned that compassion has a way of gently drawing me out of the sometimes tight, perhaps uncomfortable corners of life where there is a tendency to want to pull back and contract for one reason or another.

Recently, I heard Tim Cook define compassion as "everyday simple acts of kindness." Yes! For me, kindness can come through a loving expression, a hug, or just being deeply present for another. Such compassionate kindness is the ability to see beyond the exterior personality to that which seeks to be understood, seen and ultimately loved within each of us.

I have seen this truth often in my life and that truth is strengthened in me when I have the honor of serving the Eucharist – which I see as the embodiment of love

and compassion. Sometimes I pinch myself when I walk into the Sacristy, because serving is one of the greatest joys of my life. It is often where I feel Oneness the most and where I feel warmed by the Light and Love of Christ that stands before me as a human being. More on that later; first, let me share about how compassion has shaped my life from a young age.

Compassion in My Early Family Life

My first real remembrance of an experience of compassion began around the age of eleven or twelve. Looking back, I can see that at a very young age I was going through my first Dark Night of the Soul experience. Young, innocent and probably a soul-seeker from an early age, I was also stricken with what felt like a wall of fear about the world and all that appeared to be so uncertain and unpredictable in life. My fears literally felt like they were sucking the very breath out of my body day and night. Mostly, I kept this as my own inner secret – not wanting to reveal my shame, or how unlike my peers I felt I was. But after experiencing that deep, inner suffering for what felt like forever, I decided to share it with my mother. While she felt like a safe person to share my “secret” with, I was still concerned that I might not be understood or that it would be awkward. It wasn’t. Instead,

for the first time in my life that I can remember, I learned about what compassion was through my mother’s wise response. She said, Shannon, “I’m sorry ... I had no idea you were hurting like this.”

Finally, in that moment, through my mother’s compassion, what had for so long felt deeply ugly within me began to shift and I didn’t feel so alone and scared anymore. My mom would often say, “Tell me more.” or “You’re okay, Shannon.” and then eventually she said, “Shannon, I’m not sure of the best way to help you, so perhaps we can talk with someone together who could help.” This was a good first example in my life of a truth I have come to know, cherish and seek to practice: compassion inherently creates an experience of feeling safe, comforted, okay, understood and loved.

The conversation with the counselor served an important purpose in my life. The counselor told me, “Shannon, your fears are not based on anything rational.” That truth has served me well over the years – my first encounter with not identifying with my thoughts and feelings.

There, at twelve years old, for the first time, I felt like I had fallen from Grace, and lost an innocence in my life – yet somehow I intuitively knew I didn’t want to just make it go away with

medications, as the counselor also had suggested. What I have come to know now, through the Work of Inner Christianity taught at the Church of Conscious Harmony, is that back then, instead of being medicated, I really wanted to wake up and Work on myself. And so I did.

Again, I turned to my mom and asked, “What do I do with these fearful thoughts?” She answered with such love and empathy in her voice, “Give them to God, Shannon. Have faith that God can help.” Looking back, I feel that my mother’s compassion and understanding was the birth of my relationship with God and a deep, loving, kindness towards myself. I decided to try and surrender my “irrational” thoughts repeatedly to God, even when my mind wanted to be afraid of them, and as I did, it felt like the veil of darkness lifted. Compassion was at the core of this inner transformation.

Compassion and My Work

The experience of being broken open at a young age, and the compassionate kindness of my mother and God’s love, helped me discover a sincere peace with that which I cannot control. That experience was one of the primary reasons I studied counseling in college and worked for years in nonprofits. Instead of shying

away from what I saw through my professional work, I was willing to move towards people with understanding and compassion. From the inner lens of compassion, I was able to deeply appreciate the suffering of the clients I worked with. For many years, my affirmation was “See the miracle in front of me and allow the miracle to come through me.” With that in my heart, I felt like God’s love and compassion helped me see past the surface personality of others and to instead see my clients as love, even when they didn’t.

In my current work, I’ve seen my own multiplicity when my false personality thinks there is one way to express one’s thoughts and opinions. As I let go of my need to “be right,” or of my need to be understood, or thinking something should look or sound a particular way, I am learning even more deeply what it means to rest in what is – full acceptance. And with that, compassion often naturally emerges and my preferences fade into the empty nothingness they are. Lately, when I live from this place of acceptance and compassion, I can see so plainly that we are all beautiful souls on a spiritual path, peeling away the layers of our accumulated emotional debris so that the love, the joy and the wholeness that is what we are can shine through.

Compassion and Serving at CCH

Compassion was ultimately one of the reasons I said yes to serving the Chalice at CCH. To share a Eucharistic moment with another, and to see them as the Light and Love of Christ, is for me the heart of compassion. This influence came into my life early on. My dad has been a reader and has served the Eucharist in the Catholic Church for as long as I can remember. I have distinct memories of listening to him practicing the readings for the Sunday service early in the dark stillness of the morning. As I sat and listened to him read in Church I was often brought to tears with the love, compassion and strength of Christ that moved through him so effortlessly.

My dad and I hold a mutual truth – that everyone arrives at the Chalice having a different internal emotional experience, and we consider it a great honor to meet that person in the moment with the compassionate loving presence of God. And with this wish as my guide when I serve at CCH, I’ve been amazed; because after at least eight years of holding the Chalice, I can honestly say it has never felt mechanical. It feels like the first time, every time. I’m in awe.... The power of compassion and love never grow old and the Mystery is constantly bringing the Infinite to each moment in ways that truly

break us open.

Compassion and Marriage

Thank goodness I have a lifetime to get this, because I might need it! Relationships have always been the area of my life where my inner “know it all,” and my lack of acceptance, shows itself. My personality type thinks she knows best and can “help” make it all right as a way to mask what’s really underneath – which are the “I’s in me that want to be approved of by others and fit in.

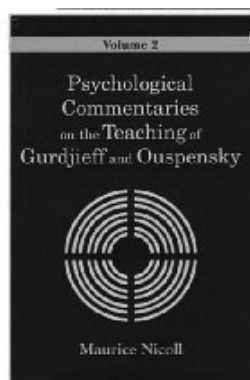
Well, marrying a pastor is certainly not the secular norm or what I envisioned for my life. Yet Peter’s vocation is aligned with my soul’s longing and inner call. In fact, this unfolding has been active for many years. God knows best. And in seeing this inner contrast, I have compassion for the struggle that sometimes occurs in me – the “I’s that want to fit in to “normal,” non-clergy life, and my deeper yearning for an ever-evolving fulfillment in and through Christ.

Compassion helps me remember that Peter and I had a common aim before we met and that was to “become love.” This was, and continues to be, our aim at the core of our being. When I rest in compassion, I have this inner knowing of love and I simply get to observe and be amused by the stealthy side of my feminine that

sometimes shows up. Compassion teaches me that it's okay to not have it all figured out in the first year of marriage (or to ever have it figured out, thank goodness), enjoying the journey of learning about compassionate communication, joy and the evolution of love that seeks its fulfillment through us.

Sue Young, one of the church's music leaders, recently sang a beautiful song in our Sunday service. It was like she was singing to what my heart most yearns to live and experience in life. The words landed deeply. The music left an impression that what she was singing was part of my life-journey and purpose both personally and professionally. The words were, "Let Compassion be your guide." How perfect!

Ultimately compassion is not the easiest Way of Being to define; yet, for many years, and to this day, I often offer a simple prayer that serves as my guide when interacting with others: "God, may your loving compassion move through me now." And when I consent to God through that prayer, it's as if the Mystery dances in and through me in some beautiful and unexpected ways. I'm humbled by it and simply say, "Thank you. My heart is open ... I'm in service to your Love." ☺



*My Father is still working,
and I also am working. John 5:17*

THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

COMPASSION AND THE DEVELOPED EMOTIONAL CENTER

In the Work, external considering ... belongs to the purification of the Emotional Center. One of the great objects of this Work is to awaken the Emotional Center, which is drugged with negative emotions and all the small emotions of self, of vanity, of self-conceit, etc. External considering (in the Work-sense) requires *conscious effort*, whereas internal considering is mechanical—that is, it requires no effort but goes on by itself and grows by itself just as do negative emotions. In the Work, external considering does not spring from life-motives. That is why it requires conscious effort. You have to consider people whom, in life, you would probably not for a moment think of considering. It is this kind of external considering that can change the level of being.

* * *

We become human to one another when we know ourselves. An exercise was given to us to visualize one another and to

say to the person visualized: "What is your trouble?" and if rightly done it was said that the person would tell you. That is, the image would speak to you. I can only say that I know this is possible but very difficult. The purification of the Emotional Center is one of the tasks in the Work. We have to handle one another far more gently internally than externally. ... This visualization is the connection between the Intellectual Center and the Emotional Center and if you have an aim to behave rightly towards somebody, you must visualize yourself behaving rightly, and not merely think it.

* * *

I will say one thing—that emotion is not compassion. Compassion belongs to a developed Emotional Center. ☺

Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, pages 262, 468, 1361. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the Work of Inner Christianity class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS

“I stepped through the door into the Divine therapy room to set forth the miraculous power of the Forgiveness Prayer. ... What followed was profound reconciliation, forgiveness, then freedom.” ~Cynthia D.

Sept 15-20	6-day Forgiveness	\$495
Oct 15-16	2-day	\$100*
Dec 1-7	7-day Advent	\$625

*2-day commuter retreats at CCH include meals (sleep at home).
Single rooms available for an extra \$15/night on a first-to-register basis.
Contact the office for further information and registration.

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.

38TH GUIDELINE

The disintegrating and dying of our false self
is our participation in the passion and death of Jesus.
The building of our *new self*,
based on the transforming power of divine love,
is our participation in his risen life.

SEPTEMBER CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Sep 9 8:30 am-4:30 pm
\$15 Bring a brown bag lunch.
No need to pre-register.

Six-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Sep 15-20 See details to left.

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Gurdjieff Music
Sep 19 7:30-8:30 pm

WEEKLY

Sundays
Lectio Divina 8-9 am
Worship Service 10-11:30 am
Youth Program 10-11:30 am
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays
Prayer Circle 10:15-11 am
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7 pm
Yoga 7:30 pm-8:30 pm \$10

Thursdays 7:30-9 pm
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm
Devotional Service

DAILY

Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am
Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available
through the Bookstore and online at
www.consciousharmony.org



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AWAKENING OF THE EYE OF FAITH

The awakening of the eye of faith
which is the awakening of the contemplative process
is to begin to see the Divine Presence in everything.
You see everything as it is but you also see it in its Source
and the presence of God and then you are meeting God
in the physical presence of other people and things.
This is the Presence that predominates in deep prayer
or contemplative prayer and when it's pretty well established,
the fruits are available in everyday life
in the awareness of the presence of God.

To see God as present is an enormous elevation
of the capacity to see because it's seeing
the Source and the Love and the Person
of the Trinitarian relationships that are present
in the smallest particle that we know of and beyond.
A new level of Christian life opens up ... doing what has to be done
without self-reflection. This is non-duality. This is heaven on earth.

Thomas Keating, *God is Love: The Heart of All Creation*

*The earth is full of the love of God.
... He spoke and it came to be.
... The plan of the Lord stands forever,
The designs of His heart
through all generations.
... Blessed, blessed,
the chosen ones.*

Cf Psalm 33:5, 9, 11-12

