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THE MARK

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony ❖ A Contemplative Christian Community



CONTEMPLATIVE LOVE

GOD ROCKS

BY TIM COOK

The mighty Gautama Ganga River thundered in the background where it emerges from the high Himalayan foothills as we shared hard labor while joyfully and ecstatically chanting the names of God. We were a group of pilgrims from many nations, yogis, sanyasi babas and simple, mostly illiterate local villagers and we were moving rocks together. We were participating in the annual rebuilding of an aqueduct that carried water from higher up the river to the ashram gardens. Each spring the staggering power of the Himalayan snow melt would sweep away the previous year's efforts and the aqueduct would be rebuilt again ... and again ... and again.

At that time, there were no roads to the ashram and village, the only access was by wading, sometimes chest-deep, up the river from tiny Kathgodam 13 kilometers downstream. That meant that all labor was unassisted by machines and there was no concrete to build with. When Barbara and I were assigned to that

job I could hardly imagine how it could ever be done. The distance to be covered was a couple of hundred yards and the rocks would have to be stacked, in interlocking stability, more than six feet high in some places. But the people of Haidakahn village had been performing this annual necessity for countless generations and they showed us the way. We shared no language, except the love of God, as we chanted his names and praises over and over while passing rocks from one person to another in a chain of 20 or so karma-yogis that extended from the rocky river edge to the villagers who piled them skillfully into an ever-growing water channel that would soon feed the ashram gardens.

We felt so blessed to be in that chain of love that our several days of apparently hard labor didn't feel hard at all. Rather we felt enriched, enlivened and grateful to have served the ongoing life of a community dedicated to God. In this era of great self-interest and the Western tendency toward a "what's in it for me" attitude; it

felt great to give ourselves fully to an effort that had no self-interest or personal profit in it at all. In fact, it felt wonderfully liberating and left us with a warm feeling of quiet gratitude.

However, this was not my first experience of carrying rocks for God. And my earlier experiences were not as interiorly joyful as this one. There in that high river valley, it became happily clear to me that I had really done some big shedding of pictures and inner attitudes from my earlier, less spiritual, immature self. I recalled that on my first pilgrimage to India, a series of seemingly miraculous, unplanned coincidences led me to an ashram in Delhi and my first meeting with His Holiness, Baba Virsa Singh. He promptly put me to work carrying rocks, really big, heavy rocks to build a wall. A long line of us carried these rocks on our heads, balanced on tiny cushions as we sang in Punjabi, "Ek Onkar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru," meaning "God is One, His name is Truth, Wondrous beyond All Knowing." Nearly all of the

50 or so people in that line of workers were women, tiny women, about half my size and weight who came out to the ashram from the city after completing their work at home. Hour after hour we carried rocks in the hot Indian sun. My masculine, western, can-do attitude would not let me give up; but I sure wanted to quit! My seva partners never seemed to tire as they were clearly enjoying chanting and serving God in this way. But I was exhausted and my prideful, competitive, false-self was my only companion. I was not remembering God. I was just struggling not to quit, to not look bad. After a day of seeing my willingness to work and witnessing that I had not come as a tourist but as a real seeker, Maharaji invited me to stay and study with him.

But there was an even earlier, unwillingness to work with rocks on my spiritual journey. My very first retreat, ever, was with Ram Dass at the Lama Foundation in San Cristobal, New Mexico. The silent, eternal beauty of the view from Flag Mountain was utterly

captivating and I was completely content to just sit there and stare out at the several magnificent, ancient volcanic cones that rose several miles away on the plains below the mountain. However, I soon discovered that I was not there for sitting in silence. I was there to carry rocks for God. The retreat had been advertised as a Karma Yoga Retreat with Ram Dass. For years I had longed to be with Ram Dass, so I eagerly signed up for the retreat without really knowing what karma yoga meant. It meant carrying rocks to build a wall near the kitchen. Oh how I felt angry. The inner self-talk went something like, "I paid a lot of money to come to this retreat. I took time off from work. Let 'em build their own damn wall. I've been had. This is not fair!" and so on.... I was not praying or chanting while I was working. I was seething. It was not lost on me that I needed a lot of inner work before I could move through my resentful anger if I was ever going to experience life as the loving person I was hoping to become.

Karma yoga leads to spiritual liberation. It is quite simply the yoga of rightful, unselfish action performed for the benefit of others, without attachment to fruits, results or consequences. Karma yoga provides us with opportunities to give as God gives and it leads us to union with Him. Participation in selfless service reveals the hidden feelings of specialness and indolence that keep many of us stuck in ourselves and it gives us the opportunity to own those hidden barriers to love, offer them up to God and to thereby be progressively liberated from our godless, narcissistic, selfishness.

By the time we were ready to build the Church of Conscious Harmony, I had grown a lot in my valuation of the many blessings and freedoms I had received through my years of prior experience with karma yoga and I was eager to participate in construction. I closed out my counseling calendar, put on a tool belt and came to work here every day as a construction laborer, working for the Bach Brothers Construction Company.

If any of our community needed to talk to me, they could come out to the site. We would sit on downturned buckets on the floor and counsel or sometimes we'd join together in the spirit of karma yoga and talk while working together on the very buildings in which we learn, celebrate and pray today. I loved and was blessed by every moment of the 18 months or so that so many of us worked together on this beautiful and most blessed campus.

During that construction phase I had many different jobs to do. I loved working with the construction guys. They still feel like family when I meet them around town. I loved working with power tools, climbing up and working from the scaffolding, piling the straw bales for our walls and even sweeping up each night at the end of the work day. Here too I carried rocks. In fact, of all the jobs I got to do, I most of all loved carrying the rocks. I was so happy to get to personally carry each and every one of those huge rocks that you see lining the Sacred Creek that flows through our church courtyard, because this time God let me carry those great rocks joyfully by driving them on a big-kid's toy, a Bobcat skid steer heavy tractor. My rock work had

clearly evolved.

Our beautiful church was built by a small army of karma yogis. Many are still here, some have passed away, some have moved away, others no longer attend; but the loving effort of each one remains to bless all of us. Their rightful, beneficial service continues to provide this inspiring church and spiritual home for friends, even those we have yet to meet. But the

opportunities to serve and to grow spiritually through participation in selfless service are still here. Our weekly Seva groups and our quarterly church work days provide great opportunities to gather as a community and put our own efforts to work in unselfish service to God. These are only two of many open doors to discovering and sharing the liberating and joyful truth of karma yoga. ☸

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.

39TH GUIDELINE

In the beginning, emotional hang-ups are the
chief obstacle to the growth of our *new self*

because they put our freedom into a straight jacket.

Later, because of the subtle satisfaction that springs
from self-control, spiritual pride becomes the chief obstacle.

And finally, reflection of self becomes the chief obstacle

because this hinders the innocence of divine union.

THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY IS NOT A PRIVATIZED JOURNEY

BY BARBARA COOK

Fr Thomas Keating teaches that there is no such thing as private prayer. He said that every time we open to God in prayer we are in touch with all humanity, past, present, and to come. Each human being is a cell in the body of Christ. And just as it is in our personal bodies, each individual cell has no life outside the body as a whole. Jesus spoke of the same phenomenon when he said that no branch can live without its connection to the vine. The cell and the body are one. The vine and the branch are one. They cannot be separated. As Tim and I prepare to move away from our active time with the community of The Church of Conscious Harmony, I am reminded of Fr. Thomas' comments on the impossibility of private prayer. We are all deeply joined in Christ consciousness through Centering Prayer, the Work of Inner Christianity, retreats, service, daily practice and the ongoing influence of the many great teachers and

guides who have come here to share their wisdom with us. The accumulated stability and focus of our community have bonded us consciously together in Christ.

The spiritual presence we feel when we enter CCH is palpable because we have, as a community, followed the instruction of the Work of Inner Christianity, which clearly states that our individual transformation follows from each of us working together on all three lines of Work. We must work on ourselves for the sake of ourselves, work with others for the sake of the others, and work for the sake of the Work of Inner Christianity itself so that it might continue to bless those who will come. The vine, the branch and the earth; the cell, the body and the Creator all work together for flourishing life to manifest. That is a description of the whole spiritual journey.

Whenever I pray, go to church or enter into service, I try to remember to feel myself as a cell or a branch in relation to everyone I



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connect with. These other cells in Christ's Mystical Body include all those in other contemplative prayer groups, spiritual communities, denominations, people of all faiths and all of God's children. I cannot really grow by myself or by my efforts make anything happen. It takes the whole body and the whole vine with all the branches. This vision clearly calls to us as individual selves to step beyond ourselves into an awareness of reality and to act on that awareness. As Bernadette Roberts has witnessed to us from her experience, there is not and never was any separate self.

If we hunger for contemplative love, we will only find it together. Remember that Fr. Thomas has taught us that in our tradition of transformation, contemplative love is not sentimental or emotional. It is a love that is simply a movement of attention and identity beyond self-interest, selfishness and self-centeredness. Cells cut off from the greater body are dead. True love takes our experience beyond ourselves and into the greater reality of the Body of Christ, the entire vine and all its branches. It invites us to sacrifice our futile hold on our separate, false-self sense and to open up to vastly greater possibilities, while contributing

our part to the greater good. Love frees us from the selfishness of our culturally conditioned selves and brings us the freedom of reality and of the Spirit. Love brings us to the wonder of the Whole and opens us to allow that graceful Wholeness to flow into our experience.

It can be painful to release our hold on our usual ways of thinking and feeling; but once we realize that there has never actually been a separate self, we also realize that these discomforts are simply temporary growing pains. We must never forget that sometimes, all love hurts. As Sr. Ilia Delio asked us, "Is there anyone who has ever loved and not suffered?" If our growth in Christ sometimes feels painful, it also reminds us of the bigger picture of the joy and peace of mind that He promised to those who would follow Him.

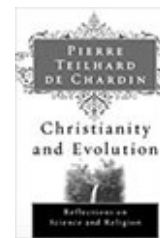
Contemplative love empowers us to go the extra mile, turn the other cheek and to say "yes" when the false-self is habit-bound to say "no!" Contemplative love is a graceful gift from God that opens us to the higher purpose of each human life, a great personal yes to the Divine Mystery. There is nothing private about our personal spiritual journey. The call of God is to change us into something more than we could ever imagine. 

CCH BOOKSTORE

Suggested Titles for October



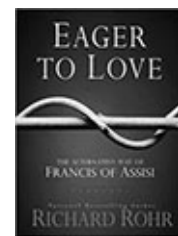
The Human Condition
by Thomas Keating



Christianity and Evolution
by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin



How to Love
By Thich Nhat Hanh



Eager to Love
The alternative way of Francis of Assisi
by Richard Rohr

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

CONTEMPLATIVE LOVE

BY ALICIA GENUNG

The human being
down here in the darkness
of his fleshly state is as mysterious
as the saints in heaven
in the light of their glory.

There are in him
inexhaustible treasures,
constellations without end
of sweetness and beauty
which ask to be recognized
and which usually escape completely
the futility of our regard.

Love brings a remedy for that.
One must vanquish this futility
and undertake seriously
to recognize the innumerable
universes that one's fellow being
carries within ...

This is the business of
contemplative love
and the sweetness of its regard.

Jacque Maritain, *Conference to the Little
Brothers of Jesus*, December 1964

If we have not experienced ourselves as unconditional love, we
have more work to do, because that is who we really are.

Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition*

“There is only one true flight from the world; it is not
an escape from conflict, anguish and suffering, but the
flight from disunity and separation, to unity and peace
in the love of other men.” Thomas Merton, *New Seeds*

A common story of growing
up in a family of seven, Roman
Catholic, and strong Italian roots:
we could be at each other's throats
and in the next moment, be in
each other's arms. Love was
very present for me in our home.
My mother and father loved us
very much. My father worked
very hard. He had three jobs at
one point and collapsed one day

when I was five years old. I don't
remember being afraid and sensed
that Life would come back into
him...it did. It was shortly after
this event that my father took all
he owned and saved, and bought
an old farm in a very small rural
town in upstate New York. My
mother was an “at home” mom
and my siblings and I had much
fun growing up in nature. We

were the once-a-week church family and our closeness is still very active today.

Separation

Believing in Good and not knowing that it was interior fear and guilt that would not allow me to step outside the lines, I became a “helper” at a very early age. Keeping everyone happy was my job. With good grades and a willingness to leave this “job,” I went off to college – the first in the family to leave this small rural town. But going off to college wasn’t enough. Beautifully described by Merton,

“The true inner self must be drawn up like a jewel from the bottom of the sea, rescued from confusion, from indistinction, from immersion in the common, the nondescript, the trivial, the sordid, the evanescent.”

I did not know then nor was I curious enough to ask myself the pertinent question, which would be most important in the illumination of a life-change, “What do you want?” It just didn’t matter in my youth, because I believed my role was to keep the family together and that meant to keep people happy with each other.

Still running from the family “job,” I left to study abroad and

chose Heidelberg, Germany as my next home for a half year. Now remember, this is a time when there wasn’t affordable technology like today. It was hard for my family to reach me because they did not have the resources to call internationally. Returning back to the states, my childhood sweetheart and I were married after completing our Master’s programs. And again, off we went to settle away from our childhood small town. As I am writing this, I can feel the numbness in my time body ... I did not want to feel anything. Fr. Carl Arico reminds us that the “issues are in the tissues.” They sure are!

Awakening

During the next 20 years, I experienced the same kind of indescribable numbness, yet I trooped on to building a home and raising two children with my love. It was one day driving to an appointment and out of no-where I began to sob and had to pull off the road. Something deep within me was revealed, what Merton describes as:

“Our Discovery of God is God’s discovery of us ... He looks at us from the depths of His own infinite actuality, which is everywhere and we become contemplatives when God

discovers Himself in us.”

This was an awakening moment, because all at once I felt everything and the sense of my moral bankruptcy came into me. It was obvious that what I was running from was not outside of me.

The next event placed in our midst was an invitation to a wedding in Kansas City and it was there we met Tim and Barbara Cook. Over the next several years, we were corresponding members of the Church of Conscious Harmony. It was just after my father’s long illness and death; we decided to move to Austin. With God, and through His Contemplative Love calling us, we sold everything and uprooted to Texas.

Many Gifts

Over the next 20 years, we emerged ourselves in our beloved Church and the Tenth Man School. Drawn to a commitment of service, being on the Communion committee has been the place of cleanliness for me – a place that would “wash away my sins.” The Eucharist for me has been the Infant to care for. Perhaps, this holy place has gifted me with much forgiveness in regard to prior life experiences. I am simply “in Love” serving on the Eucharist committee and deep down I knew it would keep me looking at God more than

in the past.

“A man must look away from the scene of life to reach its meaning. Faith is thus a continual inner effort, a continual altering of the mind, of the habitual ways of thought, of the habitual ways of taking everything, of habitual reactions. To act from faith is to act from beyond the range of the ideas and reasons that the sense-known side of the world has built up in everyone’s mind. On the side of love it is to will action beyond natural considerations, in the light of comparison between what one is and what lies above one, what is possible.” Maurice Nicoll,

The New Man

Through the Eucharist, by touch and sight alone, it has allowed freedom and grace to fill the dark cells. Something new has emerged over this time. My ever deepening and evolving aim has been that of metanoia – a change of mind and heart. By self-observing the big and little behaviors, slowly the numbness and restrictions of my bodily cells have become lighter and softer. My faith was deepened.

Contemplative prayer, the Work of Inner Christianity and

yoga have gifted me with “patient waiting.” A consciousness of feeling and knowing all together, including the body as a whole that went missing-in-action, has never been so enlivening. Being present has not a past or future; for me, if fear or anxiousness is felt, I am aware that I am not being present in this moment of the day. Through these spiritual gifts, God’s body is once again His temple.

Experiencing silent retreats have born many more gifts, including a complete burn within – an experience when you totally trust the process of the prayer and wait for the inner burning to finish its work in you. A deepened faith that comes from the willingness to burn in and through has allowed me to become lighter. The study of the Work has honestly saved my life. Saying “Yes” to a Work teacher who loves me so very much has been a huge part of the saving. And now, yoga has been an add-on for the last seven years and its gifts have been tenfold. I breathe in and out consciously and am being rooted in the ground I walk on. The “fruits” of labor through the inner Work is bountiful and the joy in the peace that surpasses the understanding of contemplative life is seen also in our children and how they take in life. I am so very blessed! Now, as I enter the next 20 years in this life I’ve been given, it’s with the pure

strength of a warrior of Light in peace, joy and love.

His Great Love and Contemplation

In ending this phase and beginning the next, I listen patiently to a voice within that directs me and through a big “Yes!” I embrace what is before me. The voice can only be heard in the silence, because “Silence is the language God speaks.” His great love directs us through contemplation. I am kept alive through the continual effort and courage to keep looking at the One. It is there in the silence; it provides peace, understanding, compassion and love. The Practices are truly keeping me well.

My yoga class ends with this wish, a form of the Metta Prayer:

May all beings be enlivened.

May all beings be blissful.

May all beings be healthy and wise.

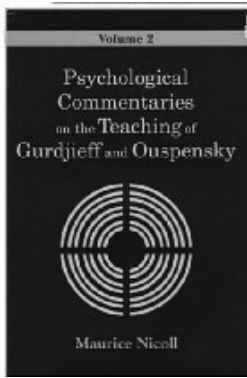
May all beings love nature.

May all beings be released from suffering.

May all beings love one another.

And May all beings awaken to the Light of their true nature.

May it be so for each and every one of us. Amen. ☸



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

THE WORK

OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

CONSCIOUS LOVE

Most of what we call love is a veiled extension of the self-love. The only relevant commentaries I can find are those of the Early Church Fathers who chiefly dwell on the illustrative parable of the Good Samaritan, given in Luke x.29-37 that follows the injunction. They take this as signifying Christ, who came from above to be neighbor to those in this world who are spiritually wounded almost to spiritual death. The symbolism is interesting. He gave them “oil” and “wine”, and paid for them at the Inn. Certainly anyone having understanding of this Work might be able to help those who are today similarly wounded by this age of materialism. They would then clearly be neighbours, psychologically speaking.

Now the Work speaks of three kinds of love. There is physical love, emotional love and Conscious love. It says that emotional love easily turns into its opposite. It is love-hate. For this kind, the Greek word *φιλειν* seems to be used in the

Gospels. It is a torturing jealous love—and not love at all. For Conscious love the word *ἀγαπειν* seems to be used. It is never used of sexual love. Christ asks Peter which kind of love he has for him. Peter only understands emotional love (John xxi.15-17). This is the word used in the passage under discussion. Suppose we substitute consciousness for love. It would then read: “Thou shalt be conscious of thy neighbour as thyself.” This could mean “Thou shalt be conscious of thy neighbor as thou art conscious of thyself.” To me, at least, this rendering would be considerably more understandable in the light of what the Work teaches about the need for increasing our consciousness. We are not nearly conscious of ourselves. We behold the mote in another’s eye, but do not see the beam in our own eye. We do not put ourselves consciously in the position of another person. We do not do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Owing to a general lack of consciousness,

human relations in the world are what they are. As you become more and more conscious of what you are really like, you become less and less critical of what the other person is like. Arrogance, superiority and intolerance fade, because they are seen by you to be ridiculous. The object of this Work is to increase consciousness in every direction. Observing, in quiet, the same fault in yourself as you have heatedly or bitterly pointed out in another seems to me to be practical love. For by the Work method of finding the same thing in yourself, you eventually see your neighbor as yourself, and yourself as your neighbor. But you must know yourself to begin with. You must begin to be conscious of yourself. This is the most necessary part of Conscious Love, which is not blind. ☉

Maurice Nicoll, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, page 1636. 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.

SEEDS

The union of the simple light of God
with the simple light of man's spirit,
in love, is contemplation. The two simplicities are one.
They form, as it were, an emptiness
in which there is no addition but rather
the taking away of names, of forms, of content,
of subject matter, of identities.
In this meeting there is not so much a fusion of identities
as a disappearance of identities.

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, pages 291-292.

MULTI-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREATS

"Being on a multi-day silent retreat provides a unique opportunity for
intimacy with God. ... It's healing and transformative. Just do it!!"

~6-day retreat exit survey

| | | |
|-----------|--------------|--------|
| 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.

NEW MEMBER CLASSES

Series of (4) Wednesday evening classes - Oct 4, 11, 18, 25 from
7:30-9:00 pm. Topics include: CCH History, Sacraments, Practices
in Community, and Stewardship & Tithing. These classes are
required for those who are joining the Church in October, as well
as for those who would like to learn more about CCH.

OCTOBER CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Oct 14 8:30 am-4:30 pm
\$15 Bring a brown bag lunch.
No need to pre-register.

Two-Day Commuter Retreat
Oct 15-16 Cost \$100
Sun 8 am-5:30 pm, Mon 7 am-4:30 pm
Register in the office.

New Member Classes
Oct 4, 11, 18, 25 7:30-9:00 pm
See details at left.

Intro to Centering Prayer
Oct 21 8:30 am-3:30 pm
+ 6 Mondays 7:30-9:00 pm
\$75 Register in the office.

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Gurdjieff Music
Oct 17 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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*I give you a new commandment:
love one another. As I have loved you,
so you also should love one another.*

*This is how all will know
that you are my disciples,
if you have love for one another.*

John 13:34-35

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

The Kingdom of God requires something more than
to love our neighbor as ourselves.

To love our neighbor from the perspective of the true self,
as one possessing the image of God, is a great insight,
but it still is not the fullness of the Kingdom of God ...

A new commandment characterizes the Christian faith.

It is to love one another as Jesus has loved us. This is much more difficult.
This is to love others in their individuality, uniqueness, personality traits,
temperamental biases, personal history, and in the things
that drive us up the wall, to love our neighbor, in other words,
just as they are with each one's grocery list of faults, unbearable habits,
unreasonable demands, and impossible characteristics.

The new commandment is to accept others unconditionally;
that is to say, without the least wish to change them.

To love them in their individuality is the way Jesus has loved us.
This love is what Saint Augustine calls 'bearing the unbearable.'

By showing love unwearingly, no matter what happens,
we imitate and pass on the mercy that Christ has shown for us.
... And by exercising this unconditional love,
the dismantling of the false self takes place.

Thomas Keating, *Awakenings*

