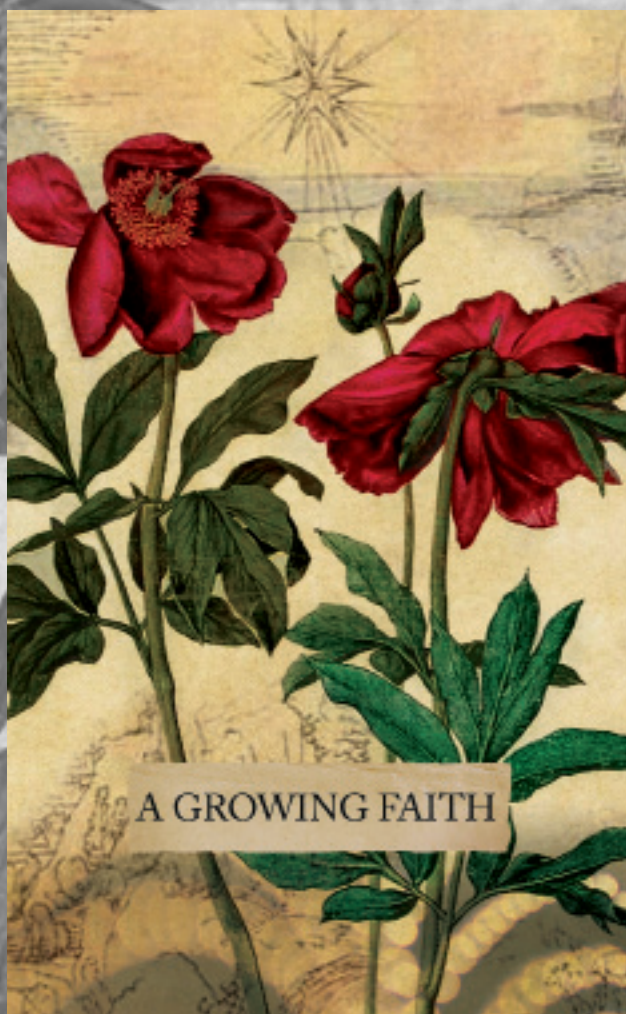


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THE MARK

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A GROWING FAITH

EXPERIENCING A GROWING FAITH

BY PETER HAAS

While aging is inevitable, growth is a choice, especially when the subject is our spiritual growth. As I reflect upon my spiritual journey so far, it's paradoxical to see that the most "fruitful" seasons of my spiritual life, were also the most challenging. Perhaps you've noticed that too on your journey.

Losing Our Beliefs Can Help Us Discover Our Faith

Sometimes, it seems for our faith to grow, we may need to seemingly lose it. That's what happened to me in the late spring of 1996. I was intellectually losing my grip on God. And, after years of feeling a devotional closeness with God, suddenly it seemed as if God had disappeared. I gave in to my deepest doubts and darkest fears, and then gave up on God.

It's important that you understand this was primarily an intellectual dark night, necessary for my continued growth. At the time, though, I did not understand it that way. It felt total. It seemed like a death and I grieved. Then, I acted out with an expression of nihilism – wearing all black clothes, smoking

clove cigarettes and listening to foreboding music while reading philosophers like Nietzsche and novelists like Dostoevsky. At 24 years old, I had come to the all too common edge of belief, where many other twenty-somethings also journey during or soon after college.

Thankfully, my season of intellectual atheism was short lived. About a month later, after a long walk in the fields, I came home and turned on the radio. What I heard then for the first time was the unexpected beauty of the first ephemeral harmonies of the opening string movement in Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring." Listening with my being, the music wordlessly seemed to dissolve the doubts and fears of my mind and cracked my intellect open to a deeper surrender; a knowing that seemed to originate in my heart-chakra.

I can't explain what happened, or how music uplifted me out of my intellectual atheism. All I can say is that I know with certainty that it happened and since then the question of God for me has been resolved. It wasn't the first

time music ministered to me, and it wasn't the last either.

My story is a simple example of the truth that sometimes growing in faith requires a kind of loss of belief(s). It's a spiritual law that growth in faith often occurs after our beliefs are tested, twisted, tempted and transformed. We can count on it. That's in part because faith is a living process within us, encompassing our intellect, emotions and body.

Faith both incorporates beliefs, and always transcends beliefs. It turns out that the ending of our childhood-limiting beliefs can also become an opportunity to leap into the mystery and possibility of faith. And, while it may feel like we are losing our grip on God, God never loses a grip on us.

A Little Faith Grows a Long Way

We don't need a gold-medal in faith. It's not about how much faith we have, or even how good our faith is. Jesus teaches that even the tiniest bit of faith will be enough, when the "object" of that faith is God. What is required of us is the disposition

of trusting patience and hope. We wait through the seasons of pain, lack, sickness, difficulty, friction, uncertainty, despair and doubt. As we wait, hope arises. As we wait, faith is strengthened. As we wait, love endures. Along the journey, we often become seasoned saints, through what Eugene Peterson calls the “unhurried rhythms of grace,” working through whatever situation might be testing our faith (Matthew 11.29 *The Message*).

Jesus’ life shows us what the rhythms of grace look like. The rhythms become a kind of pattern for our faith: Suffering. Death. Resurrection. It’s at least a three-fold patterned process. Though not always sequential, this process is constantly at work within us, even when we are not conscious of it. This process is a manifestation of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit within us, who is *always* seeking ways for us to be and become more and more fruitful in and through Christ.

A Connection Between Our Spiritual Growth and Worship

The book of Genesis begins with a creation story that starts with being. God says: *Let there be*. Then, a further invitation is voiced by God: *become fruitful and multiply*. Pause for a moment and notice the movement from being to becoming.

Then, a final invitation is voiced from God that completes the

entire movement from **being** to **becoming** to **resting**; this movement is not accidental:

On the seventh day God finished the work God was doing; so on the seventh day God rested from all the work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all the work God had done. (Genesis 2.2-3)

Recall that the seventh day became the day of the Jewish Sabbath, and for Christians, the Sabbath became the day of resurrection, the eighth day – the start of a new Octave, where the worship of God is deeply connected to rest. *Be. Become. Rest. Repeat... Be. Become. Rest. Repeat...*

A twice-daily practice of Centering Prayer can become a primary way to enter that divine Sabbath rest. That’s because our consenting into the silence is a kind of passive resting and worshiping. It’s a letting go and leaning back into the grace of doing nothing. There, we rediscover it’s the silence, stillness and Spirit that holds us; perhaps even engulfs us.

The Hebrew word *RaBa* translated into English as “multiply” at the start of Genesis has at its core-meaning “to grow.” So perhaps the Hebrew scriptures are seeking to convey to humankind that we are seeded here on this planet to both grow **and** worship. Indeed, that it’s not only good and

appropriate for us to grow, it’s also our responsibility to participate in our growing **as an overflow of our worship of God**. Having received the gift of being from God, it’s as if our growing is one of our primary gifts we give back to God. Our growth is an essential expression of our God-devotion and worship.

Similarly, in India, the great and sacred word *Brahman* comes from the Sanskrit root *Brh*, and means to swell or grow. During worship, a *Brahman* priest would offer the sacrifice, intoning the word *Brahman, Brahman*, as an expression of the mystery that was in the sacrifice. Contemplative Bede Griffiths reminds us that “to sacrifice is to make a thing sacred...a turning of things over to God.” This connection also reminds us of the essential link between our worship of God and our spiritual growth.

As we worship, we’re invited to turn things over to God—our life, our needs, our relationships, our dreams, our aims, our everything. Worship isn’t just what happens on Sunday mornings in church. Worship is a global disposition that directs our sense of awe and love and gratitude toward the Ground of our being – the depths of divine life and love. This ground is also a Transcendent-Omega, beyond all conceptions and manifestations of the created, material dimension, yet also drawing us toward Itself in the

energy of Its Radiating Love, which we name Holy Spirit.

Worship is a moment by moment disposition. It's an environment we cultivate in our life. It's an atmosphere that emerges through the direction of our thoughts and feelings. If you wish to grow in faith, I invite you to not just go to church, but to enter the sanctuary to worship. Enter each day with thanksgiving and praise on your lips. Offer to God your deepest consent in the silence, and your very being. In so doing, we will all experience a growing faith. We will all enter more fully into the joyful rest of the Presence of the One, who grows All and Everything. ☉

UPCOMING SUMMER SERMON SERIES

CENTERING PRAYER TUNE UP

June 10

Tuning Up Procrastination

June 17

Tuning Up Distraction

June 24

Tuning Up Agitation

July 1

Tuning Up Motivation

July 8

Tuning Up Dullness

July 15

Tuning Up Discomfort

COMMUNITY READING FOR MAY-JUNE

The Story of Monasticism
by Greg Peters

In June, we continue to delve into the new and exciting work of Greg Peters, who is helping the wider Christian church retrieve the lost riches of the monastic tradition. You'll find this book particularly helpful in strengthening your intention and practice of being a monk in the world. The book also helps CCH continue to evolve its wish to be and become a monastery without walls.

NEW SUMMER READING GROUP

Meditations on the Tarot
Wednesdays, 7:15-8:30 p.m.
Jun 6-Aug 29, 2018

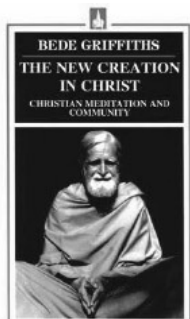
Grow in spiritual wisdom on Wednesday evenings following our 6:00 p.m. Contemplative Communion service. All are invited for a book reading group on the *Meditations on the Tarot*, an unparalleled modern masterpiece of Christian spirituality. The group will share in reading selections from the book out loud. All participants are invited to comment on passages and ask questions of the group. We will begin at 7:15 p.m. on June 6th and conclude August 29th. We will aim to conclude each session by 8:30 p.m. Open to all. Drop-ins are welcome.

Group leader: Peter Haas

Location: Scriptorium classroom

BOOK LOOK

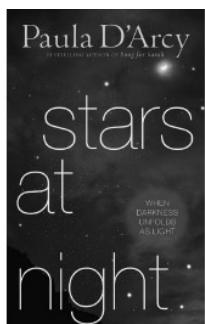
SILENCE AND STARS



Bede Griffiths was a Benedictine monk who was born in England and educated at Oxford. After twenty years as a monk in England, Bede moved to India “to find the other half of his soul.” He moved to Shantivanam Ashram, where he ministered to many visitors and helped articulate a fruitful interreligious spiritual conversation and meditative practice. Like John Main and Thomas Keating, Bede Griffiths has been a living witness of the important rediscovery of a meditative prayer tradition within Christianity, resourced from the East, but embodied within the West. Bede’s influence in the contemplative Christian renewal movement is significant – touching leaders from Thomas Merton to Cynthia Bourgeault – and now us.

In this important book, *The New Creation in Christ: Christian Meditation and Community*, Bede briefly, wisely and simply helps the reader see the deep resonances of the different meditative prayer traditions – including Centering Prayer, and its sister method Christian Meditation.

If you are interested in a Christian interpretation of the richness of Hindu spirituality and meditation practice, this is a very helpful resource to begin with.



Paula D'Arcy’s writings are an invaluable comfort to all who are going through seasons of change, friction or grief. In *Stars at Night*, Paula writes brief but poignant reflections, in the manner of a daily reader, that deeply touch the mind and heart. She takes the reader on a journey through seeming darkness and mist, into the dawn of renewed faith and spiritual growth.

Her abundant personal stories and rich quotations from past spiritual masters go a long way to making this book a treasured companion through any storm or situation wherein you might be needing a little extra comfort or guidance.

Some might say that Paula’s writing in this book is a blend between Mark Nepo, Thomas Merton and Anne Dillard. Whatever the mix, you will be blessed by her graceful influence.

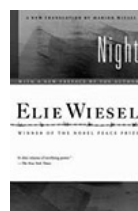
CCH BOOKSTORE

SUGGESTED TITLES FOR JUNE



The Sabbath

Architecture of Holiness
by Abraham Joshua Heschel



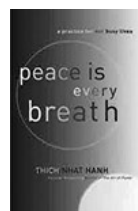
Night

A Human Document
by Elie Wiesel



Test Everything

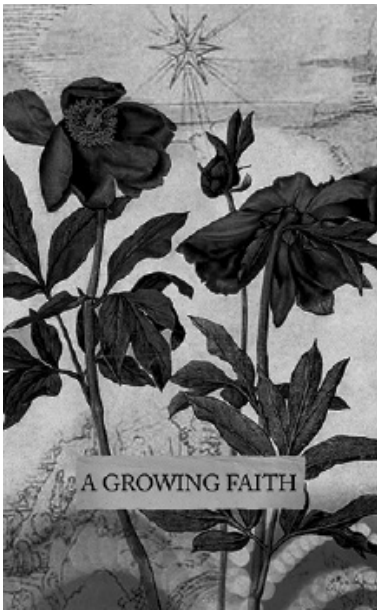
Hold Fast to What is Good
by Hans Urs von Balthasar



Peace Is Every Breath

A Practice for Our Busy Lives
by Thich Nhat Hanh

Bookstore and Library Hours
Open Monday-Friday 9:00 am-4:00 pm
Sunday 9:30-10:00 am & 11:30 am-noon



In Your light, we see light. Psalm 36:10

ANNUAL AIM: EVOLVING AS CHRIST

A GROWING FAITH BY BOB BRECKBILL

You need not have it
all together to begin.
All that is necessary is the desire
to listen for God's call
in the midst of your life.

That is enough.

We bring our little drop of
generosity, and God responds.

We ask for spiritual freedom,
and God assists us to grow in it.

We seek what is better
in a particular situation,
and God meets us in that seeking.

... The most important activity
in all that follows is simply
to hunger for God's life
to come more fully
– in you, in others, in the world.

All the rest is God's job.

And God is faithful,
beyond our ability
to ask or imagine.

Elizabeth Leibert,
The Way of Discernment:
Spiritual Practices for Decision Making Prayer

In the whole construction of the world,
... some excess of personal, extra-human energy
should be perceptible to us if we look carefully,
and should reveal to us the great Presence.

... Christianity seems desperately intricate.

In reality, taken in its main lines, it contains an extremely
simple and astonishingly bold solution of the world.

In the center, so glaring as to be disconcerting,
is the uncompromising affirmation of a personal God.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*

My appreciation and understanding of Christianity has lingered in numerous states of being “half-baked” for fifty or so years. The growth of my faith was in “fits and starts” for many decades, and I sought a process to help me satiate my spiritual hunger. I didn't know it at the time, but I needed a stronger, more developed foundation on which to build my faith. I wanted to develop more trust in God's plan for both me and the world.

I had been introduced to Centering Prayer and Fr. Thomas

Keating at my home congregation in Houston about six years ago and I was as attentive to that experience as I could be. When my wife and I moved to Austin about two and a half years ago to spend more time with the grandkids, I was led to the intentional study, learning and practices available at The Church of Conscious Harmony so that I could continue growing in my faith. After all those years of wishing, it has begun to come together. I found I was ready to let go of the resistance to the Christianity in which I was raised,

and embrace the ideas in Elizabeth Leibert's quote:

"You need not have it all together to begin. All that is necessary is the desire to listen for God's call in the midst of your life. That is enough."

The Invisible World

According to Richard Rohr, "The visible world is an active doorway to the invisible world, and the invisible world is much larger than the visible one."

This idea challenges me to expand my understanding of the cosmos and its enormous creative power and spaciousness. All of which means I have begun to develop a Christian cosmology. A new and meaningful idea regarding my cosmology is that the Christ was present at the "Big Bang." Such a concept helps enlarge my understanding of God's direct and intimate evolutionary involvement in the creating, redeeming and sustaining activity of the cosmos. Also, a comment by Barbara Cook keeps me honest and seeking. She said,

"What ever your concept of God is, it's too small."

Such an idea reminds me that my concept of the cosmos and its creating Source must continue to evolve and expand.

Another early idea I learned as a kid that now makes sense in terms of being within the influence

of God's love and guidance, which is part of the invisible world, is to *seek first the Kingdom of God, and everything else will follow*. In my more sane or perhaps conscious moments, I am choosing to put myself under the authority of this love and guidance. I've come to more fully appreciate how the power of today's culture can misdirect my life and how much effort it takes to self-correct. Jesus reminds us that God's Kingdom is all around us; but it's through this journey of faith that I am beginning to see and experience the invisible world environment in which we are "drenched or saturated" as we live within the visible world. Another part of the Good News is that living within this visible world, we can also live in and through God's Kingdom if we are awake and seeking. This is my understanding of the New Testament idea reminding us that "we live in the world but are not of this world."

Core of Goodness

Since my growing faith is a work in process, I am continuing to wrestle with questions that undergird my faith. For instance, according to Fr. Keating, God created me with a core of goodness. This is startling news to a little boy who got the impression he was basically sinful. It suggests

we've all got more to work with and have more potential than perhaps we originally thought. This seems encouraging.

Incarnation

Another issue of growth has been more clarity regarding the concept of Incarnation. While I had certainly heard of the divinity of Jesus and that being a declaration of the Incarnation, I had not understood nor appreciated, as I do now, that the Incarnation is for all of the earth, all of creation, and all of the cosmos. As Fr. Keating writes, "God is in all, and all is in God." Amen.

And thanks to Tim Cook's teaching, I visualize the point in history when the vertical activity of God crosses the horizontal point of the world; initiating the Incarnation of God in Jesus the Christ. That point in history has become for me one of the meanings, by which I interpret making the sign of the cross. That specific point of where the vertical touches and crosses the horizontal of the sign of the cross reminds me of the Incarnation. Again this is a religious activity or symbol I had never used from my Protestant background. It was far too mysterious and "catholic." For a number of years, I have thought we Protestants threw "the baby out with the bathwater" in our attempt to move away from Roman Catholic

traditions. And through my recent acceptance and appreciation of some of the rituals and symbols that I've experienced at CCH, my earlier hunch is confirmed.

Eucharist

Another religious or spiritual event that I have come to appreciate is my understanding of the Eucharist. In the last couple years, I've embraced the idea that the Eucharist reminds me that all of the material world (the visible world) is infused with the Divine Mystery and that includes me. Such an understanding becomes a part of my Christian cosmology that has also been supported by some terrific and simulating television shows on PBS and National Geographic stations. These scientific shows have cracked open my comprehension and appreciation of God's radical and awesome involvement in our world and universe. We live in a world and universe that is not random, but created by a loving and compassionate Divine Mystery.

Silence

In her book, *The Grace of Aging*, Kathleen Dowling Singh says, "The spiritual journey could be described as the movement from noise to silence."

This is a broad description of the spiritual process, but clearly a part

of my growing faith. Embracing the silence and stillness through Centering Prayer has stretched me in a number of unexpected ways. In particular, it challenges my lopsided reliance on my intellectual powers that too often ignore the emotional and physical aspects of my total experience.

Another wise and helpful invitation I received from Barbara Cook was to "drop to the heart, which is the seat of spirituality" when I begin my silent Centering Prayer practice. I have come to envision reaching for the Silence from the heart area of my chest rather than from intellectually trying to grasp or understand as I used to. I imagine a growing direction for me would be to expand that "reach" or perhaps its "openness" to include 360 degrees around me, so I am saturated in the Divine Silence. But even as I write this, it sounds like I am attempting to control or direct the experience. Obviously, the silent meditative part of my practice continues to be a growing edge of my faith journey. Again, in more conscious moments, I know that the deep and broad Mystery I am seeking to be present to can't fully be known at this level of being. It is infinite....

Scriptures

An important addition to my sojourn of growing trust or faith in the God of Jesus has been a more

disciplined study of the scriptures. Through a regular reading in *The Daily Reader for Contemplative Living* by Sister Stephanie Iachetta and the daily devotional reading from *Give Us This Day*, I am gaining a broader understanding of our Faith. Of particular importance to me has been Fr. Keating's reminder regarding humility. He writes in *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*,

"Humility is the right relationship to God. It is at the same time total dependence on God and invincible hope in God's infinite mercy."

Given my historical resistance to the reality of the invisible world this prompting about total dependence on the Ultimate Source of all continues to give me pause and separates me from the fantasy that I am in charge and control of my life. Also, my Biblical illiteracy has become painfully obvious, as I have consistently studied our sacred scriptures through the daily readings. I've come to appreciate more and understand more deeply the story of my "salvation" and the early church's development from this study.

Evolving


The sharing I have expressed in this short article has been my attempt to explain some of the ways I believe my Christian faith has grown, in particular, since I began my attendance and participation

in CCH, which I think of as a spiritual school. As I have alluded to, faith is easily translated as “trust” for me, and it is a process of moving from my head to my heart. This is enormously difficult for me because of my false personality type and despite having professionally worked as a psychotherapist, I have historically not been “present” emotionally or somatically for the majority of my own life.

But I am here now, and as Elizabeth Leibert writes, “The most important activity

in all that follows is simply to hunger for God’s life to come more fully – in you, in others, in the world. All the rest is God’s job. And God is faithful, beyond our ability to ask or imagine.”

I trust that if I am faithful and awake to God’s process, which appears to be working in and for me, I am evolving as Christ. Perhaps, some day, I can say as Paul,

... *the life I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me ... Galatians 2-20.* 

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.

GUIDELINE 5

Original sin is not the result
of personal wrongdoing on our part.

Still, it causes a pervasive feeling of alienation
from God, from other people and from the true Self.

The cultural consequences of these alienations
are instilled in us from earliest childhood
and passed on from one generation to the next.



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

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

Work Idea

One of the many unforgettable Work phrases that answers so much, and yet opens many other questions and connections, is the phrase “a human being is created as a self-developing organism.” In the Work, the idea and possibility of development is synonymous with growth. In the Work, we are interested in a certain kind of growth – the growth of Essence. Essence grows in many ways – by Grace, by conscious efforts, by intentional suffering, by selfless love, by patient enduring of trials, by sacrificial giving, by the study of wisdom, by worship, by reading more conscious influences, and Essence grows by Essence “eating” personality. What might that mean? Let’s turn to Maurice Nicoll’s teaching on the subject in his first commentary where he details this (and more) in a profoundly impactful and concise wisdom-letter to Mr. Bush dated March 27, 1941.

Work Source

“Now, if a human were nothing but a well-formed personality and this were one’s *end*, then we might very well believe in all those doctrines of humanitarianism and other scientific ideas that say that man is nothing, but a creature turned toward external life ... But if you have followed what has been said in this letter about the idea of a human in this system you will see that the development of personality is merely a stage, and an absolutely necessary stage, towards a further stage. It’s directly comparable with the formation of a mass of food round a seed, as in the case of [an acorn]. The nut has an essential part in it – namely, the seed itself that can grow – but it cannot grow until it’s surrounded by a mass of nourishing material, just as an egg has a seed in it surrounded by a mass of yolk, and so on ... A human surrounded by personality resembles an acorn and suffers, as

it were, the same fate as the acorn, unless one begins to grow ...”

Practical Application

Admittedly, it’s a powerful idea, but also somewhat odd.

1) To begin, ask yourself: Why am I? What am I here for? If you’re beginning to intuit that there must be more to life than just life, this is a good thing. To continue the analogy from above, we’re here to be more than just “acorn nuts.” We’re here to grow into “Oak Trees.”

2) Next, identify one or two behaviors that are more external in nature, connected to your personality, such as smoking, gossiping, criticizing a politician, watching movies, etc. Discern the behaviors that keep you “nuts.”


3) Then, explore ways of giving that identified behavior(s) up this month. And not only giving the behavior(s) up, replace it with a different behavior that is more connected to your interior life,

something deeper and more real within you that can serve your development and growth into an “Oak Tree.”

4) Observe how this exchange of behaviors impacts you (and your loved ones) this month. Notice: Do you feel more or less energized? Connected to wisdom? Capable of patience or love? Did you note the contrasts?

5) Celebrate all conscious growth, whatever the form!

Further Resources: Few resources are as profoundly honest and clear

on the process of spiritual growth and development by way of the diminishment of the personality or “self”, than Bernadette Roberts’ essays in her book, *The Christian Contemplative Journey*—in particular, her essay on the “Cessation of Self”. Older, but equally clear masterpieces on the spiritual process of growth through diminishment, are John of the Cross’ classics, *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel* and *The Dark Night*. 

For more 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.

NEW!
PARTICIPATE IN THE
SUNDAY INTERCESSORY PRAYER CIRCLE

Barbara Cook’s passion for prayer permeates the CCH community. Many do not realize that for decades Barbara met weekly to pray for thousands of prayer requests, needs and concerns conveyed to the CCH community from its members and beyond. At CCH, we believe in the power of prayer, under the metaphysical principles that: *what we hold in mind, unfolds in kind* and *where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am also*.

Our wish is to expand the opportunity for wider prayer participation for the community. To that end, the former Wednesday prayer circle is transitioning to Sundays from 9:15-9:45 a.m. in the Scriptorium classroom. The method of our intercessory prayer circle allows you to join or depart the circle anytime during the 30-minutes, as your schedule allows. Drop-ins are welcome. All are invited.

JUNE CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

Introduction to Centering Prayer Class
June 2 8:45 am-3:15 pm \$75 Register at 512-347-9673. Lunch included. Includes 6 follow-up classes Tuesdays June 5-July 10 7:30-9 pm

1-day Centering Prayer Retreat
June 9 8:45 am-4:30 pm \$15 Register by Friday, June 8 at noon 512-347-9673
Potluck lunch - bring a dish to share

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

WEEKLY

Sundays
Lectio Divina 8:00-9:00 am
Prayer Circle 9:15-9:45 am
Worship Service 10:00-11:30 am
Youth Program 10:00-11:30 am
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays
Contemplative Lunch noon-1:00 pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6:00-7:00 pm
Meditations on the Tarot 7:15-8:30 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9:00 pm
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:45 pm
Devotional Service

Saturdays
Conscious Movement 7:45-8:15 am
Scriptorium noon-12:50 pm

DAILY _____

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



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*When Jesus came down from the mountain,
great crowds followed Him.
And then a leper approached, did Him homage,
and said, 'Lord, if You wish, You can make me clean.'
He stretched out His hand, touched him, and said,
'I will do it. Be made clean.'
His leprosy was cleansed immediately.*

Matthew 8:1-3

AWAKENING TO THE WORD OF LIFE

The universe came into being when God said,
'Let there be light.'
In His miracles God says,
'Let there be life!'
Thus, in a deep period of stress
or a prolonged absence
of consolation, all of a sudden,
Jesus touches our inmost being.
Healing flows on every level
and all our woes are forgotten
as if they had never happened.

The touches of the Spirit are transforming.
They point to a gradual change of consciousness.
Transformation of consciousness into the mind
of Christ is the goal of contemplative prayer.

Thomas Keating, *Rearwakenings*

