About this time of year, a common experience is the recognition that one has failed at keeping one’s New Year’s resolutions or aims. This recognition is both the result and cause of losing force, which is a kind of deflation of one’s interior energy.

This deflation can often lead to a sense of disorientation characterized by a further wandering of the will. A common result of this wandering will is the curious state of knowing one has made a wish, but forgetting the intention or urgency behind the wish in the first place – thus never fulfilling the original aim, and sometimes even doing further damage by a resigned abandonment to give up trying and just keep indulging. Thankfully, affirmations are a potent remedy for our common human experience with deflation, disorientation and damage.

So what is an affirmation?
First, an affirmation is a kind of active prayer. Affirmations are a fusion of request and declaration. Grounded in faith, we use words, thought and emotion to shape a request to God/Source. The request is most effective when rooted in an inner seeing; a kind of future vision of what could or should be for one’s life – and declaring it to be even before it actually is. That is the first aspect of an affirmation: it is an active, willed prayer of declarative faith.

A second aspect of an affirmation is that it is a treatment to oneself. Literally, affirmations are a way of resetting and releasing from disempowering, patterned, habituated thoughts, feelings and behaviors – Mind-states, Emotion-states, and Body-states. Affirmations can often transform or interrupt a habitual thought or emotional process and replace it with another – the affirmation itself. This switch becomes a self-treatment plan for one’s own mental and emotional wellbeing.

It can work like this: we observe the unworkable, habitual thought, feeling or behavior, and replace it with a pre-determined, personally tailored affirmation. A treatment is more than just a prayer, it is literally a rope to jump and catch. The rope (the affirmation in this case) lifts one up and out of a particular thought or emotional pattern and experience. Notice that it will take effort and will to make the switch and say the affirmation. If possible, it is best to say the affirmation out loud to oneself, as if declaring it to oneself. We can get very lazy about this and assume thinking the affirmation is the same as saying the affirmation. It is not.

A third aspect of an affirmation is that it is a tangible expression of faith. Affirmations make visible and verbal what is often invisible and silent. Affirmations are a primary way our faith is expressed in day-to-day life. Faith is often intangible. Affirmations externalize the intangible, in very practical and precise ways. Somewhere
thirteenth-century mystic Meister Eckhart wrote that “thoughts are our inner senses.” Affirmations are more than thoughts – but they use thought as a kind of spiritual mind to help navigate the inner landscape of our life. This inwardness is a root to faith: the evidence of things unseen, the certainty of things hoped for. Thought becomes a kind of sixth sense by which we shape and navigate our inner and outer worlds.

Fourth, affirmations leave a trail for one to follow ahead of time. Affirmations can go ahead of your life and draw you forward, like a GPS map route. Affirmations can mark the way ahead for your future journey, one you have yet to take. In the Work terms, this would be setting a “future memory.” Affirmations provide a kind of orientation to life’s disorientation and mystery. Our affirmations meet us in the future as if they have arrived before us. In a certain sense, affirmations are an echo, voiced in the past but heard in the present and future – an echo that aids us in making choices and discerning directions and decisions more wisely by way of intentional principles, not just momentary preferences.

An example of an affirmation is our offertory prayer during worship at The Church of Conscious Harmony. We affirm together verbally, out loud, that “God’s love has always met and will always meet all my needs. I give freely and receive joyfully.” This affirmation is a treatment to the ordinary fears and concerns that come up around our relationship to money. It is very normal to feel a sense of lack of money, or fear losing it, or believe there isn’t enough money in one’s bank account, or that one has to take control of one’s life to provide for every possible need or contingency. Declaring an affirmation such as we do during our worship service helps us all remember and reorientate our life back to Source not just self; back to Divine not just digits.

No matter the season or subject, affirmations remind us of our responsibility to observe and develop our thoughts. We can do that by intentionally creating and writing affirmations designed for specific situation, thought, feeling, behavior or relationship. No matter the time or season of year, affirmations are a vital aspect for experiencing and becoming a New Creation. Remember, the spoken word is powerful, nearly God-like. The Hebrew scriptures begin with God declaring, “Let there be…” (Genesis 1), and there was. The Christian scriptures begin with the soaring affirmation that “in the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh… and all things came into being through the Word (John 1). May affirmations aid us in partaking and shaping in the emergences of a New Creation wherever and whenever it’s needed.
In 2019, our community reading list focuses on deepening our understanding of the spiritual journey as contemplatives. Each of these books was selected to compliment the annual aim for our community: A New Creation.

We began in January with Bernadette Roberts’ *The Christian Contemplative Journey: Essays on the Path*, which was frequently referenced in the panel discussion that took place on January 12-13. If you missed it, please contact the bookstore to purchase the recording.

Our February reading by Byron Katie, *A Mind at Home with Itself*, is a useful complement to our January focus on Bernadette Roberts. Katie’s “no-self” experience was similar and distinct from Bernadette’s, and can help us see the contrast between a Christian path and a non-religious path both coming upon the no-self event unexpectedly – and the impact it had on these two extraordinary women.

February  
Byron Katie, *A Mind at Home with Itself*

March  
Phileena Heuertz, *Mindful Silence: The Heart of Christian Contemplation*

April  
Amos Smith, *Be Still and Listen*

May-June  
Christina Feldman, *Boundless Heart*

July-August  
Guy Armstrong, *Emptiness: A Practical Guide for Meditators*

September-October  
Mitzi DeWhitt, *Reality Decoded*

November-December  
Thomas Keating, *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*

May these readings nourish our journey deeper into wisdom and love!
One way to keep affirming the grace of God in our lives is to turn for inspiration to the writings of the Christian mystics. We can’t really get enough exposure to them. There are vast resources to access the primary writings of the Christian mystics, and two recent books offer general overviews and insightful introductions to the history and nuances of the primary Christian mystics.

Joseph Conti was recently a guest panelist at The Church of Conscious Harmony. His insight and clear theological and spiritual understanding is a hallmark of his teaching and writing, especially integrated in his very user-friendly historical overview of Christian mysticism. If you are looking for a mystical theologian’s take on Christian mysticism, Holistic Christianity is a wonderful place to start. Note that this book presents a more Roman Catholic perspective.

Similarly, Amos Smith provides a theologically astute lens in service of recovering the importance of the contemplative and mystical dimension of Christianity. Healing the Divide is a comprehensive invitation to the Protestant church to recover and reconnect with the writings and ideas of Christian mystics – experientially, not just doctrinally. Note that this book presents a more Protestant perspective.
Whoever is in Christ is a new creation …
behold, new things have come.
2 Corinthians 5:17

ANNUAL AIM: A NEW CREATION

AFFIRMATION by Jill Frank

The chief preliminary voluntary act – and it needs to be lifelong in its voluntariness – towards the inner spirit, the source and conveyor of meaning, is that of affirmation. Only by this act does all that is outward, external and dead become connected with what is internal and alive. This is the chief of all psychological acts. It is the preliminary and at the same time the continually renewable act whereby psychology, in the deepest sense – that is, the science of personal evolution – begins. The final goal of it, far ahead, is the unity of oneself. Man becomes gradually united through himself with himself and not merely with what he accidentally has become and believes himself to be. Affirmation is not by argument but by understanding.

…
To grow one must affirm.

Maurice Nicoll,
“Transformation,” The Mark

Greeting the Day: “Turn to the day, wish the day…”

Before my eyes open and I completely emerge from sleep I take out my ear plugs and a gentle, pitter-patter of falling rain greets me. Eyes remain closed and lips curve upward, “Thank you God for the gift of another holy and sacred day, another opportunity to dance in the kingdom. And thank you for this rain and thank you for the beloved that you sent who lays next to me, and thank you for the chiweenie that lies between us and the very old Labrador whose presence graces me for another day! Lord have mercy, help me to remember what I am on this very blessed day.” Eyes open, I turn to the day.

After feeding the dogs, the troupe proceeds to our prayer room for 30 minutes of Centering Prayer followed by the Eucharist. At this point our paths diverge, we get our coffee and go to our
morning readings, chihuahua in a lap and Labrador always at my feet. I take in the liturgy listening for a word or idea I can apply to my day. Today I read from Proverbs 9:6 “Forsake foolishness that you may live—advance in the way of understanding.” I jot that down, I wish for that! I think I can use that today. A seed is planted and I move to a commentary from The Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky (Volume 4, p. 1389). It begins, “Today I will speak to you about one method of Self-Remembering in terms of the following Work-phrase: ‘Try to will what you have to do.’” It so happens that I have the day off and am planning to write this article. I wonder, is affirmation a means of willing?

I will add more from this commentary as we go along, but want to complete my morning practice. Based on my readings, the day that I am anticipating and our weekly group aim from the Work of Inner Christianity class, I create an aim for the day. Observe what you will? Is it foolishness or can it increase understanding? And Smile! I jot it down.

Now I go to the mat, my yoga mat, my dear grounding friend. Some days I get my full practice of 20-30 minutes, others may just be 5 minutes and sometimes this is the part of my morning practice that I miss … and that makes for a different article. I do a simple heart opening, stretching and grounding yoga with music because it speaks to my heart. I think of my aim as I go to the mat and then let it go moving and sensing the body with gratitude. On this mat, the breath is my sacred reminder.

After shivasana, I sit in front of my altar and chant the Gayatri Mantra three times connecting with time honored tradition around the world asking for Divine light and Wisdom. It awakens a Wish and the chanting again moves the aim deeper into heart and body. I then visualize the chakras saying the “I am” statements. “I am the resurrection and the life. I am the light of the world. I am the Good Shepherd. I am the bread of life. I am the door. I am the Way, the truth and the life. I am the true vine.” This is affirming the “secret goal” of “Christ born in us…the realization of Real I”. (Maurice Nicoll, Commentaries, p. 1348) It is creating a new neural pathway and it is self-remembering.

And finally, I close with an affirmation that is used in the CCH Children’s chapel every week. This connects me back to my inner child/essence, and is self-remembering for us. “The Light of God surrounds us, the love of God enfolds us, the power of God protects us and the presence of God watches over us, wherever we are God is and All is well.” I roll up my mat, sealed with a Wish for the day!

Several days a week I talk with my Work partner and share observations from the previous day’s aim. Often this is the point in sharing and reflection when understanding is born. I get to practice owning “my stuff” and noncritically anchoring the observations outside of myself allowing the light to do its healing work.

You may be thinking, are you kidding me? That would never work for me! And it might not, the Work of Inner Christianity suggests we try it all on for ourselves. Don’t do
what I do, do what nourishes the Christ in you. This is a practice that has evolved over time. It reminds me the day is sacred and clothes me with an aim and a prayer for navigating in life with some consciousness. I see the way I greet my day as a microcosm of the way I live my life.

From Maurice Nicoll, “Transformation ... The chief preliminary voluntary act—and it needs to be lifelong in its voluntariness—toward the inner Spirit, the source and conveyer of meaning is that of affirmation.” So I greet the day with a “Yes!” and invite Spirit to live, breathe and move me into the world as a vehicle of Divine Love.

**Engaging the Day: “the continually renewable act... whereby evolution begins”**

To affirm anything is to assert positively that it is so, even in the face of all contrary evidence. Back to the commentary I read and set aim from: “when the phone rings you must not let it take you to it but go to it. By this I mean, will it. To will what happens to you has a most marvelous issue in your own relationship to Second Force. Of course, if you are going to the telephone sighing and groaning and saying: ‘Why should I have to do this?’ do you not see that you are making life full of Second Force. On the other hand, if you will what you have to do, for instance scrubbing the scullery, as I had to do at the Institute, peeling the potatoes, lighting the fire at dawn, [writing an article] and all the rest of it—if, I say, you will it, there is no Second Force there. So if, therefore, I will what I have to do, I will reduce Second Force, but if I hate what I have to do I will increase Second Force possibly so much that I will become a nervous wreck.”

I set aim this morning to observe what I Will and ponder its usefulness vs foolishness. So far, it’s been a fairly intentional day. Since my full morning practice, I have eaten two healthy, conscious meals, written some, taken care of usual household business and am feeling a bit stir crazy on this cold, rainy day. It is 36 degrees and pouring down rain, the kind of day that I always longingly wish I could stay home. Yet, I have parts of myself that are ready to go shop, exercise, run errands...anything other than be where I’m at! Isn’t that interesting? I remember my aim, I remember an e-mail I sent this morning saying I will have this article completed by Sunday. I treat myself to an afternoon cup of coffee and get back to it. The first force that I am reconnecting with is what I Wish for, what I set intention to complete; second force within me is everything that resists that Wish. At any moment “foolish ‘I’s, my internal second force” can rise up and next thing I know I’m on Highway 183 sitting in traffic in the cold and rain when I could be here completing what I set out this morning to do!

It’s a continually renewable act and it’s not through argument but by understanding. When I apply an aim and affirm that it is so and then bump up against everything that wants to say otherwise, I build my Work muscle and my faith and decrease internal second force! Work idea: If you can’t change it, Will it! Say “Yes” and go to it.
Closing the day: Unity of oneself

Only by this act (affirmation) does all that is outward, external and dead become connected with what is internal and alive. So, it doesn’t seem to be saying that all that I don’t like, within or out there, will “go away” but rather that All may become connected with what is internal and alive. Become connected to what I truly am on the deepest level beyond competing desires. Emilie Cady, in Lessons in Truth, one of the foundational texts of our community says on affirmation, “In reality, God is forever in process of movement within us, that he may manifest himself (All-Good) more fully through us. Our affirming, backed by faith, is the link that connects our conscious human need with his power and supply.” (p. 66)

Hum...the link that connects, that’s what Christ is, so “our affirming” is manifesting Christ. Christ brings together the external and dead with internal and alive; maybe those observations that I landed outside of myself with my Work partner, the ones that seemed like foolishness are brought to life in the light by my affirming that “they are not I” because they make room for self-remembering what I really am! What seemed foolishness (life) becomes my teacher.

I just completed my evening Centering Prayer period – the parenthesis on the day; the silence where conscious human need is linked up with power and supply. I return to where the day began and reflect. What did I observe today around the aim that I set? What did I Will today and what can I give back to the Source? If I had ended up in traffic, in the cold rain, I simply get a complete observation of it. What was the thought, the feeling, the sensation? The Work says as long as the observer is present nothing is wasted. I observed some boredom, some imagination, some impatience but at a distance for I wasn’t identified with them. I Worked against the foolish ideas and stayed home. I affirm “The Father and I are one” (John 10:30) and I bring all the remaining energies to Center. I smile and say “Thank you, let’s do it again tomorrow!” 🌼
Living the Work of Inner Christianity in Daily Life

**Work Idea:** Agreeing with the Work. We agree with the Work by delighting in it as a means for our transformation, and making affirmations is one way of expressing our delight in the work, of agreeing with the Work. Affirmations can help us agree with the Work, and participate with the Work inwardly, for our own healing, joy and freedom from self.

**Work Source:** Maurice Nicoll provides a useful teaching in his “Notes on Will and Delight” found in the Psychological Commentaries on pages 1496-1498. Here is a brief excerpt:

“You cannot be horse-whipped into the Work or frightened into it by religious dragons. For the Work to enter, you must invite it and agree with it and will it and treat it internally with the highest consideration and the greatest courtesy and with true delight. I have said to you elsewhere that Will is Delight.”

**Practical Application:** Are you aware of a pattern of thinking or feeling or behaving that is deflationary or disorientating to your life? This month observe the pattern. Name it. Study it. Also, intentionally write a brief one sentence affirmation as a treatment to the observed pattern of thinking, feeling or behaving. For example, a common thought-rut is “I don’t have enough money.” A possible affirmation is:

“God’s love has always met and will always meet all my needs.”

This affirmation will most likely take conscious effort to verbally say out loud. One will need to work at catching oneself in the act of saying, feeling or doing the habitual pattern “I don’t have enough…”, and when seen, one will work to replace the habitual with the intentionally created and spoken affirmation.

**Supplemental Resource:** Watch the opening scene of the movie Meetings with Remarkable Men about Mr. Gurdjieff’s early life. The scene demonstrates the power of vibrations through music. This idea of the power of vibrations to affect a cause can shed light and understanding on the vibratory power possible within the spoken word as we declare our spoken affirmations.

For more experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the Work of Inner Christianity class held Thursdays 7:30-9:00 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

**Sunday Sermon Series**

**The Spiritual Journey**

February 3
Unloading Negative Emotions

February 10
Depth and Divine Therapy

February 17
Dying and Rising
1 Corinthians 15:12-20

February 24
A New Creation
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 13

Our basic core of goodness is dynamic and tends to grow of itself. This growth is hindered by the illusions and emotional hang-ups of the false self, by the negative influences coming from our cultural conditioning, and by personal sin.

February Calendar

Visit consciousharmony.org for a complete listing of events

Special Events

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Feb 16 9am-4:30pm
$20 Bring your own lunch.
Register by Feb 15, noon.

Monthly

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Weekly

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

Wednesdays
Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7pm

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

Saturdays
Scriptorium noon-12:50pm

Daily

Sunday-Saturday 7-7:35am
Centering Prayer Service, Theosis Chapel

Join the Next One, Two, and Three-Day Centering Prayer Retreats at The Church of Conscious Harmony

March 9 Sat 9 am-4:30 pm
March 10-11* Sun 8 am-4 pm & Mon 8:30 am-4 pm

One-day ~ $20 love offering
(Please bring your own lunch)

Two-day commuter retreat $100
(sleep at home; meals included)

*For a 3-day retreat experience, combine with the Saturday 1-day retreat.

Contact the CCH office or website to register.

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

Ordinary Time is time that has been transformed by the eternal values introduced by Jesus through His entrance into the space-time continuum of human experience.

Every moment of chronological time is now the precious present in which eternal values are being offered, communicated and transmitted. Chronological and eternal time intersect in the mystery of the present moment and become one: the stream of time and eternity are co-terminus. The liturgy, under the influence of the Spirit, examines the teaching and example of Jesus from this contemplative perspective. Jesus’ teachings ... show how ordinary life is transformed by the power of the Gospel and by the divine light, life and love transmitted through the liturgy. In this sense, Ordinary Time is in fact totally extraordinary – time that has been transformed or time to be transformed.

Thomas Keating, The Mystery of Christ

*I came that they may have life and have it to the full.*
John 10:10

*You shall seek the Lord, your God; and you shall indeed find Him when you search after Him with your whole heart and your whole soul.*
Deuteronomy 4:29