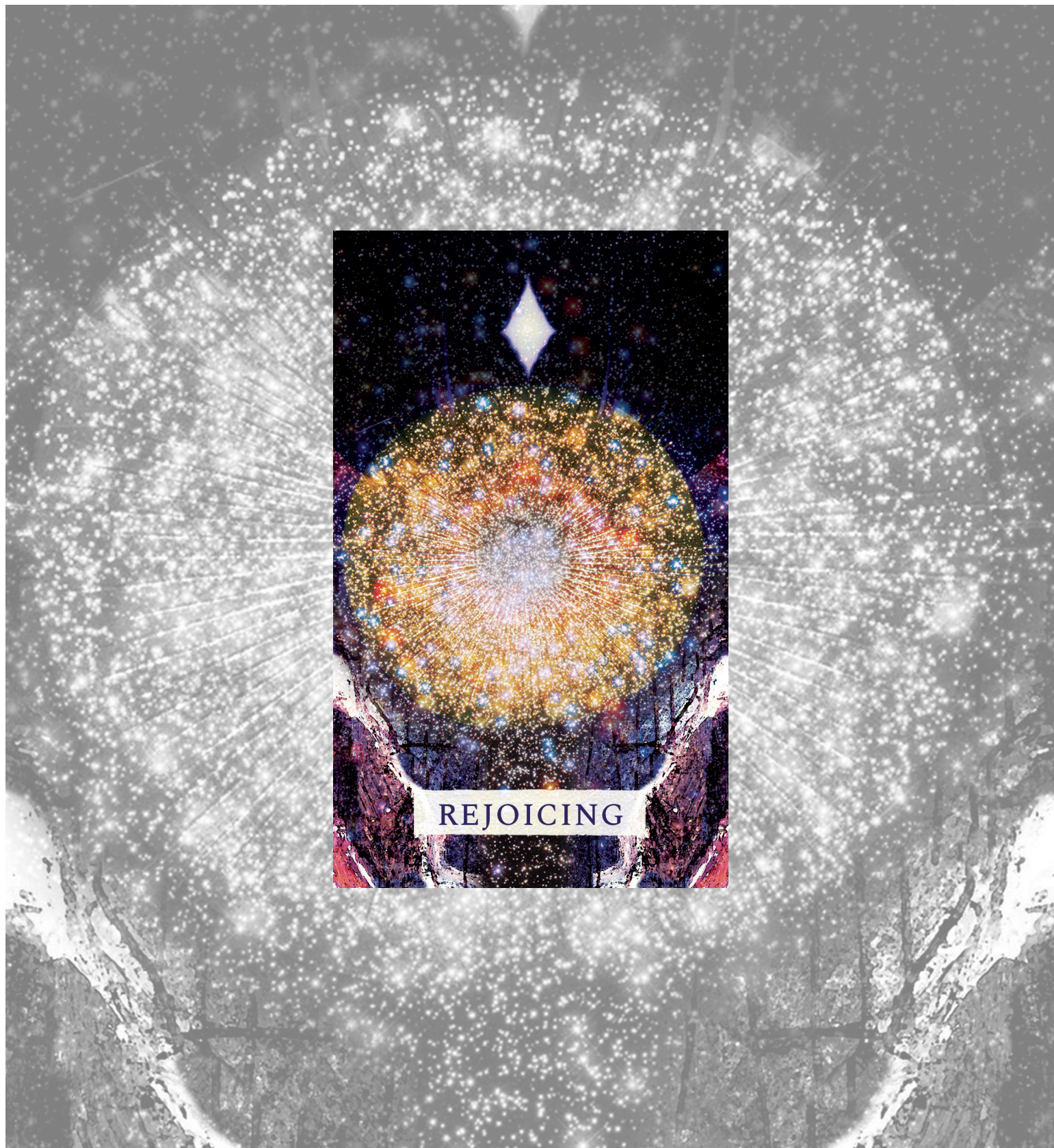


December 2021
Volume 33
Number 12



THE MARK

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



REJOICING

CHRIST IS THE UNION

BY PETER HAAS

On June 3, 2017, Alex Honnold became the first person to free solo Yosemite's El Capitan. He scaled the 3000-foot vertical wall without a rope, a partner, or any protective gear. As I watched the movie documenting this seemingly super-human effort, I noticed that my hands got clammy, and I could not comprehend what I was seeing. The raw, visceral sense of possible dread and death was immediately followed by overwhelming sheer joy and exhilaration for Alex as he made it past the most difficult part of the climb and summited alive.

This is often the kind of victory human beings think of as worthy of celebration. Success as defeating something or someone. Success as winning. Success as accomplishing. Success as summiting. That's normal; we are all motivated by something. For Alex Honnold, his motivation is a kind of Zen-like beauty, becoming one with the rock and mountain, and journeying with it, which is inspiring.

What is most noteworthy

about Alex's endeavor is summed up by the two words: free solo. Free means without a rope or any protection. If he slipped or lost his grip, Alex would fall to certain death. Solo means that he climbs all alone. Normally, people climb in pairs.

I share this story to illustrate one perspective on the spiritual journey. It often seems that the spiritual journey is a solo ascent. It's you and God. We also tend to interpret the journey using vertical language such level of being, rising in consciousness, higher dimension, lifted up, born from above, reaching for the rope, growing up, ascending and many other such vertical, ascending expressions.

While it is true that the developmental nature of our spiritual journey is indeed moving us toward and into "something," it's less an ascent and more a boring out and through us. As Bernadette Roberts demonstrated with her "circle tour," the divine

center is consuming us from the inside out. While it may feel like we are ascending, we're actually descending, deeper and deeper into the empty center that is empty of the solo-self, yet also full of the transformed self: I, not I, Christ in me. Like water to wine, the center is unionizing our human self and turning into Christ. Remember, Christ is the union of the human and divine natures. The grounding of the Christian spiritual journey is humility, and humility is the Christian way of speaking about emptiness.

Furthermore, while it may feel like we are on a journey without a net, without protection, without rope, all alone, it turns out that on this journey of a lifetime, nothing can truly hurt us or separate us from God, our Source. No matter how high or far or deep or dark we go in life, even there, we are connected by the lifeline of grace that is God's love in Christ. Every fall we take, every leap we make, is useful for our growth. Nothing

is wasted. If we need a mulligan, it arises. If we need 3000 new beginnings, they are available.

The Christmas Story

Wrapping all these ideas and images together, we come to the story of Christmas. The Christmas story begins with the celebration of the first descent. The Divine Logos made a free solo descent joining the human condition in all of its complexities. But not just a descent. The fullness of the Christmas story is revealed through the resurrection of Easter and the ascension of Pentecost. The free solo descent of the Logos is completed by the free solo ascent of the Christ. Involution and Evolution. Inbreath and outbreath. Descending octaves and ascending octaves.

Yes, Christmas is a time for celebrating. We rejoice with the angles of old that humankind is not on a free-solo journey into the unknown. We are a living community unfolding into deeper


wholeness nourished by the lights from above, the living cloud of witnesses of the great chain-of-Being, which won't forsake us or leave us or let us fall to failure. Yes, we are a beautiful possibility still in the becoming.

We celebrate Christmas as the festival of lights because it crowns the year of our conscious efforts to listen more deeply, consent more completely, sit more peacefully in the silence. To observe, non-identify and remember our true life in God as Christ. We have journeyed together this year as a living community of spiritual friends wishing to ascend into the truth that opens the eyes of our hearts. For many of us, this ascent first required a descent. We have been humbled by what we have seen and discovered about ourselves. And soon thereafter, we have been lifted up into exquisite joy; the joy of the Lord and the victory of a consciously chosen love in a consciously shaped life.

As children of God woven

into the Christmas story, we do not bestride the monuments of this world's power, wealth and fame. In contrast, we aim to bow with the shepherds and the foot washers of the world. We have been touched and inspired not by the summits and their summiteers, but by the humility that kneels to serve with kindness, by the gentleness that calms the stressors, by the sweetness of beauty that heals even the deepest of traumas and scars from prior falls and fears.

And so, let us celebrate each Sunday of Advent. We celebrate Christmas Eve. We celebrate Christmas morning – not just the cultural celebrations, but the spiritual evolutions that Christ is for each of us and for this planet. We all need more of God, and the world needs more of God in you as Christ.


I wish you and yours a most Blessed, Holy, Conscious, Joyful Christmas, celebrating the journey that has been and all the journeys yet to be. Amen. 

OUR MONTHLY PRACTICE:

MEMORIZATION

The integration of our intellect and emotions can be served by cultivating the practice of memorization. Another way of saying integration is: Truth Opens The Eyes of Our Hearts.

This month, our community practice is memorization. Why not make effort to memorize a few verses of your favorite Christmas carol or hymn; or of a passage of scripture particularly related to the Christmas story such as John 1, Philippians 2 or Galatians 4:4-7? What we memorize and internalize stays with us and feeds us, meeting us when we need help from above.

There are many influences we partake of during this holiday season, why not explore memorizing some very high-quality influences as a Christmas gift to yourself? 



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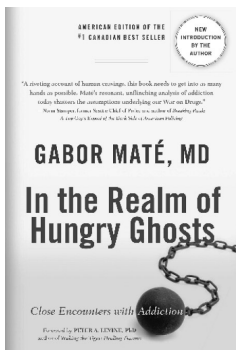
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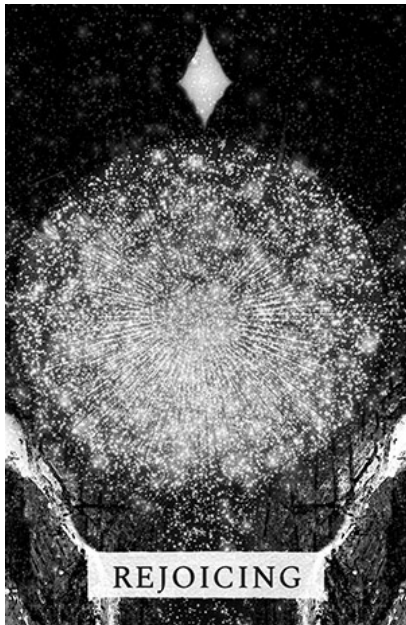


BOOK LOOK

CELEBRATING CONSCIOUSLY

Gabor Maté has written a brilliant and beautiful book that locates the source of all addictions in the trauma of an emotionally empty or lacking early childhood, shining light on the relational roots of all addiction. *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts* comprises honest, heart-opening stories of addicts treated at a Downtown Eastside Vancouver clinic where Maté serves as a physician.

This book provides a much needed glimpse of hope into the nature of addiction, and will inspire us all in our journey discovering the presence of what Fr. Thomas Keating called our energy centers and programs for happiness, which are totally unworkable. 



Consecrate us in the Truth. Your word is Truth. John 17:17

ANNUAL AIM: TRUTH OPENS THE EYES OF OUR HEARTS

REJOICING IN GRATITUDE BY LYNNE SMITH

When we arrive at a state
of pure detachment
we realize that
“God’s ground is my ground and
my ground is God’s ground.”
There is no longer desire
and thus no longer a need
to pray *for* anything.
Like Martha, we are simply
living in uniformity
with God’s will
as every moment demands.
One has, in a sense,
become prayer.
This is what it means to *become*
another Christ in the world. ...
Christ, who said,
“I am the Way” (John 14:6),
is for us the wayless Way,
the path that is a person,
the method that is a relationship.

Vincent Pizzuto, *Contemplating Christ,
The Gospels and the Interior Life*

I wish give *real* Christmas present. Imagine Christ.
Somewhere in space *is*.

(Mr. Gurdjieff forms an oval with both his hands.)

Make contact. Not to center, but to outside, periphery.

Draw from there, draw in, *I*. Settle in you, *Am*. Do every day.

Wish to become Christ. Become. Be.

G. I. Gurdjieff, December 24, 1948, cited in *Harmonic Development, The Complete*

I first attended The Church of Conscious Harmony on Christmas Eve 2018. At that service, I felt so moved that I knew I had found a spiritual home. I live in the hill country near Blanco, Texas, so regular attendance was not something I considered a possibility. However, I did begin reading and studying the Work of Inner Christianity through the *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky* by Maurice Nicoll. In 2020, I heard The Journey

School was starting and I signed up for the weekly email and eagerly awaited its arrival each Thursday. I am thankful the pandemic came, because it gave me the opportunity to become a more active member of the CCH community through the online options. I became a devoted attendee of services and The Journey School. I have always been a spiritual seeker and I am grateful for the spiritual home and community that I have at CCH, The Journey School,

and my wonderful Spiritual Journey Group. The spiritual community of CCH and all the many teachings have grounded my centers in gratitude.

“If the only prayer you ever say your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.” Meister Eckhart

Every day, I am so thankful to be alive and witness God’s splendid love in all things. I am thankful for the sunlight dancing through the leaves and the rainbow sparkle of light shining forth from the spider’s thread. I am thankful for the call of the hawk and the flutter of the red bird in the trees. Every second of every day, there is so much to be thankful for and to love – the earth, the air, the fire, the water.

I love the stars whose dust we are made of. The way they glitter in the night sky and open us to the immensity of the mystery of creation, star nation beyond star nation. The constellations, the Great Square, Orion, the Big Dipper, Scorpio, and Cassiopeia, are all wonderful comforting friends whose light greets me and gives me surety in the divine order of things. The elegance and order of the stars bring peace and a certain kind of order within

myself that fills me with wonder and trust in the vastness and love of creation.


I feel a kinship and love for the trees, all my friends, struggling to consume as much carbon dioxide as possible, so we can breathe and thrive. The Live Oak trees feed so many with their acorns. The Cedar Elms delight and feed the birds and deer as her seeds travel like feathers on the wind. The Hackberry offers shade and sustenance to many weary travelers on migration. I love the Sycamore, whose fragrance fills me with sweetness and peace. The Pecan’s spiral of leaves lead me to the infinite mystery of the night sky. I love the Cypress trees that stand like sentinels on the river bank and the Red Oaks that delight all with their fall and spring colors on the hillsides. Every day, the trees fill me with joy, love, and gratitude, and I try to let them know how special they are to all of us and our love for them. I hold appreciation and respect for the tree’s deep wisdom, care, and compassion that they share helping us human wanderers have life on this magnificent planet in creation.

I am thankful for all the stones, the patience and stillness they teach – occupying the same place for millions of years or

willingly allowing themselves to be skipped on the water or shaped into tools or statues.

I am grateful for the aliveness and sentience of the air and the water. The sustenance and relief they bring to all bodies as the earth nurtures us with her sweetness.

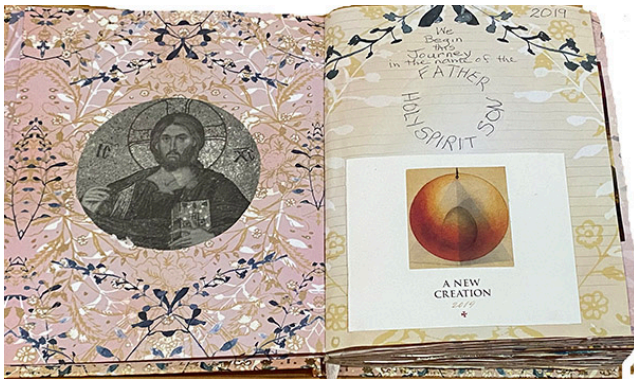
Life is full of wonder and mystery, and she offers herself to all of us to be in a relationship with her in love and trust. Every day we have the opportunity to be alive in creation is a day filled with gratitude for all the miracles we have to behold, love and be in relationship with. Creation gives the love of the universal Christ to us every day. This love is freely given. I encourage all of us to take it all in - from the minutest splendor to the magnificent gloriousness - and with all our rejoicing hearts and souls say, “Thank you God. We love you, God, Beloved Source, our Creator.”

Through the teachings, CCH and The Journey School, I have learned to set a daily aim of seeing and being grateful for all the beauty and love of creation. My aim of gratitude gives me a place to set aside the tumult of my mind and rest in gratitude for the opportunity to be in a conscious relationship with creation and Beloved Source. 

ELDER WISDOM: HONORING OUR FATHERS AND MOTHERS

JUDITH'S JOURNAL BY JILL FRANK

Our beloved Judith August departed this realm on July 25 of this year. When the Elder Wisdom column began she was the first person I invited to share, but by this time she did not feel she had the energy and was past the point of verbal sharing. She did, however, leave me her 2019 journal to use as I saw fit for our community. It is a work of beauty and wisdom intentionally prepared for us with



the first page stating:

“We begin this Journey in the name of the Father, Son, Holy Spirit.” She cut out our annual aim “A New Creation” and pasted it beneath. Judith was a hermeticist and brought together images, Liturgy, and Journey School excerpts that spoke to her

experience in this beautiful gift. Turning the page, we see the February 2019 aim “Affirmation” with the image of an egg cracked open and the sun rising in the middle radiating beautiful golden light. *Oh, Lord, open my lips. And my mouth will proclaim your praise, followed by Psalm 100, Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness ... God is faithful from age to age.* At the

bottom of this page is an excerpt from Beryl Pogson, “Turn to the day, wish the day. You have to will the day, receive it, not turn away from it. Think: ‘It is a new day.’”

The journal chronicles a Work student’s life amidst chronic pain and bodily diminishments. For example, a Work class exercise

includes: “Observe and name – tell on our demons. The Judge and the Fixer work together to create hell now. At church there is the fellowship of those in travail – physical, mental, emotional. We sustain each other – yet the demons lurk Pour them a glass of wine as well, I guess ... and remember,

Sunday Chant by Billie and Peter
I feel your grace, in this place I am loved,
And I feel your grace, in this place I am loved
I lift my voice to You, I turn within anew
I feel your Spirit move in me and know that I am loved.”

Below, Judith wrote, “This one has a direct connection to Higher Emotional Center. But you have to hear the music too.”

The poem, *Shadows*, written by D.H. Lawrence placed at the second to last page of her journal is a synopsis of her journal. A chronical of an intentional life of conscious labor, intentional suffering, forgetting and remembering, pain

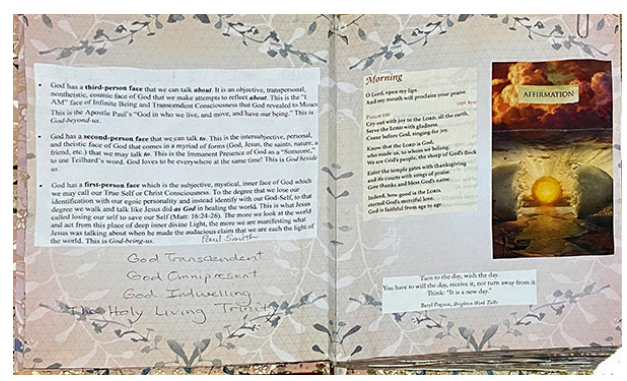
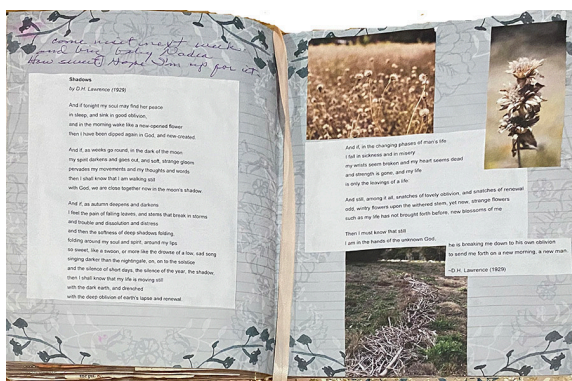
and much gratitude, diminishment and evolution into Christ.

Shadows by D.H. Lawrence (1929)
And if tonight my soul may find
her peace in sleep, and sink in
good oblivion,
and in the morning wake like a
new-opened flower
then I have been dipped again in
God, and new-created.
And if, as weeks go round, in the
dark of the moon
my spirit darkens and goes out, and
soft, strange gloom

the drowse of a low, sad song
singing darker than the nightingale,
on, on to the solstice
and the silence of short days, the
silence of the year, the shadow,
then I shall know that my life is
moving still
with the dark earth, and drenched
with the deep oblivion of earth's
lapse and renewal.
And if, in the changing phases of
man's life
I fall in sickness and in misery
my wrists seem broken and my
heart seems dead

a new man.

The journal comes to a close following this poem with an excerpt from Fr. Keating's Night of Spirit, part 2: "...the Divine Plan seems to be to transform human nature into the divine, not by creating it with some special role or giving it some kind of tremendous powers, but rather in enabling it to live ordinary life with extraordinary motivation. And the motivation is showing love, compassion,



pervades my movements and my thoughts and words then I shall know that I am walking still with God, we are close together now in the moon's shadow. And if, as autumn deepens and darkens I feel the pain of falling leaves, and stems that break in storms and trouble and dissolution and distress and then the softness of deep shadows folding, folding around my soul and spirit, around my lips so sweet, like a swoon, or more like

and strength is gone, and my life is only the leavings of a life: And still, among it all, snatches of lovely oblivion, and snatches of renewal odd, wintry flowers upon the withered stem, yet new, strange flowers such as my life has not brought forth before, new blossoms of me Then I must know that still I am in the hands of the unknown God, he is breaking me down to his own oblivion to send me forth on a new morning,

forgiveness, kindness, concern, even at great sacrifice of one's own interests bodily, mentally, or even spiritually. And hence the freedom from the false-self system and the emotional domination is complete." Judith August manifested extraordinary motivation and was freed on July 25, 2021 sent "forth on a new morning, a new man!" How blessed we are to participate together in all aspects of our journeys of evolution. Thank you for sharing your elder wisdom Judith....

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

CELEBRATING CONSCIOUSLY BY NATHAN JONES

Work Idea: A way, a path, a teaching, a system is offered by the Work of Inner Christianity. An echo of sayings and stories made louder by the man Yeshua a long time gone. We are offered practical exercises that allow us to become more conscious, should we wish. Forget not the power of a wish. It is either a fraction of a prayer or a prayer to the second power, it escapes me. We are something of a combination lock whose code changes each day. The Work offers a system to go about decoding this lock. Self-Observe, Non-Identify, Self-Remember. With practice, we are able to more deeply follow and understand the way of the Work. Understanding failure is part of the process. Learning thoughts are not our own is part of the process. Experiencing the absurdity and repetitive nature of our behavior is part of the process. Like a young born who is realizing that hand just might be attached to this torso. With practice, we are able to more easily assimilate those old desert teachings. We can understand why the man would teach to fish or


turn the other cheek. Or why the man would walk on water during a storm. The Work teaches that walk, that water and that storm are inside all of us. Importantly, the way of the Work encourages experience. There is much to be said of faith, but how much more can we appreciate with a common experience. Seek not the master, seek what they sought.

Work Source: “Whereas, when ‘working’ in solitude there was nothing to control the degree of objectivity and seriousness that we put into the ‘work,’ on the other hand, during these love-feasts a chain reaction took place in which nothing any longer made ordinary sense. Eating and speaking became momentous acts and remarks exchanged across the table seemed like the stabs of a knife. Everyone, picked out by a search-light, was caught in the very act of desertion and had to be brought back between bayonets. Failing trial by red-hot iron or poison, the glass of alcohol became a kind of judgment from heaven. What spiritual progress can be

claimed by one who hasn’t even the grace to allow himself to be made drunk? This great feast—can I say it without shocking?—reminded me of another. It was impossible not to think of the Last Supper. Bludgeoned into life, we were taking part in tragic agapes. We dipped our hands in the dish with a Master. The figure of Judas or of the favorite disciple was enough to give one a fit. Our indomitable friend, the Banker, whose face was aglow with the vodka that he detested (‘you drink another toast, Director, you not drink anything!’). There were swooning Mary Magdalenes, incorrigible Marthas and Nicodemus’s painfully full of goodwill. Was Gurdjieff himself aware of these resemblances? The very act of eating, if surrounded by rites, however incongruous, could not fail to make us think of Holy Communion.” Pierre Schaeffer, *Dinner with Gurdjieff in Paris*

Application: As we move toward the Winter Solstice, by design there is more darkness today than yesterday. In a few days, the same will be true with light. If

we can keep our eyes up, we can hear the drumbeat of the external world, a rhythmic mirror of our internal life. The Work offers a way to understand the outside through the inside, where the scales will fall from your eyes.

Further Resource: “When I came into contact with Mr. Gurdjieff’s teaching through Mr. Ouspensky, I was shown a way. For a long time, I was content to hear the ideas, to ‘learn’ them, almost like a child that listens open-eyed to a subject that fascinates him. But the time came when I wanted more: I wished to feel, as it were, the pulse of the teaching. I wished to have the tools to make the teaching live in me and make it my own.” Anny Juer, Gurdjieff Society of London. 

SUNDAY SERMON THEMES

December 5
The Second Sunday of Advent

December 12
The Third Sunday of Advent

December 19
The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 26
The Christmas Family

A YEAR IN REVIEW: TRUTH OPENS THE EYES OF OUR HEARTS

In 2021, we were invited to move ever deeper together as a community of intention, practice and devotion in the annual aim:
“Truth Opens The Eyes of Our Hearts.”

The journey is realizing the Truth already with us
and then allowing it to transform us.

Christ’s revelation, “I am the Way and the Truth” allows no separation between the Way (means) and its end (Truth). Our end being transformation into Christ, when the Christian comes to the end of his journey there is the same truth he began with, only now unveiled in all its reality and marvel. The journey is one of gradual transformation, ever seeing and living more profoundly the Truth already with us. Truth was never somewhere beyond or down the road, it is always here and now, the means (Christ) being the end Itself.

Bernadette Roberts, “Means-Ends,” *The Christian Contemplative Journey, Essays on the Path*

January	Opening	July	Attending
February	Unfolding	August	Receiving
March	Yielding	September	Transmitting
April	Arising	October	Deepening
May	Ascending	November	Consuming
June	Descending	December	Rejoicing

Consecrate us in the Truth. Your word is Truth.

John 17:17



Previous issues of *The Mark* are available at consciousharmony.org/read-listen/the-mark for your review and reflection on these monthly community aims.

May you continue to go ever deeper in your spiritual journey.
Let us rejoice!

DECEMBER CALENDAR

For more details, visit
<https://consciousharmony.org/>
or call 512-347-9673

SPECIAL EVENTS

Lux Divina: Advent Friday Vespers
Dec 3, 10, 17 7-8:05pm (in-person only)

†The Glorious Impossible Christmas Program
Dec 16 7pm

†Christmas Eve Services
Dec 24 6pm

†New Year's Eve Services
Dec 31 8:30pm-12:05am

MONTHLY

Caritas Donations
1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables to CCH or
donate to caritasofaustin.org

WEEKLY

Sundays
*Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
*Intercessory Prayer 9am
†Worship Service 10-11:30am
†Youth Program (pre-K-12) 10-11:30am

Wednesdays
†Contemplative Worship Service 6-7pm

Thursdays
*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

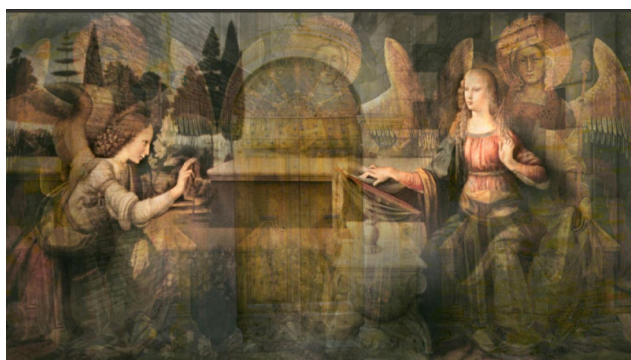
Saturdays
*Scriptorium noon
*Compline 9-9:15pm

DAILY

*Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

*Please join these services, groups, and classes via
online video conferencing. Contact the website
for accessible links and more information.

†Open for in-person at CCH



ADVENT OFFERING

There is something wondrous and expectant evoked by the very word “Advent.” What is this expectation that beckons – something our hearts instinctively know and yet not entirely within our consciousness. While the affairs of the world clamor for our attention and retail euphoria abounds, we can participate in the affairs of the world and be attuned to the ancient harmonies of this holy time – nourished by silence, prayer, Scripture, and the sacred music, art, beauty, and rituals of the season, shared intentionality, together waiting – expecting – the Light Divine, the Light who came to transfigure the whole cosmos.

We are invited to pause with intentionality each Friday evening during the season of Advent to abide in silence, prayer, Communion, chant, beauty to nourish our being and prepare for the Incarnation, to Self-Remember in Christ.

Lux Divina: Advent Vespers
December 3, 10, & 17 7-8:05 PM, in-person only
Hosted by Oblates for the Community

CHRISTMAS SEASON EVENTS

The Glorious Impossible Christmas Program

Dec 16 7:00 pm (in-person & broadcast)

Come to the sanctuary and enjoy this gift to our community.

Christmas Eve Service

Dec 24 6:00 pm (in-person & broadcast)

Celebrate the Gift of Love in our lives in this sacred service.

New Year's Eve Service

Taizé in Sanctuary (in-person & broadcast)	8:30-9:45pm
Food & Fellowship (in-person)	9:45-10:30pm
Burning Bowl Ceremony (in-person)	10:30-11:15pm
Chant, Eucharist, & Centering Prayer (in-person)	11:15-12:05am

Church and office closed Dec 27-31.

Please go to www.consciousharmony.org to find more information on these events.



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*The true light, which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world.
And to those who would accept Him
He gave power to become children of God,
to those who believe in Him,
who are born not by natural generation
nor by human choice nor by a man's decision
but of God.*

John 1:9, 12

INCARNATION

Christ, by joining the human family,
has subjected Himself to the consequences of the flesh
and at the same time introduced into it
the principle of redemption ...

The joy of Christmas is the intuition
that all limitations to growth
into higher states of consciousness have been overcome.
The Divine light cuts across all darkness, prejudice, preconceived ideas,
prepackaged values, false expectations, phoniness and hypocrisy.

It presents us with the truth.

To act out of the truth is to make Christ grow
not only in ourselves, but in others. ...

'Now is the time of salvation,' that is,
now is the time when the whole of the Divine mercy is available.

Now is the time to risk further growth. ...
As we turn our gaze toward the Babe in the crib,
our inmost being opens to the new consciousness
that the Babe has brought into the world.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

