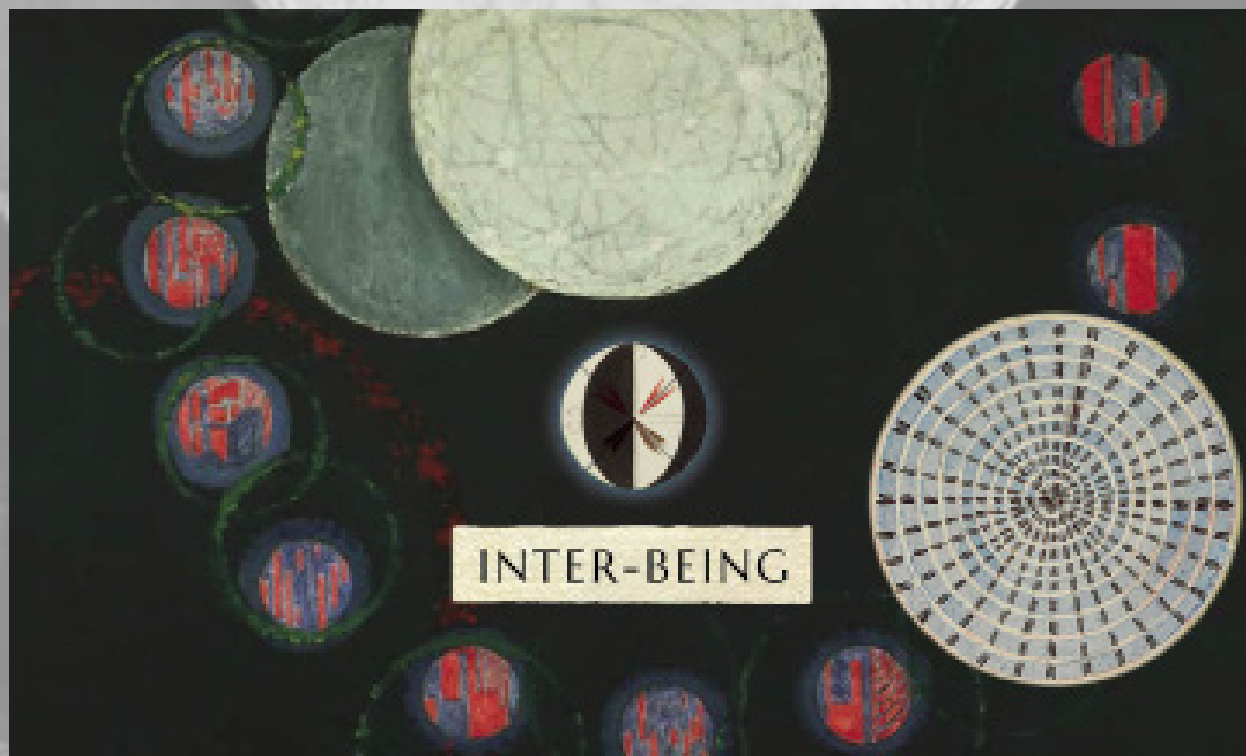




# THE MARK

May 2022  
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# CENTER BEING

BY PETER HAAS

Christ is our Center!

Everything else is in service to this Center. Everything, including prayer and especially silent, meditative prayer, frequently named Centering Prayer.

What I have learned on my spiritual journey into and through meditative prayer methods is that no practice of prayer, nor path of spiritual practice, is greater than its Source. The method serves the master. All prayer is prelude.

Methods of prayer, modes of prayer, all manner of praying – these sacred, profound, beloved friends – are first and foremost, simple servants. They are all humble and gentle means by which the living Christ, can become available to us. Like the finger pointing to the moon, our preferred prayer practice, no matter how dialed-in, only points to Christ our Center. Our practice is *not* the Center. Just as the finger is not the moon.

This also means that at the heart of all prayer, especially meditative, silent prayer, there isn't just emptiness or a void, even

if that is part of one's experience. At the heart of prayer, in the very ground of the void, is relationship.

Yes, sometimes, in some seasons of our spiritual journey, our prayer life may feel fruitless, dark and empty. Yet the emptiness is like a deep passageway in a cave, simply an opening into new territory, through which a deeper and fuller way of relating and living can occur. Perhaps it feels empty because we are invited to let go of some or all of the comforting fullness of our self and its stories and attachments. This is the baggage we're carrying along on our way through life.

Through this opening – this dying, this unencumbering of self, this letting go – a more mature relating becomes available to us. The relating with the One we name God – our Ground through Christ, the Word and by the presence and action of the silent Spirit. From this silence of the Center, by way of the sacred, behold, words birth forth! We hold onto these words for our life, and they hold onto us.

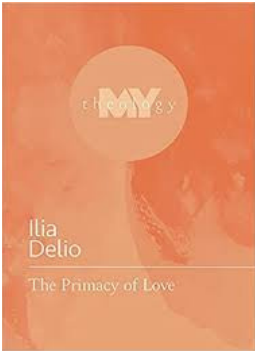
Democritus wrote that “the cause of coming-into-being of all things is the vortex.” Silence is a kind of vortex, a meeting place that both encircles and spirals forth. Like a quasar birthing stars, the silence of the Christ-Center births words for us to live by – words to understand mysteries – words to feed upon during faith-famines and dark nights. This is one reason why the living faith tradition confesses that *the Word of God is living and active* (Hebrews 4:12), and why Jesus pairs the Word of God with eating the bread of life (John 6:35).

Silence is not the pinnacle of spiritual maturity because it mutes us. Rather, silence is the fecund depths of spiritual maturity; because through this silence, an opening unfolds. A space for grace that enables the Word of God to be spoken to us, to be heard by us, and to again create in and through us a deeper connection and relationality to God, to Cosmos, to creation, to our self and to our beloveds.

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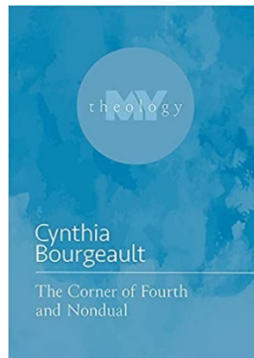
# Book Look



The Fortress Press *My Theology* series is a lovely and accessible collection of essays written from a more personal side, versus academic. Two recent contributions to the series include teachers near and dear to us: Ilia Delio and Cynthia Bourgeault. Both essays are under one hundred pages yet overflowing with accessible and practical wisdom.

The titles of each slim book hints at the core teaching contained. Ilia's focus on *The Primacy of Love* and Cynthia's focus on non-duality in the world, inspired from Merton's experience on the corner of Fourth and Walnut in Louisville, KY: *The Corner of Fourth and Nondual*.

Of particular note is Cynthia's chapter that shares the title of the book. Her discussion on the distinction between Christian non-duality and others is exceptional and very helpful in rooting the Christian perspective in relationality. She sums up her belief with three powerful maxims: the redemptive reality of suffering, the endurance of the personal, and the scandal of particularity. If you have ever struggled with the conundrum of the one and the many, Cynthia's brief essay goes a long way for giving intellectually guidance toward a Christian, Trinitarian and evolutionary way forward.




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The silent depths turn us into the ground in which the seed of God's living and active Word takes root and grows, producing the fruit of wisdom and love in every season (Psalm 1).

Two decades of silent, meditative prayer practice have instructed my heart to understand that the silence is useful only to the extent that it enkindles God

devotion and unites us more keenly and closely to the living Christ.

The silence is only as useful as the silence does. As the silence infuses a joyful awe, it calls forth a kindred care toward all, and a healing ministry of wholeness binding the many into the One.

When the silence kneels to the Word, silence then serves its masters well. 



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## INTER-BEING

We must ... set ourselves  
to be aware of the respect  
to which material objects  
are entitled.

If we learn to respect,  
to have a conscious, intentional  
contact with material objects, we  
shall be fulfilling  
one of the duties

which has been laid upon man.  
... How are we related to these  
various things that we use?

Everyone who has had training  
in some art or craft or profession  
knows that the tools of his trade  
are a sacred responsibility for  
him. ... The great part of our  
relationship with material objects  
is quite unconscious  
and insensitive.

We must set ourselves to make it  
more conscious, more sensitive,  
to remember that we have that  
relationship, that we are the  
creators of things we use.  
We have this power over the  
material world.

How do we use it?

J. G. Bennett, "Material Objects,"  
*The Sherborne Theme Talks Series #3*

*Now and always may Christ be magnified in my body,  
whether by life or death.* Philippians 1:20

## ANNUAL AIM: ARISING AS EMBODIED LIFE

EVERYTHING BELONGS BY ANA GALLO

"To be" is to inter-be.

You cannot just be by yourself alone.  
You have to inter-be with every other thing.  
This sheet of paper is, because everything else is.

Thich Nhat Hanh,  
*The Heart of Understanding*

*Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be  
rejected when received with thanksgiving, for it is made  
holy by the invocation of God in prayer.*

1 Timothy 4:4-5

In pondering what to write on  
the topic of Inter-Being, I knew  
that I couldn't possibly do it alone.  
I needed to read more, to listen  
more, and do some research. At the  
same time, I knew that I needed to  
let go of the "doing" and instead to  
just "be." I could go by the shores  
of the lake and practice drawing a  
simple leaf for eight hours in the  
form of *Lectio Divina* as James  
Finley speaks about in one of his

podcasts. Instead, I began to just  
pray, knowing that somewhere  
inside me existed the words that  
would come. I also knew that I  
needed to be very present, very still,  
and just feel into the responsibility  
I had been assigned.

Very soon after, I remembered  
a recent experience when on my  
way out the door to run errands, I  
saw an unfinished painting that I  
had stuck in the garage. Something

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inside told me not to get distracted with these not-so-important errands, but to stay home and paint. I listened to this voice, got out my paints and brushes, hung the painting on a wall, and started going at it. I had just gotten news that my ex-husband's daughter had gone into labor with her first child, but didn't realize that this event was influencing my actions. As I painted, the work became softer and softer and I kept making oval shaped movements with my bare hands, rags and paint onto the canvas. I remember asking the paint tubes whether they were the next one to be used or not and listened to their wisdom. The colors were ones I had not used before, being more pastel in nature. For the first time in my short painting career, I knew clearly and without hesitation when this painting was finished. I put the paint down and looked at it. At that very moment, her father called to tell me that a baby girl had just been born. Needless to say, that painting belonged to that little soul. I don't know how good the painting was, but I do know that it came from somewhere deeper than I had ever experienced before. It had come from a place of complete surrender. My hands made it so, and my

hands were just following my heart, present to the very moment of being one with the paint, the canvas, the movement of my hands, and Nevada's contractions.

I have had this experience before and after, a losing of myself and being one with what is – so present with that very moment where everything belongs. This has also happened during Centering Prayer when I am aware that my body is there, but there is no sense of time or anything other than what is.

“One of the things that Centering Prayer, as it deepens, will affect is our intuition of the oneness of the human family, and indeed, the oneness of all creation. As one moves into one's own inmost being, one comes into contact with what is the inmost being of everyone else. Although each of us retains his or her own unique personhood, we are necessarily associated with the Divine – human person who has taken the whole human family to himself in such a way as to be the inmost reality of each individual member of it. And so, when one praying in one's inmost being, in one's Spirit, one is praying, so to speak, in everyone else's Spirit.”  
Contemplative Outreach News,

Winter 1997

Inter-Being is our belonging to ourselves, to Mother Nature, it is our response to our world from our hearts. Thich Nhat Hanh explains it so eloquently in *The Heart of Understanding*,

“If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud, there will be no rain; without rain, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, we cannot make a paper. The cloud is essential for the paper to exist. If the cloud is not here, the sheet of paper cannot be here either. So we can say that the cloud and the paper inter-are ... If we look into this sheet of paper even more deeply, we can see the sunshine in it. If the sunshine is not there, the forest cannot grow. In fact, nothing can grow. Even we cannot grow without sunshine. And so, we know that the sunshine is also in this sheet of paper. The paper and the sunshine inter-are ... Everything co-exists with this sheet of paper. That is why I think the word inter-be should be in the dictionary. “To be” is to inter-be. You cannot just be by yourself alone. You have to inter-be with every other thing. This sheet of paper is, because

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everything else is ... as thin as this sheet of paper is, it contains everything in the universe in it."

The day after reading this passage in the Sunday bulletin at The Church of Conscious Harmony, I listened to Tara Brach quote the exact passage. In her talk, she encouraged us to feel into four different ways of re-connecting and therefore experiencing Inter-Being:

With our natural world and all the sacredness that animates it.

With people. All of those we know and not know.

To experience our belonging through the flow of time.

And finally to attend to the living awareness that is opening in us.

What we are in this moment is created by infinite other expressions of life: our parents, the moon cycles, what we ate or read or listened to, and our conscious awareness to our hearts' aspirations. I hear a call to widen my identity through these explorations.

How do I activate my belonging to the earth and what prevents my engagement with the natural world?

I remember when I was a child growing up in El Salvador that I would spend countless hours playing literally inside a bush in my grandfather's yard. Pretending that bush was my store, multiple

clients would come and purchase goods from me as I would hand over all they needed. The branches and twigs of that bush were my store's counter, adding machine, and on and on. I spent hours riding on large branches of a tree as if it were my horse going to distant lands that only existed in my imagination. The natural world was my playmate. The earth was never "other." I belonged to the earth and the earth belonged to me. I widen my identity when I know that the same life that animates the trees animates me. We inter-are.

Perhaps the closest I get to that now is when I swim at Barton Springs and sometimes lose myself in my every stroke. I do not know where my body ends and the water begins. For milliseconds, sometimes, the spirit of the water moves through me as I move through the water.

How do I widen my belonging in regards to others?

We are all facing the same hard times together and we have been created by the same common Father. How do I relate my struggles with the struggles of others? The Work guides us to never "internally consider" and always "externally consider." I re-connect when I think of all of those who serve and give their life to serving. When I see the skills that others have and

I might not have. When I listen to my neighbor's inability to sleep and just try to be in his shoes without judgement. When I work on a project and know how ill prepared I am and have to ask for help. When I notice being angry at a person and I stop and see the exact same thing in myself. I then feel compassion for the other, and myself. When I dig into my feelings of resentment towards my relative and begin to instead remember all that I love about her.

I enlarge my belonging when I remember the fellowship at CCH, our desire to confess to each other in our journey groups, and our daily, monthly and yearly aims that hold us together. Together, we desire to learn, transform and bare the unpleasant manifestations of others.

How do I widen my identity and feel my belonging through the flow of time?

When I remember that I am a continuation of my ancestors and the result of the love of thousands, I have gratitude that life has been passed to me. When I call on my ancestors for support or guidance and I am still and receptive in my openness, gratitude and remembering that I belong to an infinite flow of life, past and future. When I hold a pen and over paper I design what is to become, there I honor my parents who afforded

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me the privilege of becoming an architect.

“Never forget that your children are your elders in Universe time. They’ve come to a more complete universe than you will ever understand except through their eyes.”

Buckminster Fuller

And it’s not just my child who opens my eyes to far more than I can comprehend. I have the privilege of teaching Sunday school to the children at CCH and those hours are sacred. In preparation for the class, we study and memorize the Bible stories as written by Jerome W. Berryman. The way he has written them is perfectly done for the children to be left with wonder. When I have told those stories with presence and wonder in me and the room is quiet with their full attention, it is like magic. In those moments, I am a child, I am in wonder, I am one with all. I transport myself to the times of Jesus, I am in that story as are the children.

Another magical moment that I can recall happened in a museum in Dallas. I stood next to a sculpture of Picasso, and experienced something different than any other time I had been at a museum. I went back in time, and could almost see Picasso’s hands touching the sculpture so

many years before, and here I was in its presence. The day before I had stood in line for hours waiting to get an embrace from Amma, a living saint dedicated to alleviating the pain and suffering with her selfless love and compassion for all beings. When she embraced me, she whispered in my ear numerous times in Spanish, “Querida”, “Querida”, “Querida”, “Querida” which means beloved. Yes, I was God’s beloved, Amma is God’s beloved, Picasso is God’s beloved, and the sculpture is God’s beloved. Everything in that moment belonged to each other; one couldn’t be without the other.

Another example of finding the magic happened towards the end of a multi-day workshop. We were given water and no solid food for around 36 hours before being taken to an unknown town with nothing. No phones, no identity, only the clothes we were wearing. We were to only speak the words “I am thirsty” or “I am hungry” and to see what was revealed for the coming hours. I was hungry, very hungry, and couldn’t get myself to say those words to anybody. A part of me was so ashamed to approach people and ask for help. I followed people with their doggie bags. I watched a homeless person reach into a dumpster. A seagull took a piece of bread I was about to grab. There we were, all united in hunger! And to my surprise and delight, I was

given just enough of what I needed to go on a little longer, thanks to God’s infinite flow! I was no different than every homeless, cold and hungry creature then and there.

And finally, I belong when I attend to the living awareness that is opening in me.

I belong when I sense into the quality of tenderness, and when I self-inquire without needing to answer. Am I more kind and caring? Who am I becoming? Are my acts aligned with my heart and Spirit? How can I use my skills, express them, engage with them? What is Love asking of me? What is Love asking from me as part of this sacred body?

“When I give myself in service and ministry, the act of self-donating love to God, permeates throughout the world in ways we don’t understand. It isn’t just that our life is interwoven with the angels and the Saints in God, but our lives are interwoven with all of humanity. We are all woven into each other in the love of God. Unseen ministry and Fidelity to prayer touches the world in ways we do not understand how.” James Finley, *Turning to the Mystics*

I pray that my life be an expression of God’s Love in action. Amen. ☸

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# ELDER WISDOM: HONORING OUR FATHERS AND MOTHERS

I AM, I WISH, I CAN WORK      BY GAY BULLARD

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In looking back through my Time Body, I see a very different woman occupying this body and mind from the one who walked in the door of the Church of Conscious Harmony several decades ago and met the Gurdjieff Work and the work of Fr. Thomas Keating. At that time, I had gone down many dark alleys and one-way streets, looking for that magical “thing” that was going to turn me into a happy person. That person was full of her stories, her resentments and her judgement of others. Now, several decades later, I can’t really identify any major epiphanies or big shifts in my state of consciousness – the changes have come in very small increments, so small to be hardly noticeable. And yet, everything is different. Here I am, not just happy, but sometimes even overcome with joy.

It has been difficult trying to explain what has happened to effect these changes, and what these changes even are. What exactly is different?

What has the Work of Inner Christianity changed in me? Like many others, I undertook the Work journey not really understanding or appreciating what the Gurdjieff Work was and what it meant. There was an underlying belief that it would help make me (my personality), better in some way. I could observe very quickly that there were many things in me to “work” on, which needed improving or changing. I observed that most of the small daily aims that I would make would be forgotten by 10 o’clock and I would have forgotten my aim by the next day. My big aims were simply flowery words without much real meaning for me. Now I see that it was never a “self-improvement project.” It is a way to clear away the negative emotions and lessen Gay’s personality so that more God can shine through.

Another observation was that there were so many, many things to learn that it could seem overwhelming. In Maurice

Nicoll’s *Commentaries*, I learned that the Work takes “a long time” and that one needs to be patient. The one thing that I did come in with was a deep hunger – a yearning for something deeper and more authentic to believe in and live by. I instinctively knew that the ministers, Tim Cook and his wife Barbara, had that something that I wanted and I was willing to hang in there until it began to make sense to me.

I was informed by the profound Work saying that “my being draws my life.” It was one of the first aphorisms that I used to hang onto every day. If it is my being that is causing this problem, or drawing this event to me, then I can no longer blame anyone else. This was a huge shift in consciousness for me. Little by little, in using Work aphorisms like this one, my attitudes slowly began to change. I began to keep a small notebook of these useful truths that I came across in reading the *Commentaries*.

There were many, many other


Wisdom books that came into my life through the Church community. Each one held truths that began to formulate something solid in my being. The Sunday morning talks, the Work classes, the Second Line Groups (as these small groups were called), my Work partners, and the whole community held me in place while God was chipping gently away at the negative gunk.

At the same time, the community was beginning to practice Centering Prayer. I had never meditated, but this was something that I was drawn to right away. The ability to let things simply drop away – to let go, let go, let go is the gift that Centering Prayer and Fr. Keating's wisdom has given me. I don't have to react to events, people or myself and it is such a relief. Even when there are times that my prayer practice is quite noisy, or when things seem dry, I know God is still in there working. It is in daily life that the fruits of the prayer become evident.

There is much, much more that needs to be chipped away, but I know now without a doubt that between the Work of Inner Christianity and Centering Prayer, and of course, the community – there is no doubt that change is still happening and will continue

to happen until I die.

In Cynthia Bourgeault's book, *Eye of the Heart*, she reminds that the heart of the Gurdjieff Work is Conscious Labor and Intentional Suffering. She says "... it is a continual inner effort, a continual altering of the mind, ways of taking everything, of habitual reactions. It can be as small an effort as noticing a typical negative emotion and not reacting, or a heroic struggle with addictions. It is not the scale of the undertaking but the honesty of the struggle that reverses the flow." So it is in the daily small events of my life that my Work lies.

Whatever "wisdom" I have to share does not come from me. There's always help coming down from Higher Centers and from the Conscious Circle of Humanity. All I did was my very small part in keeping my daily practice. And, of course, I certainly cannot say that I have reached any kind of finish line. As I am full into the last phase of my physical life, my wish is to have practiced the "letting go" to the point where I welcome everything, even the end of this life. And I know that this learning, this changing, will continue as long as I continue to be faithful to my practice of the Prayer and the Work. 

## MAY CALENDAR

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

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Adult Baptism Online Classes  
Saturdays May 14-Jun 4, 9-10:30am  
Register with office or on website.

Online Workshop led by Jim Reale  
"A Multi-Dimensional Approach  
to Centering Prayer"  
May 21 9am-3pm \$25 Register on website

Youth Baptism In-Person Classes  
Sundays May 22, May 29, 10-11:30am  
Contact the office for more details.

Half-Day In-Person Centering Prayer Retreat  
May 25 1-5pm \$10 Preregister online

### MONTHLY

Caritas Donations  
1st Sundays  
Bring non-perishables to CCH or  
donate to [caritasofaustin.org](http://caritasofaustin.org)

### WEEKLY

Sundays  
†Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am  
\*Intercessory Prayer 9am  
†Worship Service 10-11:30am  
Youth Program (preK-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 via internet; links are on our website.  
†In person and online.

# LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

## THE POWER OF THREE CENTERED PRAYER BY NATHAN JONES

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### **Work Idea:** Three Centered Prayer

Prayer in our culture has often been associated with supplication. The Work offers a broader depth for understanding a practice of prayer. It speaks of a three centered prayer that incorporates the Intellectual, Emotional and Instinctive-Moving centers. A valuable example of a three centered prayer is the lodge ceremony of the Lakota that combines the steam and sweat with song, solicitation and thanking.

The power of prayer cuts both ways, a quality that is oft forgotten. It appears that we have the ability to co-manifest reality. When engaged in a three centered prayer directed purposely, we can rightfully expect a level of reaction. The Work speaks of this when it describes prayer as a “response to request.” While we must monitor how we pray, it is equally important to observe what we worry over, fret about

and fear. Those anxieties and concerns that operate in the background have the ability to come into being as a result of the lawful power of prayer. Yes, we can create the very event that we want least to come to pass. A mirror to the three centered prayer is a three centered worry, where our mind, emotions and even physical body incarnate this worry. Thereby forcing it out into the energetic level of the universe tempting it to become manifest. *Thoughts in mind produce like in kind.* Through self-observation, we have the ability to neutralize the negativity. We can catch and prevent the manifesting of fears.

We are parents of and to reality, we are co-creators. The power of a three centered prayer informs us of this truth.

**Work Source:** “... it was said that the Universe can be taken as a *response to request*. People request, and the Universe in all its full and total reality, outer and

inner, responds according to the request ... I wish to draw your attention to this fact: many people are getting responses to requests which they do not understand they are making. If the Universe, visible and invisible, material and psychological, gross and fine, as apprehended externally by the senses and internally by the mind and heart, is response to request, then you will see how important it is to realize what kind of *requests* you are making in order to understand why you get the response, from any side of life, that you are actually getting. The Work says: “Your being attracts your life.” Do you see the connection? Without knowing it, a man or woman may be making requests and so getting a response from the total Universe that he or she does not like. They see the response but do not see what excites the response, what it is in themselves that attracts it. People, in other words, may be asking for trouble without being

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*“Again, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

aware that they are. They only see the result – that is, the response. They see only effects, not causes. To think only from effects is one thing. It is how mechanical people think. To think from causes is another thing. It belongs to more conscious thinking.” Nicoll, *Commentaries*, p. 154

**Application:** It you were dead certain that you were a co-creator to reality and your thoughts manifest in the physical form, how would this impact that which you think about?

**Further Resource:** *Let me tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Again, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you are praying, if you hold anything against anyone, let it go, so that God may forgive you.* Mark 11:23-25 🕒

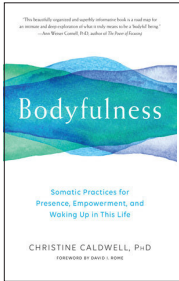
# COMMUNITY PRACTICE: WRITING LETTERS

Seneca wrote to his friend affirming that “I never receive a letter from you without being instantly in your company.” Letter writing is an ancient art, especially dear to those who aim to nurture and care for others at the spiritual level. This month’s community practice is letter writing, that is handwriting messages on a piece of paper or card, rather than typing or emailing. Handwriting helps slow us down. Contact with paper and pen helps us ground the energy in a tangible, embodied way.

Explore writing a letter to a family member, a friend, a colleague, and a stranger this month. See what comes up for you. See what comes back to you. 🕒

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# COMMUNITY READING MAY-JUNE



Join us as we continue our exploration of our annual aim theme *Arising as Embodied Life*. Christine Caldwell’s excellent and practical book, *Bodyfulness: Somatic Practices for Presence, Empowerment and Waking Up in This Life* can help us all explore embodied practices that support our Work and spiritual journey. 🕒

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# MAY SERMON THEMES THE POWER OF THREE

- |        |                                    |
|--------|------------------------------------|
| May 1  | The Power of Three                 |
| May 8  | Three Centered Parenting           |
| May 15 | Three Centered Communication       |
| May 22 | Three Centered Conflict Resolution |
| May 29 | Three Centered Worship             |



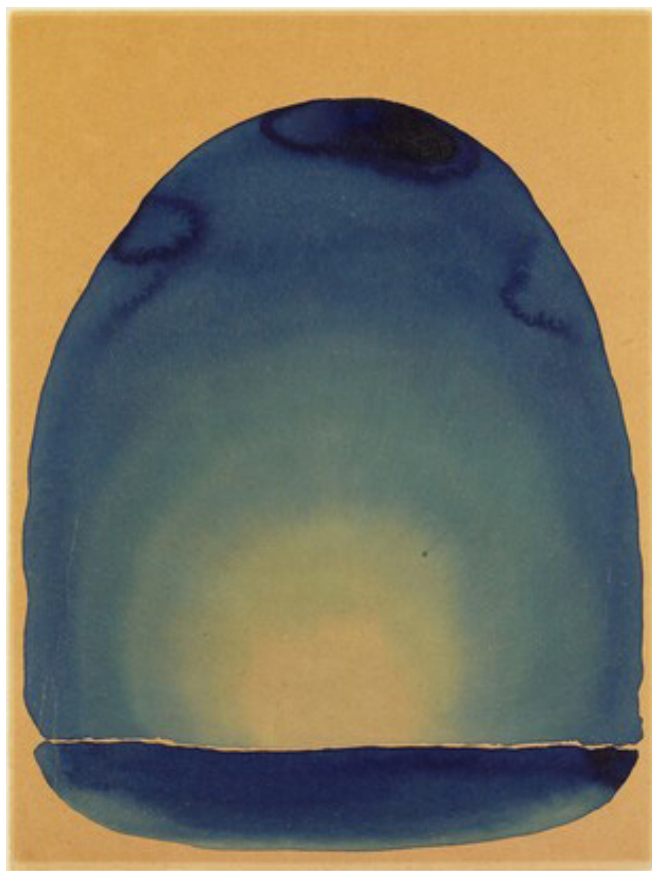
THE CHURCH of CONSCIOUS HARMONY

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Georgia O'Keefe, *Light Coming on The Plains No. II*

## THE GRACE OF ASCENSION

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God;  
believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so, would I have told you  
that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you,  
I will come again and will take you to myself,  
that where I am you may be also.

And you know the way to where I am going.

John 14:1-4

The Ascension is our return to the Source and our  
entrance into the bosom of the Father. We enter into the  
house of God as a permanent state of consciousness, even  
in this life, by being always aware of the divine ground  
within us and the spaciousness that has no end.

Thomas Keating, *The Gift of Life*

