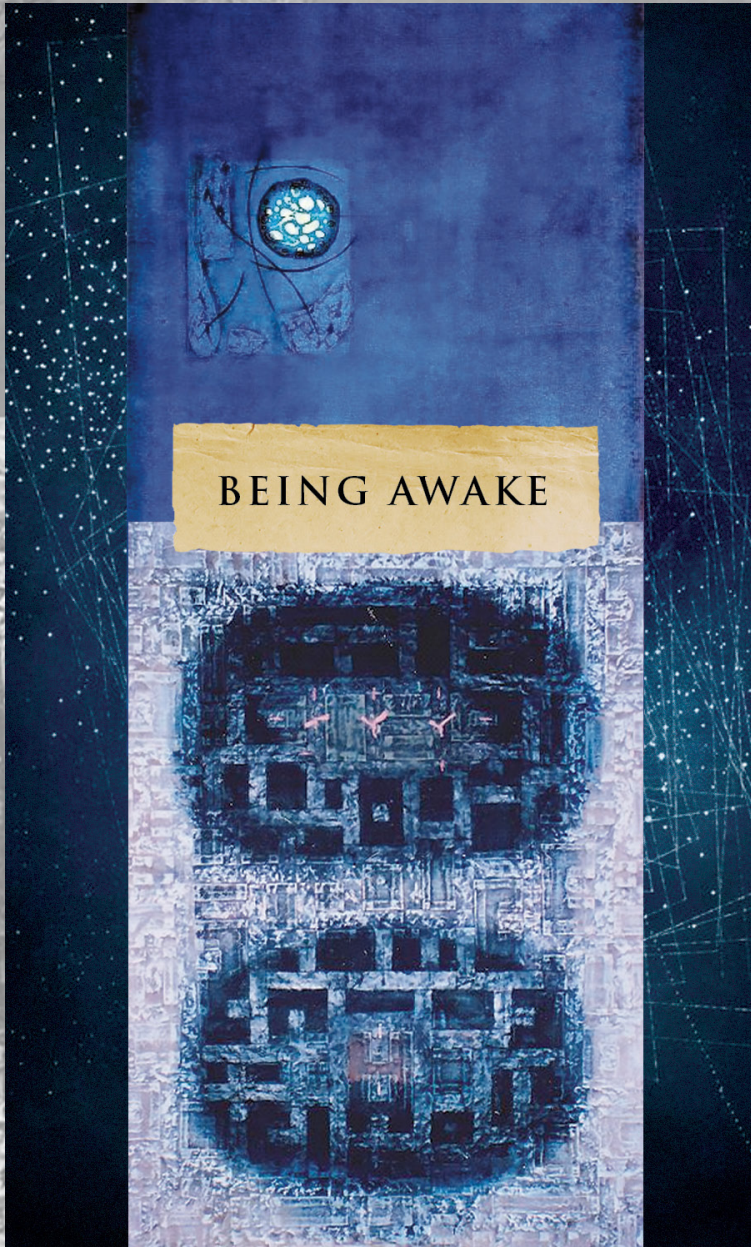


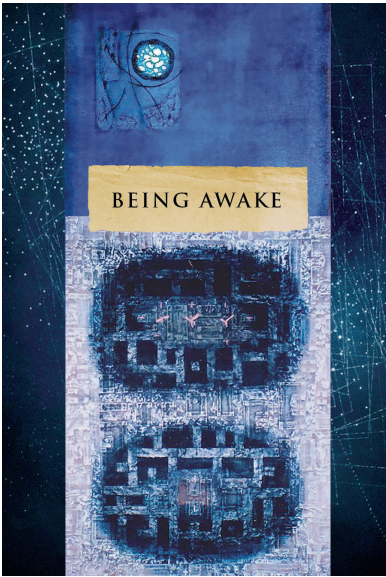
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The Mark

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





Holy, holy, holy ... the whole earth is filled with God's glory! Isaiah 6:3

ANNUAL AIM: HOLY REMEMBERING

BEING AWAKE BY PETER HAAS

What does it mean
to “remember oneself?”
It is not to remember
the person I represent –
my body, my position in life, my
obligations.

It is to become conscious
of my inner being.
I wish to be whole, unified, *one*,
what I essentially am.

Jeanne de Salzmann,
Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff

I walk down the mountain
and see the snow, the pine trees,
the blue sky, with different eyes.

My lungs fill with deep –
different – breaths.
I sense the spring in my step
and I begin to sing.
I know that now *I am* –
I remember myself.

John Fuchs, *Forty Years After Gurdjieff*

*Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ will give you light.*

Ephesians 5:14

Poet Thomas McGrath conveys a subtle and sapiential teaching in several lines of his poem, *The Tourists*. As I read the poem, I immediately related it to this year's annual theme of Holy Remembering. Here are the lines, slightly adapted for our annual aim:

The place they seek,
Brother/Sister, they cannot
remember. They cannot
remember, Brother/Sister,
because their hearts are too
empty... It is himself/herself,
Brother/Sister, that each of
us is looking for.

The Work of Inner Christianity's diagnosis of what is “wrong” with humankind, is partially that we are asleep. Among the core ideas of sleep is the idea that we are *not* remembering ourselves at many such ordinary moments. That indeed we have forgotten something vital in not remembering this other sought for “place” or state of being.

The poem says it all so powerfully. It is worth repeating to oneself several times. See what line lingers to you. Feel into it. For me, I am haunted by the notion that: “It is myself that I am looking for.”

By self, I mean my deepest truth, my essence, the wholeness that I was created for and that my heart can be filled with overwhelming joy.

I think that aptly describes much of the first half of the spiritual journey where we traverse beyond the habitual, rigid, ego-centric self-system. In the words of Fr. Thomas Keating, we are looking for our true self. In the words of the Work, we are looking for Real I. In the words of Bernadette Roberts, we are looking for Christ, our center.

The first half of the spiritual journey has much to do with purgation, elimination, and transformation. The desert monastic tradition emphasized that each of us needs to work on our besetting thoughts, or what modern psychologists call hot cognitions. We need to make efforts to not give into and express such hot cognitions such as anxiety, fear, anger, rage, and so on, by cultivating being cool.

Modern therapy says that we can practice cooling off the hot cognitions before they become hot. It seems to me that this is what we are doing in Centering Prayer. We are preparing our nervous system, as well as consenting to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, to

be a little emptier of self so to be filled with more of the presence of Christ – which is our deepest origin and furthest destiny.

The other line from McGrath's poem that speaks to me is the phrase:

“they cannot remember because their hearts are too empty.”

This speaks to me of the second half of the spiritual journey – the process of illumination and union.

By that I mean perhaps, paradoxically, it is a good thing that our hearts are increasingly empty, so they are actually empty of negative emotions, personality reactivity, or simply empty of the self with all its permeating, undulating, multiplying manifestations. With this kind of emptying that occurs in the first half of the spiritual journey, the crowded psychological fullness of the heart lessens, and in the emptying, an opening occurs, and Christ arises once again in us.

In short, perhaps it is a good thing that the heart is empty and can't remember all that was once there: the energies of falseness, or incompleteness, and all its manifestations that form our accumulated, condensed, barnacled, buffered, ossified, personality. In

other words, our human matrix of reactivity. This emptiness, and loss of self, points to the grace of what we will explore next year more completely – the grace of Holy Forgetting.

For now, we can tie this together with another wise poet, Emily Dickinson, the mystic of Amherst, who reminds us that the best things in life can't be acquired with money because “the best things in life cost everything on the marketplace of life.” The price, this cost, she says, “is precisely an existence.” As Bernadette Roberts reminds us, the marketplace is where, from the unitive state, we spend our self, giving it all away. This is the way of sacrificial love. The way of being emptied in crucifixion so to be filled at Pentecost to serve the world with love and wisdom from above.

And so, we can wonder – what payments am I making to be awake? To serve other's awakening? To serve the awakening influences of the grace of Wisdom in all its many expressions? As Gurdjieff puts it, “have I paid for my arising?” Have I paid an existence? And what I am doing with the gift of this awakened life – for myself, for our community, for wisdom's light itself? ☉

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

REMEMBERING SELF BY KATHRYN NICHOLS

To practice Remembering Self, I must first distinguish which Self I am invited to remember. As students of the Work of Inner Christianity, we have often used the convention of a capital ‘S’ to indicate we are talking about the higher Self and a lower case ‘s’ to indicate all the multiple selves or ‘I’s in our personality. These personality ‘I’s or life ‘I’s can easily be found in times when I observe self-love, self-centeredness, self-justifying, self-consciousness, and self-deprecation, to name a few with which my personality is quite familiar. It is the Higher Self we are to remember.

Maurice Nicoll helps me understand the difference: “... you will see that all real Self-Remembering is simply forgetting yourself, your ordinary self, your ordinary negative ‘I’s, your ordinary forms of internal considering, and all the rest of it, and feeling certain that some further state of yourself

exists above all this personal uproar that takes place all day long in each one of you.” (*Commentaries*, p. 898)

How Do I Wake Up?

For a personality that goes too easily to a feeling of not good enough or less than, I am grateful the Work only accuses us of being asleep. One way for me to wake up from this psychological sleep is to realize that I am identified. Identification is when I put my entire sense of I into a feeling or thought that is, in reality, simply one of many and may be passing. For me, this is often a feeling of upset, a thought that I am right (and of course, the other is wrong and needs to hear my opinion), or a feeling of being wronged. These occurrences are most noticeable when I sense an unsettling amount of energy. Then I must make effort to separate from it by the classic Work expression of “This is not I.”

The teachings of Byron Katie

are useful when I realize I need to separate from those identified states of myself. When sensing I’m stuck in one of those, Katie’s Self-Inquiry questions about beliefs (thought/feeling/sensation) are most helpful, beginning with “Is this true?” and “Can you absolutely know that it’s true?” There’s more to the inquiry, but it usually doesn’t take long for me to realize there are many other ways to view the situation.

Many years back in my spiritual journey, I went to a counseling session with Tim Cook, our founding minister. My topic often tended toward what the Work calls “singing our song.” My song was how broken I was and how I didn’t seem to be progressing in my spiritual journey. Talk about a negative “affirmation!” Tim gave me a shock that has served me well ever since. He said that feeling the most broken was a form of reverse pride. From time to time after that session, I’d be visiting with Tim,

and he would remind me with something like “Remember when you didn’t think you could do this?” I also realized that my song of being so broken was a lack of faith that God couldn’t reach me.

How Do I Self-Remember?

I am a Child of God. This is a phrase I’ve heard ever since I’ve been at The Church of Conscious Harmony. It reminds me that there is a part of me, my truest part, my True Self, that is not buffeted by a multiplicity of ‘I’s or parts of my personality. It reminds me that I am made of star dust, made in the image of God, and have within a Divine Spark. This is my most often used method of Self-Remembering after I’ve uncritically self-observed and non-identified. It is perfect for the personality that early on thought God wasn’t working in my life.

Centering Prayer helps me feel I’m beloved by God. Old memories of a judging God are in the past. I can hear Fr. Thomas Keating saying anything more than 30 seconds of guilt is neurotic. In Fr. Keating’s *Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation*, I am reminded that “Our basic core of goodness is our True Self.” That is the Self I wish to Remember!

Being outdoors is another way

I practice Self-Remembering. I feel lifted to higher states when I spend time in nature. That is where I had my first experiences of feeling God. I feel my spirit move when I view vistas as well as when I sit quietly and study the tiniest of flora and fauna at my feet. Many times, when I need to wake up from my identification, I can simply take a walk outside, and my perspective can shift.

Another gift I received was from Barbara Cook, our other founding minister. During a counseling session, when I was feeling anxious about my daughters, she suggested that I think of all the other mothers/parents in the world that are also worrying for their offspring. Practicing this is Self-Remembering; it almost immediately lifts me from wallowing in my individual story and provides a feeling of compassion for and oneness with my fellow humans. It takes me from seeing life on the horizontal plane in a particular moment to a higher perspective, rising up the vertical.

Doing my Work in the company of others practicing the Work – what we call the Second Line of the Work – is a form of Self-Remembering. I am so grateful for the community we have at CCH, both in-person and remotely.

When we are vulnerable and authentic in each other’s company, I believe we can separate from our identification with our many life ‘I’s and experience the oneness and love of each other.

Jesus invites us *to become like little children* (Matthew 18:3). In the children’s book *The Velveteen Rabbit* by Margery Williams, I feel the story is a perfect parable for becoming Real (Real I), realizing our Children of God-ness, and accepting love in community.

“‘It doesn’t happen all at once,’ said the Skin Horse. ‘You become. It takes a long time. That’s why it doesn’t happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby. But these things don’t matter at all, because once you are Real, you can’t be ugly, except to people who don’t understand.’”

May I continue to Work to know myself, to understand and love my fellow humans, and feel more fully the love God has for this Child of God. 🕊

But whenever you pray, go into your inner room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6

REFLECTIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF CENTERING PRAYER

STILLNESS AND THOUGHTS

BY NORMA LAIRD

Sitting in silence, whether it is with six people from my Journey Group at Theosis Chapel, with 36 people over the internet, with 30 people at Cedarbrake retreat center, with the congregation at Church, with 12 women at Hobby women's prison, by myself at home, at Enchanted Rock, by the lake, or in the Cedar forest, is a treasure and a mystery. We are told *when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.* (Matthew 6:6) What is it about the silence, this inner room, that is so magnetic, mysterious, and leans towards the magical and miraculous?

When I was first introduced to meditation-prayer by Tim and Barbara Cook at Unity Church, it facilitated a remarkable shift in

my perspective. I felt something in the silence that was a release from opinions, judgments, chatter, and the stress of the craziness of my life, and it opened up a radically new way of relating to God, not pleading to an entity out there, but a relatedness to an indwelling spirit. Sitting in silence would become an intrinsic part of keeping me sane. Many times, I felt like I didn't have enough time to sit in silence ... the kids needed me or I was overwhelmed with chores, so I would skip the practice of sitting in silence. More times than not, it was a bad decision. Nothing would jive. I would think it was the kids being fussy or too much to do. Whatever I blamed, I finally realized that the problem was me not being centered in something greater than myself. The silence back then was elevating, but also a practical

tool to make my life flow.

A lot has transpired since that first dive into the silence. When I reconnected with Tim and Barbara at The Church of Conscious Harmony, I delved into Fr. Thomas Keating's work and Centering Prayer. I had used sitting in the silence as a lifeboat and now it became a way of life. My understanding of the silence through Centering Prayer is ever evolving and the experience itself is multi-faceted and takes many shapes. One day, I can sit with a clear mind and feel a light energy pulsing in my heart. Another day, I may have a million trite thoughts floating through my head vying for my attention. The next Centering Prayer may be completely vacant of thoughts, but with no sense of connectedness. Other times, I may have a million physical distractions taking me

in and out of silent prayer. There is no right or better way to do Centering Prayer. It is just what it is—waiting in a space of the Great Mystery of God as I know that being.

The truth is that God is there even when my mind wants to hijack the moment. My mind is a trickster that likes to be in control. In the practice, I yield the thoughts, shift my focus to my sacred word, my sacred connection to the Divine, and let all of those exhausting thoughts, opinions, regrets, hurts, judgments, worries, and imaginings melt away. They are put on the sidelines as a vast and beautiful space opens. Regardless of the many ways the Centering Prayer experience presents itself, the result of lightness and a sense of seeing beauty in the ordinary almost always follows, even if it is hours after sitting in Centering Prayer.


Fr. Keating talks about Centering Prayer as a divine therapist. My experience of his wisdom is that the practice not only allows me to make

space and time for God, but also creates a practice of distancing my personality from my being. As personality starts playing second fiddle to my inner being, all of the complaints, judgments and opinions start to lose power and steam (not that I don't have them, but I lose my attachment to them). Some become quite obviously trite and ridiculous. Hurts and regrets gain a new perspective as events that occurred are now seen with no innate meanness towards me. It is just what happened. It's like Spirit is showing me to just give that thinking up; good riddance to bad rubbish as my mom used to say. In that new space, love has room to grow and in healing moments, I have a sweet sense of being deeply loved. Centering Prayer is an experience of God as a journey into greater love, compassion and healing.

It is a practice that has the appearance of doing nothing. On the contrary Centering Prayer has a powerful, magnetic quality. Once I developed a taste for the silence, there seemed no straying from it. It always has beckoned

me back. Centering Prayer opens the heart and creates space for an abiding peace and love; it is manna for the soul, a way of feeding on the spiritual energy of the heavens. For this reason, people love Centering Prayer retreats. It's like getting a supercharge of love and peace. As Mary Anne Best told me once, "it's just good spiritual hygiene" to do a silent retreat once a year.

Kahlil Gibran writes in *The Prophet* about Self-Knowledge, "Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights ... the hidden well-spring of your soul ... the treasure of your infinite depths would be revealed ... for self is a sea boundless and measureless."

When I connect with the Silence, I feel the boundlessness of my soul, myself in the midst of something outside of space and time. It is the spark of the stars and infinity within me. The Divine is a part of me and Centering Prayer allows me a glimpse into that beautiful realm. 

SCRIPTORIUM

THE AWAKENING SPIRIT BY PETER HAAS

Centuries of monastic tradition and wisdom teach us the importance of reading scripture in a prayerful, slow, attentive way. This method came to be known as *lectio divina*. In addition to the monk's personal prayerful reading of scripture, the community of monks gather throughout the day to hear and ponder scripture. Many monasteries also set aside a special room for the hearing and reflecting upon scripture, and a specific time during the week. They often called this room the scriptorium, where they studied and copied scriptures. A related room was called the Chapter room, where monks and abbots would gather to receive focused teaching, beyond the daily lectionary reading, a teaching rooted in spiritual theology or history, or some other matter related to the spiritual journey.

This new column inaugurates an aim to replicate the spirit of the monastic scriptorium. Here, we will ponder the meaning of a scripture, usually one that is pertinent to the liturgical season or lectionary reading that pairs well with our

Church's monthly theme.

This month's scripture is taken from the story of Pentecost recorded in the Book of Acts chapter 2. Pentecost is a Greek word that literally means 50 days. The Christian Pentecost experience corresponds to the Jewish spring harvest festival known as the Feast of Weeks, or *Shavu'ot*, as described in Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 16, which occurs 50 days after Passover. Here is our scripture:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Of the many interesting and important ideas in this passage, one phrase arises for us to ponder. It is

the meaning of the words *rushing violent wind*. The Greek word here is from the root *pneo*, where we get the English word pneumatic. In Hebrew, the word for wind or breath is *ruah*, so you can hear the similarities in the languages: *pneuma* and *ruah*, and it's worth pointing out that both are feminine nouns. The Greek word *pneo* conveys the ideas of wind, air and breath, and it is clear by the adjectives used that this air or wind is moving. That is the key – it is living wind, moving wind, described by the adjectives rushing and violent. In Greek, *phero*, meaning to be carried and violent, and *bias*, meaning powerful or forceful, is poorly translated here in this version as violent.

Perhaps the inner meaning of this isn't so much about the physical movement of air or wind. Perhaps this is a beautiful way of speaking about the experience of feeling the presence of higher energies in the room arise. Literally, the force or power of wisdom itself is symbolized by the capacity to not only speak, but to speak in a new way and to understand others in a new way.

THE WORKSHOP

Welcome to our inaugural column of the Workshop, where we will ponder a question submitted by a participant of The Journey School. Answers are experiential, aiming to apply the Work of Inner Christianity ideas to their life in a practical way.

QUESTION: Can you help me understand why I fall asleep psychologically more easily in some situations over others? For example, when I visit my in-laws, I have observed that I am much more prone to become mechanical and unconscious than many other interactions or situations in my daily life.

ANSWER: The awareness of this difference of your being in different contexts and situations is very useful. Just noticing the different qualities of being, moods, dispositions, body language, facial expressions, inner sensations or inner taste in various situations is helpful and instructive Work.

Being different when with family is a frequent observation by many in the Work. Recall that even Jesus acknowledged the difficulty of being with family and friends. *A prophet is honored everywhere except in his own hometown and among his relatives and his own family.* (Mark 6:4) It turns out the roots of our family systems run very deep into our earliest formation. We can be gentle with ourselves when it comes to this deep layer of our psycho-spiritual formation. It was years in the making and isn't fully seen or changed quickly.

Inner Work is a gradual process. It takes years of self-observation and making aims, little by little, to show up differently, more from consciousness and Real I, than our mechanical sleep. Perhaps, we are mostly asleep where we have our ingrained patterns from childhood. Mostly, we are innocent about all this early formation, and nothing is so ingrained than our family relations.

Patience and making small, practical aims each time you visit with family is a helpful approach. Aim to be awake in one conversation, or for a part of one conversation. Aim not to take the bait with a specific person. Aim to be more verbal with someone you normally clam up around. In time, you will also observe that your Work away from your family will form your being so you will gradually show up with them as you are without them. In time, you will experience a deepening freedom from your centeredness, from your Real I; and this will be your state of being – no matter who you are with or what situation you are in. You will see that your time asleep lessens. Little by little, you will see that there is less reaction and little to no negative emotional expression, with words, silence or gestures. You will be the beginning of a new family line, healing the lineage and playing your part in a new future for your family line. 🕒

Submit a question for consideration to the Workshop to: minister@consciousharmony.org.

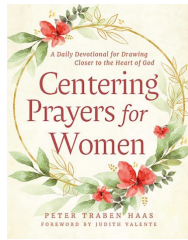
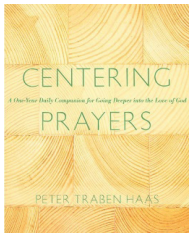
The presence of the higher energies brings a uniting power into contexts that are often occasions for division and depletion. From a wider-angle lens of the overall narrative of the Bible, Pentecost becomes the healing reversal of the language chaos that disrupted the social harmony symbolized in the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis chapter 11.

The takeaway for us is that the force of the higher presence symbolized by the wind brings about the awakening gift of Understanding symbolized by the tongues of fire, the ability to speak and to understand one another. The reason for this new capacity to speak and understand was to initiate the teachings of Jesus, now in a new way, beyond his physical presence. Without this capacity, the early Jesus movement and all its healing wisdom would never have flourished as it did.

What is blocking our understanding today? In a culture overwhelmed with confusion and conflict, we can ask for this higher force to help us speak and hear in new ways that unite in new possibilities, not just declare our positions. 🕒

BOOK LOOK

DAILY PRAYERS FOR CENTERING



In celebration of Mother's Day, Paraclete Press has published a ten year anniversary edition of Peter Traben Haas' *Centering Prayers*. This new edition, however, is curated with a view to celebrating the divine feminine. The prayers are brief and aim to provide a vestibule into your time of Centering Prayer.

Contemplative author Judith Valente provides a meaningful new preface and a woman's voice to *Centering Prayers for Women*. Judith also conveys deep appreciation for the monastic and contemplative traditions.

These prayers read more like poetry and come forth from the silence. The new edition makes a lovely gift for the women, sisters, mothers and grandmothers in your life. ☸

CENTERING PRAYER 6-DAY RETREAT

with Forgiveness/Welcoming
Prayer Presentations
led by Mary Dwyer

June 9-14
at Cedarbrake Renewal Center
\$800 includes meals & lodging
See details + register online

COMMUNITY READING

MAY-AUGUST

Our May through August community reading grounds us in the wisdom of Mr. Gurdjieff's leading student and friend, Jeanne de Salzmann. *The Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff* invites the reader into self-discovery. This profound book aids the encounter with the Real in each of us. If you have never read Madame de Salzmann before, consider reading in small sections, perhaps a page at a time or you may consider reading it like poetry or prayer. It is helpful to keep a notebook for recording insights, questions, and wonderings that arise through the book's wisdom. ☸

COMMUNITY PRACTICE

MAY-JUNE

EXPLORE YOUR GENEALOGY

While aligned with the Journey School curriculum, this invitation is less about in-depth historical or genealogical study, and more about becoming more aware of the family dynamics and patterns that have shaped your life. What is calling you to awaken? What needs to be worked with? See where you are led. There are many ways to this time body work, but one suggestion is to talk to your parents and grandparents about their understanding of their life and spiritual journey. Ask other relatives as well. Simply see what you see. Self-observe at the level of your family system – in the spirit of non-critical, non-judgmental kindness. Everything belongs and all is well. This practice is not about judgment; it is about understanding. ☸

MAY SERMON SERIES

REMEMBER THYSELF

- May 7 Remember Your Calling
- May 14 Remember Your Connection with the Divine Feminine
- May 21 Remember Your Suffering
- May 28 Pentecost Sunday, Remember Your Anointing

MAY CALENDAR

For more details, visit consciousharmony.com or call 512-347-9673

SPECIAL EVENTS

One-Day Online Centering Prayer Retreat
led by Caren Betz
May 6 9am-3pm Register online

Adult Baptism In-Person Classes
Saturdays, May 6-27 9-10:30am
Baptism: Sunday, May 28 Register online

Youth Communion Baptism In-Person Classes
Sundays, May 7-28 10:20-11:10am
Baptism: Sunday, May 28 Contact Deborah Hale for details

Godly Play Enrichment
with Rev. Cheryl Minor
May 13 9am-noon Register online

One-Day In-Person Song & Silence Retreat
led by Bev McCune
May 20 9am-3pm \$20 Register online

Introduction to Centering Prayer (online)
June 3 10am-noon Register online

Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat (online)
June 3 1-4pm Register online

MONTHLY

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

WEEKLY

Sundays
†Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
†Worship Service 10-11:30am
❖Youth Program (preK-12) 10-11:30am

Wednesdays
❖Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm

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

DAILY

†Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am
*Centering Prayer 6pm



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

†In person and online ❖In-person only at CCH



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*I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice,
and no one will take your joy away from you.*

John 16:22

THE GRACE OF THE ASCENSION

By becoming a human being,
Christ annihilated the dichotomy between matter and spirit.
In the person of the Divine-human Being, a continuum
between the divine and the human has been established.
Thus, God's plan is not only to spiritualize the material universe,
but to make matter itself divine.

The grace bestowed on us by the Ascension of Jesus
is the divinization of our humanity.

Our individuality is permeated by the Spirit of God
through the grace of the Ascension ...

Our life is a mysterious interpenetration of material experience,
spiritual reality and the divine Presence.

The key to being a Christian is to know Jesus Christ
with the whole of our being. It is important to know His sacred
humanity through our senses and to reflect upon it with our reason,
to treasure His teaching and to imitate Him.

But this is only the beginning ...

It is to the transcendent potential in ourselves –
to our mind which opens up to unlimited truth,
and to our will which reaches out for unlimited love –
that Christ addresses Himself in the Gospel with particular urgency.

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*