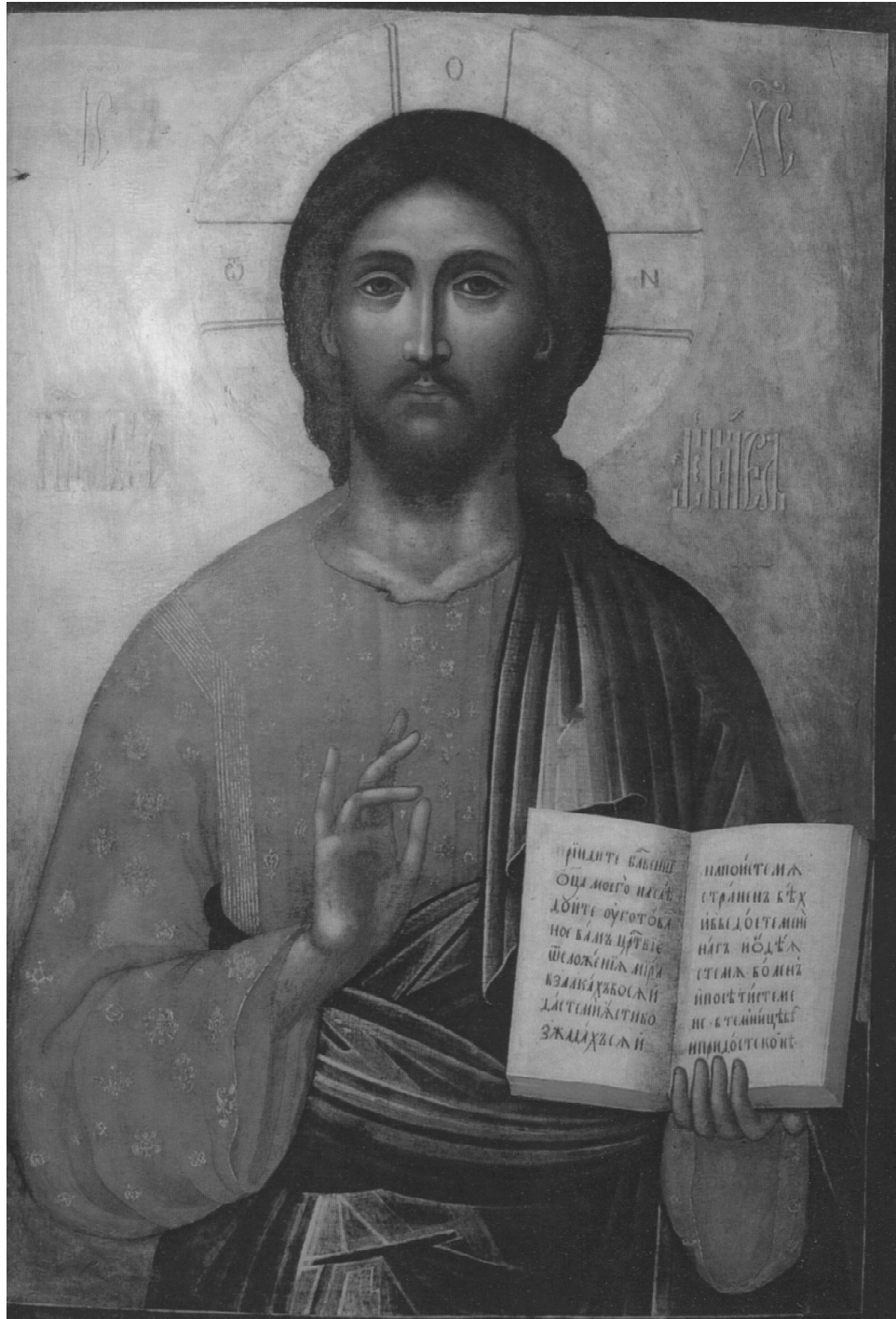
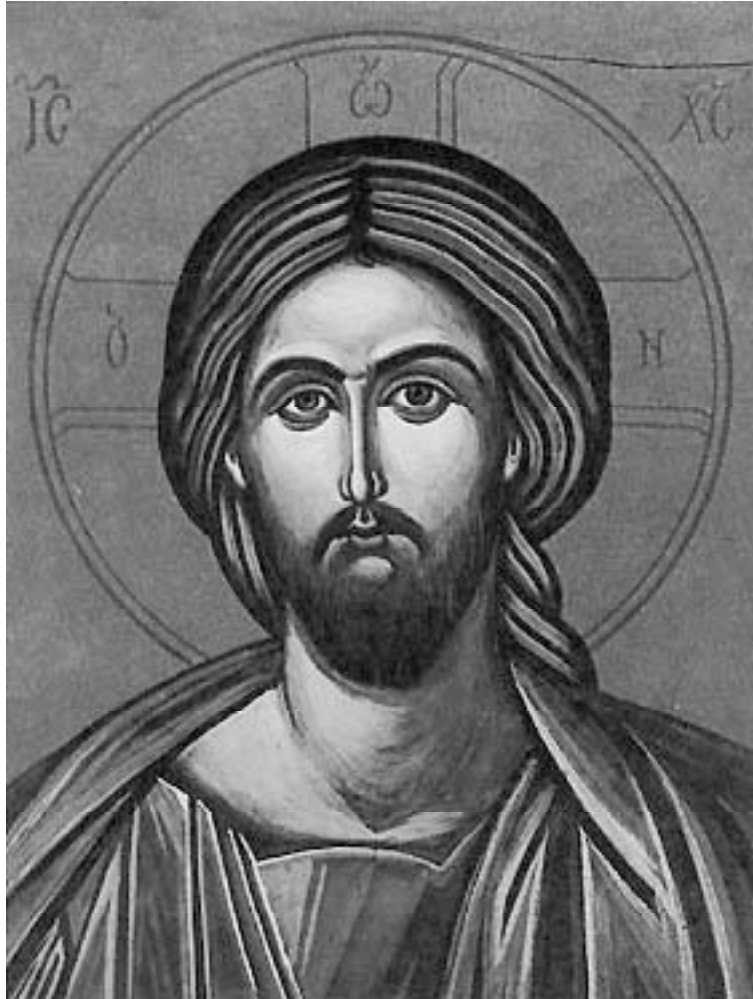


Yeshua- Our Sacred Path in Prayer of the Heart

By William T. Ryan





Dedication

This work is dedicated in gratitude to human beings across time and culture who have sought to become persons of kindness and healing.

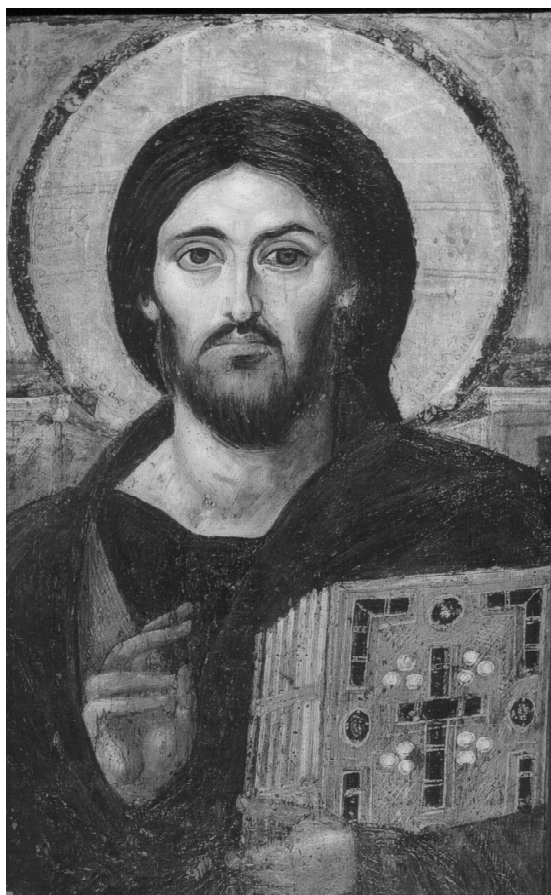
Yeshua- Our Sacred Path in Prayer of the Heart

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Author's note: Readers will observe that the Holy Name of *Yeshua*, the Aramaic form, is used in this work, rather than the Anglicized form of *Jesus* used in American churches. Aramaic was the language of *Yeshua* and his time. As the invocation of the Holy Name is the prevalent expression of the Prayer of the Heart, the name that I invoke in my prayer practice is *Yeshua*. The meaning of the name is particularly powerful for devotees who invoke it: "Salvation, Savior, or the Lord Who Saves." The name *Jesus* has no defined meaning in the English language.



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Chapter One



THE PATH OF CONSECRATION

Yeshua, the eternal and universal Christ, is the Sacred Path. Institutional definitions of the historical Jesus, his message, conceptions and beliefs about him, over which religions and the powers of the world have fought, are not the sacred path. Yeshua the Christ, the Life and Presence who abides in the deep sanctuary of the human heart, is the Sacred Path of holiness and sanctification, the path of the consecration of our life.

Consecration means to unite or align with the Sacred. In Christian terms it means to allow the Light of Christ to illumine our lives, to allow the Living Water of Christ's Mercy and Love to flow freely through us. It means to utterly merge every aspect of our soul and humanity to be immersed in and united with Christ. In this short work I will focus on how to walk this Path that is Christ, how to establish the "praxis" of an interior Christianity. "Praxis" means practice, or the actualizing of Christ's Presence in our life and soul. As early Christians, who called themselves the "Followers of the Way", we also in our time have an opportunity to walk the *Way* into deepening, conscious intimacy with the Light of Christ within.

Most Christians have been acculturated since childhood into a religion based on doctrinaire ideology of the mind and solidified in institutional power structures rather than offered a discipline of transfiguration and harmonization of the soul with the Light of Christ in the deep heart. In large part this is the consequence of a lack of unitive depth experience in many religious leaders as well as a lack of a transformative map to offer adherents. The Christian East, inspired by desert mysticism, has at least upheld the vision of an interior transfiguration based upon the spiritual teachings of *Theosis*, divinization, or Christification of the soul from within. Most Christians, however, are unaware of our spiritual birthright of being consciously indwelt and enlivened by Christ within as the core of religion. Blessedly, the secret stream of Christian mysticism, which has run throughout

the history of Christianity, is becoming more available for individuals who long to be thus illumined and consciously united with Christ.

The Spiritual Theology of Theosis and the Praxis of Soul Healing

The often overlooked mystical depths of the canonical and non-canonical Gospels and other Christian spiritual texts inform us that any real transformation and healing of the soul must involve unifying our human soul/consciousness with the inner Light and Fire of Christ, the process of transfiguration, sanctification, or what the fourteenth century mystic, Julian of Norwich, calls the “oneing” of the soul with Christ. To tend to the inner Fire of Christ’s Presence takes vigilance. In the “praxis” or actualization of *Theosis*, we must offer our entire selves moment by moment, day by day, to be consumed and made “one” with Yeshua’s Fire. (“Fire” was the metaphoric image of early desert Christians to mean the Spirit of God.) Our humanity, with all its trials and blessings, is the fuel for the Fire that He is kindling on earth. (“I came to cast fire upon the earth and how I wish it were already kindled.” Luke 12:49) And the locus of this praxis is the cave of the heart. Clearly, in this dimension of Christianity, the source of all spiritual transformation, inspiration, and mercy arises from the inner Fire of Christ who dwells within the heart and not the accumulated indoctrination of ideas and ideals of the mind.

Christ as interior Presence, must be our religion and our life, and not the maps of the religious life or the institutions who enshrine them In the canonical Gospels. Yeshua is the Word of God or Divine Logos (God’s Self-Expression), and the kingdom of union with Him is within. And we are invited to that union, “Abide in my love.” (Jn 15:9) “Abide in me as I abide in you.” (Jn 15:4) In the canonical Gospels Yeshua is the Light of the human soul but also the Light of all Creation. “I am the Light of the World.” (Jn 18:12). In the Gospel of Thomas the same truth is stated in similar fashion: In the Gospel of Thomas Yeshua is the uncreated Fire and Light of God, present in the world. “I am the Light that Shines on everyone. I am the All. The All came forth from me and the All came into me.” (Logion 77) The images are Light and Fire, expressions of the Divine Life and Essence brought into the world. These themes are continued in the desert hermit and monastic tradition where the spiritual journey is understood as the uniting of our soul with the uncreated Light and Fire of Christ within. “Why not become all Fire?” says Abba Joseph. (Apothegmata). Later the 16th century mystic, John of the Cross, expresses this same truth metaphorically in his spiritual poem, ***The Living Flame of Love***.

Today we are faced with a choice between two paradigms of Christianity, one that is mythical and institutional, and one that is mystical and interior and brings healing and transformation to the human soul. In the mystical communion paradigm Christ is the Inner Light. The life long spiritual journey is intimate transformational relationship with the Inner Light of Christ., the *Lumen Christi*.

The actualization of this relationship is the uniting our soul/consciousness with the Inner Light. In the mythical / institutional paradigm the historical Christ is the founder of Christianity as an institution. The life spiritual journey is one of affiliation with and loyalty to the institution of Christianity as mediator of the God relationship. One paradigm offers divinization and healing of the human soul through inner communion with God; the other offers redemption through a divinized institution as mediator of a mythical gulf between the human and the divine.

Consecration- Purification of the Heart and Prayer of the Heart

The tradition of spiritual practice that best actualizes the teachings of the communion paradigm of mystical Christianity is that of Prayer of the Heart or Contemplative Prayer. The desert monastic wisdom of earliest Christianity offers a diagnosis and a cure for the ills of the human condition. For the desert mothers and fathers the source of every spiritual ill is the condition of separateness and a dividedness of soul and our vital spiritual energies. Their prescription for the malady of the human condition they called “Purification of the Heart,” which is really a life long transformative process of contrition and conversion fed by interior communion with God in Prayer of the Heart leading to ever more deepening union of the soul with God. Through this life long praxis of Prayer of the Heart the core wound of separateness is healed and we come home to a life wholly consecrated to union with God through the inner Light and Fire of Christ within. *Consecration* then is both spiritual process and goal.

Awakened or not, our deepest longing, our deepest desire, is to give ourselves, all of our faculties and energies, to a Life and Presence that is utterly trustworthy, utterly loving, utterly essential, such that we could cast aside every other care or pursuit. For many those times of greatest soul accessibility to that point of conversion and commitment happen when we are most alienated and most discouraged. Such moments are points of great accessibility of the soul. Fortunately through grace early in life I experienced an opening to that interior Christ and discovered He was seeking me devotedly and passionately from within all the while I thought I was alone and separate. I simply needed to change direction and open my soul to receive the gift that was always being offered. That was the beginning of my journey into the consecrated life and that was the beginning of the “re-membling” of my spiritual life.

The word “consecrate” means -to make holy, to make sacred, to sanctify, to align what may be of the earthly or human order with the Divine Essence or Spirit. If we take this meaning even further, we adopt the premise that the Divine Essence is Love, Agape, Self-Giving, Self-Offering Love that seeks nothing for itself. This Divine Love is the root and ground of all existence, say the mystics of the great Wisdom traditions. Therefore the conscious spiritual journey for human beings is to awaken to that Holy Ground of being within us, and unify all of our human faculties and potential around the singular desire of Love Itself, seeking to

become us, seeking to express Its very Essence in us. We may even say with some confidence that our deepest desire is God's deepest desire, expressing Itself in us. In Consecration we give ourselves, the entirety of our being to our Greatest Desire to be united in love with the Source of our Life. Hence Consecration is the actualization, the Praxis, of the Great Commandment of Yeshua, to love God with our whole being.

If there is any "original sin" in the human condition, it is not some primeval offense committed by our ancestors whose effect is somehow inherited by us as punishment. Rather it is the sin of unconsciousness, of ignorance of our own truest nature as child of God and sanctuary of the Inner Light of Christ, and our own potential to realize it. Out of this ignorance we act out the unconscious, misdirected, and undisciplined energies and inclinations of our instinctual drives and predispositions, untempered and unguided by the purposes of Divine Love. We have been given the marvelous tool and faculty of the human brain in all of its complexity, and with all of its capacity for intellectual development and understanding. Yet by itself the brain, the thinking mind, and its creation, the egoic self, cannot discern or be guided by the ultimate purposes of Divine Love. The spiritual center or Heart, the sanctuary of the Divine at the center of the human soul, is the true organ of awakening and the desire to be given in love, to be at the service of Divine Love.

So it seems somehow that Divine Providence has brought into being the human species, whose destiny is to meld our psycho-physical, instinctual, mammalian make-up with the spiritual consciousness of soul, and Divine sanctuary of living spirit into a whole being, a new consciously loving Creation to walk this earth. We have been given the revelation and the gift of God's Self Nature, Yeshua the Christ as the Personhood of this Divine Light and Fire that lives within us, seeking to pour forth the fullness of the Self-Gift of Love in us and through us. Yeshua awakens us from spiritual sleep, and in His Person within us we experience the Divine Beloved reaching into all Creation bringing us toward completion while we walk this earth to final completion in the banquet of the Divine Wedding feast where all Creation is united with Creator and Source.

The ancients of the desert tradition in Christianity had a simple formulation for consecration, for uniting the soul with the Christ Light and Fire within. For them the entire process was the "purification of the heart," that is, uniting all of our inner life with the Divine Purpose of Love Incarnate. In this sense the Great Commandment of Yeshua, to love God with all of one's being, and to love one's neighbor as one's very self is the simple formulation of consecration. And the simple (not easy) formulation of growth in prayer is to move from prayer that is mediated by thought, image, and words of speech, to prayer that is formless and a receptive inner communion opening to receive Christ's gift of Self, and opening to our self-offering in love.

The formulation of prayer of the desert ancients was this: we pray to God in thoughts and images with the prayer of the mind, we pray to God with words in the prayer of the lips, and we open to receive inner communion with God in Christ beyond thoughts, words, or images, in direct experience in the Prayer of the Heart. Hence Prayer of the Heart is the door to the Consecrated Life, the Unified Life, through Inner Communion with Christ. And as St. Symeon the New Theologian (10th c) states it *"We awaken in Christ's body, As Christ awakens in our bodies,.....Where all our body, all over, every hidden part of it, is realized in joy as Him,....We awaken as the Beloved in every last part of our body."* (Mitchell, The Enlightened Heart, p.38)

We realize the Divine Beloved is the true Seeker and we are the Sought. In uniting with our truest deepest desire we unite with the Great Divine Desire and discover it is also our own deepest longing. Thus the journey of consecration becomes the journey of theosis (divinization), in the words of St. Paul "I live no longer I, but Christ lives in me."

*"You are the peace of all things calm
You are the place to hide from harm
You are the light that shines in dark
You are the heart's eternal spark
You are the door that's open wide
You are the guest who waits inside
You are the stranger at the door
You are the calling of the poor
You are my Lord and with me still
You are my love, keep me from ill
You are the light, the truth, the way
You are my Saviour this very day."*
(Ancient Celtic Prayer- **Carmina Gadelica**)

Chapter Two



THE PATH OF INNER COMMUNION

The image of “cave of the heart” in the mystic tradition refers to a real interior sacred space where the Divine Flame we know as the personal and universal Christ burns in the spiritual center or heart. And the practice of “tending” this Fire is about our actualization of interior union of the soul with this Fire of Divine Presence. In our “tending” we make real in our consciousness what is already ontologically true in the depths of our being. This actualization, discipline, or praxis, is known in Eastern Christianity as the Prayer of the Heart, and its foundation is one of silent inner communion with Christ in the interior space of the Heart.

Centering in the Heart

The historical Yeshua was put to death because he challenged religious and temporal authority by teaching that the temple of God was not the bricks or mortar on the hill but the temple of the Heart, or spiritual center. Hence our intimate connection with the Source of all Life, realized or not, is accessible within every being without the intermediation of human beings, institutions, or correct beliefs. Yeshua taught that in his true essence as the Universal Christ he is present in the sanctuary of the Heart in every person. So the great and good news of the Gospel is that the Divine Beloved is present as Living Flame and Spirit, in intimate personhood and in oceanic being in the holy Kingdom of God within the deep Heart. The spiritual journey therefore involves unifying every aspect of our soul and humanity with this Divine Life within in Its every moment invitation and offering of Divine Selfhood. In its simplicity this is the mystic promise of Yeshua: The Kingdom of God is within, and we are all invited to enter and live our life in communion with His Life.

Kallistos Ware, Orthodox Bishop and spiritual elder and teacher in the Prayer of the Heart, says this about the heart as the spiritual center and locus of the presence of Christ within:

"Those who, however imperfectly, have achieved some measure of 'prayer of the heart,' have begun to make the transition ... from 'strenuous' to 'self-acting' prayer, from the prayer which I say to the prayer which 'says itself' or, rather, which Christ says in me. For the heart has a double-significance in the spiritual life: it is both the center of the human being and the point of meeting between the human being and God. It is both the place of self-knowledge, where we see ourselves as we truly are, and the place of self-transcendence, where we understand our nature as a temple of the Holy Trinity. In the 'inner sanctuary' of our own heart we find the ground of our being and so cross the mysterious frontier between the created and the Uncreated. 'There are unfathomable depths within the heart, state the Macarian Homilies. '...God is there with angels, light and life are there, the kingdom and the apostles, the heavenly cities and the treasures of grace: all things are there.' "(The Power of the Name, Kallistos Ware)

Prayer of the Heart/Hesychastic Meditation

Every authentic mystic tradition has a formal meditative practice as the central spiritual discipline for unifying human consciousness with the Divine Beloved within. In mystical Christianity, the most highly developed and widely known meditative practice is Hesychastic meditation, or Prayer of the Heart. It has its origins in the early Christian desert mothers and fathers who lived a hermetic monastic life to realize the mystic teachings of Yeshua in their own interior life. To enter the inner Kingdom of Heaven at the center of the heart, or deepest spiritual nature, the desert practitioners of Hesychastic meditation taught we must continually align awareness and will with the heart or sanctuary of the Divine. They taught that this was the road to salvation, the re-ordering of our soul and humanity to the Divine Indwelling. They called this metaphorically, "becoming Fire," becoming ablaze with the fire of the inner Spirit of Christ through communion with His Fire in the Cave of the Heart.

The earliest practitioners taught the synchronization of prayer word and breath as an anchor to continually re-orient awareness and will in the heart. This teaching was formalized by John Climacus at the monastery of St. Catherine of Sinai (7th c.) In his book on Christian Contemplation Brian Taylor speaks of this development in Christianity:

"However, at some point these desert contemplatives began to use the name of Yeshua as their invocation. In the fourth century text, The Life of Anthony, by Athanasius of Alexandria, there was already a practice of invoking Christ in a repetitive prayer, even linking the breath to its repetition, as if the one who prayed was actually breathing Yeshua: 'Anthony called his two companions...and said to them, 'Always breath Christ.' " (*Becoming Christ: Transformation Through Contemplation*, Taylor)

We know this practice as the Prayer of the Heart. When Christianity was a vital movement and not yet an institution, the ancients of the early centuries fled the towns and cities of North Africa and the Middle East to realize the simplicity and singled hearted life of the Kingdom within to which Yeshua invites us in the Gospel. Yeshua and all mystic traditions teach that the spiritual suffering endemic in the human condition is caused by an ignorance of our true nature and our inheritance of interior union with the Divine. The Good News is that the Divine Beloved is always accessible to us, yet we are rarely accessible to the Divine. To heal this condition and become accessible we must become undivided; to live a life wholly consecrated, wholly unified, in God. The words “monos” and “monastic” emerged from their fervent desire for a singular, undivided life. The early men and women monastics were intent on realizing a life consecrated to union with Christ. They lived as hermits as well as in communities of “cenobites”, a Greek word translated as sharing a “common life”. These ancient seekers gathered around teachers who were called “abba” or “amma”, spiritual father or mother. The desert elders offered their lives to prayer, both in silent solitude, as well as in activity. They helped guide their students to ‘become Fire’, ablaze with the Light of Christ, through communion with Him in the cave of the heart.

The desert ammas and abbas realized the primary impediment to the undivided life is the scattered attachments of the mind. When early Christians escaped into the desert seeking silence and tranquility, they also carried their minds with the incessant, noisy traffic of thoughts. The desert elders understood that to fully surrender and rest in communion with Christ in the heart, individuals must be free from the mind's tyranny.

Hesychastic Meditation or Prayer of the Heart is the most highly developed and widely known meditative practice from the early Christian desert mothers and fathers. *Hesychia* is an ancient Greek word, which means silence or rest. The desert elders understood that when an individuals focus upon their longing for God, in the silent communion of Hesychastic Meditation or Prayer of the Heart, they are less apt to be captivated by mind phenomenon. The desert practitioners of Hesychasm taught that the way to enter the inner Kingdom of Stillness is to continually anchor our attention (awareness) and intention (will) in the Heart of Christ. The praxis of Prayer of the Heart can occur during formal times in silent sitting as well as in the midst of activity, throughout the day. For the desert practitioners, the invitation to “pray without ceasing”, advocated by Saint Paul (1st Thessalonians 5:17) is both possible and desirable for all. Since the early centuries of Christianity, the Prayer of the Heart has also been called the “Yeshua Prayer”.

Brian Taylor, an Episcopal priest, speaks further of this ancient tradition of inner communion with Christ. He writes, "This rich and focused tradition is perhaps the only specific, practical teaching about contemplative prayer in all of

Christendom that has been handed down faithfully and precisely from master to disciple, remaining intact over sixteen hundred years. In this sense, the Yeshua(Jesus) Prayer/ Prayer of the Heart tradition is more akin to the way in which Buddhist or Hindu meditation is handed down from generation to generation than it is to anything comparable in the West. The use of the Yeshua Prayer and the teachings about contemplation that surrounded it spread from master to disciple through the deserts of Egypt, and then came into prominence in the sixth century at the well-known and ancient monastery of Saint Catherine on Mount Sinai, established by Emperor Justinian I in 527. In the fourteenth century, the center of the Yeshua Prayer movement moved to Mount Athos, Greece. ...In our day, Mount Athos and to a lesser degree, St. Catherine's of Sinai, continue as centers of practice of the Jesus/Yeshua Prayer." (*Becoming Christ: Transformation Through Contemplation*, B. Taylor)

The Holy Name of the Beloved

When you are in love with someone, the name of the beloved is powerful. Invoking the name of your beloved stirs the yearning to be united with him/her and to give yourself in love. Historically, across cultures and traditions, the name of the Divine Beloved has been chanted to arouse devotion in the hearts of participants and to embody the qualities of God. In the Christian mystical tradition, the name of the personal Beloved is Yeshua and invoking his holy name connects us to our great longing and willingness to be “oned” with the Divine Beloved. Ancient Christians discovered that communion and transformation in Christ arose through invoking Yeshua’s name in silent prayer and breath in the midst of activity. In the crucible of the desert, early Christians attest that with continual prayer and communion with Yeshua, the Light of Christ ignites our being into Fire.

Breath as Pure Prayer

In our culture, when a person is fearful or angry, we encourage, "Breathe easy" or "Take a deep, slow breath". When captivated by memories of a painful past or dreading an imagined future, we can re-orient to being here-now by consciously breathing. Through awareness of our breath, we can also root and ground in the present eternal moment where God dwells.

As observed by the desert Christians, our consciousness is habitually captivated by object creations of the thinking mind. Anyone who has attempted to meditate or pray is acutely conscious of the barrage of thoughts and emotions that flood awareness. To assist the practitioner in communion with the Divine, the desert elders advocated using the synchronization of a prayer word with the breath as an anchor to continually re-orient our awareness into the heart. A word that catalyzes our deepest longing for the Beloved is the most powerful prayer word. Our longing for God is the doorway to the Divine, not magic formulas or

words. For many the most powerful word of all was reverently calling upon the name of the Living Christ, or Yeshua.

The invocation of “Yeshua” synchronized with the breath has become the central expression of Prayer of the Heart. One of the foremost guides in the formation of the Hesychastic Meditation/Prayer of the Heart tradition is John Climacus from Saint Catherine’s Monastery on the slopes of Mount Sinai in Egypt. During the seventh century, he taught that the invocation of the Holy Name was key to perceiving the Divine Light in the eye of the heart. He instructs in the *Ladder of Paradise*, “May the remembrance of *Yeshua* be united to your breathing, and then you will know the value of hesychia(silence)”. He advocated that the practitioner “fasten” their breathing to the invocation of the Holy Name. In later centuries, the Yeshua Prayer was embellished, to phrases, such as, “Lord Yeshua Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner” to accommodate theological formulas and doctrinal purposes. But the simplest and most easily aligned with the breath has been the holy name of Yeshua alone.

A powerful word for God or Holy Spirit in the Jewish tradition is “Ruach”, or Life-Breath. To breathe fully with attention and intention is to be aware of the Breath or Spirit of God breathing in us. The Prayer of the Heart is the antidote to the human suffering of alienation and separation from God. Whether we combine our breath with the invocation of the Holy Name or not, the breath in the Prayer of the Heart roots us into the Heart of God. During every activity, in each inhalation and exhalation, we can breathe Yeshua.

The nature of the Divine Beloved is Self-Giving Love. In the Gospel of John, when Yeshua encounters the Samaritan woman at the well, he informs her, “If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you ‘give me drink’, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:6) In this gospel passage, Yeshua calls his true nature, the “gift of God”. In our practice of inner communion, we breathe in the Self-Giving of God, welling up within us, and we breathe out our own humanity in self-offering love. To breathe Yeshua, we continually say “yes” to receiving Him and continually say “yes” to offering ourselves. In essence, we wordlessly pray, “I breathe in Yeshua; I breathe out Yeshua. I breathe in the gift of God’s life; I breathe out in offering the gift of my own life in God. In my breath, I sink into and abide in communion in the Heart of Christ. In this intimate communion with Christ, I touch the Kingdom and the Kingdom touches me.” (*Breathing Yeshua* , Ryan)

Silent Sitting Practice of Hesychastic Meditation or Prayer of the Heart

The method of the Prayer of the Heart simply calls us to take refuge in the Inner Flame of Love. In this intimate encounter, similar to when we seek intimacy in our human relationships, we give our full presence, letting no thing intrude, whether our own thoughts, external noise or distraction. In the interior

sanctuary with the Beloved, we give ourselves to our longing to be fully given in love. To cultivate this sacred silent space, which the ancients called “hesychia”, there are external and internal disciplines we must cultivate.

The Guidelines of Formal Prayer of the Heart Practice

1. **Setting:** Set aside a sacred space, a quiet place consecrated to your desire for communion with the Beloved in the cave of the heart.
2. **Time:** Choose a time most conducive to silent interior meditative prayer, when you are alert and not likely to be interrupted. For most that is early morning and early evening.
3. **Body Posture:** Sit upright, where minimal effort is required to maintain a straight back and be alert. For some a chair is best, for others, a prayer bench or cushion. Let the hands be reverently folded in your lap or resting on your thighs facing upward or downward.
4. **Breath:** Breathing should be relaxed, not forced. Allow the breath to be deep and abdominal, relaxing the tensions in the shoulders, chest and abdomen. Let the out-breath be released slowly, synchronized with the invocation of the Holy Name or prayer word.
5. **Preparation:** Choose or create a short prayer phrase of consecration to prepare for your entry into silence and to awaken your longing. Examples might be, “O Beloved, take my life and make it yours.” or “O Yeshua, You are my Refuge.”
6. **Length of Prayer Session:** Twenty-five to thirty minutes of Prayer of the Heart session is best, with a brief walking meditation in between for more than one session. Two sessions a day, one session in both the morning and evening, or two sessions in the morning, are often recommended. Allow for a gentle transition from the meditation session, perhaps ending with a spoken vow of practice, devotional prayers or short spiritual reading you may find inspirational. (To be explored in a later chapter.)

The Method

Prayer Word: Choose a word, which touches you and best expresses your desire to be one with the Inner Flame of Love, or Christ within. For many, the most fitting meditation word is the invocation of the Holy Name of Yeshua or a form of the Yeshua Prayer, such as “Lord Yeshua, have mercy”. Repeat the word or words silently and continuously, synchronized with your breath. Let the word and breath sink deeply into the heart in the chest and solar plexus. With more than one syllable or word, align the recitation of the word or phrase with the in-breath and out-breath in an easy rhythm of breath and word. Let this prayer

word or phrase be the anchor of returning to your longing for communion with Christ. Some practitioners may find repeating any word is unnecessary or even a distraction. For these individuals, the in-breath and out-breath alone is the purest and simplest form of meditation practice, and breath alone is fully sufficient complete prayer.

Observing the Mind/Abiding in the Heart: Observe the mind traffic, release and return to abiding in the heart (This may be experienced energetically in our body awareness deep in the lower chest and solar plexus area). Continually observe and release from involvement with thoughts by returning to your breath and the name of Yeshua or prayer word. The continual process of “release and return” coincides with the natural rhythm of the breath. When breathing in, we receive the Self-giving of the Divine. When breathing out, we offer ourselves into the Divine Embrace. Being present to the Presence of the Beloved with loving devotion and self-offering, we increasingly abide in the Heart of Christ in the sanctuary of our own heart. In growing depth our awareness settles and anchors in the warmth and spaciousness of our spiritual center, the cave of the heart within.

Summary of Guidelines and Method

Gradually, over time, we cultivate a capacity, not to stop thought and emotion, but to release from them. Increasingly, we abide in the ‘cave of the heart’, which is beneath and beyond all mind activity. We experience that we have thoughts, but we are not our thoughts. We can rest in the Heart of Christ alone, in our silent prayer practice, or in the midst of daily activities. Our true home, our monk’s cell, is the Kingdom of the Beloved within, and our practice is one of ceaseless return and refuge in the Heart of Christ, the Inner Flame of Love.

Thomas Kelly, the twentieth century Quaker mystic, spoke eloquently of the “perpetual return of the soul to the Inner Sanctuary.” He writes, “Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continually return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself...Continuously renewed immediacy, not receding memory of the Divine Touch, lies at the base of religious living...What is here urged...are secret habits of unceasing orientation...so that we are perpetually bowed in worship, while we are also very busy in the world of daily affairs. What is here urged are inward practices of mind...letting it swing like the needle, to the polestar of the soul. And like the needle, the Inward Light becomes the truest guide of life...He who is within us urges, by secret persuasion, to such an amazing Inward Life with Him, so that...we always look out upon all the world through the sheen of the Inward Light...Yield yourself to Him...and you will have found the Instructor Himself, of whom these words are a faint and broken echo....the Master of Galilee...expected this secret to be freshly discovered in everyone...The Inner Light, the Inward Christ, is no mere doctrine,

belonging peculiarly to a small religious fellowship, to be accepted or rejected as a mere belief. It is the living Center of Reference for all Christian souls and Christian groups - yes, and of non-Christian groups as well - who seriously mean to dwell in the secret place of the Most High. He is the center and source of action, not the endpoint of thought. He is the locus of commitment, not a problem for debate. Practice comes first in religion, not theory or dogma... A practicing Christian must above all be one who practices the perpetual return of the soul into the inner sanctuary, who brings the world into its Light and...who brings the Light into the world with all its turmoil and its fitfulness and re-creates it after the pattern seen on the Mount....On one level, we may be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes,...we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship and a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings...ever the accent must be upon the deeper level, where the soul ever dwells in the presence of the Holy One...("The Light Within," *A Testament of Devotion*, T. Kelly)

The path of inner communion with Christ opens to us in the praxis of Prayer of the Heart. Through a daily practice in silence and solitude, we are ever more accessible to Divine Love. To commune with and remain rooted to the Divine, we continually tend to Yeshua's Fire in the cave of our heart.

Chapter Three



THE PATH OF KENOSIS

*"To reach satisfaction in all
desire its possession in nothing.*

*To come to the knowledge of all
desire the knowledge of nothing.*

*To come to possess all
desire the possession of nothing.*

*To arrive at being all
desire to be nothing.*

*To come to the pleasure which you have not
you must go by a way in which you enjoy not.*

*To come to the knowledge which you have not
you must go by a way in which you know not.*

*To come to the possession you have not
you must go by a way in which you possess not.*

*To come to be what you are not
you must go by a way in which you are not.*

*When you turn toward something
you cease to cast yourself upon the all.
For to go from the all to the all
you must leave yourself in all.*

And when you come to the possession of the all

you must possess it without wanting anything.

*In this nakedness the spirit finds
its rest.*

*For in coveting nothing,
nothing raises it up
and nothing weighs it down,
because it is the center of its humility.”*

John of the Cross, Toledo, 1578 (poem from ***Ascent of Mt. Carmel***)

The above poem written by a Spanish monk and mystic of the 16th century was composed as a summary statement of an entire work he penned on the process of spiritual purification. The poem with its series of apparent paradoxes is often dismissed as confusing or theologically incorrect. Yet it states the process of union with God in a series of negatives. In the broad spectrum of denominations and traditions in the history of Christianity many paths to God or spiritual salvation have been taught. Some emphasize right belief, some emphasize right behavior, and others emphasize right ritual. For them, no doubt, this statement is puzzling at best, or heretical at worst. Mystical Christianity embraces the “Via Negativa” or the understanding that we come to God through the process of subtraction.

In mystical Christianity, God is already present and accessible to us, and the sole obstacle to our conscious union with God is ourselves, that is, the self-created self, a product of our mind. Our identification and idolatry to this mind-creation renders us consciously inaccessible to God’s Presence. In other words God waits eternally for us at the center of the sanctuary of the Heart. We come to God by peeling the onion of our layers of false self identity and releasing from all the brain-created mind objects, motivations, and mental formations that cement them and hold them together. To realize in our soul/consciousness, to make aware, and to live an ontological union with God that already exists we are invited, as the poem declares, to ‘get naked.’ The Beloved invites us to rest in our true inner being, and therefore rest in “God’s being at the center of our being” (paraphrase from *The Cloud of Unknowing*). In this ‘No-thingness’ of the Divine that John of the Cross describes as “Nada, Nada, Nada,” the spirit finds its rest, and we find our life’s purpose and reason for being.

Various global mystic traditions define this obstacle of the separate-self identity as “forgetfulness,” others as “delusion,” or “illusion.” For me these descriptions all possess truth. Thomas Keating, the Christian abbot and spiritual teacher, explains our problem this way: (paraphrase) ‘the source of the human condition arises from the habitual course of human development and coming to full adult ego development without the benefit of an awakened interior knowledge of our union with God.’ This dilemma is beautifully described in this anecdote I once heard, (allegedly true): A young couple brings home a new infant from the

hospital, their second born. The first night at home, the babe sleeps in a crib in a nursery equipped with sound monitoring for the sake of safety and the peace of the parents. The parents hear the patter of the footsteps of their 4 year old daughter enter the nursery, walk slowly to the crib and pause in the silence. The daughter's voice breaks the silence as she peers through the bars of the crib. "Please tell me about God, I've almost forgotten." Indeed it is the recovery of our memory of God, and who we are in God and living that truth in the world that comprises our true spiritual salvation (healing). Meister Eckhart puts it this way simply, "God is at home; it is we who have gone for a walk."

Why is this so? Why does our spiritual/evolutionary development take this course? The answer may come again from the 14th c. Christian mystic Meister Eckhart, who said that the purpose of the spiritual journey of transformation is "God expects but one thing of you, and that is that you should come out of yourself in so far as you are a created being made and let God be God in you." (*Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley) This is another way of stating the spiritual theology of *theosis*, the foundation of Eastern Christianity. We are here in the human created state to become incarnate vessels of this "living water" that Yeshua spoke of, that, if we consent, will "well up" and flow within us. Yeshua proclaims an amazing truth, that the purpose of human existence is to consciously and intentionally live Divine Life in our own.

What is the nature of this Divine Life? Mystics say, and experience tells us, that the nature of God is Love that offers of Itself without condition, unlimited selfless Love, Love for Love's sake. And so it is, that to live this Love in our own humanity calls forth a great letting go of the diversion of self-seeking on our part. Hence the word, *kenosis*, or self-emptying is used in the spiritual transformative journey. St. Paul uses the word "*kenosis*" in First Philippians to describe the self-emptying of Yeshua of any personal desire or clinging to a self-identity, in order that his essential Life of the universal Christ, the emanation of the Source (Abba) might be fully manifest in his own human life. Paul invites us to "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," (I Phil: 2:5) So this same union with the Divine, realized in Yeshua, can also be actualized in our own life. And the realization comes through an utter and progressive surrender of self-seeking so that the separate self-identity melts into the unitive Christ identity. It involves no dramatic slaying of a monster false-self, but rather a deepening letting go into our own naked inner being, releasing from all the fake substitutes our egoic mind has created. Being given to love without expectation or self-seeking is no small task. Yet when we truly trust and sink into our deepest humility, Love is present and Love lives and moves through us unimpeded. The Greek word for this love is *Agape*. In the self-emptying, and growing freedom and spaciousness of *kenosis* *Agape* flowers.

Evagrius Ponticus (4th c.) is one of the early masters of the praxis of contemplation in the desert tradition of Christianity. His *Praktikos* (*Chapters on Prayer*) are a classic text in Christian mysticism. Evagrius recognizes that the

obstacles to the fullest awareness of God, of being at peace in God, begin with self-attachment to thoughts. These attachments pull us away from our own spiritual center, or Heart, where we experience our abiding and rootedness in God. The practice of Hesychastic meditation/Prayer of the Heart is described by the ancients as one of bringing and rooting our consciousness into the Heart or spiritual sanctuary. This must of necessity involve a release of the consciousness from being embedded in habitual patterns of thinking and all the emotions and behaviors that flow from them. As we release from thoughts, by not giving attention and will, they incrementally lose their power over us. Over time we began to reach in degrees the state of "apatheia ", or interior freedom, (not to be confused with "apathy") which is the state of calm or peace found in freedom from the passions and restlessness. Those who practice the Prayer of the Heart gain freedom by letting thoughts rise and fall without giving them the power of volition. The more of an inner groundedness we have in this inner peace and freedom, flowing from the state of resting in the Heart in silent interior prayer, the more we are able to carry this same awareness into daily life. This is an insight key to the praxis of kenosis and true interior freedom in daily life. I recall the statement of a spiritual directee of mine who expressed with astonishment that pure awareness is a dimension of her pure being and that the passing of a thought through awareness is just "phenomena." Thus she found an insight giving her great freedom.

I speak in my first book (*The Beloved is My Refuge*) about the growing freedom and choice we have as our inner Prayer of the Heart practice grows both in silence and in daily life. We cultivate awareness of thoughts and their effects on us, "...the more we can make choices about our thoughts. When we give volition, or choice, to thought, there are consequences for good or ill. When our choice is in utter harmony with the deepest intentionality of the Heart, we bring forth goodness. In our sitting practice we release from thoughts and abide in the Heart. In the midst of life we also observe the mind and abide in the Heart. But in activity in the middle of life we must choose. Choosing and acting on some thoughts leads us to peace and harmony in communion with God within. Acting on other thoughts leads us from peace and towards further disharmony and dissonance from our own Heart." The ancients simply referred to this release and centering in the Heart as "setting aside thoughts." Evagrius in his *Praktikos* goes further to describe how release from the obstacles to Love allows the "living water" of Agape, pure Love, to spring up naturally from the Divine Presence already in the Heart. "Now this apatheia (inner freedom) has a child called agape.""Agape is the progeny of apatheia. Apatheia is the very flower of asceticism." His term "asceticism" is another word for *kenosis*, releasing from the web of thoughts that are the glue of the separate self-identity and all that keeps it intact. As Prayer of the Heart practice deepens we taste the naked state of pure being in God wherein lies our true humility and true abode and release from all created substitutes of the mind.

Kensosis in Daily Life

We are not the creators of Divine Love, or Agape. We are both the vessels and stewards of the sacred Wine of Divine Love that is Christ. We are the medium where our human love is consecrated, transformed, and poured out as Divine Love in the Cup of Salvation, in the eternal Wedding Feast of the Beloved and Creation. The Wedding Feast of Love happens in the everyday where we are called to be in relationship as spouses, friends, parents, children, brothers and sisters in the human family and in the family of all Creation. This is the joining of the many small circles of separateness into the One Circle of all beings in the vision of Sioux mystic, Black Elk. And at the center of this Circle is the Beloved, the Tree of Life from whom all Life comes forth and is lived.... for ***I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like One Being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one Circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.***" (Black Elk Speaks)

Though we often treat these relationships carelessly or even with contempt, they are the garden of our stewardship. As we awaken in the Heart we began to see how precious each one is, and how our purpose and our responsibility is to regard each with reverence and care. This can only happen when we have cultivated the capacity to release and let go of the separate-self agenda and motivation, and the thought forms of emotional reactivity that hold and maintain the separate-self consciousness. Serving and loving the One Being, the Heart of Christ, in each being can only happen through the freedom and spaciousness of kenosis.

Kenotic Praxis

Undivided Presence is a primary dimension of kenotic praxis. We must be fully present with the task, event, or person before us, fully present to the sacred dimension of each and equally present to the mental formations that arise in response to each that may deflect or filter the sacred. In this regard our previous conditioning or habit energies must be seen for what they are and released, so that the present moment is alive and complete. Ceaseless practice is ceaseless presence to the Presence, observing the mind and abiding in the Heart. We bring awareness to all that brings disharmony or disturbance in our thinking, feeling, and behaving.

Letting Go- Releasing from all conditions, reactions, thoughts, judgments, or behaviors that affect or impede our full presence and attention to the person, task, or relational interaction before us. Releasing from all that is dissonant with the most kind or loving intention of the heart.

Offering Up- to the Beloved all that is beyond our understanding, beyond our control, in need of help or healing, everything before us in our consciousness that is in need of release.

Self Offering- our best intention, our best effort, our best service, our kindest and most loving action to the relationship, task, or situation before us. Accepting that our best and most loving offering is enough, being always willing to modify or change it as the need arises, while releasing from every expectation of reciprocation or approval from another.

In all conditions and circumstances our ongoing practice of prayer word and breath remains a “homing pigeon” to grounding in the Heart in the midst of daily life.

Loving in Human Relationships and the Dance of Kenosis

Human relationships are all characterized by attachment with self-seeking motivations. We learn to love selflessly through such attachments and motivations as love matures and grows, and as our capacity to give of ourselves deepens. The pain that arises through hurts, conflicts, and disappointments is the raw material of our growth in loving. We learn to return and ground ourselves in the Heart and the Heart’s intention of loving kindness or Agape, rather than our agenda. We learn to see our unconscious motivations for what they are and release from them for the good of the beloved ones in our life. Here the **principle of non-reactivity** is essential. Because of our Prayer of the Heart practice we can rest and act from interior stillness while observing and releasing from the hurts and fears that arise in the middle of life. If we are caught by our reactions and act on them, we can use the pain to return to contrition and resolve to stay and act from the interior stillness and loving intention the next time. Our human relationships of family, helping, care-giving, companionship, work, and friendship, all become the garden of the stewardship of Divine Love. In them we learn and grow to fulfill our life’s purpose to “Let God be God in us.” The practice of Presence, Letting Go, Offering-Up, and Self-Offering continue ceaselessly. Thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are gradually harmonized with the deepest awareness and intentions of the heart, and dissonance becomes increasingly and painfully felt as a guide to greater loving. The greater our willingness and capacity to release and empty of these dissonant reactions and intrusions of the mind, the greater we grow in our capacity to love. “To be full of things is to be empty of God. To be empty of things is to be full of God.” (Meister Eckhart).

Familial and Spousal Relationships

The greatest hurts and damage are inflicted in spousal and familial relationships when our defense mechanisms are in charge of our thinking and behavior. Our capacity to “see” our thinking, feeling, and behaving reactivity and release from them before we choose and act on them is essential to growth in

love. Our praxis of Inner Communion and Kenosis make possible the needed sanctuary of trust, safety, and reverence for such sacred relationships in our garden of the Stewardship of Divine Love.

Personal Account

Work-I was blessed to work for over 30 years in the mental health counseling field. During this time I did have a Prayer of the Heart/Meditation practice. Especially in this profession where the practitioner enters the private psychological space of another in a relationship of trust, I found it vital to maintain a vigilant observance of the content of my own mind, mental and emotional responses to another. I found there was a certain quality of “stickiness” or “jaggedness” when such content of my own was filled with reactivity of the “self.” By contrast when I found I was moving “with” a client without the intrusion of agendas, reactions, judgments, or otherwise of the “self” there was an inner experience of ease, and of simply focusing on the counseling task at hand and of a movement of grace greater than my own effort at work. In this work frequently the clients who sought help were in a disturbed state. My kenotic practice meant I needed to exercise a “self-vigilance” of observing the mind, abiding in the heart, releasing from reactivity, in order to have the empathy, professional judgment, and detachment necessary to be of real help in particular where critical outcomes are at stake.

Kenosis and Dark Nights

Caregiving- Just prior to writing this paragraph I found myself with the responsibility of caring for my elderly mother of 86 years of age, afflicted with advanced Alzheimer’s Dementia with a psychotic mental illness. While my relationship with my mother has been a sometimes troubled and painful one, I could not have anticipated the time of trial I would be facing in taking on this 24/7 responsibility. Coping with my own reactions to the irrationality, paranoid symptoms, and hostile affect and behavior present in my mother’s condition proved to be an ordeal that tested my spiritual practice to its core. I found being a witness to this degradation of all that I found human and endearing in my mother to be a challenge of hope and faith. I found my own psychological lows and reactions to her behavior and illness to place me in a posture of vulnerability rarely experienced in my life. I found the confidence in my 40 year spiritual practice to maintain inner stability was shaken. Blessedly the responsibility for care-giving came to an end after three months, and I have been left with a great compassion for all of us human beings who must confront such a terrible illness as caregivers or as victims who endure it to the end of life. It was a “dark night” where many of my spiritual consolations were taken from me, and I was challenged to a level of kenotic practice rarely experienced before. All that was left to me was simply to let go, to “offer up” all of the pain and resistances to the emotional and spiritual pain I was experiencing, and to offer each moment my best effort of service. I found I had to trust Divine Love was present when my

personal love was undermined or seeming to be so insufficient, and the relationship of mother and son so damaged by the onslaught of the disease process.

Death and Loss- No time of kenosis is more profoundly felt than the death of a loved one. The greater is the attachment, the greater the challenge to our practice of kenosis. When I was just 31 years of age my beloved son of one year of age was taken from me through the disease of Acute Leukemia. There was a moment of grace that taught me a life long lesson in kenosis and the stewardship of Divine Love: My son, Carlo, was in a children's hospital in Portland, Oregon with a diagnosis of Acute Myelocytic Leukemia and a grave prognosis. One evening I was pulling him in a wagon with an IV bottle attached along a circular corridor where all the children who could were moving in the tricycles and wagons, or pulling toys in a circular caravan. I was filled with rage and resistance at what was happening to him. In a moment of paralysis I pulled over to an alcove. An inner voice told me to just drop my rage and crazy thinking and look into his eyes. The eyes were clear and peaceful and had a simple question. "Are you going to walk with me through this, or are you going to run away?" In that moment there was a powerful clarity that cut through all of my pain and resistance. I knew there was but one answer, and I could say it. The answer was an unequivocal "Yes!" By letting go of all the things I didn't have control over, by offering them up to the One Love who is Greater than everything my son or I might endure, and simply offering to my son, Carlo, what I could do, I could be at peace. Yes, I could walk with him, no matter how painful it would be Yes, I would love him the best I could, and be the best father I could. Yes, I would endure with him the disease and its outcome. Yes, that's something I could do, and I did. At such moments we are naked, unprotected, and vulnerable. And we can choose love and the inner refuge of Yeshua's Fire in the Heart. It is the only refuge we have that is real in this life.

Nakedness of Spirit

About five years ago I retired from my adult life-long profession of mental health counseling. At that time I was grateful for the time and spaciousness to give myself to a deeper life of Inner Communion with Christ. Yet I could sense a stripping away of identity and a sense of protection that professional identity gives in the world. What would I do with my life, now without a work identity? At that time I began my day early, about 5 AM in my morning meditation space. On my lap I laid a quilt that had been given to me by my stepmother, Margie, whom I loved dearly, and who had been a healing force in my life. She had died just months previously. And that is how I started my day. Still I held the question, "What should I do with the remainder of my life, who am I now, that I am no longer a mental health counselor, with no work identity?"

One morning very early, before rising I had a vivid dream. In the dream I found myself naked in a room filled with polite but horrified guests in a very

proper social situation. I ran away in this naked state to be alone and away from public scrutiny. I found myself walking along a country road. Thankfully there was no one around but I felt acutely uncomfortable and vulnerable in this state of nakedness. After a while of feeling fearful and forlorn as I walked alone, I noticed something ahead along the side of the road. There was a bush, resembling a lilac bush overhanging the edge of the road. As I got closer I noticed there was a quilt hanging from the bush. As I reached for the quilt I was amazed to see it was Margie's quilt, my meditation quilt. Very slowly and tenderly I took the quilt in my hands and wrapped it around my body. And I felt safe and secure, and at peace. Then I awoke from the dream, feeling a great liberation. I knew my practice of Inner Communion and the freedom and trust of Kenosis in Prayer of the Heart was the sole refuge for my nakedness and vulnerability.

*Yeshua replied:
"On that day when you are naked
as newborn infants
who trample their clothing,
then you will see the Son of the Living One
and you will have no more fear."
Logion 37, Gospel of Thomas*

Chapter Four



THE PATH OF DEVOTION

As human beings we give outward expression to the inward reality of our love with our human beloveds. We speak our love; we have special places in our homes where we connect with our loved ones in images, symbols, and objects of remembrance. We have private spaces where we share intimacy with them, emotional, physical, and spiritual. We express our love in whispers, smiles, gestures, posture, and in physical embrace. Sometimes we even sing songs or lullabies. Throughout our day we have moments of pause to turn our attention and affection to our cherished ones. In our wallets, in our offices, we keep photographic images of our beloveds to remind us of the sacred connections and life purpose we are committed to, and that give us refuge and solace. We create and sustain sacred rituals of togetherness and intimacy, whether in the dining room or the bedroom where we sometimes we even light candles and turn off the phone or other distraction, and play special music. All these are acts of devotion. They establish us and return us to the presence of our loved ones, and enable us to invoke our deeper intention to give our lives, our presence, and our love to them day to day. These outward expressions not only nourish this unitive love and incarnate it in direct or symbolic expression, but in their totality they hold our life together and return us to our grounding in deeper purpose, meaning, and communion. All of this practice of relational love holds true even more profoundly in our relational life of communion with the Divine Beloved. Such is the Path of Devotion.

Nurturing and Expressing Devotional Love

In the mystic path of Christianity, unitive love is both the goal and the way. The core practice is intimate communion with the Beloved, Who abides in the sanctuary of our heart and the heart of all beings. Even though the Divine is beyond words and form, reverent rituals, sacred chants and physical gestures lead us to the threshold of intimacy, where we embody Christ in our physical

forms and daily lives. A human love affair includes both the assuredness of an unspoken love, as well as the dance of romance in words of endearment, acts of kindness, tender looks and gentle touches that nurture and deepen a union that extends beyond words and emotion. Similarly, in the love affair with the Divine Beloved, we both abide in the stillness of pure Presence, where we eternally belong, as well as nurture our longing for the Divine. Both *attention*, being present to the abiding Presence, and *intention*, our loving surrender, are essential dimensions of our devotional practice. The way of devotion helps us engage, nurture, and focus our deep longing of the soul for the Divine embrace.

In Hindu spiritual tradition the practices that cultivate intimacy with the Divine are called yoga, which means joining, or yoke. In the tradition of yoga, pure meditation is called “raja (highest) yoga,” where the practice of awareness or attention is the focus. The yoga of devotional love is called bhakti yoga, where the practice of intention or loving desire for God is cultivated and liberated. Bhakti can have many expressions, including chanting, singing, dancing, prostrations, bowing and so on. All of these are forms that engage the humanity, body and soul, of the practitioners in their desire for God. We find parallel expressions in the Christian path of devotional love.

My own life experience and spiritual journey has brought me into contact with many rich forms of both Christian and Soto Zen Buddhist monastic devotional practice. (As a young person I attended a Benedictine seminary and was also a lay minister practicing in a Soto Zen monastery.) Some may be surprised that the Zen monk who sits countless hours facing a wall, still and passionless, also chants, bows, does offerings, prostrations, recites vows, and sings litanies to the Mahayana deities of Buddhism. The Benedictine monastic life embodies many of the highest forms of Gregorian chant and liturgical forms of devotional expression. The chanting of the Liturgy of the Hours, or Divine Office, is the center of the Benedictine Life. I was graced to live this devotional life for a time as a young person. I should also say that the Zen Master and Abbess of Shasta Abbey, Margaret Jiyu Kennett Roshi, my first spiritual teacher in the practice of meditation, had a doctorate in liturgical music from London University, and as a musician played for many of the great Cathedrals of England. She translated the Zen sutras into English and put the chanting into Gregorian forms. One of the daily morning scriptures at Shasta Abbey was put to the music of a beautiful Russian Orthodox hymn. Thus I was blessed to have engaged in a deep and beautiful devotional practice during my tenure as a lay practitioner in training at Shasta Abbey and its associated priories.

I have to say while there can be beautiful music expressions, the average lay person’s devotional practice in Western Christianity of the European or North American kind can be greatly impoverished. Worshippers are often limited to sitting in pews, sometimes standing or kneeling. Either alone or in community the average Christian has no experience in the exercise of devotional chanting, bowing, devotional hand gestures of adoration or offering, and, least of all,

prostrations. For too many, devotional practice is largely a barren experience that scarcely nurtures nor expresses to any great degree the interior life of Inner Communion and Intimacy with the Divine Beloved. It is no wonder that the young especially find devotional practice to hold little spiritual nourishment.

Devotional Practice in Daily Life

My friend and excellent teacher in the Christian contemplative prayer arena, Cynthia Bourgeault, tells the story of a young man who seeks out an Orthodox priest in search of faith and purpose at a time of despair and discouragement in his life. The spiritual guide advises him to drop his obsessive mind questions and instead adopt a simple practice of 100 reverent prostrations daily for a month. In other words let the body, rather than the thinking egoic mind resolve the spiritual dilemma and find true connection in the heart, or spiritual center. The story goes that the young man returned in a month in a transformed state. With the burden of belief lifted from his shoulders through the body and the Heart he found Faith in the connection to Inner Communion and taking refuge in Divine Mercy through devotional practice. It is also no accident that for practitioners undertaking the spiritual journey in the Tibetan Buddhism tradition the initiation practice is the completion of 100,000 prostrations. Such wisdom of the Path of Devotion extends across the mystic traditions of the world.

Our Home Sanctuary: Sacred Meditation Space

Everyone who has experienced conscious intimacy with a human or Divine Beloved knows that becoming accessible to intimate union requires the dropping of the boundaries of separateness to reveal an exquisite interior receptivity and sensitivity of the soul. This same sensitivity as revealed in the Song of Solomon “My Beloved is mine, and I am his..” is where we respond with full surrender to the invitation of Yeshua to “Abide in my love.” This interior exposure and nakedness requires the presence of complete safety and trust, made possible only through the creation of a sacred sanctuary space. It is a sad reality that so few humans experience this sacred sanctuary space in their lives, especially in their own homes. What a different world it would be, if at the center of every home was a room dedicated to utter silence and communion with the Divine, a space where silent meditation and devotional practice could take place without intrusion and with full respect and reverence from all who take residence in the home.

At minimum a serious spiritual practitioner who is on the path of Inner Communion and seeks to be immersed in the interior love of Christ should set aside a sanctuary space in her/his living space. Ideally it should be a room, at minimum, a corner of a room, where no other activity takes place, a space where quiet and non-intrusion is the rule, at least when meditation/Prayer of the Heart or devotional prayers are taking place. This space should be consecrated space,

wholly set aside and made holy by its dedication to the purpose of Unitive Love with the Divine. Reverence requires it should be kept clean and uncluttered and prayerfully decorated with those sacred symbols and objects that are an expression of its high purpose. The space should be entered with a reverent attitude, reverent movements, and practices. Heartful bows, prayerful hand position, and even removal of shoes expresses this for many practitioners. (Bringing the hands together, palm to palm, in a prayerful bow, gathers our awareness and willingness, into the devotional energies of heartful love in the central heart area of the chest. Such a devotional practice is powerful in anchoring us in the Stream of Christ's Love as we gather the totality of our heartful presence and longing in the heart and settle into the interior quiet and communion of the heart as our hands move from palm to palm bowing and are folded resting in our lap.)

Altars: At the center of the sanctuary space of practice should be an altar. An altar in nearly every sacred tradition is a symbol of the meeting ground between Divine and human. It is the symbolic meeting place where the Divine offers Itself to Creation and receives Creation's self-offering. In this sacred place the human/Creation self-offering and becomes transmuted and transformed, infused and divinized with the Divine's Gift of Self. The altar is the table of the Wedding Feast of the Divine and Creation taught in mystic Judaic tradition. It is also the sacred space of the daily Wedding Feast in our daily joining with the Beloved. In our daily practice it is towards the altar that we bow and do prostrations, reverencing the Life and Love that is our Source and to which our own human mind and creations are forever subservient. For those who are devotees of Yeshua, as personification of the Divine Beloved it is appropriate to place icons of the sacred traditions of icon veneration, or other appropriate symbols of Yeshua, on the altar. The physical altar in our devotional space stands in for the altar present in the inner sanctuary of the Heart, and the Divine Indwelling present therein.

I am one who suggests to devotees that they be creative and intuitive, led by grace and interior need, in the placement of other sacred objects on the altar, and the artistic veneration of the altar and sanctuary space. Objects of nature can be place in accordance with the season. Objects or images, photographs of love ones, who are especially held in prayerful concern or gratitude, are a blessing to place on the altar. And of course, traditionally flowers or incense may also be placed on the altar in acts of veneration. A lit candle during times of devotional or meditation practice is meaningful. (With a childhood history of our house burning down at age 5, I am one who is particularly concerned about fire danger, so I use battery powered or electric lights or candles.)

Reverent etiquette should be the rule at all times in your meditation sanctuary space. Observing silence, bowing toward the altar and icons to begin and end every period of spiritual practice. A protected sacred space for formal practice of meditation/Prayer of the Heart, should be a prime purpose in this sanctuary.

Some practitioners use a meditation bench or cushion; some use a chair. We make these choices based on physical considerations or prior training. I started out in my meditation practice at age 21 sitting on a cushion in half lotus position. Since then I have graduated to a meditation bench and now to a chair at age 62. So in 40 years I have adapted to the state of my body. There is no need to inflict needless pain to attain some externally prescriptive ideal of what a meditation posture should be. Most prefer to have the meditation space facing the altar, while some prefer the Zen style of facing a wall during silent meditation and facing the altar during devotional practice.

A Daily Order of Devotional Practice

In order to flesh out the varied dimensions of devotional life and practice I am going to draw on examples from my daily patterns. The specific forms I may use might not be the best for everyone, but the basic elements are applicable to all practitioners. My devotional practice in the course of the day is largely wrapped around and is an outward expression of my silent meditation practice:

Morning:

The early morning is a most receptive time for beginning your daily practice, before the obsessive mind has a chance to get fully engaged. For me the time of rising is usually at 5 AM. After a quick cup of English tea I enter my meditation space with hands folded over the heart. I approach the altar, bow with palms pressed together over the heart, and light the candles, three of them. My altar is many tiered with Orthodox icons at various levels, along with Taize and Celtic devotional crosses.

The central icon on the altar is the Christ Pantocrator icon from St. Catherine of Sinai monastery (5th c.). I then strike a Japanese style temple bell three times in invocation of the Holy Trinity before the altar, and in namaste' prayer style, again with palms together before the heart, I chant this invocation, "Yeshua, Yeshua, you in me, I in you." This establishes me in my intention as I prepare to enter into silent Prayer of the Heart practice. (A variant of this might be an extended period of devotional chanting. For example a contemplative community I am affiliated with has a practice of five minutes of devotionally chanting "Shalom" in the morning and evening before the first meditation period. In a group it is quite powerful.) I then extend my hands outward toward the altar reciting softly a prayer of consecration, "*O Beloved, take my life and make it yours. O Beloved, take all that I am and transform it into you. Heart of Yeshua, I vow to take refuge always in you.*" I then hit the bell with the ringer one more time, bow and turn to my meditation seat. I have a meditation quilt that was made by my dear step-mother, Margie, and given to me at her death. It has ritual as well as emotional value for me, so I place my hands folded on the quilt as I am seated, with an erect back but comfortable posture, and begin my first period 25 min. period of meditation, and I introduce the Holy Name of Yeshua, synchronized with my breath and continue on in silence.

At the conclusion of the first period of meditation, I hold my hands prayerfully in namaste' ("gasho" in Zen practice) position and recite a vow of practice. This is done each morning at the conclusion of the first meditation period. The words of the vow connect the silent practice of inner communion with entirety of my life and activity. They are as follows:

"How great and wondrous is your Mercy, O Beloved, enfolding all the universe. I vow to bring forth your Life within me that I may help all living beings. I will love You with my whole heart, soul, spirit, and strength. I will love all beings as myself. O Beloved, make me a vessel of your mercy."

The purpose of this vow is to re-commit myself to my life's purpose of "Theosis," or Christification. In this vow I commit to live out the Great Commandment of Love and to unite my human life with the flow of Divine Life in and through me. The inner and the outer life are united and consecrated to this one purpose.

My usual pattern is to have three 25 minute periods of Prayer of the Heart meditation practice each morning. Sometimes they will be continuous; sometimes they will be interspersed with walking meditation in a circular or oval fashion in the sanctuary space, with hands folded over the heart. On rising for the walking meditation I bow towards the altar and begin the walking meditation. The walking meditation lasts about five minutes. At the conclusion of the walking practice I bow again toward the altar and resume my next period of sitting meditation. At the end of my silent Prayer of the Heart meditation practice, after striking the gong or bell twice in the customary way, I position myself for devotional praying and holding my devotional prayer book in my hand.

Devotional Praying

Across the global traditions there are varied expressions of recited or chanted devotional texts. Buddhists recite or chant the sutras, poetic formulations of the sayings of the Buddha or other prominent teachers in their tradition. Muslims recite selections from the Koran. Christian monks recite or chant the psalms and collections of other traditional prayers. This formalized devotional praying from established texts and prayers has the effect and the intention of reshaping the consciousness of the devotee, bringing it into an alignment of devotional love for the Divine and grounding the consciousness in the teachings of that spiritual tradition. In my own background I have chanted the psalms using Gregorian modes of intonation. I have also chanted the sutras and other tradition Buddhist prayers and texts using both Western and Eastern (Japanese) modes of chanting. Done alone or in community this is a powerful exercise of devotional expression.

Intercessions: While all of Prayer of the Heart is an offering of the world to the healing touch of Yeshua, the Beloved, there is a pause in my devotional practice for deliberate intercessions, which begin with the verse, "*O Beloved Yeshua, extend your mercy and healing touch into our soul and the soul of humankind.*"

Touch us and heal us, bring us to abide in your love.” Then I bring to awareness my offering of persons, beings, and situations of need to the Mercy of Christ. These intercessions extend from the very personal to the global, coinciding with hand movements of offering directed towards the altar.

Integration of Chant forms and Body Devotional Practice: In my morning devotional practice I have included Gregorian invocations and responses, such as the Gregorian “Kyrie,” which is recited following the intercessions. I love deeply the prayer chants of the Taize community and include a number of them also in my practice. In place of the traditional psalms I chant text from the *Celtic Prayers of Iona* prayer book (Philip Newell). It is important that the meaning content of words used in devotional praying be utterly in harmony with the heart’s intention.

I also include in my morning devotions a “*Litany of Refuge in the Heart of Christ*,” modified from a traditional Catholic “*Litany to the Sacred Heart*.” I include a prayer from Brother Roger of Taize, and two verses from the ancient Celtic Hymn, “*Be Thou My Vision*.” The morning devotional practice is punctuated at the end with a chant of my own creation, emulating a form of the Yeshua Prayer. The chant goes “*Yeshua my beloved, heart of the living God, In your Mercy, In your Mercy, we abide*.” (repeated three times and accompanied by hand movements of offering and bowing.)

The morning devotional practice is concluded by three prostrations before the altar (Trinitarian devotion). These are full or kneeling prostrations with my head resting on my hands, palms downward, on the floor, accompanied by the whispered invocation, “*Yeshua, my beloved*.” “*Yeshua, my beloved*.” and “*Yeshua, in your mercy*.” (third prostration) I then bow before the altar, strike the bell two times and extinguish the candles. The formulation and development of this and all my devotional practice has been a creative process over time, done with great intentionality and intuitive discernment to include those forms and expressions that resonate deeply with the Heart and which feed and tend the Flame of Yeshua’s Fire.

Devotional Recollection Throughout the Day: Even in the hermit life I live one can be forgetful and get off track and lose conscious connection from the interior silence and communion and the interior intentionality through the day. Not only do I practice a habitual, ongoing return to the prayer word invocation of the Holy Name of Yeshua, but at intervals through the day, and especially during my exercise work out, I practice the prayer mantra, “*Yeshua, in your mercy*” which helps my consciousness find refuge in the self-offering and the offering of the world and any special intentions or intercessions I have for persons or situations of need. At a psychological level this ongoing act of “offering up” the concerns that come to me is a source of peace and compassionate detachment from the obsessive mind. At pauses in the day I sit quietly and whisper inwardly the prayer

of consecration used at the beginning of the day, *“O Beloved, take my life and make it yours, take all that I am and transform it into you.”*

Sacred Rituals in Community or in Solitude

With those who share my love of devotional practice I find two particular devotional rituals practiced primarily in community (but also alone) particularly meaningful and sacred. They are the practice of the Agape Liturgy, which is a non-canonical form of the Eucharist without a clergy presider. This sacred ritual is practiced from a theology more in keeping with the early table Eucharist presided over by lay people and referred to as the “Breaking of the Bread.” They are a true “Remembrance,” awakening to the Self-Gift of the Divine Christ within and among us, without the mediation of external institutional authorities. (Such lay-led personal devotional expressions of the prayer of Remembrance, are not intended to replace, but to supplement the clergy led canonically celebrated Eucharist in community.) I also find the Taize devotional service of chanted prayers, candles, inspirational readings, and veneration of the cross a deeply inspired and grace-filled sacred ritual to practice in community or alone.

Evening Devotional Practice

Possibly like most persons in their 60s I am often fatigued toward the close of day. I bring my day to closure with a short time of recollection of the events of the day, discerning whatever residue of unease, unforgiveness, or disturbance of conscience may be in my consciousness. I enter my quiet Prayer of the Heart time with the Yeshua chant before my altar having again struck the bell as with morning. At the end of silent practice there is a shorter devotional practice, again using text from the evening prayer text of the Iona community, with the intercessions, and with the offering up of any sources of interior disturbance to the healing touch of Yeshua, praying for and opening to any need of forgiveness. The last chanted verse comes from the Western monastic hour of Compline, *“Into your hands, O Beloved, I commend my spirit.”* It is chanted twice, followed by the responsorial of “In Christ we are given to you day and night.” And then “Into your hands.....” is recited the third time.” This is, of course, the prayer surrender of Yeshua at his death and an appropriate prayer of surrender for us before entering sleep. The evening devotions are then concluded with the same chanted form of the same Yeshua prayer used at the conclusion of the morning devotions and a slowly whispered recitation of the 23rd Psalm.

The Yoga of Devotional Love

The Way of Devotion is the complement and outward expression of the interior silent practice of Prayer of the Heart. It releases our consciousness from the content and contagion of the media and culture we live in, restores us from misdirection, and brings us ceaselessly home to our heart’s true desire. In these daily patterns the fires of loving surrender to the Beloved are fed, and the “Intention” dimension of the life of Inner Communion in Yeshua’s Fire in the Cave of the Heart is liberated and flames up in power and grace.

Chapter Five



THE PATH OF GUARD OF THE HEART

Spirituality and Vulnerability

When I emerged into the life of a young adult, it became stunningly clear that the world around me, especially the world of the social order and culture I lived in, was a coarse, uncaring, and often cruel place. From this awareness I found part of the impetus to seek a spiritual awakening, based on the mistaken belief that if I were spiritually strong enough, I would find an invulnerability against the harshness and pain of the world of human beings. As a young male I found the warrior archetype attractive, and it drew me to the toughness and the discipline of Zen training in a monastic ideal. Having experienced success in athletics, and the psychological hardening of football, basketball, and baseball, I mistook athleticism for spiritual growth, in this case an athleticism that served me well in the coarseness of adolescent male culture but that may not apply in authentic awakening and opening to the Divine. I will concede that learning to discipline myself, albeit for less than sublime purposes, was good preparation for the development of the spiritual disciplines of daily meditation practice and the asceticism of kenotic self-confrontation.

Spiritual Practice and Interior Change

The truth is, quite the opposite happened. The more that I grew and matured in my daily practice and interior spiritual development, the more the protective armor surrounding the spiritual heart in my inner being melted, the greater was my experience of sensitivity to the pain of the world around me, and my own painful empathy with it. I found over time that awakening makes this exquisite sensitivity of the sanctuary of the heart less blockaded and more exposed. Instead of a male warrior with his shield intact against a hostile world, what emerged was a soul with greater receptivity, warmth, and empathy. My macho world was disappearing and the illusions I concocted about the spiritual life

making me invulnerable were scattered and lost. I was discovering that the Communion Paradigm of exposed, open, and self-offering love was the real Kingdom of God, and the only happiness to be found was there, and not behind the walls of the castle of my self-constructed self. My choice was clear and I knew the way that led to Life. Brother Roger of Taizé' says it poetically, "In silence in the presence of Christ, you heard him say, 'Come, follow me; I will give you a place to rest your heart'. And so you are led to the audacity of a yes that lasts until your dying breath. This yes leaves you exposed. There is no other way." (*No Greater Love*)

Union with God and Divine Sensitivity

When I was on a contemplative prayer retreat in 1997 with one of my spiritual teachers along the way, Thomas Hand S.J., he described clearly the nature of the spiritual life. "Spiritual enlightenment is awakening to Oneness, and fully accepting and living the consequences." In the process of awakening, I learned that the armor we erect to prevent us from the pain of an empathic and merciful heart also keeps us from experiencing our oneness with the Divine Beloved, and the exquisite and beautiful sensitivity of Divine Loving Mercy emanating from the Heart of God. Living in the Communion Paradigm is a two edged sword. The experience of communion with God that brings us joy and security also brings us the experience of interior pain and wounding at the cruelty and pain of the world where we live. We know we are not separate, and the exquisite sensitivity of God is alive in us. My first spiritual teacher, Margaret Jiyu Kennett Roshi, gave this caution to her students. "You want enlightenment, but you don't know what you are asking for." What we are really asking for in our unfolding journey of spiritual maturation, knowingly or not, is to open to the Self-Gift of the Divine, and accepting the consequence that this openness will also open our soul to full vulnerability to the spiritual suffering of humankind, and the range of temptations and trials of the soul that the spiritual journey brings.

Becoming the Guardian of the Cave of the Heart

In every mystic tradition across the globe there are sacred stories and myths about the spiritual quest. At the end of the quest the seeker must divest of himself or herself every unworthy motivation and every encumbrance or defilement of the soul that keeps one from entering the chamber of the Holy with integrity. There are guardian spirits or entities in the stories whose task is to protect the entrance with vigilance and to keep out what doesn't belong there. Failure to observe these boundaries results in a closing of the sacred chamber to those who seek. In our own sacred story when we have grown and matured to the point that our own entrance to the inner sanctuary is open and the armor around the heart has melted sufficiently that we can enter and warm ourselves by Yeshua's Fire, then we, ourselves, must assume also the responsibility to be the guardians of the sacred Cave. We must keep watch over our own impediments of soul, over the tempting or violent contagion that may try to enter our sacred

chamber. The exquisite sensitivity that we have found must be protected, or the walls will come up again and prevent entrance to the Cave of the Heart.

Here is where the warrior archetype serves us well. The invading energies come from the culture we live in, the television, the internet, violent, cynical, despairing, or pornographic forms of entertainment. We must keep watch over the Cave of the Heart, and be its guardian spirit. That includes not letting harmful, cynical, coveting, parasitic, or hateful thoughts of our own mind's creation not gain energy or entrance or a foothold in our soul. Such thoughts were classified into eight categories by the ancient desert spiritual elders. While not understanding the workings of the brain or human psychology, these elders had the correct insight that giving our vital energies of soul to these thought patterns gave them powerful momentum over our consciousness. For that reason they called these extreme obsessive compulsive forms of desire and aversion the "demons" of gluttony, concupiscence, avarice, sadness, anger, vainglory, pride, and acedia or despair. With these our practice of vigilant awareness and vigilant kenotic release, prevents entry and diverts these thought forms from gaining any energy or power over our soul. The spacious loving refuge of the Cave of the Heart is protected and remains accessible to the conscious awareness and devotion of the soul. Walking Yeshua's sacred path, and tending the sacred Fire of His Presence in the Heart must involve of necessity keeping watch in vigilance to protect these sacred boundaries.

Yeshua- Our Protection

Some choices we have about what experiences or influences to be exposed to. Over others we have no choice. We can usually choose to not deliberately expose ourselves to harmful or degrading entertainment, to personalities that are cruel, violent, or disrespectful of the sacred, or to influences that might stimulate us unduly towards anger, fear, or hardness of heart. However, over some influences and experiences we may have no choice. In such cases we are guided to seek interior refuge and spiritual protection when exposed to the influence of these situations, personalities, or external conditions. One practice that can be helpful is the use of prayer mantras or visualizations of spiritual protection. In the tradition of Celtic Christianity the invocation of the spiritual circle of protection, and invoking the name of Yeshua or the Trinity is often used. i.e. "O Sacred Three, Encircle me." "Lord Yeshua, You are my refuge and my protection." This invocation of the Holy Name and a visualization can be quite helpful, both spiritually and psychologically, involving a circle of Light, or the image of Yeshua, or the Cross. This prayer of refuge in Christ is taken from the ancient "Breastplate of Patrick:"

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger, Christ in the hearts of all that love me, Christ in the mouth of friend and stranger."

A Practice of Spiritual Maturity for Every Age

Guard of the Heart is an ancient practice of the desert tradition of Prayer of the Heart that must be learned and cultivated as we mature spiritually. In our practice we learn to accept the beautiful openness and exquisite interior sensitivity that comes with nearness to Yeshua's Fire of Presence within. In becoming a guardian of our own heart we consciously protect, reverence, and cherish our inner being and heart as temple of the Living Flame of Love that is Christ, and keep watch and tend to His Fire in the cave of our own heart.

Chapter Six



THE PATH OF OFFERING

“Our mission in this world is to let the **Person Communion** shine through the cosmic order. To do this is to be *theotokos*, the God-bearer, giving birth to God in the forms of organized matter.” (*The Holy Thursday Revolution*, Beatrice Bruteau)

Living in the Communion Paradigm

In the canonical Gospel of John, Yeshua informs us how to enter the Kingdom of God. When Nicodemus, a highly respected Jewish leader, visits Yeshua in the darkness of night, Yeshua teaches, “...I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again...Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:3,6) To be “born again” and enter the Kingdom is to dwell in what Beatrice Bruteau names the “Communion Paradigm.” She describes the Communion Paradigm as “a symmetrical, reciprocal relation of enhancement of being: that beings may be, may become, all that they can be, may act in maximum freedom and be valued for their incomparable preciousness.” (*The Holy Thursday Revolution*, B. Bruteau) The essence of the Communion Paradigm is “personhood in the Oneness of the Divine Being.” We are “born again” and enter the Kingdom of the Communion Paradigm through direct participation in the Self-Gift of the Divine I AM. Our true personhood, our original face, is realized as child of God.

To be “born again” is also to birth God in the world. The Greek word, “theotokos” means “God-bearer” or “God-birther”. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the title “Theotokos” was officially bestowed upon Mary, the mother of Yeshua in the fifth century. Yet, our true being, who we are, is potentially God-birther and God-bearer in the world of form. When empty of self-absorption, we are filled with the Spirit of God.

What is the nature of the realization of “theotokos”? In the first epistle of John, the author writes, “God is love and those who abide in love, abide in God.” (1st John 4:16) The word “love” is translated from the Greek word “agape”. Distinct from “eros”, another Greek word for “love”, which means self-seeking desire, “agape” indicates a self-offering love to the beloved. Agape seeks nothing for itself. As Bruteau states in *The Holy Thursday Revolution*, “Agape reaches out to the beloved, it ‘flares’ out, like a solar flare; it enters into the beloved to nurture the beloved, to give life, to give being, to bestow value.”

The early Greek Church Fathers used the word “perichoresis” to describe the mutually overflowing love within the Trinitarian God. “Perichoresis” means an intimate indwelling or mutual interpenetration of the Father, Son and Spirit. To become “theotokos”, we are accessible to the flow of the Divine Trinitarian Life in our human form. As Yeshua declares in the Gospel of John, “...you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (John 14:20) Our own personhood and humanity is the locus of the upwelling and inflowing/outflowing of the Living Water. As Yeshua proclaims to the Samaritan woman in the mystical encounter at Jacob’s well, “...If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks for a drink you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.” (John 4:10) In the path of offering, we become interiorly empty of obstacles, spacious enough to be a vessel of the Living Water of Trinitarian Life. We wholeheartedly drink from Christ’s Stream of Mercy. As Yeshua promises in the Gospel of Thomas logion 108, “Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me, and I will become them and what was hidden will be revealed.”

Kenotic Practice: Doorway to the Way of Offering

What is the encumbrance that seems to block the flow of Living Water? The unconscious enslavement to a separate self where we feverishly compete against others for self-survival and self-fulfillment is the encumbrance. According to Beatrice Bruteau again in *The Holy Thursday Revolution*, most humans are ensnared in the “Domination Paradigm.” The Domination Paradigm is a zero-sum reality based on the illusion of seeking for a self-fulfillment over and against all other beings, in a world constructed on a competition for attainment of desires, in which the strong, the clever, the resourceful, and the efficient win out over the weak and the innocent. The Domination Paradigm sadly has been “religionized” by institutional Christianity, which holds forth a tyrannical, demanding “god” who showers blessings upon those who please and pacify him and punishes the rebellious. A deity has been created who is a caricature, an abhorrently ignorant, cruel, and childish despot. In the Domination Paradigm salvation constitutes an allegiance with the most powerful dictator, who has dominated all other contenders. Actually humans both fear and long for Agape and the world of communion. In entering the Communion Paradigm, we must abandon the

private and collective deals we have struck with a controlling, domineering deity and open to the vast, limitless freedom of the mysterious Source of Life. All identities of being winner or loser, vanquished or victorious dissolve into the Infinite Mercy Who ceaselessly pours Her/Himself out in Self-gift into all Creation.

In *The Awakened Heart*, the contemplative spiritual teacher Gerald May affirms that we must be freed from our primal addiction of compulsively seeking objects of self-fulfillment and gratification. Paradoxically, authentic wholeness only occurs when we surrender all ideas of self-fulfillment. In spaciousness and emptiness, we become vessels of the Stream of Mercy, the Divine Beloved. In kenotic opening and self-offering we allow the inner Living Flame of Love, Yeshua's Fire, to consume us. As the fifth century desert father, Abba Joseph exhorts, "Why not become become all flame?" (Apothegmata). To become "theotokos", ignited by Yeshua's Fire, we must enter the path of offering.

In Chapter Three, "The Path of Kenosis", I describe the process by which we realize interior freedom through self-emptiness. The path of offering, however, is not a separate step from the way of kenosis. Self-emptying and self-offering are a simultaneous interior movement of "giving up" our self-seeking agenda and "giving over" to the Beloved all desires and expectations. In each moment, with wholehearted attention and intention, we trust our offering merges with and is carried by the Divine Stream of Mercy. We are freed from the addiction of seeking self-fulfillment and are available to be filled with Christ's Love.

Self-Offering in Daily Life

We do not control the events in our lives or the world around us. Yet, we have the gifts of awareness and will as well as the freedom to make choices that affect our life and our world. We can choose to offer ourselves to the Divine Self-Offering Who flows in and through us. When we choose to be present to the Presence and respond wholeheartedly to all beings, human and nonhuman, we become "theotokos". We can bear and birth God in our lives, no matter what the circumstances.

Motivations

How do we practice self-offering in our daily lives? In order to be an offering, a vessel of birthing God in our human form and in the world, we must observe and release from the self-motivations that arise in our mind while we give ourselves to our deepest longing for the Divine in the Heart. In a passage from *The Beloved is My Refuge*, I write, "In the human condition our motivations are often fear based. They are driven by the compulsions of the ego to enhance and protect our misdirected drives for control, affection and security. Through the practice of vigilant presence we continually open to see our hidden motivations of the mind, honestly, as they are, however twisted and misdirected. Through vigilant presence we become aware of the inner disharmony between the

motivations of the mind and the deeper intention of the heart. Through the continual opening to presence, we accept the pain of this disharmony and learn from it, returning to our deepest motivation”.

Yeshua reveals that God's motivation is always love. Knowing or unknowing, our deepest intention in the heart is also love. In the way of offering, we continually return to the singular desire to love God and love creation. The practice of self-offering is the practice of ceaseless prayer. Self-offering is more than an abstract mental discipline. We release from defensive reactions, fear-driven motivations and compulsions that impede the flow of God's Love through our own life and ceaselessly re-member and return to communion with the Divine in each moment. Just as we surrender ourselves in love during our sitting practice, we also open to God's Love in the midst of activity. Self-offering is not an emotion, even though tenderness and sensitivity often arise. In an act of will and commitment, every moment, during emotional highs and lows, we willingly consecrate ourselves in service to God's Love flowing in and through our lives.

Offering of Self to Divine Mercy and Healing

In cultivating interior awareness, we are painfully aware of how often we are captured by the misdirected, convoluted, and usually unconscious motivations of our egoic mind, which is disharmonious and injurious to others and ourselves. Rather than reactively self-justify or self-condemn, we learn to accept the pain of our choices and acts. We simply offer with open hands, our humanity's brokenness to the Divine Heart of infinite Mercy and Healing. When captivated by defending or attempting to perfect an illusory separate self, we return home to God's Love. Contrition and conversion are the doorway into theotokos.

Offering the World to Divine Mercy

In the news events of the day, we can be tempted to worry or despair. We can also be overwhelmed with the cares and concerns of our loved ones and friends. In the Path of Devotion I spoke of how I offer prayers of mercy or intercession in my formal times of practice. My practice also extends throughout the day. When my consciousness is weighed by fear, concern or sorrow for the suffering in the world, with open hands, I gather all beings and give over a prayer of offering into the Stream of Mercy. In intercessory prayer, we are freed from the obsessive need to control out of fear. We trust the universe is held by a limitless Love Who moves through all places and circumstances. Self-offering fulfills the great commandment to “Love my neighbor as myself”.

The Little Way of Ceaseless Offering

Many great teachers across mystical traditions have taught the way of self-offering in daily life. In the seventeenth century, Brother Lawrence of the

Resurrection called the way of self-offering “practicing the Presence of God.” As a Carmelite Monk in France, he learned that the alchemy of inner communion and interior transformation simmered in the kitchen where he washed potatoes, swept floors and scrubbed pots. Being attentive and devoted to the Divine Presence every task became self-offering love. He united his life with the Stream of Love and poured out love in his monastic community and the world.

Similarly, in nineteenth century France, the young girl, Therese of Lisieux discovered that her vocation as a monastic nun was really the vocation of love. In every moment, she offered herself to the Divine Beloved. During the most sublime joy and painful suffering, in every earthly task and spiritual worship, her life was a love-offering to her community and world. She called her path of self-offering love the “Little Way.”

During the Viet Nam War, while napalm bombs and Agent Orange ravaged his country, the Zen monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, practiced self-offering through the way of mindfulness. Acutely aware of the suffering of his own people and the environment, as well as the suffering of those who inflicted harm, he extended loving-kindness to all beings. Currently in his eighties, he has been a prolific writer and spiritual teacher for decades, inspiring millions. He teaches that everyone can awaken through the simple discipline of mindfulness. By slowing down, paying attention to the breath, being aware when walking, smiling, cooking and eating, we extend gentleness and loving-kindness in our world.

The way of offering is both utterly simple and profound. The “Little Way” is available to all. From deep center of the heart we long to be a vessel of loving mercy. When we allow Yeshua’s transforming Fire of Love to flame up and consume us, we become theotokos, God-birther and God-bearer. “In this way we awaken and find ourselves in the Heart of Christ and find that we were never outside of Christ. We find that our own body is Christ’s body.” (*Breathing Yeshua*, William Ryan)

Chapter Seven



THE PATH OF REVERENCE

*"My Beloved is the mountains,
solitary wooded valleys,
strange islands,
resounding rivers,
the whistling of love-stirring breezes,
The tranquil night
at the time of the rising dawn,
silent music,
sounding solitude,
the supper that refreshes and deepens love."*

(The Spiritual Canticle, Saint John of the Cross)

The Human Choice: Consecration or Desecration

Spiritual words are not mere ideals to be believed or emulated, but experiential truths to be actualized in our daily lives. At this critical time, perhaps more crucial than any other era, the choice before us is either holy *consecration*, holding sacred our world and our lives, or harmful *desecration* and the destruction of the ecosystems that support life as well as ourselves. Most humans have not yet fully awakened to the sacred interconnection and communion with all creation and with the One Source from Whom all life springs. Instead of sacralizing the earth and cherishing the intimacy we share with this planet and all its inhabitants, we desecrate the world, treating it with contempt, an object at our disposal to exploit and abuse. Such are the fruits of desecration. Inversely, the full expression and fruit of consecration is the path of reverence.

The violation of our world today is rampant. At this moment, as I write, a massive, catastrophic oil spill, wrought by corporate greed and negligence, threatens the environment of the entire Southern United States and Mexican Gulf Coast regions and is rapidly poisoning our oceans. At this moment, a small percentage of humans over-consume the world's resources in unsustainable ways, while the vast majority live in abysmal poverty and starvation. At this moment, entire species and ecosystems are disappearing into extinction caused by human devastation and indifference. And sadly, at this moment, humans murder and brutalize entire populations of human and non-human creatures who share the planet with us. We idealize a consumerist social order that reduces every created being, every human relationship, into an object of consumption. Sexual relationship is diminished into casual entertainment, too often a transitory "hook up" or mutual exploitation, rather than sacred intimacy. Friendships and marital pairing are often measured in the terms of a market exchange.

De-Sacralization of the World in Organized Religion

The broken relationship with ourselves, our fellow humans, our beautiful green planet as well as the living systems that sustains us, arises from the de-sacralizing of life. Unfortunately, our legacy of religious beliefs frequently contributes to this harm. The major religious traditions of East and West have often viewed the spiritual realm as being in opposition to the material realm. The physical world has been described by religions in the West as "fallen" or "unholy" because of a mythical "original sin" committed by ancestral parents. Religions of the East view the world as "maya" or illusion. Thus, the suffering, degenerate realm of "samsara" must be escaped and transcended. In both East and West, the material universe has not been seen or experienced as God's body. In the age of corporate capitalism, modern Christianity has often idolized profit and accumulation of possessions. Christian "stewardship", which cherishes, protects and reveres the natural world, has been twisted into a religious justification for abusing and exploiting our natural world for profit and pleasure. As Yeshua states, "...*You cannot serve God and Mammon.*" (Matt 6:24) "Mammon", from the Aramaic word "mamona", is described as the false god of material wealth. One greedily pursues and worships material accumulations for self-enhancement. What do we truly worship? Too many Christians today trust in Mammon rather than Christ. Even churches are not revered as sanctuaries of quiet and peace, but places where backslapping and mundane social interactions prevail over the intention of reverencing sacred space and communing with God.

Relational Life is Sacred

Human relationships, even the closest human spousal and familial bonds, are too often characterized by domination, abuse and exploitation rather than honored, cherished and protected. Family and work relationships, as well as human creativity, are desecrated and devalued by economic competition and the

corporate drive for profits. The Domination Paradigm breeds alienation, despair and violence.

To reverence relational life, we must be liberated from our captivity to the economic marketplace and narcissistic selfish societal culture. Communion with the Divine grounds us in the sacred and allows us to be a vessel of care and nurturance in our world.

Mystic Vision - Unitive Vision

“The disciples asked him: ‘When will the kingdom come?’ Yeshua answered, ‘It will not come by watching for it. No one will be saying, Look, here it is! or Look, there it is! The Kingdom of the Father is spread over the whole earth, and people do not see it.’” (Gospel of Thomas logion 113)

Human evolution is now poised for, and in desperate need of, a mystic vision. Karl Rahner, a German Catholic theologian in the Second Vatican Council convened in the early 1960’s, prophetically reflected, “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.” I believe this statement is a global prophecy for all people, not only Christians. Our future survival and evolution as a conscious species depends on awakening to the mystic vision. Arising across geography and time, the mystic vision is a unitive vision, which reveals the Living Flame of Love in the human heart is also the Living Flame of Love dwelling in the heart of the universe. With the mystic vision, we abide in the Communion Paradigm where all life is sacred.

Our relationship with friends, co-workers, families, neighbors, communities and fellow creatures must be healed. We practice the way of reverence by cherishing and cultivating our relationship with the Fire of the Beloved in the interior cave of the heart. . All other expressions of the Path of Reverence flow from the Center and Source of all relationships.

The Path of Reverence as Spiritual Practice

“Yeshua said: I am the Light that shines on everyone. I am the All. The All came forth from me and the All came into me. Split the wood, and I am there. Turn over the stone, and there you will find me.” (Gospel of Thomas logion 77)

Reverence as Consecrated Awareness or Holy Perception:

The path of reverence is fully tending to Yeshua’s sacred Fire within and without, with tenderness and attention. Through a daily practice of communing with the Divine in silence and stillness and through the discipline of kenotic self-emptying practice in daily life, our soul is freed from the entrapment of the habitual patterns of mind and the egoic filters of separateness. The practice of

consecrated awareness enables holy perception. The vision of the deepest heart becomes alive, spacious and clear. Our spiritual sight is aligned with the Light of Christ, the “Lumen Christi”, Who shines within and upon all creation. The Celtic prayers from the Christian community of Iona, Scotland, sing, “*There is no plant in the ground but tells of your beauty, O Christ*” and “*Lighten my understanding of Your Presence all around, O Christ.*” (*Prayers of Iona*, Newell)

John Scotus Eriugena, a mystic and theologian from ninth century Ireland, listened to the Word within his heart and heard God resounding throughout all creation. He wrote that God’s Essence is poured out in all creation and is “the light ...of all visible and invisible existence”. He realized that if God were to stop speaking, the whole universe would cease to exist. Eriugena regarded the world as a “theophany”, a visible manifestation of God. (*Listening to the Heart of God*, Newell) Similarly, Morgan of Wales, or Pelagius, from the fourth century taught that God’s Presence vibrates in the heart of all creation and is the Source of innate goodness in the natural world. He taught women to read scripture and emphasized that the treasure of the image of God is hidden in every newborn child, waiting to be unlocked. Pelagius was excommunicated and condemned to death by the Church, accused as a heretic by Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, who insisted that every child is born in “original sin”. (*Listening to the Heartbeat of God*, J. Newell)

Yet the mystic vision of the immanent Light of Christ in the heart of creation is widespread in the history of Christianity, although frequently condemned by religious authorities. The Beguine movement, for example, flourished in northern Europe during the thirteenth century. For a time some unmarried women were to make the choice to live in independent communities devoted to loving God and serving life in communities of prayer and service. These women were called Beguines. In time, the Church authorities targeted the Beguines as heretics because they were “free spirits”. Repression and persecution followed, including burning at the stake, and the Beguine movement faded. A Beguine medieval mystic, Mechtilde of Magdeburg, recorded her visions and love songs in a series of books, entitled, *Flowing Light of the Godhead*. Affirming the insight that God indwells creation, she wrote, “*The day of my spiritual awakening was the day I saw and I knew I saw, all things in God and God in all things.*” The fourth century mystic and Archbishop of Constantinople, Gregory of Nazianzus similarly shared, “*Christ exists in all things that are.*” (*Original Blessing*, M. Fox)

In holy perception we attune our vision to the Light and Presence of Christ with increasing sensitivity and attentiveness. We see with undivided vision the Light that shines forth from the beginning. The holy perception or mystical vision is described by the ninth century Celtic mystic, John Scotus Eriugena as “the true beholding of the light from the inner eyes” through the healing grace of Christ. (*Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, J. Newell). In the path of reverence, we continually open our eyes to “behold” the holy in all life. The natural fruit of “beholding” the Light of Christ in all creation and in every circumstance is awe

and adoration, a reverent interior posture of bowing. In every moment of daily life, the tasks before us are doorways into the Divine if we see with unified vision. Hence, as Brother Lawrence or Thich Nhat Hanh, when cooking or sweeping the floor, we are present, allowing God to see through our eyes. When drinking coffee or communicating with loved ones or friends, we offer the gift of undivided and holy perception and bow to the Holy Presence Who indwells all life.

Reverence as Holy Tenderness

In the Gospel of Thomas logion 15, Yeshua states, “*Love your brother and sister as your soul; protect them as you do the pupil of your eye.*” In this logion, Yeshua provides a poetic metaphor of love. He correlates love to the physical eye, which is miraculously powerful, able to perceive the universe, yet also vulnerable. According to Yeshua, just as we safeguard our eyesight, we must provide tender care and protection to our “brothers” and sisters”. Who are our “brothers” and “sisters”? All creatures who share our world, human and nonhuman, are our relations. In the Gospel of Thomas logion 15, Yeshua also equates the preciousness of love with true seeing. With our inner eyes, with holy perception, we perceive Love everywhere.

In the path of reverence, the companion of *consecrated awareness* or holy perception is *consecrated intention* of love or holy tenderness. Through daily practice of inner communion with the Divine and kenotic self-emptying, consecrated awareness or holy perception is freed. Likewise through daily practice, holy tenderness is released from the impediment of habitual egoic patterns. Through holy perception and holy tenderness, we unite with and rest in the spaciousness of Christ’s Heart. Hence, by giving nurture and care to every creature we meet as well as every task before us, we practice the path of reverence. We extend holy tenderness in warmly greeting a stranger on the street or extending politeness and courtesy to drivers in traffic and fellow shoppers in the grocery store. We offer holy tenderness and devoted respect to our spouse at the dinner table and in the intimacy of sexual union. Holy tenderness is also the gift we share with family pets as well as the loving concern we extend to the flowers, birds, insects and other creatures we encounter in our garden, yard or neighborhood walk. Nonhuman creatures and the environment are “the least of these,” “the little ones”, in whom Christ’s presence and Light resides. In the twelfth century, Saint Francis devoted himself to tenderly serving all life. In his “Canticle of the Sun”, he expressed respect and honor to “brother sun”, “sister moon and stars”, “brothers wind and air”, “sister water”, “brother fire”, “sister earth, our mother”. If the great mystic and saint, Francis of Assisi loved creatures of this world as his brothers and sisters in the universal circle of life, should not this also be true for us?

Twenty years ago, on an early summer’s morning, I was walking to join a circle of meditation practitioners for a time of shared silence and inner communion together. When crossing the street in front of the meditation center, I

saw a wounded sparrow flopping around in the street, frantically trying to fly. Apparently a car had just hit the bird. I intuitively picked up the bird with both hands and held it firmly until it stopped struggling. Softly whispering words of encouragement, I cradled the frightened little creature with one hand and carefully placed it in the pocket of my windbreaker jacket. The bird stirred slightly once or twice during the two periods of meditation. At the conclusion of the community meditation period, I walked into the meditation center garden and gently removed the small sparrow from my pocket to see if it were still living and able to move. I held the bird extended on the palm of my right hand and after a brief moment of orientation, the bird flapped its wings and flew away. Such is the healing balm of meditation, which cradles both human and bird, mutually bathed in God's tenderness. We learn to rest in healing holy tenderness and fly into the vast freedom of the Heart.

Practice of Reverence – Fulfillment of the Great Commandment

In the Gospel of Mark, a teacher of the law asks Yeshua, "...Of all of the commandments, which is the greatest?". Yeshua answers, "*The greatest one is this: 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength'. The second greatest is... 'love your neighbor as yourself.'..*" (Mark 12:28-31)

In the Christ Mystery, all beings who share the circle of life are our neighbor. All beings are embraced within the One Self, Who is God. The practice of reverence is the fulfillment of the Great Commandment. In the path of reverence, all actions are infused with the presence and awareness of holy perception and with the exquisite care of holy tenderness.

Holy Communion in the Sacred Body of Christ

"We are the universe becoming conscious of its capacity to be in communion with the Holy Mystery that lies at the Source of our being."
(Making the Shift, E. Prevallet)

Before the Eucharist or Agape Liturgy was Romanized in the institutional church, it was celebrated in a sacred circle of lay persons seated at a table meal or feast. As a ritual for the remembrance of Yeshua, early Christians awakened to the living Presence of Christ within and amongst themselves. Known as "people of the Way" or "followers of the Way", early Christians followed Christ into the ever deepening and broadening depths of Love. The Agape liturgy, at its deepest level, is the Mystery of mutual self-giving between the Divine Beloved and creation. The Eucharist is rooted in the mystical Judaic tradition which describes the relationship between humans and Divine as a cosmic wedding feast, where all existence is moving toward greater intimacy with the Source of creation. In mystical Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy, this sacred union is

called Theosis or Christification of the soul. Our destiny as humans is to be the universe conscious of itself in God. In the path of reverence, full expression and fruit of mystical Christianity, we awaken to our unique, essential personhood in mutual communion with the Divine Personhood of Christ.

As Yeshua teaches in the Gospel of Thomas 108, *“Whoever drinks what flows from my mouth will come to be as I am and I also will come to be as they are, so that what is hidden can become manifest.”* We flow with the mutual indwelling and self-giving Trinitarian Life, described as “perichoresis” by the fourth century Greek Fathers from Cappadocia, Turkey. Literally translated from the composite Greek word “peri” and choreoi”, “periochoresis” means a “round dance” or “circle dance.” In the Eucharist, we are invited to join the dance in God. “Periochoresis” is expressed in the stanza below from a contemporary text of the sacred Agape Liturgy:

*“Through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ,
our humanity is consecrated
and transfigured in the Beloved.
Thus we enter the stream of our Beloved’s life
with full adoration and self-offering love;
Thus we share in the Everlasting Banquet
of Eternal Life. Amen”*
(Agape/Eucharistic Liturgy closing prayer, W. Ryan)

In the unitive mystical vision, we are the consecrated bread and wine, lifted up and offered, the body and blood of the Cosmic Christ, transformed and conscious of our sacramental divinization. The twentieth century French Jesuit theologian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, envisioned all creation evolving toward the Omega Point where the fullness of the incarnation of Christ, the Divine Living Word made flesh, is realized. In the Celtic Christian mystical vision, Christ is the Aliveness at the heart of all creation as well as the One Who embraces the entire universe. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Christ is the Universal “Pantocrator”, a Greek word meaning All-mighty or All-powerful. Nothing exists outside of Christ.

The time is ripe for a new mystical awakening of the Christ mystery. Uniting our lives utterly with the Divine Beloved in Christ, we let go of our fixations on organizational loyalties and identities and are transformed into Christ and the Mystical Body of Christ, Who permeates and embraces all life. The Universal Indwelling Christ must be our true religion whether or not we choose to participate in the institutional Church. The simple truth is that our sacred Path is Yeshua the Universal Christ, the inner Living Flame of Love, the Fire that burns brightly in our heart and the Heart of the Universe.

The nature of God is Unconditional Self-Offering Love and exquisite Presence and Tenderness. In the Prayer of the Heart, we participate in the Divine Stream of Love Who moves through all human and nonhuman creation. The nineteenth

century Russian author, Dostoyevsky, elegantly expresses the breadth and depth of the Path that is Yeshua. He writes,

*" Love all of God's creation,
the whole and every grain of sand of it.
Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.
Love the animals, love the plants, love everything.
If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things.
Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day.
And you will come at last to love the whole world
with an all-embracing love."*

(The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoyevsky)

I conclude our reflection on the life of intimacy with the Christ Mystery within and among us by intoning this, my daily chant, that expresses profoundly both our heart's longing and the utter simplicity of our ceaseless practice of inner communion with Yeshua the Christ, the Living Flame of Love at the center of our Heart.

***"Yeshua, Yeshua,
You in me, I in You."***

About the Author



William Ryan

Bill Ryan is a spiritual director and retired clinical counselor born in 1948. He offers instruction and support (www.Avalon-Counseling.com) for those who wish to make a serious commitment to grow in the spiritual path of meditation, Prayer of the Heart or contemplative prayer practice. Bill provides his writings and audio recordings of contemplative spiritual practice through his website: www.Avalon-Counseling.com (www.Avalon-Counseling.com/avalon_resources.html).

Since 1971 Bill has undergone formation in contemplative spiritual practice, guided by several contemplative teachers of both Zen Buddhist and Christian Mystical practice. Most prominent among them is the spiritual direction and guidance received from Abbot Bernard McVeigh O.C.S.O. over a ten year period. Bill has completed a two-year training program in spiritual direction from Shalom Prayer Center in Mt. Angel, Oregon. Since 1997 he has been co-director in a ministry of contemplative teaching and support through Contemplative Ministries of the Pacific Northwest in partnership with Sharon K. Cooper . (www.PrayeroftheHeart.com)

Bill has authored three books on transformative Prayer of the Heart practice, *The Beloved is My Refuge*, *Breathing Yeshua* and *Entering the Stream of Mercy in the Jesus Prayer*. His article on a teacher-student approach to spiritual direction in Prayer of the Heart, "Apprenticeship - One Model for Spiritual Direction," was published in *Presence* magazine, the journal for Spiritual Director's International, June 2006 issue. He presently lives in Salem, Oregon with his spouse and family pets, where his home is his hermitage and where the center of his life is the every-moment practice of Prayer of the Heart or Hesychastic Meditation.