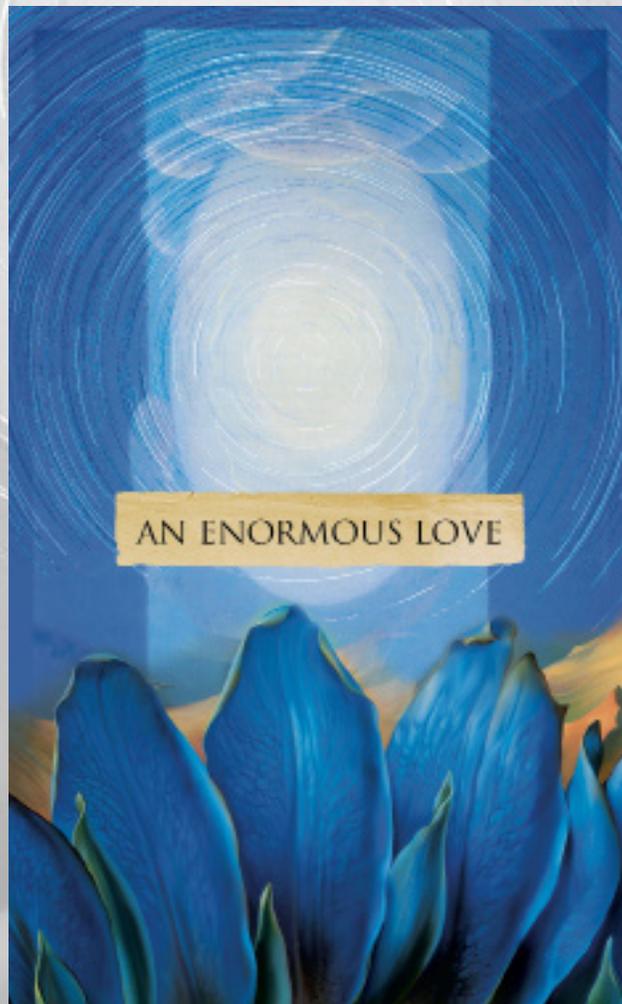




THE MARK

July 2019
Volume 31
Number 7

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LIGHT AND BE LIT

BY PETER HAAS

The Sixteenth Century mystic John of the Cross found himself at the age of thirty-five unjustly imprisoned in a small, dark and cold monastery prison cell. For nearly nine months, he endured body and soul crushing conditions, yet he was not crushed.

Instead, something in him cracked open more deeply to the enormous, expansive love that he called “the living flame of love.” In his suffering and solitude, he was inspired to write poetry, mystical stanzas that still speak to us five hundred years later of the possibility we each have of recognizing, receiving and responding to God’s love in our most difficult life moments, when the way forward to freedom or help seems closed.

Such difficult moments are when a different, inward way often unexpectedly opens up, revealing a Center we forgot was there – a Center of stillness and contentment that softens all resistance to whatever is occurring that we are reactive to;

a Center that consumes our wanting and longing into itself, bringing real inner freedom to simply be at peace in and with our reality, even if that reality isn’t what we desire or think we deserve.

Here’s how John of the Cross expresses it in the first stanza of his poem, *The Living Flame of Love*:

O living flame of love

That tenderly wounds my soul

In its deepest center! Since

Now you are not oppressive,

Now Consummate! If it be
your will:

Tear through the veil of this
sweet encounter!

Bernadette Roberts, a modern “mystic” and spiritual heir to John of the Cross, teaches that “this unitive Center is the living flame of love, an enormous expansive love that continuously goes outward.” The nature of fire is that it turns everything it touches into itself. By way of analogy, this living flame burns us into itself, consuming our self and revealing the Light of Christ

– the deepest Center, the source of this state of enormous, expansive, outward flowing love. Fr. Thomas Keating, also a spiritual heir to John of the Cross, usefully updated John’s language by incorporating the aspect of “divine therapy” and “unloading” to describe what the living flame of love is doing spiritually and psychologically.

In day-to-day life, the process of spiritual transformation is always occurring, though we may not be aware of it. A daily meditative prayer practice, such as Centering Prayer, supports this process, and creates a receptive environment for the “tender wounding” John of the Cross speaks of.

Once, on a Centering Prayer retreat for a different church I served, a retreatant asked to visit for spiritual companionship. This person shared with me that through the silence, a long-standing fear, hatred and resentment of a family member that had oppressed the retreatant for years, seemed to disappear and fall away into the

silence. They knew that they would never be the same.

Several months later, this retreatant visited at the church office, and shared with me that in the weeks following the retreat, they had reconciled with this family member and that forgiveness and peace were now occurring where once fear, hatred and resentment had been the norm. This is a tangible example of what Bernadette means when she writes that, “this unitive Center is the living flame of love, an enormous expansive love that continuously goes outward.” Similarly, the Katha Upanishad calls us to “light the fire...that burns out the ego and enables us to pass from fearful fragmentation to fearless fullness in the changeless whole.”

A daily practice of Centering Prayer supports our being alighted by the living flame of love and also keeping it lit. So too does the practice of Self-Observation, which in many ways is what is meant by witnessing what is arising and

revealed in the fire. A daily practice of physical movement also supports this process. I notice particularly how helpful Yoga is in burning away aspects of myself that need to be released. For example, I may begin my yoga practice unaware of an anger or grief weighing me down, and unexpectedly, in the midst of a downward facing dog, I begin to release an energetic emotion, and a sigh of tears indicates that the tender wounding of the living flame of love has done its secret work, once again.

We are halfway through the year of our 2019 Annual Aim of wishing for “A New Creation.” The summer is a good time to pause, reflect and recommit to the community Aim:

How are you growing?

What are you observing?

What is arising in you that needs to be consumed by the living flame of love?

Where have you seen transformation occur in your life?

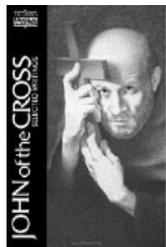
What is falling away in you

and what is arising in its place?

John of the Cross eventually escaped his imprisonment. He made a daring escape and survived near starvation. His life story is an appropriate analogy for the overall human experience: we may often feel imprisoned by our self, especially the karma and consequences of our self-bound ways of life. Fear. Shame. Sorrow. Pity. Hopelessness. Such emotions can seem to trap us in a prison of our own making. We will need to ask for help. We will need a plan. We will need to take courage. We will need to make effort. We will need to Work toward escaping. We will need to be both patient and decisive. Our freedom awaits! We must remember it is not a freedom unto the expanding self, but a freedom unto the flame that frees us from our self and replaces it with an enormous love that when lived and shared, alights the hearts and lives of others. 

BOOK LOOK

JOHN OF THE CROSS: SELECTED WRITINGS



“I have turned the page of a book only to find, after a moment’s reading, the page has turned me.” This is a good way to describe the experience of reading the works of John of the Cross. There are some pages in this book that are so clear and insightful, that having read them, you will never be the same. The practical wisdom and simple analogies

John of the Cross uses to articulate the nature of the spiritual journey are at once classic and contemporary. His wisdom endures in part because of his deep empathy for the human condition paired with an expansive view of God’s love.

For instance, here is a sample section from his book *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* that bears witness to the difference between a unitive experience and the unitive state. This simple nuance helps us understand the nature of the Center consuming us, turning us into flame:

“In discussing union with God, we are not discussing the substantial union that is always existing but the soul’s union with and transformation in God. This union is not always existing, but we find it only where there is likeness of love. We will call it ‘the union of likeness’; and the former, ‘the essential or substantial union.’ The union of likeness is supernatural; the other, natural...Consequently, a soul must strip itself of all creatures and of its actions and abilities...so that everything else unlike and un-conformed to God is cast out.”

This is our part. This is the Work of Inner Christianity. This is what happens in the Dark Night of the senses.

If you wish to read more of this insightful and impactful mystic, the book to start with is *John of the Cross: Selected Writings* in The Classics of Western Spirituality Series published by Paulist Press. 

SUNDAY SERMON TEACHING THEMES

July 7	Genesis 3:1-24	Listening and Learning
July 14	Genesis 4:1-16	East of Eden
July 21	Genesis 7:6-24	Deep Cleanse
July 28	Genesis 8:2-22	New Beginnings

JULY-AUGUST COMMUNITY READING

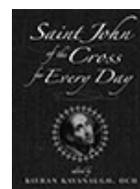
Emptiness: A Practical Guide for Meditators by Guy Armstrong

CCH BOOKSTORE

SUGGESTED TITLES FOR JULY



*John of the Cross
Doctor of Light and Love*
by Kieran Kavanaugh



*Saint John of the Cross for Every Day
Daily Readings from
John of the Cross*

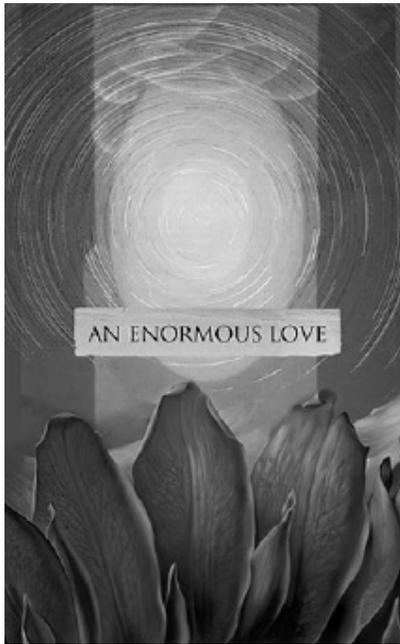


*Fear
Essential Wisdom for
Getting Through the Storm*
by Thich Nhat Hanh



*The Subject Tonight Is Love!
60 Wild and Sweet Poems
of Hafiz*

Bookstore and Library Hours
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon



Whoever is in Christ is a new creation ...

behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

ANNUAL AIM: A NEW CREATION

ENORMOUS LOVE BY TANNA FISKE

To follow Christ means to have his same interior experiences and to follow the inner, not the outer, movement of his life. ... We cannot put Christ on like a coat, for even if we copied his behaviors, followed his words or did everything he said, this would still not be true following.

Christ's first commandment to love God above all things is the sole key to his interior life and his experience of God. As beginners we aim for love by the practice of virtue through self-discipline, but later the practice of virtue arises automatically out of love and is not a matter of self-discipline or curbing the ego-self.

... Realizing this priority is, I think, the essence of a contemplative.

... He follows the first commandment until it leads automatically and *per force* into the second.

... This unitive Center is the living flame of love, an enormous expansive love that continuously goes outward.

Bernadette Roberts, *What is Self?*

Only the Divine matters, And because the Divine matters, Everything matters.

Thomas Keating, "What Matters," *The Secret Embrace*

As I read and reflect on these quotes, a stirring question comes forth, "Is it enormous love or enormous loss?" I continue pondering this month's theme of An Enormous Love and invite you to do the same. As contemplatives, we are often asked to question everything, to see how ideas apply

to our own experiences and lives, and to remember that God is in All. So, how is An Enormous Love present in my life and how has it evolved in my ever-deepening relationship with God?

I can remember feeling joy when copying Corinthians 13 in my journals and sharing those words

in cards and sentiments to loved ones. I often aspired intentionally to arise to those loving actions in my life. But it wasn't until a Centering Prayer class that I thought to myself, "Wait, this is for real – these attributes of love is patient, kind, long suffering and the rest – this is game on. Love isn't just a pretty

idea or the lines of a Hallmark card, God really means for us to live this every day and with everyone!”

A Blessing from an Enormous Loss

Enormous love is a blessing from enormous loss. My mother developed an untreatable brain tumor when she was 44 years old. Although my grandparents went to all the experts and clinics in the country, nothing could be done. She was strong and brave and gave me a tremendous base on which to grow. She became my angel when I was six years old. My sweet father and brother were at her bedside as she greeted her maker and had the blessing of seeing her in peace.

My father lost the love of his life, his best friend, his strongest supporter and his spiritual partner. People say that my mom was the real deal. She led Bible Study Fellowship. She never drank, smoked, or did drugs. She only had dessert on special occasions. She lived a very disciplined, God-centered life. She loved and adored my dad, my brother and me.

Shortly after she passed, my dad came into my room when I was playing on the floor. He sat down on my bed and before he could speak I said, “You aren’t going to come in here and start crying are you?” And so the stuffing of emotions began. We all did our very best.

Therapy wasn’t a consideration in rural east Texas.

My maternal grandmother anticipated my every need and spoiled me with unconditional love and care. She would hold me tight, answer every call no matter what time of the day or night it was and provide an example of pure abundant love. What an amazing foundation she gave me.

My father went through his suffering and about 18 months later was reconnected with a woman he fell in love with before he joined World War II. Their flame was quickly rekindled and they married shortly thereafter. She moved into our house. We had one disagreement in the 42 years we shared. I mouthed off to her about how she was not my mom and she should go back to Georgia. She immediately pinned me to the ground and said in a voice I never heard again, “I’m not going anywhere, so you need to get used to it.”

As I grew up, my stepmother was a provider extraordinaire. She kept the most amazing household. She was always 100% committed to my dad. My father made a deal with her; she would be his wife, but not my mother. He would be making all the parenting decisions regarding me. I have no clue how he was so wise. But growing up,

I hated it because he was a drill sergeant and a trial attorney. His view of God was very dualistic. I remember him saying that churches aren’t like they should be these days, “we need more fire and brimstone.”

True Love

My dad made many sacrifices so that he could provide me with what he thought was the best education and athletic training possible. He often told me his goal in parenting me was to make sure I was independent in case anything ever happened to him. Along the way, I dated one young man that my dad “sort of” approved of, but it wasn’t meant to be. In 1992, I stood up in a crowded room and over the heads of everyone else, my eyes caught the eyes of my one true love. I didn’t have a clue at the time, but after talking for four hours he went home and thanked God he had met his soulmate.

About a year and a half later, he wanted to get married. I had a complete collapse and locked myself in a small closet on and off for three days. The idea of trusting someone triggered the pain of losing my mom at a young age. Prior to this, I had never cried specifically for the loss of my mom. I had no idea I was projecting all of my pain and loss on this individual and wanting him to fill the void. I had never trusted

anyone outside of my family. He didn't run off. Instead he asked my dad for my hand in marriage. My dad said, "Hell no!" and began plans to immediately send me to France so I would hopefully get over this young man. We started the first of many counseling sessions.

Our hometown church never got over the fact that I was supposed to marry the first man I had dated. This meant that my husband and I weren't in a church community from 1992-2000. But in God's time, we found The Church of Conscious Harmony.

On Children

From a very early age I remember my dad and paternal grandmother reading Kahil Gibran's book, *The Prophet*. It was mysterious to me. My dad read the poem on "Children" to me on special momentous occasions like high school graduation and my beginning of college. My mother also carried a copy of this book in her bag. She and my dad had a special connection with it in their marriage and so it always held a dear spot in my life.

When my first born baby was christened by Tim and Barbara Cook, they read Kahlil Gibran's poem on children. These words went deep into my heart that day holding my baby girl, "although they are with you yet they belong

not to you. You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts... You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you." This wisdom has been the foundation of my understanding of motherhood.

Raising children when you do not have the experience of being raised by a mother has put me on some shaky ground. Often I find myself feeling inadequate and lost. But through a dear friend and member of CCH, I have come to believe our children pick us as parents. In my case, I think my mother sent this loving child to me to help heal the wounds of losing my mom at six years old. I've been additionally blessed by my son who provides me the most unconditional deep love I have ever felt. He has a way of smiling at me that makes everything okay. He can be furious with me at one moment and then runs to me for hugs and says I love you in his special way.

As a Contemplative

My false personality constantly goes around looking for someone to mother or help. As a young adult, I became a teacher and still love educating students. As I have learned to self-observe myself, I have had the experience of time slowing down to really see my false self getting anxious about something and immediately avoid

it by running to find someone to help. Through Grace, I began to ask myself what I needed and the answers are given. It's a continuing question as I aim in making God-devotion the center of my life.

At times, especially since 2016, I have had very low months, even years. My family has been through difficult times – the loss of multiple loved ones, serious life-threatening illnesses, and navigating through adversity. I have felt lost and confused. I contemplated divorce. Instead, when I got really still and silent in contemplative prayer, I knew that I was being called to an enormous love – love that I needed to provide for my husband and my family even though it appeared to be the hardest choice for me personally. These spiritual experiences of knowing the divine energy within are so powerful and clear. The inspirations of the Spirit guide me. The pure love of God leads the way.

As Bernadette Roberts shared in the opening quote, "As beginners we aim for love by the practice of virtue through self-discipline, but later the practice of virtue arises automatically out of love and is not a matter of self-discipline or curbing the ego-self. ... This unitive Center is the living flame of love, an enormous expansive love that continuously goes outward."

May it be so in God's enormous love! 

PRACTICING THE SACRED AT LAMA

Last month, 18 pilgrims from the Church of Conscious Harmony (14 youth, 4 adults) traveled to the northern mountains of New Mexico for their annual journey to the Lama Foundation, an intentional spiritual community that was founded in the 1960s by people who held a deep wish to discover harmonious ways to live together with each other, the land, and with the Creator. The Lama Foundation describes itself as “a spiritual community, educational facility, and retreat center ... that embraces all spiritual traditions. It has strong ties to Taos Pueblo, the Hanuman Temple in Taos, NM, Sufi Ruhaniat International, Dervish Healing Order, The Church of Conscious Harmony, St. Benedict’s Monastery in Snowmass, CO, and dozens of other communities, spiritual teachers, and thousands of pilgrims from nearly all religious heritages who call Lama their home.”

Many pilgrims have sought the sacred at Lama, including Ram Dass, Fr. Thomas Keating, Fr. Carl Arico and our own Tim Cook who stood looking out over the San Cristobal Mountains and made a real wish for a spiritual community to manifest in his life.

Our CCH community is alive and thriving with a rich congregation built on some of the same principles found at Lama – silence, practice, seva, and community.

For about 19 years, our HYPED (Harmony Youth Practicing Evolving Devotion) group has made the Lama pilgrimage. Their devotion is a connection between God and each other through Centering Prayer and conscious togetherness. They leave electronic devices at home and step whole-heartedly into a wish to be present. This year’s group aim demonstrates this devotion:

“Channeling our love in all worlds radiates peace and joy and reveals the One True Self.”

Their level of engagement and willingness to say “Yes” to spirituality is a quality we can all learn from. Reflections from some of the pilgrims are below.

“Traveling to Lama each year with the youth and a few adults of the church on a pilgrimage is like physically traveling into prayer. There is a delight in going into the liminal space and a need to let go of the thoughts and emotions that generally keep my attention. But

this is also the challenge of the pilgrimage for me. The struggle to let go of my usual way of Being is uncomfortable and yet very gratifying. The discomfort comes from the unloading of emotional material that comes up from the constant praying, altitude, and responsibilities. But these experiences are also the gifts of the trip because they are experienced in community with remarkably brave, open, loving, young people.

This pilgrimage to the birthplace of the wish for The Church of Conscious Harmony is for and about the young people who have put aside their normal lives to come to the sacred mountain to experience God in nature, God in dance, God in prayer and all things everywhere and always. Sharing these experiences through words, seva, silence, and deep listening opens the collective heart of the group so that an intimate, courageous level of expressing the realities of what is happening in each individual “Now” can be understood and felt by all. This profundity is the gift we Pilgrims receive and bring back to our CCH community each year and it is a privilege and joy to do so.” ~Don Hale

“As soon as I arrived at Lama, I felt my energy shift immediately. I suddenly felt extremely calm and present. Every day at Lama was different, but the energy and the atmosphere invoked a sense of ease and openness to whatever the day may bring.” ~Kyra Ely

“My Lama experience was life changing. Up until this point, I’d been skeptical and disconnected. My peers at HYPED all seemed to be connected and friendly, which I envied and didn’t feel part of. And whenever we went into Centering Prayer, I never felt completely tuned into a higher being. It was hard, and I felt like I wasn’t a part of the group, which made me think that I couldn’t have a healthy relationship with myself and God. But at Lama, the community felt safe and helped me explore. My connection to the higher being that I had never fully known finally clicked, and I was One. My fear, isolation, and pain finally was overpowered by the knowing that I was loved by the people around me and the higher beings watching.” ~Hazel Wilton-Green

“For me, this year’s pilgrimage to the Lama Foundation was a

beautiful expression of our group aim, “Channeling our love in all worlds radiates peace and joy and reveals the One True Self.” The container that we created through our combined intentions, the love we share, and the synergy that we have with that sacred land and the Lama Beans allowed for the possibility that each would get exactly what they needed. My greatest joy came from witnessing the healing and transformation of our youth, each of whom proved that the spiritual journey isn’t just for adults. My personal journey was about getting the small self out of the way so that Spirit could work through me, and my heart bursts open when I think of our time together and how five days in this simple community of love in the mountains can transform those who ask for it.” ~David Jenkins

“This was my fourth trip to Lama and each year I am able to go deeper into my connection to a higher power. I had a very emotional year but had not really known how to express it. At Lama, I was able to unlock and unload all of this emotion. Lama creates a community where I feel free to be my true self. My aim going into this trip was to

accept who I truly am because I had been struggling a lot with loving myself; and I can sincerely say that Lama allowed me to accomplish this aim. I feel such a strong connection to all of the people that went on this pilgrimage and would not have been able to do this without them.” ~Mary Sophia Shakespeare

“It is a blessing for me that the Universe called me up to Lama this year. It was not something I had planned. The mountain gave us beauty, bears and Be Here Now. I had the seva of preparing rooms for unknown guests, sweeping, dusting, and making beds, just as someone had prepared sacred space for me. Lama is a place to step out of our usual and make space for intense group transformation and to experience the magnificent wonder of clean air, sparkling water bubbling up at the spring and huge pine trees that have stood in the fire and lived to tell about it, but above all to Remember God in conscious togetherness. I’m in!” ~Deborah Hale

For more reflections from our pilgrims, please listen to the June 23, 2019 Sunday worship service on www.consciousharmony.org. 



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My Father is still working, and I also am working. John 5:17

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

WORKING AGAINST SELF-LOVE

Work Idea: The Work of Inner Christianity connects the idea that we have an inner kernel of Essence that can grow, and also an outer layer of personality that can be made more passive – once it has been formed and supported our human development. This Essence can be viewed as our deepest Center. Related to this is the idea that self-love keeps us asleep in personality, and perhaps even dissociated from our Center and that self-observation begins to lessen the grip self-love has over us.

Work Source: “Self-love fights against the truths of the Work. The truths of the Work can waken us. Self-love seeks to keep a man and a woman asleep. Awakening is thus rendered impossible for them. They are ‘ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.’ It must be clear to everyone by now that no one can awaken without self-observation. A person simply cannot see what is meant when told he/she is difficult, slow, self-satisfied, lazy, smug, conceited, and so on. The self-love will not accept it. It may get violent. If you cannot see by your own observation, step by step, over a long, accumulating time, what you are like, you cannot awaken to what you are like, and so will never desire to die to what you are like. Your consciousness of yourself will not show any increase. And unless you begin to awaken to what you are like, the self-love will continue to have full undisputed power over you.” Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, Volume 5, p. 1619.

Application: This month, Work to self-observe how your self-love manifests. Focus on one thing it does. How it is expressed. Observe it in a non-critical way. Notice it. Name it. Be with it. Once you have observed it completely, or as much as you can bear, ask the Center, the living flame of love, to take it away and replace it with an enormous love that moves outward toward others, not inward toward the self.

Further Resource: Prayerfully ponder and perhaps memorize St. Paul's poetic definition of Love recorded in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. 

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey. Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of Lectio Divina.

One principle appears in these pages each month.

GUIDELINE 18

The growing awareness of our true Self, along with the deep sense of spiritual peace and joy which flow from this experience, balances the psychic pain of the disintegrating and dying of the false self. As the motivating power of the false self diminishes, our true Self builds the *new self* with the motivating force of divine love.

UPCOMING CENTERING PRAYER RETREAT DAYS IN COMMUNITY

AT THE CHURCH OF CONSCIOUS HARMONY

July 13	1:00-5:00 pm	\$10
Aug 10-11	Sat 8:30 am-4:00 pm & Sun 8:00 am-4:00 pm	\$100
Sept 21	9:00 am-4:30 pm	\$20
Oct 19	9:00 am-4:30 pm	\$20
Nov 16	9:00 am-4:30 pm	\$20
Dec 14	1:00-5:00 pm	\$10

One-day – please bring your own lunch.

Two-day commuter retreat – sleep at home; meals included.

Cost is a suggested love offering. Scholarships are available as needed.

MULTI-DAY, OVERNIGHT AT CEDARBRAKE RETREAT & RENEWAL CENTER

July 26-31	6-day	\$595
Sep 13-18	6-day	\$595
Dec 6-12	7-day	\$695

Double room prices. Single room is an additional \$10/night.

Please contact the CCH office or website to register.

JULY CALENDAR

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

1/2 day Centering Prayer Retreat
July 13 1-5pm \$10

Intro to Centering Prayer Course
July 20 9am-1:30pm \$75
+6 consecutive Tuesdays 7:30-9pm
(July 23-Aug 27)

MONTHLY

1st Sunday
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

WEEKLY

Sundays

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

Wednesdays

Contemplative Communion Service 6-7pm

Thursdays

Yin Yoga 6-7:15pm \$15
Preregister: AwakenedHeartAustin@gmail.com
Work of Inner Christianity Class 7:30-9p

Fridays

Yin Yoga 1-2:15pm \$15
Preregister: AwakenedHeartAustin@gmail.com

Saturdays

Scriptorium noon-12:50pm

DAILY

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

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



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TRUE HAPPINESS

When He saw the crowds, Jesus went up the mountain,
and after He had sat down, His disciples gathered around Him,
and He began to teach them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted
for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you
and utter every kind of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven,
For in the same way, they persecuted the prophets
who were before you.

Matthew 5:1-12

+++

The time of the year not associated with the major seasons of the Church calendar is known as Ordinary Time. This period of ordinary time is sometimes known as the season of Pentecost. It extends until the start of Advent. It is the time of manifestation of what Jesus taught by His life, death, Resurrection and Ascension . . . the fullness of possibility of a human life. Ordinary life can be transformed by the power of the Word and become totally extraordinary.