January 23, 2020 – Self-remembering in Christ

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## "Remember yourself always and everywhere."

## One of Gurdjieff's 38 Work aphorisms inscribed above the walls of the Study House at the Prieuré.

Maurice Nicoll, in speaking about practical work on ourselves, says "*the most important thing is Self-remembering"* and that all other work on ourselves *depends* on Self-remembering. Self-remembering is probably the Work concept that people new to the Work ask the most questions about. So my aim tonight is to explore it from the lens of one Work student's experience and to hear from some of you.

My father was brilliant. He was funny. I have absolutely no doubt that he loved me – and I loved him. Yet during most of my adulthood, I had a rocky relationship with him. He had an exasperating way of smiling and saying the thing that he knew would drive me bonkers and then laughing uproariously when I took the bait. Then when I blew up way out of proportion, *he* would get hooked and we would be off to the races. We would both end up being surprised and hurt. Obviously, there were a lot of unhealed hurts from childhood. This whole recurring scenario drove me bonkers. I remember driving from here to San Antonio to visit my parents. The drive, at least at that time, was only an hour or so on I-35. I remember so powerfully making an aim to get along with him. I wanted to have a peaceful, loving time with him. "I am peaceful. I am loving. I am peaceful. I am loving." Yet so many times, before the trip was over, Dad would say something – or lots of things – and before I knew it, I would be reacting, arguing, furious. And then I would find myself driving back home after the visit, in shock – wondering what had just happened, beating myself up. And then the next drive down, "I am peaceful. I am loving. I am peaceful. I am loving."

By the time he died in 2007, though, something had changed in me. I was able to be with him in a new way. I spent the last few days of his life by his side at the hospital. I felt so blessed to be doing little things for him: massaging his neck and shoulders, combing his hair, brushing his teeth, sneaking him Tums, which were – for some reason against the rules. Somehow, I was genuinely peaceful, genuinely loving. At least for this time, I had been released – and so he had been released – from the bonds of resentment that had tied us up for so long. It was really a miracle.

It turns out there was still more to deal with on the road to forgiveness, but the process after he was gone was so much easier. I even had the sense that he was with me in the Work, cheering me on. There is no doubt that it was my engagement with Self-remembering, through both Centering Prayer and the Work, that changed me.

**What is Self-remembering?**

A note about the capital 'S' – You'll notice that in Work writings, the 'S' in Self-remembering is capitalized. This is a signpost that we're not talking about the same self that is spoken about in the term "self-observation" or in Bernadette Roberts' writings about no-self. The Self being remembered is the manifestation of what we are with and in God; it's the revelation of our Christhood.

From today's email – "Self-remembering is both a state of being and a practice, an experience of increased consciousness and Presence and an effort to remember oneself in God. … It gathers one's fragmented attention and reconnects to one's intention or aim. It reclaims life force and the feeling of "I" from the horizontal *content* of life to remembering the vertical *context* of life – becoming aware of God as the source and animating presence in and through all of life."

**Self-remembering as a state of being**

All of us have probably had an experience of Presence *–* of feeling connected to Ultimate Mystery and all of existence.Maybe it lasted a moment or maybe it lasted hours or days, but we know it is real and the Truth and Beauty of it can never be taken away from us. And even though, we don't *live* in that experience, *it lives in us* and we long for more of it. We *know* that it is somehow the truest reality of us and the destiny of us. That experience or experiences were probably what got us into this room.

There are many degrees of Self-remembering, from a momentary sense of inner separation from reactions to the content of life to a profound and palpable communion with the Beloved.

**Self-remembering as a practice**

So, when the Work asks us to *practice* Self-remembering – to *remember ourselves always and everywhere*, we are being asked to practice living from this deepest knowing of our true identity. We're reaching for that reality of who we are.

Without the practice of Self-remembering, we may live out our lives, as Thomas Merton pointed out, as functional atheists – as if there is no God. Our temporary amnesia becomes permanent. We stay asleep. The practice of Self-remembering awakens us.

**Parallels with Centering Prayer as a practice and Contemplative Prayer as a state of being**

We can see that this relationship between practice and state of being is paralleled in the distinction between Centering Prayer and contemplative prayer. From the Centering Prayer literature:

"In the Christian tradition contemplative prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart - our whole being - to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing, closer than consciousness itself."

"Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to receive this gift."

Just so, the *practice* of Self-remembering is designed to facilitate the development of the *state* of Self-remembering by preparing our faculties to receive this gift. The practices of Self-remembering cultivate silence, stillness and spaciousness in our lives that we might be more and more available to the movement of Spirit in our lives.

**Self-remembering as a part of the triadic transformational process**\* **of the Work**

How does Self-remembering function in the Work process of self-observation, non-identification and Self-remembering?

* First, Self-remembering is both *part of* the triadic process and *context for* the process. It is the very *reason* for the process.
* All three movements of the foundational process of the Work feed one another and need one another.
* If we are able to do a complete, three-centered observation, we are removed enough to see "it" (the energetic pattern); we are, to a certain extent, already non-identified. In other words, we've backed away enough to recognize on a deep level that, "Oh … this cannot be I, because if it were, who's doing the observing?" Our feeling of I has shifted from being totally stuck to or identified with the pattern to a more neutral, spacious place in us.
* This, in itself, is to some extent already Self-remembering. If we were to give voice to this moment, it might say, "Well, if *this* is not I … what is?!" And this very wondering would lead to deeper Self-remembering.
* So not only do the three movements of the process feed one another and need one another, as we go along, we experience that they really *are* one another. It becomes all one woven-together process. (Ex. Learning to drive.)
* When an energetic pattern is completely seen through in this way, it loses its addictive pull over us and allows for a new choice in that situation. And each "neti neti" – not this, not this – opens more space within us allowing the next "not I" to be seen-through and dissolved in the Light. This is known in the Work as the purification of the emotional center.
* I don't mean to present this as if it's totally tidy and there's no challenge or effort. In truth there can be many efforts toward self-observation before the pattern is completely seen through. There may be enough non-identification to see the pattern, but it still has an ancient addictive pull toward our old ways of being. We recognize that we cannot do this alone and we need help in letting go of the pattern. Remembering that God is here, we can and must ask for help. Fr. Keating said this is the shortest prayer: "Help." As in Step 7 in 12-step programs, we're humbly asking God to take this pattern away.

\* I use the terms "triadic transformational process," or "three-fold process" to indicate the primary foundational process in the Work: self-observation, non-identification and Self-remembering. It just means the big three.

**How does the Self-remembering practice of Centering prayer serve the Work?**

* As you know, the Work came first to us at The Church of Conscious Harmony through Tim and Barbara and then Centering Prayer was given to us through Fr. Thomas as the perfect synergistic partner to the Work.
* As we consent and open in the silence over and over again, we give the Divine Therapist a way in – a way to begin loosening up the hard-packed, concretized buried wounds of a lifetime. In this way the very next thing is revealed to us. We experience unloading, the release of old stuck emotions, such as fear, grief and anger.
* As the Divine Therapist unearths the next unseen thing for us to work with, the Work allows us to participate in our own healing and transformation. And as our relationship with God deepens through the prayer, our trust in this healing and purification process grows.
* We come to realize that the Work *without* Centering Prayer can become a self-improvement project. It can be co-opted by fragments of self that are perfectionistic and wish to become better, stronger, richer, prettier. Or in the case of spiritual pride, we want to see ourselves as more evolved, more humble, more devoted, gooder!
* The prayer yields our next work and each bit of work deepens our valuation for the prayer. So we live a life of *ora et labora* – prayer and work – which is really one unified thing — One Work. As prayer becomes integral to our life, our very life becomes prayer, which is the very definition of contemplation.
* Through Centering Prayer, we come to have a deeper and deeper understanding of God's extraordinary, personal love for us. In my own life, I came to know God as my beloved Father and Mother as I experienced the tenderness, the care, the patience, the intricate unfolding of my life and the reality that "God's love has always met and will always meet all my needs."

It was this that changed my relationship with my Dad. I came to see that, if he had known that kind of love, he would have been a different Dad, perhaps more like the Dad I had always wanted. Given the love, experience and support he had in his life, he did the best he could, just as I have done and am doing as a parent. And now, thank God, with the perspective of life as school, I have come to see that he was the *perfect* Dad for me. I think one of the many gifts of the Work and Centering Prayer is this kind of evolution with regard to our parents. With these precious contemplative practices, we come at last to be able to follow the Commandment to *Honor thy father and thy mother.*

"Teilhard [de Chardin] would see the mystic as the forerunner of evolution. In other words, what he would say is that contemplation and the maximization of consciousness then becomes the fastest mover of evolution. In other words, one then moves out into the world and sees the world in radically new ways, and acts out of that new conscious awareness."

- Ilia Delio, today's video

*Be still and know that I am God.*

Psalm 46:10

**Homework**: Practice Self-remembering at least once a day. If you have never practiced Centering Prayer, you may wish to [access the method here](https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/sites/default/files/private/method_cp_eng-2016-06_0.pdf) and begin building one or two short periods into your day. If you are a beginning practitioner of the Work, the practice of Self-remembering begins with the practice of self-observation, so you are invited to practice uncritically observing yourself in the moment, without commentary. Others may wish to try some of the forms of Self-remembering listed in this email. What do you learn? What do you experience?

Restated: Practice Self-remembering at least once a day. What do you learn? What do you experience?

Suggestions:

- For those who haven't practiced Centering Prayer: start there. You can access the method through a link in the email and begin building one or two periods into your day.

- If you are already a Centering Prayer practitioner, but are new to the Work: practice uncritically observing yourself in the present moment, without commentary.

- All others: try some of the forms of Self-remembering listed in today's email.

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*When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret.*

*And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you.*

- Matthew 6:6

**Centering Prayer Guidelines**

**I. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.**

* The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.
* The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer to the Holy Spirit. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. Other possibilities include: Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust.
* Instead of a sacred word, a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence, or noticing one’s breath may be more suitable for some persons. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.
* The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention to consent.
* Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be engaging thoughts.

**II. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.**

* “Sitting comfortably” means relatively comfortably so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer.
* Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.

• We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.

• We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.

• If we fall sleep, we simply continue the prayer upon awakening.

**III. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.**

• “Thoughts” is an umbrella term for every perception, including body sensations, sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.

• Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.

• By “returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word” a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.

• During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.

**IV. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.**

• The additional two minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.

• If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer, while the others listen.