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THE MARK

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



DESCENDING

DESCENDING INTO THE GROUND OF BEING

BY PETER HAAS

Our annual aim continues to bring us face to face with our inner life. It can be unnerving as well as exhilarating. The truth is a kind of invisible light that opens the eyes of the heart, going down deep into our being and history so to heal us of what ails us: the wounds, fears, repressions, projections, dreams, imagination, and fragmentation of a lifetime.

Joseph Campbell wrote, “The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.” Applied psychospiritually, this speaks to the invitation to explore the interior realms, deep down within our hearts and our bodies. And when we do, we often find treasures of healing, peace, freedom, love, insight, wisdom, understanding and wholeness. Teilhard de Chardin said something similar when he wrote in *The Divine Milieu*:

“To lose oneself in the Unfathomable, to plunge into the Inexhaustible, to find peace in the Incorruptible...to give one’s deepest to the One whose depth has no end.”

Let us descend there – into that ground of being: the limitless, unending love of God.

In his essay on the mysteries and wonders of Missouri caves, H. Dwight Weaver writes of the nature of darkness experienced in caves. He reminds us that the darkness: “is not unlike a black liquid. The darkness has a life of its own. It stalks you. It crawls and creeps around you as you move. At every opportunity it seems to sweep up and cling to your back. You actually feel it sometimes...unrelenting and unforgiving.” Weaver is speaking of actual darkness, but the description accurately conveys our experience of the inner darkness, those places and seasons in our life where we have fallen asleep to the light, gone dim to consciousness and been overcome by unconscious reactivity or fear. In a phrase, we forget God. We forget ourselves. And we forget the light.

Psalm 139:8 reminds us that there is no cave deep enough to separate our conscious awareness and connection with God: *if I descend into the depths, You O God are there.* It

seems to me that all our inner work and all our consenting in the silence of Centering Prayer is a means for descending into the darkness of our being – descending into the depths of our being. There, we not only experience healing, we also discover grace-filled treasures and gifts. We discover:

the power of fearlessness,
the strength of joy,
the ease of peace,
the wisdom of understanding,
the goodness of being, and
the ground of our being is
in God, our Beloved Source, no
matter what.

Bernadette Roberts reminds us that our entrance into the state of “transforming union” often is marked by:

“the descent of the cloud of unknowing, which, because one’s former light has gone out and left one in darkness, the contemplative initially interprets this as the divine going into hiding. In modern terms, the descent of the cloud is actually the falling away of

BOOK LOOK

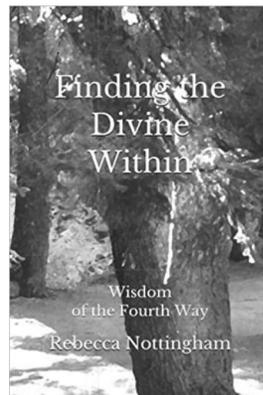
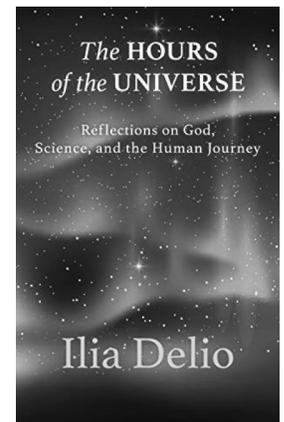
FROM TWO OF OUR FAVORITE WISDOM TEACHERS

the ego-center, which leaves us looking into a dark hole, a void or empty space in ourselves. With the veil of the ego-center, we do not recognize the divine; it is not as we thought it should be. Seeing the divine, eye to eye is a reality that shatters our expectations of light and bliss. From here on we must feel our way in the dark, and the special eye that allows us to see in the dark opens up at this time.”
The Christian Contemplative Journey, “An Interview”

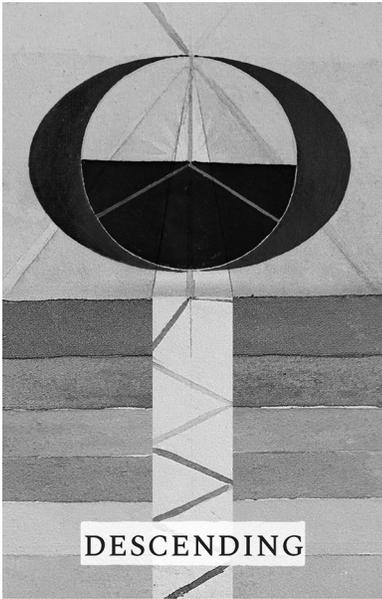
With this new eye of the heart open, we learn to not be afraid of the depths or the dark. We learn to hold on to the practices of the Wisdom tradition and let the practices hold on to us. We learn what is necessary to speak and what is necessary to keep in the silence. We learn to transform fear into love and darkness into light. We remember:

“The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek.” 

Illia Delio’s new book *The Hours of the Universe* continues her important exploration of Teilhard de Chardin’s ideas set in conversation with Christian spirituality. Of particular importance is the structure of the book’s chapters, which follow the traditional monastic hours of the day, starting with Matins and concluding with Compline.



Rebecca Nottingham’s new book, *Finding the Divine Within*, is also her last. Rebecca transitioned into Life Eternal on March 20, 2021. One of the unique features of this helpful book is that Rebecca’s teaching is placed side-by-side with excerpts from Maurice Nicoll’s *Commentaries*. Another important feature of Rebecca’s writing is the very clear connections she draws between the Work and Esoteric Christianity. For example, consider this passage: “This teaching isn’t Gurdjieff’s invention, not to diminish his brilliant presentation of it, but he himself says that this is Christ’s teaching given to humanity for this epoch. It is perennial teaching that predates written human history just as Christ does. That is the source of this teaching and that is where it leads – back to our origins in communion with the Divine. And that is why this path is sacred and why we follow it. In doing so we not only receive gifts from the Kingdom of Heaven within us, we contribute to the evolution of the solar system.” 



Consecrate us in the Truth. Your word is Truth. John 17:17

ANNUAL AIM: TRUTH OPENS THE EYES OF OUR HEARTS

DESCENDING BY MIMI CONROY

We must never be astonished
at temptations,
however outrageous they may be.

On this earth all is temptation.

Crosses tempt us by
irritating our pride,
while prosperity tempts us
by flattering it. ...

We must pass on
unmoved

while temptations rage
around us,
as the traveler,
overtaken by a storm,
simply wraps his cloak
more closely about him
and pushes on
more vigorously
toward his destined home.

The Complete Fenelon,
translated and edited by
Robert J. Edmonson

In my experience, confusion is the only suffering.

Confusion is when you argue with what is.

When you're perfectly clear, what is is what you want.

So, when you want something that's different from what is,
you can know that you're very confused.

Byron Katie, *A Thousand Names for Joy*

I am not suicidal, but sometimes I wished I were dead. This was not the feeling I had in any other dark night of the soul but a fixation on my death. After thirteen months of recurring illness and subsequent hospitalizations, my family and friends intervened and asked me to self-check into a psychiatric hospital. I saw fear in their eyes during the intervention. I could not argue as I was empty and past caring; I could not get out of this if I tried. With muscles atrophied,

brain detached, and heart exhausted, I was as compliant as I have ever been.

The feeling of spiritual emptiness I felt was compounded by a vomiting syndrome that was cyclical by nature, an acute recurrence. I observed myself getting weaker, most of my force going to the physical fight I was in while descending into my wound. My roles in this life were falling away leaving nothing in place. The chef, the social happy seven (on the

*No temptation has overtaken you, but such as is human.
God is faithful and will not let you be tempted beyond what you are able ...*

1 Corinthians 10:13

Enneagram), the mother, sister and friend, grandmother, gardener, all-around welcoming hostess of life, and the strong confident woman were all gone. I cried for my mother like a child in the long dark nights. Overwhelmed by weakness, I was closer to her and my angels than life.

Whatever strength I had left came to carry me through the check-in process as a patient on the third floor at St. David's. After intake and a full body visual check, an aide goes through everything and records every item to the penny. Most toiletries are locked away, shoelaces and drawstrings are removed, it was one o'clock in the morning when I was shown to my room and medicated. One of the side effects of the many medications I had been put on over the months was sleep deprivation; which depleted my force physically, mentally and spiritually. This would be my first full night's sleep in almost a year.

It did not take me long the next day to figure out someone was checking on me every 15 minutes and documenting my state. With schedules posted, I had a full day ahead of me. First, a psychiatrist's visit that cut right through my posturing to let me know I was

on suicide watch, confined to this wing and would begin treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder. I was able to make limited collect phone calls, but was restricted to no other outside contact. I watched as my personality tried to charm the staff and befriend them to no avail, they saw me coming for miles, they were trained for this. I went to every group and participated fully in everything from painting to strengthening my body. I listened to social workers teaching self-care and the signs to watch for when I am descending into depression.

Every morning, I waited for the phone to talk to my son. His love and humor were familiar to me and calmed the frightened child that the PTSD was exposing. He had become the parent and I the child.

Early childhood trauma had been revealed during the trials of this long illness. Each night's sleep and each meal gave me force, a lighter sense of being, a connection to the Conscious Circle of Humanity. The Work and my spiritual identity were being transformed in the years since I left the church. Layer by layer, the knowledge was stripped bare as the refiners' fire revealed the alchemical gold of my soul.

I was literally unraveling from the fetal position. My spine and core

were weak; walking a hallway had become a herculean effort. Making my body stronger and exercising my core helped me to stand and sit upright. For this, I swam in the lake as often and far as I could. This Work student who identified with her spine and uprightness of the Ray was beginning to feel the Ray of Creation radiate from within with each stroke and kick. After a year of descending into a hospital bed, the cosmologist in me awoke and knew: as above, so below – as without, so within.

I continue to work with a wonderful therapist and my family on my lifelong struggle with the trauma of losing my mother. The long illness became the portal through which I was reborn again and again.

Now when the trauma is triggered, I do not lose my place feeling how I am held in God's hands while I descend again into my healing. I am back in this community and have revealed my struggle to the people I love and have been accepted with open hearts. Learning over my own bones that in descending, ascending responds in kind and holds me in balance to traverse this life and living into the very promise of the Work – Balanced Man. 

ELDER WISDOM: HONORING OUR FATHERS AND MOTHERS

LOVE WHAT IT HATES, GOD-REMEMBERING IS FREEDOM BY TIM COOK

Editor's note: Last month, Tim covered the importance of adopting a daily practice that includes your body, emotions, intellect, soul and spirit. Constant learning, keeping your eyes on where you want to go, and vertical breathing help us be in the presence of God. Tim continues ...

One of the best tools for navigating through life and discerning which direction to go is, "Love what it hates." When you see, "I don't want to go there," press against what your mind wants. What I can't stand, I want to stand that. What I've gotta have, I do not want to have. "Gotta" is a clue for this limited, unsatisfactory mindset. That's my freedom. This freedom comes from God at a price – to be open to Him. That's it. Nothing grand ... trees blowing, green spring leaves ... no politics in that.

The Christian journey promises something, no small

thing: *that my joy be in you and your joy be complete*. The false personality says no problem, as long as I finish grabbing the next thing I gotta have – you name it, fill in the blank: shake, bag of chips, drink, etc. My experience is that the more I let go, the more caring comes to me. I can't do much for myself right now and yet beautiful souls are caring for me. It's very difficult for me to open to this. Long ago, Ram Dass called me on being unworthy, and I've still got that in a greatly diminished fashion. Everything stays, but your identity goes deeper. The story stays as a memory, but its message changes. Now I can say, "Oh, my God, thank you!" All the things that I didn't want to have happen, I now say yes. It's a hard method, but one that I'm into practicing.

The thing about loving what it hates is it takes a strong aim. I have to set an aim in the morning and *want* to manifest that aim in

the day, and when I go to bed at night I say, "Thank you Lord. I couldn't see the goodness you had in store for me."

As an elder looking back, I'd say the miracle of practice is beyond comprehension. The gift of creating a monastery without walls with a strong intention every day is beyond estimation – you can't dream this big.

There's a letter on my wall from Maharaji. One of his devotees says, "The Maharaji has blessed you greatly. Believe on what he says and do whatever you like." Similarly Ouspensky said there aren't any rules, do what you want to as long as you can self-remember; but if you can't self-remember, why in the world would you want to do anything? Self-remembering, God remembering is everything.

By hunkering down and knowing I'm not going anywhere; this is the cross – here and now. I'm here. The things I like are

going to be dragged through me, the things I don't like are going to be dragged through me, and I'm going to stay on my cross and glorify God knowing there's a resurrection coming and the way to resurrection is dying to the self. You can't cancel your "self" out. This is grace, it's all Grace. The grace of the cross is the most misunderstood of all. We used to sing the old rugged cross song: "On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame..." Everybody dabs their eyes. As a little kid, I'd get crocodile tears.

The letting go of my earthly roles and identities is dependent on bringing them to the foot of the cross. Pick up your cross and follow me is not advice for somebody else at some time in the future. The cross, yours and mine, are the things that I'm resisting or addicted to. You're going to let that go, all of that started and therefore, it has to stop sometime.

When you put this body down, it'll sure end then. All of that has got to go! Your fears won't come with you, your addictions won't come with you, your hatreds won't either; but, you can't leave this until you let go of all those crosses.

The cross of Jesus is our chance to accept our full humanity, following Jesus in bearing our own cross and bearing to know God the Father without time – letting time go. Like the thief that curses Jesus to take himself down, there's an attitude that curses the present moment because it didn't do the past perfectly. Oh, there was that history test that I cheated on. All things that haven't been released yet must be crossed off the list. By releasing our hold on the objects in time, there's nothing left for us to experience but eternity. My experience of this was shocking: "What? Why didn't I do this before?"

The thief of the future is the one that says when I get out of this

mess, I'm gonna change, I'm gonna ... you name it. What does this do to the present? These seductions are not here. Why am I dreaming about them when the almighty God of the universe is here?

The Theory of Celestial Influence by Rodney Collin has this marvelous image of cosmology that puts these two little people right in the heart of the galaxy while it's swinging around in its orbit, and the sun is swinging around in its orbit in the local cluster, and the earth and moon are swinging around the Sun – and we're sitting here worrying about somebody taking over the world. Somebody is always taking over the world. You can't stop that, but you can wake up from the dream that says you can. You can choose to be part of a contemplative community that supports each other to make God-devotion the center of your life. ☺

For this monthly column, we will hear from various elders in our contemplative community for our own growth and transformation.

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

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

FEAR BY NATHAN JONES

Work Idea: There are many types of fear that can take hold of us: the fear of being stuck in a dark cave, the fear of punishment, the fear of death, the fear of social gatherings, the fear of failure, the fear of pain, and so on. The Work asks us to become conscious of these states and their associated mechanical reactions. Through self-observation, shed light on them. There is an instinctive fear that allows for self-preservation and correct orientation to reality. It is appropriate to exit the burning building based on what your senses are telling you. There is another type of fear that stems from the negative side of the Emotional Center. These are the fears that play tricks on the mind. They lead to unfounded anxieties and wrong worries. They divert crucial energy and cast shadows from a sun that isn't there. It is these fears we must catch through observation and cast out. In so doing, we tangibly change. Our day

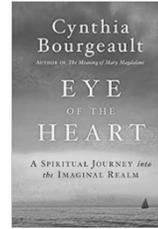
to day changes as does our being.

Work Source: "...undirected imagination, exerts an incalculable influence on sleeping humanity. Suppose a person is always imaginatively afraid. This arises from the Emotional Center. He is afraid he may be buried alive, or afraid he has a serious illness, or afraid he will be suddenly attacked, or afraid he will fail in his exams, or that he may lose his money or position, and so on. All this is fear arising from the Emotional Centre and of course it is negative – that is, it arises from the manifold activities of the negative part of Emotional Center. It is not based on an actual sense-given situation. A rabbit, seeing a dog, dives into the burrow. Its fear is from the Instinctive Center – a direct response to a sensory stimulus. After a time, the rabbit emerges again. Just imagine if rabbits had emotional imaginative fear! They would never appear above ground. It is wonderful how they do. But this is not bravery ...

In short, the Emotional Center is wrong unless it is increasingly susceptible to the feelings that come from ideas such as that we did not create ourselves and that this life is not explicable in terms of itself. Now, all the emotions opened up by sufficient contact with the Work begin to purify the Emotional Center and lessen fear. That leads to the elimination of fear ... If you begin to see the connection between some forms of violence and some not hitherto realized or acknowledged fear, then you will find that this connection, exposed more and more to the light of consciousness (by means of self- observation) will operate less and less powerfully. In other words, whereas you reacted mechanically, now you see and begin to act consciously. This is a change of being." *Commentaries*, p. 1048-1049.

Application: Can you taste the difference between instinctive, justifiable fear and that which arises out of the anxious mind (the

2021 ANNUAL COMMUNITY READING



Eye of the Heart by Cynthia Bourgeault

Paired with our 2021 Annual Aim theme, *The Truth Opens The Eyes of Our Hearts*, we invite you to slowly read this book with us in 2021. Read in small portions, so as to guide us in an interior transformation of our centers (emotional, intellectual and physical).

negative part of the Emotional Center)? I often consider walking at night. While the mind is quick to play tricks with each small sound, or broken branch in the forest, in actuality, it is far safer to take a stroll at night. Although with all that darkness around, our *rational* mind wouldn't know it. Or perhaps, staying in the country far from people in solitude invites the mind to entertain all sorts of exposed thoughts. "What would I do if *this* were to occur?" "How quickly could *they* come to help?" I invite you to take a walk at night, surrounded by reasonably achievable silence and observe the mind. Attempt to distinguish between: instinctive fear and anxious fear.

Further Resource: Recall ancient wisdom: "If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment." Marcus Aurelius 

GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart* recommends reading this spiritual journey principle three times in the method of Lectio Divina.

GUIDELINE 4I

Jesus did not teach a specific method of meditation or bodily discipline for quieting the imagination, memory, and emotions. We should choose a spiritual practice adapted to our particular temperament and natural disposition. We must also be willing to dispense with it when called by the Spirit to surrender to his direct guidance. The Spirit is above every method or practice. To follow his inspiration is the sure path to perfect freedom.



THE CHURCH of
CONSCIOUS HARMONY

7406 Newhall Lane
Austin, Texas 78746
512.347.9673
512.347.9675 fax
www.consciousharmony.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Anne Best
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Tracey Stephens

MINISTER

Peter Haas
minister@consciousharmony.org

EMERITUS MINISTERS

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Billie Woods, Director
musicdir@consciousharmony.org
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THE JOURNEY SCHOOL

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tjs@consciousharmony.org

YOUTH EDUCATION SERVICES

Deborah Hale, Children's Director
childmin@consciousharmony.org
Jacque Botto, Asst to the Children's Director
Don Hale, Youth Director
youthdir@consciousharmony.org
David Jenkins, Asst to the Youth Director

OFFICE

Mon-Fri 8:30am-4pm
Donald Genung, Business Manager
bizmgr@consciousharmony.org
Lisa Genung, Office Manager
officemgr@consciousharmony.org
Jill Frank, Program Director
programdir@consciousharmony.org
Mark Cadell, Media Producer
mediapro@consciousharmony.org

NEWSLETTER

Sandra Ely, Editor
garzaely@swbell.net
Carol Hagar, Design
carol.hagar@austintennisacademy.com

OUR MONTHLY PRACTICE: GROUNDING

As Psalm 139:8 reminds us that there is nowhere deep enough to separate our conscious awareness and connection with God: *if I descend into the depths, You O God are there*. Our monthly community practice relates with our monthly aim of Descending. The practice of Grounding (or sometimes referred to as Earthing) is a physical, embodied way to daily practice descending to the earth.

It turns out that many of us never touch the earth. In modern home and city life, one can go months without physically touching earth with your feet. This is problematic enough, but it is exacerbated by the fact that we are inundated and immersed in countless electromagnetic frequencies – all of which go ungrounded. Who knows the impact all this electromagnetic energy is having upon us emotionally, intellectually, and physically? One wonders.

Thankfully, there is a simple and free remedy. Take your shoes and socks off and stand on the bare earth, preferably dewy, wet earth, such as the morning grass. Preferably, try this practice morning and evening. You might even try lying on the earth, with as much skin to earth contact as possible.

Sense.

Feel.

Smell.

Receive the energies from the earth. Give your energy to the earth. Let the earth ground you – just like the earth grounds a lightning bolt of untamed electricity from above.

Grounding can calm the nervous system, enhance the immune system, and convey a sense of connectedness to the living field of life, the Ray of Creation, and the gift of one's own ground of being sourced from God and Mother Earth. Enjoy!

JUNE SERMON THEMES

HEART OPENING GIFTS

June 6	Guy on God
June 13	Heart Opening Gifts: Music
June 20	Heart Opening Gifts: Poetry
June 27	Heart Opening Gifts: Story

SPIRITUAL COMPANIONING

Spiritual companioning is offered and encouraged for the church community. Appointment times are available (via phone or Zoom room) weekly on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Contact the church office at: officemgr@consciousharmony.org or call 512-347-9673 to schedule.

FIVE-DAY CENTERING PRAYER RETREAT

at Cedarbrake Renewal Center
Jul 23-27 in Belton, TX \$570

Please register and find more details on our website.

JUNE CALENDAR

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

SPECIAL EVENTS

- *One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Jun 12 9am-3pm Register online
- *Intro to Centering Prayer Workshop
Jun 12 10am-noon \$15 Register online
+4 consecutive Tuesdays 7-8:15pm

MONTHLY

Caritas Donations
To continue our long standing partnership, please consider making a donation of food or money directly to caritasofaustin.org

- *Saturday Morning Parable Cartoon Show
Jun 12 11am

WEEKLY

Sundays

- *Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
- *Intercessory Prayer 9am
- †Worship Service 10-11:30am

Wednesdays

- †Contemplative Worship Service 6:30-7:15pm

Thursdays

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

Saturdays

- *Scriptorium 11am
- *Compline 9-9:15pm

DAILY

- *Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

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

†Open for in-person in CCH sanctuary



THE CHURCH of CONSCIOUS HARMONY

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BLESSED

Peace is the great gift of Jesus on the day of His resurrection.

The peace that Jesus offers is not sentimental.

This peace transcends joy and sorrow, hope and despair.

This peace is rooted in a way of being
that transcends the emotions.

We are no longer blown away by the winds of persecution,
not washed away by the floods of tribulation.

Our house is built on rock, and the rock is Christ.

That rock is strength against every storm.

Divine union has become an invincible conviction,
a way of being, a fourth dimension to all reality

... If one has special gifts,
these are exercised in dependence on God.

One is completely free of the results
and does not draw one's identity from any
glamorous role, but is simply,
like God, the servant of creation.

Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love*

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

Matthew 5:9