



### INTRODUCTION

The idea of Spiritual Formation is to bring a person to a state in which they are able to do two key things: first, to be continuously aware of God in themselves, in other beings, and all of nature; and second, to meet each moment of life (even the most trivial circumstances of everyday living) with love and understanding. Every moment is a critical decision point for us – for we are continuously called upon to make an all-important choice – do we choose a way that leads to the Light and life, or do we choose a way that darkens our soul?

Every person begins life from a unique and diverse place – man, woman, tall, short, white, black, gay, straight, young, old, etc. But as we move through life we gradually realize that we are all part of God’s one family – everything and everyone is connected to each other in a special, spiritual way. We reach a point where we discover, as St. Paul did, that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28) From diversity we grow into unity, a unitive knowledge and presence of God, having transcended our false selves. We honor and respect our differences, but we celebrate a newly found solidarity.

This is the “One-pointed” life that makes us “monastics,” when we come to know, really know, that God and all of His creation are One. Then we have a singleness of heart and mind, and when all the false gods finally drop away, we experience true monotheism.

### FOUNDATIONS

1. *Our desire for God.* God designed each and every human being with an inherent, natural desire to seek Him, to “return home,” so to speak – to reconnect with God and be with Him. He then placed each one of us in a unique situation that might encourage us to make the journey. As we read in Acts 17, “From one ancestor He made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and He allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they should live, so that they would search for God and perhaps strive for Him and find Him – though indeed He is not far from each one of us.”

2. *God is within us.* Not far indeed! In John 14 we learn that His Spirit of truth abides in us, “and He will be in you.” In verse 20 Jesus says, “I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” This is where this aspect of the Kingdom of God can be found! (Luke 17:20ff)

3. *The Heart must Rule, not the Head.* “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2) Formation, then, is the pilgrimage from our head (this world) to the heart (the abode of Our Father). It is a short distance from the head to the heart, but it can occupy one’s entire life’s journey. It is when we actually enter the realm of the

heart that we become “transformed” by Him, and become the special individual that God made us and meant us to be.

4. *The Two Major Parts of Transformation.* We can say, therefore, that there are really two aspects to formation: one is our “awakening to the Presence of God within us,” the renewing of our minds, which is a universal purpose for everyone, and the other aspect is our “manifestation,” or becoming what we were truly meant to be – agents of God, serving Him (or Her) in our own unique way. Personal manifestation is very special and unique to each person, since God made us all quite different, and for good reason. We must awaken to the Presence of God within us, and then fulfill our destiny. To do this is to glorify God in the best way possible.

5. *Formation is individual, but also Community based.* A formation experience needs to help the individual to both “awaken” to the Presence of God and to realize who one truly is so that God can fully manifest Himself in all forms and variety. In a sense, we are helping Him complete His creation by being who He meant us to be. Formation experiences will certainly have some common elements, but, for the most part, must be highly individualized.

6. *We are spiritual beings having a human experience.* As humans, we are vulnerable to the difficulties of being human: we experience many good things, but we also experience despair and anxiety, grief and loss, fear and worry. Together as a Community, and with the help of God through our local support teams, these things can be transformed into greater faith, greater gratitude, and greater joy.

## **THE PERSON IN HARMONY**

7. *We are Mind, Body, and Soul.* A human being is both “human” and “being.” We are a blend of body, mind and soul. The body is a form that allows us to live and function in this worldly realm. It is designed to eventually wear out and dissolve. While it is active, it influences and shapes the mind through instincts, hormones, reactions, urges, pain and aging. We best achieve transformation when mind, body, and soul are in harmony.

8. *The mind starts with a healthy ego.* The mind is a great “thinking tool” given to us to sort through our external environment and internal experiences of thoughts and perceptions. Sometimes referred to as the “ego,” this part of us chooses and directs our behavior to fulfill our needs. It creates our “self-structure” by which we “see ourselves.” As we will see later, this ego can sometimes become dysfunctional and gain control of our lives.

9. *The soul is the essence of the person.* The soul is the part that was individually crafted by the hand of God in a unique and special way. It could be viewed as the “software” of a computer, very different from all other software with its individual combination of 1’s and 0’s. Not much happens with that software until power is sent through it. The power is from the Holy Spirit. In a healthy person, the soul becomes aware of the mind as a separate tool, and directs what happens in the mind through the choices of free will.

10. *We are fueled by the Holy Spirit.* The Holy Spirit is the power that brings the soul to life. It is the energy that drives every one of us. It is the breath of life that lets us be who we were meant to be. Romans 8:9 – The Spirit of God dwells in you. So, we have both a soul and a spirit.

11. *The healthy person is in harmony.* In a healthy person, the body, mind and soul are in harmony. There is a “space” between the soul and the mind so that the soul can observe what the mind is up to. The soul is aware of the mind’s thoughts and functions. The public self displayed by the person to others is close to the real self of the soul. The Holy Spirit flows freely through this person to the outer world in a loving manner wrapped in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The person is aware of the Presence of God, and can “see” the special soul in others, whether they are in harmony or under the influence of a dysfunctional ego.

12. *People in harmony have understanding.* People in harmony cannot be offended, or spiritually or emotionally harmed by others, nor do they have the need to harm others. They realize that attacks by others are not from that other person’s true self, but are a product of that person’s dysfunctional ego.

13. *The Fruits of the Spirit.* Persons in harmony enjoy the “fruits of the spirit”: peace, joy, happiness, gentleness, patience, etc. They tend to have more synchronistic events in their lives that mean more to them, and help them in their spiritual journey. Healing seems to occur faster and be more complete. Creativity is enhanced, and attachments and addictions are diminished or non-existent. Being a person in harmony is the first goal of formation. But when this happens, and how it happens, and what it finally looks like, is up to God, not us. We merely place ourselves in a position to welcome Him.

## **DYSFUNCTIONS**

14. *The Ego may become Dysfunctional.* When the soul of the person begins to identify with the promptings and thoughts of the ego, the person begins to experience some dysfunction, causing disharmony within. The space between the soul and the mind begins to fade, and can disappear altogether. The person begins to feel “disconnected” from their true power source, God, as their ego begins to take on a life of its own and fights for survival.

15. *An Illustration.* This condition is described in the story of the Garden of Eden, where the man is first warned not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for “in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Genesis 2:17) Surely, when we take on this judgmental self, and begin to assume that we know better than God, our true self does indeed die, and we become controlled by the mind, which was never meant to “call the shots.” The dysfunctional ego has taken over, and our true selves have been veiled by it. The child-like innocence, honesty and openness that once characterized our lives has been lost.

16. *Social Programming can create Dysfunction.* The creation of the dysfunctional ego comes largely through the “programming” we experience from our culture, our parents, our friends, our teachers and our marketing. From an early point in our lives, we are taught to compare ourselves to others, to compete against and “beat” them, and to devalue ourselves if we are not fast enough or strong enough, or clever enough. We are rated by faulty tools, and encouraged to be more like someone else. We praise those who succeed in this world, making idols of the wealthy and powerful.

17. *Characteristics of the Dysfunctional Ego.* Identification of the soul with the mind is a product of our programming and ends up creating a veil made of attachments, desires, prejudices, biases, labels, fear and beliefs that block our ability to form true relationships, and that distort reality. We begin to feel isolated and threatened by the world around us. The ego begins to seek anything it can to survive, attacking any threats to it, and manipulating those people it finds useful to its advancement. The dysfunctional ego consumes an immense amount of energy and time.

18. *Defense Mechanisms.* The ego develops defense mechanisms to survive and grow. It may demand attention and recognition; it has a deep concern for what others think of it; and it tries to make an impression on others. It may use repression, rationalization, reaction-formation, projection, or any of a number of other mechanisms to defend itself.

19. *Physical Health can be affected by Dysfunctional Ego.* Physical health is in jeopardy to the extent that the ego is in control. Stress increases, and there is often abuse or neglect of natural physical nutrition and interaction.

20. *Sin Defined.* Traditionally, sin is defined in belief and behavioral terms – it is not conforming to the beliefs and expected behaviors of a set of standards. In classic monasticism, however, where the goal is unity with God, sin is considered to be a state of separation from God, and thusly the true self as well. The further we are from God, the greater our state of “sin.” The wages of this state of sin is indeed the death of the true self. Sin creates suffering.

## **FORMATION**

21. *The Dysfunctional Ego must die.* Simply put, as mentioned earlier, formation has two parts. The first is to become “aware” of the Presence of God within you, and get re-connected. The second is to allow your true self to flow out into the world in a manner that it was meant to flow. For you to live, the dysfunctional ego must die.

22. *Formation paths are unique to the individual.* No two paths are the same, just as there are no two people who are the same. We are all at different points in our lives, each experiencing a different degree of separation from the Holy Spirit. The veil of our dysfunctional ego is the only thing separating us from the love of God.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

23. *Formation Network.* Each member of the Community needs to have a Formation Network assisting him or her to make this pilgrimage back to the heart. Each person in the network must have an understanding of the formation journey and must find the person wherever s/he is at and move forward from there. Here are some of the people that should be considered in assembling a network. Not all may be necessary, and there may be others to consider:

- Formation Guide(s): This is a member of the Community who coordinates the formation plan of the member, and monitors progress on a scheduled basis. These people keep the Guardian informed of formation progress.
- Spiritual Director: This person is trained specifically for spiritual guidance. Every member should find a spiritual director suitable to his or her journey and meet with that person on a regular basis.
- Pastor: One's local pastor may serve as a resource for your formation team.
- Counselors: Professional counselors can be a vital member of your team, depending on your journey.
- Friends: People who know you that are good listeners, and encourage you to work out issues. Good friends listen at the heart level and can offer genuine positive reinforcement.
- Support Groups: Sometimes we have a difficult issue that can be served with the help of a special 12-step group, such as AA. These can be a great help and should not be overlooked.
- Physicians, Therapists, Psychoanalysts: depending upon the person's unique situation, some additional professional help may be needed who can specifically address the situation.

## METHODS AND TOOLS

24. The monastic tradition is full of practices, methods and tools that can be used to “reconnect” with God. A number of these are listed below. Some of these are the core of our work as members of the Community (such as our prayer life), but we must keep in mind that these practices **are not the end in themselves** – they are the means to the end (reconnecting with God and diminishing the dysfunctional egoic system within us). These methods and tools merely put us in a place where we are willing to accept the Presence of God - but when and how He arrives is up to Him.

- **Daily Office** (Morning Prayer, Noon Day Prayer, Evening Prayer and Compline). Members of the Community are committed to offering at least one session of the Divine Office each day. There is no set form for these Offices, but when we meet as a Community we will use the Community Prayer Book.

- **Mass / Holy Eucharist.** Central to re-connecting with God, regular attendance at Mass is key to building connections to the Kingdom. This needs to be an integral part of any formation program.
- **Lectio Divina.** “Holy reading.” This is a special form of contemplative prayer that has a rich history. Members of the Community are encouraged to offer lectio as often as they are able.
- **Centering Prayer.** A form of meditation, this prayer form has particular value in re-connecting with God.
- **Statio.** This is the pause we take between each of our activities in the course of a day. It brings us back to the present moment, a place where the dysfunctional ego can not survive.
- **Stations of the Cross.** Usually a set of 14 places where we stop and reflect on the passion of our Lord. Particularly appropriate during Holy Week, and especially Good Friday.
- **Rosary.** The Anglican Rosary is a very versatile prayer tool. It can be used for the Daily Office, meditating on the Mysteries of the Rosary, the Psalms, and many other prayer needs.
- **Retreats.** Going on retreat for several days at a retreat center is refreshing and renewing.
- **Greater Silence.** Silence is one of the greatest portals to a reunion with Christ. It can bring us more quickly into the presence of God in the present moment than many other practices. It is more than just “not talking.” It is moving quietly, and moving things quietly. Focusing on this will bring our attention to the objects and bring our awareness to the forefront.
- **Nature Walks.** Highly recommended for re-connecting with God. We often forget that we are a part of nature and not above it. As an early jazz song begs, “Get out and get under the moon!”
- **Present Moment Awareness.** A very basic and important tool: consistently ask yourself these key questions:
  - What is my relationship with this moment right now? How am I feeling about it? Why?
  - Why did I react the way I did to that person just now?
  - Why did I react the way I did to that situation I was just in?

Questions like these will help you to begin to separate any dysfunctional ego you may have from your true self that is asking the questions. Often you will realize that there was an unwarranted attachment to something, or an unjustified prejudice, or a belief or label that was untrue. As you identify these things, they will begin to dissolve before your eyes. The dysfunctional ego *can not* survive in the present moment. It wants to live in the guilt, shame and anger of the past, or the fear of the future.
- **Service to Others.** One of our core values, we serve others best by being what we were meant to be. It might be a life of prayer! But it could be just about anything. It all fits into God’s design, and no one thing is more important than another.
- **Health.** Taking care of the main tool given to us by God, our bodies, is very important in providing good service to Him. Learn to eat right, eat naturally, exercise appropriately, and promptly address medical issues.

Other Methods and Tools can be found contained within the latest version of the Methods and Tools document found on our Community website or available from the Guardian.

## PRINCIPLES OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

25. *Principles of Spiritual Formation for Individuals.* Our Community has collected a number of Principles of Spiritual Formation that are used to guide us along the way. The latest set of these can be found in the document titled, *Principles of Spiritual Formation for Individuals*, found on the Community website or from the Guardian.

## FORMATION PLANNING

26. *Formation Guide Purpose.* Formation Guides need to understand where their assignees are spiritually, and help them build a formation program that will promote their “awareness” and move them along the path to becoming who God made them to be. We do not want to shape other people to become like us. We must help them become who *they* are supposed to be. And that has to come to them through Christ.

27. *Tools and Methods will vary.* We must try not to give our assignees a fixed set of formulas to follow. Fixed formulas have a strong tendency to create inappropriate filters that can cause a person to lose their way. We can point to the way, but they must walk the path themselves, and find out what works and what doesn't. Remember: “A finger pointing at the moon is not the moon – it's a finger.”

28. *Sometimes it's Trial and Error.* Knowing what formation is supposed to yield, we can more safely and easily say when the person is headed in the wrong direction, and advise them so, but it is much more difficult to confidently say that they should do this or that, and if they do it they will realize a specific result. We *can* suggest that they try this or that, and see what the results are. Then try something else. The life of a monastic is to fall down and get up, fall down and get up, fall down and get up. It is not how many times we fall that counts, but how many times we get up and try again.

29. *Sometimes it involves Awareness and Reflection.* The member's formation team needs to listen to the member and together build a formation plan that seems appropriate. It may be a combination of prayer and books, or retreats and walks. It will change over time as needs change. Choose from the Methods and Tools listed above, or find something else that may work within the boundaries of decency and safety. The important thing is: Is the person drawing closer to the heart of Christ, shedding his or her dysfunctional ego, and becoming who they were truly meant to be?

30. *Members are responsible for their own formation.* The Community makes no promises or guarantees about a person's "success" or progress. We cannot “transform” anyone. That is the work of Our Lord and Savior through the Holy Spirit. We can only guide the person to a closer relationship with God, but that's about it. Transformation through formation is a gift that comes from above.

31. *Formation is really a process of subtraction rather than addition.* As we remove the pieces of our dysfunctional ego, our natural, true self (the self that God made in His image) will begin to shine forth. (It's somewhat like cleaning off a dirty light bulb – the light bulb being our soul, and the dirt being our dysfunctional ego.)

32. *Imperfections can be the way to God's Grace.* With the dissolving of the dysfunctional ego comes a recognition, understanding and forgiveness of our own imperfections. Sometimes we discover that what we thought were imperfections (as defined by society or those people close to us) are not really imperfections at all. Sometimes we discover that what we call imperfections are actually the keys to welcoming God's Grace into our lives.

33. *The Soul will not reach perfection in this life – but it can be cared for along the way.* The formation process is not a cure – it will not result in a perfect human being in this life. Some things in life are not resolved – but we do outgrow them. When we reach new heights in awareness and life, we rise above the storm. It's still there, but it's below us now. The process is actually more of an ongoing care of the soul than it is a cure. A Christian Community is simply a network of care-givers and care-receivers for the soul.

34. *One's personal growth and development can occur naturally.* Having said all the above, it's important to remember that, like the human body, there is a natural tendency for the psyche to heal, too. Sometimes we just need to let things happen – the art of action through inaction. It doesn't mean that nothing is happening, it just means that we are letting the Grace of God take over for a while. The temptation to interfere is almost irresistible.

May you find your way to the heart of Christ with His help. There you will be lovingly received and blossom into the person you were meant to be. I beg of you to wait for me there, as I may take a bit longer to arrive.

Yours in Christ

/s/ Br. Daniel-Joseph, CG

Guardian

Original: April, 2008

Latest Update: September, 2017