

# NUGGETS

A Garden of Spiritual Treasures

Compiled for  
The Community of the Gospel



[www.communityofthegospel.org](http://www.communityofthegospel.org)

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## ACCEPTANCE

What does letting go on the practical level tell us? Letting go is different than denying or repressing. To let go of something is to admit it. You have to own it. Letting go is different than turning it against yourself; different than projecting it onto others. Letting go means that the denied, repressed, rejected parts of yourself, which are nonetheless true, are seen for what they are; but you refuse to turn them against yourself or against others. This is not denial or pretend, but actual transformation. – Fr. Rohr

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## ACHIEVEMENT

After an optimistic explosion that we call hope, and an ensuing sense of deep safety, comes an experience of deep *rest*. It's the verb, I'm told, that is most used by the mystics of all religions: some kind of "resting in God." All of our striving and our need to perform, climb, and achieve becomes, on some very real level, unnecessary. The gift, the presence, the fullness is already here, now. I can stop all this overproduction and over-proving of myself. That's Western and American culture. It's not the Gospel, and yet we have made the Gospel conform to the meritocracy of most cultures.

One thing that got me into men's work is that I found that males are especially driven by the performance principle. Most males just cannot believe that we could be respected, admired, received, or loved without some level of achievement. So many of us are performers and overachievers to some degree, and we think that only then will we be lovable or acceptable. Even when we "achieve" something with a good day of "performing," as I often do myself as a type A personality, it is never enough, because it is inherently self-advancing and therefore self-defeating. We might call it "spiritual capitalism."

- Fr. Richard Rohr

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We belong to a generation that wants to see the results of our work. We want to be productive and see with our own eyes what we have made. But that is not the way of God's Kingdom. Often our witness for God does not lead to tangible results. Jesus himself died as a failure on a cross. There was no success there to be proud of. Still, the fruitfulness of Jesus' life is beyond any human measure. As faithful witnesses of Jesus we have to trust that our lives too will be fruitful, even though we cannot see their fruit. The fruit of our lives may be visible only to those who live after us. What is important is how well we love. God will make our love fruitful, whether we see that fruitfulness or not. – Henri Nouwen

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Our society encourages individualism. We are constantly made to believe that everything we think, say, or do, is our personal accomplishment, deserving individual attention. But as people who belong to the communion of saints, we know that anything of spiritual value is not the result of individual accomplishment but the fruit of a communal life. – Henri Nouwen

## ACTIVISM, ACTION

I think that the great disappointment with so much political activism, even many of the non-violent movements of the 60s and 70s, and why many people were not long-lasting in these movements, is because these movements did not proceed from transformed people. They were coming from righteous ideology of either Left or Right, from mere intellect and will, and not from people who had put head, heart, body, and soul together.

We need to find inside ourselves the positive place of communion, of holiness, where there's nothing to react against. Pure action is when you are acting from a place which is good, true, and beautiful. The energy at that point is entirely positive.

Until you can find that, don't act. I'm trying to keep you in there for the long haul. I'm trying to call forth an instrument that can really make a difference in the world. These people are the lightning rods of God's energy into the world. They can be quite adamant, clear, and long-suffering. They can even allow themselves to suffer violence, like Jesus, instead of inflicting it on others.

Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer* (CD) [Rohr]

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If you're doing what's right and standing straight, don't worry about what your shadow looks like (how it may impact others). Shadows are shaped by what they fall on, not just from what makes them.

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Any new structures of emerging Christianity cannot be *in opposition* to any existing church structures or anybody at all. Any antagonistic action merely creates an “equal and opposite reaction.” “The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better” is one of our core principles at the CAC. Just do it better yourself, and don't waste any time criticizing others or the past! This, in fact, purifies your own commitment and motivation.

Don't bother being against anybody, anything, any group, or any institution. That will only keep you at a low level of ego, while falsely feeling superior. It is a most common mistake. You can, however, practice simple avoidance or quiet noncooperation with immature organizations, but don't waste time or energy being oppositional to anything. We need positive energy now over negative criticism of anything. It is almost as if consciousness has now grown up to see this—and do this! Fr. Richard Rohr

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Do what you can do; give what you can give – even if it seems ridiculously insufficient.

-Br. David Vryhof, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

In the 16th century, Saint Teresa of Avila said, “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good.” It’s still true. What our world today is going to know about Jesus will be through us and because of us.

-Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of St. John the Evangelist

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Man who waits for roast duck to fly into his mouth must wait a very, very long time. – Chinese proverb

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## **ADDICTIONS**

*We are all addicts.* Human beings are addictive by nature. Addiction is a modern name and description for what the biblical tradition calls “sin” and the medieval Christians called “passions” or “attachments.” They both recognized that serious measures, or practices, were needed to break us out of these illusions and entrapments; in fact, the New Testament calls them in some cases “exorcisms!” They knew they were dealing with non-rational evil or “demons.”

Substance addictions are merely the most visible form of addiction, but actually we are all addicted to our own habitual way of doing anything, our own defenses, and most especially our patterned way of thinking, or how we process our reality. By definition you can never see or handle what you are addicted to. It is always “hidden” and disguised as something else. As Jesus did with the demon at Gerasa, someone must say, “What is your name?” (Luke 8:30). You cannot heal what you do not first acknowledge.

From Rohr, *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*, pp. xxii-xxiii

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## **ADVERSARIES**

St. Paul teaches us that as Christians, we will inevitably be involved in some conflict. It is not that we seek this conflict, but that we continue to serve others according to the love of God. If we do get involved in a conflict, we are to treat our opponent with gentleness, reverence, and respect – and look for ways to reconcile our differences.

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## **AGGRESSION**

[See also: Delusion; Attachments]

Aggression represents the energy you put into keeping veils of illusion, delusion, and attachment in place and is a consequence of solid self's (ego) attempts to control the flow of life events and restore a sense of safety and permanence. Aggression solidifies an experience and keeps part of you stuck in the past, which keeps you from moving on and connecting with what is actually occurring. These actions also get stuck in the body and can show up in a myriad of physical symptoms.

Only understanding and compassion can neutralize anger.

- "The Mindfulness Workbook", T. Roberts

## **ATONEMENT**

[See also: Reconciliation; Forgiveness]

We hear a great deal from religious leaders about the importance of atonement, especially in the example of Jesus Christ, who, we are told, suffered and died to *atone* for our collective sins and put us all in good standing with the Power of God. This sense of atonement begins with a belief that a wrong was committed, that God is angry about it, and that God expects mankind to do something - some atonement - to put things right.

The idea of an angry and vengeful God may not be part of our shared belief system, but atonement is still an important concept in understanding our spiritual purpose. The purpose of atonement is not to placate God into forgiving us, but to forgive ourselves by seeing ourselves from the perspective of God; from that perspective of divine love, there has never been anything to forgive! The sense of separation between ourselves and the Power of God has been entirely an idea in our own human consciousness, and it will dissolve as we are willing to be "at one" with the indwelling Presence of God, the Lord of our Being that Jesus called the Christ.

Does this then diminish the role of Jesus Christ in our personal atonement? By no means. It clarifies that role in a way that allows us to appreciate it - and the incredible, unconditional love behind it - more deeply than ever.

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Jesus bravely, gently and lovingly demonstrated everything we need to know and do in order to reach our own sense of atonement - through his teachings, his actions, and especially through his demonstration that death is simply an illusion and eternal life is our true nature. He did not do it for us. He showed us the way, the truth and the light and assured us that we could do as he did. [Unity]

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The murdered body of Jesus is forever an image of what the world does to love—it fears it and kills it, far too often. And yet God will have the last word: *This Jesus that you've killed and hated, I raise Him up and hold Him now before all the nations. Until the end of time, He is the sign of how love will win, for love is always stronger than death.* [Rohr]

## ATTACHMENTS

[See also: Mindfulness; Delusions; Illusions; Detachment]

Think of an attachment as the energy you put into keeping the veils of illusion and delusion intact. There is an exceptionally strong interrelationship between attachment and delusion. We become heavily invested in our delusions. There's a desire to maintain them at all costs. The seed of these attachments is the fear that, in and of yourself, you aren't enough – you are not complete, not whole, and unsatisfactory.

- "The Mindfulness Workbook", T. Roberts

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To be able to enjoy fully the many good things the world has to offer, we must be detached from them. To be detached does not mean to be indifferent or uninterested. It means to be non-possessive. Life is a gift to be grateful for and not a property to cling to.

A non-possessive life is a free life. But such freedom is only possible when we have a deep sense of belonging. To whom then do we belong? We belong to God, and the God to whom we belong has sent us into the world to proclaim in his Name that all of creation is created in and by love and calls us to gratitude and joy. That is what the "detached" life is all about. It is a life in which we are free to offer praise and thanksgiving. – Henri Nouwen

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## BALANCE

Many of us at different times have decided that what we need in our lives is a sense of balance - balance between work and play, between heart and head, between sacrifice and selfishness. Afraid of tilting too far in one direction or another, we struggle mightily to maintain balance. Sometimes we may - briefly! - succeed at feeling that we are achieving balance, but it doesn't last. Why? Because balance is not ours to achieve.

Balance is a state of equilibrium between opposing forces. It is achieved by giving equal weight to each of two or more energies.

But there are not two valid energies in all of creation. There is only one - God the Good, omnipotent. With only one power, there is no question of balance. There is only commitment. That is why Jesus

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warned that man cannot serve two masters - not because balance is difficult, but because it can't exist in a mind that sees with spiritual clarity. We must 'let our eye be single' - we must commit wholeheartedly to the only Truth there is. We must throw ourselves wildly off balance, into the Power of Love.

A key lesson in **A Course in Miracles** is that everything we experience is ultimately rooted in either fear or love, and fear and love cannot co-exist. There is no balance to be sought. Love, the **Course** also teaches, is letting go of fear. And the Bible reports that perfect love casts out fear. [Unity]

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## **BEAUTY**

“Beauty is the experimental proof that incarnation is in fact possible.” - Simone Weil

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## **BIRTHDAYS**

Birthdays are so important. On our birthdays we celebrate being alive. On our birthdays people can say to us, "Thank you for being!" Birthday presents are signs of our families' and friends' joy that we are part of their lives. Little children often look forward to their birthdays for months. Their birthdays are their big days, when they are the center of attention and all their friends come to celebrate.

We should never forget our birthdays or the birthdays of those who are close to us. Birthdays keep us childlike. They remind us that what is important is not what we do or accomplish, not what we have or who we know, but that we are, here and now. On birthdays let us be grateful for the gift of life.  
– Henri Nouwen

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## **BODY OF CHRIST**

In the 16th century, Saint Teresa of Avila said, “Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion is to look out to the world. Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good.” It’s still true. What our world today is going to know about Jesus will be through us and because of us.

-Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of St. John the Evangelist

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## **BODY WISDOM**

The spiritual power of LIFE describes the quickening energy of God as it vibrates in every cell of our physical bodies, every thought in our mortal minds. The power of life acts as a bridge between our

spiritual identity and the physical expression of that identity with which we are presently working, our human body.

The Anglican mystic Evelyn Underhill returns to her metaphor of the body as a house to emphasize the importance of this power of life uniting our spiritual and physical identities. We live, she writes, in a two-story house, and both stories have important roles to play. Some people try to live only on one floor. Very spiritual people may act as though the ground floor, rooted in the physical realm, were undesirable, to be avoided as if it weren't even there. Conversely, scientists and cynics may focus so much attention on the ground floor that they completely overlook the more spiritual realms above.

*"If we try to live on one floor alone," Mrs. Underhill writes, "we destroy the mysterious beauty of our human vocation; so utterly a part of the fugitive and creaturely life of this planet and yet so deeply colored by Eternity; so entirely one with the world of nature, and yet, 'in the Spirit,' a habitation of God. ... When Saint Teresa said that her prayer had become 'solid like a house,' she meant that its foundation now went down into the lowly but firm ground of human nature, the concrete actualities of the natural life: and on those solid foundations, its walls rose up towards heaven."*

Today let us feel the divine energy of life vibrating in every cell of our body, echoing in every thought of our mind. We recognize that through the power of life God is eternally expressing through us in this physical realm, infusing it with the eternal power of Spirit. Thank You, God.

[Unity]

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## BURDENS

I have never seen a Biblical verse that says that God will never give you more than you can handle.

Actually, much of Biblical teaching goes more along this line: **God will never give you more than HE can handle.**

Many people, if not most people, experience times in their lives when they are way overburdened – carrying much, much more than they can handle alone. Sometimes it ends up destroying them.

John 16:33 says that we *will* have trouble in the world, but that Christ has overcome the world. Matthew 11:28 says "Come unto me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." And Psalms constantly points out that our help (not our burden) comes from the Lord. See Psalm 33:20; 40:17; 46:1; 70:5; 121:1 and many others.

I think what we often fail to realize in this world is how God's help comes to us. We forget that God works through other people - that's His favorite way of interacting with us. When we need help, we should rarely try to do thing alone. God gave us counselors, therapists, physicians, teachers, friends, pastors, nurses, and many, many other kinds of people to help us get through the things that life throws at us.

God built us to need other people, and to need God Himself, too, to be whole. We are all interconnected and one family. Alone, our burdens could easily be too much for us. Br. Daniel-Joseph, CG

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## CARE

Care is something other than cure. *Cure* means "change." A doctor, a lawyer, a minister, a social worker- they all want to use their professional skills to bring about changes in people's lives. They get paid for whatever kind of cure they can bring about. But cure, desirable as it may be, can easily become violent, manipulative, and even destructive if it does not grow out of care. Care is being with, crying out with, suffering with, feeling with. Care is compassion. It is claiming the truth that the other person is my brother or sister, human, mortal, vulnerable, like I am.

When care is our first concern, cure can be received as a gift. Often we are not able to cure, but we are always able to care. To care is to be human. – Henri Nouwen

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## CHANGE

It has been truly said that change is the only constant in our life experience. This is true, I think, no matter how spiritually aware we believe ourselves to be. The amount of change in our lives certainly doesn't decrease as we progress in awareness - indeed, it often seems to increase. It is in how we react to the change that we measure our growth.

Sometimes change seems to be out of control, and we are tempted to resist for all we are worth. Other times change seems to be happening very, very slowly - if at all. And we may want to speed things up through impulsive choices.

In fact, our mental perceptions are not to be trusted when it comes to change. In truth and in spirit, change is constant, unavoidable and always unfolding exactly on schedule.

The perfect energy from which to approach all change is patience. Patience allows us to wait for change that seems slow in coming. Patience also centers us and stills us when the pace of change seems to be out of hand. How do we access patience? It helps to remember what Emmet Fox described as **The Golden Key**: *Take your focus off whatever the problem may be, and focus instead on God.*

So we release every thought of anxiety or fear about change, and focus on the one unchanging constant, the Power and Presence of God. The result will be patience that allows change to unfold in divine order.  
[Unity]

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## CHRISTMAS

[See: Incarnation]

## COMPASSION

[See also: Present Moment Awareness; Mindfulness]

Compassion means putting your need to manipulate and control outcomes aside and attuning to the needs and feelings of others – and your own needs and feelings.

A genuinely compassionate attitude doesn't change in reaction to any given person or experience. It is a deep, heartfelt, concern for the well-being of every living being in the universe. It emerges as you maintain a spacious sense of patience and openness, and hold your experiences with tenderness.

-From "The Mindfulness Workbook" – T. Roberts

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"A human being is part of a whole, called by the universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." - Albert Einstein, 1921

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Compassion is the capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too. -- Frederich Buechner

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## CONNECTEDNESS

[See also: Interconnectedness]

There are three degrees of union of the soul with God:

- 1) General. When the soul is united to God solely by grace.
- 2) Virtual. Beginning any action by which we are united to God, we remain so united to Him by reason of that action for such time as it lasts.
- 3) Actual. The perfect union. In the other degrees the soul is passive, almost slumbering. Here it is intensely active.

Brother Lawrence

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Connectedness with God creates Epinoia – direct, intuitive knowing; used by the early Church.

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## CONSOLATION

Consolation is a beautiful word. It means "to be" (*con-*) "with the lonely one" (*solus*). To offer consolation is one of the most important ways to care. Life is so full of pain, sadness, and loneliness that we often wonder what we can do to alleviate the immense suffering we see. We can and must offer consolation. We can and must console the mother who lost her child, the young person with AIDS, the family whose house burned down, the soldier who was wounded, the teenager who contemplates suicide, the old man who wonders why he should stay alive.

To console does not mean to take away the pain but rather to be there and say, "You are not alone, I am with you. Together we can carry the burden. Don't be afraid. I am here." That is consolation. We all need to give it as well as to receive it. – Henri Nouwen

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## CONTEMPLATION

[See also: Present Moment Awareness]

"Contemplation," or "meditation" in some groups, was rediscovered in contemporary times beginning with the writings of Thomas Merton in the 1950s and 1960s. The word most Christians are more familiar with is simply "prayer."

Unfortunately, in the West, prayer had become something functional; something you did to achieve a desired effect—which too often puts the ego back in charge. As soon as you make prayer a way to get what you want, you're not moving into any kind of new state of consciousness. It's the same old consciousness, but now well disguised: "How can I get God to do what I want God to do?" It's the egocentric self deciding what it needs, but now, instead of just manipulating everybody else, it tries to manipulate God.

This is one reason religion is so dangerous and often so delusional. If religion does not transform people at the level of both mind and heart, it ends up giving self-centered people a very pious and untouchable way to be on top and in control. Now God becomes their defense system for their small self! Even Jesus found this to be true of the scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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*We don't teach meditation to the young monks. They are not ready for it until they stop slamming doors.*

~ Thich Nhat Hanh to Thomas Merton in 1966

The piercing truth of this statement struck me as a perfect way to communicate the endless disguises and devices of the false self. There is no more clever way for the false self to hide than behind the mask of spirituality. The human ego will always try to name, categorize, fix, control, and insure all its experiences. For the ego everything is a commodity. It lives inside of self-manufactured boundaries instead of inside the boundaries of the God-self. It lives out of its own superior image instead of mirroring the image of God. The ego is constantly searching for any solid and superior identity. A spiritual self-image gives us status, stability, and security. There is no better way to remain unconscious than to baptize and bless the forms of religion, even prayer itself, instead of surrendering to the Substance Itself. First stop slamming doors, and then you can begin in the kindergarten of spirituality. Too many priests, bishops, and ministers are still slamming doors.

In the name of seeking God, the ego pads and protects itself from self-discovery, which is an almost perfect cover for its inherent narcissism. I know this because I have done it all myself. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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In order to understand contemplation and the contemplative mind, we need to talk about the “True Self,” *who you are in God from all eternity*. This is the only self that has ever existed. It's the only self that exists right now. The trouble is that most people don't know it or even know about it! The work of religion is to get you to know your True Self, “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3) as Paul puts it.

You came from God. Your deepest DNA is divine. You're already spiritual beings, and the daily concern and question is “How do I become human?” I believe that's why Jesus came as a human being. He didn't come to teach us how to go to heaven but how to be a human being here on this earth—which is heaven now. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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The false self is your psychological creation of yourself in space and time. It comes from your early conditioning, family, roles, education, mind, culture, and religion. The false self is who you *think* you are! But thinking doesn't make it so. The false self dies and passes away. Yet it is the raw material through which you discover your True Self in God.

The True Self is not created by anything you have done right or wrong. It is never about requirements; it's about relationship—the quality and capacity for relatedness. This lays the foundation for contemplative prayer. The false self will say prayers but the True Self *is* a prayer and looks out at reality from a different pair of eyes larger than its own. This is why in Ephesians it says "pray always" (6:18). We pray always whenever we act *in conscious and loving union with God*, which eventually can be all the time—even in our sleep! - Fr. Richard Rohr

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I think some kind of experience of God is necessary for mental and emotional health. You basically don't belong in the universe until you are connected to its center, and one word for that center (and everything else by implication) is "God." When you live in the false self you are "eccentric" or off center. You're trying to make something—yourself—the Center that is not the center. It will never work in the long run, because it is not true. A part can never pretend to be the Whole.

So I would call the false self your "relative identity," and I would call the True Self your "absolute identity." A relative identity is not bad. The false self is not bad either. *It's simply not the True Self!* If you do not have some experience of your True-Self-in-God, by which to relativize and limit your false self, it has to pose as the real thing—and tries to get away with it. But it cannot work. It is not true. An edge can never pretend to be the Center. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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The word "presence" is a relational term. The real Presence is offered in the Eucharist, but if we don't know how to be present to the Presence there is no presence; certainly no "real" presence that can change you. What we're doing in contemplation is learning, quite simply, how to be present. We're learning how to access what is—and how to offer ourselves to it.

The reason most people run from contemplative prayer is because what comes up first is usually the garbage. That's why most teachers of contemplation insist on at least a 20-minute sit to begin with, so that you have a chance to separate from the garbage—a chance to move to a level beneath your thoughts to the level of pure being, the level of what we call pure consciousness or the prayer of quiet.

Adapted from the *CAC Foundation Set: Gospel Call to Compassionate Action (Bias from the Bottom) and Contemplative Prayer[Rohr]*

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The mind is given pre-eminence in almost all people. The mind starts steering, judging, analyzing, fixing, controlling, and trying to dominate body and soul. Most people think they *are* their thinking! That's what contemplation can help you resolve. It allows you to find the deeper self—prior to thinking about it, prior to the judgments you make and the preferences you have, and your endless mental commentary on everything. It really doesn't matter what you think about things, believe it or not. This is a revolutionary and humiliating breakthrough for most people. What matters is **WHAT IS**.

Rohr, From an unpublished talk in Assisi, Italy, May 2012

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"As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives." Henry David Thoreau

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"And the faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* [master of oneself] if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be *the education par excellence*. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical directions for bringing it about."

William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 1890.

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Contemplation is the third level of presence: understanding. Thoughts, or thinking, is the first level, and reason, or meditation, is the second level. Hugh of St. Victor (1078-1141) and Richard of St. Victor (1123-1173)

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One increasing consensus among scholars and spiritual observers is that conversion or enlightenment moves forward step by step from almost totally dualistic thinking to non-dual thinking at the highest levels. We call that higher way of seeing and being present *contemplation*. Good religion is always about *seeing* rightly: "The lamp of the body is the eye; if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light," as Jesus says in Matthew 6:22. *How you see is what you see*. And to see rightly is to be able to be fully present—without fear, without bias, and without judgment. It is such hard work for the ego, for the emotions, and for the body, that I think most of us would simply prefer to go to church services.

Rohr, From *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*

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Contemplation is a long, loving look at what really is.

Rohr, *Simplicity: The Art of Living*

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It is in imageless contemplation that the soul comes to unitive knowledge of reality. The fewer distracting symbols, the better.

Aldous Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, p.264

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Today the unnecessary suffering on this earth is great for people who could have known better and should have been taught better by their religions. In the West, religion became preoccupied with *telling people what to know more than how to know, telling people what to see more than how to see*. We ended up seeing Holy Things faintly, trying to understand Great Things with a whittled-down mind, and trying to love God with our own small and divided heart. It has been like trying to view the galaxies with a five-dollar pair of binoculars.

*Contemplation*, my word for this larger seeing, keeps the whole field open; it remains vulnerable before the moment, the event, or the person—before it divides and tries to conquer or control it.

Contemplatives refuse to create false dichotomies, dividing the field for the sake of the quick comfort of their ego. I call contemplation “full-access knowing”—not irrational, but prerational, nonrational, rational, and transrational all at once. Contemplation is an exercise in keeping your heart and mind spaces open long enough for the mind to see other hidden material. – Fr. Richard Rohr

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## **COURAGE**

"Have courage," we often say to one another. Courage is a spiritual virtue. The word *courage* comes from the Latin word *cor*, which means "heart. A courageous act is an act coming from the heart. A courageous word is a word arising from the heart. The heart, however, is not just the place where our emotions are located. The heart is the centre of our being, the centre of all thoughts, feelings, passions, and decisions. – Henri Nouwen

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Courage is connected with taking risks. Jumping the Grand Canyon on a motorbike, coming over Niagara Falls in a barrel, or crossing the ocean in a rowboat are called courageous acts because people risk their lives by doing these things. But none of these daredevil acts comes from the centre of our being. They all come from the desire to test our physical limits and to become famous and popular.

Spiritual courage is something completely different. It is following the deepest desires of our hearts at the risk of losing fame and popularity. It asks of us the willingness to lose our temporal lives in order to gain eternal life. – Henri Nouwen

## **CREATION**

The more we look, the more questions we ask, the more great and luminous stories there are to tell. Even the marble under our feet has a great and luminous story to tell. Even the speck of dirt on my shoe. So many great and luminous stories to tell. And all of them stories about the Poet who speaks these things into existence. -Br. Mark Brown, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## CRUCIFIXION

The supreme irony of the whole crucifixion scene is this: he who was everything had everything taken away from him. He who was seemingly “perfect” (Hebrews 1:3, 5:9) was totally misjudged as “sin” itself (Romans 8:3-4). How can we be that mistaken? The crucified Jesus forever reveals to us how wrong both religious and political authorities can be, and how utterly wrong we all can be—about who is in the right and who is sinful (John 16:8). The crowd, who represents all of us, chose Barabbas, a common thief, over Jesus. That is how much we can misperceive, misjudge, and be mistaken.

Jesus hung in total solidarity with the pain of the world and the far too many lives on this planet that have been “nasty, lonely, brutish, and short.” After the cross, we know that God is not watching human pain, nor apparently always stopping human pain, as much as God is found *hanging with us* alongside all human pain. Jesus’ ministry of healing and death, of solidarity with the crucified of history, forever tells us that *God is found wherever the pain is*. This leaves God on both sides of every war, in sympathy with both the pain of the perpetrator and the pain of the victim, with the excluded, the tortured, the abandoned, and the oppressed since the beginning of time. I wonder if we even like that. There are no games of moral superiority left for us now. Yet this is exactly the kind of Lover and the universal Love that humanity needs.

This is exactly how Jesus “redeemed the world by the blood of the cross.” It was not some kind of heavenly transaction, or “paying a price” to an offended God, as much as *a cosmic communion with all that humanity has ever loved and ever suffered*. If Jesus was paying any price it was to the hard and resistant defenses around our hearts and bodies. God has loved us from all eternity.

Fr. Rohr, Adapted from *The Great Themes of Scripture: New Testament*

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## DEATH

We fear nothingness. That’s why we fear death, of course, which feels like nothingness. Death is the shocking realization that everything I thought was me, everything I held onto so desperately, was finally nothing (read Kathleen Dowling Singh’s *The Grace in Dying*).

The nothingness we fear so much is, in fact, the treasure and freedom that we long for, which is revealed in the joy and glory of the Risen Christ. We long for the space where there is nothing to prove and nothing to protect; where I am who I am, in the mind and heart of God, and that is more than enough.

Spirituality teaches us how to get naked ahead of time, so God can make love to us as we really are.

Adapted from *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations* , p. 333, day 344 [Rohr]

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In his book *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker believes that the denial of death largely creates human culture. We all pretend that we are going to live forever, and that we can avoid all forms of dying. To overcome this illusion, you must come to understand that life and death are not two, but one. They cannot be separated except by blindness and denial—but your mental ego tries to have one without the other. It splits from all necessary dying, losing, and suffering in a thousand ways. This keeps you very superficial.

Once you know that life and death are one, you're not afraid of death anymore. The only people who are afraid of death are the people who haven't walked through it ahead of time. St. Francis said "Face the first death and the second death can do you no harm." So what he called poverty, humility, suffering, diving right into death by identifying with the lepers and the poor, was identification with the first death. Once you walk through it and come out on the other side even more alive, you're not afraid of death anymore.

Rohr, From an unpublished talk in Assisi, Italy, May 2012

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Death was instituted by God so that imperfection and separation from God would not be immortal. This gives God a chance to finish the creation of each person at some point; to complete what He began.

Gregory Nazianzen, Oration 45, For Easter, 8

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For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

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Dying is returning home. But even though we have been told this many times by many people, we seldom desire to return home. We prefer to stay where we are. We know what we have; we do not know what we will get. Even the most appealing images of the afterlife cannot take away the fear of dying. We cling to life, even when our relationships are difficult, our economic circumstances harsh, and our health quite poor.

Still, Jesus came to take the sting out of death and to help us gradually realize that we don't have to be afraid of death, since death leads us to the place where the deepest desires of our hearts will be satisfied. It is not easy for us to truly believe that, but every little gesture of trust will bring us closer to this truth. - Henri Nouwen

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Death is a passage to new life. That sounds very beautiful, but few of us desire to make this passage. It might be helpful to realize that our final passage is preceded by many earlier passages. When we are born we make a passage from life in the womb to life in the family. When we go to school we make a passage from life in the family to life in the larger community. When we get married we make a passage from a

life with many options to a life committed to one person. When we retire we make a passage from a life of clearly defined work to a life asking for new creativity and wisdom.

Each of these passages is a death leading to new life. When we live these passages well, we are becoming more prepared for our final passage. - Henri Nouwen

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When we lose a dear friend, someone we have loved deeply, we are left with a grief that can paralyze us emotionally for a long time. People we love become part of us. Our thinking, feeling and acting are codetermined by them: Our fathers, our mothers, our husbands, our wives, our lovers, our children, our friends ... they are all living in our hearts. When they die a part of us has to die too. That is what grief is about: It is that slow and painful departure of someone who has become an intimate part of us. When Christmas, the new year, a birthday or anniversary comes, we feel deeply the absence of our beloved companion. We sometimes have to live at least a whole year before our hearts have fully said good-bye and the pain of our grief recedes. But as we let go of them they become part of our "members" and as we "re-member" them, they become our guides on our spiritual journey. - Henri Nouwen

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We think life and death are two separate realities. In fact, they are two sides of one coin, and this deep insight is called by Christians "the paschal mystery." God must surely understand that humans see things "die" and seemingly disappear, starting with the first death of our pet, our grandparents, and perhaps even parents. It sure looks like either-or.

Ken Wilber says that "the fact that life and death are 'not two' is extremely difficult to grasp, not because it is so complex, but because it is so simple." And Kathleen Dowling Singh, who has given her life to hospice work, says that "We miss the unity of life and death at the very point where our ordinary mind begins to think about it." - Fr. Richard Rohr

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## **DELUSIONS**

[See also: Illusions; Attachments; Present Moment Awareness]

Delusions are the way that you try to explain the discrepancy when your perception of a lasting, permanent, and solid reality is challenged by the way events actually unfold. They are the stories that you tell yourself to explain the vicissitudes of your life. While Illusion is a misperception, delusions are the stories your ego mind constructs about why your illusions don't match reality.

- "The Mindfulness Workbook", T. Roberts

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## **DESIRE**

Listen to your desire. Our capacity to desire is God-given. No matter how flimsy our desires, no matter how conflicted or shadowy or duplicitous or even wrong our desires may be on the surface, they are connected to something deep within our souls that really demands attention, and that is good.

-Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## **DESPAIR**

Life is God's initiative and can end or change suddenly, unexpectedly, and unpredictably. When we humans are ready to give up hope and resign ourselves to inevitability, God intervenes and reveals completely new beginnings. The resurrection of Jesus is God's sign breaking through every form of human fatalism and despair. In every critical event, there is an opportunity for God to act creatively and reveal a deeper truth than what we see on the surface of things. God also can turn around critical incidents and seemingly hopeless situations in our lives and reveal light in darkness. – Henri Nouwen

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## **DETACHMENT**

[See also: Attachments]

Also known as "Holy Indifference."

We must not wish anything other than what happens from moment to moment, all the while, however, exercising ourselves in goodness. – St. Catherine of Genoa

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The holy indifference inculcated by exponents of the Perennial Philosophy is neither stoicism nor mere passivity. It is rather an active resignation. The Divine Will may use the mortified mind and body as its instrument for good. The double currents of love and detachment.

Aldous Huxley, Perennial Philosophy

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## DIVERSITY

What is healthy in nature is healthy for the people of God. A wide range of understandings and interpretations is a sign of good health in the religious eco-system. Bio-diversity in our religious ecosystem can help us curb the excesses of unchallenged points of view.

-Br. Mark Brown, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## EGO

The ego is that part of the self that wants to be significant, central, and important. It is very self-protective by its very nature. *It must eliminate the negative to succeed.* (Jesus would call it the “actor” in Matthew 23, usually translated from the Greek as “hypocrite”.)

The shadow is that part of the self that we don’t want to see, that we’re afraid of and we don’t want others to see either. If our “actor” is well-defended and in denial, the shadow is always hated and projected elsewhere (we tend to hate our own faults in OTHER people!). One point here is crucial: *The shadow self is not of itself evil; it just allows you to do evil without recognizing it as evil!* That is why Jesus criticizes hypocrisy more than anything else. He does not hate sinners at all, but only people who pretend they are not sinners!

Jesus’ phrase for the denied shadow is “the plank in your own eye,” which you invariably see as the “splinter in your brother’s eye.” Jesus’ advice is absolutely perfect. “Take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:4-5).

[Rohr]

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In Edward Edinger’s model the ego is shown in the beginning as being in a dependent and symbiotic relationship with the Self. In infancy they cannot be separated. This is the condition of Paradise, “*at being at one with nature and the gods*”. *It is an “inflated” state, a condition of irresponsibility, unregenerate lust, arrogance and crude desirousness. The basic problem for the adult is how to achieve the [re]union without identification.*” - Murray Stein, Jung’s Map of the Soul, p. 11

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The birth of consciousness is the birth of the ego. ‘One becomes two’ - Nietzsche. This is the beginning of duality, which eventually must be overcome, not by identification with the Self, but in relation to it. This is the acceptance of transpersonal authority, usually after an ordeal. – from Ego and Archetype, Edward Edinger

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“The ego is the locus of decision-making and free will. Jung said it is the center of consciousness. He referred in his autobiography to two personalities. Personality No. 1 is the innate core ego, and Personality No. 2 is the culturally acquired layer of the ego that grows up over time...” Murray Stein, Jung’s Map of the Soul, p. 23ff.

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The healthy ego refers to the active, controlling, perceiving, learning functions of personality. The ego scans external reality and inner experience, then chooses and directs the person's behavior so that needs will be met without danger or violating moral taboos.

A dysfunctional ego goes too far in compiling and evaluating information, taking on a life of its own. This is commonly known as the "false self." It will go to great lengths to protect its own image using things like repression, rationalization, reaction-formation, projection, illusions, and delusions.

- Dr. S. Jourard

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The ego loves to identify with things that enhance its image; it favors roles and title versus peace and gentleness.

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The vast majority of human beings believe that their own selfness and the objects around them possess a reality in themselves, wholly independent of God. This belief leads them to identify their being with their sensations, cravings and private notions, and in its turn this self-identification with what they are not effectively walls them off from divine influence and the very possibility of deliverance."

- Aldous Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*

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In the first aborted ending to Mark’s Gospel—the oldest Gospel—the text ends on a very disappointing and thus likely truthful note: “They ran away from the tomb frightened out of their wits. They said nothing to a soul, for they were afraid” (16:5-8). . . .

Such running from resurrection has been a prophecy for Christianity, and much of religion, just as in these early Scriptures. I interpret this as the human temptation to run from and deny not just the divine presence, but our own true selves, that is, our souls, our inner destiny, our true identity. Your True Self is that part of you that knows who you are and whose you are, although largely unconsciously. Your False Self is just who you think you are—but thinking doesn’t make it so.

We are made for transcendence and endless horizons, but our small ego usually gets in the way until we become aware of its petty preoccupations and eventually seek a deeper truth. It is like mining for a diamond. We must dig deep, and yet seem reluctant, even afraid, to do so.

- Fr. Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*, pp. vii-viii

There are three ways that the ego will treat the present moment: 1) as a means to an end, 2) as an obstacle, or 3) as an enemy. The ego is always trying to get elsewhere. What happens then? Impatience, frustration, and stress.

Eckhard Tolle

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We are all the Body of Christ, and even more so in our togetherness (1 Corinthians 12:12ff). Now that is quite Scriptural, in many sacred texts, but perhaps it just seems too good to be true for most Christians: “There is only Christ, he is everything and he is in everything” (Colossians 3:11). The ego resists such inclusivity, because the ego is that part of you which wants to be special, separate, and superior instead. The ego (“flesh” for Paul) resists any change, vulnerability, and union with anything else. – Fr. Rohr

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## **ENLIGHTENMENT**

[See also: Formation]

Enlightenment is simply your natural state of felt oneness with God. It is a state of connectedness; finding your true self and nature beyond name and form.

The single most important step in your journey toward enlightenment is this: learn to disidentify from your mind.

The present moment holds the key to liberation. Enlightenment means rising above thought, not falling back to a level below thought.

When consciousness frees itself from its identification with physical and mental forms, then you have Presence – enlightenment. Feeling will get you closer to the truth of who you are than will thinking.

There is nothing you can *do* about enlightenment. You cannot transform yourself or anyone else. All you can do is create a space for transformation to happen – a place for grace and love to enter.

[E. Tolle]

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Scripture references:

Luke 9:27

John 1:9-13, 17: 14:26; 16:13

Romans 1:20; 8:6, 9, 19

Ephesians 1:17-19

1 Corinthians 3:3, 11

2 Corinthians 5:17

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Colossians 2:2-3  
2 Timothy 2:7

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"Hasten to the springs, draw from the wells. In God is the wellspring of life, a spring that can never fail. In his light is found a light that nothing can darken. Desire that light which your eyes know not! Your inward eye is preparing to see the Light. Your inward thirst burns to be quenched at the spring."

Augustine of Hippo, Commentary on Psalm 41, 2

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To know about things is to be knowledgeable; To know about people is to be wise; To know about yourself is to be enlightened.

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## **EUCCHARIST**

Jesus is the Word of God, who came down from heaven, was born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit, and became a human person. This happened in a specific place at a specific time. But each day when we celebrate the Eucharist, Jesus comes down from heaven, takes bread and wine, and by the power of the Holy Spirit becomes our food and drink. Indeed, through the Eucharist, God's incarnation continues to happen at any time and at any place.

Sometimes we might think: "I wish I had been there with Jesus and his apostles long ago!" But Jesus is closer to us now than he was to his own friends. Today he is our daily bread! - Henri Nouwen

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The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity. It makes us into one body. The apostle Paul writes: "As there is one loaf, so we, although there are many of us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

The Eucharist is much more than a place where we celebrate our unity in Christ. The Eucharist creates this unity. By eating from the same bread and drinking from the same cup, we become the body of Christ present in the world. Just as Christ becomes really present to us in the breaking of the bread, we become really present to one another as brothers and sisters of Christ, members of the same body. Thus the Eucharist not only signifies unity but also creates it. – Henri Nouwen

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The Eucharistic body and blood of Christ is a place we must come to again and again to find our own face, to find our deepest name, and our absolute identity in God. It takes years for this to sink in. It is too big a truth for any one moment, too grand and wonderful for our small hearts and minds.

So we keep *eating this mystery* that is simultaneously the joy of God and the suffering of God packed into one meal. (Some have seen the body/bread as eating the joy and the blood/wine as drinking

the suffering.) All we can really do is to be present ourselves, because we cannot ever rationally understand this. Presence cannot really be explained.

When the two presences meet, Jesus and the soul, then we have what Catholics brilliantly call “the Real Presence.” We did maintain the objective end of the presence from God’s side rather well, but we seldom taught people the subjective way of *how to be present themselves!* Presence is a relational concept, and both sides must be there, or there is no real presence. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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What we’re doing in contemplation is learning, quite simply, how to *be present*. That is the only way to encounter any other presence, including God in prayer, Jesus in the Eucharist, and Jesus in others. The change is all and always on *our* side. God is present everywhere all the time. There really is not much point in arguing about IF and HOW Jesus is present in the bread and wine; simply be present yourself and you will know all that you need to know. It is an exercise in surrender and presence from your side alone.

We know that God is always given from God’s side, but we have to learn how to receive such total givenness, which is a very vulnerable position for humans. So Jesus said “Eat it” and did not say “think about it,” which is our defensive control tower. The Christian strategy seems to be this: struggle with divine presence in one focused, determined, and *assured* place (bread and wine, which is just about as universal a symbol as you can get)—and from that moment of space and time move to all space and all time. That is the final and full goal. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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## EVIL

Traditional Catholic moral teaching says there are three sources of evil—the world, the flesh and the devil. Dom Helder Camara, who was the holy and wise archbishop of Recife, Brazil, taught this in terms of “a spiral of violence” spiraling from the bottom up. “The world” (systemic evil) is at the root a lie, in the middle is “the flesh” (personal evil), and at the top is “the devil” (evil disguised as “good power” to enforce the first two).

Up to now in human history most people’s moral thinking has been overwhelmingly oriented around the personal evils of “the flesh.” There was not too much knowledge of the social foundations of evil behavior until very recently.

The Biblical Prophets of Judaism were the unique and inspired group who exposed all three sources of evil and it’s also why they have been largely ignored, as was Jesus, the greatest of the Jewish Prophets. They didn’t concentrate on the flesh, but on “the world” and what we will describe this week as “the devil,” which very often passes as good and necessary “evil.” You see what we are up against, and why evil continues to control so much of the human show. – Fr. R. Rohr

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## **FALSE SELF**

[See: EGO]

The false self is your psychological creation of yourself in space and time. It comes from your early conditioning, family, roles, education, mind, culture, and religion. The false self is who you *think* you are! But thinking doesn't make it so. The false self dies and passes away. Yet it is the raw material through which you discover your True Self in God, so you must not hate it or kill it. Just learn from it. Of itself, it does not know how to pray, because it does not understand simple presence, communion, or relationship. The false self is all about utility and "What can I get out of this?" Not bad, but very incomplete.

– Fr. R. Rohr

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## **FEAR**

Whatever kinds of fear be suggested to us other than "reverent" fear, though they appear disguised as holiness, they are not...; and this is how they can be recognized apart. The fear that makes us hastily to flee from everything that is not good, and to fall into our Lord's breast, as the child into a mother's arms, with all our intention and with all our mind, knowing feebleness and our great need, knowing his everlasting goodness and his blessed love, seeking only in him for salvation, cleaving to him with faithful trust, that fear which leads us in this direction is gentle and good and true; and all that is opposed to this is either wrong or mixed with wrong. So this is the remedy, to recognize them both and to refuse the wrong.

- Julian of Norwich

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## **FORGIVENESS**

There's an old joke about a man who invented a universal solvent - it would easily dissolve anything. It could have made him a rich man, but he couldn't find anything to put it in.

There is a universal spiritual solvent, and it doesn't have to be contained in anything, although we sometimes act like it's a dangerous poison or destructive acid. The universal spiritual solvent is - forgiveness.

Forgiveness dissolves every obstacle to a full realization of our Oneness with God. We may perceive the obstacles as anger, fear, resentment, unworthiness - or as the result of wrongs done to us by others. In every case, without exception, the correct solution is forgiveness - of others, and of ourselves.

Jesus Christ was emphatic in his teachings on the power and importance of forgiveness from the very earliest days of his ministry. He warned that even the power of prayer would not work effectively until we had first been willing to forgive any resentments we might hold against others.

Forgiveness is more than a mental exercise. It is an activity of the heart. Forgiveness recognizes that there is no evil; there is only Good imperfectly expressing. Forgiveness dissolves all obstacles, and joyfully unites us in the Presence and Power of Love, which is God working in and through us. [Unity]

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When someone hurts us, offends us, ignores us, or rejects us, a deep inner protest emerges. It can be rage or depression, desire to take revenge or an impulse to harm ourselves. We can feel a deep urge to wound those who have wounded us or to withdraw in a suicidal mood of self-rejection. Although these extreme reactions might seem exceptional, they are never far away from our hearts. During the long nights we often find ourselves brooding about words and actions we might have used in response to what others have said or done to us. It is precisely here that we have to dig deep into our spiritual resources and find the center within us, the center that lies beyond our need to hurt others or ourselves, where we are free to forgive and love.

Henri Nouwen

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Forgiveness is of one piece. Those who give it can also receive it. Those who receive it can pass forgiveness on. You are a conduit, and your only job is not to stop the flow. What comes around will also go around. The art of letting go is really the secret of happiness and freedom. – Fr. Rohr

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Jesus revealed to us how to bear the pain of the world instead of handing on the pain to those around us. When you stop resisting suffering, when you can really do something so foolish as to welcome the pain, it leads you into a broad and spacious place where you live out of the abundance of Divine Love. I can't promise you it will leave that quickly or that easily. To forgive is not the same as to forget.

Forgiveness has the power to lead you to your True Self in God. Because the hurts of life are so great, you cannot let go of the pain on your own. At that point, you need to draw from a Larger Source. What you are doing with forgiveness is changing your egoic investment in your own painful story—which too often has become your ticket, and sometimes your very identity. Forgiveness is one of the most radically free things a human being can do. When we forgive, we have to let go of our own feelings, our own ego, our own offended identity, and find our identity at a completely different level—the divine level. I even wonder if it is possible to know God at all—outside of the mystery of forgiveness (Luke 1:77). – Fr. Richard Rohr

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Forgiving does not mean forgetting. When we forgive a person, the memory of the wound might stay with us for a long time, even throughout our lives. Sometimes we carry the memory in our bodies as a visible sign. But forgiveness changes the way we remember. It converts the curse into a blessing. When we forgive our parents for their divorce, our children for their lack of attention, our friends for their unfaithfulness in crisis, our doctors for their ill advice, we no longer have to experience ourselves as the victims of events we had no control over.

Forgiveness allows us to claim our own power and not let these events destroy us; it enables them to become events that deepen the wisdom of our hearts. Forgiveness indeed heals memories.

– Henri Nouwen

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## FORMATION

[See also: Metanoia, Transformation, Ego]

Goodness need not enter into the soul, for it is there already, waiting to be perceived.

- *Theologia Germanica*

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The purpose of formation is to transcend the notion of self and all its constraints. It is to find the impermanent, interconnected self.

- Living Buddha, Living Christ [Hahn]

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The greatest gift of centered and surrendered people is that they know themselves as part of a larger history, a larger Self. Their life is not about them! They are just one lovely instance of a Much Larger and More Wonderful Life, the very life of God.

Holy people are in one sense profoundly conservative, knowing that they only stand on the shoulders of their ancestors and will be shoulders for the generations to come. They are only a part of the Eternal Mystery of God unfolding in time, *and yet they are a part!*

Yet these same people are often quite liberal and reforming because they have no private agendas or self-interest to protect. They are unattached to any superior self-image or inferior self-image or any career or promotion. Such freedom! It is all about God for them, and they are just along for the ride. Such seeming contradictions held inside of the same person usually make it into a very wild ride.

*The Art of Letting Go: Living the Wisdom of St. Francis* [Fr. Richard Rohr]

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The authentic religious life is a matter of *becoming who we already are*, and *all* that we truly are! Can you imagine that? Is the seed already within you—of all that God wants you to be? Do you already know at some level who you authentically are? Are you willing to pay the price, even the mistrust of others? Could that be what we mean by having a unique “soul”? Most saints thus described the path as much more *unlearning* than learning. There are so many illusions and lies that we must all unlearn. And one of the last illusions to die is that we are all that different or that separate. Finally we are all one and amazingly the same. Differentiation seems to precede union and communion, for some strange reason.

- Fr. Richard Rohr

“How can I be more holy?” We don’t have to make ourselves holy. We already are, and we just don’t know it yet. In Christian terminology this inherent holiness is called the Divine Indwelling or the gift of the Holy Spirit. The awakening of the True Self in God is the essential, foundational, and primary task of all religion. Thus authentic religion is more about subtraction than addition, more letting go of the false self than any attempt at engineering our own True Self. You can’t create what you already have. We become the One we gaze upon. We are, eventually, just like the God we worship. This reciprocal gaze *is* the True Self, perfectly given to us, and always waiting to be perfectly received. It is so dear and so precious that it needs no external payoffs whatsoever. The True Self is abundantly content as it is.

- Fr. Richard Rohr

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All religions in their own way talk about dying before you die! They are all indeed saying that something has to die. We all know this, but often religions have chosen the wrong thing to kill, which has given us a very negative image. In almost all history it was always the “other,” the heretic, the sinner, the foreigner that had to die. Seldom was it “me.”

In most ancient cultures it was the virgin daughters and eldest sons that had to be sacrificed; in Biblical times it was an animal, as we see in the Jewish temple. By the Christian Middle Ages, it was our desires, our intellect, our bodies, and our will that had to die, which made many people think that God had created something wrong in us. Religion then became purity or separation codes instead of transformational systems.

Jesus did say very clearly that we had to “lose our self to find our self” in several different settings. For much of Christian history this was interpreted as the body self that had to die, and for some miraculous reason this was supposed to make the spiritual self arise! It did not work, and it allowed us to avoid the real problem. What really has to die is *our false self* created by our own mind, ego, and culture. It is a pretense, a bogus identity, a passing fad, a psychological construct *that gets in the way of who we are and always were—in God*. This is our objective and metaphysically True Self. It seems we all live with a tragic case of mistaken identity. Christianity’s most important job is to tell you that *you indeed and already have a True Self*, “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3-4).

- Fr. Rohr, Adapted from *On Transformation: Collected Talks, Volume I:*

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The separate self is the problem, whereas most religion and most people make the shadow self the problem. This leads to denying, pretending, and projecting instead of real transformation into the Divine (*Transformation*).  
- Fr. Rohr

## **FREEDOM**

All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then, when you can get little enough and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find that the little place where you *really are* is ironically more than enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect.

That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody because they've come to the place where, as I like to say, everything belongs. To live from this place cuts the roots of violence at their very foundation, for there is not even any basis for fear or anger or protection or hatred. Negativity must be nipped in the bud—that is to say, *in the mind*. - Fr. Richard Rohr

Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer* (CD)

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Those who belong to God and know themselves to be loved unconditionally by God find great confidence and freedom. There is nothing that God does not know. There is no place where God is not present. There is nothing that can separate us from God's love. Nothing. Ever.

-Br. David Vryhof , Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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Jesus' notion of the Kingdom has a different understanding of freedom than that of most religious and secular leaders today. We think of freedom as *not having to do what we don't want to do*, but divine freedom is the capacity to be fully who we already are, to develop our inherent and true nature, as much as possible—*really wanting to do what we know we have to do*. Only God can create that freedom inside of us. Love can only proceed from such inner freedom. – Fr. Richard Rohr

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## **FRIENDSHIP**

Friendship is one of the greatest gifts a human being can receive. It is a bond beyond common goals, common interests, or common histories. It is a bond stronger than sexual union can create, deeper than a shared fate can solidify, and even more intimate than the bonds of marriage or community. Friendship is being with the other in joy and sorrow, even when we cannot increase the joy or decrease the sorrow. It is a unity of souls that gives nobility and sincerity to love. Friendship makes all of life shine brightly. Blessed are those who lay down their lives for their friends. – Henri Nouwen

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## **GENTLENESS**

Once in a while we meet a gentle person. Gentleness is a virtue hard to find in a society that admires toughness and roughness. We are encouraged to get things done and to get them done fast, even when people get hurt in the process. Success, accomplishment, and productivity count. But the cost is high. There is no place for gentleness in such a milieu.

Gentle is the one who does "not break the crushed reed, or snuff the faltering wick" (Matthew 12:20). Gentle is the one who is attentive to the strengths and weaknesses of the other and enjoys being together more than accomplishing something. A gentle person treads lightly, listens carefully, looks tenderly, and touches with reverence. A gentle person knows that true growth requires nurture, not force. Let's dress ourselves with gentleness. In our tough and often unbending world our gentleness can be a vivid reminder of the presence of God among us. – Henri Nouwen

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## **GOODNESS** [See also True Self]

Goodness need not enter into the soul, for it is there already, waiting to be perceived.

- *Theologia Germanica*

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## **GRACE**

Grace is the presence of God in us.

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The present moment is the only aperture through which the soul can pass out of time into eternity, through which grace can pass out of eternity into the soul, and through which charity can pass from one soul in time to another soul in time. Aldous Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, p.188

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## **GRATITUDE**

To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives-the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections-that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only truly grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment. As

long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for.

Let's not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God. – Henri Nouwen

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## GRIEF

We live a long time in order to become lovers. God is like a good parent, refusing to do our homework for us. We must learn through trial and error. We have to do our homework ourselves, the homework of suffering, desiring, loving, and winning and losing, hundreds of times.

Grief is one of the greatest occasions of deep and sad feeling, and it's one that is socially acceptable. Most understand and want to walk with you in your grief. When we lose a beloved friend, wife, husband, child, parent, or maybe a possession or a job, we feel it is okay to feel deeply. But we must broaden that. We've got to find a passion that is also experienced when we *have* it, not just when we're losing it. And we have it all the time. Don't wait for loss to feel, suffer, or enjoy deeply.

Adapted from *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*, [Rohr]

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Every time we make the decision to love someone, we open ourselves to great suffering, because those we most love cause us not only great joy but also great pain. The greatest pain comes from leaving. When the child leaves home, when the husband or wife leaves for a long period of time or for good, when the beloved friend departs to another country or dies ... the pain of the leaving can tear us apart.

Still, if we want to avoid the suffering of leaving, we will never experience the joy of loving. And love is stronger than fear, life stronger than death, hope stronger than despair. We have to trust that the risk of loving is always worth taking. – Henri Nouwen

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## HAPPINESS

Unhappiness comes from false beliefs that we have been programmed with, such as:

- 1) You can't be happy without things that you are attached to. (Fact : You are really unhappy because you are focusing on what you do not have, rather than on what you have right now.)
- 2) Happiness is in the future. (Fact : It has to be in the present moment. Underneath all your programming you are actually happy [joyous])
- 3) Happiness will come if you manage to change the situation you are in and the people around you. (Fact: What really makes you happy is the thinking in your head.)
- 4) If all your desires are fulfilled you will be happy. (Fact: It is these very desires and attachments that make you tense, frustrated, nervous, fearful. They bring flashes of pleasure and excitement, but this is not happiness.)

Understand your false beliefs and they will drop; then you will know the taste of happiness.

DeMello, *The Way to Love*

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Once we have learned to discern the real and disguised nature of both good and evil we recognize that everything is broken and fallen, weak and poor—while still being the dwelling place of God—you and me, your country, your children, your marriage, and even your church and mosque and synagogue. That is not a put-down of anybody or anything, but actually creates the freedom to love imperfect things! As Jesus told the rich young man, “God alone is good!” (Mark 10:18). *In this, you may have been given the greatest recipe for happiness for the rest of your life.* You cannot wait for things to be totally perfect to fall in love with them or you will never love anything. Now, instead, you can love everything!

- Rohr, Adapted from *Spiral of Violence: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*

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## HEALING

Without a mythological context, sacred text, or some symbolic universe to reveal the greater meaning and significance of our life, we can become trapped in our own very small story. And in that limited story, without any larger perspective, our wounds can make us into embittered victims. We just keep repeating the story line to ourselves over and over, and soon it suffocates us like a python.

The Jesus way is to embrace our wounds and accept them as the price of the journey. We can choose to carry our wounds with dignity until the time comes when we forget why they were so important or debilitating to begin with. The wounds in Jesus’ hands, feet and side are still carried in his resurrected body—this is quite significant! (John 20:25-28) I think we carry our wounds until the end; they do not fully go away but keep us humble, patient and more open to trust and intimacy. The healing lies in the fact that those same wounds no longer defeat us or cause us to harm ourselves or others. My favorite mystic, Lady Julian of Norwich, puts it this way, “our wounds become our honors.”

Rohr, Adapted from *On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men,*

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When Jesus says "preach", he usually adds, "and heal." Healing has to be a sensible, balanced, scriptural ministry. To be acceptable, it must be true to:

- scriptures as a whole,
- all that we know of Jesus
- reason – because God gave us minds and presumably means us to use them.
- experience – including personal experience, historical experience, and traditional experience of Church
- promptings of the Holy Spirit in us

Christian healing is the difference made by Jesus when he meets us at our point of need. There is only one healer, and that is Christ.



What Christian healing is NOT:

- A venture into magic or a flirtation with the occult. It works within God's self-consistent laws.
- It is not a ministry which is confined to those who have special "gifts" – although special gifts can and do occur. Healing is a ministry for the whole body of Christ.
- It is not dependent upon "super-saintliness" on the part of the ministrants. Ordinary Christians are called to this ministry.
- There is a difference between Christian and faith healing. Faith healing is a form of auto-suggestion. In Christian healing, faith is no more than a channel for God, in Christ, to act through.
- It is not meant to discourage anyone from seeking medical care – it is also not incompatible with good medical practice.

from Roy Lawrence, "The Practice of Christian Healing"

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## HEART

The English word, "contrite," comes from the Latin, *contrītus*, which means "thoroughly crushed." The sense of the word is not about a broken heart, but rather, a heart broken open. To be contrite addresses the continual warnings of the Old Testament prophets who decry that people have become "hard hearted," that is, insolent and indifferent to the needs of the poor.

-Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## HELL

Hell is the most alienated, broken state of consciousness, a place so fearsome, so anguished that God who is Light and in whom there is no darkness, can be blocked from entering. But Jesus gave us the answer – on Holy Saturday he demonstrated how to penetrate hell – he entered in love, and just sat there, letting the darkness be in love. He joined those in hell, reconnected them and let them be a part of the whole.

Cynthia Bourgeault

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"I have the keys of death and of hell." Revelation 1:18

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"Nothing burns in hell but the false self." - Theologica Germanica

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"God will devise plans so as not to keep an outcast banished forever from His presence." 2 Samuel 14:14

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The self will is that which has all the power; it makes heaven and it makes hell; for there is no hell but where the will of the creature is turned from God, nor any heaven but where the will of the creature works with God. - William Law

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This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell".  
Catholic Catechism, #1033

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Often hell is portrayed as a place of punishment and heaven as a place of reward. But this concept easily leads us to think about God as either a policeman, who tries to catch us when we make a mistake and send us to prison when our mistakes become too big, or a Santa Claus, who counts up all our good deeds and puts a reward in our stocking at the end of the year.

God, however, is neither a policeman nor a Santa Claus. God does not send us to heaven or hell depending on how often we obey or disobey. God is love and only love. In God there is no hatred, desire for revenge, or pleasure in seeing us punished. God wants to forgive, heal, restore, show us endless mercy, and see us come home. But just as the father of the prodigal son let his son make his own decision God gives us the freedom to move away from God's love even at the risk of destroying ourselves. Hell is not God's choice. It is ours. - Henri Nouwen

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## **HIDDENNESS**

[See also: Contemplation, Solitude]

Hiddenness is an essential quality of the spiritual life. Solitude, silence, ordinary tasks, being with people without great agendas, sleeping, eating, working, playing ... all of that without being different from others, that is the life that Jesus lived and the life he asks us to live. It is in hiddenness that we, like Jesus, can increase "in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and with people" (Luke 2:51). It is in hiddenness that we can find a true intimacy with God and a true love for people.

Even during his active ministry, Jesus continued to return to hidden places to be alone with God. If we don't have a hidden life with God, our public life for God cannot bear fruit. - Henri Nouwen

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## **HOLY SPIRIT**

St. Paul refers to the Spirit's presence as the one who breathes life into all creation, starting with the first verses of the Bible (Genesis 1:2). The Holy Spirit fills in for our human limits and makes up for our

shortcomings. “The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For when we do not know what to say in prayer, the Spirit expresses what we mean in wordless sounds and sighs” (Romans 8:26).

When we pray, the Holy Spirit is the relationship itself, a movement back and forth, a giving and a receiving between ourselves and God.

The Holy Spirit is also the basis for most inter-religious dialogue and respect, because most of the world religions have a similar notion of an indwelling and animating God. Remember that John the Baptist, whom we celebrate today on this counterpoint to Christmas Eve, was “pre-Christian,” yet he was a man who knew and transmitted the same Spirit to Jesus himself.

Fr. Rohr, Adapted from *Great Themes of Scripture: New Testament*, p. 125

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## HOPE

Life is God's initiative and can end or change suddenly, unexpectedly, and unpredictably. When we humans are ready to give up hope and resign ourselves to inevitability, God intervenes and reveals completely new beginnings. The resurrection of Jesus is God's sign breaking through every form of human fatalism and despair. In every critical event, there is an opportunity for God to act creatively and reveal a deeper truth than what we see on the surface of things. God also can turn around critical incidents and seemingly hopeless situations in our lives and reveal light in darkness. – Henri Nouwen

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## HUMILITY

Humility is not the will to be "nothing" in order to become all; rather it is the acceptance of self in openness to the other person. Humility is not simply the exploration of one's own inner life or the acquisition of 'cosmic' powers.

- Olivier Clement

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God judges our transformation not by our efforts, but by our humility.

- John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

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While in form (physical body), you are and will always be inferior to some, superior to others. In essence, you are neither inferior nor superior to anyone. True self-esteem and true humility arise out of this realization. In truth, self esteem and humility are one in the same.

[E. Tolle]

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The two adjectives most applied to God by Franciscan mysticism were *goodness* and *humility*. Hardly any of us would think to call God humble, but Francis did. He fell in love with the humility of God because if God emptied himself and hid himself inside the material world as in Jesus, and waits so patiently for us to grow up, then God is very humble indeed.

Francis fell in love more with Jesus' humanity than with his divinity. It was his humanity that he wanted to draw close to and imitate. Only in a humble state, and among the humble, could Francis easily and naturally see God. He even loved humble creatures like worms, and crickets, and little lambs because they more truthfully revealed the Mystery of Jesus.

Some art historians say that Western Christian art changed after Francis. Giotto, the early Renaissance painter and architect, for example, moved from the depiction of exclusively sacred scenes and religious icons, to the painting of natural life: animals, nature, and human encounters. It is never the same afterwards, because this world and God's world are now revealing themselves as one.

Fr. Rohr, From an unpublished talk in Assisi, Italy, May 2012

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Great people are usually humble. They understand and accept that they draw from another Source; they are satisfied to be an instrument. Their genius is not of their own making but a gift. They do great things precisely because they do not take first or final responsibility for their gift, and they don't worry much about their failures. They understand that their life is not their own but has been entrusted to them. Someone Else has taken them seriously, and they feel profoundly respected, which is what men ultimately want and need.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes us as mere light bulbs. We get all the credit and seem to be shining brightly for all to see, but we know that if this light bulb was unscrewed from its source for even a moment, the brightness would immediately stop. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less. C. S. Lewis

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## **IDENTITY**

[See also: TRUE SELF, INDIVIDUAL]

It seems to me that we have made God *a being* instead of *Being itself*. Both John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas said "*Deus est Ens*," or "God is existence itself." That is the first name of God in the Book of Exodus (3:14), which could rightly be translated "I am *Am-ness*," or perhaps as Acts of the Apostles puts it: "God is the one in whom we live, and move, and have our being" (17:28).

Being, or naked existence, is the one thing that we all are a part of. It seems the essential religious problem is that human beings suffer almost universally from a massive case of mistaken identity about their radical union with God. If we can break away from the illusion of our separateness then the rest follows rather clearly, and we can reconnect with our core identity. We are each a manifestation of that Universal and Divine Being, which then takes the form of angels, humans, animals, trees, water, and Earth itself. Until we recognize that inherent and shared sacredness, we have no philosophical or compelling basis for nonviolence. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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I think the one thing the Church should do is teach people how to pray. Contemplative prayer in particular can give people back their birthright as children of God (inherently connected to and created by God). That is the only way to know your birthright experientially.

Prayer is not something you *do*; it's finally something *you are whenever you collapse back into the very Ground of your being*. Unfortunately, we flee into our minds instead—to create and defend our separateness and our specialness. The mind concocts an identity for itself based on our race, our country, our shape, our color, our religion, etc.—the very things which are passing and accidental and not essential. These are the very things that are going to die when we die; you might say we fight wars precisely because we don't pray.

Fr. Rohr, Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer* (CD)

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It is because we don't know who we are, because we are unaware that the kingdom of heaven is within us, that we behave in the generally silly, the often insane, the sometimes criminal ways that are so characteristically human. To become God-like is to identify ourselves with the divine element which in fact constitutes our essential nature, but of which, in our mainly voluntary ignorance, we choose to remain unaware.

- Aldous Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*

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## **IDENTITY** (Continued)

If the self doesn't find some way to connect radically with Being, it will live in anxiety and insecurity. The false self is inherently insecure. It's intrinsically fragile, grasping for significance. That's precisely because it *is insignificant!* So it grabs at things like badges and uniforms and titles and hats and flags to give itself importance and power. People talk about dying for the flag of their country. They don't realize that the Bible would definitely call that idolatry. What were you before you were an American? Will you be an American in heaven? Most of us don't know how to answer those questions without a spiritual journey and an inner prayer life.

In prayer you will discover who you were before you were male, before you were female, before you were black, before you were white, before you were straight, before you were gay, before you were Lutheran, Mormon, or Amish. Have you ever lived there? At that naked place, you will have very little to defend, fight about, compete with, overcome, hate, or fear. You are then living in the Reign of God, or what Buddha calls the Great Compassion. Violence is unneeded and undesired.

Fr. Richard Rohr, Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer*

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We don't *need to project or maintain* any kind of self-image at all, when we discover ourselves "hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). I hope this doesn't sound too esoteric, because it isn't. This is exactly what happens in true prayer and in true lovemaking too: "*I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine.*" This lovely phrase is used three times in the "Song of Songs," and is often found on contemporary Jewish mezuzahs, to be touched and invoked as you pass the doorway.

This is what will happen when we live first inside of silence, the silence that surrounds everything all the time. Only then can we stop exposing ourselves to the judgments of the world; only then will we stop "picking up" the energy of others; only then can we cease our endless self-commentary. *We are who we are in God—no more and no less.* We probably do need to remind ourselves of this almost every time we pass through a doorway.

Adapted from *Simplicity*, - Fr. Richard Rohr

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The secret of our identity lies in how we can reveal our inner quality of aliveness. When we fail to be who we really are, we sicken.

- Cynthia Bourgeault

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An artist is not a special kind of person, but every person is a special kind of artist.

- Ananda Coomaraswamy

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## **IDENTITY** (Continued)

Is it possible to let go of the belief that you should or need to know who you are? Can you cease looking to conceptual definitions to give you a sense of self? Defining yourself through thought is limiting yourself. It does not matter what function you fulfill in this world, but whether you identify with your function to such an extent that it takes over you and becomes a role that you play. When you play roles, you are unconscious. You become most powerful in whatever you do if the action is performed for its own sake rather than as a means to protect, enhance, or conform to your role identity.

[E. Tolle]

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Now we are the continuation of Word made flesh, grafted into Christ's body—we are the continuity of light and life; you and I are the continuity of Christ's grace and truth in this world (in all our frailty; with all our faults and sinfulness). -Br. Mark Brown, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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We all slowly learn how to live in what Thomas Merton would call the True Self—who you are, and always have been, in God. Who you are in God is who you forever are. In fact, that's all you are, and it is more than enough. Everything else is passing away. Reputations, titles, possessions, and roles do not determine our identity. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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You are already spiritual beings, and the only concern and question is “How do I become human?” I believe that's why Jesus came as a human being instead of an apparition in the sky. He didn't come to teach us how to go to heaven but how to be a human being here on this earth—which is the creation of heaven now. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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How we understand, how we appropriate our personal identity in Christ is a highly individual thing. We may grow in this understanding over time, in incremental ways. It may come to us as an occasional insight in moments of spiritual clarity. We may experience considerable confusion as we navigate between our various identities. And yet the center is Christ himself. -Br. Mark Brown, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

## **IDENTITY** (Continued)

I think some kind of experience of God is necessary for mental and emotional health. You basically don't belong in the universe until you are connected to its center, and one word for that center (and everything else by implication) is “God.” When you live in the false self you are “eccentric,” or off center. You are forced to try to make something the Center that is not the center—yourself. It will never work in the long run, because it is not true. A part can never pretend to be the Whole. The edge cannot act as if it is the Center.

Your relative identity, or false self, is not bad; it is a necessary starting place—which we fall in love with—and so it passes for everything. Its only real problem is that it is *not the True Self, while thinking that it is*. If you do not have some experience of your True Self in God, by which to relativize and limit your false self, it has to pose as the real thing—and tries to get away with it. But it cannot work. It is not true, and will finally disappoint you. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Each soul is a unique “thisness” (*haecceity*), and it is to be found in every act of creation in its singularity. God did not create universals, genera, and species, or anything that needed to come back again and again to get it right (reincarnation), but only specific and unique incarnations of the Eternal Mystery—each one chosen, loved, and preserved in existence as itself—*by being itself*. And this is the glory of God!

Paraphrased from John Duns Scotus (1265-1308), the Franciscan philosopher

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God is not primarily choosing people for a role or a task, although it might appear that way. God is really choosing them *to be God's self in this world, each in a unique situation*. If they allow themselves to experience being chosen, being a beloved, being somehow God's presence in the world, they invariably communicate that same chosenness to others. And thus the Mystery passes on from age to age. Yes, we do have roles and tasks in this world, but finally they are all the same—to uniquely be divine love in a way that no one else can or will. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Often we want to be somewhere other than where we are, or even to be someone other than who we are. We tend to compare ourselves constantly with others and wonder why we are not as rich, as intelligent, as simple, as generous, or as saintly as they are. Such comparisons make us feel guilty, ashamed, or jealous. It is very important to realize that our vocation is hidden in where we are and who we are. We are unique human beings, each with a call to realize in life what nobody else can, and to realize it in the concrete context of the here and now. We will never find our vocations by trying to figure out whether we are better or worse than others. We are good enough to do what we are called to do. Be yourself! - Henri Nouwen

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## ILLUSION

Illusion is about misperception and generally involves considering yourself and your experiences to be permanent, lasting, and solid. Big deal mind (ego) thrives on creating and maintaining this illusion of permanence and solidity. However, perceiving that your experience, and even your identity, is lasting and permanent creates a conflict between your perception and your actual experience, and this can cause you to resist the flow of your life.

- "The Mindfulness Workbook", T. Roberts

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## IMAGINATION

The spiritual focus for today is on one of the most rewarding, and trickiest, of all the twelve powers of God present within us, the power of **IMAGINATION**. Imagination is the power by which we form ideas into mental pictures of possibility. This power allows us to focus our creative energy, and produce in the manifest world that which we imagined in our hearts and minds.

Imagination works with our other powers in many ways. It is through imagination, for instance,



that we can understand the guidance of God, which so often speaks to us in dreams, symbols and apparent coincidence. In fact, the Old Testament character who most embodies the power of imagination demonstrated through dreams both the challenges and the rewards of working with this power. Joseph was able to exercise his imagination to interpret dreams from an early age. At first this gift, unwisely used, got him in trouble. For reasons of human pride, he forced his guidance onto others - his brothers - who were not willing to receive it. As a result, he was sold into slavery and later imprisoned. These traumatic events helped shift his spiritual awareness. When he was next called upon to interpret dreams - the Pharaoh's - he first affirmed that the power was not his but God's. When he became willing to be a channel, allowing his power of imagination to serve a greater spiritual energy, his life was transformed.

Let us appreciate today the many ways in which the power of imagination enriches our lives. And let us recognize that only when it is allowed to express as a channel for love, strength, and all of the qualities of God will imagination find its true role in our own unfolding path. [Unity]

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## INCARNATION

Easter, not Christmas, was the big celebration for the first 1200 years of Christianity. It was the Franciscans who popularized (and sentimentalized) Christmas. For Francis, if the Incarnation was true then Easter took care of itself. He told us to celebrate Jesus' birth and created the custom of the creche, or nativity scene. To his normally fasting friars, he said "Even the walls should eat meat on Christmas Day!" Incarnation was already redemption for him. Once God became a human being, then nothing human or worldly was abhorrent to God. The problem was solved forever.

Resurrection is incarnation coming to its logical conclusion. If God is already in everything, then everything is *from* glory and *unto* glory. We're all saved by mercy, without exception. We're all saved by grace, so there's no point in distinguishing degrees of worthiness because God alone is all good and everything else in creation participates in that one, universal goodness to varying degrees. There is no absolute dividing line between worthy and unworthy people in the eyes of God, because all our worthiness is merely participation in God's.

From an unpublished talk in Assisi, Italy, May 2012, Richard Rohr

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Paul, a good Jew, quotes Deuteronomy, "The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Romans 10:8), and begins with a challenge that we still need today: "Do not tell yourself that you have to bring Christ down!" (Romans 10:6). He knew that God had overcome the human-divine gap in the Christ Mystery once and for all. God is henceforth here, and not just there.

This is Christianity's only completely unique message. Full incarnation is what distinguishes us from all other religions. This is our only real trump card, and for the most part, we have not yet played it. History, the planet—and other religions—have only suffered as a result. Incarnationalism does not put you in competition with any other religions but, in fact, allows you to see God *in all things*, including them! It mandates that you love and respect all others.

The mystery of the Incarnation is precisely *the repositioning of God in the human and material world and not just part of that world*. Common variety top-down religion often creates very passive, and even passive-dependent and passive-aggressive Christians. Certainly that is very common in my own

Roman Church. Bottom-up, or incarnational, religion offers a God we can experience for ourselves and a God we can see—and must see—in everyone else. Any God on a throne does not achieve that purpose, but merely makes you fight other “thrones.”

Rohr, Adapted from *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*, p. 121

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## INCARNATION

*Your all-powerful Word, leapt down from heaven, from your royal throne.* — Book of Wisdom 18:15

Do we have any idea what this sentence means, or what it might imply? Is it really true? If it is, then we are living in an entirely different universe than we imagine, or even can imagine. If the major division between Creator and creature can be overcome, then all others can be overcome, too. To paraphrase Oswald Chambers, “this is a truth that dumbly struggles in us for utterance!” It is too much to be true and too good to be true. So we can only resort to metaphors, images, poets, music, and artists of every stripe.

I have long felt that Christmas is a feast which is largely celebrating humanity’s unconscious desire and goal. Its meaning is too much for the rational mind to process, so God graciously puts this Big Truth on a small stage so that we can wrap our mind and heart around it over time. No philosopher would dare to predict “the materialization of God,” so we are just presented with a very human image of a poor woman and her husband with a newly born child. (I am told that the Madonna is by far the most painted image in Western civilization.)

Pope Benedict XVI, who addressed 250 artists in the Sistine Chapel before Michelangelo’s half-naked, and often grotesque, images, said quite brilliantly: “An essential function of genuine beauty is that it gives humanity a healthy shock!” And then he went on to quote Simone Weil who said that “Beauty is the experimental proof that incarnation is in fact possible.”

If there is one moment of beauty, then beauty can indeed exist on this earth; if there is one true moment of Incarnation, then why not incarnation everywhere? The beauty of Christmas is enough *healthy shock* for a lifetime, and it leaves the shocked ones *dumbly struggling for utterance*. Once the Eternal Word has become human flesh it is very hard to put it back into words—only music, poetry, and art can begin to suffice.

— A Christmas Meditation by Richard Rohr

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You are already spiritual beings, and the only concern and question is “How do I become human?” I believe that’s why Jesus came as a human being instead of an apparition in the sky. He didn’t come to teach us how to go to heaven but how to be a human being here on this earth—which is the creation of heaven now. — Fr. Richard Rohr

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## INCLUSIVITY

We are all the Body of Christ, and even more so in our togetherness (1 Corinthians 12:12ff). Now that is quite Scriptural, in many sacred texts, but perhaps it just seems too good to be true for most Christians: “There is only Christ, he is everything and he is in everything” (Colossians 3:11). The ego resists such inclusivity, because the ego is that part of you which wants to be special, separate, and superior instead. The ego (“flesh” for Paul) resists any change, vulnerability, and union with anything else. – Fr. Rohr

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The standing, structural proof that Christianity was intended to be an *inclusive religion* is that two-thirds of our Christian Bible is, in fact, the Jewish Bible! Why don’t more people see this obvious message? Further, our entire Bible is filled with stories, metaphors, images, and even names for God that were taken from pre-Jewish religions, pagan sources, secular history, and Greek philosophy. We are more exclusionary than the Biblical writers were! As Paul says to the Athenians, “You already worshiped God without knowing it” (Acts 17:23).

Any myth of a “pure,” single, and unadulterated source for divine revelation is a pure myth itself! Yet naïve Christians still want to make their recent version of Christianity totally exclusionary and elitist in relationship to all other revelations of God. This is untrue to their declared history, sources, and theology.

When we are true to our Jewish sources, Jesus himself is easily seen as an *inclusive* Son of God (inviting us to join him there!), and not the exclusive Son of God that we made him into. It seems we found it much easier to worship him than to imitate him. – Fr. Richard Rohr

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## INDIVIDUAL

[See also: TRUE SELF, IDENTITY, INTERCONNECTEDNESS]

In some ways, you are a separate individual; but for the most part, this is an illusion. Salvation comes with communion – knowing that you are actually interconnected with every other human being as well as the earth and all the creatures on it. Salvation cannot come to you in isolation because it is dependent upon other people – it is won or lost based on our relationships.

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## INTERCONNECTEDNESS

[See also: Connectedness]

It seems to me that we have made God a *being* instead of *Being itself*. Both John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas said “*Deus est Ens*,” or “God is existence itself.” That is the first name of God in the

Book of Exodus (3:14), which could rightly be translated “I am *Am-ness*,” or perhaps as Acts of the Apostles puts it: “God is the one in whom we live, and move, and have our being” (17:28).

Being, or naked existence, is the one thing that we all are a part of. It seems the essential religious problem is that human beings suffer almost universally from a massive case of mistaken identity about their radical union with God. If we can break away from the illusion of our separateness then the rest follows rather clearly, and we can reconnect with our core identity. We are each a manifestation of that Universal and Divine Being, which then takes the form of angels, humans, animals, trees, water, and Earth itself. Until we recognize that inherent and shared sacredness, we have no philosophical or compelling basis for nonviolence. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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To become neighbors is to bridge the gap between people. As long as there is distance between us and we cannot look in each other's eyes, all sorts of false ideas and images arise. We give them names, make jokes about them, cover them with our prejudices, and avoid direct contact. We think of them as enemies. We forget that they love as we love, care for their children as we care for ours, become sick and die as we do. We forget that they are our brothers and sisters and treat them as objects that can be destroyed at will. Only when we have the courage to cross the street and look in one another's eyes can we see there that we are children of the same God and members of the same human family.

- Henri Nouwen

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We cannot grow into the full stature of children of God on our own: we need each other! “What if the eye said to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’ Or the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’.” We need one another, not just practically, but at a much deeper level.

-Br. Geoffrey Tristram, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## **INTERDEPENDENCE**

[See: Interconnectedness]

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## **INTIMACY**

Intimacy between people requires closeness as well as distance. It is like dancing. Sometimes we are very close, touching each other or holding each other; sometimes we move away from each other and let the space between us become an area where we can freely move.

To keep the right balance between closeness and distance requires hard work, especially since the needs of the partners may be quite different at a given moment. One might desire closeness while the other wants distance. One might want to be held while the other looks for independence. A perfect

balance seldom occurs, but the honest and open search for that balance can give birth to a beautiful dance, worthy to behold. – Henri Nouwen

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## JOY

Joy is what makes life worth living, but for many joy seems hard to find. They complain that their lives are sorrowful and depressing. What then brings the joy we so much desire? Are some people just lucky, while others have run out of luck? Strange as it may sound, we can choose joy. Two people can be part of the same event, but one may choose to live it quite differently than the other. One may choose to trust that what happened, painful as it may be, holds a promise. The other may choose despair and be destroyed by it. What makes us human is precisely this freedom of choice. - Henri Nouwen

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## JUDGMENT

One of the most confusing, apparently contradictory concepts of our spiritual journey concerns the power of judgment. It is, we are told, one of the divine powers through which the Spirit of God expresses within us. And yet Jesus advises us repeatedly to "judge not." And in the spiritual guide known as "A Course in Miracles" we read that our insistence on judging ourselves and others is the single greatest hindrance to our spiritual growth.

The key to this apparent paradox lies in differentiating between human judgment and divine judgment. Both are a part of our consciousness, but their effects are very different.

Divine judgment is based in spiritual understanding. It concerns judgment as discernment, an ability to recognize the most efficient expression of spiritual energy so that we can always choose the better path. Discernment is an essential spiritual quality, allowing us to begin setting our thoughts in order by separating thoughts based in love from those based in fear.

Human judgment, on the other hand, is a mental act based in sense perception. It is not seeking efficiency, but blame. It does not affirm unity; it creates a sense of duality, since it is rooted in a fear-based belief that someone must be wrong. This is not our role to assume; it is a misuse of the Power of God within us. As Jesus points out (Luke 6:45), "*The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil.*"

This is simply the Law; it cannot be avoided, and it does not require our judgmental energy to enforce it. It is amazing the transformation that occurs in our lives when we simply take our tendency to human judgment to our heart, dissolving it in the divine love that we find there, surrendering all judgment to God. [Unity]

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What we see in the face and form of Jesus is love, a judgment of love; you are judged lovable, you are judged beloved. -Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## JUSTICE

Jesus describes his work as moving outside of polite and proper limits and boundaries to reunite things that have been marginalized or excluded by society: the poor, the imprisoned, the blind, the downtrodden. Jesus' ministry is not to gather the so-called good into a private country club, but to reach out to those on the edge and on the bottom—to tell those who are “last” that they might just be first! That is almost the very job description of the Holy Spirit, and therefore of Jesus. Today some call it God's unique kind of justice or “restorative justice.” God present with us and in us, *Emmanuel*, justifies things by restoring them to their true and full identity in Himself, as opposed to “retributive justice” which seeks only reward and punishment. Adapted from *Preparing for Christmas with Richard Rohr*

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Justice is not cause and effect, but it is a state of being. God's justice is to make everyone "just" – that is, become close to God in a loving relationship. – Thomas Merton

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## LIMINAL SPACE

What some call “liminal space” or threshold space (*limen* in Latin means a threshold, a starting line in a race, or a beginning place) is a very good phrase for those special times, events, and places that open us up to the sacred. It seems we need special (“sacred”) days to open us up to all days being special and sacred; we need special and sacred times to universalize to all time. (It is only some forms of late-blooming Protestantism that never recognized this need.) Even ancient Initiation Rites were both intensely sacred time and space to send the initiate into a newly discovered sacred universe.

What became All Saints' Day and All Souls Day (November 1-2) were already called “thin times” by the ancient Celts, as also were February 1-2 (St. Bridget's Day and Candlemas Day when the candles were blessed and lit). The veil between this world and the next world was considered most “thin” and most easily traversed during these times. On these days, we were invited to be aware of deep time—that is, past, present, and future time gathered into one especially holy moment. On these pivotal days we are reminded that our ancestors are still in us and work with us and through us; we called it the “communion of saints.” The New Testament phrase for this was “when time came to a fullness,” as when Jesus first announces the Reign of God (Mark 1:15) or when Mary comes to the moment of birth (Luke 2:6). We are in liminal space whenever past, present, and future time come together in a “full” moment of readiness. We are in liminal space whenever the division between “right here” and “over there” is obliterated in our consciousness. – Richard Rohr

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## LOVE

We have put our emphasis on trying to love God, which is probably a good way to start—although we do not have a clue how to do that. What I consistently find in the mystics is an overwhelming experience of how God has loved them. God is the initiator, God is the doer, God is the one who seduces them. All we can do is respond in kind, and exactly as Meister Eckhart said, “The love by which we love God is the very same love with which God has first loved us.”

The mystics’ overwhelming experience is of a full body blow of the Divine loving them, the Divine radically accepting them. The rest of their life they are trying to verbalize that, and invariably finding ways to give that love back through forms of service, compassion and non-stop worship. This is not to *earn* God’s love; it’s always and only to *return* God’s love! “Love is repaid by love alone,” as my father, Francis said.

Rohr, Adapted from *Following the Mystics through the Narrow Gate*

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Love is known *when we recognize our self in the other. We are then no longer other, and that’s the ecstasy of love.* Then we’re all in this thing called life together. We have to start with little others—our partner, friend, lover, child, parent, dog or cat—to be ready for the great leap into the Great Other. This is a whole mirroring process, and God does it best of all by mirroring us perfectly and with total acceptance. In fact, that is what God alone can do. Paul says it so well: “I shall know even as I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Fr. Richard Rohr

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## LOVE, of God

"God has fallen out of containment in religion and into human hearts. God is incarnating. Our whole unconscious is an uproar from the God who wants to know and to be known." - C.G. Jung

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Any true experience of the Holy gives one the experience of being secretly chosen, invited, and loved. Surely that is why bride and bridegroom, invitations, and wedding banquets are Jesus’ most common metaphors for eternal life.

The mystics of all religions talk of being seduced and ravished and of deep inner acceptance, total forgiveness, mutual nakedness, immense and endless gratitude, endless yearning, and always a desire and possibility of more. This is religion at its best and highest and truest. The mystics know themselves to be completely safe and completely accepted at ever deeper levels of trust, exposure, and embrace. It is a spiral that goes ever deeper and closer. This is so different from fear of hell or punishment which characterize so much common religion, and which keep us on the far edge of the only dance that there is.

Adapted from *Following the Mystics Through the Narrow Gate*, by - Fr. Richard Rohr

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If God is love and God's love is perfected in us, God's own being and ours are somehow integral to each other. To put it more provocatively, God's own being is in some way incomplete without your life, your love; my life, my love. -Br. Mark Brown, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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What can we say about God's love? We can say that God's love is unconditional. God does not say, "I love you, if ..." There are no *ifs* in God's heart. God's love for us does not depend on what we do or say, on our looks or intelligence, on our success or popularity. God's love for us existed before we were born and will exist after we have died. God's love is from eternity to eternity and is not bound to any time-related events or circumstances. Does that mean that God does not care what we do or say? No, because God's love wouldn't be real if God didn't care. To love without condition does not mean to love without concern. God desires to enter into relationship with us and wants us to love God in return.

Let's dare to enter into an intimate relationship with God without fear, trusting that we will receive love and always more love. – Henri Nouwen

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We often confuse unconditional love with unconditional approval. God loves us without conditions but does not approve of every human behavior. God doesn't approve of betrayal, violence, hatred, suspicion, and all other expressions of evil, because they all contradict the love God wants to instill in the human heart. Evil is the absence of God's love. Evil does not belong to God.

God's unconditional love means that God continues to love us even when we say or think evil things. God continues to wait for us as a loving parent waits for the return of a lost child. It is important for us to hold on to the truth that God never gives up loving us even when God is saddened by what we do. That truth will help us to return to God's ever-present love. – Henri Nouwen

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## **MARTYR**

The word martyr has come to refer to someone who gives up their life in witness to the faith. But martyr is an ordinary Greek word that means witness, and we all give witness. We give witness every moment of the day. All that we say, all that we do. All we don't say, all we fail to do—every bit of it gives witness. -

Br. Mark Brown Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## **MEDITATION**

[See also: Contemplation]

Contemplation is the third level of presence: understanding. Thoughts, or thinking, is the first level, and reason, or meditation, is the second level. Hugh of St. Victor (1078-1141) and Richard of St. Victor (1123-1173)

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## **MERCY, of God**

"Like a handful of dust thrown into the sea are the sins of all mankind compared to the mercy and providence of God." - St. Isaac of Syria

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## **METANOIA**

[See also: Formation, Transformation]

Metanoia means a conversion of self not merely of the heart, but also of the senses and of the perceiving mind. It is a total and radical "change of the mind". It is a process of conscious discrimination between the personal self and the soul, between the individual ego and the universal mind.

## **MINDFULNESS**

[See also: Present Moment Awareness]

It is a way of *being* in the world. It means responding, not reacting, to the ever-present flow of events and experiences. To develop mindfulness, we can use Compassion, Openness, and Patience.

-From "The Mindfulness Workbook" – T. Roberts

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Mindfulness is to know what is going on within and all around us. Not just to sit and walk and eat, but to know we are sitting, and to know we are walking, and to know we are eating. Mindfulness makes it possible to see and listen deeply, bringing the fruits of understanding, acceptance, love, desire to relieve suffering, desire to bring joy, inner healing.

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Mindfulness is like the Holy Spirit.

Breathing awareness can bring us into mindfulness. Entering deeply into this moment we see the nature of reality, which releases us from suffering and confusion.

To be truly here, now, and to enjoy the present moment is our most important task.

When mindfulness is born in us, we need to continue to practice if we want it to become solid. When the energy of the Holy Spirit is in us we are truly alive. We practice by touching mindfulness in ourselves through sitting meditation, walking meditation, mindful eating, and so on. We observe and learn to handle our body, breathing, feelings, mental states, and consciousness.

- from *Living Buddha, Living Christ*

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## **MISSION**

[See also: Service]

All that is necessary is to look into one's own heart; for what God asks of us is not found at a great distance.

- St. Jerome

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There is no greater mission, no higher calling than this: to be channels of God's love and healing and salvation to every human being and to the whole of God's creation.

- Br. David Vryhof, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## **MOODS**

Are we condemned to be passive victims of our moods? Must we simply say: "I feel great today" or "I feel awful today," and require others to live with our moods? Although it is very hard to control our moods, we can gradually overcome them by living a well-disciplined spiritual life. This can prevent us from acting out of our moods. We might not "feel" like getting up in the morning because we "feel" that life is not worth living, that nobody loves us, and that our work is boring. But if we get up anyhow, to spend some time reading the Gospels, praying the Psalms, and thanking God for a new day, our moods may lose their power over us.

- Henri Nouwen

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## MYSTICISM

Mysticism begins when the totally transcendent image of God starts to recede; and there's also a deepening sense of God as imminent, present, here, now, within me. Augustine's line was "God is more intimate to me than I am to myself" or "more me than I am myself." St. Catherine of Genoa shouted it in the streets, "My deepest me is God!" In other words, the One Beyond is also one with me. The delight is total.

You must overcome your primary alienation to know truthfully—and what you learn is that the Beyond One is doing the knowing through you! You are not alone. The gap has been overcome from the other side. God is no longer "out there." At this point, it's not like one has a new relationship with God; it's like one has a whole new God! "God himself is my counselor, and at night *my innermost being instructs me,*" says the Psalmist (16:7).

The mystics are those who are let in on this secret mystery of God's love affair with all souls, but with their soul in particular; and that God loves me just as I need to be loved. It's absolutely our unique love affair, and that sets the whole thing on a different and deeper ground than mere organized religion can ever achieve by itself.

Rohr, Adapted from *Following the Mystics through the Narrow Gate*

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## NATURE

It seems to me that we have made God *a being* instead of *Being itself*. Both John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas said "*Deus est Ens,*" or "God is existence itself." That is the first name of God in the Book of Exodus (3:14), which could rightly be translated "I am *Am-ness,*" or perhaps as Acts of the Apostles puts it: "God is the one in whom we live, and move, and have our being" (17:28).

Being, or naked existence, is the one thing that we all are a part of. It seems the essential religious problem is that human beings suffer almost universally from a massive case of mistaken identity about their radical union with God. If we can break away from the illusion of our separateness then the rest follows rather clearly, and we can reconnect with our core identity. We are each a manifestation of that Universal and Divine Being, which then takes the form of angels, humans, animals, trees, water, and Earth itself. Until we recognize that inherent and shared sacredness, we have no philosophical or compelling basis for nonviolence. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Nature is more complex than we think; Nature is more complex than we *can* think.  
- Niels Bohr, Danish physicist

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## NEIGHBORS

[See also: Interconnectedness]

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## OPENNESS

Openness is part of Present Moment Awareness skills. – CG

Openness means maintaining a sense of curiosity about the outcome of any experience. It is unencumbered by opinions, prejudices, or expectations; it is an inquisitiveness in which you wonder how the situation is going to turn out.

Also refers to opening your senses to the flow of experience and embracing the flow of your life as it occurs. This can bring a freshness to the way you're present amidst your experiences.

-From "The Mindfulness Workbook" – T. Roberts

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## PATIENCE

Patience is part of gaining and sustaining Present Moment Awareness.

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Patience is a hard discipline. It is not just waiting until something happens over which we have no control: the arrival of the bus, the end of the rain, the return of a friend, the resolution of a conflict. Patience is not a waiting passivity until someone else does something. Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment, to taste the here and now, to be where we are. When we are impatient we try to get away from where we are. We behave as if the real thing will happen tomorrow, later and somewhere else. Let's be patient and trust that the treasure we look for is hidden in the ground on which we stand. – Henri Nouwen

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Patience is a quality that is urgently recommended to us from our very earliest days in human form. Children are notoriously lacking in patience, and many of us have not shown marked improvement in this area as we grew into adulthood.

If what we mean by patience is a meek acceptance of today's situation, believing that perhaps in time it will change, then *impatience* can be an important spiritual attribute. We are always being called to move forward, as Jesus reminded his disciples (at John 4:35): "*Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?' I tell you, lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest.*" In

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other words, our good is available to us now! To "patiently" defer it into the future will only prevent its coming at all.

And yet, like so many other concepts, patience takes on a richer, deeper meaning when we apply it to our spiritual purpose. *"Patience,"* Charles Fillmore writes, *"is a state of mind that beholds the world from the harmony of the Christ Mind, a freedom from personal thinking. It is an attitude of mind characterized by poise, calmness and a quiet restful truth, especially in the face of trying conditions. It has its foundation in love."*

Impatience can produce great stress if it becomes a belief that there is something we or others must do in order to experience our good, and stress is the greatest source of damage to our physical and emotional well-being. Patience - true patience - is not about surrendering to the artificial confines of time, but surrendering to the eternal harmony of God. If patience is, as Fillmore writes, a freedom from personal thinking, then my efforts to introduce patience into my personal mind are doomed to failure before they even begin. *"I of myself can do nothing,"* Jesus said, and certainly I of myself cannot reach a state of patience regarding the events of my life.

Patience is an attribute of God; it can only be realized as I surrender my limited mindset to the greater Divine Mind within me. When my view of life shares the perspective of God, then patience is my natural state of being. When I am lost in a sense of separation, then impatience is my stock in trade. [UNITY]

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It has been truly said that change is the only constant in our life experience. This is true, I think, no matter how spiritually aware we believe ourselves to be. The amount of change in our lives certainly doesn't decrease as we progress in awareness - indeed, it often seems to increase. It is in how we react to the change that we measure our growth.

Sometimes change seems to be out of control, and we are tempted to resist for all we are worth. Other times change seems to be happening very, very slowly - if at all. And we may want to speed things up through impulsive choices.

In fact, our mental perceptions are not to be trusted when it comes to change. In truth and in spirit, change is constant, unavoidable and always unfolding exactly on schedule.

The perfect energy from which to approach all change is patience. Patience allows us to wait for change that seems slow in coming. Patience also centers us and stills us when the pace of change seems to be out of hand. How do we access patience? It helps to remember what Emmet Fox described as **The Golden Key**: *Take your focus off whatever the problem may be, and focus instead on God.*

So we release every thought of anxiety or fear about change, and focus on the one unchanging constant, the Power and Presence of God. The result will be patience that allows change to unfold in divine order. [Unity]

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Patience means allowing any given situation to evolve without imposing a need to manipulate, influence, or control the outcome. It means simply being with whatever is occurring, without fear-based, self-protective reactions.

Patience is an invitation to wait for a mindful response to arise as you allow the flow of your experience to fully evolve without interrupting or distracting. Once your experience fully manifests, mindful responses often arise naturally.

-From "The Mindfulness Workbook" – T. Roberts

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Waiting is essential to the spiritual life. But waiting as a disciple of Jesus is not an empty waiting. It is a waiting with a promise in our hearts that makes already present what we are waiting for. We wait during Advent for the birth of Jesus. We wait after Easter for the coming of the Spirit, and after the ascension of Jesus we wait for his coming again in glory. We are always waiting, but it is a waiting in the conviction that we have already seen God's footsteps.

Waiting for God is an active, alert - yes, joyful - waiting. As we wait we remember him for whom we are waiting, and as we remember him we create a community ready to welcome him when he comes. – Henri Nouwen

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Adopt the pace of nature; her secret is patience. – Ralph Waldo Emerson

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What grows tall and strong must also grow slowly and deep, or it will tumble... Depth takes time. God has all the time in the world. Though we live in a culture that so highly values instant access to everything, at least in the spiritual realm, we can only bear a little at time.

-Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

## **POSSESSIONS**

To be able to enjoy fully the many good things the world has to offer, we must be detached from them. To be detached does not mean to be indifferent or uninterested. It means to be non-possessive. Life is a gift to be grateful for and not a property to cling to.

A non-possessive life is a free life. But such freedom is only possible when we have a deep sense of belonging. To whom then do we belong? We belong to God, and the God to whom we belong has sent us into the world to proclaim in his Name that all of creation is created in and by love and calls us to gratitude and joy. That is what the "detached" life is all about. It is a life in which we are free to offer praise and thanksgiving. – Henri Nouwen

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## **POVERTY**

Poverty is where we experience our own and other people's weakness, limitations, and need for support. To be poor is to be without success, without fame, and without power. But there God chooses to show us God's love. – Henri Nouwen

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## **PRAISE**

It seems that God enjoys being praised at least as much as we do. There is one ancient strain of belief that God is in some way empowered or energized by our praise and thanksgiving. Maybe you can understand that, quite personally. Do you know, from your own experience, how your being praised and thanked and your feeling empowered all seem to go hand-in-hand?

-Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## **PRAYER**

[See also: Meditation, Contemplation]

Contemplation (the prayer beyond words and ideas) is a way to describe what Jesus did in the desert. It is not learning as much as it is unlearning. It is not explaining as much as containing and receiving everything, and holding onto nothing. It is refusing to judge too quickly and refining your own thoughts and feelings by calm observation and awareness over time—in the light of the Big Picture.

You cannot understand anything well once you have approved or disapproved of it. There is too much *you* there. Contemplation is loosening our attachment to ourselves so that Reality can get at us, especially the Absolute Reality that we call God.

Contemplation is the most radical form of self-abandonment that I can imagine. It is most difficult if there is not a profound trust that there is Someone to whom I can be abandoned! Such self-forgetfulness paradoxically leads one to a firm and somewhat fearless sense of responsibility. Now I can risk responsibility precisely because I know the buck does not stop here. There is a co-creation going on, a life giving *synergism* that is found somewhere between surrender and personal responsibility, God fully “co-operating with those who love God” (Romans 8:28), as St. Paul says it.

Adapted from *Near Occasions of Grace*, - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Our operative God image is often a subtle combination of our mom and our dad and/or any other significant authority figures. Once we begin an inner life of prayer and in-depth study of sacred texts, we slowly begin to grow, and from then on it only gets better. Grace does its work and creates a unique “work of art” (Ephesians 2:10).

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Most early “God talk”—without self-knowledge and inner journey—is largely a sincere pretense, even to the person who consciously believes the language (see teachings of Socrates, Teresa of Avila, Carl Jung). The miracle of grace and true prayer is that they invade *the unconscious* mind and heart (where our real truth lies)—and thus really change us! It invades them so much that the love of God and the love of self invariably proceed forward together. On the practical level, they are experienced as the same thing!

Adapted from *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*, - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Prayer gives us the gift of knowing ourselves. It offers us the power to shape our lives by choosing according to the yearnings we have consciously embraced as being congruent with our truest selves.

-Br. David Vryhof, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

### **PRAYER** (continued)

In what is commonly called prayer, you and your hurts, needs, and perspectives are still the central reference point, not really God. But you have decided to invite a Major Power in to help you with your already determined solution! God can perhaps help you get what you want, but it is still a self-centered desire, instead of God’s much better role—which is to *help you know what you really desire* (Luke 11:13, Matthew 7:11). It always takes a bit of time to widen this lens, and therefore the screen, of life.

One goes through serious withdrawal pain for a while until the screen is widened to a high-definition screen. It is work to learn how to pray, largely the work of *emptying the mind and filling the heart*—that is prayer in one concise and truthful phrase. Or as some say, “pulling the mind down into the heart” until they both operate as one. A good thing to think about with all of the hearts you will probably see on this Valentine's Day!

Adapted from *Breathing under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*, - Fr. Richard Rohr

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“Everything exposed to the light itself becomes light,” says Ephesians 5:13. In prayer, we merely keep returning the divine gaze and we become its reflection, almost in spite of ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:18). The word “prayer” has often been trivialized by making it into a way of getting what we want. But I use “prayer” as the umbrella word for any *interior journeys or practices that allow you to experience faith, hope, and love within yourself*. It is not a technique for getting things, a pious exercise that somehow makes God happy, or a requirement for entry into heaven. It is much more like practicing heaven now.

Such prayer, such seeing, takes away your anxiety for figuring it all out fully for yourself, or needing to be right about your formulations. At this point, God becomes more a verb than a noun, more a process



than a conclusion, more an experience than a dogma, more a personal relationship than an idea. There is Someone dancing with you, and you are not afraid of making mistakes.

From *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*, - Fr. Richard Rohr

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*"And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light" (Matthew 17: 1-3).*

We have talked often in this 46-day appreciation of our spiritual process about the importance of becoming a clear channel so that the Power of God can flow into our consciousness. When we allow this to happen, we find even our deepest fears being replaced with a sense of love, peace, joy and power.

In this reading from Chapter 17 of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus shows us clearly that this realization in consciousness is only the beginning of our spiritual possibilities. Our consciousness forms our material world. When we connect more fully through prayer with the Presence and Power of God, that new energy of love will express through every cell in our bodies. We will be transfigured - we will glow with a new inner light, as Moses did after he had intimately communed with God - as described in the Book of Exodus - and as Jesus clearly does in this incident.

Taking Peter, John and James - who metaphysically represent his spiritual faculties of faith, love and discernment - Jesus ascends a mountain, rising to a higher realm of consciousness, the realm of prayer. And his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. Charles Fillmore writes that *"when the mind is exalted in prayer the rapid radiation of mental energy causes a dazzling light radiation from all parts of the body, and especially the head."*

We are often tempted to think of our bodies as excess baggage, destined to be left behind when we move into the kingdom of heaven. That may well be so, but it doesn't have to be. Nothing in the material plane - nothing! - is so dense that it cannot be penetrated and transfigured by the prayer-focused power of God. Our cells and organs are never an impediment to God's love, and as we continue our spiritual growth they will become an expression of that love, shining with an eternal light. [Unity]

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I think the one thing the Church should do is teach people how to pray. Contemplative prayer in particular can give people back their birthright as children of God (inherently connected to and created by God). That is the only way to know your birthright experientially.

Prayer is not something you *do*; it's finally something *you are whenever you collapse back into the very Ground of your being*. Unfortunately, we flee into our minds instead—to create and defend our separateness and our specialness. The mind concocts an identity for itself based on our race, our country, our shape, our color, our religion, etc.—the very things which are passing and accidental and not

essential. These are the very things that are going to die when we die; you might say we fight wars precisely because we don't pray.

Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer* (CD)

In the West prayer became something functional; something you did to achieve a desired effect—which puts you back in charge. As soon as you make prayer a way to get something, you're not moving into a new state of consciousness. It's the same old consciousness. "How can I get God to do what I want God to do?" It's the egocentric self still deciding what it needs, but now often trying to manipulate God too.

This is one reason religion is in such desperate straits today. It really isn't transforming people, but leaving them in their separated and egocentric state. It pulls God inside of my agenda instead of letting God pull me inside of his. This is still the small old self at work. What the Gospel is talking about is the emergence of "a whole new creation" and a "new mind," as Paul variously calls it.

Fr. Richard Rohr, Adapted from the *CAC Foundation Set: Gospel Call to Compassionate Action (Bias from the Bottom) and Contemplative Prayer*

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The "false self" settles for ritualism and legalism, petty moralisms instead of true mysticism (which is available to all once one does not make it a contest or an achievement). The true self is not about requirements, it's about relationship—the quality and capacity for relatedness. This lays the foundation for contemplation. The contemplative does not need to be "right," but only in relationship.

The false self will say its prayers but the true self IS a prayer. This is why Paul can say "pray always" (Ephesians 6:18). We pray always whenever we live in conscious union with God. Then every action is a prayer no matter how secular, mundane, or ordinary it might appear. I would more admire someone cleaning the house in loving union than a priest saying Mass outside of union.

Fr. Richard Rohr, Adapted from the *CAC Foundation Set: Gospel Call to Compassionate Action (Bias from the Bottom) and Contemplative Prayer*

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Prayer is not about changing God, but being willing to let God change us, or as Step 11 in the *Big Book* of Alcoholics Anonymous says: “Praying only for the knowledge of his will.” Jesus goes so far as to say that true prayer is *always* answered (Matthew 7:7-11). Now we all know that this is not factually true—unless he is talking about prayer in the sense that I will try to describe it. *If you are able to switch minds to the mind of Christ, your prayer has already been answered! The new mind knows, understands, accepts, and sees correctly, widely, and wisely. Its prayers are always answered because they are, in fact, the prayers of God, as well.*

True prayer is always about getting the “who” right. Who is doing the praying, you or God-in-you, “little old you” or the Eternal Christ Consciousness? Basically prayer is an exercise in *divine participation*—you opting in and God always there!

Fr. Richard Rohr, Adapted from *Breathing under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*

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Contemplation, or meditation in some groups, was rediscovered in contemporary Christian times beginning with the writings of Thomas Merton in the 1950s and 1960s. The word most Christians are more familiar with is simply “prayer.”

Unfortunately, in the West, prayer had become something functional; something you did to achieve a desired effect—which too often puts the ego back in charge. As soon as you make prayer a way to get what you want, you’re not moving into any kind of new state of consciousness. It’s the same old consciousness, but now well disguised: “How can I get God to do what I want God to do?” It’s the egocentric self deciding what it needs, but now, instead of just manipulating everybody else, it tries to manipulate God.

This is one reason religion is so dangerous and often so delusional. If religion does not transform people at the level of both mind and heart, it ends up giving self-centered people a very pious and untouchable way to be on top and in control. Now God becomes their defense system for their small self! Even Jesus found this to be true of his own scribes, Pharisees, and teachers of the law. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Prayer is the bridge between our conscious and unconscious lives. Often there is a large abyss between our thoughts, words, and actions, and the many images that emerge in our daydreams and night dreams. To pray is to connect these two sides of our lives by going to the place where God dwells. Prayer is “soul work” because our souls are those sacred centers where all is one and where God is with us in the most intimate way. Thus, we must pray without ceasing so that we can become truly whole and holy.

- Henri Nouwen

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## PRESENCE

[See also: Present Moment Awareness]

Presence is when our heart space, our mind space, and our body awareness are all simultaneously open and nonresistant. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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The two disciples whom Jesus joined on the road to Emmaus recognized him in the breaking of the bread. What is a more common, ordinary gesture than breaking bread? It may be the most human of all human gestures: a gesture of hospitality, friendship, care, and the desire to be together. Taking a loaf of bread, blessing it, breaking it, and giving it to those seated around the table signifies unity, community, and peace. When Jesus does this he does the most ordinary as well as the most extraordinary. It is the most human as well as the most divine gesture.

The great mystery is that this daily and most human gesture is the way we recognize the presence of Christ among us. God becomes most present when we are most human. - Henri Nouwen

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Third-eye seeing is the way the mystics see. They do not reject the first eye (thought or sight); the senses matter to them, but they know there is more. Nor do they reject the second eye (the eye of reason, meditation, and reflection); but they know not to confuse knowledge with depth or mere correct information with the transformation of consciousness itself. The mystical gaze builds upon the first two eyes—and *yet goes further*. This is third-eye seeing.

Third-eye seeing happens whenever, by some wondrous “coincidence,” our heart space, our mind space, and our body awareness are all simultaneously open and nonresistant. I like to call it *presence*. It is experienced as a moment of deep inner connection, and it always pulls you, intensely satisfied, into the naked and undefended now, which can involve both profound joy and profound sadness, and will always include the first and second eyes at some level. So it is never irrational, but it is indeed transrational. Dionysius (the Areopagite) called it “super-essential knowing.” - Fr. Richard Rohr

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## PRESENT MOMENT AWARENESS

[See also: Contemplation]

The early but learned pattern of dualistic thinking can get us only so far; so all religions at the more mature levels have discovered another “software” for processing the really big questions, like death, love, infinity, suffering, and God. Many of us call this access “contemplation.” *It is a non-dualistic way of seeing the moment.* Originally, the word was simply “prayer.”

It is living in the naked now, the “sacrament of the present moment,” that will teach us how to actually experience our experiences, whether good, bad, or ugly, and how to let them transform us. Words by themselves invariably divide the moment; pure presence lets it be what it is, as it is.

*When you can be present, you will know the Real Presence.* I promise you this is true. And it is almost that simple.

Rohr, From *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*

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The Present Moment is the field on which the game of life happens. There are three ways that the ego will treat the present moment: 1) as a means to an end, 2) as an obstacle, or 3) as an enemy.

The ego is always trying to get elsewhere. What happens then? Impatience, frustration, and stress. A vital question to ask yourself frequently is: What is my relationship with the present moment?

Eckhard Tolle

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"I don't think we understand the importance of the present; there's nothing more important than what you are doing right now." Harold Clurman, American Theatrical Director and Dram Critic

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The present moment is the only aperture through which the soul can pass out of time into eternity, through which grace can pass out of eternity into the soul, and through which charity can pass from one soul in time to another soul in time. Aldous Huxley, *Perennial Philosophy*, p.188

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You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment.

- Henri David Thoreau

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## PUNISHMENT

The threat of punishment may be a deterrent to wrongful behavior, but ultimately I suspect the whole concept of punishment is destined for the trash can of history. The mind of Christ is, I believe, not to punish, but to heal. -Br. Mark Brown, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## PURPOSE

The ultimate purpose of human existence (your purpose) is to bring the power of Presence into this world. And this can only be done through the present moment. The only thing that matters is this: Can I sense me essential beingness, the "I am" in the background of my life at all times? The very reason for our existence in human form is to bring that dimension of consciousness into this world. Eckhard Tolle

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Your life has two purposes: the first is an inner purpose, and that is to discover who you truly are – who God made you to be; not what someone else told you that you should be. The outer purpose, then, is to use this inner being in a way that grows in the love and service of God, in your own unique way, regardless of whether or not it is "productive" by human standards, but whether or not it represents a loving you.

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You CAN'T be anything you want to be, unless what you want to be is what God made you to be.

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A person's final end, the purpose of his or her existence, is to love, know and be united with the immanent and transcendent Godhead. Aldous Huxley

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Your purpose in life is to help creation expand and grow in unique ways. Deepak Chopra

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As many mystics and saints throughout history have said, God created because God needed something to love beyond the internal love of the Trinity. And then, to take this one step further, God created humans so that one species could love God back *freely*. Robots cannot love. Trees cannot love consciously, at least in the way we understand consciousness. Now parallel this to your relationship with your own children. Your fondest desire, maybe at an unconscious level, if you consciously conceived a child, was to

bring forth a love object. "I want to love this child in every way I can, and even hope that this child will love me in return. And the way I love them, paradoxically, becomes their empowerment to love me back." Now apply this pattern to God and us.

I think this is why the reproductive process is given to us in this unique and special way, precisely so that we can experience the reciprocal character of love. God is creating an object of love that God can totally give himself to, so that eventually we will be capable of freely loving God back in the same way. Humans are like two-way mirrors, both receiving and reflecting. Humans are like tuning forks that pick up a tone and hand it on as resonance. Adapted from *The Cosmic Christ* by Rohr

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If logic tells us that life is meaningless, don't give up on life; give up on logic.

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## **RECONCILIATION**

Reconciliation and forgiveness are related, but they are not the same. We can be forgiven for our offenses, but we still must make things right with those impacted by the offense (reconciliation). Western civilization primarily focuses on punishment for offenses, but does little in the way of reconciliation. Our sense of justice is limited to "getting even" with the offender, while for the most part we overlook restoring the victims to their pre-offense state. What involvement should there be by the offender in this restoration and reconciliation? Sometimes this can do more harm than good, so reconciliation must come from some other source. [Br. D-J]

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## **REFLECTION**

To know about things is to be knowledgeable; To know about people is to be wise; To know about yourself is to be enlightened.

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## **RELATIONSHIPS**

Intimacy between people requires closeness as well as distance. It is like dancing. Sometimes we are very close, touching each other or holding each other; sometimes we move away from each other and let the space between us become an area where we can freely move.

To keep the right balance between closeness and distance requires hard work, especially since the needs of the partners may be quite different at a given moment. One might desire closeness while the other wants distance. One might want to be held while the other looks for independence. A perfect balance seldom occurs, but the honest and open search for that balance can give birth to a beautiful dance, worthy to behold. – Henri Nouwen

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## RELIGION

The primary purpose of religion is not to put people in touch with God, but to put them in touch with each other.

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## RENUNCIATION

The power of RENUNCIATION is usually thought of as a willingness to leave behind those aspects of ourselves that are not compatible with the spiritual kingdom we are creating. What is it that is not compatible? Every sense of lack or separation. Every judgment of ourselves and others. Any belief that we are powerless over disease. In short, we are asked to release error thoughts and replace them with the truth that we are spiritual beings, eternally one with God, and that the Power of God is present within us now as abundance and perfect health. When we renounce the error thoughts, we dissolve the obstacles they represent - obstacles to a full experience of the indwelling Lord of our Being.

In a wonderful image for the power of renunciation, the writer Evelyn Underhill compares our physical form to a house that is occupied for a time by the spiritual energy that is the truth of who we are. "*The furnishing of our rooms and cultivation of our garden is largely left to our personal industry and good taste,*" she writes. But she adds that we must still, in a general way, fall in with the larger plan of the city "*and consider, when we hang some new and startling curtains, how they will look from the street.*" Our true significance is more than personal; it is bound up with the fact of our status as members of a spiritual community.

In other words, our focus on renunciation requires us to do more than simply release error thoughts that are making us uncomfortable, holding us in lack. We must also be aware of our effect on the community of faith that we form collectively. Jesus told his disciples a parable about a servant who owed his master a large sum; when he could not pay it, his master forgave the debt. That same servant, however, was owed a very small sum by another servant. When that debt could not be repaid, he had the offending servant thrown in prison, at which point his master reinstated his large debt and sent him to prison as well (Matthew 18: 23-35).

How we relate to others is an essential part of our spiritual process; it is not just a matter of an individual relation to God, but of a spiritual relation to everyone else as well. [UNITY]

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## SACRIFICE

Not everyone, we pray, will face John the Baptist’s fate; but all of us who profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior will be invited to die more than once. Something great, or puny, must die that we are sorely tempted to clutch at and save at all costs, something that will get in the way of life if we don’t let it go, or don’t give it up, or don’t let it die. -Br. Curtis Almquist, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## SALVATION

One view of salvation: To know, and love, who we really are is one of the most important things we come to realize in our lives. Once we recognize who we really are, a child of God, our love will naturally spill over into our relationships with others and the world. We begin to know, love, and serve God in our own unique way, in a way that God made us. This is enlightenment, this is salvation.

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The clarification and rediscovery of what I am going to call the True Self lays a solid foundation—and a clear initial goal—for all religion. You cannot build any serious spiritual house if you do not first find something solid and foundational to build on—inside yourself. “Like knows like” is the principle. God-in-you already knows, loves, and serves God in everything else. All you can do is fully jump on board.

I would call that jump *consciousness*, and I believe the Risen Christ is the icon of full consciousness. In the human mind of Christ, every part of creation knows itself as (1) divinely conceived, (2) beloved of God, (3) crucified, and (4) finally reborn. He carries us across with him, assures us it is okay, and thus models the full journey and final direction of consciousness. That is my major thesis about how Jesus “saves us.”  
Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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Salvation comes with communion – knowing that you are actually interconnected with every other human being as well as the earth and all the creatures on it. Salvation cannot come to you in isolation because it is dependent upon other people – it is won or lost based on our relationships.

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## SECRETS

We all have our secrets: thoughts, memories, feelings that we keep to ourselves. Often we think, "If people knew what I feel or think, they would not love me." These carefully kept secrets can do us much harm. They can make us feel guilty or ashamed and may lead us to self-rejection, depression, and even suicidal thoughts and actions.

One of the most important things we can do with our secrets is to share them in a safe place, with people we trust. When we have a good way to bring our secrets into the light and can look at them with others, we will quickly discover that we are not alone with our secrets and that our trusting friends will love us more deeply and more intimately than before. Bringing our secrets into the light creates community and inner healing. As a result of sharing secrets, not only will others love us better but we will love ourselves more fully. – Henri Nouwen

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## SECURITY

What is the basis of our security? When we start thinking about that question, we may give many answers: success, money, friends, property, popularity, family, connections, insurance, and so on. We may not always *think* that any of these forms the basis of our security, but our *actions* or *feelings* may tell us otherwise. When we start losing our money, our friends, or our popularity, our anxiety often reveals how deeply our sense of security is rooted in these things.

A spiritual life is a life in which our security is based not in any created things, good as they may be, but in God, who is everlasting love. We probably will never be completely free from our attachment to the temporal world, but if we want to live in that world in a truly free way, we'd better not belong to it. "You cannot be the slave both of God and of money" (Luke 16:13). – Henri Nouwen

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## SERVICE

The Belgian mystic Ruysbroeck describes the ideal life as "ministering to the world without in love and mercy, while inwardly abiding in simplicity, in stillness and in utter peace."

It is this inner simplicity and stillness, this sense of being centered in perfect peace, that allows us to maintain a physical body that always expresses youth, vitality and divine energy.

Many people believe that it is necessary to carefully protect ourselves from worldly distractions around us, and particularly to keep troublesome people at a safe distance to protect ourselves from stress and tension. This is certainly not the example of Jesus. He could have taken his spiritual awareness and retired to a spiritual community, or into the wilderness, to avoid the challenges of interacting with the many discordant factions clashing in the world around him. His ability to fully express the Christ in such a reclusive setting would have been no less wonderful, but perhaps a lot less useful for us who seek to follow his example.

Instead, Jesus lived his life to the fullest, moving through social upheaval and political turmoil, through negative public opinion and massive demands on his time and strength, without ever losing that sense of simplicity, stillness and peace in his heart.

The spiritual power that makes that possible is ORDER, which describes the importance of maintaining a deep source of spiritual energy within ourselves no matter what demands we may be facing from without. So long as we are centered in God, we need never be afraid to offer energy where it is needed, for in God there can be no depletion. We must be careful, though, *not to squander our spiritual energy in situations where it will not be received or recognized* - in what Jesus called 'casting your pearls before swine.'

[Unity]

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The littleness of the work lessened not one whit the value of the offering, for God regards not the greatness of the work, but the love which prompts it.

- Br. Lawrence

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God requires a faithful fulfillment of the merest trifle given us to do, rather than the most ardent aspiration to things to which we are not called.

- St. Francis de Sales

## **SERVICE** (continued)

We become neighbors when we are willing to cross the road for one another. There is so much separation and segregation: between black people and white people, between gay people and straight people, between young people and old people, between sick people and healthy people, between prisoners and free people, between Jews and Gentiles, Muslims and Christians, Protestants and Catholics, Greek Catholics and Latin Catholics.

There is a lot of road crossing to do. We are all very busy in our own circles. We have our own people to go to and our own affairs to take care of. But if we could cross the street once in a while and pay attention to what is happening on the other side, we might become neighbors.

- Henri Nouwen

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We belong to a generation that wants to see the results of our work. We want to be productive and see with our own eyes what we have made. But that is not the way of God's Kingdom. Often our witness for God does not lead to tangible results. Jesus himself died as a failure on a cross. There was no success there to be proud of. Still, the fruitfulness of Jesus' life is beyond any human measure. As faithful witnesses of Jesus we have to trust that our lives too will be fruitful, even though we cannot see their fruit. The fruit of our lives may be visible only to those who live after us. What is important is how well we love. God will make our love fruitful, whether we see that fruitfulness or not. - Henri Nouwen

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God's call always involves service to others. It always leads us beyond ourselves and our own needs and desires. It is never solely for us, but always has some benefit for other people. There is no genuine call from God that does not include this dimension.

-Br. David Vryhof, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## SHADOW SELF

[See also: False Self]

Face the shadow side of yourself, but do not identify with it. It represents only part of who you are. Totally identifying with the shadow leads to much evil in the world. If you live there, you will be driven and motivated by fear, guilt, shame, and even malice. So there is a difference between relating to the denied parts of yourself (bringing light to them), and totally “acting them out” (which is to leave them in their unconscious and dark state). This is why it is so foundational to know yourself, and to learn to be honest about your real motivations.

When we meet our shadow self, our response should not be anger or surprise as much as sadness. I am sure this is what so many of our saints meant by “weeping over their sins,” which to most of us seemed a bit dramatic—or impossible. We can experience days of deep sorrow after encountering what we’ve denied in ourselves for a long time. We get a glimpse of how broken and needy we are. It is a huge humiliation to the ego, and so most people just refuse to do much shadowboxing.

The hero in us wants to attack, fix, or deny the existence of our dark side. We can also be tempted to share dramatically everything about it as a way to control it (sometimes called ventilating or dumping). The saint merely weeps over the shadow and forgives it—and by God’s grace forgives himself for being a mere human. He opens his arms to that which has been in exile and welcomes it home for the friend that it often is. (Rohr)

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All God appears to want from us is honesty and humility (and they are finally the same thing). If God is holding out for human perfection, God is going to have a long wait. There is no other way to read Jesus’ stories of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) or the publican and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14). In each story, the one who did wrong ends up being right—simply because he is honest and humble about it.

How have we been able to miss that important point? I suspect it is because the ego wants to think well of itself and deny any shadow material. Only the soul knows we grow best in the *shadowlands*. We are blinded inside of either total light or total darkness, but “the light shines on inside the darkness, and it is a light that darkness cannot overcome” (John 1:5). Ironically, it is in darkness that we find and ever long for more light. Did you know that even physics is now telling us that what looks like total darkness to the human eye is actually filled with neutrinos, which are light? Again, the mystics like John of the Cross knew this to be true on the spiritual level too. (Rohr)

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The ego is that part of the self that wants to be significant, central, and important. It is very self-protective by its very nature. *It must eliminate the negative to succeed.* (Jesus would call it the “actor” in Matthew 23, usually translated from the Greek as “hypocrite”.)

The shadow is that part of the self that we don’t want to see, that we’re afraid of and we don’t want others to see either. If our “actor” is well-defended and in denial, the shadow is always hated and projected elsewhere (we tend to hate our own faults in OTHER people!). One point here is crucial: *The shadow self*

*is not of itself evil; it just allows you to do evil without recognizing it as evil!* That is why Jesus criticizes hypocrisy more than anything else. He does not hate sinners at all, but only people who pretend they are not sinners!

Jesus' phrase for the denied shadow is "the plank in your own eye," which you invariably see as the "splinter in your brother's eye." Jesus' advice is absolutely perfect. "Take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly enough to take the splinter out of your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:4-5).  
[Rohr]

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The separate self is the problem, whereas most religion and most people make the shadow self the problem. This leads to denying, pretending, and projecting instead of real transformation into the Divine (*Transformation*).  
- Fr. Rohr

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## **SILENCE**

[See also: Solitude]

One good thing that silence and waiting has taught me is that *our lives are always usable by God. We need not always be effective, but only transparent and vulnerable.* Then we are instruments, no matter what we do. Silence is the ability to trust that God is acting, teaching, and using me—even before I perform, or after my seeming failures. Silence is the necessary space around things that allows them to develop and flourish without my pushing.

God takes it from there, and there is not much point in comparing who is better, right, higher or lower, or supposedly saved. We are all partial images slowly coming into focus, as long as we allow and filter the Light and Love of God, which longs to shine through us—*as us!*

Adapted from *Contemplation in Action*, [Rohr]

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Silence is the language of God, and the only language deep enough to absorb all the contradictions and failures that we are holding against ourselves. God loves us silently, because God has no case to make against us. Silent communion absorbs our self-hatred, as every lover knows.

Adapted from *Simplicity*, [Rohr]

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"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10. This is the cornerstone of all spiritual freedom.

## SIMPLICITY

All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then, when you can get little enough and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find that the little place where you *really are* is ironically more than enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect.

That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody because they've come to the place where, as I like to say, everything belongs. To live from this place cuts the roots of violence at their very foundation, for there is not even any basis for fear or anger or protection or hatred. Negativity must be nipped in the bud—that is to say, *in the mind*.

Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer* (CD) [Rohr]

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One of the key techniques to achieve simplicity is the ability to distinguish the difference between a desire (want) and a true need. The ego is very good at coloring a want as a need.

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A life too comfortable makes spiritual growth difficult. Food, clothing and lodging should always be adequate, but not excessive.

Thich Nhat Hanh

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## SIN

[See also: Addiction, Attachment, Evil]

The ultimate sin is to despair (doubt) of God's mercy. - Olivier Clement

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Jesus has patient sympathy for what we later called the sins of the flesh. He is never harsh or judgmental here. Jesus is only hard on what we call sins of the spirit—arrogance, pride, hypocrisy, ambition, and deceit. These are the sins that really destroy the soul and separate us from God and other people.

Rohr, From an unpublished talk in Assisi, Italy, May 2012

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## SIN, ORIGINAL

Leonard Cohen's song, "Anthem," states in the refrain: "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." It sounds a lot like Paul's statement about carrying "the treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). These are both much more poetic ways of naming what we unfortunately called "original sin"—a poor choice of words because the word *sin* implies fault and culpability, and that is precisely not the point! Original sin was trying to warn us that *the flaw at the heart of all reality* is nothing we did personally, but that there is simply "a crack in everything" and so we should not be surprised when it shows itself in us or in everything else. This has the power to keep us patient, humble, and less judgmental. (One wonders if this does not also make the point that poetry and music are a better way to teach spiritual things than mental concepts.)

Fr. Rohr, Adapted from *Spiral of Violence: The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*

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## SOLITUDE

[See also: Hiddenness; Silence]

As you come to realize that God is beckoning you to a greater hiddenness, do not be afraid of that invitation. Over the years you have allowed the voices that call you to action and great visibility to dominate your life. You still think, even against your own best intuitions, that you need to do things and be seen in order to follow your vocation. But you are now discovering that God's voice is saying, "Stay home, and trust that your life will be fruitful even when hidden."

It is not going to be easy to listen to God's call. Your insecurity, your self-doubt, and your great need for affirmation make you lose trust in your inner voice and run away from yourself. But you know that God speaks to you through your inner voice and that you will find joy and peace only if you follow it. Yes, your spirit is willing to follow, but your flesh is weak.

You have friends who know that your inner voice speaks the truth and who can affirm what it says. They offer you the safe space where you can let that voice become clearer and louder. There will be people who tell you that you are wasting your time and talents, that you are fleeing from true responsibility, that you fail to use the influence you have. But don't let yourself be misled. They do not speak in God's name. Trust the few who know your inner journey and want you to be faithful to it. They will help you stay faithful to God's call. - Henri J. M. Nouwen

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One of the reasons that solitude is such an important aspect of the spiritual life is that it keeps us focused on God. In solitude we do not receive human acclamation, admiration, support, or encouragement. In solitude we have to go to God with our sorrows and joys and trust that God will give us what we most need.

In our society we are inclined to avoid solitude. We want to be seen and acknowledged. We want to be useful to others and influence the course of events. But as we become visible and popular, we



quickly grow dependent on people and their responses and easily lose touch with God, the true source of our being. Solitude is the place of purification. In solitude we find our true selves. – Henri Nouwen

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How can we stay in solitude when we feel that deep urge to be distracted by people and events? The most simple way is to focus our minds and hearts on a word or picture that reminds us of God. By repeating quietly: "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want," or by gazing lovingly at an icon of Jesus, we can bring our restless minds to some rest and experience a gentle divine presence. This doesn't happen overnight. It asks a faithful practice. But when we spend a few moments every day just being with God, our endless distractions will gradually disappear. – Henri Nouwen

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All human beings are alone. No other person will completely feel like we do, think like we do, act like we do. Each of us is unique, and our aloneness is the other side of our uniqueness. The question is whether we let our aloneness become loneliness or whether we allow it to lead us into solitude. Loneliness is painful; solitude is peaceful. Loneliness makes us cling to others in desperation; solitude allows us to respect others in their uniqueness and create community. Letting our aloneness grow into solitude and not into loneliness is a lifelong struggle. It requires conscious choices about whom to be with, what to study, how to pray, and when to ask for counsel. But wise choices will help us to find the solitude where our hearts can grow in love. – Henri Nouwen

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Solitude is the garden for our hearts, which yearn for love. It is the place where our aloneness can bear fruit. It is the home for our restless bodies and anxious minds. Solitude, whether it is connected with a physical space or not, is essential for our spiritual lives. It is not an easy place to be, since we are so insecure and fearful that we are easily distracted by whatever promises immediate satisfaction. Solitude is not immediately satisfying, because in solitude we meet our demons, our addictions, our feelings of lust and anger, and our immense need for recognition and approval. But if we do not run away, we will meet there also the One who says, "Do not be afraid. I am with you, and I will guide you through the valley of darkness." – Henri Nouwen

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## **SOUL**

[See also: "True Self"]

This is the true self, the part of us that was put into us when God made each of us. It is a piece of God himself, embedded with some of the same divine characteristics he has: love, creativity, connectedness, patience, peace, joy...the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The soul also contains special gifts, interests and talents that are unique to each individual.

To know, and love, who we really are is one of the most important things we come to realize in our lives. Once we recognize who we really are, a child of God, our love will naturally spill over into our relationships with others and the world. We begin to know, love, and serve God in our own unique way, in a way that God made us. This is enlightenment, this is salvation.

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## SUFFERING

Without a mythological context, sacred text, or some symbolic universe to reveal the greater meaning and significance of our life, we can become trapped in our own very small story. And in that limited story, without any larger perspective, our wounds can make us into embittered victims. We just keep repeating the story line to ourselves over and over, and soon it suffocates us like a python.

The Jesus way is to embrace our wounds and accept them as the price of the journey. We can choose to carry our wounds with dignity until the time comes when we forget why they were so important or debilitating to begin with. The wounds in Jesus' hands, feet and side are still carried in his resurrected body—this is quite significant! (John 20:25-28) I think we carry our wounds until the end; they do not fully go away but keep us humble, patient and more open to trust and intimacy. The healing lies in the fact that those same wounds no longer defeat us or cause us to harm ourselves or others. My favorite mystic, Lady Julian of Norwich, puts it this way, “our wounds become our honors.”

Rohr, Adapted from *On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men*,

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Suffering is the necessary *deep feeling* of the human situation. If we don't feel pain, suffering, human failure, and weakness, we stand antiseptically apart from it, and remain numb and small. We can't understand such things by thinking about them. The superficiality of much of our world is that it tries to buy its way out of the ordinary limits and pain of being human. Carl Jung called it “necessary suffering,” and I think he was right.

Jesus did not numb himself or withhold himself from human pain, as we see even in his refusal of the numbing wine on the cross (Matthew 27:34). Some forms of suffering are necessary so that we *know* the human dilemma, so that we can even name our shadow self and confront it.

Brothers and sisters, the irony is not that God should feel so fiercely; it's that his creatures feel so feebly. If there is nothing in your life to cry about, if there is nothing in your life to yell about, you must be out of touch. We must all feel and know the immense pain of this global humanity. Then we are no longer isolated, but a true member of the universal Body of Christ. Then we know God not from the outside but from the inside! Adapted from *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*, [Rohr]

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## SUFFERING

When I was young, I wanted to suffer for God. I pictured myself being the great and glorious martyr somewhere. There's something so romantic about laying down your life for something great. I guess many young people might see themselves that way, but now I know it was mostly ego, but sort of good ego at that stage.

There is nothing glorious about any actual moment of suffering—when you're in the midst of it. You swear it's meaningless. You swear it has nothing to do with goodness or holiness or God—or you. The very essence of any experience of trial is that you want to get out of it. A lack of purpose, of meaning—is the precise suffering of suffering! When you find a pattern in your suffering, a direction, you can accept it and go with it. The great suffering, the suffering of Jesus, is when that pattern is not immediately given. The soul can live without success, but it cannot live without meaning.

Adapted from *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*, [Rohr]

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Memory is the basis for both pain and rejoicing: We cannot have one without the other, it seems. Do not be too quick to heal all of those bad memories, unless it means also feeling them deeply, which means to learn what they have to teach you. God calls us to suffer (read: “allow”) the whole of reality, to remember the good along with the bad. Perhaps that is the course of the journey toward new sight and new hope. Memory creates a readiness for salvation, an emptiness to receive love and a fullness to enjoy it.

Strangely enough, it seems so much easier to remember the hurts, the failures and the rejections. It is much more common to gather our life energy around a hurt than a joy, for some sad reason. Remember the good things even more strongly than the bad, but learn from both. And most of all, as the prophet Baruch said, “rejoice that you are remembered by God” (5:5), which is the Big Memory that can hold and receive all of the smaller ones. Adapted from *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*, [Rohr]

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If you want to always have sunshine, you must live in a desert. – Arabic saying

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Only the great self, the True Self, the God Self, can carry our anxieties. The little self cannot do it. People who don't pray basically cannot live the Gospel, because the self is not strong enough to contain and reveal our delusions and our fear. I am most quoted for this line: “*If you do not transform your pain, you will always transmit it.*” Always someone else has to suffer because I don't know how to suffer; that is what it comes down to. Jesus, you could say, came to show us how to suffer, how to carry “the legitimate pain of being human,” as C.G. Jung called it. Beware of running from yourself and your own legitimate suffering, which is the price of being a human being in a limited world.

From *A Lever and a Place to Stand: The Contemplative Stance, the Active Prayer* [Rohr]

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## SURRENDER

Do you realize with what difficulty surrender will come to a fixing, managing mentality? There's nothing in that psyche prepared to understand the spiritual wisdom of surrender. All of the great world religions teach surrender. Yet most of us, until we go through “the hole in our soul,” don't think surrender is really necessary. At least that's how it is for those of us in developed countries. The poor, on the other hand, seem to understand limitation at a very early age. They cannot avoid or deny the hole in reality and in their own soul.

The developing world faces its limitation through a breakdown in the social-economic system, and any access to basic justice. But we, in the so-called developed world, have to face our limitations, it seems, on the inside. That's our “liberation theology.” We must recognize our own poor man, our own abused woman, the oppressed part of ourselves that we hate, that we deny, that we're afraid of. That's the hole in our soul. This is our way *through*—maybe the only way, says the crucified Jesus.

Adapted from *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*, [Rohr]

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## THOUGHTS

[See also: EGO, SOUL]

Your brain is designed to produce thoughts. It does this as part of its creative nature, and as an aid for survival. It takes what it knows, and assembles ideas that are based on our experiences, joys, needs, and fears. Some thoughts can be inspiring. Some can be fearful. Where we often go wrong is in assuming that our thoughts are actually ourselves; that they represent who we really are.

But this is not the case, and was never meant to be. It is our job, as free-will, loving souls, to examine the thoughts that come into our head and decide their worth. Should they be ignored? Laughed at? Acted upon? Discussed with others? What we do with them is what determines our future, as well as our peace of mind in the present moment. As the saying goes:

- Watch your thoughts; they become words.
- Watch your words; they become actions.
- Watch your actions; they become habits.
- Watch your habits; they become character.
- Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

## TRANSFIGURATION

What the companions of Jesus see this day through the dazzling whiteness of his appearance is his humanity, the surface Jesus they had known up to that moment, opening up to reveal his inner, divine self, the dwelling of light from deep within him. This opening up they witnessed is a gateway to an endless journey to God. -Br. Eldridge Pendleton, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## TRANSFORMATION

[ See: FORMATION]

God gives us our lives, our selves. In gratitude we offer our selves as an oblation to God. In gratitude God returns ourselves to us, transformed. The engine of transformation is the current of mutual gratitude and mutual self-giving that flows from creator to creature, from creature back to creator, from creator back to creature—over and over again, day by day, year by year.

-Br. Mark Brown, Society of Saint John the Evangelist

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## TRUE SELF

[See also: SOUL]

For the True Self, there is nothing to hate, reject, deny, or judge as unworthy or unnecessary. It has “been forgiven much and so it loves much” (Luke 7:47). Compassion and mercy come easily now, once you live from inside the Big Body of love. The detours of the False Self were all just delaying tactics, bumps in the road, pressure points that created something new in the long run, as pressure does to carbon deep beneath the earth. God uses everything to construct this hard and immortal diamond, our core of love. And diamonds, they say, are the hardest substance on this earth. It is this strong diamond of love that will always be stronger than death.

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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[In] finding your True Self, you will have found *an absolute reference point that is both utterly within you and utterly beyond you at the very same time*. This grounds the soul in big and reliable truth. “My deepest *me* is God!” St. Catherine of Genoa shouted as she ran through the streets of town, just as Colossians had already shouted to both Jews and pagans, “The mystery is Christ within you—your hope of Glory!”

The healthy inner authority of the True Self can now be balanced by a more objective outer authority of Scripture and mature Tradition. Your experience is not just your experience, in other words. That’s what tells you that you are not crazy. That God is both utterly beyond me and yet totally within me at the same time is the exquisite balance that most religion seldom achieves, in my opinion. Now the law is written on both tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18) and within your heart (Deuteronomy 29:12-14), and the old covenant has rightly morphed into the new (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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The discovery of your True Self will feel like a thousand pounds of weight have fallen from your back. You will no longer have to build, protect, or promote any idealized self-image. Living in the True Self is quite simply a much happier existence, even though we never live there a full twenty-four hours a day. But you henceforth have it as a place to always go back to. You have finally discovered the alternative to your False Self.

You are like Jacob awakening from sleep and joining the chorus of mystics in every age. “You were here all along, and I never knew it!” he says (Genesis 28:16). He anoints the stone pillow where this happened and names it *Bethel*, or the house of God and gate of heaven” (28:17-18). Jacob then carries the presence with him wherever he goes. What was first only there is so on everywhere. The gate of heaven is first of all in one concrete place, better if carried with you, and best when found everywhere. That is the progression of the spiritual life.

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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### **TRUE SELF** (continued)

Most spirituality has said, in one way or another, that we have all indeed begun to forget, if not fully forgotten, who we are. Universal amnesia seems to be the problem. Religion’s job is purely and simply one thing: to tell us, and keep reminding us of who we objectively are. Thus, we keep eating “the Body of Christ” until we know that we *are* what we eat—a human body that is still the eternal Christ.

Is it possible that we do know our True Self at some level? Could we all know from the beginning? Does some part of us know from the beginning? Does some part of us know—with a kind of certitude—who we really are? Is the truth hidden within us? Could human life’s central task be a matter of consciously discovering and becoming who we already are and what we somehow unconsciously know? I believe so. Life is not a matter of creating a special name for ourselves, but of uncovering the name we have always had.

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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Our True Self is surely the “treasure hidden the field” that Jesus speaks of. It is your own chunk of the immortal diamond. He says that we should be “happily willing to sell everything to buy that field” (Matthew 13:44)—or that diamond mine! Could any one thing be that valuable that we would sell everything for it? In all the Gospels, Jesus is quoted as saying, “What will it profit you if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?” (Matthew 16:26), and the context invariably implies he is talking about something happening in *this* world. If you find the treasure hidden in your own field, then everything else comes along with it. It is indeed the “pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:46) to continue our precious gem metaphor.

The early Christian writers tell us that this discovery of our True Self is also at the same time a discovery of God. . . .*The two encounters with a True God and a True Self are largely experienced simultaneously and grow in parallel fashion.*

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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Your True Self is who you are in God and who God is in you. You can never really lose your soul; you can only fail to realize it, which is indeed the greatest of losses: to have it but not have it (Matthew 16:26). Your essence, your exact “thisness,” will never appear again in another incarnation. . . . You (and every other created thing) begin with a divine DNA, an inner destiny as it were, an absolute core that knows the truth about you, a blueprint tucked away in the cellar of your being, an *imago Dei* that begs to be allowed, to be fulfilled, and to show itself. As it says in Romans (5:5), “It is the Holy Spirit poured into your heart, and it has been given to you.” . . .

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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### **TRUE SELF** (continued)

As I studied accounts of the Resurrection, I came to see what is now completely obvious to me: these texts reveal both the Christ and the True Self as a deep capacity for intimacy with yourself and with everything, probably including life itself. Starting with Christ’s “white as snow” robe and his “face like lightning” (Matthew 28:3), we have initial statements of perfect transparency, accessibility, and radiant visibility. The True Self is a shared and sharable self, or it is not the True Self.

In John’s account. . . Mary Magdalene knows Jesus not by sight but when he pronounces her first name (20:16). She completes the exchange by calling him “Master” in return. Jesus’ puzzling “Do not cling to me” (20:17) statement is what makes true intimacy possible. Intimacy is possible only between two calm identities and is not the same as melding or fusing into one. As we say in non-dual teaching, “Not two but not one either.”

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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So how do you communicate to others what is inherently a secret? Or can you? How can the secret become “unhidden”? It becomes unhidden when people stop hiding—from God, themselves, and at least one other person. The emergence of our True Self is actually the big disclosure of the secret. Such risky self-disclosure is what I mean by intimacy, and intimacy is the way that love is transmitted. Some say the word comes from the Latin *intimus*, referring to that which is interior or inside. Some say its older meaning is found by *in timor*, or “into fear.” In either case, the point is clear: intimacy happens when we reveal and expose our insides, and this is always scary. One never knows if the other can receive what is exposed, will respect it, or will run fast in the other direction. One must be prepared to be rejected. It is always a risk. The pain of rejection after self-disclosure is so great that it often takes a lifetime for people to risk it again.

Rohr, Excerpted from *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

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We all slowly learn how to live in what Thomas Merton would call the True Self—who you are, and always have been, in God. Who you are in God is who you forever are. In fact, that’s all you are, and it is more than enough. Everything else is passing away. Reputations, titles, possessions, and roles do not determine our identity. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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### **TRUE SELF** (continued)

The True Self is not created by anything you have done right or wrong. Nor can you lose it by doing anything good or bad. The True Self is not formed by adhering to any requirements; it’s about relationship itself—the quality and capacity for connection. Only the True Self can pray. The false self will say prayers but the True Self *is* a prayer and looks out at reality from a different pair of eyes larger than its own. This is why in Ephesians it can say “pray always” (6:18). We pray always whenever we act *in conscious and loving union with things*—which eventually can be all the time. Then whatever you do is a prayer, not a recited prayer but a full-bodied, bigger-than-mind, contemplative prayer. When you are in your True Self, your prayer and your breath are the same thing. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Jesus’ life and his risen body say instead that the discovery of our own divine DNA is the only, full, and final meaning of being human. The True Self is neither God nor human. *The True Self is both at the same time, and both are a total gift*—and it takes an essential dying to know that, which Jesus also dramatically exemplified. - Fr. Richard Rohr

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Your True Self is who you are in God and who God is in you. You can never really lose your soul; you can only fail to realize it, which is indeed the greatest of losses: to have it but not have it (Matthew 16:26).

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### **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**

[See Love, of God]

What can we say about God’s love? We can say that God’s love is unconditional. God does not say, “I love you, if ...” There are no *ifs* in God’s heart. God’s love for us does not depend on what we do or say, on our looks or intelligence, on our success or popularity. God’s love for us existed before we were born and will exist after we have died. God’s love is from eternity to eternity and is not bound to any time-related events or circumstances. Does that mean that God does not care what we do or say? No, because God’s love wouldn’t be real if God didn’t care. To love without condition does not mean to love without



concern. God desires to enter into relationship with us and wants us to love God in return.

Let's dare to enter into an intimate relationship with God without fear, trusting that we will receive love and always more love. – Henri Nouwen

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## UNITY

[See also: Connectedness]

It seems to me that we have made God *a being* instead of *Being itself*. Both John Duns Scotus and Thomas Aquinas said “*Deus est Ens*,” or “God is existence itself.” That is the first name of God in the Book of Exodus (3:14), which could rightly be translated “I am *Am-ness*,” or perhaps as Acts of the Apostles puts it: “God is the one in whom we live, and move, and have our being” (17:28).

Being, or naked existence, is the one thing that we all are a part of. It seems the essential religious problem is that human beings suffer almost universally from a massive case of mistaken identity about their radical union with God. If we can break away from the illusion of our separateness then the rest follows rather clearly, and we can reconnect with our core identity. We are each a manifestation of that Universal and Divine Being, which then takes the form of angels, humans, animals, trees, water, and Earth itself. Until we recognize that inherent and shared sacredness, we have no philosophical or compelling basis for nonviolence. [Rohr]

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“The journey of the soul into God,” as Bonaventure put it, was to learn how to see the unity of all being, how to look for this partially hidden God, and how to honor those footprints everywhere once you could see them. It was surrender to gratitude—and also to immense confidence that you were a part of something very good. The result was a continuous life of appreciation and reverence, non-consumption, and simple joy—while still living a very busy life in the world! – Rohr

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## VIOLENCE

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If the self doesn't find some way to connect radically with Being, it will live in anxiety and insecurity. The false self is inherently insecure. It's intrinsically fragile, grasping for significance. That's precisely because it *is insignificant!* So it grabs at things like badges and uniforms and titles and hats and flags to give itself importance and power. People talk about dying for the flag of their country. They don't realize that the Bible would definitely call that idolatry. What were you before you were an American? Will you be an American in heaven? Most of us don't know how to answer those questions without a spiritual journey and an inner prayer life.

In prayer you will discover who you were before you were male, before you were female, before you were black, before you were white, before you were straight, before you were gay, before you were Lutheran, Mormon, or Amish. Have you ever lived there? At that naked place, you will have very little to defend, fight about, compete with, overcome, hate, or fear. You are then living in the Reign of God, or what Buddha calls the Great Compassion. Violence is unneeded and undesired.

Rohr, Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer* (CD)

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All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then, when you can get little enough and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find that the little place where you *really are* is ironically more than enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect.

That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody because they've come to the place where, as I like to say, everything belongs. To live from this place cuts the roots of violence at their very foundation, for there is not even any basis for fear or anger or protection or hatred. Negativity must be nipped in the bud—that is to say, *in the mind*.

Adapted from *Healing Our Violence Through the Journey of Centering Prayer* (CD) [Rohr]

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## VOCATIONS

Often we want to be somewhere other than where we are, or even to be someone other than who we are. We tend to compare ourselves constantly with others and wonder why we are not as rich, as intelligent, as simple, as generous, or as saintly as they are. Such comparisons make us feel guilty, ashamed, or jealous. It is very important to realize that our vocation is hidden in where we are and who we are. We are unique human beings, each with a call to realize in life what nobody else can, and to realize it in the concrete context of the here and now. We will never find our vocations by trying to figure out whether we are better or worse than others. We are good enough to do what we are called to do. Be yourself!

- Henri Nouwen

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## VULNERABILITY

Life is precious. Not because it is unchangeable, like a diamond, but because it is vulnerable, like a little bird. To love life means to love its vulnerability, asking for care, attention, guidance, and support. Life and death are connected by vulnerability. The newborn child and the dying elder both remind us of the preciousness of our lives. Let's not forget the preciousness and vulnerability of life during the times we are powerful, successful, and popular. – Henri Nouwen

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There is a great difference between successfulness and fruitfulness. Success comes from strength, control, and respectability. A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame. Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another's wounds. Let's remind one another that what brings us true joy is not successfulness but fruitfulness. – Henri Nouwen

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## WILL POWER

A common saying is, "God helps those who help themselves." I think the phrase can be understood helpfully; but in most practical situations it is not true. Scripture clearly says, in many ways, that God helps those who *trust in God*, not those who help themselves.

We need to be told that very strongly because of our "do-it-yourself" orientation. As educated people, as Americans, as middle-class people who have practiced climbing, we are accustomed to doing it ourselves. It takes applying the brakes, letting go of our own plans, allowing Another, and experiencing power from a Larger Source to really move to higher awareness. Otherwise, there is no real transformation, but only increased willpower. As if the one with the most willpower wins! *Willfulness is quite different than willingness*. They are two different energetic styles and normally yield very different fruit. Adapted from *Radical Grace: Daily Meditations*, [Rohr]

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## WISDOM

The spiritual gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 12:10) is when seemingly good things can be recognized as sometimes bad things, and seemingly bad things can also be seen to bear some good fruit. Darn it! Discernment has largely been undeveloped among ordinary Christians, except among those good Jesuits!

It invites people into “yes/and” thinking, rather than simplistic “either/or” thinking. This is the difference between merely having correct information and the true spiritual gift of wisdom (1 Corinthians 12:8). Both knowledge and wisdom are good, but wisdom is much better. It demands the maturity of discernment, which is what it takes to develop a truly *consistent ethic of life*. - Fr. Rohr

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## WORDS

Words that do not become flesh in us remain "just words." They have no power to affect our lives. If someone says, "I love you," without any deep emotion, the words do more harm than good. But if these same words are spoken from the heart, they can create new life. It is important that we keep in touch with the source of our words. Our great temptation is to become "pleasers," people who say the right words to please others but whose words have no roots in their interior lives. We have to keep making sure our words are rooted in our hearts. The best way to do that is in prayerful silence. - Henri Nouwen

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Words are very important. When we say to someone: "You are an ugly, useless, despicable person," we might have ruined the possibility for a relationship with that person for life. Words can continue to do harm for many years.

It is so important to choose our words wisely. When we are boiling with anger and eager to throw bitter words at our opponents, it is better to remain silent. Words spoken in rage will make reconciliation very hard. Choosing life and not death, blessings and not curses often starts by choosing to remain silent or choosing carefully the words that open the way to healing.

- Henri Nouwen

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## WORRY

A psychologist walked around a room while teaching stress management to an audience. As she raised a glass of water, everyone expected they'd be asked the “half empty or half full” question. Instead, with a smile on her face, she inquired: “How heavy is this glass of water?”

Answers called out ranged from 8 oz. to 20 oz.

She replied, “The absolute weight doesn't matter. It depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a few seconds, there is no problem. If I hold it for an hour, then it gets heavier and I'll have an ache in my arm. If I hold it for a day, my arm will feel numb and paralyzed. In each case, the weight doesn't change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes.”

Stresses and worries in life are like that glass of water. Think about them for a little while and nothing happens. Think about them a little longer and they begin to hurt. And if you think about them all day long, you can get paralyzed by them – incapable of doing anything.” - author unknown

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## The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

~ Rumi ~

We should have much peace if we would not busy ourselves with the sayings and doings of others.  
- Thomas á Kempis