

CENTERING PRAYER NETWORK AUSTRALIA

DECEMBER CONTEMPLATIVE NEWSLETTER – SEASON OF ADVENT 2014

ADVENT- AN INVITATION TO 'STAY AWAKE'

The Context of Awakenings and Awareness (Page 5) Taken from *Spirituality and the Awakening Self* by David G Benner

Each moment of awareness is a small awakening, and each awakening – no matter how insignificant it might seem – can be a doorway to becoming. As an object of awareness, nothing is too small to empower such an awakening. Awareness of anything opens us to the transcendent. This is why awareness is so central to prayer. Douglas Steere describes prayer as “awakeness, attention, intense inward openness.” In his view, sin is anything that destroys this attentive wakefulness.

Let us look more closely at this sequence of events that surround awakening. Awareness is always preceded by a sensation. Sensations are invitations to engage with something in the present moment, something either in our inner world or in the external world. The traditional five senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste – are the most familiar to us and are the most regular doorways to the present moment that we encounter. Each invites us to notice something. Each is, therefore, an invitation to awareness. Awareness begins, therefore, as a response to a sensation.

The act of responding to the invitation of the sensation by noticing it (awareness) immediately sets in motion a chain of events and possibilities. The first is that it brings us back from our heads (where we escape whenever we are not present to the moment) to our bodies and to our vital energies that are grounded in them. We can only be alive in our bodies through our senses. And conversely, we cannot be engaged with our senses without being in touch with our bodies. However, as soon as we attend to a sensation – any sensation – we immediately experience the gift of mobilised energy. This energy will not always feel positive. But awareness always mobilises energy that prepares us to respond to whatever we now notice. If we back away from this energy out of fear, we shut it down, cut off our access to our vitality, and go back to sleep. However, if we respond to whatever our attention has engaged, we allow the energy to awaken us.

Returning to the awakening of Paul, the sensations that invited attention were the blinding light and the voice addressing him. Even such a dramatic encounter as Paul experienced could have been easily ignored and regularly is ignored. But Paul responded to the sensation by offering attention rather than resistance. From a more theological perspective, we can say that he opened himself to God. He did this by submitting to those who told him where to go and waiting until God revealed what he should do next. This waiting was preparation for response; the immediacy and lifelong persistence of his response attests to the magnitude of the vitalisation that was associated with his awakening.

The invitation of the present moment is always to awaken, to respond rather than simply react, and to become full participants in our lives.

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ADVENT invites us to awaken to the Energies of Love at the Heart of the whole cosmos. In the church at Santa Teresa Aboriginal Mission about 80 kilometres from Alice Springs the interior walls have been painted by Aboriginal artists depicting the story of Creation. This magnificent painting enters us so powerfully into the Energies of this Beginning/Present/Future – but we keep falling asleep and lose sight of this profound Truth. This Fire of Love which is at the Heart of all Creation is what the season of Advent is all about- preparing for the birth of Jesus the Christ in our Hearts and consciousness – a Birth that already IS but we keep falling asleep to this Truth. Can we prayerfully ponder where and how we experience this Energy of Love?

ADVENT PRACTICES

In preparation for Christmas I have found it good to read or re-reread Julian of Norwich: Revelation of Love.

Julian of Norwich offers us three windows of consciousness awareness-raising practices for Advent:

Where today was I awakened to the window of Prayer?

Where today was I awaked to the window of hospitality, listening, supporting my neighbour?

Where today did I sit at the window of Nurturance:

Planning and celebrating Christmas meals,

My support and awareness of the needs of Asylum seekers and the oppressed,

The poor in my parish or community –

And the nurturance of my Spirit -

(receiving God's extravagant and transformative love in my periods of Meditation, Lectio Divina, and the Daily News Paper Etc.)?

It could be good to go within and see where these windows have been honoured or neglected in my journey through Christmastide. Hopefully not adding on practices for this liturgical Season but really being present to the Incarnation in daily life.



Submitted by Helen Duffy – Mercy Sister Melbourne

An Awakened Heart - Jesus weeps over Jerusalem

*As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying,
"If you, even you, had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace! Luke 19:41*

When we give our 'yes' to a contemplative practice and we open into Listening to that Word of God alive within us then we can be assured that our Hearts will change, we will change and therefore our world will also change. The power of silence in prayer cannot be underestimated and this silence gives a voice in our world that paradoxically won't be silenced. Some of us might be looking for a nice peaceful road on this journey we have said 'yes' to and when we discover it isn't quite what we wanted or expected it to be we can begin to back off. We can do this in all sorts of ways. The guide for us in this Mysterious Silence is our personal growth and our awakening to the Life within us and the world around us. If we have no sense of growth and if we are not open to change and growth then it is a pretty good indicator that something is not right.

Jesus' Heart was awake to the poor, the outcast and the oppressed. He suffered for them and with them (us) because Love had to act in the face of the injustices. When this Spirit of Love begins to crack open our hard outer shell and begins to expose to us the Truth of who we really are (at the core of our being we are Love itself) then our Hearts too will open to the poor, the outcast and the oppressed. When we open into this Truth we too will weep over our World - we will weep over our own role in the mess we are in - we will weep over our limitations - our beautiful Hearts will be broken open in Love and we will begin to see that Love itself is all that is Real. This is the GIFT of contemplative prayer. It is this *disturbance* that will *make peace*. Until our world (and you and me) is *disturbed* enough to see what we are doing to each other and to our world in the ordinary every day small things and the big things, then we cannot know or *recognise the things that make for peace*.

Love does not worry about conformity to cultural expectations or religious expectations - it is faithful only to Love. Love's wisdom cuts through all our game playing: our reasons and justifications for war and our need to be the powerful ones, for oppressing others so that I feel safe and secure, for our judgmentalism on the poor and outcast so that I can feel justified in my non-action etc. When Love in us sees all this happening in our world all we see is what we are doing to Love itself and we will weep because we come to know that we are doing it to ourselves. This is Love's revelation - *what you do to the least you do it to me*. This is the fruit of contemplative prayer. It is the invitation of Advent - *wake up!*

As we ponder some of the horrors happening in our world at this time let's examine the response in our own Hearts to them. Do we get caught up in trying to justify ourselves and our in-action or lack of awareness? As soon as we find ourselves making excuses or trying to justify ourselves we must know we are not coming from that place of Love within us - we are falling back into our sleep. Sometimes all we can do is be with our helplessness and vulnerability in that painful place - but we must open into being in this place. Here are just some of the things that Love weeps over at this moment and the list could go on and on.....: The many wars happening in our world as we speak and for what reasons; Poverty and hunger largely in third world countries and too at our own back door; The extended detention and cruel treatment of asylum seekers including women and children seeking safe haven; The rise in addiction to drugs and alcohol and the rise in depression and other mental illnesses; The oppression of indigenous peoples worldwide and at our own back door; The oppression of women worldwide both culturally and in our religious institutions again at our own back door; The building up of the rich and the knocking down of the poor and depriving them of a voice; The racism that is at the core of so many injustices around us; Governments and Oppositions that place the economy above the wellbeing of the people and the Earth; Our planet that we continue to pillage for our economic gain with no care or respect; Our planet that screams out to us daily for our respect of its resources and its beauty; The increase of violence be it physical, mental, environmental.....; The loss of our ability to see that at the core of everything (without exception) is LOVE. Jesus says to each of us on this Advent journey: *"If you, even you, had only recognised on this day the things that make for peace!* If we are not opening into the pain and suffering of what we are doing then we are *asleep*. The call of Advent is to *wake up* and give birth to the Love that IS already within us.

Annemarie Reiner



IMPORTANT DIARY DATE
CENTERING PRAYER NETWORK AUSTRALIA

OUR ANNUAL RETREAT

AT BORONIA, VICTORIA

6 – 8th MARCH – 2015

With the AGM on Monday 9th March

THE THEME:

The Mystic Within – The Cosmic Heart Awakening.

During this retreat we will explore and open into the Mystic at the Heart of all of us.

We will explore Christ Consciousness as our One Reality and what it might mean to evolve in Christ and open to the Oneness of the Cosmos.

There will be opportunities for personal reflection – community sharing and stories – opening into our own creativity through simple expressions of art, the written word and music – Lectio Divina and meditation.

Our facilitators will be:

Annemarie Reiner and Fr. Tom Gleeson

Stewart will forward more expanded information soon regarding registration, times and cost etc.

Someone's coming! Shh! Be still now, Listen.

Are you expecting? Where is your heart right now? I know our minds are inundated with an avalanche of all that is about us, and we, like all that is in the path of a cyclone get caught up and swept away, but its Advent! Someone's coming! Shh! be still now, Listen.

Listen deeper down. No, deeper! Become aware of the stirring of Love there in the silent centre of your being. There is One who is birthing something new! Oh, I pray that you are patient and trusting enough. Do be generous at this special time, what is birthing is new, it has never been before. Once you 'know it' within, you will be enabled to see and know it everywhere.

You will see it in the stars, in the trees and flowers in sunrise and especially if you look carefully, lovingly in the eyes and faces of the people you encounter. If you smile, they may even see something of that beautiful mystery that is unfolding within You.

Within Love
Tom Gleeson - Adelaide

A BOOK REVIEW

WHO YOU ARE by Joseph Kloss

WHO YOU ARE shines a non-dual light on the age-old mystery embodied in the words, "Know Thyself," and offers a simple practice for living in and as...reality.

(Taken from the introduction to this book given in the Book Depository)

When I (Annemarie) was in Snowmass, Colorado for a 10 Day Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat in 2009 this book had only just been released that week. I was told that Thomas Keating had just read it and gave it a very high recommendation. I was fortunate enough to be given a copy by my director at that retreat.

When I first read it (and it is a short read) it didn't really speak to me but I read it again recently and my response was very different. I think it gives a beautiful clarity about *who we are*. I offer you some quotes from within the book:

*Imagine that you are someone who is searching. In this case, imagine that you are searching for your misplaced eyeglasses. Truth is the eyeglasses that make it possible for you to see while you are looking for the eyeglasses that you **think** you have lost, forgetting that if they were not already in use, you would not see to search for them. This is the truth of who you are.*

You are not what you appear to be. You are not a biological organism that has become conscious of itself. You are not made up of elements.....And here's the problem: your mind is an inadequate tool for exploring the truth of who you are and is, in fact the source of your mistaken identity. Your mind has assembled your perceptions and thoughts into concepts that have become your knowledge of yourself, and this accumulated knowledge has been summarily promoted to the rank of reality..... Your image of reality, no matter how informed and sophisticated, is just a symbol, a representation born of imagination. How could it be otherwise? There can be nothing that appears in your mind that is not a concept, a mental image, a construct. It is therefore unrealistic to expect that you can apprehend the whole truth about anything at all through the agency of your mental processes..... To imagine that your powers of perception are sufficient to reveal actuality of any single thing in all its dimensions and qualities is evidence of a gross misunderstanding of the nature of....nature.

You have spent a lifetime accumulating and interpreting your experiences and relationships, defining yourself, developing an identity, cultivating a persona, a look, a personal philosophy, a set of values, and a code of conduct, creating a style all your own. In short, you have assumed your rightful place in the universe. Very naturally then, this is who you take yourself to be....But the assumptions you have made about yourself are based on faulty data and are thus incomplete and misleading. They make sense to you because you usually have no reason to call them into question...Your "knowledge" of yourself keeps you from knowing who you are....

*From the very beginning until this moment, you have lived your life in your mind....The vast majority of your physical and mental processes, and your emotional life, happen beneath the level of your waking consciousness... Thinking creates your reality and binds you to it.... **Thinking is the lock. Awareness is the key...** The awareness that is present in this and every moment is the timeless witness of all the sensations that arise in you, all the experiences that happen in you and to you.... Every experience you have ever had, no matter how commonly shared with other people, has been your own experience....No matter how heroically you attempt to communicate your inner experience, you cannot adequately articulate how you feel or who you are....Words cannot describe you... The only thing you can know directly is the content of your own consciousness. As far as your personal experience is concerned, there is no other consciousness...You can never experience anything that is outside of your own consciousness.*

Everything is in consciousness. When you get right down to it, that could be what you are: consciousness.

*You are not what you see when you look in a mirror. You are that which sees what you see when you look in a mirror. You are the witness. You are the seer of everything seen. In reality, you are not even the seer; you are the seeing. You are not a person who is aware, you are **awareness**.*

*The practice of self-knowledge does not require a daily renewal of the search for your true self. Once you have recognised that you are the changeless witness of everything that arises within and without, you lose the urge to look for yourself, because you understand that you cannot see the seer... You will never see what you are; you can only **be** what you are.*

Remember, stillness is not your goal; stillness is merely a point of access to the inaccessible. Why inaccessible? Because you cannot "get to" where you already are....Whether your mind is busy or still, you already are what you have always been. It is impossible to "become" what you already are...Like the lost eyeglasses that are already on your face, the trick is to find what you have not lost. That's why it's called realisation.

Available on line at the Book Depository for around \$21

Fra Angelico's 'The Annunciation'

AN ADVENT IMAGE TO PONDER



“One of the great paradoxes of the transformational journey is that effort and initiative are both counterproductive. All that is required of you is consent that is offered in openness and faith. Effort may sometimes be enough to change behaviour, but it is never enough to awaken a self.”

From: Spirituality and the Awakening Self by David G Benner

Questions: How do I respond to the above statement and image? What is it saying to you?

 Am I open to give my ‘consent’ to the birthing of Love living within me?

 How is this season of Advent speaking to me and the way I am living my life?

COMMON GROUND FOUND IN DIFFERENCE – A Buddhist perspective

Taken from the book: *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche

In the Sufi Master Rumi's *Table Talk*, there is this fierce and pointed passage:

The master said there is one thing in this world which must never be forgotten. If you were to forget everything else, but were not to forget this, there would be no cause to worry, while if you remembered performed and attended to everything else, but forgot that one thing, you would in fact have done nothing whatsoever. It is as if a king had sent you to a country to carry out one special, specific task. You go to the country and you perform a hundred other tasks, but if you have not performed the task you were sent for, it is as if you have performed nothing at all. So we have come into the world for a particular task, and that is our purpose. If we don't perform it, we will have done nothing.

All the spiritual teachers of humanity have told us the same thing, that the purpose of life on earth is to achieve union with our fundamental, enlightened nature. The "task" for which the "king" has sent us into this strange, dark country is to realise and embody our true being. There is only one way to do this, and that is to undertake the spiritual journey, with all the ardour and intelligence, courage and resolve for transformation that we can muster. As Death says to Nachiketas in the Katha Upanishad:

There is the path of wisdom and the path of ignorance. They are far apart and lead to different ends....Abiding in the midst of ignorance, thinking themselves wise and learned, fools go aimlessly hither and thither like the blind led by the blind. What lies beyond life shines not to those who are childish, or careless, or deluded by wealth.

At other times and in other civilisations, this path of spiritual transformation was confined to a relatively select number of people; now, however, a large proportion of the human race must seek the path of wisdom if the world is to be preserved from the internal and external dangers that threaten it. In this time of violence and disintegration, spiritual vision is not an elitist luxury but vital to our survival.

To follow the path of wisdom has never been more urgent or more difficult. Our society is dedicated almost entirely to the celebration of ego, with all its sad fantasies about success and power, and it celebrates those very forces of greed and ignorance that are destroying the planet. It has never been more difficult to hear the unflattering voice of the truth, and never more difficult, once having heard it, to follow it: because there is nothing in the world around us that supports our choice, and the entire society in which we live seems to negate every idea of sacredness or eternal meaning. So at the time of our most acute danger, when our very future is in doubt, we as human beings find ourselves at our most bewildered, and trapped in a nightmare of our own creation.

Yet there is one significant source of hope in this tragic situation, and that is that the spiritual teachings of all the great mystical traditions are still available. Unfortunately, however, there are very few masters to embody them, and an almost total lack of discrimination in those searching for the truth. The West has become a heaven for spiritual charlatans. In the case of scientists, you can verify who is genuine and who is not, because other scientists can check their background and test their findings. Yet in the West, without the guidelines and criteria of a thriving and full-fledged wisdom culture, the authenticity of so called "masters" is almost impossible to establish.....

In Buddhism we establish whether a teacher is authentic by whether or not the guidance he or she is giving accords with the teaching of Buddha. It cannot be stressed too often that it is *the truth of the teaching* which is all important, and never the personality of the teacher. This is why Buddha reminded us in the "Four Reliances":

*Rely on the message of the teacher, not on their personality;
Rely on the meaning, not just on the words;
Rely on the real meaning, not on the provisional one;
Rely on your wisdom mind, not on your ordinary, judgmental mind.*

Looking for a Retreat?

Have a look at:

St. Mary's Towers – Douglas Park

Run by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart

<http://towersretreat.abundance.org.au>

Situated on a working farm just south of Sydney and set amongst large natural bushland.

Jamberoo Abbey – New South Wales

Run by Benedictine Monastic Community

<http://www.jamberooabbey.org.au/html/home.htm>

A beautiful setting near Wollongong

Bethel Community – Gold Coast

This community specialise in a six day live in retreat called *Healing Life's Hurts*.

<http://bethelhealing.org.au>

A very powerful experience of healing.

Mary MacKillop Centre – Largs Bay Retreats – Adelaide.

Offering a series of six day guided retreats in a beautiful beach side setting and offered by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

For further information and brochures email:

infosa@sosj.org.au

Ignatian Spirituality Centres Australia wide.

Email: www.cis.jesuit.org.au

Roy's Retreat – Adelaide.

Offering one day retreats and longer and other programs. Take a look at

Email: www.roysretreat.com

If there are any retreats you wish to advertise here please advise the Editor at rareiner@bigpond.com



A PROPHETIC VOICE

Demands involving the distribution of wealth,

concern for the poor

and human rights

cannot be suppressed

under the guise of creating a consensus

on paper or a transient peace

for a contented minority.

The dignity of the human person

and the common good rank higher

than the comfort

of those who refuse to renounce

their privileges.

When these values are threatened,

a prophetic voice must be raised.

Pope Francis, [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 218

The Gospel has an intrinsic principle of totality:

it will always remain good news

until it has been proclaimed to all people,

until it has healed and strengthened

every aspect of humanity,

until it has brought all men and women together

at table in God's kingdom.

The whole is greater than the part.

Pope Francis, [Evangelii Gaudium](#), 237



CHRISTMAS BLESSINGS TO EVERYONE

***MAY WE AND OUR WORLD
OPEN TO THE BIRTH OF LOVE ALIVE IN OUR HEARTS
THIS CHRISTMAS***

***Special thanks to those who made contributions to this newsletter –
anything submitted that was not used will be considered for 2015.***

***NATIVITY PAINTING ABOVE IS
ON THE INTERIOR WALLS OF THE CHURCH
AT
SANTA TERESA MISSION
CENTRAL AUSTRALIA***