

CHRIST IN TRAINING

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SUMMARY

Christ In Training is an exciting experience of self-discovery. The teachings of Jesus are a guide for the journey, but the real understandings come when the reader accepts the challenge to delve deeper into his/her consciousness to more completely understand these principles of Spirit and to practice them in daily life. The “Christ” in us is the representation of our yearning for wholeness, fullness, completion, peace of mind, and inner harmony. You and I and everyone we meet is Christ In Training. This manuscript details the discovery of spiritual power, and reveals the universal identity of the Spirit of God, the Christ Spirit in all of us. Most books approach the subject of Christ in either a linear and traditional way or in a New Age context that sometimes bears little resemblance to the Christianity with which most people are familiar. *Christ In Training*, however, gives a distinctive view of the Person of Jesus, a non-traditional approach to New Testament Scripture, and a contemporary exploration of the teachings of the Master.

These subjects are presented in ways which go beyond established views, along with emphasizing that becoming the Christ is a universal goal for everyone. There are many people who are looking for a direction that reflects their Christian roots, but in non-traditional ways. There is potential in this book for mainstream Christians open to new understandings, students of *A Course In Miracles*, those involved in addictions recovery, and any seekers wanting to integrate the essence of the teachings of Jesus into their lives.

All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful beyond words to everyone in my life, and throughout this book there are echoes of all those from whom I have gained knowledge and wisdom.

Deepest gratitude to:

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DEDICATION

Margo, my wife and spiritual partner on the Path, and my best friend — you are the love of my life, my gratitude to you is infinite.

Our granddaughters Mikayla, Paige, Meaghan, and Aoife — you are the joys of my life, my hopes and prayers for you are boundless.



The other day I had this fantasy. I entered a musty old bookstore. It had one of those glass and wooden doors with a little bell on top that jingled as I went in. There was an ancient-looking man sitting behind the counter, reading, of course. Along with piles of books, there was an assortment of other things on the shelves — sea shells, old tin toys, cigar boxes, all kinds of dusty relics.

I began to browse, and came to a section on spiritual themes. A little book caught my attention; I pulled it down. It was called Christ in Training. I felt a rush of excitement. I had always been looking for the “magic book” that would change my life. Of course I knew there was no such book, but . . .

In spite of my doubts, I said to myself, “This is a treasure. Maybe this is IT.”

The first paragraph began:

If you are reading this, which you obviously are, your schooling has already begun. You have started to realize you are Christ In Training. The next steps you take will lead you into a more conscious awareness of what being the Christ is all about.

Of course we have a very obvious role model in the person of Jesus who became the Christ. He came to the full realization of who He is, a

Son of God. He let us know that becoming the Christ was not restricted to Him alone, but He suggested that “greater works than this shall you do.”

The man called Jesus, with whom most of us are familiar, is often referred to as Jesus Christ. “Christ” is not His last name! Christ, or Christos, in Greek, means the Anointed One. There is the name, Jesus, and then there is the description, Christ, the Anointed One.

Jesus became the Christ. He became so deeply involved in God, the Source, and the Father that He became One with It. He became as He said, “One with the Father.” John 10:30 He entered into a realm of awareness we sometimes refer to as the “Christ Consciousness.” This Consciousness is the state of mind and being in which you completely recognize your Oneness with God. There is no separation. Since there is no separation for you, there is no separation for anyone.

Jesus not only taught that He is the Way to this awareness, but also dedicated His life to showing how we could also obtain that awareness. Jesus dedicated Himself to being a living example of the Christ Consciousness. He dedicated himself to teach us how we also could be One with the Father.

H.G. Wells is credited with this statement about Jesus: “Either there was something insane about this man, or our hearts are still too small for his message.” That thought forms the short definition of Christ Training. Christ Training is meant to open and widen our hearts, to make them big enough to contain the truth of who we really are.

The Table of Contents showed some fascinating chapters in the book about things such as casting out demons, changing water into wine, healing sickness, and making one meal to feed over 5,000 people. I had no idea what I would do with that information if I had it, but I wanted it anyway.

I went to those dramatic chapters immediately. The pages were blank; there was nothing on them! Annoyed, I went back to the introduction of the book. In bold script right below what I had already read, it stated:

Only the parts of this book which you are ready for will be available

to you. Many of you are still caught in drama and glamor; you are probably reading this now because some chapters appeared as empty pages. You most likely turned to sections of this book such as “Walking on Water” or “Raising the Dead.” When you are ready, you can read them, for now, know that as exciting as these thoughts might be, they are electives in this course of Christ Training. They are not necessary, and in some ways they are not even very important. Let go of your drama and your need to impress; move on to what is truly essential.

You see, you think you know what you need to learn, but you do not even know who you are. The essence of being Christ In Training is to fully discover the truth of who you are: God’s child. The teaching is to know that Truth so fully and so completely that you will always live out of that reality of being a Divine Child of God. Then you will be as Jesus on the mountain in what is sometimes referred to as the Transfiguration, where “his face shined as the sun.” Matthew 17:2

To perceive yourself as a Child of God is to go beyond all ego barriers; it is to go beyond the personal self. To truly love, you must be willing to let go of all that you think you are. You are encouraged to let go of all your little identities, such as banker, lawyer, teacher, and other professions. You are encouraged to even let go of the ones that are so precious to you — parent and grandparent, for instance — and even the ones that seem essential to your existence, such as your identification with your body, and what kind of shape it is in, your senses, your intellect and how it works, your emotions and feelings, and all those stockpiles of memories good and bad. These emotions and feelings remain as an important aspect of your life, but for Christ In Training, you must remember, none of these are who you are.

“Why is training necessary at all?” you might ask. Well, the most uncomplicated answer to that question is, “You forgot who you are.”

Here is a simple view of how everyone forgets to some extent. The Christ In Training instructions that follow this explanation are how you can begin to remember.

THE NECESSITY FOR TRAINING

We hear this all the time: “God is inside of you.” As the New Testament puts it, “The kingdom of heaven is within you.” Luke 17:21 An Eastern tradition states, “God is in you *as* you.” Well, if that is the truth and you believe it, how does that truth affect you? How does that reality influence your life and your actions? It seems if we really believed “God is within me (and you),” and acted from this belief, the world would be a tremendously different place.

The “God-within” theme is reminiscent of an old Hindu story of creation. After the world was fashioned the gods looked upon it and saw that “it was good,” and then sensed there was something more to do. They decided to conceive a creation such as themselves, and they would place some of their divinity inside each new being. So humankind was formed, and divinity placed in each new life. For some time everyone recognized this divine and sacred nature within themselves and one another, but then people started to forget and began treating themselves and others badly. The gods were horrified at this desecration of divinity, and although they could not take this divine gift away from humans, they could hide it, so it would no longer be neglected and mistreated. After a long discussion one of the oldest and wisest of the gods exclaimed, “They will find this gift practically any place we hide it, so we will conceal this divinity within their hearts, for that is the last place they will look.”

As we shall see later, many of us spend our lives looking for God in all the wrong places.

God lives inside of you and me. How does that work?

The first thing to keep in mind is that God is not a thing or even a person. God is the Infinite Loving Creative Energy of the Universe.

Here is the way Emilie Caddie put it: “God is Spirit, or the creative energy that is the cause of all visible things. . . God is not a being or person having life, intelligence, love, power. God *is* that invisible, intangible, but very real something we call life. God is perfect love and infinite power. God is the total of these, the total of all good,

whether manifested or unexpressed.”¹

We can be the expression of that energy. The German mystic Meister Eckhart suggested that God has planted Himself in our souls; that the seed of God is in us. Scott Peck in *The Road Less Traveled* resonated with Eckhart by saying, “If the bud of consciousness that grows from the root of the unconscious God can become God itself, then God will have assumed a new life form. This is the meaning of our individual existence. We are born that we might become, as a conscious individual, a new life form of God.”²

What we sometimes call the Soul, is our true Self, the Self that contains and reflects the Divine. Carl Jung along with many other spiritual teachers expressed the idea that, “You are much more than who or what you think you are. Your idea of self is usually limited to your narrow identity as an ego. You are much more than that. The Kingdom of heaven is within you.”

In a very real way whenever you are loving, compassionate, positively creative, you are experiencing and expressing “Godness” in you and through you. The expression of these qualities of God is also an expression of God.

Now here is where the human experience becomes so interesting. We have a choice to act from the qualities of God within us, what we call the Christ Consciousness, or we can respond to life from our fretful, fearful little ego. Rather than trying to define the ego, right now, just get a sense of the choices you have every moment: you can be upset or you can be peaceful; you can be vengeful or you can be forgiving; you can be petty or you can be magnanimous; you can be critical or you can be empowering. There are choices such as these every moment.

It does not take a genius to look at the world to see the choices we are making and how most of us are responding to life. What is puzzling is why anyone would choose *not* to honor their “Godness.” It seems as if it would be the most wonderful and powerful choice you can make. Why would you ever choose gossiping over saying nice things about somebody or self-criticism over self-love or being mean over being kind? Why would you choose anything over being One with God?

It’s a great question.

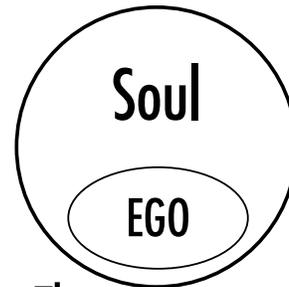
In The Beginning

If you have ever looked into a little baby's eyes (and if you have not, please do), what you see looking back at you is Infinity. You discover yourself looking at a being that has it all together.

We were all like that once.

This is a simple model of how that looks on the inside. Our spiritual nature (what we are calling the Soul) is always connected to the Divine and is shining through our eyes. The little ego, which is the beginning of a personality or sense of individuality, does not have much to do and therefore does not interfere with the sense of Spirit within.

The Spirit is the leading energy here. This integration of Soul and ego is what Jesus was talking about when He told us to become as "little children." He was encouraging us to enter back into that state of harmony and integration, but to do it consciously. In other words, Jesus asked us to be "born again." He told us to be born again into this integrated awareness of the dominance of the Soul over the ego, and to do that in such a way that we are conscious of it. The little baby is very well integrated with the Soul leading the way, but the baby is not conscious of that integration. It is simply in its natural state. We as adults are asked to enter into that state of integration consciously, and we can exercise the choice to do so.



**The
Integrated
Self
Unconscious
Stage**

Losing It

So what happened? How come we could not just move from unconscious integration to a conscious balance of ego and Soul? Well, what

happens is we get duped along the way; we get convinced that we are something other than One with God. We get convinced that other things are more important than being One with God. We become convinced that other things are more important than our spiritual nature.

Now those influences could be meaningful things in life, such as job, or money, or a relationship. These aspects of life are certainly significant, but we have a tendency to make idols or false gods out of these important things. Our “idols” begin to take the place of our Oneness with God, and we start losing touch with our true nature. We do not deliberately choose to put our Spiritual Self aside, but that is what happens. We forget the powerful maxim of Jesus, “Seek ye first the kingdom of heaven and all things else will follow.” Matthew 6:33 We forget the beautiful message in Emmett Fox’s *Golden Key*: “. . . whatever (concerns you), stop thinking about it and think of God instead.”³ We begin to seek our joy, our freedom, and our sustenance in sources other than God.

God is inside of us, but we do not always realize it, acknowledge it, or act on that truth. What is happening here? How do you begin to lose something so significant and meaningful as your own spiritual nature and the Presence of God in your life?

There are times when you might wake up in the morning and wonder who is going to show up. Is the person who knows “God is in you” going to show up? Are you going to perceive yourself as being in the flow of life — loving, strong, and gentle; or is this self-centered little ego, who thinks everything is about himself/herself, going to take center stage?

This dilemma of knowing what to do, wanting to do it, and yet going against your own positive desires is beautifully expressed by Paul in Romans: “I don’t understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can’t. I do what I don’t want to; I do what I hate.” Romans 7:15 Living Bible

How do these dynamics happen to unfold? It is important to understand the process of “forgetting,” then you can “remember.” You can get back to the belief “God is in me,” and allow your actions to flow from that belief.

Me and My Ego

We use the word “ego” quite often. Please understand this is not a Freudian or psychological explanation. The concept of “ego” here is an expression of your “limited, separate self.”

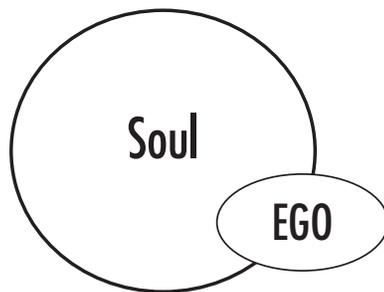
Your ego is an important part of your vehicle here on Earth. One of the major tasks of your ego is to establish a sense of individuality, and although that is a necessary piece of development, it can cause some difficulties. When you begin to make distinctions between yourself and others, you create a distance. Even your language creates a sense of separation; the simple use of the words “me” and “you” creates a divide. It is not surprising that the three most important words in a two-year old’s vocabulary are “no, me, and mine.” This is the time in development when the sense of individuality is consciously expressed, and with it the sense of separation.

Your ego also represents your personality, and all the different roles you play in life. Because the ego is responsible for your sense of individuality, your ego also lives with a certain amount of isolation. The ego by its nature has a difficult time seeing beyond itself, and because of its contracted vision and understanding, it experiences other individuals as threatening. It lives in either a constant state of overblown self-importance, or dramatically exaggerated unimportance. It is either saying, “Hey, pay attention to me!” or “Nobody loves me; nobody could love me.”

The ego can also be viewed as a primitive part of the self. It is an extension of our early evolutionary protection that has become part of our human condition. Imagine you are a little animal trying to survive here on planet Earth. You need to be constantly vigilant. If you are not wary, then something will swoop down and gobble you up. You need to be totally “self-conscious.” As soon as you start thinking about someone else, you will be distracted and stepped on and/or eaten. The little ego that is a part of you carries with it these same characteristics. Your ego is not a bad thing; it is just limited in its understanding of what is. When your thinking becomes distorted, you think your ego is all that you are.

Because the ego is so self-protective by nature, it perceives most

other egos as a threat. Even in the most benign of situations, egos can come in conflict with one another. For example, after a child is born and for some time afterward, in most average, loving homes, there is a sense of wonder and reverence around the new baby. The most insignificant things such as pooping, sneezing, and smiling are looked upon with exaggerated excitement, but after six months or so, the tasks of changing diapers, feeding, and cleaning-up begin to produce a bit of ennui or resentment. You might know you should not feel this way, but you do. “Why couldn’t he just have waited until I got the diaper on before he peed?” “We’re all out of baby cereal. Now I have to go to the store again. I wish she were eating more solid food.” Little by little what was wonderful begins to become abrasive.



The Ego Explores

Of course, there is some natural “newness” that wears off, but another thing that is happening here is that the child is developing its own ego. The baby is forming its own identity, and the child’s ego is beginning to “rub” against Mom and Dad’s egos. When egos meet, they inevitably clash.

So the question arises again, “How did we begin to get so lost in our ego consciousness?”

Our model continues to illustrate the process of our earthly development, and offers some ideas about our increasing identification with our ego and its limited perceptions.

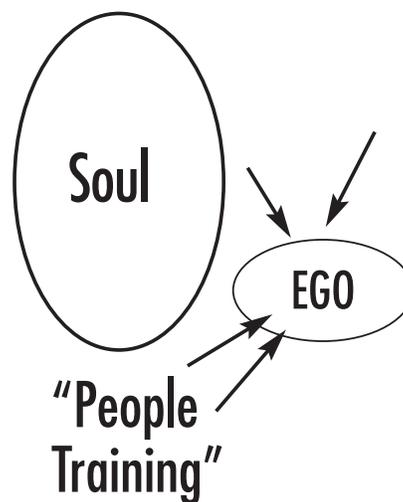
We begin to move from the integrated state of our Soul’s power being predominant over the ego to a stage of exploration and experimentation. Imagine the ego, which is linked to our intellect and our five senses, as a little craft that sets out to investigate the physical world. Again, presuming a relatively loving environment, the exploring ego finds the world a fairly safe and comfortable place. When you are cold, you get covered; when you are hungry, you get fed; when you are thirsty, you are given something to drink; when you cry, someone holds you.

People Training

Then a little further on in life, when this little undefined self goes out into the world to explore and discover who it is, one of the first things it bumps into are other people. All these other people, who are almost totally identified with their own ego consciousness, start telling you who you are. The paradox is that none of them know who *they* are, but they are experts on you! This stage of development is sometimes referred to as “people training.” Everyone is telling you who you are, and how you should act. They are even telling you what you are going to be when you grow up! All these voices are informing you, “You’re a nice boy or a nice girl” or “You’re just like your father.” “I love you when you giggle.” “You’re going to be a teacher just like me when you get bigger.” On and on; they never stop.

Because you are like a little sponge at this period of your life, little by little you take in these messages and begin to hold onto them. All these “things” other people are telling you become your idea of who you are. You become identified with all these roles you play, and you are taught to especially identify with your behavior. You become “good” or “bad.” Your identity becomes dependent on what you do. You begin to lose track of who you really are. As you experienced life in this way, you moved further away from the truth that you are made in the image and likeness of God. You moved more away from a sense of identity with your spiritual nature and Oneness with God. You experienced yourself as more and more separate.

These ego-related messages come from all sorts of people in charge, from your parents, priests, ministers, and teachers. Like most children, you assume all these authority figures must know what they are talking about; they must be right. Despite the power of these many nega-



tive and limiting messages, you might have still been aware of a sense inside of yourself that whispered all this egoistic information was not correct. Even after being bombarded with “people training” ideas, many people still have a deep feeling of spirituality and the presence of God. Even if the words were not there, you might have discovered that you still strongly believed, and *knew* you were unconditionally loved. Powerful inner critics spawned from all this “people training” objected to these wonderful and healing beliefs. They would say such things as, How could you be a lovable child of God if:

You displeased your parents?

You didn't obey all the rules?

You doubted what the minister told you?”

The list of objections to unconditional love and life in the Spirit was endless. You learned: “I am bad because I talk in school; getting all A's is not enough, I need to be sure to get all A's next time; I upset my mother so there is something wrong with me,” and on and on. You have all of this external negativity coming from so many of the authority figures in your life. It is not difficult to understand how that spiritual truth inside of you that “you are a blessed child of God” became fainter and more distant.

Soon your education broadens, and now you are not only influenced by the voices at home but also of church and school. Most of your schools put their emphasis on your intellect, which is aligned with your ego. Your church community places a lot of emphasis on your behavior. Even though you might not hear it spoken in words, the message, “You are what you do,” comes across loud and clear. If you have done something “wrong,” you hear “You are a bad boy or a bad girl.”

It is fascinating when reading the Gospels to discover the people Jesus had the most problems with were the Scribes and the Pharisees. These were the teachers of the law, the keepers of the letter of the law. They lived by the rule: “You are what you do.” In challenging them Jesus was saying, in effect, No, you are much more than what you do. What is inside of you is much more important than what is outside. God will not judge your negative actions if you are willing to change. The Spirit of God is within you!

For most of us, however, there was a constant barrage of messages, that made no distinction in your mind between your behavior, and who you are as a person. Probably no one knew how to help you distinguish between you and your behavior. It usually turns out when you did something to displease someone that you were a “bad boy,” you were a “brat,” you were a “liar,” or “a cheat.” Inevitably there was something wrong with you!

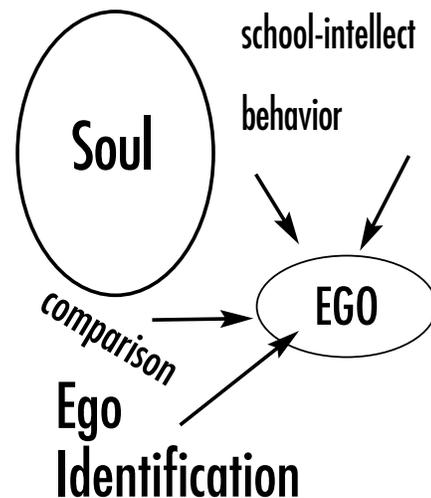
Consider how different it would have been if you had grown up with the messages, “You are a marvelous child of God, and you just did something unacceptable, and I love you just as much as I did a moment ago.” “I don’t like what you did, but I want to let you know that nothing can interfere with my love for you and certainly nothing can interfere with God’s unconditional love for you.” If these beliefs were spoken and assimilated, even by a fraction of the population, the world would be an amazingly different place.

It is easy to become more and more identified with the ego, and all of its aspects, especially your thoughts and actions, and the roles you play in life. As you become more solely identified with the ego you become more anxious, afraid, and self-conscious. You become more and more of an individual self, but also more and more alone and isolated. You find yourself lost and confused in a world that is continually giving you contradictory and mixed messages about who and what you are. Especially confusing and disheartening are the conditional love messages that tell you “I will love you if. . .” and “I will love you because.” As you learn and grow, you become more and more identified with this needy, wanting, and never satisfied part of yourself called the ego. You continue to think this is what you are, and you continue to lose more and more contact with that spiritual part of yourself. At the same time, your initial image of God as a loving and creative power living within you changes. God becomes this distant, external force that judges and then punishes or rewards you.

Your religious education misses the mark many times by teaching that you have a Soul, but never letting you know what a powerful force you have within yourself. You learn that you have a body and a Soul. The body, of course, is usually a source of temptation and evil. Then there

is this Soul, this spiritual part of you and me that no one can describe very well. Many of us learned our body would perish, but our Soul would live for all eternity. Somehow, even though our Soul was more essential than our body, our Soul was still subject to our body's whims. Even though our body was not all that important, if we let our body's desires get "out of control," we could get our Soul into a hell of a lot of trouble, literally. We were always told our Soul was the most important part of us, yet it somehow just stood helplessly by as our body and mind continued to mess up. Our Soul might have been significant, but it had no power.

We discovered we had all of these urges and desires, and most of them were directed toward something we had been told was bad or sinful. Our Soul never seemed to be able to do anything about that stuff. Sure, it was wonderful and Godlike and immortal, but it did not have any influence. Our appetites or our urges or even other people's opinions were more powerful than our Soul. Most of us never really learned about the infinite energy of Spirit, so we continued to put our focus on the power of the ego. Remember, the ego thinks it is alone, and so it has to do everything. We live in a world where the ego thinks it is IT. It thinks it is who you are.



I Become My Ego

As our education continues, we hear about the Spirit or the spiritual part of ourselves from church, and other sources, but we are taught to identify with the ego. We are taught to identify with fear, guilt, scarcity, and shame. Since we learn from experience and most of our experi-

ences are directed towards the ego, this is the part of ourselves with which we identify. This ego is who we think we are. Even in many churches we are denied direct experience with God or Spirit. We are told what to believe and how to feel. Visions, mystical experiences, and inner guidance are somehow reserved for the religious elite. To claim these experiences for ourselves, we are told, is to be overly proud and presumptuous.

Living this way, without much of a spiritual identity, is what the poet Thoreau called “quiet desperation.” We know there is something more; we just do not know what it is. Because we are continually looking outside for fulfillment, we are ripe for embracing anyone or anything that can help us feel more whole or complete. This yearning for wholeness, coupled with the sense that completion can only be found outside of the self, creates the fertile ground for addictions.

We become more and more identified with our little shuttle craft, our ego. The world around us helps to support this belief. Advertising is a great example. The whole gist of advertising is to make us feel deficient, and tell us that we will feel better, and be more complete, if we buy this or that particular product. Religious views support this belief. We are sinners, and that is it; we cannot do anything on our own; there is something wrong with us. All of these “we’s” refer to our ego; in actuality it is only a part of who we are. By the time we get to adolescence, however, we are so identified with our ego consciousness that it is difficult to perceive ourselves any other way.

Addictions: A Dead-End in Our Search For Wholeness

By this time it is probably easy to see why we begin to seek outside of ourselves for a sense of Oneness or security. A speaker by the name of Bob E. from California related there were two primary messages he got during his childhood. Now, nobody necessarily said these words, but the messages were: “There is something wrong with me” and “I am not enough.”⁴ What a profound way of describing the ego! Most of us, whether we heard the words verbally or not, are carrying around

those messages to some degree. These painful sensations of not being enough or having something wrong with us combine with a sense of incompleteness to create a powerful longing for peace and wholeness. We naturally begin to start looking for someone or something to heal our woundedness and relieve our pain.

We realize we cannot look inside ourselves for the answers because we have already decided “Something is wrong with me, and I am not enough.”

So we turn our focus outside of ourselves, and guess what is out there? It is a smorgasbord; it is like Alice in Wonderland! “Eat me; drink me; buy me, and I will make you whole and complete.” That is the promise of practically everything “out there.” The culture of consumerism and advertising is built on the idea of creating a need or a feeling of inadequacy. Once the “need” is created, then someone develops a way of filling that need. “Get hair, lose hair, change the color of your hair, straighten it, make it curly, condition it, bleach it,” and so on.

You have probably heard the word “co-dependency” before. Without going into a great deal of detail, co-dependency is the root of all addictions. Co-dependency is *seeking outside of ourselves what we can only really find inside*. The trap is if we are looking for wholeness, fullness, completion, and God outside of ourselves, we will never find it (remember that story of creation on page 4?). Looking for something in the wrong place never works. You probably recall that wonderful song title, “Looking for Love in all the Wrong Places.” Even knowing in your mind that God is inside of you does not keep you from continuing to look outside. Your old learning can be so ingrained and powerful that it defies logic and experience.

Surrender To Win

The transformation from the ego-restricted-self to Spirit-led-Consciousness can be called many things, such as “letting go” or “acceptance,” but it is usually referred to as “surrender.” Surrender is the process of “waking up.” Surrender is the true meaning of being

“born again.” Surrender opens us up to consciously embracing our natural state, which is having our Soul, our spiritual energy, in charge of our lives. The process can be triggered by many things, but surrender is probably most signified by willingness or a desire to change.

This moment of willingness is sometimes expressed as “being sick and tired of being sick and tired.” We come to the realization that everything we have been trying to do with the power of our ego is just not working. At this moment, we might not even be consciously aware of our spiritual nature; in fact, we probably are not. We just reach a point where we need to say, “Help me, I can’t do it anymore.” This is the moment when the structure of the ego collapses. For a brief instant the ego implodes, and the Soul shines through.

We get a glimpse of who we are beyond all the glitter and the garbage, beyond all the roles and all the things we think we are or we think we ought to be. We get a sense of unconditional love. We get a taste of God within, a personal presence inside of us. At the same time we can also “know” God outside of ourselves as a transcendent mystery. The “I” of me is no longer a stuck, helpless, addicted, self-centered little thing. In surrender we go beyond all of that, and we realize what it is like to sense the presence of God deeply within us.

We might not have words for all of this, but that does not matter. The experience is not an intellectual one. It is an inner experience of God and our Soul, our true nature. Although the experience might only last for a second or so, it can remain part of our awareness forever.

Many of us did not even know surrender happened when it happened, but when we awake, we realize we were never alone. Even if we could not feel it, Spirit was there to love and to guide. Grace is forever happening here, even when we do not know it or feel it.

The process of letting go is frightening. It is scary. Many of us con-



tinue to hold onto addictions and attachments because we do not know who or what we are surrendering into. We do not know what kind of God is going to be waiting for us on the other side of our surrender. The God we meet is nothing like the one we had learned about and feared. The God we encounter on the other side of surrender is Unconditional Love, Strength, Wisdom, and Light. We do not meet a person; we meet Love Itself. This moment of surrender is when the ego blinks out of existence, sometimes just for a split second. In that instant the full light of our Soul comes shining through. We are conscious of our connection with God, the Source of unconditional love.

The fact that we cannot consciously make this happen, as much as we might desire it, says that: “This moment of surrender is Grace.” It is a gift, but one that is freely given always. We only need to be open to receiving it. We can describe it in many ways: the realization of God’s unconditional love; the deep yet unconscious release of old beliefs; the vision to see ourselves as we really are. We see ourselves as miraculous shining lights, children of God, and the light of the Love of God here on planet Earth.

By intimating that surrender is not something we can consciously control, we do not mean to say our inside work is trite or meaningless. We believe our internal disposition, conscious or unconscious, is essential. It is from our heartfelt desire to change or transform that surrender springs, because this is a desire of the Soul to come to the forefront. Even though surrender is sometimes described as “ego death,” surrender is not about destroying the ego (which is what the ego thinks) but a matter of reestablishing our original identity, where the power of Spirit and our identification with Spirit creates a deep knowing of who we really are.

Waking Up Is Hard To Do

After a moment of surrender, we find the ego is tremendously resilient and comes back to “life” almost immediately. It begins its quest for getting back on top with a vengeance. This is a natural response. We

need to recognize that this reaction of the ego emanates from its sense of isolation and aloneness. We do not need to respond in kind. Reacting to the ego with anger or fear simply produces more anger and fear.

Sometimes we can choose to perceive our ego as a 3-year-old (which it is in many ways). We might like to think our ego has matured a little over the years, but most of the time it is still 3. So, let us suppose your “inner 3-year-old” is acting up. It is frightened or angry, and it wants to get its way. That is OK; it is just being a typical 3-year-old. We do not have to get angry or fearful back at it. We do not have to figure it out either. That is like trying to figure out a 3-year-old who does not want to talk with you. All we have to do is love it, even in its obnoxious state of behavior, and know that our Soul, connected with God, is in charge.

For example, let us say we are crossing the street and our real 3-year-old is having a fit because he wants to stay where he is or because he is afraid of all the noise and the cars. We do not have to get mad and just leave him there. We do not pound him into submission either. We pick him up and take him across the street.

Marianne Williamson says that when her ego acts up or gives her a piece of fearful information, she just gently pats it on the head and says, “Thank you for sharing,” and then prayerfully listens to her Soul for direction.

Although Grace presents itself in many ways, there are dramatic moments of surrender and Grace. Perhaps the most celebrated one is Paul on the road to Damascus, when he was thrown from his horse by a great light and heard the words of the Risen Christ, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Acts 9:4 From that moment, Saul, or Paul as he is now known, expressed himself in a very different way. Before his awakening he was a staunch persecuter of the Christians; now he was a Christian himself. He was so fired up on the truth of the Christ that he spent the rest of his life spreading the Word.

Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous was lying in a hospital bed undergoing his umpteenth detox treatment, when he cried out in despair and total frustration, “If there be a God let him show himself!” Wilson reports, “Suddenly, my room blazed with an in-

describably white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was pale by comparison. . . I became acutely conscious of a Presence which seemed like a veritable sea of living spirit. I lay on the shores of a new world.”⁵

For many, however, there is no drama. The answer to the prayer of the heart comes slowly and gradually, sometimes without our conscious knowing. For some it is comparable to taking a pain reliever for a headache. Once we take it we usually go about our business, then perhaps an hour or so later we recognize that the medication has worked; we do not have a headache any more.

Surrender is sometimes like that. We earnestly and deeply pray for peace and deliverance, then go about our lives as we must. Later on, in a moment of awareness we realize we are responding to life differently than before. We might realize we are much more at peace, less troubled, and we realize that the prayer worked. We recognize surrender has happened even if we were not conscious of it. We become aware we are in the gentle hands of Spirit rather than the fearful, harsh, and sometimes cruel hands of the ego.

The moment of grace is marvelously describe by Marion Woodman when she expressed, “. . . the god comes through the wound.”⁶ God comes through the wound. That is beautiful!

Before surrender, many of us have taken the road of addiction and attachment. It is not something we did on purpose, but it is the only road possible when we are looking for God and peace and truth outside of ourselves. When we are trapped in our limited ego consciousness, we live in the illusion that whatever it is we seek can be found outside of ourselves. We might even know we are seeking God, but our consciousness has become convinced that God cannot be in here (inside of me) — it must be out there someplace.

Strangely enough, it is addictions that lead us to this place of Grace. We might spend years looking outside of ourselves for God, for peace, for self-esteem. Finally, we reach that space when the ego can no longer sustain the illusion that it is in charge and can take care of everything, including things such as inner peace. When the illusion is pierced, the ego collapses and the Spirit of God (your Spirit) comes shining through.

Hitting bottom with addictions is a wakeup call and sometimes a trumpet blast reminding us that we are much more than our egos. Recovery from addictions can be the way we find our way home.

The gift of Grace is that through our woundedness comes the Light of the World. Through our woundedness comes the power and the presence of wholeness, love, goodness, and peace. Once we experience that Presence of God, nothing will ever be the same. We open to Spirit that was there all along, although we could not see it. We begin to realize Spirit is who we are.

There are so many things that can wake us up. It could be a death in the family, an illness, a divorce, losing a job, or hitting bottom in an addiction. Sometimes asking that age-old question “Is that all there is?” can be the opening to surrender and spiritual awakening. None of us can tell or predict what the event or circumstance will be for us or for anyone else. Along with the event or situation there has to be a certain internal disposition of readiness. This is so subtle and beyond our conscious control that it defies description, but willingness, conscious or unconscious, is an essential part of the process of “waking up.”

We have all probably had the experience of reading a book or watching a movie more than once, and noticing that a certain phrase or sentence or scene powerfully grabs us, and we wonder to ourselves why it did not affect us before. We might not even have remembered it the last time around, or if we did remember it, it never had much meaning to us. Now, however, it is ripe with meaning. What is the difference between the first time you came across that sentence or scene and now? The difference is that you now have some life experience that makes that part of a book or movie meaningful to you. You have a piece of life experience you did not have before. Obviously the book or the movie has not changed, you have. “Waking up” or becoming aware has a similar set of qualities. We have become open or ready for a new way of perceiving ourselves and the world.

In the Eastern traditions, it is believed that when the person is ready the slightest touch of even a drop of rain can produce enlightenment, but if the person is not ready a tidal wave can knock you over without any transformational effect at all! However it happens, we begin to

wake up to our Soul; we begin to wake up to the realization of God within. For most of us it is not usually a sudden, dramatic “road to Damascus” kind of experience. It is usually pretty gradual.

Grace can come subtly and gently as well as dramatically. However it shows itself, it reveals to us the secret of what we have been trying to reach all along. The secret is that we are not this little self-centered ego that is running around getting attached to anything it can. No, we are so much more than that. We are a part of God. We are a reflection of the creative Spirit. We are whole; we are perfect.

As we balance and become more and more identified with our spiritual nature, and the ego returns to its designated place, we again are led by Spirit, but now in a conscious way.

Having Soul; Being Soul

The Soul views life as a wonderful adventure, a marvelous school-room where all the answers are just waiting to be discovered. The world is a playground full of games; a never-ending dance. The Soul lives in the present moment where everything and anything is possible. From the Soul’s viewpoint, “I am free and loved unconditionally. Always.”

From the Soul’s perspective love is unlimited; there are no strings or conditions on love. The Soul knows it is loved in this unconditional way, and it returns that love without restraints. It can rejoice in the love coming from others and receive it openly. This is the wonderful part; we can give and receive in an unquestioning, loving way. The Soul carries with it no judgment, and no comparisons. It lives in an eternally calm and centered present. In the realm of non-judgment there is only peace, equality, and unity. Compassion springs naturally from the heart, for there is nothing to lose, nothing is threatened, and the person knows intuitively that “giving and receiving are the same.”

Imagine being completely in the present moment. In this present instant there is no judgment, there is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong; there just IS. Other than the basic survival instincts that are im-

portant to keep us out of physical danger, the Soul looks upon fear as an unnecessary part of life. The Soul realizes that the ego is like a child in the dark. Since fear is not essential to life, then in times of turmoil the Soul will gently ask, “What do you accomplish through your fear and guilt?” “Do you realize that you could be in this same place without expending all this energy on fear, guilt, and worry? Other than exhausting you, did all your guilt, worry, or your fear change anything?”

To the Soul there is no death. Death and all its counterparts, such as change, are simply manifestations of moving on, going to a different level, graduation. There is nothing to fear in this; it is the natural progression of things. As Easwaran states it: “To live completely in the moment is to realize immortality, here and now. Mystics who have lived like this tell us that in the complete unification of consciousness we are released from time; we are delivered from time into eternity.”⁷

Grace says, “Don’t hide your light under a bushel basket; you are whole; you are light, you are my son; you are my daughter. You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world. Shine, shine. You are the light and peace of the world; you are the Love of God, let your light shine and know that nothing, absolutely nothing, not drugs or alcohol or food or nicotine or anything else can get in the way.”

Ah, but even after surrender, even after awakening, even after the Soul and the Light of God have come through, we will forget, and lapse back into ego consciousness. We wake up, go to sleep, wake up, and go to sleep. We become aware of our true identity; we forget. Like right now. Just in the past minutes in reading this. There have been moments of insight when you became more aware of who you really are, and then, even with this book in front of you, your mind might have wandered off to a phone call you need to make, or the car that needs to be repaired, or the conversation you had yesterday, “Well, when he said that, I should have said this.” We are in touch with the deeper reality, and then before we know it, we identify with something else. We do not “lose it” on purpose, but we are so easily diverted from our Truth.

Rather than judging yourself for these lapses of consciousness, you are encouraged to accept that situations such as these are what life is all about. Life is about getting back to the Soul. It is not about going crazy

if you lose it. It is natural to be sucked into your body or your mind or your ego, and to begin to think or to act as if that is all you are. The secret is that as soon as you realize you are compromising your values, or being overly self-centered, or just concentrating on your pain, get back to your Soul; get back to God; get back to your center; get back to goodness and peace.

Judgment, especially self-judgment, does not get your Soul back. Meditation, prayer, affirmations you keep in your mind — these are the things that bring you back; they are reminders of who you really are. Sometimes little phrases such as, “God is in me and you” or “I choose to see the good” can help to bring you back to the truth.

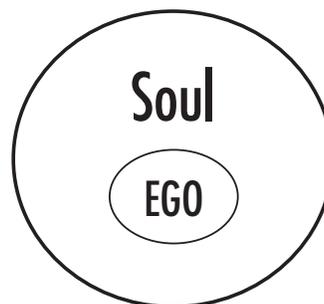
Here is where your choice comes in love or fear, the ego or the Soul?

Our goal is balance. The ego does not go away, but it is not in charge. Love is in charge; God is in charge.

When we transcend the ego we do not leave it behind. It is still a part of us. We can call it an illusion, but the fact is if we did not have an ego we could not be writing or reading this. Where the “illusion” part comes in is that we think our ego is all we are.

Your ego is like a coat rack where you hang all your various identities. You are a human being, but that is not who you are. You are a man or a woman, a husband or wife, grandmother or grandfather, a therapist, a plumber, a businessman, a housewife. None of those are who you are. That is why we say in meditation, “You are not your body, not your mind, not your emotions.” You have all those things, but in reality you are the unique expression of God. You are the image and likeness of God; you are the Christ; you are the One.

This is who you really are; you are One with God. In the past you



The Integrated Self

Conscious Stage

The ego is
directed by the
Soul

Balance of
Intellect and
Intuition

Decisions are
for the Higher
Good

missed the important fact that your spiritual nature had power. We learned that our desires had power, and our appetites had power. We learned God “out there” had power, but we did not have any. Shakespeare talked about “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” That is what life pretty much feels like when we are identified with our little ego, and have no sense of God within, no sense of the power of Spirit within ourselves. When we do not have that inner sense of “God-Power” then we experience ourselves as victims, having no control over the conditions of life.

If we have awakened to an awareness of “the God within,” even just a little, we have also awakened to the power of choice. We realize we do have the power to choose. We are not simply at the whim of our appetites, desires, patterns of behavior, or what other people think. When we know the power of God, the grace of God, the power of Spirit is within us, we can choose goodness, kindness, graciousness, abundance, and compassion. We can choose to act out of all those qualities of God that live inside of us.

The power of Spirit, the power of God within you is infinite. When Jesus reminded you of the “greater works” you will do He meant, the more you realize that your true identity is defined by the Divine Nature that dwells within you, the less you will give your power away to the “little you,” and the more you will choose to act from your “Godness.” Imagine what a different world this would be! Your choice now is “How do you choose to perceive yourself today, at this moment?”

Take a little time to go back to where we began this journey. Listening to the words of Paul again, of “Why do I do what I hate?” The answer is simple; we are living out of our ego and not our Soul, and our Soul, our spiritual nature, is the essence of who we are. The God within us is our deepest truth and our highest identity.

The goal we are working towards is an Integrated Self, where our spiritual energy is in charge. We are striving to establish that same balance of Soul and ego we saw in the little baby, but now to have that balance express itself consciously.

You have probably met some older human beings whose eyes shine as brightly as a baby’s. Many times these are the people who have

reached that blessed balance, and have achieved it consciously. Not that they are even aware of this as an achievement. They are not going around saying, “Hey, look at me; I’ve got it all together.” No, when speaking of having that balance consciously it means that many or all their decisions and actions in life are governed by their Soul. Their lives and their choices are guided by the higher good rather than the petty limited yearnings of the ego.

The Soul shines through. You are a spiritual being having a human experience. You are an integrated ego and Spirit, and you are expressing that consciously. That is your journey; that is your goal.

Thank you, God.

**I live now,
not I,
but Christ
liveth in me.**

GAL 2: 20

I had to go to the bathroom. I wasn't sure how much time had gone by since I picked up the book. I looked around, it was still light outside. I went to the counter where the old man was reading. I tried to get a glimpse of his book, but I couldn't quite make out the title, and I didn't want to be too nosey. I asked him for the bathroom and he pointed to the back of the store, and then I asked if I could leave the book I was reading with him; he just smiled and pointed to the counter, where I left it. As I walked towards the rear of the store, I glanced back just to make sure the book was still there. I came to an old wooden door; its lines had become smooth with uncountable layers of paint. I stepped into the tiny water closet; it was immaculately clean. I sniffed. No old bathroom smells and no flowery sprays either. “Far out,” I thought.

After I had finished, I turned to the little sink, washed my hands, and then checked myself out in the tiny mirror. I noticed some printing in the corner of the glass; it was a decal

like you would find on a car mirror. The printing stated, “Objects in mirror are better than they appear.” That’s what it said, “Objects in mirror are better than they appear.”

Hey, I thought, I am more than my ego. I’m more than my body. That made sense.

I picked my book up at the counter, thanked the man, and went looking for a more comfortable place to read. Over in a corner was a floor lamp and an old overstuffed chair. As I got comfortable, the book seemed to open itself up to the section on Love.

LOVE

“**A** man asked Jesus, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ and Jesus began his reply by saying, ‘You shall love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, and with all your whole Soul, and with all your whole mind.’” Matthew 22:36-37

And I thought to myself — yeah, yeah, yada, yada, yada. Not another one of these drippy rehashed overcooked lessons on love. But as I allowed myself to be open to the message, some thoughts began to ripen.

Well of course I love God with my whole heart and whole Soul, whole mind, and whole strength. And then I asked myself, “Do I really?”

How do I love God beyond the words, beyond just saying it? And I didn’t know.

Before you begin to think this talk of love is too mundane, take a moment and observe your life, and look at all the things that you love. Begin to notice all the little loves that get in the way of the Big Love. For example, you love your own comfort, don’t you? Americans only make up a small percentage of the world’s population and use about half of the world’s resources. Just on a physical level, you use up a good

amount of the world's energy on your own comfort.

Is that Love of God or love of comfort?

What about emotional comfort, which you love almost as much as physical comfort? How much food do you eat that you do not really need just to be emotionally and physically comfortable? (Then you exercise like crazy to burn up the calories!)

Is that Love of God or love of comfort?

The phone rings or there is a knock at the door. "I'm having dinner, damn it; I don't care if so-and-so wants to talk with me. I don't care if they've got problems — I'm eating, leave me alone."

Love of God or love of comfort?

I began to think of the first of the Ten Commandments; "I am the Lord thy God thou shall not have strange gods before me." Exodus 20:2

I hardly ever give much thought to that one since there are not a whole lot of pagan idols around my house. Then I thought of our family room and this huge idol right in the middle called a TV set.

Then I thought, "What about my stove, my refrigerator, my computer, my camera, my guitar? Have I ever let my love for any of those things interfere with a deeper, more complete love?"

Has your fear of losing any of the "important" things in your life ever pulled you into scarcity thinking or any other kind of negativity? Has your love of something other than God made you lose sight of the fact that God is your Source? Have there even been times when your fear of losing something has caused you to forget that you are completely and unconditionally loved? Has your fear ever led you into dishonesty or manipulation of others?

Love of God or love of things?

I began to get a sense that this question, "Is this the Love of God or something else?" was cropping up too often for comfort.

And then my mind kicked in and said, “Oh, come on. Being Christ In Training is fine, but give me a break. I’m only human, you know.”

You might think that to be Christ In Training is to deny your humanity. That is not true. Your humanity is part of who you are, but it is not the essence of who you are. The whole point of the training is to realize you are not just a human. To be a conscious Christ In Training, you are meant to realize you are in school, and your human body is your uniform. The training is to help you realize who you really are, and you are not your uniform.

As difficult as this might sound right now, your training is about being perfect, “You must, therefore, be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48

It is about perfectly knowing you are God’s child. When you know that perfectly, you realize you need to let go of anything that gets in the way of that perfect knowing. Before you can become the Love of God, you must open yourself to the Love of God within you. You must open yourself to the reality of knowing that you are loved, and before you can know you are loved, you have to believe that you can be loved.

Christ In Training cannot tolerate silly drama such as, “I know God forgives me, but I can’t forgive myself” or “I’m not worthy.” That kind of thinking is simply arrogant. It is what some people in recovery call “terminal uniqueness.” It is holding onto the notion that somehow or another everybody else can be loved, but you cannot.

When you recognize that style of conceit, you can begin to realize it does not come from the truth of you; it comes from that limited, fearful, needing-to-be-special ego consciousness. The truth of you is never arrogant. It is open and unafraid. Your truth is humble and strong in its expression. As Paul said, “Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. . . It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out.” I Corinthians 13:4-5 Living Bible

Paul also said, “When we cry Abba, Father, it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” Romans 8:15

As Christ In Training you recognize God as your Source — of everything.

Loving God is not an abstraction. It is praying many times during the day, “God, I don’t know the answer. I don’t know how to do this. I don’t know how this will be accomplished. You do. Please, show me.” Christ In Training is all about praying and loving with surrender in all circumstances. If your intention is losing weight, healing an illness, asking for peace in the world, or letting go of a resentment or fear, pray with a surrendering heart. Know that the Love of God is always with you.

Jesus went on to say that, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Luke 10:27

Then of course the book presented me with the quintessential story on loving others, The Good Samaritan. We’ve heard the story hundreds of times, but when I heard it this time it was really challenging. It woke me up.

There was once a man who was planning an act of terrorism. As he was traveling, he was jumped, beaten, and robbed by a gang who cared only for themselves. They left the man at the side of the road, bloody and dying.

A priest, a man of God, walked by, and saw him there and moved to the other side of the street. The man cried out for help, but the priest pretended he did not hear. He needed to get to his church; his congregation was depending on him.

In the same way, a doctor, a healer, walked by on his way to the hospital where he worked, and saw the man who was now moaning in pain. The doctor also moved to the other side of the street. He could not afford the chance of a malpractice suit.

A construction worker came by, saw the man and heard his cry, he started going over, but he decided not to, he just could not get involved. He thought to himself, “Who knows what that person might have been mixed up in?”

A family went by — Dad, Mom, and the kids, they too saw and heard the man, they were drawn to help him, but someone said, “Maybe it’s a trap, a setup; we’d better not stop.”

And finally an off-duty policeman walked by. He was thinking about his brother officers lost on 9/11. He saw and heard the man. He went over, looked at him, and knew exactly who and what he was. Initially he was filled with rage. The urge to inflict more pain and revenge was strong in him, but he also remembered he was Christ In Training, and so was the wounded man in front of him. The officer got a blanket, wrapped the man in it, and carried him to his car. He tended his most serious wounds and then drove him to the nearest emergency room, where he enlisted the care of a physician he knew. He said, "Treat him as you would a fellow officer. I will come by later and check on him. I'm good for any expenses."

"Then Jesus asked, 'Which of these, do you think, proved neighbor to the man?' And the questioner said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said, 'You go then and do the same.'" Luke 10:37

It is written, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." 1 John 4:20 And who is my neighbor, you may ask? Here are a few examples: the person in front of you who is going too slow, the person behind you talking at the movies, the guy who shortchanged you at the store, the annoying guy who wears his hat in the restaurant, the woman jabbering about nothing on her cell phone, the person who left the shopping cart blocking your car, the person who is late, and Osama bin Laden and all the rest. These are all your neighbors, and all your neighbors are Christ In Training. If you leave even one of them out of your heart, it does not work. Being Christ In Training is being reminded every moment that no one is better than you and you are no better than anyone else.

Be careful, there is a deep lesson here. Throughout history there are experiences of violence and oppression. It is easy to feel anger and hatred when you hear names such as Stalin, Hitler, and Osama bin Laden. You are told to love them, and you feel a resistance. You know you "shouldn't" feel that way. It is natural to take these seemingly unacceptable people, and say, "Yes, you are my neighbor, but I'm not putting you in the same room in my mind with my grandkids. I still love you, but you go over there."

Sorry. That will not work. Christ In Training is not a popularity contest. It is the recognition of Jesus' statement when asked, "Lord when

did we see you hungry or thirsty . . . or naked . . . or sick?” and Jesus’ answer, “Truly I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.” Matthew 25:37-40 There must be room in your heart for everyone — no exceptions, no separation.

A Course In Miracles makes reference to something it calls “special relationships.” It is a way you have of making some people or relationships better than others. It says that “special relationships” keep you from the Love of God and the love that you are.

Well, I thought, that’s baloney. My wife Margo is certainly special to me; my granddaughters are special to me. Are they trying to take that away?

I wrestled with that one for a while until I finally had a picture in my mind of our granddaughters, and seeing their lovely smiles, and feeling my heart open and lighten. It was a wonderful mixture of sensations. While I was experiencing that heart opening, the message I was searching for became very clear. It was this: Notice the love and openness of your heart right now (as you think of your grandchildren); this is the way you are being asked to love everyone. This is how to love everyone, not just someone “special.” And I got it.

Another Christ In Training, Buddha, put it this way, “See yourself in others; then whom can you hurt; what harm can you do?”

It is your job to see *everyone* as Christ In Training. That is your mission. You do not know what other people’s assignment might be. Their job might be to bump into you, or hold the door for you, or do something else to help you learn whatever it is you need to learn. As Christ In Training one of the questions you can ask yourself is, “How many disguises did I see through today, and what disguises tripped me up?”

This is not easy, and it is going to take more than just a New Year’s resolution to change life-long patterns of hatred and fear. Even Jesus said, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Matthew 10:34 The sword is what you experience when your little ego’s self-centered ideas come up against

the Truth of Love. That truth is *you must perceive everyone as a brother and sister*. Everyone you experience today, tomorrow, and forever, no matter what disguise they might be wearing, is a child of God and Christ In Training just like you.

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35 How many times must I come back to that truth? As Jesus said about forgiveness, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” Matthew 18:21-22

THE WORK OF CHRIST IN TRAINING

There is a wonderful old joke: a tourist in New York asks someone on the street for directions. “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” he asks. Instead of giving the expected directions to the location of the concert hall, the man who was questioned responds, “Practice, practice, practice.” (Performing at Carnegie Hall is the epitome of achievement for a singer and/or musician.) Well, that is how you work on being Christ In Training: “Practice, practice practice.” The practical daily choices you can make follow the directive: Choose what opens your heart and choose to release what closes it.

When you completely open yourself to love, you become God incarnate, you become the Christ. There is no “me” or “you”; there is just love. There is just the realization that all the masks and disguises people wear are just another way of pointing to the fact that everyone is Christ In Training.

Could you imagine what it would be like to be fully and completely open to all the love that is?

FORGIVENESS AND NON-JUDGMENT

Christ In Training knows the biggest hindrance to loving well is *judgment*. The ego uses judgment as a powerful tool to create a sense of separateness. The separateness of judgment can

happen when you hold onto any implication of difference. Difference can take many forms such as being right, or being superior, or even being less than. Every judgment produces a never-ending spiral of separation. With judgment, there is division, and a sense of alienation. These judgmental thoughts produce anger, self-justification, a greater need to defend oneself, and then more judgment. Judgment is a withholding of love. It is a hindrance to the gift of life. It prevents the gift of Christ-Life and Christ-Light from flowing through you.

Some common distinctions we make in the world of matter are that things are good or bad, black or white, beautiful or ugly. As soon as you make the judgment that something is ugly, you have cut yourself off. You have just severed part of your being, from yourself, and from the rest of the world. You have become much less of a person. You have become much less of a lover than you could be. You have become much less Christ In Training.

Judgment, and the sense of separation that comes with it, engenders feelings of fragmentation and incompleteness. Notice how those inner sensations are going to color your whole perception of the world. When you fail to perceive the beauty in any one thing, you also separate yourself from the beauty of all creation. Even more, you cut yourself off from your own beauty and preciousness.

Beauty is not just in the eye of the beholder; beauty is the essential quality of everything. *Everything*. All is beauty, and if you leave anyone or anything out of the universal circle of beauty by your judgment, you leave yourself out too. The flipside of this is also true. When you perceive anything as beautiful, that perception opens you up to love; it opens you up to caring and compassion. No matter what that object might be, when you discern beauty, your heart is open in love. If you want to have an instant definition of beauty, beauty is anything you perceive without judgment.

Notice that judgment is a creation of the mind and the ego; it really does not exist in the true nature of things. Here is an example of the “mind stuff” of judgment: You are walking through a forest, and since you love nature, you are having a great time hiking through the woods, and you look around and say, “This forest is made of oak trees and as

nice as they are, they really should be maples.” How ridiculous! Someone gives you a wonderful bouquet of flowers and you say, “Those roses are beautiful, but they should be lilies.” As soon as you make that kind of a judgment that something fits and something else does not, your judgment destroys the beauty that was there.

Now, we all make judgments such as that, sometimes without even thinking. As Christ In Training we are being asked to perceive beyond appearances. Jesus was constantly doing that. He would hug lepers; He would hate the sin and love the sinner. He was continuously encouraging those around him to really *see*. “He, who has eyes, let him see.” Mark 8:18 See beyond your thoughts. See beyond your feelings. See beyond your preconceived notions. See beyond what you think other people want you to see.

We pray in the Lord’s Prayer that “we might be forgiven as we forgive.” If you want to be forgiven; you forgive. If you desire the peace and freedom that comes from non-judgment, then you need to be tolerant as well. What you express comes back to you.

Forgiveness and non-judgment are closely entwined; they are almost mirror images of one another. Jesus said, “Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get.” Matthew 7: 1-2 For Christ In Training this is another way of saying, “We are all One.” The realization that whatever you put out there will come back to you is an expression of the law of karma, or put biblically, “You reap what you sow.” Galatians 6:7 And why is that true? Because we are all One. The law of love states that same truth: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

I watch TV. I'd like to think I don't watch it too much, but I know at times it is a completely mindless escape for me. If I happen to be channel surfing, I can come across all sorts of different characters. Some people are trying to sell me something I don't need; some people want to convert me to their ideology; some want to entertain me; some are just doing what they do for reasons that are beyond me.

As I was thinking about non-judgment, I wondered what it would be like to zip through all of those channels and not make one judgment about anybody.

I would not make anybody too fat or skinny, or beautiful or ugly, or egotistical or obnoxious or stupid or crazy or self-centered. If I could go through 75 or so channels and not make one judgment about anybody, man, I would have arrived! You know what? I'm not even close!

Now, the reasoning is simple, but the doing — ah, there is another story.

The person you are judging because of the way they look or the way they act, that person is also Christ In Training, just like you. They might be learning a different lesson right now, but that does not matter. Whoever that person is, he or she is Christ In Training. How often do you forget that?

Well, I had been studying this Christ In Training book for a while, and at this point I was getting a little annoyed. Being the genius that I am, I started poking holes into this whole Christ In Training idea, and Jesus in particular.

Hey, I thought, If you were so loving and non-judgmental and forgiving, what about the Scribes and Pharisees you were yelling at all the time. Man, you were hell on wheels with those guys. You called them blind guides, whitened sepulchers, and all kinds of other stuff. What was that all about?

I was almost sorry I asked that question.

My manual pointed out to me there are all kinds of lessons to learn from Jesus' interaction with the teachers of the law.

We all forget. Hopefully these continuing lessons about judgment for Christ in Training will help you find ways to remember.

1) **Nothing is more contradictory to the law of love than the abuse of authority.** This is especially true when that authority touches other people who depend on you and look to you for help and guidance.

Wow, how many times have I either ignored that truth or not even thought about it, with my students, my clients, and my grandchildren?

How many times have I put the desires of my ego above the more important needs of others? Just for instance, as a teacher sometimes it was much easier to ask a question with a predetermined answer than it was to accept whatever answer a student gave and help to find some truth in it.

As a counselor it is sometimes easier to direct and instruct than it is to take the risk of challenging the other person, and risk not being liked.

When my back is against the wall with the children in my life, it is much easier to fall back on, "Because I said so," as opposed to finding a loving solution. It is so much easier to say, "Stop doing that" or give a time out than it is to work at discovering what the real problem is and finding solutions.

To Christ in Training, authority carries high responsibility.

2) **It is important to stand up for what you believe in no matter what the consequences, even death.**

Jesus' interaction with the Scribes and Pharisees was not a matter of being right. That is an ego thing again. For Jesus, it was more a matter of speaking the Truth. He was suggesting to the teachers of the law: You are not taking care of what is inside of you; you have somehow let that go. You are not taking care of your Soul, your Spirit, your essence, your God-self. You have lost track of what is really important. You have become so absorbed in appearances that you have lost touch with the inner truth of who you are.

He was angry at them not just because they let their outer values dictate the values of their inner world, but because they made themselves

exclusive. In effect, they said to the world, “We are beautiful, and you are not.” They also said, “The only way to be OK is to do it our way.”

The egotistical message the Scribes and Pharisees were delivering to the people was *you are what you do*. The whole purpose of being Christ In Training is to discover that even though your actions are important, you need to know that who you are is much more than what you do.

I used to lie to get myself out of tight situations. I had a lot of shame in me, and I found it very difficult to even imagine that other people might think I was wrong or that I made a mistake. So I would tell “white lies” to cover up. I remember when I first thought of doing that with Margo. I don’t know what the situation was now; I might have forgotten a phone message or neglected to communicate an important piece of information. Whatever it was, I found myself feeling ashamed and wanting to cover it up. Before the untruthful words were out of my mouth, I realized I did not want to do this anymore. I did not want to have dishonesty enter our relationship. I owned up to whatever it was that I would have preferred to hide. I was surprised to find out that the ceiling didn’t cave in. I was not made to feel bad or ashamed. Most importantly, the incident was over. It was done with. There was no baggage. What I do, or don’t do, might have an effect on others, but it is not who I am. I realized that Margo loves me for who I am.

3) The only ultimate authority is God, as God speaks in your heart.

Scripture tells us that judgment is in God’s hands, not ours. “For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ and again, ‘the Lord will judge his people.’” Hebrews 10:30

In other words, only God knows the heart of another. Only God can comprehend the myriad pieces of past and present that go into someone’s actions. You know you have freedom of choice, but there are so many influences that contribute to the way people act. Your actions

are motivated by past hurts or woundedness, defenses that you have built up to protect yourself, doubts, fears, addictions and compulsions, ego needs to impress or get attention, and so many other factors, both conscious and unconscious.

How many times have you said to yourself, “Why the heck did I do that?”

This is not a suggestion of irresponsibility; it is a suggestion that you remove judgment, that you leave judgment in God’s hands where it belongs.

I remember walking through a grade school a few years ago. I passed by a third-grade classroom, and in front of the room, hanging from the ceiling, was a huge sign that said, “JUDGMENT.” Sometime later, I was able to ask the teacher what that was all about. She said, “In this classroom, judgment is suspended.” That was great!

A Maxim of Jesus: “Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye.” Luke 6:42 The Scribes and Pharisees refused to see. They refused to turn and look within. Jesus’ anger was an intervention. It was an invitation in the only language they might understand.

Some Pharisees like Nicodemus got it, even though they came by “dark of night.” John 3:2 In the end, to emphasize the power of love, there was no anger. Jesus’ enemies received his sadness and compassion; “Father, forgive them; they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34 What a lesson in forgiveness and non-judgment!

Judgment can take many forms. Christ In Training is encouraged to be wary of all of them. A most common form of judgment is comparison, and it is always a losing game. As stated in the oft-quoted poem by Max Eharmann, “Desiderata”: “If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain and bitter; for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself.”⁸

Prejudice is judgment. It is perhaps the most destructive kind. Jesus

spent a lot of energy on getting rid of this one. It was almost as if He hung out with those who would draw the most criticism, and then directed people to look beyond labels, to see beyond appearances. The Scribes and Pharisees, who clung to appearances, pointed out many times that Jesus kept company with tax collectors, wine drinkers, and whores. To Jesus, they were all Christ in Training.

Self-criticism is a form of judgment that lives with many people like an infectious disease. As someone put it, “We are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves and unfortunately most of us do.” Whenever you allow yourself to be less than you are, self-judgment has taken over. As Christ In Training, if there is a message you can continually give yourself, it is: “With God, I am more than this situation. With God I am unconditionally loved.” When you give the power of judgment back to God, you no longer have to lose your own power in ways that do not serve anyone. Letting go of your judgment, anger, and helplessness allows you to acknowledge that, “There is nothing that God and I can’t handle.”

The scripture of forgiveness and non-judgment continually directs you back to looking at (not judging) yourself. When you direct yourself inside, you meet all of your projections in what Carl Jung called “the shadow.” The shadow is not a bad part of you; it is just all of those pieces hidden and disowned by your consciousness. As long as it stays hidden and denied, it will continually come back to haunt you.

If there is something you see in someone else, you probably have it yourself. As a recovery phrase goes, “If you spot it, you got it.” Please, do not interpret this idea in an overly simplistic way. As a general rule, if someone else’s smugness or self-righteousness annoys you, well, you might have a similar kind of self-righteousness that you have not wanted to examine. Another possibility is that you might be afraid that other people view you as smug and/or self-righteous. It is the fear of this fault rather than the fault itself that might be prompting your reaction.

Your judgment about what you are calling ugliness comes from anything inside of you that you still think is ugly or not right. Every bit of hatred, every bit of resentment, every bit of unhealed woundedness

that you are carrying around inside of you contributes to your perception of the world and other people.

A big thing for me was seeing the phoniness in other people. Then I thought, "Oh my God, that's probably because I'm so phony myself." I really sat with that one. I certainly know there are times when I am not as real as I could be. Lurking in my shadow, though, was not a whole bag of phoniness so much as the fear of being labeled a phony. The fear, if not acknowledged, can be just as destructive as the real thing.

So often I find myself becoming angry at someone, and then a few minutes later I find myself doing the same thing to someone else. I'm driving along, and someone comes annoyingly close to me. I get angry. Then I am lost in my own thoughts, and someone honks at me, and I discover I'm dangerously close to the yellow line. Whoops! I just did to someone else what I got angry about a few moments ago.

As with any other addiction or fault, you need to own it first and then embrace it as part of yourself before it can be let go, healed, and transformed. You are encouraged to bring these hidden things into consciousness, and through grace accept and embrace those "unacceptable" parts of yourself. As you are doing that, you begin the process of healing and transformation. When you set yourself to the task of unearthing and healing the shadow, you no longer have to project your faults onto others. You are relieved of a huge burden of judgment and wasted energy.

The Gospel of Thomas states: "Jesus said, 'If you bring forth what is in you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is in you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.'"⁹ Bring forth your shadow. Bring forth all those unacceptable things, and allow God to heal and transform them. Do not let them decay and fester inside of you. Be aware of how you project your own faults and your own dislikes onto others. Neither judge nor condemn yourself for this, but

be aware of what needs to be made whole within you. Offer it to the Father to be healed and transformed.

I never thought I had much anger in me. What I think happened was, I observed my family and it seemed as if anger was usually used to hurt or control somebody, and anger was never resolved. Anger hung around like nuclear waste; it had a half-life of 50,000 years! People would say something like, "OK, that's it. We will never bring that up again." I knew, though, that if someone ran out of ammunition in the next argument, that "thing," like an old black arrow would be shot off into someone's gut.

I disliked anger so much and was so afraid of it that I convinced myself I did not have any. Of course, it all got stuck in my shadow. I was both unconscious of my anger and in denial about it. What happened then was my anger would keep coming out in various ways. You can deny your shadow, but it's still going to express itself. My unacknowledged anger would come out as passive-aggressive behavior, cynicism, and, probably worst of all, depression.

It took some time, therapy, and healing to be OK with my anger. I realized practically everybody gets angry sometimes, and that the expression of anger does not have to be harmful or destructive.

As soon as you discover yourself being judgmental, you can turn that judgmental thought around and say, "What is going on with me that produces such an angry, defensive reaction?" Your ways of using judgment can teach you much about yourself if you are willing to look.

Judgment shows up in its most destructive, potent, and negative form when you are judging yourself. Think of what you do to yourself with your self-criticism. Can you imagine what it would be like to talk to another human being the way you talk to yourself? Does God think of you the way you think of yourself? What is God thinking of you right now? Questions such as that will halt your negative thinking. Questions

such as these can bring you to the realization that any negative thoughts, any thoughts at all that put you down, or make you less than a Divine, unconditionally loved child of God, are not God thoughts. They are ego thoughts. They are not thoughts God is thinking about you, and therefore have no truth. These ego thoughts of negativity have no reality. Well, they only have the reality or the energy you choose to give them. If the nature of God is Love (and it is), then God can only think loving thoughts — even about you!

I recalled a moment a few years ago when I was feeling somewhat down and depressed. I was lonely, feeling unlovable. I began to pray, and the thought came to me, “I wonder what God thinks of me?” I was almost afraid to ask, I mean what if He told me the same things that I was thinking?

As risky as it felt, I prayed, “God, what do you think about me?”

I got an answer immediately. I just connected with these words inside of me, “You are my son, and I love you.” A weight was lifted; I felt more whole and much lighter. Then, of course, my ego chimed in by saying, “Oh, you just made that up.” But I knew I did not, the answer to my prayer was too perfect; it was too immediate for me to conjure up. At that moment I connected with the truth of God’s thought within me: “You are my son and I love you.”

Another question you can ask yourself is: “What is it that I am still holding onto about myself that is getting in the way of my true perception of beauty, especially the beauty inside of me?” “Judge not” to Christ In Training means keep the focus on yourself in a loving way. Accept, embrace, and release old thoughts, old patterns, old beliefs that no longer serve you.

One of the most exquisite and profound teachings on the subject of non-judgment is Jesus’ parable of the Publican and the Pharisee. You might recall that the Pharisee went to the front of the synagogue and proclaimed in his prayer, “I thank you, God, that I am not like other men . . . even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I pay my tithes

of all that I get,” and on and on. The publican, a tax collector, on the other hand, stayed in the back of the synagogue and prayed, “God, be merciful to me a sinner.” Jesus asked the crowd, which was made up of many Pharisees, which man’s prayer was justified. Of course there was probably a lot of squirming and shuffling of feet, because it was obvious that the Publican was much more honest in his prayer. Now, here is the lesson: you hear or read that story, and without thinking, you say to yourself, “Thank God I am not like that overblown pompous Pharisee.” Look, you have gotten caught up in judgment again without even realizing it! Luke 18:10-14

And so it is that you are directed back to looking at yourself, not to condemn, but to grow. You shine the light on yourself to get out of your old destructive patterns. Only you can do that for yourself in cooperation with Grace. As Jesus said so many times to those He had healed, “Go and sin no more.” In other words, be aware of what contributed to bringing you to this state. Be aware and choose differently.

When you are in a place of non-judgment, there is no need for forgiveness, for in non-judgment you see only beauty in all things and approach all things with love. But in your limited perception you will judge, you will do harm, you will be unloving. The corrective tool for being all too human in our judgments is forgiveness.

Forgiveness, of course, is also another way of letting go of judgment.

As mentioned before, Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Peter probably thought he was going way beyond what would be expected of anyone, but Jesus replied, “I do not say to you seven times, but 70 times 7.” Matthew 18:21

In other words, you are asked to forgive always and forever. Forgiveness has no limits.

Another simple yet profound example of the forgiveness of Jesus is found in the story of “the woman taken in adultery.” There was a woman who was brought to Jesus as one of the many “tests” from the Scribes and Pharisees. After Jesus “wrote with His finger on the ground” and everyone left the scene, Jesus asked the woman, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? Does anyone condemn

you?” She replied, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you, go and do not sin again.” John 8:11

Jesus even forgave those who crucified Him unjustly, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Luke 23:34 He set a goal about forgiveness that indicates to all of us how far we have to go.

As Christ In Training you realize that nobody is doing anything to you. Life happens, and people can be mean and cruel and hurtful, but that is their stuff, not yours. You certainly do not need to be a victim, nor do you need to think that everything that goes on in life is about you.

A teacher once suggested that you look within and notice what is bothering or annoying you, and observe who or what you are blaming. Instead of projecting all those feelings outside, notice what is going on inside of you that needs healing. Let us say, for instance, you are in a noisy city and you are used to the quiet of the country. The city could be disturbing to you; that is understandable. But the city is not doing anything to you; it is just being the city. You are the one who is upset. The question is, if you choose to stay in the city, how are you going to deal with the upset? Complaining about the city might deflect some of your bad feelings, but it certainly is not going to change anything. Look inside yourself and realize and respect your need of quiet and solitude. Help yourself to find that space and time even within the noisy city. The city will become much less of a burden, and you will be much more at peace. And when you step back from that learning experience you will realize the city has not changed at all, but you have.

It is raining. The rain is not doing anything to you; it is just being the rain. You dropped the broccoli. The broccoli did not do anything to you; it was just obeying the law of gravity.

I thought about the times in my life when I felt God was “doing” something to me. I went back in my mind to a pivotal learning in my life: my mother’s funeral. I was just coming to terms with my father’s death. He passed quietly in a coma, which I guess is like sleep. Dad was alcoholic, and I deeply know some of his pain and confusion with life. He

seemed to let go gently, which was different for him. I was not physically present, but I knew when it happened.

It was not his death that I was dealing with that day, though. It was my Mom's. She had died just a couple of days ago, and I was coming out of shock, feeling both anger and sadness welling up inside like a bubble ready to burst, and an anger and sadness descending on me like a cold wet cloth, smothering me.

I walked outside the funeral home with its indirect lighting and muted colors into the grayest day I have ever experienced. There is nothing grayer than a gray day in Brooklyn in March. The sky was gray, the buildings were gray, the sidewalks and streets were gray, even the air was gray.

I was still stunned by her passing. Mom was healthy and working through her grief over Dad's passing. She had just moved to a new place, close to friends and family. In fact, she had moved back into her old neighborhood, where she grew up, and where I grew up as well. I had just talked with her on the phone, and she was pleased with her new place, even though she had not settled in yet. It was fixed up just the way she wanted it, and she would be moving in completely in a few days. I could tell she had found a home. We were even talking about going to Ireland that summer.

Two days after talking with my mother, my aunt called and told me Mom had died that evening. She had a case of the flu; the doctor thought she might have a slight touch of pneumonia and wanted her to stay overnight at the hospital; during her time there she developed a blood clot and died suddenly.

I stepped into the gray outside, confused, hurt, sad, and angry. I looked up to the bleak sky that seemed to be a mirror of my own grayness that day. I thought I believed in a kind and a loving God; this loving God was in stark contrast to today's feelings of doubt, hurt, and despair. I

screamed to the gray heavens, to this God I had my doubts about, "Why do you make me hurt so?"

As happens sometimes with prayer, an answer came immediately in my mind (there were no voices, no thunder-claps; I just knew), "Gerry, I am not hurting you or making you hurt. You hurt because you chose to love; you hurt because you chose to love."

What a revelation! I chose to love my mother, my father; they were no longer physically present to me; therefore, I hurt.

That was a moment of surrender, of letting go, but also a moment of embracing the entire situation. I had to let go of blaming God for my hurt and my pain, but I also had to embrace the pain as my own, and realize it was not just pain, but also a reflection of heart-felt love as well. As Gibran says so wonderfully, "the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was often times filled with your tears. How else can it be?"¹⁰

Forgiveness in its most complete form is not blaming anyone for anything. It is accepting responsibility for whatever is going on with you, and opening yourself up to the healing and transformational power of God.

If someone cuts you off in traffic, are they doing something to you? They are not even thinking about you. They are wrapped up in what they are doing, what they need to do, or where they need to go. You have no idea if they are hurrying home to a sick child or a six-pack (either way it is none of your business). You have no idea if they are hurt, angry, confused, lost, or just in a bad mood. You are affected by what they do, certainly, but they are not doing anything to you. You choose how much you are going to be affected by the actions of others.

I had to laugh to myself. I had this absurd image of Jesus getting cut off in traffic and having a fit. I couldn't imagine Jesus (or Buddha or Gandhi or Mother Teresa) flipping somebody the bird for cutting him/her off. See, they realize nobody

is doing anything to them. They simply recognize the other person as Christ In Training just like them and they move on. There is no ego attachment there. They have learned to "let be."

One of the ways forgiveness comes about is the recognition of the emotional price your anger and resentment takes out on you. That is what you are letting go of; you are letting go of anger and resentment, and its emotional burden. You realize that by holding onto these things you are punishing yourself, not the one that hurt you.

Christ In Training is constantly learning how to let go. You are continually encouraged to release anger, fear, pain, self-righteousness, and the idea that it is "all about you." When you release all of that, there is less energy given to the ego and more to the Soul. You also have a lot more room inside of you for love and compassion.

Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Matthew 5:44-48

As Christ In Training, you are always learning to bless all those whom you encounter. All those you touch and who touch you are Christ In Training. I have no idea what their lessons are or what they are learning. I bless them, just as I desire to be blessed.

There are many misnomers about forgiveness. Forgiveness is not about allowing someone to be irresponsible, and it certainly is not about you being a victim. You will notice Jesus was never a victim and never irresponsible, but always forgiving.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person and everything to do with you. So statements such as, "They don't deserve to be forgiven" are meaningless. The real questions are "What are you holding onto?" and "What are you getting out of it?"

Does it take grace and humility to let go? Of course it does. The ego wants to control; it wants to be God. The ego wants to say, “Vengeance is mine; I will be the one to enact the punishment.”

Forgiveness is another way of surrendering. It is releasing to God what is God’s. Forgiveness is the way you can be healed of the toxicity you created from your own anger, resentment, and self-righteousness.

Just as you cannot consciously perform any act of surrender, you cannot forgive until you are ready. You can consciously prepare yourself for surrender by affirming your willingness, by loving the sinner (but hating the sin), by accepting and embracing your own faults and failings, but the ultimate letting go will happen when your Soul opens up to the cleansing power of Spirit. You can make yourself ready for the “bridegroom’s” arrival, but you are not in control of the “day or the hour.”

I remembered something I heard at a recovery meeting. It was a quote from what is sometimes referred to as the “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous. Even justified anger “was the dubious luxury of normal men.”¹¹ The ego can be quite convincing in letting us know we are right and therefore justified in our judgment. Whether you agree with that or not, the statement makes a powerful point about how toxic anger and resentment can become.

We will have anger, of course; we will have justified anger, for sure, but to hold onto it and use it as a tool for judgment, comparison, or self-righteousness is dangerous to all of us.

Feeling your feelings is not the same as holding onto toxic ones. With forgiveness you need to feel your feelings, the hurt, the anger, and the sadness. It is only when you feel those things fully, that you are going to be able to cleanly let go. If you attempt to let go before you have felt what you need to feel, you are going to be fooling yourself and creating an emotional quagmire.

For years I used to listen to well-meaning people say something to the effect of, “Honey, you need to forgive him.” And I would see people really trying to do it, and coming

back with the same feelings plus a load of self-condemnation because they did not feel they were doing it right.

I discovered if people tried to rush the process of forgiveness without feeling what they needed to feel, they would often be left with all their old toxic feelings along with a sense that they “deserved” what happened to them. Instead of being free of those old destructive feelings, they were now burdened with a deeper sense of victimhood. Whenever I get the opportunity, I encourage people to feel the feelings of sadness and anger around what they are experiencing. They need to find ways to express those feelings in a healthy way. Once they are able to get those things out of their system, then forgiveness can follow.

Jesus once cured a paralytic, but He first said, “My son, your sins are forgiven.” Matthew 9:2-5 Can you imagine the thoughts that were going on in that guy’s head? It would not be farfetched to imagine him thinking, “Hey, I didn’t come here to be forgiven; I came here so you could work a miracle and make me walk.” You are probably like that too; you do not realize the essential and powerful nature of forgiveness. You might realize forgiveness is important, but think other things take precedence. Not so. With Christ In Training, forgiveness as a form of love is tops on the list. You are encouraged to be aware of whatever is going on with you: feel it; experience it; and give it to God.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly, never be conceited. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

“If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by doing so you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:14-21

Forgiveness is freedom. It is the freedom to love unconditionally without judgment.

I was just about to get up and stretch when someone bumped into my chair. Even before I looked up I heard this annoying voice talking, and initially wondered if he was talking to me. As I looked up, here was this young man on a cell phone. "He's got some nerve invading my space," I thought. "This is a sacred place. Why doesn't he just go someplace else to carry on his business." My mind just went nuts for a minute. Then I remembered forgiveness. Man, how easily I get hooked.

I got up, stretched, sat down again, and tried to concentrate, but that voice on the phone kept nagging at me.

I remembered a story I heard years ago. A teacher opened a little meditation center outside of Washington, D.C. The center happened to be very close to the Beltway which goes around the D.C. area. One day a student complained, "All this traffic noise is so distracting; I can't concentrate on my meditation." The master asked him, "Are the cars coming in here and bothering you, or are you going out there to be bothered by the cars?"

Great question. The guy on the phone is not doing anything to me.

The obvious lesson here is letting go, and letting him be. I settled back down in the chair.

I read again, "Forgiveness is freedom. It is the freedom to love unconditionally without judgment."

SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING

I began to think of that wonderful advice, and realized in my heart how freeing forgiveness is. I thought of how much more simple life could be without all those judgments clut-

tering up my mind. But then my thinking mind kicked in again, of course, and wondered, “How then, do I know what is right for me? How do I know what to do next? Don’t I have to judge? Don’t I have to use judgment to get those answers?”

The book took away my difficulty.

To live life fully, you are encouraged to open yourself to the ability to listen to the voice of God, the Holy Spirit within you. This is not judgment, but it is a knowing. It is the knowing of the Soul and the Heart.

Spiritual understanding is not exclusive territory. Solomon is praised and remembered for his wisdom, but to think too highly of Solomon is to put yourself in a lowly place. The gifts of wisdom and discernment are yours as well.

An oft-repeated lesson for Christ In Training is that *the power is within you*. The understanding and the wisdom are within you. The Scribes and Pharisees actually encouraged people to give their power away to them. “We are the teachers,” they said. “We are the knowledgeable ones,” they told the people. “We are the ones that know the truth; listen to us. We know much more than you do.”

You can get caught in the same trap. You can “lord it over others,” in the sense that you “know” and they do not. The more common trap, however, is to think or to feel that other people have much more wisdom and spiritual understanding than you do. It is so easy to give your power away to other people. You can say to yourself: “They have a Ph.D. — they must know; she’s a minister — she must know; he’s a doctor — he really must know; he’s a priest — he must know; he’s a Native American shaman — he must know; she wrote a book about it — she must know; everyone thinks she is a great psychic — she must know; he’s rich — he must know; she has a guru — she must know; he *is* a guru — he must know; he’s so much smarter than I am — he must know; she’s been a student of *A Course In Miracles* for years — she must know; she spent three years in Tibet — she must know; spirit guides live in their house — they must know” — and on and on.

Another Christ In Training known as Siddhartha or Buddha, when instructing his followers, suggested, “Don’t believe anything I tell you. Don’t believe anything anyone tells you. Take in only what resonates with the deepest truth of your heart.”

Can anyone teach you the smell of a rose or the colors of a sunrise? It is you who has that experience. It is you who takes it in. It is you who knows and experiences God and love. Do you have to be a saint to appreciate the beauty of a sunset? Let us hope not.

In breaking down society’s boundaries and prejudices, Jesus eradicated the notion of exclusivity. Everyone is not only entitled to God’s gifts, everyone already has them. For Christ In Training, living is not about *feeling* wise, it is more about knowing that wisdom is there inside of you. It is the realization that a deeper knowing, beyond the mind, exists. It is also developing ways to reinforce that knowing.

The thinking mind or intellect has a difficult time grasping anything beyond itself. Spiritual understanding bypasses the thinking mind. A marvelous way of doing that is sometimes referred to as “acting as if.” At times the method is called “fake it ’til you make it,” but that makes the process sound like something false or phony, and it is not. When you “act as if” (and you do this much more often than you are aware), you simply bypass the resistance, negativity, and doubt that naturally exist in the intellect. That does not mean being phony. What it does mean is that if you are willing to push yourself to act in a certain healthy or positive way, then the rest of you (your old habits and reluctant ego) will generally follow. To paraphrase Gandhi, “Be the change you want to create.” You allow yourself to tap into those inner resources, those qualities of God that live with you, and you let them rise to the surface.

For instance, you might realize that you need to be more loving in a particular situation. You say to yourself, “Well, I don’t *feel* very loving.” Then your Spirit chimes in and says, “Let’s ‘act as if’ you *are* more loving in this situation.” Notice what happens. You start focusing on being more loving, and you are! This love you are experiencing and sharing did not come from the ethers. It was always there; you just did not realize it. What got in your way for a time was that your intellect

made your feeling of “not being very loving” into the truth. Turning that around and listening to your Spirit, you went beyond that false thought of the mind to a deeper truth and an ability to love within yourself. Whenever you deny the power of a negative feeling, and act on your deeper experience of God and the qualities of God, you are “acting as if.” Far from being false or phony, you are living your authentic truth.

When Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, Peter wanted to do it as well. Jesus invited him by saying, “Come.” Peter, for a few moments, “acted as if” he could walk on water, and he did! He went beyond his human understanding. He delved into that place of deep knowing that is sometimes referred to as faith. He discovered this marvelous resource inside himself that went beyond human awareness. For Peter, like most people, it did not take long for the intellect to kick in and say something such as, “Hey, I can’t be doing this. This is crazy. Maybe Jesus can walk on water, but I certainly can’t. I’m no miracle worker.” Well, you all know what happened next; he sank like a stone. You might find yourself asking questions such as, “Am I worthy of wisdom? Am I worthy of spiritual understanding?” As was mentioned above, this is not a matter of feeling; worthiness it is a matter of knowing. When you know, there is no need to even ask the question. As a child of God, these gifts are your birthright. Instead of asking such questions as “Am I worthy?” you need to center on your experiences of wisdom, love, and any other of God’s gifts. Your experiences are not a matter of thought or feeling; they are a reflection of your own unique encounters and experiences with God.

Like anything else spiritual, these experiences do not have to be huge or dramatic. An encounter with the Divine could be as simple as an act of love or kindness. It could present itself through the smile of a child. God offers His presence in so many ways: a flower, a fond memory, a piece of music. Those moments, those blissful instants, are proof of your worthiness if you choose to accept and embrace them as gifts of God. Do not think about it; do not analyze it. In your Heart of hearts, when you know something is real, stop thinking and let your Soul absorb the truth. When you know you are loved; when you know you have experienced the touch of God, just let it be and live it. Spiritual

understanding is going beyond the mortal mind, the intellect, the thinking mind. Spiritual understanding, like all other spiritual gifts, comes from within; it is listening to the stirrings of God within you.

How do you know? How do you know that you know? How do you know what voice to listen to?

Great questions, I thought. I don't know about the person (or people) who wrote this book, but I've got a committee living in my head. I remember a client of mine once saying, "You know, when I am sitting here in your office talking with you, I'm doing just fine. It's when I go out to my car and my 'group therapy' session starts that I get into trouble."

I knew exactly what he was talking about. I know that I have so much stuff going on in my head. I have so much information and misinformation. I also have such a truck-load of negative thoughts. What do I listen to? How do I separate spiritual understanding from all that other noise?

Exercise: The Truth in You

Read this over first. You can record this, or have someone read it to you, or even commit it to memory. You are encouraged to take a few moments with this exercise in order to get a sense of what it is like to "hear" your heart, and to get a sense of your intuitive voice speaking to you. Please read or record it slowly and deliberately, giving yourself all the time and space you might need.

"Take a moment and close your eyes. Breathe deeply three times. Deep cleansing breaths. That's right. Let yourself relax; let yourself go to the deepest level of relaxation that suits you right now. That's right.

"Now listen to these words, 'You are a Divine child of God, unconditionally loved.'

"Notice how you experience within yourself a part of you or an energy within that resonates with that thought. You might experience it as a part of you 'waking up' or coming to attention. You might experience a gentle tug, or an awareness, almost as if a part of you is re-

sponding ‘yes’ to that truth — ‘You are a Divine child of God unconditionally loved.’ Stay with that for a while. Then, taking all the time you need, gently open your eyes and come back here.”

Note what just happened. This part of you that resonated with the Truth of who you are is what is sometimes called your Heart or your intuition. It is a deep essential aspect of your spiritual nature which will always connect with the Truth. For many of you, almost immediately after sensing that intuitive “yes,” you also might have “heard” the mind reaching in and saying something such as, “Well, yes, you are a Divine child of God, but. . .”

As we will be exploring a little later, that kind of activity is typical of the thinking mind. Remember, the truth of the intuition, the truth of the voice of God within you, does not need to argue with the intellect, but goes beyond it. This intuitive, knowing aspect of Spirit is sometimes called the “wee small voice,” or the “tiny whisper of the wind.” Kings 19:12 It is always there for you. But notice you need to be *quiet* in order to listen. The intuition is the voice of God within you. When you hear that voice it will be powerful, yet gentle.

When Spirit, through intuition, offers you a direction or a piece of information, it will always be with the inner understanding that you have a choice to take it or not. This is a “no-strings” choice. The Spirit expresses itself something like this, “Here, you can use this gift of compassion or not, it’s up to you.” All of this quietness, gentleness, and choice are just the opposite of the other voice inside of you. This other voice is the boisterous and heavy-handed expression of the ego.

There are some key differences between the ego and the heart. When the ego offers information or direction it will also stir up feelings of guilt and fear. It will speak in such a way as to say, “This is what you need to do; this is what you must do. If you do not, then bad things will happen, and you will be labeled a bad person.” You might not “hear” that same thing, but you get the idea. The messages of the ego are infused with the pressure of guilt and fear; messages of the heart are free-flowing with freedom and love.

It takes practice to enter into the silence, and to listen to the heart. You are encouraged to perform that practice. Practice being as quiet as

you can. Do not fight your thoughts, but let your attention go deeper than your thoughts so you can “hear” the quiet yet powerful stirrings of your heart.

I remembered one of my first teachers from years ago. His name was Fr. Quinn, a big blustery, red-faced Irishman whom I connected with as a kid. I'm not sure if I asked to see him or he asked to see me, but as it turned out he became my first spiritual director.

I was about 10 or 11 and I recall sitting in his office. In those days every Catholic rectory had a middle-aged housekeeper who was highly hygienic and energetic. Everything was spotless and smelled of wood polish and soap. So here I was in Fr. Quinn's office — me in some sort of straight-backed chair and he behind his desk. He asked me, “Gerry, do you pray?” I told him, “Of course.” I proceeded to let him know when and how I prayed.

Like most Catholic kids I grew up with the Our Father and Hail Mary; they were the staples of our prayer diet. Occasionally, prayer would take the form of “Oh, God please get me out of this and I'll never do it again.” Prayer might have been directed towards a specific intention as, “Help me with this test” or “Make Mom well,” etc.

Fr. Quinn intently listened to all of this, and then said to me, “The next time you go into the church. . .” (We lived in simpler times. Churches were open all day, and since I lived right across the street from our parish church, I would hop in quite often going to and from the store.)

“The next time you go into church,” he said, “I want you to get real quiet. Can you do that?” I said, “Yes,” even though I had no idea what he was talking about. I never forgot that instruction, “Get real quiet.” Let Spirit, let God speak to you. Let yourself experience God in the quiet; let yourself experience love, peace, balance, and all those other attributes of God. In the quiet, connect with the Source in-

side yourself. It is always there inside of you waiting to be contacted. The connection with the Source is there inside of you — always.

There is another way of realizing that spiritual understanding is different from our usual mental, intellectual mode. Mental or intellectual understanding is, “Aha!” That is an expression of the mind grasping something. This kind of understanding is a form of power and control. This is the way the mind works. The mortal mind is constantly searching. It is always quite restless, and is only satisfied for a few brief moments. By nature, the intellect is always seeking out exceptions and possibilities. For instance, you can mentally affirm “I am worthy,” and almost immediately, your mind will be working overtime to find exceptions, and it will.

Spiritual understanding goes beyond the mind. If mental understanding is “Aha!” then spiritual understanding is “ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.” It is powerful, but relaxed. Mental understanding holds onto something; it is grasping and controlling. With spiritual understanding you are being upheld and supported by truth. It is not that you have a hold on it as much as it has a hold on you.

Notice the difference inside yourself between “Aha” and “ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.”

Spiritual understanding is not blind. Faith is a knowing; it is knowing something without material proof, but knowing it just the same. Think of someone in your life; do you know they love you? There is no way to prove that. Even though there is no way to prove that kind of love, you can still know it. If someone loves you, and you only rely on your mental powers to convince yourself of the truth of that love, then a scene similar to the following will probably unfold. You will begin to play the game called “Will You Love Me If. . .” The way the game goes is, you say (not out loud) “Will you love me if I do this; will you love me if I do that?” All the while you are trying to prove that the other person loves you. Of course, what eventually happens is that you finally do something that alienates the other person completely. They leave. Then you can say, “See, I knew you didn’t love me!” Of

course, now you get to be right and know that you have proven that the other person does not love you. You will notice, though, you have not won anything at all. You have attempted to use your intellect to gain evidence of something the mortal mind cannot comprehend. You are demanding a proof that does not exist. You are looking for tangible evidence of something intangible. Love knows with the heart, and it knows that the “understanding of the heart” is just as real as knowing with the senses and intellect.

If you desire to open yourself even further to the spiritual, you travel still further beyond the thinking mind. Suppose you want to become more grounded in a spiritual gift — wisdom, for example. You can affirm for yourself a statement such as:

God is my source of wisdom; I am living in truth.

Now, in order to make that real, you can say this over and over even if you do not feel it. You “act as if” you are in touch with this Wisdom. This is the action of faith. As was mentioned before, “acting as if” is not a game. It is bypassing the mind and your limited thinking ego. You are accessing the strength of God and Spirit that always exist inside you.

Certainly a major component in being Christ In Training is learning how to listen to that “wee small voice.” To do that, you dedicate time and energy to going into the quiet, to listening to the intuition, and to knowing this is really the voice of God speaking within you. Just as Jesus would sometimes go to a “lonely” place to pray, you do the same — to listen, listen, listen to the voice of God within.

Perhaps “voice” is not the best word to use here, for you can experience God in myriad ways. When you allow your awareness to flow into your intuitive mind, you also flow into the Presence of God. That Presence might reveal itself to you in words, memories, ideas, feelings, sensations, or sometimes a quiet calm with nothing else to go with it. Be open to however God reveals Him/Herself to you. Be open to whatever qualities of God, such as wisdom, strength, or abundance, are being revealed to you.

Openness to God and Divine Spirit is the key to health and understanding. This includes self-understanding as well, because from the

understanding of Spirit flows self-love. If you understand yourself as a Divine Child of God, then love follows automatically. Even deeper than all of this is another inner realm that goes beyond even our spiritual comprehension. It is the “peace that surpasses all understanding.” Philippians 4:7

For Christ In Training, the ultimate knowing and understanding is that you are One with the Father. It is the realization that God, the Power of God, and the gifts of God are always available to you. Jesus ran into His most serious confrontations when He expounded this deepest of truths. The teachers of the law totally lost it when He said, “I and the Father are One,” John 10:30 and the not-so-subtle comment that almost got him stoned to death was “Before Abraham was, I am.” John 8:55

A deep willingness is necessary in order to reach spiritual understanding. You must be willing to have an open heart. You must be willing to go beyond your mortal mind and human resources. This is not denying that you can learn from teachers, books, tapes, and workshops. Of course you can. The reminder is this: “Although you can drink the water that others give you, do not forget, you can drink from the well yourself.”

I know chewing gum was not around at the time of Jesus, but I think He would have liked this typical exchange between two grade-schoolers:

“Do you have any gum?”

“All I have is ABC gum.”

“ABC gum! What’s that?”

“Already Been Chewed!”

That’s what other people’s understanding is like. It’s like ABC gum. It’s OK; there’s nothing wrong with it, but it’s pretty watered down, all the flavor is chewed out of it.

You can use the understanding of others to enhance your own understanding, but you don’t have to make it yours. It will just be a carbon copy. Do you know what it’s like to get a copy of a copy of a copy? It’s legible, but nowhere near as good as the original.

There is a phrase from the “Big Book” of Alcoholics

Anonymous describing sobriety and its gifts; “If you have decided you want what we have, and are willing to go to any length to get it, then you are ready to take certain steps.”¹² That is so perfect. You see a quality in another person and you want it. Now you would love to have it bestowed on you with a magic wand, but that’s not what happens. What happens is you are shown the ways, means, and actions of being able to obtain it. In other words, “If you want it; here’s what you need to do to get it.”

You no longer give your power away to other people — not even to teachers or gurus. You stop making comparisons. You learn from other sources, of course. You also comprehend the true meaning of the word educate; it means to “lead out of,” not to pound into. As you grow in spiritual understanding, you become more aware and more adept at touching the wisdom of God within you.

Be aware of the yearning within you for the gifts of God. The desire for God is the God within you seeking God in His fullness. Our prayer today can be: “Oh, God, You live within me and I live within You. You have all power. You are the answer to all I desire. You radiate from the center of my being, and out into the entire world as the fulfillment of my desire. I give thanks, Oh God, for your Presence, and for Your gifts in my life. Amen.”

As you open yourself to God, you open yourself to the gift of the Holy Spirit called discernment. Discernment is the wisdom to distinguish what is best and most loving. It is not like judgment, which focuses on separation. Discernment focuses on keeping you close to the Spirit and One with the Source. The fundamental prayer of discernment is the abbreviated version of what is sometimes referred to as the Serenity Prayer, written by Reinhold Niebuhr in 1926: “God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the Courage to change the things I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference.”

Jesus asked us to “pray always.” That is another way of suggesting the Practice of the Presence of God. With the eyes of Spirit, you work to perceive God everywhere and in everything. When you let

go into the infinite wisdom and love of the Divine, this is true understanding.

The gifts of God, including understanding and strength, are with you all the time, and especially in time of need. In order to participate in those gifts, you are called on to recognize God's presence and let go of giving so much of your power away to your thinking mind. Let go of your attempts to "figure things out." One of the huge differences between intellectual knowing and knowing with the heart is that the mind always has a preconceived notion of the way things "should" be. Prayer of the heart does not get caught up in waiting or expecting how the answers will show up. The prayer of the intuitive heart is simple and direct: "Oh God, let me see you in all things, know you in all things, and love you in all things. Amen."

How perfect for Christ In Training!

Spiritual understanding is sometimes referred to as enlightenment in the East. I heard a wonderful teacher once say: "Enlightenment is the ego's biggest disappointment." It does not make you superior. It does not mean you have made it. It does not mean you have something no one else has. It does not mean your work is done. It means you *know*. It means you see All as One. You perceive all people as brothers and sisters. You are aware of all beings as needing your love and you needing theirs.

The ultimate understanding is what you have known all along: that you are made in the image and likeness of God. It is the realization that you are whole and complete, that you are One. It is the knowing, even beyond your feelings, that you are joy, love, strength, and all of those other attributes of God. You possess all of these gifts because you are not separate from God, the Source.

Go back to the heart. Go back to the deeper knowing, the deeper truth within you. The ego can be subtle and deceptive; it does not want you to be spiritually fit and OK. The ego is afraid that if you are fit and sound, you will have no need of it anymore.

Here is the true work of spiritual understanding, "Shut up and let God be God within you."

FAITH

Since spiritual understanding and intuition are not referred to directly in scripture, perhaps another way these ideas can be expressed is with the concept of *faith*. Just as there is spiritual understanding, faith is also a way of knowing. You can know things with your mind and senses, through your emotions, and through your intuition and faith. These are all valid ways of knowing, even though they operate within different parameters.

Faith is not simply belief in what someone else told you, or what you desire to be real. Faith is the knowing of a reality beyond your senses, beyond your feelings, and beyond your thinking mind. When you say “I believe,” what you are saying is you know beyond your thoughts and feelings; you know this thing to be true.

Jesus would inevitably ask people if they had faith, if they believed He could do something. He was asking, “Do you have more faith in me, and the powers of God, than you have in sickness or disease, or even death?”

When the answer to that question was “Yes,” Jesus became a vehicle of Divine Energy for them. When the people had no faith, nothing happened. When Jesus visited His hometown of Nazareth, it was said, “And He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.” Matthew 13: 54-58 The people of Nazareth believed more in the power of death and sickness, and that is what they experienced.

I was discovering that we always have faith. We just have faith in different things. Jesus’ visit to Nazareth was an example of the people believing in the power of fear over the power of love.

Faith is more about choice than it is about doubt or fear. Wherever you choose to put your energy, that is what you choose to believe in.

You have faith all the time. Sometimes you choose to put the energy of your belief in positive things, sometimes in negative things. You can believe in doom, disaster, and destruction, or you can have faith in peace, harmony, and well-being.

So the most significant issue is not what creeps in and puts doubt in your mind, but where are you putting the energy of your faith? Are you putting it into God and the Divine qualities you want to manifest, or are you leaning more towards the ego messages of fear and catastrophe?

In thinking about faith as Christ In Training, I realized that I have struggled with negativity practically all my life. To be honest, not “practically” all my life, but all my life, period! I find myself battling old thoughts and old ideas such as, “You’re not enough; there’s something wrong with you.” I am sometimes bombarded with such old unanswerable questions as “What’s the matter with me? When will I ever get it? How could I be that stupid?”

After all the work I think I’ve done, why are those old destructive messages still around? I wondered why they still had such a hold on me. I discovered there is a part of me that still believes they are true. There is a part of me, even though it might be unconscious, that is giving those old ideas energy and power.

That is what faith is about; faith is empowerment. Faith makes things real. When I put my faith in something, when I put my belief in something, I make it real. I empower it; I give it energy. I give it form; I give it substance. Fortunately there are a whole lot of other beliefs in my life that also have power (other than the negative ones).

Within me is the belief in unconditional love, in the goodness of God, in the infinite possibilities of Spirit. Within me is the belief in serenity, peace, joy, happiness, abundance, and all those other wonderful things God is providing.

The reason those things have power is because there is part of me that believes in them. It is my belief, my faith, that gives the qualities of God power and reality.

A Greek philosopher put his students in a sticky situation by asking them to imagine each one was holding a team of horses in either hand. Both teams were anxiously pulling in opposite directions. Both teams

were of equal strength. The question to the students was, “Which team of horses is going to win?” The students sat there for awhile, trying to figure this one out. After a time, one of them finally said to the teacher, “The team that will win is the one you feed the best.”

That is our challenge today: which team of horses are you going to feed the best? Which set of beliefs inside of you are you going to feed the most? Many of you have more than one set of beliefs rocking around inside, and some of them can be contradictory. Which set of beliefs are you going to give the most attention?

I had a client a few years ago who came in one day and said, “How do I get rid of these negative thoughts that seem to plague me? They are like a pack of wild dogs nipping at my heels.” Remembering the story above, I told him, “Stop throwing them (the negative thoughts) hamburgers!” We had a very good relationship so I could get away with being a little smart-alecky, but both of us realized the truth of that statement. If you want to diminish the energy of negative thought patterns in your life, STOP FEEDING THEM!

I’ve learned to not even get into a fight with my negative thoughts. I imagine a switch in my mind. When I become consciously aware of negative thoughts, I work on flipping the switch to focus on positive thought patterns.

One of the basic choices we must make is to choose love or fear. “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom,” Jesus said. Luke 12:32 He is reminding you that the Presence of God and the belief in the Presence of God surpasses all fear. You have a choice of what you put your faith in — the energy of love or the energy of fear.

Fear can have a powerful and seductive hold on us. You have probably learned to hold onto fear as a way of feeling safe. As insane as that sounds, if you look deeply within, you will discover that your fears are trying to protect you, even though they cannot. Fear is the most subtle security blanket of all. It is easy to find our faith moving from God to

antibiotics; from love and harmony to smart bombs and special forces; from compassion and the belief that the Light of God is in everyone to attempting to eradicate hatred and violence with more hatred and violence.

The physical world is based on having faith in things and material prosperity. “Buy this, do that, and you will be happy and secure.” Our whole system of advertising is based on creating a need where there is not one.

My cousin Fred came down for a visit a few years ago, and we went to a local mall. Both of us are gadget freaks, so we easily gravitated to a store specializing in new and shiny electronic things. We took different paths and got to the exit at about the same time. We looked at one another and began to laugh. The words that came to me were, “There is absolutely nothing in that store that anybody needs.” It was true. If I had unlimited funds, I probably would have bought some useless items. At the same time, I was struck with the ridiculousness of things like barbeque tools with lights on them, or special instruments for cleaning your golf cleats. Come on! Get a flashlight; pick up a twig.

Making choices based on love rather than fear is a conscious goal to keep in front of you. Do not be discouraged if you miss it sometimes. As it is described in the literature of recovery, “we claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.”

You are probably aware that you occupy a few different realities simultaneously. You inhabit this world of matter. You are connected with it through your intellect and your senses. You are also probably aware there is a spiritual world that goes beyond matter and beyond the senses. This is the world of Spirit — a world of unconditional love, a world of safety and security, a world of freedom. This spiritual world is filled with all those things you yearn for, love, and cherish. You spend much of your life walking in both worlds. Your choice of faith is, “Which one of those worlds are you going to make more real? Which one of those

worlds are you going to empower?”

Jesus cautioned us that, “No one of you can serve two masters. . . You cannot serve God and Mammon [an ancient goddess of wealth].” Matthew 6:24

Whichever master you choose to serve becomes most real to you. Faith makes things real. The more faith you put into something, the more you manifest it, and the more real it becomes here on Earth. The more faith you put into the Kingdom of God, the more you manifest the Kingdom here and now. The more faith you put into the material world, the more you make the seductive nature of that part of the world real.

So that is your choice. Which one are you going to make more real?

I had a perfect example of this while watching TV. A news show was airing a clip of a man who was leading a summer camp for Israeli and Palestinian kids. The kids were all about 10 or 11. They traveled from their homes, and the violent nature of their world, to attend this camp in the USA for two weeks. They had to learn how to communicate, how to cooperate, and perform tasks together. The results were marvelous. They made friends with one another and communicated on some very deep levels. Although some reflected that these new relationships would not change anything back home, there were many who promised they were going to drop the revenge and the negativity of their past heritage. Many committed to approaching things differently between their peoples. They made that promise to themselves, to their God — Yahweh or Allah — and to one another.

I had such a moment of hope watching and listening to those kids.

Then the announcer broke the spell by saying to the founder of the camp, “Well, all of this is very nice, but how real is it?”

They explored this issue for awhile and you could almost see the energy getting drained from the man who ran the camp. He seemed to become more and more wrapped up in the announcer’s negativity. Finally, the camp guy said some-

thing like, “You’re probably right. When these kids are 15 or 16 they will hate one another just like their parents do. They will probably go to war. They will be throwing rocks, setting off bombs, and getting into that endless cycle of revenge. They will most likely be doing the same things their parents are doing.”

And the announcer, almost jovially, agreed. He then said, “You know, realism will out-trump idealism any day of the week.”

I could not believe he said that. “Realism will out-trump idealism any day of the week.”

One moment I was crying with joy and hope, and then I heard this statement. It was as if someone dumped a bucket of cold water on me, and I wanted to yell, “No! That isn’t true; it can’t be true.”

The announcer was suggesting, “I will show you what is real. Hatred is real. The legacy of revenge and fear is real. Terror is real. The idea that ‘nothing can change’ is real.”

I also inferred from his remarks, “That stuff about love and harmony, that’s idealistic; it’s not real. The Kingdom doesn’t exist; this world of hatred and violence exists. That’s what’s real.”

I saw how easily that negativity can creep in. I saw how easily we can fall into thinking “realism will out-trump idealism every time.” How easily we can be seduced into thinking “that this material world will out-trump the Kingdom any day of the week.”

I began to comprehend more deeply that this is the world’s thinking, “Realism will out-trump idealism any day.” The world’s thinking is this is what is real: terrorism, hatred, conflict, poverty, suicide bombs, war, fear, revenge. This is real. Idealism, love, peace, and God — that’s not real. War, hatred, anger, fear, poverty, and revenge — that’s real.

For Christ In Training, faith is real, and it is belief in the real. Faith

makes the ideal into the real. “Do you believe I can do this,” Jesus asked? Matthew 9:28 Do you have more faith in the power of God than you do in the power of sickness and death? Do you believe the power of God is more real than the power of hatred and revenge? Ask yourself, “If the power of God is more real to you, how is that going to affect your thoughts and your actions?”

This is not a *denial* of pain, hunger, poverty, hatred, ignorance, prejudice, and violence. No. Christ In Training is not about being naïve. These things exist. The question is how much power you are going to give them. How much faith are you going to put into them? The choice you have is which one you are going to give energy. Which one are you going to empower? Which one are you going to put effort and passion into? Which one are you going to make more real today?

The New Testament describes two miracles of Jesus that occurred within a very short time frame. Both are beautiful lessons in faith.

Jesus was asked by an official named Jairus if he would come and heal his daughter who was sick. Jesus agreed. It was a powerful time in Jerusalem when Jesus’ popularity was high. There were many people forming a crowd around Him as He walked to the official’s house. People could feel the excitement. The Master is going to work a miracle! At one point there was a woman who had spent all her savings on physicians to cure her illness, but she was still left with hemorrhaging in her body. She thought to herself, “If I but touch even his clothes I shall be made well.” She did, and she was healed. The woman thought she could simply remain anonymous, but “Jesus turned about in the crowd and said ‘Who touched me?’ And the disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing around you and you say, ‘Who touched me?’” Jesus perceived, though, that He had been touched differently because He felt “Power had gone forth from him.” He looked around, and the woman who had been sitting on the ground timidly acknowledged it was she who touched Him. Jesus must have smiled when He said, as He did so many other times, “Your faith has made you well. Go in peace.” What a beautiful story of believing more in the power of God than in the power of money, physicians, and sickness.

That is one story of faith. The other miracle expresses the power of

faith in a different way. Remember during that tumult in the crowd, Jesus was on His way to cure a little girl. In the midst of all the excitement, some people came to the official and said, “Your daughter is dead.” That pronouncement did not seem to disturb Jesus in the least. He went to Jairus’ home and asked to be taken to the girl.

In those days, people were employed as professional mourners, and they would put on quite a show. In the room where the girl was laid out, there was a great amount of wailing and crying. Jesus had them all put out of the room, and as they were leaving, He said, “The child is not dead but sleeping. And they laughed at him. He took the little girl by the hand and said to her, ‘Talitha cum,’ which means, ‘Little girl, get up!’ And immediately the girl got up.” As He was leaving He commanded “that they give her something to eat.”

In the context of faith, the words of Jesus might sound something like this, “If you want to believe in death and negativity, if you want to put the power of your belief into that, go right ahead. I am not going to put my faith in death and illness and negativity. I do not believe in those things. I do not believe in death, fear, horror, and negativity. I believe in life, love, joy, and openness to Spirit. To show you that my belief in the power of life is more powerful than your belief in the power of death, ‘I say to you arise.’” Mark 5: 23-43

What are you going to put your faith in? You might know what you want to put your faith in, but you might also be asking yourself, “What do I do if I fall asleep again?” It is a good question, because you probably will.

Here is another choice. If you find that you have “fallen asleep” (become unaware) or been seduced by the ego (caught up in fear) or any of the many ways you can lose conscious contact with God, do not beat yourself up! Know that you are waking up again, that you are coming into awareness again. Waking up is a profound way for you to reclaim your power. It is a way to consciously get back in touch with the energies of love. Go back to the Source. Know that help is always available. God is always present.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, He left you with an aspect of God called the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is sometimes called the walker between the worlds. He has a foot in the material world and a foot in

the Kingdom. The Holy Spirit knows exactly what is going on in both of these worlds. The Holy Spirit can heal all wounds, transform all pain, fix all mistakes, and right all wrongs. In fact, *A Course In Miracles* suggests that as soon as we begin to stray from the path, the infinite love of God, through the power of the Spirit, begins to guide us back. These infinite gifts of guidance and Grace are especially more obvious to us when we ask for them, but even if we are not conscious of our need, the Father and the Spirit are still loving and guiding. What a consolation!

Faith is power. You give your power of belief to what you perceive as being most powerful. If you believe God and the good as all-powerful, then you believe in that. If you believe fear and old ideas about safety and security are more powerful, well, then you believe in them. Because faith is power, your faith is a reflection of how you direct your power. This is the ultimate form of your ability to co-create. What you believe in, you make manifest in your life. Ask yourself, “Where is my faith right now? What am I believing in, and giving my power to?” For example, “Where is my faith when I am watching the news?”

“Do you believe I can do this?” Jesus asked many times. No matter what your need might be, when you can answer with a resounding “Yes!” to that question, you open yourself up to the infinite power of God.

Faith is also safety and security, but not the kind you are ordinarily used to. In the material world, safety and security are presented to you with insurance policies and guarantees. Being safe is not all it is cracked up to be, and too much of it stops you from growing. Do you want to be safe, or do you want to keep expanding your capacity for being an instrument of God’s love?

Helen Keller said it wonderfully, “Security is but a myth, life is either a daring adventure or it is nothing at all.” She was saying, “Have faith in God, love, and the universe. Let go of your attachment to fear and ego. They will only tie you down.”

I remembered when Margo and I bought our house. It was the first time either one of us had owned a home. We knew we needed to get homeowner’s insurance, which we did, and then the agent asked us if we wanted earthquake

insurance. Well, that sounded totally ridiculous to me, but I was informed that this region of Kentucky lies on top of a huge fault line. There has not been a problem with it for hundreds of years, but it might be ready to blow any minute. It didn't cost too much, so we got it. It wasn't too long after that I saw something on TV about how most home damage is done by flooding and that most people don't have flood insurance. Well, that got me frightened and I started looking into flood insurance. Then I had to stop and ask myself, "How much is enough insurance?" I didn't have an answer to that question. I could see us attempting to protect ourselves against any and all disasters. I realized I could spend my whole life doing that and not living at all. Sure, we need to be reasonable, but am I putting my faith in insurance companies or in God?

Faith tells you there is a world other than what you perceive with your mind and senses. In this world of faith, beyond your "normal" ways of knowing, there is unconditional love, unlimited perfection, and peace.

When you have faith you will be safe. You will know you will be safe even if you are challenged again and again. As Christ In Training, you will choose to live in this deeper reality.

Faith is *knowing*. As a human on planet Earth, there are many ways of knowing. You can know through your senses and your intellect. You are probably most familiar with the workings of your mind and senses. This is the kind of knowing most people rely on.

You can know through your emotions. You might not relate to this one as much as you could. Often you attempt to explain away or counteract your feelings with logic and reason. It is so silly to attempt to explain feelings or to neutralize them with rational arguments. "You shouldn't feel that way," it is said so often, as if that bit of reasoning is going to make the feeling go away. You can learn a lot from what makes you sad or angry. You can know with joy and with pain.

You can know through your imagination. This kind of knowing is related to the *acting as if* spoken of earlier, but it is also more than that.

Through your imagination you can live or relive life experiences just as strongly as if you were in the material world. You can know and experience things profoundly without moving from your chair. Knowing through your imagination reflects all the learning you can do with guided imagery, and other similar work. It is powerful. You can literally learn to change influences from your past, and positively put energy into your future.

Ah, I thought. I remember something I heard an AA member talking about. He was saying that for new people, it was really a struggle not to drink. That it was very easy to get into a state of mind that either denied the negative results of drinking or pretended they weren't there. People who were tempted to drink were encouraged to "think themselves through the drink." They were encouraged to imagine what it would be like to drink, then to "know" that their pattern was not to stop at one or two. They were encouraged to follow that first drink as far as their imagination would take them. Many times they found themselves either in jail, a car wreck, or a fight with a boss or a spouse. As they experienced the negative consequences in their mind, the urge to drink was tremendously diminished. My AA friend described this method as "having the 'morning after' without having to have the night before." I became very aware of how powerful knowing with my imagination could be.

You can also know through your intuition, or what has been called your spiritual understanding. This requires practice and quiet, and is also a powerful way of knowing. It is especially powerful when you realize God's presence even when you do not feel it. In dark times as well as light, you can know God is present and working in you and through you.

You can also know through faith. This knowing even goes beyond your intuition. The emphasis here is that faith is not blind. Even though it is beyond the mind, it is knowing just the same. Someone once said that, "To have faith is to be out of your mind." That is true as long as you realize being out of your mind does not mean you lose your mind;

you just step out beyond it for a while.

I recalled a story I heard about Carl Jung, the noted psychiatrist. He was being interviewed for a documentary film, and the narrator asked him if he believed in God. Jung immediately answered with an emphatic “No!” The poor narrator was stunned because that was not the answer he expected. Jung came to his rescue by saying, “I do not believe in God; I know.” In other words, my belief, my faith, my knowing of God comes from my experience. My experience might not be tangible or provable, but it is very real just the same.

Faith is passionate. It is not the blind ego passion that goes with being right, but the passion that comes from being in the Truth. You can observe people of faith, like Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, and tiny, wonderful, powerful Rosa Parks. You can notice the passion of their faith, not the passion of forcing anything on someone, but believing in an ideal so strongly that something has to change. This is what Jesus meant by “moving mountains” with faith. Matthew 17:20 Faith is the passion that comes from a creative painting, or a beautiful piece of music. The passion of faith brings you to a higher level of consciousness.

There are many things in my life that I say are important to me. Am I truly passionate about them? What would I be willing to sacrifice in order to create a more loving world?

These thoughts brought me back to that question: “What are you going to do?”

I resolved to be more aware of my faith and how I can put it into action. I also promised myself I would continue to work on “walking the walk, not just talking the talk.”

Faith is all these things: knowledge, power, security, passion, and freedom.

Faith is the challenge to believe in unconditional love, the power of wisdom, grace, peace, and light. It is the challenge to believe in the good, the wholeness, the unity, and sacredness of all life.

Faith is also the ability to believe that there is only the good, only life,

only love. Faith allows you to know, even against all external evidence that these principles of truth, love, and light will prevail.

For Christ In Training, the ultimate expression of faith is: God and I are One. The ultimate questions are: Do you believe that? Is there anything that would prevent you from believing that?

So you might ask yourself, “How could I possibly slip back? How could I possibly slip back to mediocre, bland ways of knowing?” Well, for Christ In Training that is all part of being human. It is like walking up an escalator that is moving down; you always have to be consciously and actively moving upward.

Let us suppose you wholeheartedly believe, and are aware of behaviors and attitudes that could get in the way of this ultimate expression of faith. Even then, the ego can subtly move in and convince you that you have it all together, and really do not have to do anything else. You can forget that even the deepest faith entails continuing action on your part. In his epistle James states: “Show me how anyone can have faith without actions. I will show you my faith *with* actions.” James 2:18 Good News Bible The way Jesus put it was, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father.” Matthew 7:21

OK, time for a cup of coffee. I got up, stretched, looked around. There were a few people moving quietly around the store. I went over to the counter again, eyeing the old man’s book. I still couldn’t see what it was. I asked if I could leave the book with him while I got some coffee next door. He nodded his acquiescence. I tucked the book onto a shelf on his side of the counter, and walked out the door as the bell jingled behind me.

It was a bit of a shock moving from the book and the bookstore to the bustle of the coffee shop. Even as I thought about Christ In Training and the lessons I had studied, I found myself getting pulled out of spiritual thinking and plopped into my typical judgmental self. I was impatient about waiting in line, annoyed at the woman in front of me

who couldn't make up her mind, critical about body types and people talking too loudly. I noticed not only how quickly I forgot my lessons, but how quickly I became negative and fault-finding. I wondered, "If I am like this just a few minutes away from learning to be Christ In Training, what am I going to be like tomorrow or the next day?"

Then I thought, "But isn't that the learning?" I am being asked not to judge even myself. I am being asked to bless, honor, and love myself where I am. Not in an overly permissive way, but to embrace my imperfections so I can grow. I thought of a plant with a bunch of manure thrown on it. The plant doesn't try to get away from the dung or even get rid of it. It uses it to grow.

Letting go of self-criticism is a tough one for me.

With some warm, sweet coffee in my belly, I went back to the bookstore. As I retrieved my book, I was met by a knowing smile from the ancient man behind the counter. I found my chair again, and continued to study.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

You are all spiritual works in progress, and here is the dilemma you might find yourself in. You are working on believing there is nothing to do, that you are already perfect, and that your feelings of separation from God and Spirit are an illusion. This is an awareness you are cultivating. You also realize if you completely believed those truths you would be a much different person and the world would be a much different place. Wouldn't it?

So you are working on it, but what does that mean? Just what do you do to enhance your spiritual consciousness? While working on your own consciousness, how do you raise the level of consciousness of the planet?

What are you doing? What are you going to do to change and transform things?

A few years ago, Richard Pryor was struggling with his cocaine addiction. A friend came to see him in his apartment, and saw what a mess he was in. The friend said, "You really have a problem. What are you going to do about it?"

Pryor responded, "I'm OK; I'm all right."

His friend said, "Yeah, but what are you going to DO?"

This conversation went on for some time with the friend always ending with, "Yeah, but what are you going to do?"

What are you going to do? It is a great question.

I'm stuck.

But what are you going to do?

I'm depressed.

But what are you going to do?

Nothing is working for me.

But what are you going to do?

I feel as if God has abandoned me.

Yeah, but what are you going to do?

Taking action is a way of letting God and the universe know you are serious about transforming yourself. Action is a way of demonstrating that you are not just talk or empty wishes.

There might be times in your life when you experience yourself powerfully challenged by life, or even when you feel overwhelmed with seemingly impossible circumstances. At those times, please remember that *you are still here*. You might be a little bruised and maybe a little battered and bloody, but you are still here. Those circumstances did not destroy you. Please remember that. As it is said so many times, "There is nothing that comes along in life that God and you can't handle."

The question has come up before, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?"

The answer is still the same: "Practice, practice, practice." You sometimes forget that spiritual growth has many of the same dynamics as the rest of life. Any kind of growth or transformation requires commitment, focus, and work. There are very few things in life you will achieve on

the first try. When it comes to spirituality, however, many times you think you should get it immediately.

You probably expect magic, instant enlightenment, or a road to Damascus experience. There is nothing wrong with that expectation. It is destructive, though, to think there is something wrong with you if those things do not happen. Please know there is nothing wrong with the process of transformation, even if it does not happen the way you think it ought to right away.

Do you think someone could read a book on swimming and become an Olympic champion? It does not matter how good the book is. It does not matter how good a swimmer the author is. It is still going to take a lot more than a good book, or two or three or four, to get this athlete where he wants to go. Action, action, action; that is why they call it spiritual *practice*. You do not arrive at your destination all at once. Can you imagine a mother saying, “Oh, I know all there is about parenting; I can just get by on relying on what I have already learned?”

If you look at practically anything in your life, you will realize you are always learning. You are always practicing some ways to get better.

Suppose you play a musical instrument or have another hobby that requires some skill and coordination. There will be times when you have not practiced in a while. It will take you some time to get back to the skill level you were at once before. The same would be true if you stopped walking. If you were bed-ridden for a time, you would still know how to walk in your head, but your muscles would have forgotten, or at least they would not be able to function on the level they did before.

With regard to your normal daily living, with things such as eating and sleeping and bathing, going to work, taking care of the kids, paying the bills, you would not even think of saying, “Oh, I’ve done that already, and it didn’t work because there are still more bills, my teeth still get dirty; my kids still need discipline, etc.” These are such obvious examples, but, again, when it comes to the spiritual, this concept of action and practice goes out the window. Somehow when you enter into the spiritual arena, you think it should be different. You pray, so there should be instant relief. You think there should be a dramatic change,

and when it does not show up the way you want or expect, you say, “Oh what’s the use?” Can you imagine saying out loud, “Oh, I prayed about that — once.” “Oh, I worked on changing that negative thought — once.”

Even before you explore what you need to be practicing, there is an extremely important concept to be aware of, and that is *commitment*.

How would you complete the following statement: I am dedicated to. . .

Suppose you say, “I am dedicated to world peace.” The questions that follow are, “How are you dedicated to world peace? What are you doing?”

You might say, “I am dedicated to my spiritual growth.”

Oh, so you are dedicated to your spiritual growth; what are you doing?

Do those kinds of questions make you uncomfortable? Good; those questions are supposed to make you uncomfortable.

NON-ATTACHMENT

For Christ In Training, life’s journey is all about getting to God. Now, you might know you are already there, but you probably do not live in that conscious truth most of the time. There are a lot of things that seem to get in the way.

Detachment or non-attachment is about being free; it is about having no false gods; it is about pure focus and attention on God as your Source. In a mindset of freedom, you realize that nothing of importance can be taken away from you.

The great spiritual traditions of the world have called attention to attachments and addictions for millennia. In fact, apart from love and non-judgment, nonattachment is probably the most important universal message there is. The spiritual teachings of the world’s religions relate that detachment contains the ultimate rewards — freedom and happiness.

The Indian Upanishads state, “When all desires that dwell in his heart cease, then the mortal becomes immortal . . . when all the ties of the

heart are severed here on earth, then the mortal becomes immortal.”¹³ Buddhism expresses what are referred to as the Four Noble Truths: (1) suffering is a fact of life; (2) suffering is caused by attachment; (3) liberation from suffering and the reinstatement of human freedom can happen only through detachment; and (4) human effort toward detachment must involve all aspects of one’s life in a deeply spiritual way. From the Greek philosopher Heraclites to Jesus, to Buddha, and from teachers and sages of all ages comes the doctrine that the ego satisfies its yearnings and attachments at the price of the Soul.

Jesus reminds us, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven where neither rust nor moth consume, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Matthew 6:19-20 Be aware of what is truly important, and give your energies to that.

Jesus did not deny the importance of food or clothing or material needs. He found money necessary to pay taxes; He fed crowds of people. He even picked grain on the Sabbath to the dismay of the Pharisees, because He and His disciples “were hungry.” Matthew 12:1-8 (That was an interesting scene. Like so many instances in Jesus’ life, it was simple and profound at the same time. Not only was He pointing out the importance of sustaining physical life, He was also demonstrating that you can get hung up on practically anything. You could get fixated on either eating or not eating. Either one is a trap and an attachment!)

Being detached does not mean being indifferent or wishy-washy. A spirit of detachment allows you to realize every desire or yearning you have is a shadow of the only true desire of your heart, which is God, and all the qualities that are associated with God — peace, love, joy, strength. For Christ In Training it is so important to know that all of your yearnings for God are also God working in you. Your hunger for God, for Oneness, for wholeness — this yearning is also God. It is the God within you urging you to go beyond the confines of your little personality. It is the God within you moving you toward a fuller realization of who you really are.

Jesus was not kidding when He said, “I and the Father are One.” John 10:30

He meant that as the truth. In other words, “I have come to the fullest realization of God in me. I no longer yearn for God; my desire is fulfilled, for I am One with the Father.” So as you are moving towards God, God is also moving towards you. You are not alone in your seeking. Your yearning is an expression of God seeking God. The God within is seeking union with you and with all things.

Getting to God consciously takes work; it takes focus; it takes commitment. You might recall Jesus related a number of stories about the bridegroom. They were all about being focused, committed, and aware.

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.” Matthew 25:1-13 Now they all “fell asleep,” which we all do, by the way. But some were prepared, almost as if they knew they might fall asleep (what a lesson right there), and had enough oil for their lamps. The ones who were not prepared were shut out from the feast.

It might seem a little unfair to get so angry at the women who did not trim their lamps and ran out of oil or who fell asleep while waiting, but looking closely you can realize those stories are lessons in awareness, single-mindedness, and steadfastness. This kind of focus can only come about when you are not distracted by other things. The focus of Christ In Training is to be unattached, and waiting only for the bridegroom. The bridegroom, of course, is the Living Christ, which is also the essence of Christ In Training and being One with the Father. It is work, but it is worth it. By this time, in your mission at being Christ In Training, this lesson is clear: Everything of value requires work and dedication.

The law of love which was explored earlier suggests that when you only love those who love you, then you are not doing much at all. It is when you choose to love those who are seemingly unlovable, that you are doing the work of God. It is a challenge to go beyond your comfort zone, to go beyond the familiar. The land of non-attachment is one that you have traveled only marginally before this time. Whenever you enter a new country or initiate a new behavior, you can experience an awkwardness and discomfort. At those new moments, it is very easy for the mind to key in on the difficulty you feel and convince you to go back

to the familiar. Your conscious self usually wants to go from apprenticeship to mastery in one easy lesson. Notice how you would love to be able to drop the In Training part and just be IT!

Jesus deeply loved a man who came to Him and asked Jesus what he needed to do to be perfect, to be spiritually whole. The young man already was doing everything that was asked of him in obeying the commandments and the law. Jesus said, “There is still one thing you lack. Sell all that you have and give the money to the poor — it will become treasure for you in heaven and — come follow me.” And then one of the most heartrending statements in scripture was that the man, “when he heard this he was overcome with sadness, for he was very rich. He walked away sadly because he had many possessions.” Luke 18:18-23 Living Bible It was just too frightening, too threatening for him to enter into that realm of non-attachment. The yearning for wholeness was there, but the energy to fuel that desire was lacking.

Perhaps your prayer in situations like that could be, “Lord, I want to do this, I want to let go, but I am resistant and afraid. Help me; show me.”

My wife Margo calls this stage of our spiritual development “going through awkward.” It is something we all do when learning something new. It is a natural part of things. My mind doesn’t think it is natural. My mind thinks I could get it all at once.

A while ago, I had the privilege of watching our first granddaughter, Mikayla, learn how to walk. It was a marvelous and awe-inspiring experience. Because I do not have children of my own, and did not observe this phenomenon at an earlier time, I was even more moved at my first and perhaps my only opportunity to witness this milestone in human achievement.

For some time Mikayla would simply stand and reach up her hand, without even looking, just knowing and trusting someone would be there. Then she would guide me all over the house stretching those new muscles and reveling in this new found movement. It was wonderful just to be part of that trust.

Then she would get to her feet by herself, toddle a few hesitant and jerky steps, and fall. Perhaps for a moment she would look around in wonder, then get up again, toddle a few more steps, fall, and do it all over again. It was absolutely remarkable to watch. There was no boredom, no anger, no frustration, and no impatience. There was just the doing and the learning. And nothing, absolutely nothing, got in the way.

“How is she doing that?” I asked myself. “How does she know so surely she can do something she has not yet achieved?”

I became aware that there was no negativity in her. There were no thoughts that said, “I can’t do this.” or “I’ll never learn how to do this.” or “How many times am I going to have to go through this?” or “I wonder who’s watching?” or “I wonder if they think I’m a klutz?” There was none of this. These negative programs were just not there yet. I prayed for this wondrous Soul in this little body that by some miracle of nature she would not take on this negativity that seems to befall us all.

I also recalled a story about Milton Erickson, the father of modern-day hypnosis, who was stricken with polio during his teenage years. He was told that if he lived he would never walk again. About that time his mother gave birth to his youngest sister. As she grew he observed her so closely that he taught himself how to walk again by watching and learning from her. Even as an adolescent he did not say, “Well, I will try this 763 more times and if I don’t learn it by then, I quit.” He knew; he knew it was possible for him to walk again, and most importantly, he was willing to go through that period of awkwardness that we all must go through to do something new or different or growing or challenging. After deciding to move on, then comes awkward.

I thought it is so sad that so many of us have forgotten

how to learn from our past. When we were little, awkward was not something to be ashamed of or avoided. It was simply a way of gaining experience. It would be wonderful if we could adopt that attitude again.

“I will show you,” says God. “Let go. Let go into my wisdom and I will act with you and show you the way.”

“Renounce and enjoy,” a wise person once said. Love it, enjoy it, and know it will pass. Just as the rain falls “on the righteous and the unrighteous,” Matthew 5:45 things will happen in life, but these things in no way need to affect who you are. You are a Divine child of God unconditionally loved, always. Let go, let God, and smile about it. Will your feelings of grief or sadness or disappointment disappear? Probably not. Will you still have desires? Surely. Will you have to be controlled by them? No. Will you have regrets? Of course. Will there be things you are sad about losing? Certainly. Is it scary to let go? Yes. Does it take work? Yes. Will you be free? Without a doubt.

You are swimming upstream against what you have learned most of your life. You are letting go of what you think is comfort and safety for what is the true desire of your heart — being One with God.

If you dedicate yourself to the work of freedom from attachment, the mind will immediately jump in and try to convince you that you are not being sensible. It will tell you that you are crazy. It will tell you that you cannot possibly live or enjoy life without this or that attachment. Your ego will tell you, “Life will be dull, boring, a very insipid thing. There will be no spice, no zest, and no energy to your existence.” The fear that the mind and ego create will sometimes freeze you up again and put you to sleep.

And then you might find yourself much like Edward Bear in the opening pages of *Winnie-the-Pooh*: “Here is Edward Bear coming down the stairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if he could just stop bumping for a moment to think of it.”¹⁴

When you are experiencing this dilemma of bumping or thumping

down the stairs and knowing there must be another way, you can remind yourself that you are not alone in your efforts to change. Your Christ In Training prayer in times like this can be: “Oh God, I realize I’m thumping down the stairs (drinking too much, porn on the internet, using food as a drug, using drugs as a drug, wrapped up in victimhood and self-pity — whatever your attachment is today). I do know there is another way of coming down the stairs, but I don’t know what it is, or I can’t stop doing what I am doing. Help me. As best I can, Lord, I am turning my will and my life over to you to guide and to heal. As best I can, I let go of any form I think your help will take. I open myself to your love, your guidance, your direction. And I thank you God for answered prayer. Amen.” Say this again and again and again. Repeat it not so God can hear it; God hears it and answers your prayer immediately. Say it over and over again so that you can know and experience the answer to your prayer within yourself.

I almost quit smoking years ago. I had been smoke-free for a month, and then all of a sudden ‘it’ hit me. The compulsion I had seemed bigger than life. It was certainly bigger than me. I wanted a cigarette. I also didn’t want a cigarette, but I began to leave my apartment anyway. I remember walking to the little convenience store down the street, talking to myself the whole time. I was saying, “I don’t want to do this; I don’t want to do this.” It was like someone else was in control of my body. Now, I realize it wasn’t someone else, but it was “something else” that was in control. It was my ego, and that I-want-what-I-want-when-I-want-it mentality. Anyway, I smoked, and smoked, and kept trying and trying to quit. I’d quit for a day, then a couple of days, and then I would smoke. I would have a few minutes or hours, and then I would smoke again.

I prayed; I invented affirmations; I got into exercising again; I prayed some more. Outside, I guess I looked fine, but inside I was disgusted with myself.

I became a closet smoker. I would smoke in the bathroom,

and then use breath spray. I was living the façade and the illusion that I had quit.

I would usually last a whole day at work, and then succumb to buying a pack of cigarettes on the way home. I would smoke one, maybe save one more, and then throw the rest of the pack out the car window.

If I brought the pack home with me, after I smoked a few I would put the rest under the faucet and soak them and throw them in the garbage. One of my most powerful memories was getting up one night and wanting a cigarette. Pulling the soaked pack out of the garbage, pulling one of the cigarettes out — without breaking the filter off. I'm not sure why that was so important. I got it out — unbroken, mind you — put it into the microwave to dry out — then smoked it! It tasted horrible, as you can imagine. As I was doing this, I recall a very wise voice in my mind saying, "If you had any doubts about being addicted to smoking they are all gone now."

I could have given up then and just resigned myself to the fate of a life-long smoker, but I did not.

I kept praying and working and praying and working on it. It seemed as if the only thing I was doing wrong was continuing to buy cigarettes and smoking them. One day in prayer, and feeling kind of desperate, my intuitive wisdom said to me, "Gerry, believe you are in the process of quitting. Your process has not reached physical manifestation yet, but it is coming. Let go of your guilt and fear and know you are in the process of quitting and God is with you."

After getting that message, I did let go. I kept doing all the positive things I was doing, and if I slipped back to smoking, I did what I did, and did not stay there.

Soon after that, I am not sure when, I had a day when I did not smoke. It was nothing dramatic. I had had days like that before. In fact it was so un-dramatic I don't even know when it was. That was followed by another day, and another. I simply realized I had not smoked in a few days. I kept

praying, and now added gratitude to my prayer.

A day at a time, I have not smoked in over 15 years.

There are so many lessons here I cannot begin to count them all. One of the most important is: Even if you are still caught up in the addictive behavior, if you are sincere in your desire and praying whole-heartedly, then know through your faith that it is happening. You are in the process of quitting. Depend on God's power beyond even what your eyes and ears tell you. God and you are in the process together. Know that it is true and in time, in the fullness of time, it will manifest in the material world.

This yearning for God and all the qualities of God such as truth, Oneness, love, and compassion does not originate in the mind, nor can it be obtained or grasped by the intellect. The desire for God is a desire of the Soul, and it needs to be given over to the Soul, or what is sometimes referred to as your Heart. It needs to be given over to the part of you that not only deeply desires the good, but that already knows the good.

When you are attached to anything (food, gambling, drugs, your image of your body, your own opinion, being right, your expectations — the list is endless) you lose your focus of God as your goal. Your unfocused mind and your runaway senses take over. You are asleep again. You have lost touch with the truth of who you are.

Focus and intention, once lost, are difficult things to get back. Suppose you are focused on eating healthily and exercising, and one day your mind pops in and gives you the original McDonald's commercial, "You deserve a break today," and you take it. You confuse being good to yourself with indulgence. So you do not exercise and you eat whatever you think you want. Then you tell yourself, "I'll get back on my program tomorrow." How difficult is that? You *know* how difficult that is.

Every attachment you have puts you to sleep and causes you to lose touch with what you truly desire. Your attachments and addictions pretend to take you where you want to go, but addictions and attachments never really deliver on their promises. The highs of addictions

are pretend experiences of fulfillment. When the coming down happens, as it always does, you are faced with the deceptiveness of your ego. Your ego promised that this drink, this brownie, this bet, or this toke is going to make you feel better about yourself. It was going to solve your problems, or ease your pain. The catch is that it does seem to do what it promised for a moment, but the illusion lasts so briefly. The high of an addiction or attachment is like the merchant in scripture who had a bumper crop of grain. He was so excited; he thought about building more barns to store all his wealth. He was cautioned by the voice of God saying, "Fool! This night your Soul is required of you." Luke 12:16-21 In other words, "You're going to die tonight, don't get so caught up in the material world that you lose track of what is truly important and essential."

As you become used to seeking and finding satisfaction in your addictions and attachments, it becomes more difficult to look for God directly. You not only miss the transcendent God outside of you dwelling in the universe, you also miss the God within yourself. You are too busy looking outside to look inside.

You might not even be aware that your addictions and attachments are things outside of yourself. After a time, your addictions and attachments become so much of a "normal" part of your life that you think they are part of who you are. You might even come to think they are a necessary part of you. When that kind of incorporation happens, addictions and attachments are even more difficult to heal, because you do not know how to function without them, and you do not think you can function without them.

Whenever you face the need to give your power away to someone or something that is not what you truly want, that is an addiction. In a spiritual sense, an addiction or attachment is anything that is not of God, of love, of peace, or of growth. An addiction or attachment is something that wastes your energy and takes you away from your true goal.

You like to think you are in control; you like to think you have ownership over the drugs, alcohol, food, or gambling, but in reality the addiction is controlling you and you are owned by your appetites.

There is an absolutely wonderful indicator you can use to measure your movement toward your true goal of God and Spirit. Jesus spoke this truth when He said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:21 Where do you spend your time and energy? What do you think about the most? You might think you know what your treasure is, but be aware of what occupies your attention the most. You might not like what you discover. However, once you become aware of how much energy and focus is going towards your attachments, you can begin to shift and change.

Wow. I think I am so spiritual, but how much of my day is taken up with trivia? How much of my day is taken up with thoughts of anger or fear or scarcity?

What is my treasure? I think it is God and Love and Spirit. How often, though, do I find myself thinking about how much money I have or don't have? How often do I find myself sidetracked by anger and impatience? I'm waiting in line, and somehow I think I shouldn't have to do this. Somehow or another, the grocery line should part like the Red Sea did for Moses, and I should be able to waltz through. Well, the impatience is certainly off center for Christ In Training. The egotistical arrogance that somehow I am above waiting in line is even more of a hindrance.

There is a big lesson here for me. I need to check out my heart; check out what I'm thinking about and what is taking up my emotional energy. If it is not God or the qualities of God, I need to get back on track.

When you consciously choose to free yourself from addictions and attachments, you also choose to store up for yourself “treasure in heaven where neither rust nor moth consumes.” Matthew 6:19-20 Keep in mind you are accepting a challenge that in some respects makes life more difficult, but also much more rewarding.

Know that whenever you are pulled to anything — whatever that person, place, thing or event is — you are experiencing a hunger for something deeper. The yearning inside of you is *always* a reflection of

your yearning for God. Your deepest desire is to be One with God, to be totally loved. Non-attachment does not mean don't eat that brownie, or don't buy that necklace, but keep in mind what your heart's desire really is. Your heart's desire is love, God, and Spirit. That is the only reality that will completely satisfy you.

It is amazing how attached you can become to old thoughts that no longer serve you. They are like junk in your attic. The junk is especially manifest as resentments you have chosen to keep. Literally, resentment is something you feel over and over again. Why would you ever hold onto such a thing as anger or ill-will? You might have developed a distorted type of ego defense that convinces you that you might need one of those feelings sometime, as if you are ever going to need that anger or that fear or that resentment. Look at your thinking again, "Well, he/she just might say something and I might need that ammunition to throw back." Do you really need that ammunition, or is it just dead weight keeping you from your goal? You might erroneously think that holding onto a piece of anger or resentment is a way of punishing the other person. You might think they do not deserve your love or forgiveness!

Let it go. Give it back to God. The release is like cleaning off your desk. It is ridding yourself of the mind-clutter. How freeing that can be.

How many of those useless conversations have I carried on in my head? "Well, when he says this; I'll say that." Just as destructive are the internal dialogues reenacting past conversations: "Well, when she said that I should have said. . ."

I remember an old expression my mother used to use, "I should have really given him a piece of my mind." In reality, Mom, what you're doing is giving away a piece of your Soul.

I've even found myself carrying on inner conversations about things that never happened. This is such a set-up for negativity and loss of energy. I am driving along and I think to myself, "Now, if that car cuts me off, here is what I will be feeling, and here's what I will say to that guy." How insane is that?

Here I am attached to a piece of anger and resentment that has absolutely no cause or substance in reality. Perhaps that is a really a good thing for me to be aware of, because in actuality there is no cause or substance for any form of resentment.

Remember something suggested previously, as Christ In Training you need to know this commitment to the truth of who you are requires work. It requires discipline; it requires sacrifice (by the way, sacrifice does not mean suffering and pain; it means “to make holy”). It requires focusing on long-term gains over short-term ones. It requires a deep, deep love of self that goes beyond the surface. This is not any different from the work you are challenged to do in any relationship. You know that any relationship requires work and effort. The focus here is relationship in its highest form — your relationship with God.

Attachments can be subtle. Sometimes addictions can even wear the disguise of virtue. You can become attached to the good qualities of another and admire them from afar, but this does you no good at all. Admiration of a quality or a person is simply admiration. What Christ In Training is after is assimilation and action. Talking about and admiring someone else’s virtues is easy; living them yourself is the challenge. And so the question you need to ask yourself is, “Am I here to feel good about someone else’s spiritual experience, or am I willing to take up the challenge and embrace my truth which is also God’s truth, each moment of each day?”

You might delight in that idea of Jesus, “Greater things than this shall you do,” John 14:12 — but when was the last time you even thought of attempting greater or even similar things?

If you are attracted to Gandhi or any other master, it is because you sense the spark of the Divine in them. You sense that they have been able to really understand the deepest yearning of their Soul. They have been able to be inspired by their yearning for God, and they have learned how to begin to achieve and satisfy that yearning with God alone. They have not only read the book on Christ In Training, they are *doing* it.

Gandhi himself put it so powerfully: “I have not the shadow of a doubt that any man or woman can achieve what I have, if he or she would make the same effort and cultivate the same hope and faith.”¹⁵

So where do you begin this journey of moving from admiring the man to living his virtue? If it is Gandhi you are thinking about, then how do you move from admiring non-violence to living it? If it is Jesus you are emulating, then how do you move from admiring love, compassion, and forgiveness to living it? The first step is knowing you can choose any personification of virtue that you want, but you must know that the work to manifest that virtue is yours.

As with any piece of growth, you are not going to be able to take it on all at once. You take little steps; the results will not be tangible right away. Your mind is not going to be happy about little steps that do not seem to have substantial outcomes. Your “little self” wants to do it all at once, and, more importantly, the mind and ego are going to be looking for some rewards along the way. So be aware of this, when the mind does not get immediate gratification it likes to convince you to give up. Notice again how attachment crops up. This time it is attachment to results.

Stay with the work. Let go of your expectations. Continue to affirm that God is in charge. Keep your focus on God, and on loving the good. Remember what Emmet Fox stated in his wonderful *Golden Key*, “Whenever you have a problem or difficulty, stop thinking about the problem and turn your attention to God.”

According to Meister Eckhart, detachment “rekindles the heart, awakens the spirit, stimulates our longings, and shows you where God is. . .”¹⁶

The Hindu Gita states: “The disciplined man with joy and light within becomes one with God and reaches the freedom that is God’s.” Bhagavad-Gita 5.24¹⁷

To complete the circle of learning, another way of expressing non-attachment is to be loving. Jesus put it this way, “Love one another as I have loved you.” John 13:34 You realize you cannot practice that kind of love with attachments holding you back and draining you of energy. Detachment uncovers your basic desire for God and sets it free. With

freedom from desire comes the capacity to love, and to be loving is the goal of the spiritual life. Jesus' many words about detachment are set in the context of growing into the fullness of love.

Gandhi also said, "I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, try the following expedient: Recall the face of the poorest and the most helpless man whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Then you will find your doubts and your self melting away."¹⁸

Your Christ In Training prayer can be: "Oh, God, help me to keep my focus on you. Give me the grace and awareness to lovingly enjoy all the things of this world, and let me know that all of my yearnings are the yearnings to be whole, to be loved, and to be free. Let me know that through your love and truth I have all of these gifts right now. Amen."

As is usual and predictable for me, I grew impatient and wanted to move on quickly. I wanted my training to be completed. I didn't want to be Christ In Training anymore; I wanted to be finished, I wanted to be done with the In Training part.

I wanted to graduate. I wanted to be put to work in the vineyards of the Lord. Enough of this education stuff. Let's move on.

As anxious as I was, my curiosity got the better of me. I wanted to sneak a look at what lessons were to come.

I began to run into blank pages just as I did when I first began looking for things such as "How to Catch a Boatload of Fish" or "Casting Out Demons."

The pages weren't completely blank, though. There were some tantalizing hints of what was to come.

I wondered if my learning had reached a point where I was being challenged to take in these truths and ponder on them without a lot of explanation or direction. Perhaps, when I was ready, more would be revealed.

PASSION

Jesus, as Christ In Training, spoke much about peace, but He also exemplified passion. His cleansing of the temple is often perceived as a story about money-changers and salesmen. Certainly that part is true, but it is really a story about passion. Reflecting on that incident, the evangelist quotes the Old Testament by saying “The zeal for thy house has consumed me.” Psalm 69:9/John 2:17 I think Jesus was saying, “If you can’t respect the house of God which you can see, how can you respect the principle and source of love which you cannot see?” He is also asking you the challenging question, “What are you passionate about?”

As we said in the Sixties — what turns you on?

Jesus encourages us to be passionate. He said, “Would that you were hot or cold (passionate). So because you are lukewarm (indifferent), and neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth.” Revelations 3:15 Powerful words; powerful message.

TAKING DIRECTIONS

When Jesus was 12, He was separated from His family and found teaching in the temple. When Mary discovered Him and expressed her concern, Jesus replied, “Did you not know that it is my duty to be engaged in my Father’s business?” Luke 2:41-52 Weymouth’s New Testament

The rest of the conversation is not recorded, but it is presumed that since Jesus did go back home, His mother might have said something to the effect of, “You’re correct, you must be about your Father’s business. Right now your Father’s business for you is to come home and be a boy of 12.” Chronologically the next detail in scripture gives a hint at Mary’s influence and Jesus’ willingness to look at things differently through her eyes.

There was a wedding feast, Jesus and Mary were there, and the wed-

ding party ran out of wine. It was an embarrassing scene. Mary told Jesus “There is no more wine,” Jesus replied, “Oh, woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Then in the next moment, Mary turns to the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.” Of course, a few moments later there is the wonderful water into wine story. John 2:1-10

Now here is what to ponder: Jesus said His “hour had not yet come,” yet Mary started things in motion, and Jesus followed without comment or complaint.

If Jesus can listen to another voice, and be open to doing and seeing things differently, then what about you?

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

What is it again that you are supposed to practice?

AWARENESS — You need to become *aware*. You need to be aware of what puts you to sleep. You need to be aware and to be conscious of the negative patterns that seem to rule your life. You need to be conscious of your defensive reflexes that close your heart. You need to become aware of how to direct your actions. You need to remind yourself of who you are, and realize there is work to be done. You have to wake up! As the mystic Gurdjieff said, “You have to realize you are in prison before you can get out.” You have to remember what really matters. It takes constant work to stay awake.

I thought to myself, there are some moments in my life that stand out in stark relief from my ordinary vision. Sometimes these moments are so extraordinary they make the rest of life seem colorless and two-dimensional. If it is true that each moment is sacred, then what makes some moments seem more sacred than others? Is it my awareness that makes the difference?

I wonder how many of those twinkling pieces of time I missed because I was so busy doing something else. During

the final scene in Our Town, young Emily comes back to re-live a special day in her life, her sixteenth birthday. As she tries to catch the attention of those she loves, she finds that her mother and father are so busy doing things, like fixing watches or making cakes, that they are completely missing Emily herself and the beauty and blessedness that is right in front of them. Painfully, she says to the Stage Manager, "Take me back, it is too difficult. Doesn't anyone realize the preciousness of each moment?" His quiet reply was, "No, only saints and poets sometimes."

For me it was the week after Thanksgiving, and my father was dying.

He was admitted to the hospital a few days before with a severe case of pneumonia. A childhood accident along with his drinking and smoking contributed to a tendency to choke when eating. Evidently, some food entered his lungs after one of these choking episodes and precipitated this bout of pneumonia.

By the time I had received the news and flown up to New York, Dad was in a coma and was not expected to live. My mother and I spent most of our days and evenings in the ICU waiting room. We would go in to see Dad, say a few prayers, and then go back and sit.

My mother and I were both smokers then. We took turns going downstairs to do our dirty work. Every once in a while only one of us was up there in the ICU waiting room.

I am a pretty introverted person. If I was sitting next to you on a train or plane, I would probably have my nose in a book, and would be hoping you would do the same. If you did start a conversation, I would not slight you, and I might even be quite personable, but if I had a preference I would still be reading my book.

My father is dying, my mother is grieving, and here I am, this little introvert, with my nose in a magazine (probably an old Ladies Home Journal).

Into the waiting room strolls a little girl pushing a wheelchair with a tiny stuffed bear riding in it. Normally, my first reaction would have been one of annoyance, but I surprised myself by putting down my magazine, smiling, and saying, “Hi, what’s your name?” She said her name was Missy, and her smile was like the sunshine of springtime on that gloomy wintry day. I am still dazzled by the memory. At that moment, she just touched my Soul.

It sounded as if Missy had a cleft palate that left her speech somewhat nasal and a little difficult to understand. I’m not sure if that was her reason for being in the hospital. Due to her speech difficulty I was forced to listen to her even more intently than usual. She began chattering away about her little bear and all the other kinds of stuff that kids talk about. She was one of those kids who could converse with you as if they’ve known you all their lives.

My mom loved kids; it was one of her heartbreaks in life that she had only one child. She would have loved to have a houseful of them. When my mother came in, and I introduced her to Missy, they took to one another immediately, which was not surprising to me. She and Missy did “girl talk” about dolls and clothes and things. Then we both shared in Missy’s wonderful spirit and smile. I can just imagine what rich inner gifts were shining forth from her wonderful warmth. She thawed out my frozen soul that day.

Without warning, a nurse came in, pretty much ignored us, and started reading Missy the riot act — “What are you doing here; you should be in your room; blah, blah, blah.”

(I could not help but be reminded of Nurse Ratched in the book/movie One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest). Missy quietly picked up her little stuffed bear, put it in her lap, and sat down in the wheelchair while the nurse rolled her out. We waved, said goodbye, and never saw one another again.

Missy was an angel who entered my life. Here was a moment I could have readily overlooked. I could have

missed it so very easily by being wrapped up in some very legitimate feelings of sorrow and grief.

I wonder, I really wonder, how many other moments, like this one with Missy, I was unaware of because I was too busy doing things I thought were important. How many?

ACCEPTANCE — After awareness comes *acceptance*. Acceptance is another way of expressing surrender, letting go, giving it to God, and giving it over to Spirit. Many times that will mean saying, “I don’t know what to do, God. I don’t know the answer; you do. Guide me, direct me, and lead me.” You are especially encouraged to let go of how you think your prayer should be answered. You are encouraged to let go of your preconceived notions of how the answer is going to manifest. Those rigid ideas create a box you put yourself in. Many times you will miss the answers because they are coming from an unexpected source or an unexpected direction. In your acceptance, you are releasing your limited identity and your attachment to the ego. You are opening yourself to a deeper, more true awareness of who you are. You are working and living out of your relationship with Spirit. United with God and with Spirit, now you can really act. Now your actions can mean something.

ACTION — Prayer is the best and most powerfully decisive *action* you can take in any situation. It is the best way of getting out of your ego, your trapped limited consciousness, and enlisting not only a power greater than yourself, but also realizing you are united with that power, and that the Power of God flows through you.

A few years ago, I was introduced to Silent Unity, a 24-hour prayer line. A live person is on the other end to pray with you, whatever your intention might be, and that intention will be prayed for non-stop for the next 30 days. Every time I have personally made use of that prayer ministry I have been greatly unburdened of whatever I was carrying, and have known in my heart that my need, my healing, and my intention is now in God’s loving and capable hands.

Memorize this number: 1-800-669-7729. Tattoo it on your forehead. Use it!

By taking action you are getting rid of old patterns that no longer work, and you are also creating new ones. That kind of spiritual practice in any form brings you to a deeper level of loving.

The questions, “Why am I not moving?” or “What is stopping me from getting where I want to be?” are a trap. Those kinds of questions keep you in the problem. The real questions are, “What are you going to do?” and “What do you need to do?” Those questions are supposed to make you a little uneasy. Your dedication to your spiritual life is supposed to make you uncomfortable. There is no beatitude that states, “Blessed are the comfortable, for everything they desire will be theirs.”

Here are some other simple, practical exercises of spiritual action directed towards growth and transformation.

One of the simplest and sometimes most significant actions you can take is to clean up your nest. There are going to be times when you just feel stuck. There will be times when you simply do not know where to go or what to do. You might not even know what questions to ask. In those times, do something simple that can also be transforming, such as cleaning up your room or your home. If you cannot do it all, then chunk it down. Do little pieces, one corner at a time. It is amazing sometimes what happens when you clean up your nest; you gain a little more control over your life. You can experience yourself as having some power rather than being powerless.

Work on finding solutions rather than being overwhelmed by the problem. You might feel overwhelmed, and you might not be able to immediately change that feeling, but you do not have to make your feelings into facts. You can have your feelings, but you do not have to be controlled by them. This is another great opportunity for prayer, “God, I am feeling overwhelmed, and I am even thinking of myself as helpless. God, help me out of the box, help me know there is already part of me that is creating a solution with Your power, Your help, Your love, and Your grace. Thank you, God, for the vision to see beyond my problem and to see beyond this limited vision I have of myself right

now. Amen.”

Ram Dass once related a story which powerfully expressed the lesson of going beyond how you feel. It is so very important not to make how you feel into who you are.

It seems he was living in California but giving a lecture in New York. At 3:00 in the morning the phone rang in his hotel room. The person who called said, “I’m going crazy; I’m going to kill myself.” He replied, “I don’t want to talk with you.” This breaks all the rules of therapy and helping.

There was a dead silence on the other end of the phone. He proceeded to say, “I do want to talk with the person who was sane enough to track me down from California to New York, who was able to find out where I was staying, who wheedled my number from the desk clerk who was not supposed to give it out, and who was able to dial a 10-digit number at 3 in the morning — that’s who I want to talk to.”¹⁹

I just love that story!

COMPASSION — Compassion is not just a feeling or an emotion; it is a willingness to open your heart to understand the pain of another. It is not an easy thing. One of the reasons it is so difficult to go to a hospital or a funeral home is that you know there is nothing material you can do to change the situation or to relieve the other of their pain. In the world’s eyes, you will appear powerless, because there is usually nothing you can do for the pain of another except to be there for them, to be present.

Spiritually, though, you can offer comfort, and even though that does not assuage the pain, it does help the person to know they are not alone. Even though there is no objective way to describe the results of a compassionate act, all of you have experienced what the loving presence of another human being means, even if they cannot do anything to change a situation.

I could not help but be reminded of a definition of love from a favorite book of mine. It’s called If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him, by Sheldon Kopp. He said,

“Sometimes love is the willingness to live with the helpless knowing that we can do nothing to save the other from his pain.”²⁰ I have to add to that by stating, “other than being present to them,” which is a huge gift.

After my father made his transition, I stayed with my mother for a week or so. I wanted to take away the pain of her grieving. I took her out to eat, to the movies. I cooked her dinner. Finally she said, “Please, I just need to grieve.” I got it. I could not eliminate her hurt. I could be present for her. I could offer nurturing and support, but I could not take her pain away.

GRATITUDE — “Count your blessings,” you are told. That is a good thing, but *gratitude* is much more than that. Gratitude is the practice of cultivating a state of mind that constantly and consistently dwells on the positive, holy, and healthy aspects of life. It is not a denial or glossing over of things that need to be addressed or changed, but rather a deep realization that change and transformation build on what is already working. Focus on what is working rather than on what is not. Concentrating on what you do not have or what is not working in your life is like “building your house on sand.” Matthew 7:26 We are influenced by a world that dwells on the negative and what is not working. The hope is that by paying a lot of attention to it, that it will somehow change. Certainly there is a need for social awareness, but awareness of what is wrong, by itself, never changed anything.

Gratitude offers the tools and the energy for transformation. Like beauty, gratitude opens your heart. An open and loving heart is uncluttered by doubt or fear and therefore a vehicle for profound creativity.

Notice what happens to you when you dwell on what you do not have. When you are living in a state of mind of scarcity and lack, your heart shuts down. Your capacity to love diminishes. You become tight and closed off inside. Paradoxically you are now cut off from all that you really desired.

It is so easy to get lost in the negative. There is almost a pleasurable seductiveness to feeling sorry for yourself because you don’t have this

or that. In that black hole of scarcity and dissatisfaction, it is difficult to see what is working in your life. It is difficult to see what you have to be grateful for. In this negative frame of mind, when gratitude is suggested, it is always answered with “Yeah, but . . .” As you practice stepping back from those dark experiences, you realize that there is no room for grace, no room for healing in that place of discontent. Please realize that you might not be able to alter the dark feelings immediately, but, as was suggested so many other times, the feeling of lack or scarcity is not who you are. When your ego’s desires are not met, it can seem as if your whole life is going down the tube. Through the grace of gratitude, you begin to realize, “Yes, there was something that I didn’t get or that didn’t work. I am angry or sad or disappointed, yet that incident represents only a minuscule part of my life. It’s just a little piece, not the whole thing.” Relax, be open to what you have, use what is already working. Be open to the flow of love and grace that is always there, inside of you and surrounding you. Is there really anything more important in life other than knowing you are a beloved child of God?

I could be walking along the street, thinking good thoughts, or going through a catalogue looking for a gift for someone, and inevitably something will catch my attention and “I’ve got to have it.” I did not even know it existed a moment ago, but now it is taking up a huge space in my mind. Amazing! I’ve discovered that no matter what happens in life, my ego is not going to be satisfied. If I don’t get what I want, it will naturally be angry, but even if I do get what I want, the satisfaction is so brief as to be non-existent. Either something else will come along that I want or “have to have,” or I will find out this wonderful thing I just got went on sale somewhere else or a newer model just came out. When my ego’s desires are in charge, I can’t win.

Being OK in the Physical World

It is all right — in fact, it is a good thing — to pay attention to your

physical environment, including your body. Be alive to your senses. You do not have to indulge them in order to enjoy them. In fact, indulgence many times leads to the dulling of the senses rather than their enhancement. The world around you, again including your own body, can be a source of love, of learning, of enjoyment, and of Grace.

As Christ In Training, when you live in the world you go beyond a mere sense of stewardship to the realization that you are part of this whole thing. You are part of the world. An aspect of who you are is manifested here in this world of matter. Just because you are not supposed to be “of the world” does not deny that you are in it. Although Jesus is described as being in the world but not of it, John 17:11 He was not condemning physical reality. He was reminding us of the perils of attachment. He was reminding us how things can pull us away from what we value spiritually. He was reminding us of how we can be distracted from what is more deeply important. On the other hand, the world we live in, the physical world, is our classroom. It is where we do so much of our learning.

Just as in our inner world we have the choice of love or fear, in the material world we can choose to find beauty or ugliness. You can find beauty anywhere, just as you can also find ugliness. Your perception is your choice. What would a day in your life be like if you chose to find beauty everywhere and in everyone? The recognition of this choice and its positive practice is a profound act of love and spirituality.

One of my favorite lines in literature is from James Joyce. I believe he wrote, “Mr. Duffy lived a short distance from his body.” That’s me!

I lived in my head for most of my life. I never really felt, never really experienced life. Being in my body not only means really feeling and experiencing things in this material world, it means being present, being in the now. It means being open to all things.

In the movie Starman, Jeff Bridges is just getting used to being in a human body. One of his experiences is eating for the first time. He sticks a spoon in his mouth loaded with Dutch apple pie and vanilla ice cream and as soon as he

begins tasting, his mouth falls open; he has this big silly grin, and he slobbers all over himself. He is in a state of ecstasy that he cannot describe; he is so overwhelmed by these wonderful sensations. Being in my body means not taking things for granted; it means being aware of and being grounded in every moment. It means being open to all the beauty and experiences my senses are offering me.

Practice being both precious and valuable as you are now, and growing to be more than you are. When your thoughts lead you into negativity, have an internal plan of action. Have a mental list of positive thoughts and experiences you can focus your mind on. It might not always change your feelings right away, but it will eventually shift your awareness to healthier, more positive ideas. Remind yourself that you are loved. Not just when you find yourself in crisis, but every time you think of it. Do it!

I've struggled with this one. I have come to call it the paradox of spiritual growth. It is important to love and honor yourself just the way you are. It is also important to be open to continued growth. My mind cannot understand this paradox. It will say something such as, "You are either fine the way you are now or you will be fine later. You can't have it both ways." My Soul knows, though, that both can be true. I can love myself just where I am and be open to further challenges and growth.

Think about a child you love. You know you can love him/her just the way he/she is, and also be encouraging to her/his growth. There is no need for conflict.

Practice the Presence of God, and know that the realization of the Presence of God carries with it the unlimited strength, wisdom, and compassion of God, and most importantly God's unconditional love.

In Buddhism, the question is asked, "How do I lead a full and complete life." The answer is, "By preparing for your death." The student then asks, "How do I prepare for death?" The teacher replies, "By living a full and complete life."

You are all going to be released from your physical body by a

process that is sometimes called death. As someone put it, “Lighten up — no one is going to get out of here alive.” The point is, when you realize your physical mortality, when you are aware that everything you do might be the last time, you will be much more attuned and grateful for the moment. You will be very conscious of letting people know you love them. You will be very aware of eating that peach or listening to the ocean. When you live with the sense that “all is passing,” you realize more and more the preciousness of ordinary things. You live more in the moment; you are more grateful, more thoughtful, and more present. Facing death is facing the fact of death, not a morbid fascination. It is a deep appreciation of the beauty and opportunities that exist right now.

Remember the essence of your work? What is it you are moving towards? This is your goal: nothing short of being as pure an instrument as possible for God’s Love and Grace to flow through. Because not only are you the channel of Grace, you are that Grace itself, uniquely manifest.

So what are you doing to diminish your ego and to empower your Soul?

Do you want to wake up? Be honest, now. Do you want to wake up, even if you do not completely know what that means or what that will lead to? That is what spiritual action means. It means jumping into the unknown, the unpredictable. It means jumping into the things that will stretch you. It means jumping into stuff that is bigger than you are, even though you might not know where it is going to lead you. Constantly know in your heart that you are always, always jumping into the warm, safe, loving arms of God.

It was then I realized my learning would continue because God is infinite. There is no graduation ceremony. As long as I am clothed in this body and somewhat bound by my human experience, I will be learning and growing. I remain in awe of that infinite Presence.

Even with the book’s latest revelations to me, my learning has reminded me not to become attached. I am reminded not to become attached to a book or any other form, because teaching and learning are everywhere, just as God is every-

where. Every moment reveals the presence of God and all God's gifts. The continuing life lesson of Christ In Training is to be aware that whatever the situation, I have a choice of how I hold it. Grace is always present to aid in my choice.

With the help of God and Spirit, I can choose to be warm, kind, loving, peaceful, passionate, creative, non-judgmental, and lovingly detached. All of these choices are mine when I acknowledge and depend upon the Christ within. My positive and loving choices reflect my Oneness with Spirit.

As I was returning the book to the shelf, one of the last things I read was from the ending of the Gospel of John:

“But there are many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” John 21:25

As I was leaving the store, I told the old man how much I enjoyed the book. I had thought about buying it, keeping it, and taking it home, but that felt like trying to lock the truth up in a box. The book Christ In Training showed me that teachers are everywhere, and that any lesson I need is right in front of me if I am willing to look. There's my lesson — in the traffic light, the grocery line, the angry driver, the crying baby, the know-it-all at work, my friend who is sick, and my mother who seems to never change. It's all there just as it was before. Nothing has changed and everything has changed.

It's all here if I can be aware of it. As the blind man said to Jesus, “Lord, that I may see.”

I'm sure I'll visit the store again. Maybe I will spend another afternoon with the book called Christ In Training, if it is still there. Maybe there will be another book. . .

Indelibly sketched in my mind were the final words:

“Whenever confused, lost, angry, or in any way experiencing yourself as being separate from God and your true nature, go back to Love. That is always the way.”



All scripture is from The Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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