



The Contemplative Society

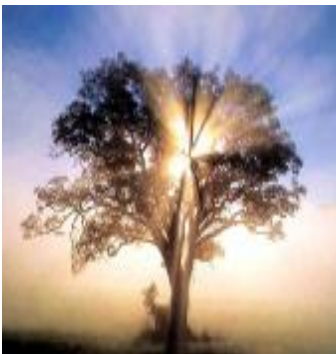
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The Spirit's Hands

They
can be a great help - words.
They can become the spirit's
hands
and lift and
caress
you.
- Meister Eckhart

Multifaith Services at the University of Victoria: Supporting Students on the Contemplative Path - by Keely Bays

In this time of great interior and exterior change within society and humanity, I am excited to be a new member on the Board of The Contemplative Society. I am a recent graduate of the University of Victoria, and a full-time student of the contemplative path. I feel, despite my shyness, that now is a fertile time for young people such as myself to voice their experiences and observations, and so I feel grateful that I have been given the opportunity to practice, learn, and share with like-spirited members of The Contemplative Society and wider contemplative community.

My meditation practice, and the beginning of a conscious spiritual journey began in my second year at the University of Victoria (UVic). My studies were in Biology and Environmental Studies, but in the background there continually bubbled in me the 'big' questions – What is life? What am I? What does it mean to be human? Why is there so much inner and outer suffering? What is the point of all of this? These questions weighed on me with a feeling of being overwhelmed, anxious, and with a deep dissatisfaction with the world.

Though I am but one voice for my generation, I have a feeling, and know from conversations with peers, that these sentiments are common to others as well.

The weight of these questions and their attendant emotions, drove me to seek out answers – in science, in philosophy, in nature. I would spend time sitting quietly in the shimmering, undulating Garry oak and camas lily meadows near my house, in awe of the beauty and life I saw and felt there. In the stillness and listening that came from this awe, I began to take notice of something. Something very intriguing. Something I had not taken notice of in my everyday world. It was a feeling I could only describe as life. Or maybe presence. I wasn't sure, but it was in me, and it was beyond me. I wanted to know more about it, I wanted to know it, I wanted to join with it.

The summer of second year, on a biology work term in big city Vancouver, the friction of big city life turned up the volume on those big questions. Those questions and anxieties now too nagging to ignore, I found myself picking up a book on meditation in hopes of finding some peace and clarity. Thus began the beginning of an eight year love affair with meditation and contemplative practice. Like a treasure trove waiting to be unearthed I quickly discovered a world of experiences within my interior self which quickly ushered me into the exploration of spiritual traditions. Once an agnostic devoted to the exploration of scientific traditions, I was amazed to see myself extending my studies to the inner world.

“The experiences brought about through my meditation practice stirred in me a desire to learn more.”

Contemplative Practice As Gateway

The experiences brought about through my meditation practice stirred in me a desire to learn more. My first point of contact with the wider spiritual community came through UVic's Multifaith Services, which provided catalytic opportunities to study, practice, and connect with other spiritually-yearning students. Here I gained knowledge, motivation, and, most importantly, support, during this disorienting and reorienting time. A bi-weekly meditation group, retreats, and discussion circles supported my meditation practice and spiritual learning.

Without meditation, my mind would not have been ready to take in and integrate such learnings. One of my favourite perspectives of Cynthia's is that meditation changes not what you think, but *how* you think. Meditation, and especially Centering Prayer, has, it seems, created the awareness 'platform,' a new and continually updated operating

Multifaith Services at the University of Victoria— *continued from page 1*

system, for better understanding, feeling, knowing, and *applying* Wisdom teachings and practices. And with this has come a deep gratitude and appreciation for the teachings of Jesus, Buddha, and other great spiritual masters and traditions.

This set of stepping stones on my path is, I don't think, too uncommon

among young people, at least within my community. Other young adults I have connected with, especially those of the growing 'spiritual-but-not-religious' cohort, have shared similar steps along their paths.



Spiritual-But-Not-Religious

A Religious Studies student at the University of Victoria, Sarah Stang, wrote a paper on the growing phenomenon of 'Spiritual But Not Religious', SBNR for short. In brief, the paper spoke of the decline in religiosity and the concurrent rise in 'spirituality', since the 1960s, in North American culture, and specifically in British Columbia. Her research for the paper included interviews with meditators from UVic's Multifaith Services, and cited other similar studies on religion and spirituality among young adults. The paper suggested several reasons for the SBNR phenomenon, one of which being the desire among a growing number of young people for a spirituality that fosters individual, direct experience.

I can only speak for myself, but perhaps what young people are wanting is proof, through direct experience – a contemplative path. In my work as a school teacher, I see this questioning and desire to learn for one's self come up in some of my brightest students. 'Why? Prove it to me, show me.' Centering Prayer has for me been a practice that does just this.

Multifaith Services

UVic Multifaith Services provides opportunities for young adults to learn in this way, not just vicariously through the words of others, but from direct inner experience, the most potent teacher of all. For myself and others, this has allowed a ripening of the mind and heart to occur, in which the student becomes ready to truly listen and *hear* the Wisdom teachings of their spiritual predecessors.

UVic's Multifaith Services is a spiritual launch point for a growing number of students. Its bi-weekly meditation group, which started in 1994 with small group of no more than 6 students, has grown dramatically to between 25 and 35 students per sit, at times growing to almost 50 students, causing the group to spill over from the meditation room into the main chapel hall. The meditation group has expanded its activities to include a weekly soup and meditation-related discussion group. In addition, the Interfaith Chapel hosts a large group sit put on by the Victoria Zen Centre once per week, a Chartres Cathedral-style labyrinth once per semester (set up for students to de-frazzle and re-centre during exam period as well as open to the wider public), and a monthly half-day workshop on Centering Prayer taught by myself and fellow Board member and UVic United Church chaplain Henri Lock. The growing interest in meditation at UVic recently led to the first student meditation retreat, with registration numbers at full capacity.

It brings great gratitude to see organizations such as UVic's Multifaith Services providing to students and young adults teachings in contemplative practice and opportunities that support a deepening awareness of Self, Spirit, and the peace of truth.

Keely Bays has recently been elected to The Contemplative Society Board of Directors.

The United Church Campus Ministry at the University of Victoria received financial support from The Contemplative Society and The Victoria Foundation to provide contemplative teaching and practice for students, staff, and faculty through weekly meditation groups, meditation retreats and workshops in Centering Prayer.

YOUR MEMBERSHIP OR GIFT TO THE CONTEMPLATIVE SOCIETY WILL MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE.

"What I personally receive from my membership in TCS is a sense of relief and gratitude that I no longer need to be a "seeker" but can now deepen my faith in a teaching and tradition that speaks to my heart (and mind) and provides an opportunity to share my experience and practice in community of like-minded souls. I appreciate and learn from teachers from many traditions and organizations, but above all I consider Cynthia as my primary teacher and she specifically provides a vision that seems most "true" for me. And she does this not only as a very learned,

articulate, and wise scholar, but also with the charm and realness of a woman who is willing to honestly share her humanity and life experiences - and in fact demonstrates how to live in this world taking each experience and relationship as a potential means for personal transformation. Simply put, TCS provides a means for me to stay connected to Cynthia's teaching and a way to participate in the recovery of the Christian contemplative and Wisdom traditions." - TCS Member

Your membership or donation provides direct support to Cynthia Bourgeault and to the work of recovering and sharing Christian contemplative and Wisdom practice around the world. Please visit www.contemplativ.org or call 250.381.9650 for details.

A Letter from Cynthia

May 2011

Dear friends in
The Contemplative Society,

What a blessing it was to spend time with you again earlier this spring! Our three Victoria events—the retreat at Poet’s Cove and my talks at The Lenten Noonday Forum at St. John’s and at UVic—were each in their own way intense, stimulating, and deeply rewarding. It was wonderful to see the creative energy and teamwork percolating! I was also amazed at how intense and provocative my short sojourn at Christ Church Cathedral in Vancouver just at the beginning of Holy Week turned out to be (you’ll find links both to my Palm Sunday sermon and to a reflection on our Holy Week Anointing Ceremony on The Contemplative Society website.) As I continue to sense that the Church (if not the entire world!) is fast converging on a tipping point, it was wonderful indeed to recognize that the seeds planted more than a decade ago when we founded The Contemplative Society are bearing fruit in a network of deeply grounded, prophetic, and visionary souls willing and able to carry the best of Christian contemplative wisdom into a world aching for new formats and new beginnings.

Barely a month later, I am at last nearing the end of my annual spring migration. My hermitage on Eagle Island, Maine, is now in striking distance! On Sunday, when the contemplative retreat I’m currently leading in the Hudson Valley comes to its end, I will be underway on the last leg of the journey, and hope by this time next week to be unpacking books and planting the garden. Even for me (“Our Lady of perpetual motion,” as one of my friends dubbed me), the past month has been off the charts, taking me from British Columbia to New Zealand, briefly back to Aspen, then over to Albuquerque for our first ever Wisdom School with Richard Rohr’s Center for Action and Contemplation, then back up to Boulder for a sparkling but again intense weekend exploring the Path of Conscious Love with Ken Wilber and the Integral Life Institute in Boulder. I am indeed ready for some hermitage time!

There’s a still point in all this turning world, however, and even as the rate of outer motion seems to be accelerating, inside I’m paying careful attention to the question of where best to concentrate my efforts. It’s not a simple question of a priority list, for as a lot of old institutional forms are dy-



ing out and new spiritual organizations proliferating at a dizzying rate, it’s almost an instinctive sense of which new forms best carry the current, energy, and depth of our received Christian mystical tradition. For the moment, the Wisdom School network (we now have six or seven schools on the books, all over North America, in the upcoming two years) is receiving my full attention, together with the need to develop some powerful contemplative immersion retreats around the chief liturgical milestones of the Christian year: Holy Week, Advent, Christmas, Ascension-to-Pentecost, and All Saints. I am also paying close attention to the chain of events set in motion by my work with Mary Magdalene, and to increasing evidence of an authentic first-century Gospel tradition in France, previously known only by its demonization as “The Cathar heresy” and still little more than a magnet for every possible kind of New Age silliness. But beneath all the bloodline conspiracy, archetypal earth goddess, DaVinci Code hype, is there a living tradition of Christianity taught and lived as a path of Conscious Love? I will be exploring this more during an upcoming semi-sabbatical year, some of it to be spent in research in the South of France.

So that’s the news, basically. People ask me if I’ve got another book in the pipeline, and while the half-completed manuscript on the Trinity is sitting on a shelf back in Maine, I’m not rushing at this point to get another book out. It’s a time for watching and listening, for tending the little networks that have come into being to help midwife this quantum consciousness shift we’re all hovering at the edge of (The Contemplative Society being one of these networks)...and yes, for getting the seeds in the ground and the boat in the water.

I send you all my love and my deep gratitude.

Cynthia

I AM NOT I

I am not I.
I am this one
Walking beside me whom I do not see,
Whom at times I manage to visit,
And at other times I forget.
The one who remains silent when I talk,
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
The one who takes a walk when I am indoors,
The one who will remain standing when I die.

- Juan Ramon Jimenez (translation by Robert Bly)

A message from TCS Administrator

Dear members and friends,

During Cynthia's visit to British Columbia this Spring, 70 retreatants gathered on Pender Island to absorb Cynthia's profound teaching walking us through Holy week with Mary Magdalene. Cynthia also gave two public talks in the city of Victoria, including to a very receptive and diverse group at the University of Victoria, co-sponsored by the ministry at UVic as mentioned in Keely's page one article. Please refer to Cynthia's schedule on our website for opportunities to attend upcoming events with Cynthia, including a June visit to the UK, and various engagements throughout the US. The contemplative yearning is truly expanding throughout the world. We greatly appreciate your membership and financial contributions as we are guided to assist people on the contemplative path and directly support Cynthia in her work.

Blessings one and all, Eileen



See www.contemplative.org for recent items of interest, including:

The Future of Church - A 12-part series of observations and reflections with Rev. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault and Christopher Page.

“Learning to stay open, stay engaged, stay receptive in the face of sweeping change (rather than going to fear-responses) is a classic fruit of spiritual practice.” - Cynthia Bourgeault

Interviews with Cynthia -

including audio and video interviews with Cynthia discussing *The Meaning of Mary Magdalene* and *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*. *“To reclaim Mary Magdalene is to reclaim Christianity.” - Cynthia speaking on Wisconsin Public Radio*

Being Mary - A young woman shares her transformative and personal experience of being touched by the Magdalenic energy while "being Mary" at a recent anointing service. *“Cynthia's presence was so disarming and pregnant with love. There was nothing about roles or backgrounds or judgments or expectations. Only love. .” - Chela Davison*

Retreat with Ward Bauman on the profound teachings of 13th century mystic, **Meister Eckhart**

Bethlehem Retreat Centre, Nanaimo, BC

Thurs Sept 29, to Sun Oct 2, 2011

While no Christian mystic is more quoted than is Meister Eckhart, none is more misunderstood. Indeed, among the metaphysicians he excels - a master of the non-dual consciousness.

Our task will be to balance Eckhart's practice with his teaching, engaging in silence, listening with the ears of the heart, and together exploring his mystical works. He points us to what is beyond our minds, yet may be known through our experience. "God," he says, "is no further off than the door of the heart. Your opening and God's entering are but one moment."

Led by Ward Bauman, Director of the Episcopal House of Prayer, and a 30 years student of the Master of Western Mysticism.

“Ward Bauman is a deeply formed contemplative and person of integrity” - Cynthia Bourgeault

Watch for more information and registration details on our website or call 250.381.9650



“Is this not a holy trinity: the firmament, the earth, our bodies. And is it not an act of worship to hold a child, and till the soil and lift a cup. And Communion, first seek that from your lover's soul before anything offered from a priest.”

- Meister Eckhart



The Contemplative Society is committed to recovering the ancient unitive Wisdom tradition and mystical heart of Christianity through contemplative teaching, retreats, and meditation.

For info please visit our website at www.contemplative.org or phone us at 250.381.9650