



Monastic Musings

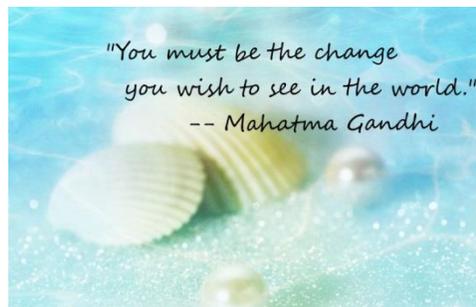
Living in and Practicing the Presence of God

Winter 2016

Welcome to 2016

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

Welcome to 2016 and everything that can happen with your spirituality this year! Are you ready to take a long hard look at what you hold as your spirituality/faith? Are you ready to allow yourself to be open to new ideas? Are you willing to discard things/ideas that really don't seem to work for you? We all have some kind of spirituality that frequently was developed through our family and church or lack of church and the world around us. So hang on as this could be a very bumpy year spiritually for each of us.



I have suggested to all the members of the Community to be Spiritual Rabble-rousers within their lives and even with the newsletter writings. How does one grow if one is not willing to really challenge their present thinking and perceptions? One does not and so one just goes with the flow of that which is around them. I would ask each and every one of you to take the time to question what you believe or think you believe and see if it makes true sense to you. If it does not, then it is time to find the spirituality that fits with you. It is time to question that which you were taught to see if it really holds any weight for you. Make this year a year that you will actually do something positive for your spiritual wellbeing. Bring the Creator of this world into your life!

2016 – A New Beginning

by Rev. Myrella LeClair

Because the New Year has just started, many of us tend to reflect on the past year, which then leads us to think about how we want to make this year different from the past year and what we need to do to "make it so". While we often think about making changes regarding our household and health related needs, we sometimes fail to consider changes/corrections to our



relationships with loved ones. We need to let go of our anger, hurts, and grudges and be willing to take the first step toward reconciliation; otherwise, healing many never occur. Any moment can be transformed into a holy moment if you choose to truly love and to forgive.

What about your relationship or lack of one with God? Have you reflected on the importance of that relationship? Whether or not we choose to believe in God and no matter what name we call our Creator, there is and always will be a relationship between the Creator and the created - a sacred relationship that needs to be recognized and

nurtured. Do you remind yourself that God is always with you at every instant? God lives in the present moment. In actuality, we can turn every present moment into a prayer if we can transition to living in the moment – then we can make all instants holy. Our goal is to be in union with God throughout every instant of our daily life. Although we will often be distracted, we must return our minds to God and keep the focus there until it becomes so natural that conscious effort is no longer needed – just as our hearts beat without any conscious effort on our parts. If attuned, one can be in union with God in the most hectic of circumstances and still remain centered.

Just as with living in the present moment, being in the presence of God at every instant is a choice. It is not easy to do so since our egos want us to multitask –attempting to distract us from being mindful of the present moment. Our egos would have us always looking at the past or the future but never the present. Is it any wonder that our future is no different from our present – that we keep repeating the same patterns, mistakes, holding on to hurts, anger, etc.? The instant that you realize that your mind is not centered, allow your mind to gently return to God and give thanks that your Creator is always there with you. Do not let yourself get frustrated about your lack of concentration and/or lack of remembering that you are constantly in union with God. Just tell yourself: “At every moment, I live and move in You. I am present to You just as you are forever present to me!”

Keeping your mind centered on God will have ripple effects that will affect all of creation – creating a new beginning for all:

“You cannot make one effort towards heaven without the whole of the world, even the very earth itself, being better for it. See the responsibility that lies within you, brethren! What a glorious opportunity is yours! Don’t allow the darkness of the earth to deny your birthright of freedom and happiness, of service and worship. Peace be to you; peace and great joy.” (*The Quiet Mind – Sayings of White Eagle*)

Amen! Let 2016 be a new beginning in which you live in and share God’s love and blessings with all creation.

Hitbodedut

By Fr. Ron Lathi

Following the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jewish prayer tradition has focused on set prayers offered 3-4 times per day. These prayers, which include a mix of rabbinic compositions, scripture and readings from the Psalms, by the Middle Ages had become fairly standardized throughout the Jewish Diaspora. The modern siddur or prayer book is basically the same form of daily prayer used by all Jews, all over the world, for several centuries.

What many people, even many Jews, are not aware of is the rich tradition of non-formulaic prayer and meditation. In the late Eighteenth Century, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810CE), a grandson of the great Baal Shem Tov, taught a particular expression of non-formulaic prayer called Hitbodedut. Hitbodedut is a Hebrew word meaning roughly “self-seclusion”. Rebbe Nachman taught that one should seek a secluded place, preferably in nature, but any room would do also, and spend time just talking to G-d, “as you would with a best friend”, or “like a child complaining and pestering his father”. It was stressed that rather than the traditional use of Hebrew, one uses one’s own language, and not to be concerned over

formalities. Rebbe Nachman taught his followers to spend at least one hour a day in this conversation with G-d, preferably in the middle of the night – a time when the day's business and clutter calm down and one can spend time in quiet.



Perhaps we can see the roots of this practice, or at least parallels, in the record of Jesus' time. Jesus is recorded many times stealing away, often at night, to "go alone and pray". As for how Jesus prayed on these occasions, we get a clue that the wording was pretty informal since it was Jesus who told us to call G-d "Abba" – Hebrew/Aramaic for "papa", hardly the formulaic language of the "official prayers". Even on the last night Jesus spent his time in prayer, secluded in a garden. The practice has been continually followed in Christianity for millennia as seen in lives of the desert mothers and fathers, the monastic traditions of east and west, and in the lives of great saints – a particular favorite of mine being St. Seraphim of Sarov who prayed alone on a rock in the forest for over 100 days.

One element of Rebbe Nachman's teaching on Hitbodedut which I have not seen paralleled in either Jewish or Christian sources is "the silent scream". Rebbe Nachman taught that one could scream without anyone hearing it. He taught that you form in your mind the clear experience of a scream with the intensity and volume that a real scream would carry – except you keep the scream in your mind and don't let descend to your lips. As you practice this, the scream becomes easier to experience with full intensity, without so much as a peep escaping from your mouth.

So why would one want to utter a "silent scream"? Why wouldn't one? An element of Jewish spirituality that has been lost in Christianity is the idea of talking back to, arguing and even getting angry with G-d. G-d is big enough for our love, worship, awe – G-d is also big enough for our anger, frustration and disappointment. I know there have been many times when the only way to express what I am feeling to G-d is a scream! In the silence of our "seclusion" with G-d we can express all of our feelings, including the pain, loneliness, disappointment and anger. I sometimes feel closer to G-d after a good "silent scream" than I do for all the flowery, nice words we usually send heavenward.

The importance of Hitbodedut, secluding oneself away with G-d, is found only through experience. I am certainly not an expert. But I know the 35 minute drive to work at 5:00am has become a precious occasion when I can just talk with G-d – sometimes laughing, sometimes sighing, sometimes begging, sometimes thanking, and, yes, sometimes screaming – silent or otherwise, I am alone in my car after all. But always it is a time of closeness with my Friend.

Just Some Thoughts

by: Right Reverend Barb Martzall

Over the last few months, my mind has been wandering over so many different thoughts/ideas. Some thoughts I end up verbalizing around the hermitage with Mother Myrella just so that I can "scream" out the feelings that are attached to the thoughts. What my mind has been playing with is really what is going on in this world and even in within our country as a whole. I am trying to wrap my head around why there is all this fighting due to religion. What has happened to create a climate of mistrust in others who do not believe as we do? What is causing this atmosphere of my religion is better than yours?



As I look around I just want to scream and run and hide somewhere that no one can find me. Just stop the world a moment and let me off of this world. It is not what it was when I was growing up. When I was growing up, we were much more tolerant of others and their faiths/religions. There was not this constant pushing one's faith/religion into the face of another person. Your faith/religion directed not only how you lived but also how to do so with others in the community so that all could live in peace and harmony. But look at today, that is not what is happening. You are constantly bombarded with religious ideas that don't even match yours and you are being told that you must forget yours and follow these new ways or interpretations.

Hello, what makes your religious teachings better than mine, may I ask. Why can't I believe what I have always believed? My beliefs are built on the idea/image of a God who is all loving and all forgiving. I don't want to have to believe in a God that is mean, cruel, and unforgiving. I also don't want to say I cannot be friends with someone just because they are of a different religion. That is not what Jesus taught during His life. What says your Holy Book is any better than my Holy Book!

For some reason, we have gotten onto a path that is far from what Jesus taught two thousand years ago. We have gotten onto a path where we think we can reinterpret the words in a way that supports our thinking instead of changing our thinking to fit what is truly being said.

So many people are being led down a pathway that will only end up destroying them in the long run. Religion should help you live a better life and should never be used to destroy people. Because of religion, life is becoming so very difficult to live. One never knows where one stands around other people. One starts to live in fear because of this feeling. That is not what God wants for his people. God wants each and every one of us to love one another and to help others live the best life possible.

What brought this to a head for me, you might ask. Well, today I was sitting in the waiting room for my physical therapy when a conversation started between me and two other people there as we listened to a newscast on TV. To put things into perspective, these two other people are also of my generation. We all realized that this world has really gotten strange and that we are being deluded with everything that is going on around us. Each one of us comes from religious backgrounds that guide us in our ways of living even though each of us is of different religious upbringing. But the wonderful part in our discussions is that we realized that the biggest problem was that religion today is being used as a weapon instead of the healing medication for the problems we are facing.

And so, these are just some of my thoughts today. I refuse to lose hope knowing that in God all things are truly possible if I am willing to be a part of His world. I pray that each of you will find your loving Creator and thus find peace within your life and that we all may become instruments of peace and love within this world.

Newsletter is copyrighted © by:

Holy Theotokos of Mercy Community

**All writings are the views of the author(s) on a particular subject
and are meant to challenge your thinking so as to help you grow in
your spiritual walk with God.**

Contact: archimandritebarb@ohioocc.org