

Contemplative Fire Post

April 2019 – no.35

Weekend at Mount St Bernard Abbey
8th – 10th March



'A doorway into the heart of being' - a meditation on prayer

based on ideas from the first two chapters of *'Primary Speech – A Psychology of Prayer'* by Ann & Barry Ulanov.



Everybody prays.

People pray whether or not they call it prayer.

We pray every time we ask for help, understanding, or strength, in or out of religion.

To pray is to listen and hear this self who is speaking. This speech is primary because it is basic and fundamental, our ground.

In prayer we say who in fact we are – not who we should be, nor who we wish we were, but who we are. All prayer begins with this confession.

In prayer we speak out of our 'flesh', the ground of all our experience, collecting into awareness what our self is saying, both what we know and what we do not know.

When we begin to hear the self, we actually are emerging out of our shadow selves, our counterfeit selves, our pretended selves. We become aware of what is in us, the best and the worst.



If we can let ourselves go in prayer and speak all that is in our minds and hearts, if we can sit quietly and bear the silence, we will hear all the bits and pieces of ourselves crowding in on us, pleading for our attention.

Prayer's confession begins with this racket, for prayer is noisy with the clamour of all the parts of us demanding to be heard.

Prayer is every kind of speaking....
In speaking to God, we collect all the parts of ourselves into our awareness and our self gets bigger. Prayer to God, to the source of being, gives us more being, more self. In the process of confessing who we are, we find ourselves addressed by the otherness within ourselves and the otherness within our world. We learn about ourselves in our interior listening... admitting ourselves as fully as we can to ourselves, in all our shades and tints of pain and delight, of goodness and not-so goodness....

We can admit life into our being by admitting who we are and what we are to ourselves. We can admit being as being admits us.

All prayer begins with desire. At its best, desire in prayer is what Augustine calls an affectionate reaching out to God. We long for contact, for connection at the centre, that grounding that brings full-hearted peace of mind and soul.

Desire leads us each of us to begin to pray from the premise of being, of who we are. We are students of being as we experience it.



Prayer is the place where we sort out our desires and where we are ourselves sorted out by the desires we choose to follow.

Prayer articulates our longing for a fullness of being, our reaching out of the mind for what is beyond it, and helps us find and love God and grow with our love. It is like the sun warming a seed into life.....

Prayer enlarges our desire until it receives God's desire for us...

Our very desire to pray, that we took as our own, reflects God's desire moving us towards fuller being, towards the embrace of love.

Our wanting to turn to God is God moving our will to turn to him. We are pulled into the primary speech of God, giving, receiving, and showing forth a constantly radiating force of relatedness. Our desire to pray has become **a doorway into the heart of being.**

'The breath of my Spirit is in you, and desire for me is in your hearts.' From "The Music of Love" by Judith Pinhey.

Charlotte Wright

Pilgrimage Walk



*The seed is in the ground
Now may we rest in hope
Whilst darkness does its work
Wendell Berry*

Our Community – Whither Contemplative Fire?

Francoise Pinteaux-Jones writes:

I have never thought of myself as a "Martha" because I am way too lazy... so it is an odd feeling, looking back on the Fellowship Weekend, to somehow have pretty much spoken for her.

Grounding the wonderful meditation, singing, walking we shared, was an experience of a community which fully assumes its co-responsibility.

Accordingly this was an opportunity to take stock of our Community's travails and direction of travel, starting from the beginning: bringing Philip's greetings and request for prayers.

I am now the only member of the current Board to have started my trusteeship under Philip's leadership and I have tried to chart how, together, and in the grace of God, we kept his vision alive.

The original operational core of Philip and Jill was first shaken by their failing health. This translated into Jill handing her responsibilities over to Gill who, having seconded Philip and deeply absorbed his inner logic, would ensure the continuity of essential processes, even as we sought to uphold the safekeeping and nurturing of the Community by maintaining the model in place. At the same time, a structure had to be found that would honour and further Philip's precious gift to us, the thriving of the Community, the development of its charism.

To start with, a dedicated group of Companions met over the best part of a year to produce a bespoke constitution, which was passed article by article at an EGM in Hemel Hempstead in March 2016. And Charlotte our Chair spearheaded the exploration of models of leadership, drawing from other communities' experience and mining our members' input.

Now sole in charge, the Trustees (John, Elaine, Charlotte and me) first had to keep the show on the road – and realised the extent of Philip's input and that the Board was not equal to the task. As it has always been in Contemplative Fire's DNA that it is nothing without individual Companions' input in direct proportion to their commitment, we asked such a Companion to manage the significant communication and events element of the Community's life. And Ann and Sharon brought the Hub into being. It was soon producing events and projects that kept the Community fresh and creative, testing new approaches and boundaries, e.g. matching more closely our geography to our calendar of events.

Now, this participative model, involving the largest number of Companions, complicates decision-making and trying to make it work coincided with Gill, the last live line to the structure as originally set up, retiring from the Administrator's post as I became Chair.

Over a generous handover period, Gill trained Tina who has done credit to her and proved an invaluable Administrator... and so we had come of age and the Board, reinforced by Jeremy, Hilary and Caroline, sought to make this new deal work. Rich in the conviction that Contemplative Fire is nothing if it does not enable each Companion fully to answer God's call in their own personal way, sustained by a rich spiritual life, we plodded on, mostly getting nowhere – or so it seemed.

This may be best epitomised in our failure to become a CIO... which turned out to be all benefit for us: Jack and his team's work had not been in vain because, besides being another example of each Companion contributing handsomely to the Community, it made us think deeply about the terms of its existence in its every aspect. The fact that this crucial exercise did not yield the result we wanted, but revealed to us the one that was desirable, through the admission and sharing of our difficulties, is a pretty good example of the way God works with us, pouring His grace where it is wanted and

taking us to the right conclusion, because we have integrated His participation in our endeavours.

This is living the charisma: accepting the way God realises Himself through us. This is how we were able to recognise the value of other experiments and take them to their varied conclusions: a Hub-rich Board is drawing from this experience of allowing God to realise himself through us, to keep Contemplative Fire burning bright.

What is it to be a contemplative and to be inhabited by Contemplative Fire?

Notes of talk by Abbot Erik Varden

"Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94 Italian philosopher pictured below) wrote a treatise on nature and the dignity of "man" – "man" is called to be the contemplator of the universe, of everything there is. At Mount St Bernard, we live by the Rule of St Benedict as interpreted by the Cistercian tradition, our "constitution". This order is wholly ordered to contemplation.



The best way of finding out what something means is to trace the history/meaning of, in this case, contemplation. There was a distinction between "active" and "contemplative" orders, but that is out of fashion now, that distinction is now debunked. Contemplation doesn't indicate a particular kind of experience – a contemplative is not a mystic.

Contemplation comes from the Latin word "contemplatio" – to gaze attentively. The word 'templum' was used to denote the defined area of sky or land within which an augur would perform their auspices, who would interpret the messages from the gods through observance of occurrences within the templum/temple/sacred space. So contemplation is worship, the practice of faith, a way of making a contract between the human/the earthly and the heavenly/divine. To contemplate equated with augury, the one who saw birds in flight as emissaries from the gods,

bringing a message from the gods, a kind of prophesy.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the son is trying to trace Odysseus, his father. Zeus sent forth two eagles that tore each other with their talons. Harmony became violence – what did it mean?

-pay attention

-look up

-observe what is around us – the universe means something – looking with a view to understanding.

So Contemplation – vision, seeing in pursuit of meaning (like a scientist) – at this stage it doesn't presuppose faith.

Richard Dawkins was a lyrical scientist with an uncanny capacity for seeing. Heisenberg, in a letter to Einstein, queried what is to be a scientist: if nature leads us to mathematical forms, we think they're true – frightening simplicity – although there is a beauty to mathematical formulae. Looking at what is there and finding it reveals its secrets, its uncanny wholeness, its simplicity of form – nature reveals itself. Perception of beauty plus the conviction that something is true – there is more there than you thought...What might this kind of seeing look like with faith, with Christianity?



Jean-Baptiste Porion (died 1987) was a Carthusian monk, who lived as a hermit. In a letter he wrote to his sister, trying to tell her what it was to be a monk, and the grace and happiness to become a true contemplative - "we must become a mirror of this beauty and its echo" – outside his window was the beauty of the mountains. And in another letter – "the contemplative life is an inexhaustible discovery of the same thing!"

To be a contemplative is to practise this kind of seeing:

-being patient, taking time to look out of the window

-being attentive over time

-being available to receive revelation as a gift
le what the contemplative sees isn't just trees, but beings with divine freedom following the laws printed on its nature, composed by a signifier – someone waiting to reveal something...So patient attention is admiration plus celebration of beauty, leading to perception of harmony, leading to a sense of revelation, and a sense of that revelation being a gift from someone, leading to a response of gratitude that rises into adoration.

Image one

A book by Marilynne Robinson called "Gilead" (2004) is the fictional autobiography of the Reverend John Ames, an elderly Congregationalist pastor in the small, secluded town of Gilead, Iowa, who knows that he is dying of a heart condition. At the beginning of the book, the date is established as 1956, and Ames explains that he is writing an account of his life for his seven-year-old son, who will have few memories of him, about what is important. They tend his father's grave and he is happy. His son sees a beautiful sunset and they feel they are at the centre of the universe, that the sunset is for them and confirms the rightness of the day. He felt the joy and reassurance of being held in a world that is ultimately a blessed world and discovers that nature isn't reducible to the utilitarian. My potential transcends my need....

Image two

He sits in a rocking chair, thinking about the splendour of the world and multiplies it by two – he prepares himself to go to heaven – eternal life – what we see will always be new (Gregory of Nyssa 335-c395).

Develop a consciousness of the given as a gift; become aware of the giver; be grateful and commune with others in that gratitude.

And finally, words from the poetess Mary Oliver:

Instructions for living a life:

Pay attention

Be astonished

Tell about it

Dear Father Erik,

Tai Chi Taster

As I was discussing your talk with my partner, I remembered two occasions which I feel may be examples of what you were talking about.



The first was going for a walk recently on one of the Derbyshire gritstone edges – I had a feeling of being above all the “strife and clamour” and looking down on the breathtaking beauty of God’s world.

The second was a few years ago when I was on a choir weekend at an outdoor pursuits centre in Derbyshire, above Ladybower reservoir. I’d got up early to prepare to lead the early morning Taize singing, and was sitting outside overlooking the view below. Everything about me started to shimmer – the trees, the bushes, the sheep, the grass – and I felt I was part of/connected to/at one with the energy of the shimmering.



Best Wishes, Gill Greenwood

Dear Gill,

Many thanks for yours — and for the splendid photographs and reminiscences! It gives me joy to know you recognised yourself in the kind of contemplative vision I tried to outline.

fr Erik

Firstly thank you for letting Woon and I give you a taster of Tai Chi over the weekend. The concepts and breathing techniques come from a teacher called Bruce Frantzis – he has written quite a bit about the Taoist water tradition. There is some direct material that covers the breath work in a book and audio book he has written called “the tao of letting go” and also work around longevity breathing. Some useful links....

Woon Lee face book page:

<https://www.facebook.com/taichiwoonlee/>

click on the link say Hi and I’ll add you to the group. In here you will see the warm ups and the different sections.

Bruce Frantzis page & books:

<https://www.energyarts.com/>

I found this book quite interesting by Bruce:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Tao-Letting-Meditation-MEDITATION>

The app I used on my phone to monitor breath is called “Paced Breathing”:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.apps.paced.breathing>

How to find local Taichi classes

If you are not local to the monastery, Energy Arts have instructors dotted around the UK. You can find an instructor from there OR look at Taichi finder

(<http://www.taichiunion.com/instructors/>)

Tips for finding the right class for you....

-Firstly work out what you are looking for, some classes will focus on the martial art aspects, others on meditative relaxation... just match the class to what you are looking for.

-Choose a style- we demonstrated Yang style, but there are variations within Yang and also other styles all together that can be more complex

-Every teacher is different so try out different classes with different teachers to find out the one you connect with best.

-Remember the 70% rule and protect your knees.

Happy for any questions/follow ups

Regards, Steve McGinty

stemcg@live.co.uk

The Lord's Prayer

(In Aramaic with transliterations)

Abwoon

Our Father-Mother who are above and within,
the breathing life of All that Is
Source of Sound: in the roar and the whisper, in
the breeze and the whirlwind, we hear your
Name

d'bwasmâja

Who fills all realms of sound,
light and vibration.

Nethkâdasch schmach

May Your light, sound and
vibration create a shrine within
us

Têtê malkuthach

Create your reign of Power and
Beauty now, unite our finite 'I
can' with your eternal 'I Can' so
that we can be the Kings and
Queens you meant us to be in
your world

Nehwê tzevjânach aikâna d'bwasmâja af b'arha

Let your heart's desire act in us
so that Heaven and Earth can
form a new Creation :

Hawvlân lachma d'sûnkanân jaomâna

Give us the food and all the
wisdom we need for our daily
life

Waschboklân chaubên wachtahên aikâna daf chnân schwoken l'chaijabên

Compost our greedily stolen ^{oo:}
fruit as we forgive others the
spoils of their trespassing

Wela tachlân l'nesjuna

Let us not be lost in superficial
things (materialism, common
temptations)

ela patzân min bischa

But break the hold of all that
keeps us from our true purpose

Metol dilachie malkutha wahaila wateschbuchta l'ahlâm almîn

Celebration of Cosmic Renewal:

Yours is the eternal power of
Life, the sound of ongoing
creation that renews itself from
age to age

Amên

Truly, power to these
statements. May they be the
ground from which all my
actions grow: Sealed in trust,
faith and truth
I confirm with my entire being

Webpage: <https://abwoon.org/library/le-arn-aramaic-prayer/>

Annemarie Neall, who led this session, sent this
link to Abwoon sung by Angelika:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AaRy7sAgL8o>

Abwoon

It has been said that the essence of the whole
Lord's Prayer is contained in this single word
Abwoon, translated as Our Father. If we
carefully look at this word and listen to its
sound we find 4 distinctive parts.

A: points to the Absolute, Unity, the One and
Only Being, the source of all that is. We often
make this sound as an expression of utter well-
being, relaxation, a big job well done - Aaaaah

Bw: this is the root of the word, which points to
a birthing process, a slow incubation, as if from
the interior of this 'Oneness' towards outer
form. We can let this sound vibrate on our lips.
(it's the image of the Spirit hovering over the
deep in Genesis)

oo: this sound is the sound of God's breath,
reaching out to bless, the flow of Spirit that
runs through all of creation like a river from
Source until it returns home to the Ocean

n: this is the moment when God's Spirit is
touching matter. The Earth is permanently kept
alive and transformed by God's Spirit/breath.

The words Jesus spoke in Aramaic are so rich
and resonant that they deserve to be spoken,
sung and tasted without rush. By chanting
slowly we can let them melt on the tongue,
bathe our hearts and nourish our bodies, mind
and soul.

n: t
tou to
alive and t

We normally think of prayer as words we utter as requests, asking God to listen and answer. But the word *Abwoon* clearly indicates a sound in the opposite direction. It reflects a motion where God the Source of all there is already hurries towards us with his gift of Life in many forms. True prayer helps us open up and receive.

Annemarie Neall

Walk, Wild Sing, Gathering



Snow on Sunday morning, at Mount St Bernard's Abbey, as part of our Gathering.

Ali Dorey writes:

Our "wild sing" and gathering at Mount St Bernard was a brilliant example of the Robert Burns' famous saying about "the best laid plans of mice and men". We had carefully done a recce and meticulously planned a suitable route, prayerfully listening and looking as chants arose seemingly out of the landscape, only to find ourselves on the day peering out of the window to a gloriously suddenly snowy landscape. We realised our wild sing was going to be wilder than intended! In the name of health and safety, we decided to change the route entirely, and to improvise accordingly regarding the readings and chants we'd planned. In the end we sang some of the chants we had planned but also quite a few others, suggested by the landscape. The awakening body prayer Diane brought seemed particularly appropriate, unveiling the reality of the snowy landscape laid out before us.

On reflection, this was all much more in keeping with the wild sings that have been evolving around Sheffield lately, which are always improvisational and quite unpredictable, although they are always prayerfully prepared for too.

Bearing in mind the wind and snow, we decided to have our gathering indoors, and prepared for sharing bread and wine by hearing *The Bright Field* by RS Thomas (one of our readings en

route) again, and an excerpt from a reflection about it by Malcolm Guite in his Lent book *The Word in the Wilderness* (London: Canterbury Press, 2014, p.21-22):

"...This beautiful little poem brings us to the heart of a gospel paradox and also takes us deep into the mystery of time. The paradox is about losing to find, giving away to gain, giving everything up, only to find it given back in new and more beautiful form. Jesus came again and again to this paradox in his teaching, and RS Thomas has responded in his poem to two parables told in quick succession in Matthew's gospel:

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13.44-46)'

"The beauty of these parables is that they fill out the positive form that redeems what might seem to be the pure negativity of 'giving up' and 'selling all' which informs our Lenten abstinence. The gospel is not about giving up and doing without for its own sake; it is about making room for something wonderful. It is about clearing out the clutter, not only making the space, but taking the time for the kingdom that might seem tiny as a mustard seed, but will prove, in due course, to be the great branching tree in whose canopy we all find a place. But we must glimpse the seed, buy the field, take the time, and not lose it all by 'hurrying by'.

It is fascinating to see what Thomas has done with these parables... fused now with that other archetypal moment and glimpse of heaven, the story of Moses and the burning bush.

He wins us, to begin with, by confession of what we have all done. These are not the proud words of some exclusive mystic who has 'got' the vision when others haven't; rather he confesses that he too has 'seen the sun break through' but also, like us, 'gone my way and forgotten it'. But, paradoxically, he has not really forgotten it. The very writing and sharing of the poem shows that, and if he too, even in the making of this poem, can find it again, then so can we in reading it."

Melanie Carroll writes:

I just got back home and wanted to say thank you for making my first group community event lovely! I so enjoyed meeting with you all, both people whose names I knew already and also the brand new people. It genuinely was a joy to spend time with you. I especially enjoyed the 4 seasons in 2 days we seemed to get... And the snow actually was very special, as was the wind in the trees on our walks. If you follow me on Facebook then you'll probably see already some of the pictures I've shared from the surroundings of the days.

Reflections - from the first session based on the words I could see from my seat that Charlotte had put out for us to meditate on...



*Your heart's the breath of being.
The gold cloth signifies soul, the blue grounding (soul) your hearts the (grounding) breath (soul) of being.
Our breath grounds us in the here, our being and our heart though are our place of soul and spirit... Our being here.
Or is it that it is your heart (God) the breath of my being. So my soul finds its rest in you, my being animated by your breath and love that then echoes out into the world through me again.
Your breath, my heart, my being (my grounding and my soul, my spirit, my creation is in you my lord).*

"Here by your side I will stand"

<https://gopro.com/v/57kIMDP99Gvv5>



Fr Erik signs Gill's copy of his book, with Irene

**The Shattering Of Loneliness
On Christian Remembrance
Erik Varden
Bloomsbury, 2018**

Caroline Newton writes:

The monks valued our financial contributions. Brother Adam, the Guestmaster, wrote and said 'Thank you very much also for all the donations. We really appreciate it.'



Twig picked up on the Pilgrimage by Francoise

**Sent on Behalf of CF Chilterns - Easter
Gathering**

This was held at St Mary's Church, Wendover, in the evening of Sunday 21st April. We encouraged people to arrive by 6.15 pm for a time of quiet preparation with reflective music before we began our Gathering at 6.30 pm. Our theme, as well as it being a celebration of the Risen Christ, was 'A New Order'. We were resourced by the scripture readings for Easter evening, taking inspiration from them as we moved through our evening together, which included Eucharist with the sharing of bread and wine. *Charlotte Wright*



Exploring Mindfulness and Quiet Gardens
- Annual Gathering 2019
from 10am until 4pm, Sat 11 May 2019



Join us for our Annual Gathering and experience the community Quiet Garden at St Mark's Haydock, at St Mark's Quiet Garden, Haydock, Merseyside on Saturday 11 May 2019.

Explore the practice of mindfulness with **Tim Stead**, author of 'See, Love, Be: Mindfulness and the spiritual life' and 'Mindfulness and Christian Spirituality: Making space for God'.



"... Just pay attention, then patch a few words together and don't try to make them elaborate, this isn't a contest but the doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak."

Praying (From *Thirst: Poems*)
by Mary Oliver (1935 - 2019)

"We live in a world where we are swamped by methods of communication and yet we find ourselves unable to communicate. Silence is the missing and vital ingredient. Even as little as five minutes can be restorative and healing".

Philip Roderick – Founder and Patron of Quiet Gardens

Find a Quiet Garden near you –

www.quietgarden.org/find-gardens

