Reflection on Inward Journey

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The Inward Journey mission group gave me the task, and privilege! of sharing with you about the Inward Journey aspect of our church's life. I'm using a chapter from the book by Elizabeth O'Connor, called "Journey Inward/Journey Outward," as a structure for this talk, as well as my own experience in experimenting what's right for ME in practicing this inward journey.

Early CoS:

In early Church of the Saviour, (which we older people may call “C of S”) back in the 1940s and 50s, through some experimentation, they came up with pairing the Inward Journey (time with God) with the Outward Journey (service to the world). Many churches do either one or the other, but the creative tension is between the two, and *Community* is the glue. Community is also the anchor for the Inward Journey.

Early on in the church's life, starting in 1952, they looked for a Retreat Center, a corporate expression of going inward. Throughout the 50s this small church raised money, bought the land, and, through their own hard work and sacrifice, almost all by volunteers, helped prepare the ground and build Dayspring.

One of my favorite stories involves a piece of art in the Yoke Room of the Dayspring Lodge: It's the brown paper head of Jesus. Robert Nathan was a well-known artist from NY, who donated this piece to Dayspring in 1955. He said, "most pictures of Jesus are not Jewish. This is a Jew. I did not know what to do with it, so I am giving it to you, because this is where I met him." My experience with this picture is, that when you soften your eyes, and have diffused vision, the face starts to move, and has many faces within it. It is a powerful focus for me to go deeper into the silence and mystery of Dayspring.

Finding Dayspring was in a sense an "outward" mission, which then helps with a Corporate inward journey, which is one anchor for individual inward journey. As you see, these elements are linked together, moving from one to the other.

Moving on to thoughts about the individual inward journey:

Elizabeth O'Connor (whom many called “Betty O”) said:

The content and quality of our lives is determined by how we respond to the ordinary, and this depends on whether or not we have taken time to nourish an inner life.

Our church uses the term "disciplines," which many of us hit up against and rebel against. Yet that tension between freedom and discipline is a creative one. So, try to keep an open mind as I tell you some of the ways that I and others have made the *Disciplines* of the Inward Journey something meaningful.

According to Elizabeth O'Connor, there are three Aspects of the inward journey: Self, God, and Others. The first, Self, is about

# *Self awareness*: being committed to growing in consciousness, to become people in touch with our *true selves*. We *Ask questions* instead of having answers — like the Jews in midrash, we question and debate! *Jesus* asked questions: who do you say that I am?

The goal is to grow in flexibility and openness, instead of rigidity. Betty O also talked about Inner fragmentation. Inside of each of us, we have "many selves." We become aware of how these "many selves" operate in our lives, exploring this aspect, because it's part of learning about our true whole Self.

Some things I do: I do a form of meditative movement called Qi Gong; I write a Gratitude Journal (because, actually, I think negatively a lot of the time!). I also talk to my "many selves,"—fearful, critical, wild, people-pleasing, especially when I have strong feelings — to learn more about myself. I learn about my resentments, my fears and the harms I've done, to see patterns in the "selves" I've created to protect me from the truth.

The second aspect of the Inward Journey is

# *Connection to God*. Two aspects of this are Prayer, and Scripture and other spiritual readings.

## Regarding *Prayer*: Many of you know different Types of Prayer:

* Praise,
* Gratitude,
* Intercessory prayer for others,
* Petition (or asking for specific things or outcomes),
* Meditation and
* Contemplation—which is prayer without words, a direct experience of God. In contemplation, there is learning how to settle into the silence which is always there. And in the stillness one hears things. As Psalm 46, one of our scripture readings, says: Be still and Know that I am God."

For myself, I have certain set prayers. My own version of the Lord's Prayer. I also say the 3rd Step prayer of AA, which is turning my will (or my heart's desire) and my life over to my Higher Power.

For meditation/contemplation, I sit with a Zen group, because I actually find it easier to sit with others; they anchor me in the silence. It gives me more resolve to sit myself in the morning for 10 or 15 mins. Sometimes at home alone, it's hard for me to concentrate, so I might listen to a guided meditation or chant to calm myself and help myself stay present in my body.

I want to mention here, that cultivating a sense of being WITH oneself, fully HERE, is crucial to connecting with my true self, and with my Higher Power. It is a richer, fuller experience than just reciting some prayers without being mindful. My whole life, I've struggled with being fully present. It's only in the last 15+ years that I've realized how important this is.

And then I try to listen to my Higher Power. through meditation or silence. Last year, I was sitting quietly in meditation, and I heard a voice: "just BE with me, Connie" And when I say this to myself, and picture a still ocean, and feel like I'm just a rock or a fish, something neutral—it helps me to stay still and reap the benefits of contemplation.

## *Scripture:* There are many ways to use Scripture and other readings to connect with God. Gordon Cosby, the founder of CoS, suggested living into one book of the Bible for a *whole year*. He did this with the Psalms, as recorded in *Journey Inward/Outward*, and memorized many of them.

Personally, I've needed new interpretations of the Bible to overcome some obstacles I have with some of the language of the Bible: I lean on Neil Douglas Klotz for his opening up of the translations of scripture. I also use Nan Merrell's book Psalms for Praying.

I wanted to share with you a song I wrote based on Nan Merrell's version of Psalm 63: You are my Beloved. (Do refrain and verse 1). Sing the refrain with me!

I also use audio meditations— Listening vs reading helps me. There are many apps for the phone, and at least two I know include Christian meditations. I listen to them while doing my Physical Therapy! Karen Mohr told me about an app called YouVersion of the Bible, where you can listen to scripture. And on Thursday nights there is Ignatian Prayer with Luisely, where we hear the Gospel reading for the week, and put ourselves in the story, using our imagination.

From Betty O I get another take on what she calls devotional reading. She says : "For my own practice of devotional reading I use any book, religious or secular, which is concerned with the three engagements of Self, God and Other. When I come to a line or thought which evokes a response in me, I stop and meditate on it."

# The Third aspect of the Inward Journey, according to Betty O, is *Engagement with* *Others, in Community.*  We're going to have a separate teaching on Community later in the month, so I'm not going into that much here.

But I want to say, Community must be a part of the inward journey. This is what anchors the inward journey and gives it purpose. And it's through Community that the Inward Journey can give birth to a Call, which is usually an outward expression of service in the world.

Betty O says: "The task is always to change ourselves—to deal with that in us which prevents our going forth to meet the other."]

In our New Creation Mission Group, my small group where I experience community, another aspect of our journey is our own art, music and other creative expressions. So time working on a song, or a meditative movie, or photography is part of my inward journey. It then connects to community and others beyond our church.

So, I want to leave you with an image, that of the Sonnet. The Sonnet is an old form of poetry, used by Shakespeare and many others. A poem created in sonnet form must be in what is called Iambic Pentameter (demo the cadence), and often a certain number of lines. So, you might say it is restrictive, yes?

Yet within this form, there is infinite creativity, there are so many sonnets of beauty and of deep meaning.

The Discipline of the Inward Journey has a structure, and it also has a lot of room for making it your own. I know others in this church who listen to music, or who meditate while exercising, or exercise listening to literature that is meaningful to them, or those who dance. Betty O suggested we look at least once a year at our disciplines, just like we look at our membership commitment, and make sure they are right for us. And, do ask Higher Power for guidance in what's right/or RIPE for *this* time in our lives.

After church, We'll have a chance to discuss at lunch what gives you life for Your inward journey. (Ring the Bell). Amen.

Random Thoughts

Betty O said, "Dayspring has made contemplatives of us all"]

St Teresa said : "we will never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God"

Our Beloved is our refuge and strength.

There is a River whose streams make glad the Holy City.

The Beloved is in the Midst of it.

Open my lips and my mouth shall sing forth your praise.

Melt our hearts of stone, guide our steps into the way of peace.]

Be still and know that I am God (Love) Psalm 51:10-19

Create in me a Clean Heart, O Gracious One, put a new and right spirit within me.

Sometimes I do Morning pages (from Julia Cameron's book "The Artist Way) 3 pages, just write anything that comes to mind to clear the mind before prayer/ meditation.

In addition, Our mission group has done "creativity afternoons" where we have a theme, use movement and art to express our unique view of the theme. And this has led to a lot of self-awareness.

I also use a type of prayer called "Metta", which is from a Buddhist practice. The one I use the most is, especially when I'm having trouble or difficulty with someone: "May you be well, may you be happy, may your give your gifts, and may you be healed."

I also have a "God Box," this is something from Alanon — I write a prayer for someone or something I'm worried about, on paper, and put it in the God box, turning it completely over to my Higher Power.

However, "One should never encourage another to embrace the disciplines [of the inward journey] until there is an internal readiness " *Call to Commitment* p36

I also work the 12 steps of AA and Alanon which, through connection to a Higher Power, allows me to do a lot of self-exploration. For instance, step 4 of the 12 steps, is taking a "fearless and searching moral inventory of ourselves." This is where I write out my resentments, my fears, and the harms I've done to others.

I do it while listening to a chant, and sometimes if I can't stay still and I listen to audio books on my phone.

Recently I listened to *The Good Lord Bird* by James McBride—it's a historical novel, the story of a young slave who got caught up with John Brown the Abolitionist in late 1850s.

*New Seeds of Contemplation* — by Thomas Merton

And, I've listened to almost all of Anne Lamott's books, which are irreverent, funny and poignant spiritual explorations. She is a Christian who is in recovery through Alcoholics Anonymous.

I have Zen readings and 12 step readings as well.

And the "Walking the Good Road," the First Nations Version.

There's an Audio meditation where someone recites the Psalms for Praying version in Lectio Divina form. This is on the app Insight Timer (And I do this while doing my Physical Therapy in the morning!),]

In the mission group we tell each other what disciplines we've made in the last week, and include reflections on spiritual readings and things we've done to further our call to the arts and creativity.