MONDAY

The goal of the spiritual journey is to discover and move toward connectedness on ever new levels. We may begin by making little connections with other people, with nature and animals, then grow into deeper connectedness with people. Finally, we can experience full connectedness as union with God. Remember, *how you do anything is how you do everything*. Without connectedness and communion, we don’t exist fully as our truest selves. Becoming who we really are is a matter of learning how to become more and more deeply connected.

The spiritual experience is about trusting that when you stop holding yourself, Inherent Goodness will still uphold you. Many of us call that God, but you don’t have to. It is the trusting that is important. When you fall into such Primal Love, you realize that everything is foundationally okay. Unfortunately, this confidence is often absent in our world especially under conditions of great upheaval and suffering.

Foundational love gives us hope and allows us to trust “what is” as the jumping-off point, no matter how unsteady it feels. It allows us to work together toward “what can be.” The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus shows us what’s fully possible. God will always bring yet more life and wholeness out of seeming chaos and death. In the words of Timothy Gorringe and Rosie Beckham, “Faith in the resurrection is the ground on which Christians hope for a *different* future, a transition to a society less destructive, more peaceful and more whole. Living in this hope . . . calls *ekklesia* [the assembly of Christians] to live as a ‘contrast community’ to society.”

Building such “contrast” communities was precisely Paul’s missionary strategy. You can see it throughout the New Testament. Paul believed that small communities of Jesus’ followers would make the Gospel message believable: Jesus is Lord (rather than Caesar is Lord); sharing abundance and living in simplicity (rather than hoarding wealth); nonviolence and chosen suffering (rather than aligning with power). Paul was very practical. He taught that our faith must take actual form in a living, loving group of people. Otherwise, love is just a theory.

Paul seems to think that corporate evil can only be confronted or overcome with corporate good. He knows that a love-transformed individual can do little against what he calls “the powers and the principalities,” or what some of us call the “system.” Our collective consciousness deems such institutions “too big to fail.” We are mostly oblivious to these forces because we take them as normative and in fact absolutely necessary. Cultural blind spots can only be overcome by a group of people affirming and supporting one another in an alternative consciousness. Thankfully, we’re now seeing many people, religious and secular, from all around the world, coming together to form alternative systems for sharing resources, living simply, and imagining a sustainable future. It has been one of the spiritual gifts of the pandemic. God never misses a chance to help us grow up.

TUESDAY
*“We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is*love and that love comes with community”*. —Dorothy Day*

Everyone relies on community in some way or another, no matter what our personal, social, or economic circumstances. No one can do it all—feed, clothe, heal, comfort, house, employ, and educate—for ourselves or our families. Despite our current obsession with independence and individualism, we were never meant to try! From the very beginning of the evolutionary process, species have worked together in mutually beneficial ways to survive. Mammals particularly have a track record of fostering the young of others within their species and kinship group, but it happens across or between species as well. Even the “fittest,” biggest, and strongest do not survive without the cooperation of others.

The Ayni Institute, an organization that envisions systemic changes through reciprocity and mutual aid, points out that human societies have worked this way for thousands of years.

In hostile environments and less than ideal situations people came together, cooperated in order to survive, and continued our legacy of life.

As tribes we collaborated, traded, and built cultures around our collective identities. We created federations and large and loose organizations of reciprocity across groups. . . . Those arrangements created practices, rituals, wisdom that sustained life for thousands of years. . . .

Our history is not a history of competition, rather a history of collaboration. We must develop alternatives that have memory, that seek to bring the evolutionary wisdom of the past in relationship to our current reality. . . .

Our own Christian scripture and tradition teaches this insight. All four Gospels contain some version of the miracle of the “loaves and fishes,” where Jesus feeds the multitudes from only a small amount of food (see Matthew 14:13–21, Mark 6:30–44, Luke 9:10–17, John 6:1–15). However, without the willingness of the few who shared the little they had, the miracle could not have taken place. Many have proposed that, in reality, the “miracle” was the generosity lying dormant within the crowds. The resources were there waiting to be called forth.

Jesus’ example of mutual aid was so inspirational to Dorothy Day (1897–1980), the founder of the Catholic Worker, that she called her book about the movement Loaves and Fishes. She wrote, “Young people say, What good can one person do? What is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time; we can be responsible only for the one action of the present moment. But we can beg for an increase of love in our hearts that will vitalize and transform all our individual actions, and know that God will take them and multiply them, as Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes.”

May we all pray for an “increase of love in our hearts” that will awaken, transform, and multiply the impact of our actions

WEDNESDAY *The Poor People’s Campaign, which was revived in 2018 by the Rev. Dr. William Barber II and the Rev. Dr. Liz Theoharis. Their work with and for the poor of the United States through mutual respect, dialogue, and organizing is foundationally based on their Christian faith and study of the Gospels. In these paragraphs, Theoharis offers a scriptural exploration of what the Kingdom of God implies for the poor and marginalized—a movement of solidarity.*

The New Testament . . . portrays the survival struggles of the marginalized, the solidarity and mutuality among different communities, and the critique of a social, political, and economic system that oppresses the vast majority of people. . . .  Jesus’s teachings and actions around poverty, wealth, and power create a picture of him as a leader of a social, political, economic, and spiritual movement calling for a world without poverty, want, or oppression . . . what he named the Kingdom or Empire of God. . . .

The Greek word for “Kingdom of God” or “Empire of God,” *basilea,*has much to do with the economic order that Jesus advocated. Few would disagree that the Kingdom of God is central to the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament. However, many understand this kingdom as otherworldly and immaterial. But if we look at both the prevalence of the concept and the specific references to it in the New Testament, we can see that God’s kingdom is a real, material order, with a moral agenda different from and opposed to the reigning order of the day. The *basilea*is particularly present in the parables that describe how the reign of God functions differently from the Roman Empire: in God’s kingdom, there is no poverty or fear, and mutuality exists among all.

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus’s parables and stories paint a picture of a reign in which the poor and marginalized are lifted up and their needs are met, rather than being despised or ignored by those in control. . . . From these passages and others, we can see that . . . God’s followers are asked to model a community of mutuality and solidarity. . . .

Centuries of [New Testament] interpretation have attempted to spiritualize or minimize this good news for the poor, hiding the reality that the Bible is a book by, about, and for poor and marginalized people. It not only says that God blesses and loves the poor, but also that the poor are God’s agents and leaders in rejecting and dismantling kingdoms built upon oppression and inequality. . . . It is the vision of society the early Christians sought to create on earth, and that we who follow Jesus today are commanded to strive for as well.

THURSDAY

“I have learned to use my anger for good. . . . Without it, we would not be motivated to rise to a challenge. It is an energy that compels us to define what is just and unjust”. —Gandhi

Today my colleague and CAC faculty member Barbara Holmes shares reflections on a “theology of anger.” Her words are challenging for white Americans like myself, but an important stage of contemplative solidarity is the ability to set aside our own opinions to listen with an open heart to the pain of the marginalized. I hope we can hear Dr. Holmes’s wisdom and desire for healing from the wounds of racism.

We all need a way to channel and reconcile our anger with our faith. . . . A theology of anger [for communities under siege] assumes that anger as a response to injustice is spiritually healthy. My intent is to highlight three ways that anger can contribute to spiritual restoration.

First, a theology of anger invites us to wake up from the hypnotic influences of unrelenting oppression so that individuals and communities can shake off the shackles of denial, resignation, and nihilism. . . . Second, a theology of anger can help us to construct healthy boundaries. Finally, the healthy expression of righteous anger can translate communal despair into compassionate action and justice-seeking. . . . The question is whether or not we will recognize our wounds and the source of our anger so that we can heal ourselves and others, and awaken to our potential to embody the beloved community. . . .

Collective and productive anger redirects our attention to the everyday survival and healing of our own community. . . Sometimes the anger of black folks is resistance but, more often, it is grief. During a demonstration in Minneapolis, Minnesota, after the police shot an unarmed black man [in 2016], Pastor Danny Givens of Above Every Name Ministry, publicly and peacefully challenged the Governor of Minnesota. He shouted into a microphone:

Your people keep killing my people. You keep telling me that you are going to do something. I just want you to put some action on it, put some respect on our people’s names. . . . This isn’t black anger. This is black grief!

Pastor Givens wanted the governor to understand that grief, anger, and black joy are hard to separate. At funerals of young people slain by the police, expressions of black joy are common. This is not “joy” in the ordinary sense of the word. . . . This is the communal performance of resistance and resilience through dancing and rhythmic movement. Funeral-car doors fly open, music is thumping, and the community dances its defiance of death and the society that produces it.

We are angry, we are grieving, we are performing black joy as a sign of our determination to survive.

FRIDAY

It would seem that, quite possibly, the ultimate measure of health in any community might well reside in our ability to stand in awe at what folks have to carry rather than in judgment at how they carry it. —Gregory Boyle

Homeboy Industries may be one of the most visibly transformative communities in the United States today. It was founded in 1998 by Jesuit priest Gregory Boyle, or “G” (as his community likes to call him). Moved by the heartache of the people he served while pastor of Dolores Mission Church in Los Angeles, Fr. Greg started Homeboy Industries to assist individuals and families affected by the cycle of poverty, drugs, gangs, and incarceration. Along with many Homeboys and Homegirls, he believes the healing process can only happen when we are in relationship with one another. The success of this organization offers evidence to support his belief.

Mother Teresa diagnosed the world’s ills in this way: we’ve just “forgotten that we belong to each other.” Kinship is what happens to us when we refuse to let that happen. With kinship as the goal, other essential things fall into place; without it, no justice, no peace. I suspect that were kinship our goal, we would no longer be promoting justice—we would be celebrating it.

Often we strike the high moral distance that separates “us” from “them,” and yet it is God’s dream come true when we recognize that there exists no daylight between us. Serving others is good. It’s a start. But it’s just the hallway that leads to the Grand Ballroom.

Kinship—not serving the other but being one with the other. Jesus was not “a man for others”; he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that. . . .

No daylight to separate us.

Only kinship. Inching ourselves closer to creating a community of kinship such that God might recognize it. Soon we imagine, with God, this circle of compassion. Then we imagine no one standing outside of that circle, moving ourselves closer to the margins so that the margins themselves will be erased. We stand there with those whose dignity has been denied. We locate ourselves with the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. At the edges, we join the easily despised and the readily left out. We stand with the demonized so that the demonizing will stop. We situate ourselves right next to the disposable so that the day will come when we stop throwing people away. The prophet Habakkuk writes, “The vision still has its time, presses onto fulfilment and it will not disappoint . . and if it delays, wait for it”

Kinship is what God presses us on to, always hopeful that its time has come.

SATURDAY

Liminal space is an inner state and sometimes an outer situation where we can begin to think and act in new ways. It is where we are betwixt and between, having left one room or stage of life but not yet entered the next. We usually enter liminal space when our former way of being is challenged or changed—perhaps when we lose a job or a loved one, during illness, at the birth of a child, or a major relocation. It is a graced time, but often does not feel “graced” in any way. In such space, we are not certain or in control. This global pandemic we now face is an example of an immense, collective liminal space.

The very vulnerability and openness of liminal space allows room for something genuinely new to happen. We are empty and receptive—erased tablets waiting for new words. Liminal space is where we are most teachable, often because we are most humbled. Liminality keeps us in an ongoing state of shadowboxing instead of ego-confirmation, struggling with the hidden side of things, and calling so-called normalcy into creative question.

It’s no surprise then that we generally avoid liminal space. Much of the work of authentic spirituality and human development is to get people into liminal space and to keep them there long enough that they can learn something essential and new. Many spiritual giants like St. Francis, Julian of Norwich, Dorothy Day, and Mohandas Gandhi tried to live their entire lives in permanent liminality, on the edge or periphery of the dominant culture. This in-between place is free of illusions and false payoffs. It invites us to discover and live from broader perspectives and with much deeper seeing.

In liminal space we sometimes need to not-do and not-perform according to our usual successful patterns. We actually need to fail abruptly and deliberately falter to understand other dimensions of life. We need to be silent instead of speaking, experience emptiness instead of fullness, anonymity instead of persona, and pennilessness instead of plenty. In liminal space, we descend and intentionally do not come back out or up immediately. It takes time but this experience can help us reenter the world with freedom and new, creative approaches to life.

I imagine that even if you’ve never heard the word*liminal* before, you likely have a sense of what I’m talking about. It would be difficult to exist in this time of global crisis and not feel caught between at least two worlds—the one we knew and the one to come. Our consciousness and that of future generations has been changed. We cannot put the genie back in the bottle.

A QUESTION OF BLACK AND WHITE

For a long time, I naively hoped that racism was a thing of the past.

Those of us who are white have a very hard time seeing that we constantly receive special treatment [because of social systems built to prioritize people with white skin]. This systemic “white privilege” makes it harder for us to recognize the experiences of people of colour as valid and real when they speak of racial profiling, police brutality, discrimination in the workplace, continued segregation in schools, lack of access to housing, and on and on. This is not the experience of most white people, so how can it be true? *Now, we are being shown how limited our vision is.*

Because we have never been on the other side, we largely do not recognize the structural access we enjoy, the trust we think we deserve, the assumption that we always belong and do not have to earn our belonging. All this we take for granted as normal. Only the outsider can spot these attitudes in us. [And we are quick to dismiss what is apparent to our neighbours who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color [BIPOC] from their lived experience.]

*Of course, we all belong.* There is no issue of more or less in the eyes of an Infinite God. Yet the ego believes the lie that there isn’t enough to go around and that for me to succeed or win, someone else must lose. And so we’ve greedily supported systems and governments that work to our own advantage at the expense of others, most often people of colour or any highly visible difference. The advancement of the white person was too often at the cost of other people not advancing at all. A minor history course should make that rather clear.

I would have never seen my own white privilege if I had not been forced outside of my dominant white culture by travel, by working in the jail, by hearing stories from counselees and, frankly, by making a complete fool of myself in so many social settings—most of which I had the freedom to avoid!

Power [and privilege] never surrenders without a fight. If your entire life has been to live unquestioned in your position of power—a power that was culturally given to you, but you think you earned—there is almost no way you will give it up without major failure, suffering, humiliation, or defeat. As long as we really want to be on top and would take advantage of any privilege or short cut to get us there, we will never experience true “liberty, equality, fraternity” (revolutionary ideals that endure as mottos for France and Haiti). If God operates as me, God operates as “thee” too, and the playing field is utterly levelled forever. Like Jesus, Francis, Clare, and many other humble mystics, we then rush down instead of up. In the act of letting go and choosing to become servants, community can at last be possible. The illusory state of privilege just gets in the way of neighbouring and basic human friendship.