A Story of Healing

The Integrated Practice of Yoga, Meditation and Contemplative Reflection in Relation to Trauma and a Journey Toward the True Self

Michael Eickhoff
December 2016

Dedication

This story is dedicated to the mystery and relationship found in the Trinitarian God, THE STORY, and the healing hope which it embodies.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

It is a joyful experience to express special and unswerving appreciation to Caryn, my wife, for your supportive presence throughout the years of this process. You brought wisdom, faith, perspective, insight and a necessary sense of humor to my work and research. A gift which also fills me with a deep sense of appreciation is the ongoing relationship with my children Erin and Kirk, his wife Trisia, and my grandchildren Jacob, Megan, and Abigail. You have and continue to write yourselves into my story and enliven my life. I also owe a debt of gratitude to The Reverend Charles Mendenhall, Ph.D., for your patience, suggestions, interest and attentiveness during the research and writing contained in this project. Your timely feedback and gracious commentary made this journey not only one of depth and breadth of knowledge but also of relational growth. My thanks are also extended to Renee Duffek and Otto Schultz for your insights and observations contained in this story. Your contribution is invaluable and I deeply appreciate the gracious extension of time and expertise you provided. Further, I thank the members and session of First Presbyterian Church in York, Nebraska. Without the deep and abiding relationship you have sustained with me over the years, none of this would be possible. In the same manner I thank the members of Alcoholics Anonymous for your contributions to my story and continued healing. Alcoholics Anonymous and the gracious presence of a healing God returned me to sanity and once again gave me hope. And last, but certainly not least, thank you to the eleven persons who agreed to be research participants and who produced the substance and depth of the story contained in these pages. Your honesty, courage and willingness to authentically travel this path reflect God's presence in our community and beyond.

Abstract

I believe that life is "story" and we are "narrative" beings. This work and research present God as "THE STORY." The research question which guides the research is *"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and a fuller life in the participants?"* The context includes my call to serve as pastor of First Presbyterian Church and my call to serve as "pastor" to the chemical dependency community in the area. The project context differentiates between "cure," which in this research is a biomedical construct, and "healing." "Healing" is interpreted as holistic, involves restoration, and may or may not include "cure." Further, the structure for the background and human research contained in this project is guided by my understanding that human and faith development take place in "stages." Ken Wilber and his concepts of *Integral Theory* are also fundamental to my context and interpretation of the human condition and experience.

Three Bible passages are explored in detail in my analysis. The passages are Exodus 3:14, Psalm 46:10 and John 5:1-9. These express an invitation into dynamic presence, incarnate restoration and new behaviors which may bring healing. Shelly Rambo and her book *Spirit and Trauma* and Kathryn Turner's "Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal," provide theological guidance for the research herein contained. Consistent with my integral approach is a brief, clinical construction of healing as espoused by Eugene Gendlin and his work in "focusing."

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the qualitative research methodology employed in the project. Keeping with the integral nature of the research of the project, a neurological foundation as presented by Bessel Van der Kolk, M.D., and theological

considerations are also presented and provide the logic behind the selection of the research methodology. The analysis is a comparison to two groups, one drawn from a Christian institutional religious background (CIRG) and the other from Twelve Step recovery (TSG). The two groups met weekly in two different and separate open group settings and participated with other non-research participants in a harmonious sequence of gentle yoga, forms of silent meditation and contemplative reflection. The two research participant groups then met separately once every three weeks to respond to research questions which arose in the course of the project.

My findings suggest that "healing," as I define it, did take place in both groups. Both groups contained persons who had experienced a significant level of trauma in their lives. The process outlined in this research appeared to impact this in a positive manner. Research participants reported an altered experience with who each is and is becoming as well as what could be considered growth in relationship with God and others. Although it would be presumptuous to suggest any research participant attained an elevated "stage" of consciousness, it appears that members of both groups experienced altered "states" of consciousness.

The findings of the research seem to suggest the TSG was more engaged in a deeper internal journey and more willing to become and express vulnerability. The CIRG expressed a greater engagement with the contemplative reading portion of the group process when compared to the TSG. It appears the synthesized process may hold potential for further and deepened healing in the context of church, addiction recovery, oncology, cardiovascular health, and corrections. However, further time and exploration is necessary in these areas to provide any definitive conclusions.

Chapter One

The Context of the Story and Foundational Thoughts

Origins of the Journey

My life's story is what brings me to this endeavor. The exploration and research which follows has its advent in my own story and life experience. It is a story I am telling. Telling stories is what human beings do. We are story and we tell our stories. As we tell them, our stories take on a life of their own as lost threads are rediscovered and are enlarged as they blend with the stories of others, and our stories and those of others are opened to change and to healing. What lies ahead is research into stories, mine, and those of others, and revelation of who I am and who I am becoming as a person and as a participant in a broader community of God's creation.

In my experience the human condition is blessed beyond imagination. However, it is also deeply fractured and broken. Neurosis, fear, deep sadness, separation from God, chemical and psychological dependency and addiction, distance from self, depression, and our sinful condition to name just a few create a landscape yearning for healing. For several years I have been actively engaged in contemplative disciplines and have personally experienced the healing that these can bring. This journey, my story, has given birth to the question, *"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and a fuller life in the participants?"* This is the research question. I will compare two groups, one from Twelve Step Recovery and one with a Christian institutional religious background, in my research of this question. I will explore if and how personal stories and experience of the "spiritual life" impact change, bring potential healing, and allow for a fuller life experience.

I am seeking to discover if the active engagement in actions and behaviors such as gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines alter the life stories of those who participate in an affirming manner and what emerging narrative these activities might produce. Additionally, if their stories are indeed altered, in what manner are they changed? Will there be a marked difference in the experience and the expression of the experience between the two groups?

Each participant group will be comprised of persons who have at some level accepted the life-altering capabilities of God, or as some in Twelve Step phrase, it "Higher Power." Their individual stories, however, may vary in the level of trauma each has encountered on his/her journey. Will the varied life experiences in these stories make a difference in how each encounters the contemplative practices utilized in the research? I believe what lies ahead is a story worth telling and a story worth hearing.

The General Context

The congregation I presently serve takes two distinct forms. One of these forms is my "formal" call to serve First Presbyterian Church in York, Nebraska. This congregation, which was founded in 1871, has approximately 294 members and 100 in worship. It is a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) congregation. First Presbyterian Church is an older congregation, in regard to the chronological age of its membership, though there is a diversity with age and station in life. I refer to this as my "formal" call because it is the call recognized by our governing body, Homestead Presbytery, and has been affirmed and documented by the processes established by our form of government in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The other form of the congregation I serve is “informal” in the nature of the call but is as central to my vocation as pastor. The “second” or “other” form of the congregation I serve takes a varied shape and is different in practical approach. This part of the congregation I am called to serve are persons involved in the chemical dependency/recovery community in York, Nebraska.

My primary contact is with Alcoholics Anonymous. First Presbyterian Church became home to all Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings in York approximately seven years ago [seven meetings in total]. I also work with a local treatment center and a local therapist, expanding my contact with the dependency/recovery community. These relationships create involvement with persons who have issues beyond alcohol use as well as placing me in contact with some of their families. Also because of the size of the community in which I live, approximately eight thousand, many beyond direct affiliation with First Presbyterian Church or the chemical dependency community are aware of my involvement in these areas.

My contact with the chemical dependency related groups began with little intentional drive or initiative on my behalf. It seems to have occurred naturally as part of my personal story. My participation and service is enhanced and broadened by my education and training in chemical dependency counseling and serving the recovery community in the capacity of spiritual guidance and friendship. And although there has certainly never been any action to formally recognize such a “call” to me as their pastor or chaplain, it is none the less a call and feels as penetrating as my formal call to serve First Presbyterian Church as Minister of Word and Sacrament. I counsel, pray with and for them, hear confession and assure their forgiveness, baptize and do their funerals. This

is clearly a pastoral role. For clarity and emphasis, Alcoholics Anonymous would not allow any formalization of this relationship, and some of its members would find what I suggest above absurd. Most of its members, ironically me included, would be hostile to any suggestion of formalization.

What further enhances my presence in my context is that I live in a small town in central Nebraska. The population, as I have written, is approximately eight thousand and has remained relatively stable for nearly six decades. The nearest metropolitan area of any size is Lincoln, Nebraska, with a little over a quarter-million people which lies fifty rural miles of cornfields to our east. To our west there are two other smaller cities, Grand Island and Kearney, Nebraska, both under seventy thousand people. These are approximately sixty and eighty miles away respectively. Beyond these two to the west are Denver, Colorado, and Cheyenne, Wyoming. Each of these cities is over eight hours away. In a manner of speaking we are an isolated island in the midst of a sea of corn and soybeans and a rural agricultural culture.

I am presently in my thirteenth year of service. I teach yoga in two fitness centers and have led yoga at the middle school. I fish and drive a truck with the vanity plate "GPA 3X." My wife works at the local bank, one of the larger employers in the county. All of this is widely known and part of trust building in my local context. Because of the size and relative isolation of the community I serve, the whole of who I am and my presence as a pastor in a local congregation creates a wider ministry base that extends well beyond my formal call.

Personal Disclosure

Because of my personal history and the deeper engagement of my own journey

and story with my research, my sense of "self" and foundational beliefs require additional discussion. My story, my narrative, is very much a part of what I bring to the table in the research and thought processes which follow. What I have experienced through direct participation in the contemplative practices I will research and my intimate relationship with Twelve Step recovery mean that my beliefs about how these practices take root and affect life are necessarily part of my "context" and should be revealed.

My research is a form, broadly speaking, of ethnographic research that is part of a qualitative research methodology. Savage and Presnell write that "Using this method, the researcher becomes a 'participant observer,' joining the faith community as a kenotic, or empty, listener. It is not that the researcher's ideas or experience are useless. It is that our own biased perceptions are likely to rush us toward hasty interpretations of the stories we are hearing unless we make intentional effort to prevent it."[1] A fuller disclosure of my experience is a part of my way of making an intentional effort to prevent and avoid an overlay of preconceived ideas and feelings on my behalf. This disclosure also allows an understanding of "where I am coming from" as a starting point.

First, and perhaps central to this entire story, is my acceptance of the axiom that all of life is spiritual in nature. Ideas which construct a portrait of a compartmentalized existence with areas cordoned off for "family life," "vocational life," "recreational life," "love life," "personal life," "spiritual life," etc., are artificial in nature. I believe the concept of varied compartments of human existence is an illusionary construction which in final analysis can actually be, in my opinion, highly destructive. I accept that the entirety of existence— body, feeling, emotion, intellect and "spiritual,"— form an

[1] Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 108.

integral whole. All of life blends together. Granted, all of what is spiritual in existence is not life affirming. Some of it is even life-annihilating. It is, however, still spiritual in nature. Cyprian Consiglio writes that "The world is at once physical, psychological, and spiritual, and these three realms of reality are always interdependent and interwoven."[2]

My Understanding of "Spiritual" and "Spirituality"

It is necessary, therefore, to describe in more detail what I mean by "spiritual" or "spirituality." I begin by stating I am not certain the terms can be accurately defined by a few short statements or brief sentences. Both words are broad, and a complete, concise all-inclusive definition seems, to me, elusive for many reasons. Nelson states that "Spirituality . . . has to do with how we deal with that basic human desire experienced in the totality of our being—how we handle our yearnings, our hunger for connection, our restless yearning to find a place to call home in the universe."[3] I agree with James Nelson when he suggests "spirituality" as all-inclusive in its nature when it comes to the human experience in relationship to others, self and God.

I do believe, however, my meaning and intent when I use these words can and needs to be more fully fleshed out. My experience suggests that when speaking of "spirituality" or what is "spiritual" many people, Christian and non-Christian, conjure images of something strictly ethereal in nature. Each are terms, in common thought, which describe something that labors beyond the boundaries of the physical body and human emotions. Donald McKim, who was academic dean of Memphis Theological Seminary and a Professor of Theology at Dubuque Seminary defines "spiritual" in this

---

[2] Cyprian Consiglio, *Spirit, Soul, Body: Toward an Integral Christian Spirituality* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015), 69.

[3] James B. Nelson, *Thirst, God and the Alcoholic Experience* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 25.

way: "Pertaining to the spirit or none material."[4] He defines "spirituality" as "The quality of being spiritual. Historically, varieties of spiritualties have emerged relating to religious traditions. They take shape through rituals and practices."[5]

"Spiritual" or "spirituality" according to McKim's definitions, I believe, do reflect popular concepts of the words, though some might argue with his phrase "relating to religious practices." I also believe, with all due respect to Donald McKim, his definitions are lacking in biblical foundation and in reality more accurately reflect Hellenistic and Gnostic thought processes when compared to what is contained in Scripture. McKim's definitions, along with widely held popular belief, reflect "spirituality" or "spiritual" as something that at best contains an ambiguous view of the body and at worst a contempt for the body when it comes to what is "spiritual" in nature. I further illustrate this pointing drawing from Christian history.

> It starts out with the ancient Orphic formula *soma-sema*: "The body (*soma*) is a tomb (*sema*) for the soul." And from that earliest of writers of Christianity riff on: Clement of Alexandria says that we must "free the soul from the fetters of the flesh," or as Gregory of Nazianzen writes, "from its bond (*desmos*) with a corpse, because the body is like mire where the soul can only befoul and defile itself. Gregory of Nyssa taught that "the body is a stranger to the soul" and an ugly mask, so we should "free ourself from the body" and "lay down this burden." Basil wrote that we should "take care of the soul" and never mind the rest. The monks are just as pessimistic. Palladius, the great monastic chronicler, records the sayings of Marcarius the Great that we should *despise, mistreat, and kill the body:* "It kills me I kill it." Antony the Great likewise says the body, "It flays me I flay it." And John Climacus says that the body is an ungrateful and insidious friend of whom we should be suspicious.[6]

---

[4] Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 267.

[5] Ibid., 268.

[6] Consiglio, *Spirit*, 9-10.

Therefore the body, along with the emotions and feelings it produces, historically and in widely held contemporary western thought, should be distrusted and perhaps even despised. Only the "spirit" and to some extent the intellect can be trusted. Biblically speaking this is not the case. The Hebrew mind and the Hebrew Scriptures have little to nothing which would reflect a compartmentalization of "spirit, body and soul." Hebrew Scriptures as a general corpus view these as an integral whole. Construction of boundaries between the physical, the emotions and the Spirit of God would be absurd to an ancient Jew. The Gospels also defy the logic of this separation. Take into account the incarnation—the Word of God takes on *bodily* form. Jesus' ministry is one which includes physical touch of others; he exhibits feelings, eats with others, heals persons' whole being, is executed and experiences bodily death, and is resurrected in bodily form. Jesus' "spiritual" life, his "spirituality," biblically, is all inclusive in respect to spirit, body and soul.

However, it can be argued from a New Testament perspective that Paul's writings can present an issue. Walter Principe addresses these issues when he says this about Pauline thought in regard to spirituality.

> In Pauline theology "spirit" (*pneuma*) is opposed to "flesh" (Greek *sarx* . . .) and spiritual (*pneumatikos*) is over against . . ."fleshly" (Greek sarkikos . . .—Gal 3:3; 5:13; 16-25; I Cor 3:1-3; Rom 7:14-8:14) or animal (Greek . . .–I Cor 2:14-15), but, significantly for later developments, they are contrasted neither with "body" (Greek *soma* . . .)or "bodily" (Greek *somatikos* . . .) nor with "matter" (Greek *hyle* . . .) . . .. The opposition, for Paul, is not between the immaterial and material, but between two ways of life. For Paul, the "pneumatic" or "spiritual" person is one whose whole being and life are ordered, led, or influenced by the "Spirit of God." . . . Thus one's body and one's psychic soul (Greek *psyche* . . .) can, like one's spirit, mind or will can be carnal if opposed to the Spirit.[7]

[7] Walter H. Principle, "Christian Spirituality," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Dowey (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 931.

Therefore, my description of "spirituality" and the "spiritual" as the whole of existence is, in my opinion, accurate from a biblical perspective. The whole of who we are is "spiritual" because we are spiritual beings in our nature, the whole and totality of our nature. Again, not all that occurs in our spiritual nature is life affirming. That does not change the reality that all that transpires in our existence is spiritual, because, allowing for redundancy, as those made in God's image we are spiritual beings in total. Consigli notes,

> We are not angels; we may never deny our humanity. As much as we may think of it as a burden, our humanity is our gift and our treasure. It is so precious that Jesus chose to take it on so that it could be raised up to the right hand of the Father in glory. At the same time, the spiritual dimension of being human cannot be denied. If we deny our spiritual dimension, we are in some way not fully human! . . . our spirituality is not something we add onto ourselves, not something we cover ourselves with, not even something "supernatural": it is the very center and source of our being. It is what holds us together, body and soul.[8]

Existence as Story and Narrative Form

The second area of disclosure is that I believe life, existence, is narrative in nature. I have already shared, to an extent, this understanding. Human beings are narrative creatures. We tell stories because in my experience we are story. This also means that existence in not linear in nature. It is, as I understand it, a spiral. Our history is part of our present. What is evolving, our future, has roots in the present and the past. It is all integrated. Human existence is always unfolding, even if we perceive it to be stagnant. Our story is a process, and narrative is always in some sort or fashion "emerging" even when the behavior might be labeled as a regression or appears to be unchanging. As story, as narrative, we are always in motion. Anderson and Foley maintain that "Part of

[8] Cyprian Consiglio, *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart: The Universal Call to Contemplation* (Coffeeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 15.

the power of narrative is that it enables us to make deep human connections that transcend unfamiliarity in locale and experience. Stories transport us to times and places we do not know. Through narrative, we become spiritual travelers undaunted by time, distance, or new landscapes. It is as if stories have mystical power to invite us, willingly or unwillingly, to enter unknown worlds."[9]

Belden Lane contends that "Narrative is the most characteristic way of articulating any human experience. Throughout the history of Christian spirituality, it has been the dominant literary form used to describe the spiritual life."[10] Story is the most characteristic means because it is who we are as created in God's image. Catherine Riessman writes, "Nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do."[11] The problem which can and does arise is how to come into full contact with one's authentic story and narrative. So much clutter is created within the human condition. Anderson and Foley write that "Trying to live according to someone else's story is like wearing hand-me-down clothes all the time. Therefore, the life narrative we compose should be significantly shaped by the choices we make and the actions we take."[12]

This is how I understand and define what it means to be narrative beings. As I have stated above, we tell stories which shape and give meaning to our existence. I believe that human beings are narrative creatures; we are story itself. Scientific data, chronological details, and linear, subjective "fact" do not contain the "who" of our being

---

[9] Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories and Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2001), 4.

[10] Belden C. Lane, "Narrative," *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Dowey (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993), 696.

[11] Catherine Kohler Riessman, *Narrative Analysis: Qualitative Research Methods Series 30* (Newbury Park: Sage Press, 1993), 2.

[12] Anderson and Foley, 7.

human. Story, narrative, does that in a unique manner. Why? Because we are story. We are narrative in nature. Therefore, let me more fully explain my use of the descriptive word "narrative."

The *New Oxford English Dictionary* defines narrative this way:

> A spoken or written account of connected events; a story: 2) The practice or art of telling stories: 3) A representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values.[13] (Highlights and emphasis are theirs)

This definition, in my opinion, reflects the human experience. We are connected events, in a lived manner, events which are interrelated, both past and present, creating a future with roots in what was once a present moment in time. It connects us also to a past which is not dissolved into the present or the future but lives on and can be, and often is, revisited. The progression of a narrative and one's life "conform(s) to an overarching set of aims or values."

I have shared Belden Lane's thought that "Narrative is the most characteristic way of articulating the human experience." [14] It is because it has its foundation in our very being. Lane breaks down the narrative experience into three parts:

> First is that the story thrives on the event-character of oral exchange . . . A second characteristic of narrative relates to its capacity for carrying a "surplus of meaning," not readily available in discursive language. Story is never exhausted in a single telling . . . A third important dimension of narrative is its rootedness in the concrete reality of ordinary life. Stories appeal to the senses—they reconstruct a sense of place, create characters, and recount events . . . Narrative is a distinctive, imaginative way of shaping truth, one that takes part in God's own creative action.[15]

---

[13] "Narrative," *New Oxford English Dictionary*, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/narrative (accessed September 17, 2015).

[14] Lane, 696.

[15] Ibid., 696-97.

Lane's description of "narrative" provides an apt rendering, I believe, of the human experience in its depth and the multi-faceted characteristics of our nature. As those created in God's image we defy any reduction into superficial terms and highly restrictive definitions. Narrative is who we are and it is how we, ultimately, understand our world. As Barbara Lundblad explains,

> Narrative theory describes one way of knowing. Psychologist Jerome Bruner says that human being come to know the world and express what they know in two very broad ways. The first is "logico-scientific," conveyed through logical propositions. The second way of knowing is conveyed through narrative. Bruner claims that narrative is the most basic way in which people give meaning to their experiences, a way of knowing that crosses cultures and time periods.[16]

Understanding human beings as narrative beings, those who tell stories because we are story, allows for the unique nature of who we are as individuals and as community to show forth in both the complexity as well as the simplicity as beings wondrously made in God's image. The "snap shot in time," the quick look at a person in a given moment and experience, is reshaped when viewed through the lens of narrative existence. What is present in that moment is a past connected to a dynamic present and an unfolding future. "Chapters" of our lives were written and filled with a depth and life which preceded the moment, the "snap shot in time," and are alive and actively present in that place in history. Narrative existence means that a specific moment cannot be held captive and become stagnant as a future, though not completely known or predictable, unfolds as new chapters are written. Story as life draws us in, alongside a greater community, as characters in our narrative who are ever changing, being created and re-created anew. How we participate and what we do as characters in the narrative matters. It reshapes us.

---

[16] Barbara K. Lundblad, "Narrative Theory," *New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 203.

How this transpires, the reshaping and recreation of our narrative, our story, is an integral part of this research.

This is the intersection of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines. Contemplative practices, perhaps, interrupt the external noise and clutter and bring individuals into closer contact with their own authentic stories. The introduction of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines into the behavior and practice of an individual may create an emerging narrative which creates healing and a fuller life.

Dry, Sober and the Narrative of a Fuller Life

The third area of disclosure is that I am a recovering alcoholic. I have taken, more than once, the Twelves Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous [AA]. The Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Steps[17] of AA remain an integral part of my daily spiritual discipline. An essential part of my story and journey is the belief that "hitting bottom" is necessary in recovery. Despite common, popular belief hitting bottom, in my opinion, is not having an experience in one's life that is so terrible or traumatic that it creates enough fear or consequence to change one's behavior from that point forward. If this type of event or occurrence were actually hitting bottom, the prisons would empty, people would not lose their jobs, their families, etc. Such traumatic events may bring a person to the bottom, but it is not hitting bottom. Hitting bottom, in my opinion and experience, is an "inside job." It is an internal experience and transformation. My analysis of "hitting bottom" and its impact on the person has bearing on my research with yoga, meditation and the participants' openness to the possibility of healing. Contemplative disciplines in harmony

[17] Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Alcoholics Anonymous* 4th ed. (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services Inc., 2001), 59-60.

with the practice of yoga may create a more fertile ground for continued transformation to occur.

What I have detailed in the process of entering recovery, or hitting bottom, entails a process, a journey over time; it is an emerging narrative or new chapter in the larger story which is the individual's existence. Each line builds on the previous line of the story to create an alternative and preferred future regarding the path of chemical and psychological dependency. Therefore, within the narrative of recovery and the healing which accompanies it, there are additional concepts contained in the process which need to be explained and understood.

I begin with the stipulation that for me and in my terminology there is a difference between being "dry" and entering the ongoing lifelong story, journey and process I refer to as "sober." To me, the recovery and healing process must differentiate the two terms and concepts. Though often used interchangeably, "dry" and "sober" are not the same experiences for my purposes and use. "Dry" begins with the first day of abstinence from mood altering chemicals [i.e., alcohol]. "Sober" is a process that is ongoing throughout the remainder of the recovering person's life, beginning with an initial encounter with the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and the suggested spiritual transformation they induce. Further, I have intentionally selected the word "process," and it is intended as specifically descriptive. In my understanding and use of the word, a "process" has a beginning but is without an end. Processes are an ongoing framework and provide guidance as a means for existence and direction. My concept of process and story and the narrative nature it contains exist in harmony as an ever-changing journey in which behavior and action play a vital role in the story which is emerging.

The Twelfth Step of Alcoholics Anonymous reads, "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."[18] The final short phrase of the Twelfth Step, "practiced these principles in all our affairs," points to the idea of "process" and "story." The Steps become a system and framework for living that has a beginning but is continually unfolding for the recovering alcoholic/addict. Further, the Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are suggested as a "design for living." Abstinence from mood altering chemicals, though essential to begin the journey toward sobriety, is not the foundational issue. To be clear on this point the word "alcohol" is only used once in the Twelve Steps [see appendix A]. The critical issue at hand is providing guidance for a manner of living which allows for a full and liberated life and to do so without mood altering chemicals or undue debilitating psychological or emotional baggage.

As I have previously suggested, the mere elimination of mood altering chemicals from the person's system leads only to the individual being "dry." I readily confess, however, that the elimination of mood altering chemicals from the alcoholic's/addict's system is often the only criteria under discussion when analyzing freedom from substance abuse/dependency. There are several reasons for this common, but incomplete view of "sobriety." For instance, the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association defines "Sustained Full Remission" from substance dependency in this manner, "This specifier is used if none of the criteria for Dependence or Abuse have been met at any time during a period of 12 months or longer."[19] In general

---

[18] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 59.

[19] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-IV* (Arlington: APA, 2000), 113.

terms, the criteria for Dependence and Abuse contain symptoms such as "tolerance," "withdrawal," "over use," "redirection of time and energy to obtain the substance," and "continued use despite the knowledge of harmful effects to the person's health."[20] Little beyond the direct elimination of the substance or seeking the substance is outlined in defining "Full Sustained Remission;" what many refer to as being "sober." Often the same holds true in discussions during Alcoholic Anonymous meetings. "Sober" is a term frequently used to describe a person who is simply free from alcohol in his/her system. I believe this description is inadequate in its final analysis when considering the promise of the Twelfth Step for a "spiritual awakening" and revitalization of one's life.

As I have stated, I intend to explore the harmonious connection of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines in the process of healing and growth in "sobriety." Bill W., one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, referred to this process of healing and growth as "emotional sobriety."[21] "Emotional sobriety," or "sobriety" in my terminology, is a sense of wellbeing and wholeness of self; it is a journey toward the "true self" away from the "false self" that has been constructed over time and diminishes the freedom which accompanies a whole, full and spontaneous life. "Now the people who live on the 'automatic' level," according to Thomas Merton, "do not by any means realize to what an extent their lives are alienated and deprived of spontaneity. Their habits, their mechanical routines have acquired the power to satisfy them with a kind of pseudo-spontaneity, a

[20] American Psychiatric Association, 110-11.

[21] Thomas Keating, *Divine Therapy and Addiction: Centering Prayer and the Twelve Steps* (New York: Lantern Books, 2009), 213-17. Keating provides a detailed description of Bill W.'s concept, taken from Bill W.'s article "The Next Frontier, Emotional Sobriety."

kind of false naturalness. What is false and unspontaneous has become, to them, second nature."[22]

Cure and Healing, the Differences

Expanding my line of thought and reasoning, I also need to clarify that for me there is a profound and concrete difference between "cure" and "healing" though, again, these words are often used interchangeably. The two concepts can coincide but, for my purposes, are not the same. For instance, if I have a coronary blockage a physician may "cure" me by means of heart bypass surgery. The blockage is bypassed and blood flow resumes as necessary to feed the heart and my body. I am "cured." But, if I continue my past sedentary lifestyle, eating fatty foods and continuing to smoke, the results of the physician's work will quickly diminish and eventually dissolve. I was "cured" but "healing" as in the sustained restoration of healthy life did not occur.

"Healing," for the purposes of this research, is holistic in nature and brings fullness of life. Scott Davis suggests "Healing and cure are to be distinguished. Curing as a modern biomedical concept focuses on individuals and treatment of disease . . . Healing is . . . directed toward a social effect of illness . . . providing social meaning, resolutions, and restoration . . . finding meaning and purpose, healing is possible even when cure is not an outcome."[23] "Cure" is not necessary for "healing" to take place.

This explanation is consistent with my experience of an alcoholic or drug dependent person who enters the journey of sobriety. His or her life can regain vitality and meaning. Wholeness is possible and even enhanced, life made more complete, and

---

[22] Thomas Merton, *The Inner Experience*: *Notes on Contemplation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 89-90.

[23] Scott K. Davis, "Healing and Exorcism," *New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 80.

each can embrace a fuller possibility of living as one created in God's image. The person may experience "healing" in the fullest sense of the word. That person has not, however, been "cured." Consuming alcohol or mood altering chemicals can never resume. "Healing," as defined, has taken place but "cure" is not part of the landscape.

The concepts presented of "cure" and "healing" and wholeness of life have application far beyond the recovery community. Theologically, this is the same concept of healing which occurs in the presence and action of Jesus the Christ. Entering a Christ centered life does not "cure" the person of sin. Each remains a sinful person. The person can, however, undergo a lifelong process of healing, returning to the abundance of life to which Christ invites all humanity. This is John Calvin's doctrine of "sanctification" in a nut shell. The journey of healing through Christ becomes a continued, lifelong movement toward a fullness and abundance of life. Healing in this context is "shalom," a wholeness and leavening given by God through Christ Jesus.

What I have outlined above as the difference between "dry" and "sober" is consistent with my concept of human existence as story. It is an ongoing story, just as the life of the person who enters recovery is narrative and is emerging in a new and varied direction. My exploration of the influence of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines follows the invitation of Step Eleven of seeking "to improve our conscious contact with God." A new chapter, an emerging narrative unfolds and continues to take shape in the individual's life as he or she follows the path of sobriety in the fullest sense of the word.

The Conversion Story and Process of Growth and Development

It is essential to understand that my contextual belief is that life is story and unfolds chapter by chapter as our narratives evolve. This is a process that takes shape step

by step over time. But what I have written, stipulating the non-compartmentalization of existence and life lived as an integral whole, that life is story and unfolds in chapters, can appear to some as ethereal and highly subjective in nature. Is there any objective conversation which can take place surrounding these concepts? I believe the answer is yes. The follow pages explain my contextual acceptance of "conversion" as a process. The upcoming pages will also explore developmental stages in regard to the human condition and growth, religious conversion, and faith development. I will conclude this segment with a contextual pillar that is one the foundations of my exploration and research, Ken Wilber's Integral Theory.

What I have described as the narrative of "sobriety" in the previous segment could also be considered as much the same type of process or the emerging story and narrative of conversion in the broadest sense of the word. William James wrote,

> To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self-hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence or its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about.[24]

The choice of William James' definition of conversion at this point is intentional. William James is specifically named for his contribution to Twelve-Step recovery in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous.*[25] It also has applications for persons of faith and, in my opinion, humankind in general. For James conversion is most commonly experienced as a

---

[24] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study In Human Nature* (U.S.A.: Seven Treasures Publications, 2009), 109.

[25] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 28, 567.

process over time. It is also a process of healing, as healing has been defined in this work, which reunifies the individual.

William James discusses two types of conversion, "voluntary" or "volitional" and "involuntary" or "unconscious."[26] My attention, because of the interest in the introduction of new behaviors and actions, will focus more intentionally on the volitional type of conversion though not exclusively. What James says is in "the volitional type the regenerative change is usually gradual, and consists in the building up, piece by piece, of a new set of moral and spiritual habits."[27] At the risk of redundancy, William James' reflection on conversion as a process is consistent with what I have set forth as my understanding of existence as narrative in nature. It is also consistent with what I have described as the process of moving from "dry" to "sober." Gradual change, gradual transformation, is present as a new story emerges. It can be interrupted, or augmented, by personal behavior and action.

Therefore, it is necessary when disclosing my contextual stance and position, to explore a brief overview of the processes of human development and of conversion and transformation in life experience. My intention with this overview is not an in-depth analysis of human development or the conversion processes. What I believe, and what follows, reflects my axiom that we as narrative beings progress in stages over a period of time with human experience within the processes as significantly impactful. What follows spells out clearly that I am not alone in my assessment of life as developmental and occurring in stages shaped by interaction and behaviors. Our development, our

[26] James, 117-19.

[27] James, 117.

conversion, processes are chapters which unfold and are modified by behaviors and experiences within our life's story.

Erik Erikson and the Human Story

I begin the conversation of transitional and volitional growth with Erik Erikson, one of the parents of developmental psychology. Developmental psychology suggests we as human beings, as narrative beings, undergo different stages of development, or different chapters in our narrative. Erikson also suggests that human beings are an integral whole.

> There is, in whatever order, the biological process of the hierarchic organization of organ systems constituting a body (soma); there is the psychic process organizing individual experience by ego synthesis (psyche); and there is the communal process of the cultural organization of the interdependence of persons (ethos) . . . the rule that to approach human behavior in terms of one of the processes always means to find oneself involved in the others, for each item that proves relevant in one process is seen to give significance to, as it receives meaning from, items in others.[28]

Further Erikson explains that becoming the totality of who we are as human beings is a process over time. He lays out different developmental stages of existence in which necessary behaviors and actions must take place to move onto the next stage in a healthy, life affirming manner. Erikson breaks down the developmental process into eight stages. His wife Joan Erikson added a ninth after his death. [See appendix B for Erikson's developmental chart]. Erikson states that in order to move onto the next stage of development an individual must accomplish the tasks of the stage in which one finds oneself. Failure to do so means the person, according to Erikson, will become mired in the "Core Pathology-Basic Antipathies" of that developmental stage. He says that either

[28] Erik H. Erikson and Joan Erikson, *The Life Cycle Completed: Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 25-26.

development will cease and stagnation will continue or the individual must "return" to the underdeveloped stage and complete the tasks necessary to move on to the next stage of development. If this does not occur, he or she will not achieve their "Basic Strength."[29]

Erikson draws from a more faith based terminology in his description of the result of healthy progression through these stages of development.

> More specifically, if developmental considerations lead us to speak of *hope*, *fidelity*, and *care* as the human strengths or ego qualities emerging from such strategic stages as infancy, adolescence, and adulthood, it should not surprise us . . . that they correspond to such major credal [sic] values as *hope, faith,* and *charity* . . . such words as hope, fidelity, and care have an inner logic that seems to confirm developmental meaning.[30]

Erikson's model clearly shows that from a clinical and therapeutic vantage point there is a process in human development that very much mirrors what William James placed before us in his definition of "conversion." Within each structural framework, both for Erikson and James, a progression takes shape over time and the narrative that is created, to a significant degree, is influenced by the behavior and actions of the individual. The narrative continues to be told with the behavior and actions of the "author" bearing significant weight on its progression. With this general information on human development in hand, let us now examine more directly the process of religious conversion and the stages of faith a person encounters.

Lewis Rambo and Religious Conversion in Stage Development

The emerging stories of the journeys of what I have termed "sobriety" and "conversion" are processes that take shape over the course of time. Moreover, these processes are to a large degree moved along by the responsive nature of the individual to

---

[29] Erikson and Erikson, Chart 1, 32-33, and 54-82. This chapter provides a detailed description of the process of human development according to Erikson's model.

[30] Ibid, 58-59.

the call of God into a deeper and more profound relationship with God and community. Human beings, I have stated, are narrative creatures. We participate in the telling of our story as we become our story. Religious conversion takes the same general shape as we have witnessed in "sobriety" as the Twelve Steps are encountered and in Erik Erikson's model of human development.

Religious conversion, as has been stated, most often takes place over a period of time with active participation of the individual as an integral part of the process. Lewis Rambo says much the same: "My choice of the word process over event is a deliberate distinction resulting from my personal interpretation that, contrary to popular mythology, conversion is very rarely an overnight, all-in-an-instant, wholesale transformation that is now and forever."[31]

Lewis Rambo defines conversion in this way:

> . . . the word conversion will mean several things—not necessarily in any particular order of priority, not in any weighted system of valuation, and certainly not all at one time. It will mean simple change from the absence of a faith system to a faith commitment, from religious affiliation with one faith system to another, or from one orientation to another within a single faith system. It will mean a change of one's persona orientation toward life, from the haphazard of superstition to the providence of a deity; from a reliance on the rote and ritual to a deeper conviction of God's presence; from belief in a threatening, punitive, judgmental deity to one that is loving, supportive, and desirous of the maximum good. It will mean a spiritual transformation of life, from seeing evil or illusion in everything connected with "this" world to seeing all creation as a manifestation of God's power and beneficence; from denial of the self in this life in order to gain a holy hereafter; from seeking personal gratification to a determination that the rule of God is what fulfills human beings; from a life geared to one's personal welfare able all else to a concern for shared and equal justice for all. It will mean a radical shifting of gears that can take the spiritually lackadaisical to a new level of intensive concern, commitment, and involvement.[32]

---

[31] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 1.

[32] Ibid., 2.

Lewis Rambo suggests that religious conversion takes shape over time, manifests itself in varied ways, and is influenced by a multitude of factors. Although there are other models of conversion Rambo accepts, as do I, the model of conversion which allows for "stage" development is the one he utilized. The "stage" model Rambo presented follows this pattern: Stage One—Context; Stage Two—Crisis; Stage Three—Quest; Stage Four—Encounter; Stage Five—Interaction; Stage Six—Commitment; and Stage Seven—Consequences.[33] It is not suggested that these steps take shape without overlapping periods. They do not take place within the framework of neat, mathematic precision. Also, the pattern is not necessarily linear but can form the image of a spiral, circling back and creating a "re-encounter" with previous stages. What this model does underscore is that conversion is a process that takes shape over time, a story told in narrative form and which presents the possibility of emerging new chapters for the individual and even for communities. [A more complete description of each stage in Rambo's model is found in appendix C]

Lewis Rambo, in my opinion, effectively tells the story of the process of conversion. Conversion is most often not the result of a one-time, traumatic or cataclysmic event. Some would argue it is never a "one-time, traumatic or cataclysmic event." Allow me to use the Apostle Paul's conversion as an example of what I am saying. The conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus is often used as an example of a "one-time, traumatic, cataclysmic event" that created a new and emerging narrative for him. I would argue, however, that Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus did not occur in a vacuum. He had been surrounded by the followers of Jesus for a period

[33]Lewis Rambo, 17.

of time and had a monotheistic faith tradition which accepted the coming of a messiah as part of its story. The conversion Stages Four, Five and Six, as outlined by Lewis Rambo, [See appendix C] may have been compressed into a single powerful event, but one could effectively argue that Stages One, Two, and Three had been evolving in Paul for some time. The ground had been made fertile by earlier events, or stages, in Paul's life to create what only appears to be a single event conversion.

Vernon Johnson in his basic text, *Intervention,* says much the same thing about alcoholism and what appears to be surrender out of the blue, the "moment of clarity" as some label it. Johnson's term for this event, "spontaneous insight," is very rare . . . "spontaneous insight, which isn't really spontaneous at all."[34] What he says is that what appears to be spontaneous is actually the manifestation of a cumulative period of events which come together and dissolve the delusion created by chemical dependency. The "moment of clarity" actually takes shape in "stages."

As one examines the processes of "sobriety" and "conversion," it is easy to discern the presence of the living symbol of "story" located in human existence. Life is always in process. Whether one looks at entry into sobriety and an initial encounter with the Twelve Steps, William James definition of conversion, Erikson's stages of human development, or Lewis Rambo's discussion of the seven stages of faith conversion, it is evident that these are presented as journeys in narrative format which take shape over the course of time. Further, they are processes which are influenced beyond the scope of the individual directly involved. Environment and relationships play a major role in the process, playing roles much as characters would in a narrative. Lastly, human growth and

---

[34] Vernon E. Johnson, *Intervention: A Step by Step Guide for Families and Friends of Chemically Dependent Persons* (Center City: Hazelden, 1998), 64.

development, sobriety, and religious conversion all involve behavioral shifts in actions in response to the call and invitation into a changed life. It is clear to me the processes mirror one another. The question is, however, is "human growth and development," "religious conversion" and/or entry into "sobriety" a "once and for all time" proposition? The answer in my opinion is no, it is not.

Intensification Process and the Creation of New Chapters

We have arrived at the point where this story begins to "thicken." It is time to examine more deeply what takes place within the process of writing new and hopefully preferred chapters in one's existence. Does increased depth and breadth of one's narrative potentially occur as stories continue to be written? I have said that the process of development, of writing new chapters, is spiral in imagery and practical observation and practice. Therefore, I believe that once one begins to write a new chapter into his/her story, a more complete portrait of the "true self" may emerge as each continues the journey.

"Intensification" is the term Lewis Rambo selects for this phenomenon in religious conversion. It is also an applicable label for those in any process of growth and further human development.

> *Intensification* is the revitalized commitment to a faith with which the covert has had previous affiliation, formal or informal. It occurs when nominal members of a religious institution make their commitment a central focus in their lives, or when people deepen their involvement in a community of faith through profound religious experience and/or transitions like marriage, childbirth or approaching death.[35]

Actions or behaviors, whether initiated by the "convert" or from an external source, can trigger a process of intensification. Perhaps the process of intensification is

[35] Lewis Rambo, 13.

initiated by the internal question, "Is this all there is? There must be something more." Maybe an external shift or pressure generates the intensification. Whether its advent is external or internal, let us take a brief look at a few of the ways the intensification process is explained developmentally.

Benedict Groeschel and Purgation, Illumination and Union

Benedict Groeschel draws from the Christian tradition in naming the process of "intensification" or growth with the concepts of "purgation," "illumination," and "union." He refers to this process in one's personal story as "awakening." "The experience may be consoling or threatening, or both . . . Aspects of reality which have not been seen previously now leap into prominence."[36] Responses to the awakening, using Groeschel's terminology, are varied. Response, however, always comes in some form even if it is refusal or flight.

According to Groeschel the stage of intensification, or "awakening" (labeled purgation) may, and most often does, require years. It is the stage of moral integration and coming to trust God more deeply. "The striving for perfection is not nit-picking, but confronts the whole value system which keeps a person from living the Gospel fully."[37] The whole of life becomes more completely integrated with the call of the gospel and the gospel fully enters daily life. The conclusion of this stage of awakening is what Groeschel terms "The First Darkness." It can be caused by an event beyond one's control or another form of existential crisis. But, if one continues, he or she will emerge. "In an hour, or a day, or a week, a new world dawns—sharp, clear free. The basic anxiety of life

[36] Benedict J. Groeschel, *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), 73.

[37] Ibid., 77.

has been silenced because all is lost . . . There is a presence at once familiar and oddly new; soft, gentle, but commanding."[38] This opens the door for the second stage, "illumination."

The illuminative stage brings freedom. The rigidity of the purgative stage dissolves. Entry into the illuminative stage does not mean one is "cured" of sin but that healing has settled and is penetrating deeply into one's being. "He or she has recently been freed from the slavish notion of external perfection or artificial purity."[39] The individual settles, grows calm, feeling a connection with self, others and all of the created order. "As the illuminative way proceeds, a silence and calm envelop the individual."[40] At the conclusion of this stage comes a second dark night. There may be a presence but it is disconnected. It is what Groeschel calls the "Dark Night of the Senses." This stage is marked, at its conclusion, with complete surrender even to the point of the possible loss of what is eternal.

The final stage, according to Groeschel, is the third stage he terms "union." According to Groeschel this stage is rarely attained. It is complete surrender into God. The phrase he uses to describe this stage is "totally absorbing, like quiet joy."[41] The individual does not become as God, but is one with God. It is the experience present in mystics and the saints of Christian tradition.

James Fowler and Thomas Keating's Models of Growth and "Intensification"

[38] Groeschel, 81.

[39] Ibid., 82.

[40] Ibid., 84.

[41] Ibid., 86.

There are other models of the "intensification" and growth processes of faith as the individual's stories unfolds. James Fowler and Thomas Keating suggest a similar journey of intensification of the convert. Both Fowler and Keating follow a model more closely aligned with the human development model Erik Erikson suggests.

> James Fowler's Model of Stages of Faith and Emergent Strengths:
>
> *Infancy*—Undifferentiated Faith. Marked by mutuality, trust, pre-images Ground of Being.
> *Early Childhood*—Intuitive-Projective. Rise of imagination, formation of images.
> *Childhood*—Mythic/Literal Faith. Rise of narrative and stories of faith.
> *Adolescence*—Synthetic/Conventional. Forming identity and shaping personal faith.
> *Young Adulthood*—Individual/Reflective. Formation of vocational dream. Reflective period.
> *Adulthood*—Conjunctive Faith. Paradox, depth and intergenerational responsibility.[42]
>
> Thomas Keating's Model:
>
> *Reptilian* Consciousness. Infancy. Immersion in nature, prompt fulfillment of needs, not conscious of self.
> *Typhonic Consciousness*. Early childhood. Body-self is distinct. Part and whole are indistinguishable. External reality with images and imagination drawn from that reality.
> *Mental Egoic Consciousness*. Late childhood to early adolescence. Full reflective self-consciousness. Logic thinking to abstract thought. Personal responsibility and guilt feelings develop. Oneness with others, belong to the universe.
> *Mythic Membership Consciousness.* Unquestioned assimilation of the values and ideas of one's social group evolve. There is high value places on conformity to family, ethnic and religious values of the community. Society is stratified into hierarchical forms. This stage takes place in adolescence to early adulthood.
> *Intuitive Consciousness*. Early to mid-adulthood. Thinking beyond rational processes. Harmony, cooperation, forgiveness, negotiation to resolve differences. Sense of oneness with others.
> *Unitive Consciousness*. Transforming union working with the experience of divine love into one's faculties and relationships.[43]

---

[42] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperOne, 1983), 290.

Cursory examination of the two models reveals a symmetry between the models presented by Fowler and Keating though different labels are applied to the stages of development. Progression through these stages of faith, whether following Groeschel, Fowler, or Keating, however, is not automatic. Each of the three suggests one can become "stuck" and growth stalled and stagnation may set in diminishing the vitality offered by God for human existence. Groeschel, Fowler and Keating each caution that many people, and even entire cultures, often become "stuck."

Potential Stagnation for Development

As is the case with sobriety or human growth and development, progression through the stages is not guaranteed. Groeschel suggests the stage of purgation is often the point of stagnation where the invitation to move onto the stage of "illumination" is resisted. "We see the light and yet we go back. My suspicion is that we are so accustomed to our own narcissistic melancholy, so guilt-ridden and attached to our own self-deprecation, that the very thought of being at peace in the light of God is terrifying to us."[44] Fowler and Keating strike the same cautionary note. Fowler suggests the "Adolescent" stage with its rigidity is the point one often stops or stagnates. "Stage 3 typically has its rise and ascendancy in adolescence, but for many adults it becomes a permanent place of equilibrium."[45] Thomas Keating makes a similar observation: ". . .

---

[43] Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation* (London: Bloombury, 2014), 171-73. This description comes from Keating's glossary of terms but these are used throughout the book when describing stages of faith.

[44] Groeschel, 134.

[45] Fowler, 172.

even as adults our consciousness is still in many ways infantile. And culture as a whole has not advanced beyond the mythic membership level. . .”[46]

Whether one is more closely drawn to Groeschel’s traditional Christian three-stage model or Fowler and Keating’s developmental model, what remains evident is that it is a “process.” It takes the shape of story. It reflects life, the human experience, as narrative in nature. These also reveal that tasks and activities must be accomplished by the person to move successfully onto the next stage in order to experience a deeper liberation and touch the gift of healing offered by God.

Therefore I am not alone when I write, within my contextual framework, that sobriety/conversion is a process that is directly related to an understanding of existence as story in nature. A new, emerging narrative takes hold as behaviors and actions unfold in response to God’s call to more fully develop as those created in God’s image. As we continue to develop and deepen our relationship with God/Higher Power, healing occurs. In the pages ahead I will explore how and if the practices of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines imprint themselves in the narrative of healing and offer an invitation to embrace a more vital, integrated existence.

Integral Theory and Ken Wilber

It is clear at this juncture that I accept and believe the nature of existence is revealed in and through the metaphor of story. I have also postulated that life is not compartmentalized but an integral whole and the totality of existence is spiritual in nature. Further, I have shown that I accept and believe that we grow as human beings through the continual writing of new and potentially preferred “chapters” in our story.

[46] Keating, *Invitation*, 36.

Another way to shape this portrait of growth in "chapters" is to say that we develop as human beings and we develop in our "faith" in stages. I have suggested that as human persons the whole of existence impacts the "Who am I?" of our story of being. But, I think, it is necessary to further flesh out my understanding of what it means when I write that life is experienced as an "integral whole." Ken Wilber's work and writing on the integral nature of existence provides insights and a clearer vision to what I have come to accept and believe intuitively. Therefore, let us exam in cursory form Wilber's work and reflection on what it means to comprehend life through an "integral" lens.

Ken Wilber begins his presentation of "integral theory" with a foothold in what is often called "perennial philosophy." Wilber suggests that perennial philosophy, along with its concept of the Great Nest/Chain of Being, is a common core of the world's great spiritual traditions. Wilber, following scholars such as Huston Smith, Arthur Lovejoy, Ananda Coomarasway, as well as others, says that "the core of the perennial philosophy is the view that reality is composed of various *levels of existence*—levels of being and knowing—ranging from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit. Each senior dimension transcends but includes its juniors, so that this is a conception of wholes within wholes within wholes indefinitely, reaching from dirt to Divinity."[47]

The label of "The Great Chain/Nest of Being" are directly linked as a descriptive term for perennial philosophy. Existence is interlinked, nested, and connected in all forms and manner. As we grow we build upon, and still contain, what has already existed. Ken Wilber introduces a helpful term, "holon," which aids in understanding this

[47] Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), 5.

configuration. "A holon is a whole that is part of other wholes."[48] For example a cell in our body is a "holon." A bodily cell is complete in and of itself. Yet a cell is also part of a greater whole, the entirety of the body. But it does not stop there. The body is a "holon," and this individual body/holon is part of a larger community of human beings which constitutes a given society. The society, then, is also a "holon."

This works in both directions. The societal community is not a bodily "cell," but cells are necessary to create the societal community. Levels develop, from junior to senior, as the structure becomes more complex. "Holons" contain previously developed "holons." "Each senior dimension in the Great Nest—from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit—transcends and includes its juniors, so that living bodies transcend but include minerals, minds transcend but include vital bodies, luminous souls transcend but include conceptual minds, and radiant spirit transcends and includes everything."[49]

As with other developmental systems previously described, such transcendence and development does not occur in a neat, tidy linear manner: ". . .overall development is absolutely not a linear, sequential, ladder-like affair. It is a fluid flowing of many streams through these basic waves."[50] Also, as with other developmental systems contained in this work, there is no "guarantee" of progress through one level onto the next higher level. "At the same time—and this cannot be emphasized too strongly—the higher levels in the Great Nest are *potentials*, not absolute givens."[51] Therefore, there it should not be

---

[48] Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 7.

[49] Ibid., 8.

[50] Ibid., 17.

[51] Ibid., 12.

assumed nor taken for granted that a person, or a society, would necessarily progress and grow through all the levels of development.

It is clear to me that Ken Wilber is following a similar line of reasoning on human development and growth in consciousness/faith as previously described in this chapter. However, his work is not a redundancy. Wilber's focus is on the whole, the integration of all manners of intra- and inter-human relationships in life experience. For instance, there is a lack of an integral view of existence, which is a shortcoming, in perennial philosophy and the Great Nest/Chain of Being. The Great Nest concentrated on the interior being, consciousness. Most often other areas of existence, and their influence, such as cultural context, political structures, and external operating systems such as neuro-function were unstudied, unknown or ignored. Wilbur contends,

> Thus the great traditions rarely understood that states of consciousness have correlates in the organic brain . . . a fact that has revolutionized our understanding of psycho-pharmacology, psychiatry, and consciousness studies. Likewise, the traditions evidenced little understand that individual awareness . . . is profoundly molded by both its background cultural worldviews. . . and the modes of techno-economic production. . . in which it finds itself. This left the Great Chain open to devastating critiques from the Enlightenment, from modern cognitive science, from neuropsychiatry, and from postmodern culture and historical studies, among others, all of which demonstrated that consciousness is not merely a disembodied, transcendental noumenon, but is deeply embedded in contexts of objective facts, cultural backgrounds, and social structures. The Great Chain theorists had no believable response to these charges (precisely because they were deficient in these areas).[52]

Thus, Ken Wilber introduces and explores an integral model of existence which includes a broader spectrum of human experience. Wilber's model is a diagram divided into four distinct quadrants (see figures 1.1 and 1.2). The Upper-Left quadrant, for Wilber, is the "I" quadrant. It is internal and engages consciousness. In the "Upper-Left

[52] Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 143.

quadrant (the interior of the individual), you find your own immediate thoughts, feelings, sensations, and so on (all described in 1st-person terms)."[53]

The Upper-Right quadrant, in Wilber's model, is the individual viewed from the outside. The person is viewed not from a subjective internal function but through the lens of objective science; "you find neurotransmitters, a limbic system, the neocortex, complex molecular structures, cells, organs systems, DNA, and so on—all described in 3rd-person objective terms ('it' and 'its'). The Upper-Right quadrant is therefore what any individual event looks like from the outside . . . for all those are items that can be referred to in some sort of objective, 3rd-person, or 'it' fashion."[54]

In the Lower-Left and Lower-Right quadrants the "I's" and "its" then become "we's" and "its" in Wilber's Integral Model.

> The connections continue. Notice that every "I" is in relationship with other I's, which means that every "I" is a member of numerous we's. These "we's" represent not just individual but group (or collective) consciousness, not just subjective but intersubjective awareness—or culture in the broadest sense. This is indicated in the Lower-Left quadrant. Likewise, every "we" has an exterior, or what it looks like from the outside, and this is the Lower-Right quadrant. The Lower-Left quadrant is often called the cultural dimension (or the inside awareness of the group—its worldview, its shared values, shared feelings, and so forth), and the Lower-Right the social dimension (or exterior forms and behaviors of the group, which are studied by 3rd-person sciences such as systems theory).[55]

Wilber's description and explanation of his overall integral approach, his IOS (Integral Operating System), is more easily understood in connection with the diagram of the system (see figures 1.1). Held within each quadrant, revealed in the diagram, is the invitation to and potential for incremental and developmental growth. Therefore, it

---

[53] Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (Boston: Integral Books, 2007), 20-21.

[54] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 21.

[55] Ibid., 22-23.

should also be understood that growth can occur in one quadrant and not necessarily have an immediate impact within another.

Growth and development occurs, according to Wilber, in "levels." He also describes these "levels" using the phrase, "Stages of Consciousness." Additionally Wilber suggests as growth occurs within the "levels" it is also experienced in "lines" of development. He often utilizes the terms "waves," or "streams" for the same concept he expresses when he uses the term "lines."

Levels/Stages of Consciousness for Wilber as described in the simplest of term are

- Level 1—(Infrared) Archaic; without a separate-self sense; . . . can't tell where [the] body stops and the environment starts.
- Level 2—(Magenta) Magic Tribal; driven by impulse and immediate gratification; . . . has a magical or fantasy mode of thinking; it is focused on the immediate now moment.
- Level 3—(Red) Magic-Mythic; more aware and more aware of its tenuous separate existence, and starts to worry about. . . safety and security and self-protection . . . develops a strong set of power drives.
- Level 4—(Amber) Mythic Traditional; the "conformist," "mythic-membership," "diplomatic," or "belongingness" stage; self can begin to take the role of other, and thus. . . identity can expand from its own self. . . in various groups: its family, its clan, its tribe, its nation, its religion, its political party, and so on. . . a switch from egocentric to ethnocentric identity.
- Level 5—(Orange) Rational Modern; a 3rd-person perspective emerges; the switch in identity from a local ethnocentric identity to a universal or global world centric identity occurs—a switch from "us" to "all of us."
- Level 6—(Green) Pluralistic Postmodern; takes a 4th-person perspective; the capacity to reflect on and criticize 3rd-person perspectives, including science, leading to a multitude of pluralistic views; the belief that there are only multiple approaches, with absolutely no universal or globally unified approach, no "Big Picture" that is true for everybody, but only culturally constructed beliefs.
- Level 7—(Turquoise) Integral; integrated, holistic, and comprehensive in nature; most inclusive, sophisticated, and complex, most conscious, most embracing, includes the greatest number of perspectives; believes all other levels have importance.

- Level 8—(White) 3rd-Tier Super Integral; this level includes the para-mind, meta-mind, overmind, and supermind. Wilber suggest that this level includes considerably less than 1/10 of 1% of the human population.[56]

As stated above, beyond developmental "stages" or "levels" of consciousness there are also "lines" of potential growth. Like levels, "lines" of development can occur in all quadrants. However, since the overriding focus of this research concerns the individual, I will keep the explanation of "lines" of development primarily within the Upper-Left quadrant. Ken Wilber's use of the term "lines" could also be understood as varied forms of human "intelligences" experienced within the complexity of what it means to be a person.

Some of the more important "lines" include:

- the cognitive line (or awareness of what is)
- the moral line (awareness of what should be)
- emotional or affective line (the full spectrum of emotions)
- the interpersonal line (how I socially relate to others)
- the needs line (such as Maslow's needs hierarchy)
- the self-identity line (or "who am I?," such as Loevinger's ego development)
- the aesthetic line (or the line of self-expression, beauty, art and felt meaning)
- the psychosexual line, which in its broadest sense means the entire spectrum of Eros (gross to subtle to casual)
- the spiritual line (where "spirit" is viewed not just as Ground, and not just as the highest stage, but as its own line of unfolding)
- the values line (or what a person considers most important, a line studied by Clare Graves and made popular by Spiral Dynamics)[57]

Following his model, one can discern that a person may become quite advanced in one "line" and remain diminished in another. For example, one could develop substantially in the area of the "needs line" but remain at a remedial point in the

[56]Wilber, *Integral Meditation*, 19-79. This work allows a broader and more complete explanation of the Levels/Stages of Consciousness for Wilber.

[57] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 23-24.

"interpersonal line." This condition might seem to appear natural and even difficult to overcome. The same thing can also occur on a societal level. It seems to me Nazi Germany is an excellent example of this phenomenon. It appears to me that this society was highly advanced in the "cognitive line" of development but was functioning at an extremely low point in regard to the "moral line" of development.

To briefly recap, for Wilber, there are four distinct quadrants of existence. Within each quadrant a person/society may develop to higher levels of being. Ken Wilber outlines this growth as developmental "levels of consciousness." The "level of consciousness" is the manner through which the person or society views life. Contained within each "level of conscious" are developmental "lines." These "lines" further reduce the over-arching "level of consciousness" into varied segments in regard to interpretation of existence and overall worldview. But, there is more.

I have noted previously, Ken Wilber's outlines developmental levels/stages of consciousness. Levels/stages of consciousness for Wilber are longer term segments of life in the human story. When one enters a "level of consciousness" he or she remains there for a period of time and a person must do the work necessary to complete that given "level" before progressing to the next "level." However, for Wilber as well as many others, there are also "states of consciousness." A "state of consciousness" is a brief experience, and it can occur at any "level/stage of consciousness." "A state means a state of consciousness, such as waking, dreaming, and deep sleep."[58] For Wilber there are two major "states of consciousness." The two "states" are "natural" and "altered" states of

[58] Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 12.

consciousness. "The natural state of consciousness include those identified by perennial philosophy—namely waking/gross, dreaming/subtle, and deep sleep/causal."[59]

As I have written, there are also "altered states of consciousness."

> An altered state of consciousness is a "non-normal" or "nonordinary" state of consciousness, including everything from drug-induced states to near-death experiences to meditative states. In peak experiences (a temporary altered state), a person can briefly experience, while awake any of the natural states of psychic, subtle, causal, or nondual awareness, and these often result in direct spiritual experiences (such as nature mysticism, deity mysticism, and formless mysticism; . . .) *Peak experiences can occur to individuals at almost any stage of development.* The notion, then, that spiritual and transpersonal states are available only at the higher stages of development is quite incorrect.[60]

However, Ken Wilber is clear that an encounter with an altered "state of consciousness" and the resultant spiritual experience is temporary. Further he is clear that such a "state of consciousness" is interpreted and understood through the present "level of consciousness" at which the individual is functioning. For instance, a child of nine or ten, functioning at the "Red" or "Magic-Mythic" level of conscious, may have an altered "state of consciousness" experience of a transcending warmth and an all-consuming love which embraces the entirety of her/his being. Following Wilber's line of thought, he/she will then interpret this experience as, let us say, a powerful, external form of mythic god or even as the appearance of a form of "super hero" who will always protect him/her.

"States of consciousness" do not last. They are temporary.

> . . . all of those peak experiences, no matter how profound, are merely temporary, passing, transient states. In order for higher development to occur, those *temporary states must become permanent traits*. . . This is where *meditative states* become increasingly important. Unlike natural states . . . and unlike spontaneous peak experiences . . . meditative states access these higher realms in

---

[59] Wilber, *Integral Psychology* , 13.

[60] Ibid., 14.

> a deliberate and prolonged fashion . . . higher levels that eventually become, with practice, *permanent realizations.*[61]

Ken Wilber believes that encounters with an elevated "state of consciousness" can allow a person to more rapidly grow in "levels of consciousness." Therefore, the more often a person enters an "altered state of consciousness," the more potential that exists for an accelerated growth in "levels of consciousness."

Ken Wilber's integral approach placed words and images to something I had intuitively come to believe and accept in my own life's story. His explanation of the integral nature of existence is central to my approach in the area of the potential for healing and my understanding of life. As I have previously written, I believe that life is not compartmentalized but is an integral whole. Further, I have stipulated that all of life is spiritual in nature, albeit, not always in a life affirming manner. Wilber's topology underscores the integral nature of existence and, as I interpret it, is supporting bedrock for what is postulated in the work and writings contained in this chapter of Erikson, Rambo, Keating, and Groeschel. It also, in my opinion, communicates the essence of the gospel message and the Divine order of creation. It draws, as I understand Wilber's integrated approach, the whole of what it means to be human together forming a larger, more fully incorporated story of our journey as we endeavor to rediscover our "true self."

The integral approach, as set forth by Ken Wilber, also illuminates the reason for an integral approach to healing which assimilates gentle yoga, meditation, and contemplative reflection. I am seeking to discover if the processes I am suggesting might touch all quadrants of the human experience as well as potentially initiate an altered "state of consciousness" and "lines" of human development. I am wondering if the

---

[61] Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 15-16.

research participants will encounter altered "states of consciousness" through the integration of yoga, silent meditation and contemplative reflection. Could this, at least potentially, bring healing and a different relationship with their concepts of God/Higher Power? Further still, could the integral approach suggested in my research also allow for an altered view of creation beyond the self? These are some of the questions contained within and to be explored in my research.

> That ***Integral Model***—"all quadrants, all levels, all lines, all states, all types"—is the simplest model that can handle all the truly essential items. We sometimes shorten all of that to simply "all quadrants, all levels"—or ***AQAL***—where the quadrants are, for example, self, culture, and nature, and the levels are body, mind, and spirit, so we say that Integral Approach ***involves the cultivation of the body, mind, and spirit in self, culture, and nature.***[62]

Concluding Remarks on Context

There are a few other areas of my personal context which require disclosure. One area is my experience in the practice of yoga. I have taught yoga for nearly seven years. During this time I have come to accept as axiomatic that we are whole beings, as I have previously stated, and experience life far beyond the widely accepted cultural perception that conscious intellectual functioning represents the whole person. There is an old yoga cliché, "your issues live in your tissues." I propose to incorporate elements of the basic philosophy and gentle, basic physical practices of yoga into the discipline of meditation as part of my research. The practice of varied forms of contemplative meditation and yoga are, in my opinion, harmonious and apply an active, focused physical experience.

> The classical Yoga system, expounded by the sage Patanjali in the Yoga Sutra, gathers together eight traditional practices . . . restraint or discipline. . .bodily postures. . .breath control. . . withdrawal from sensory objects . . . concentration . . . meditation . . . a certain sense

[62] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 26.

> of inward isolation or interior stillness . . . anchoring the naturally wondering mind on a single focus.[63]

The eight traditional practices illuminate the consistency present between the practice of yoga and more traditional forms of meditation. Yoga also draws the person into the physical aspects of being and is an embodiment of the practice of meditation. Yoga, in my experience, gives insight into the physical aspect of the whole person beyond intellectual function.

Another area of contextual internal influence and awareness is my role as a Christian pastor. I bring a Christian perspective in my world view. If I were working exclusively within the institutional Christian church, this would present little difficulty. Part of my research, however, is within the recovery community. The Christian concept of God, widely varied though it may actually be, can be repellant to some I encounter in the recovery community.

All of the above can and should be part of the landscape of personal self-awareness and has bearing on my "research question." One other minor but potentially impactful detail should be added. I am six-feet four inches tall, weighing two-hundred and twenty pounds with dark features and a deep, clear voice. My physical stature can and has created an environment of subconscious intimidation for some individuals, especially if the person has a history which contains abuse. I intend to make all possible efforts to derail this potential obstacle.

Each of the areas outlined create the possibility for sub-consciousness influence in my research and findings. During my research I will continue to employ my ongoing conversation with my accountability person, my spiritual director, as well as my own

---

[63] Michael Barnes, "Yoga," *New Westminster Dictionary of Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 654.

activities to increase a greater sense of self-awareness. My personal practices include forms of contemplative prayer, yoga, relationships, study, and play.

This research portends a potentially broad application. I believe we live in an addictive culture. Widespread obesity, excessive and pervasive credit card debt, obvious dependence and self-absorption in computer technology, chemical dependency, behavioral sexual dysfunction and resultant codependency, and the constant pursuit of "more" even though most are immersed in a culture of abundance and excess lend credence to my belief. The research into gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines may invite the participants to stop and quite literally take a breath. It is an invitation to begin a new chapter, create different and life affirming emerging narratives, and enter more deeply into the gift of healing.

In the very first verses of the Bible we hear the mighty story of God's creation of the world. In the second to last chapter of the Bible, in the book of Revelation in chapter twenty-one, we continue to hear the story of a God who continues to create. What lies ahead is a story, a journey, which invites the participant to actively engage in wondrous new creation and break the cycle of an addictive and constrictive environment.

The foundational concepts and disclosures of my context are in place. I now turn my attention to the biblical and theological as well as clinical aspects of this narrative journey. In the following chapter I will examine how the narrative of life and our active engagement in life affirming activities are understood through the lens of the incarnation of the living Word in Jesus. I will also connect the incarnation to the process of healing within the human experience. Three biblical passages will be explored in some detail: God's name as spoken to Moses in the burning bush, the psalmist's connection of silence

and the knowledge of God, and Jesus call to healing. The following chapter will also explore the impact of trauma and "the time in between," with Holy Saturday as the defining image, as I delve into Shelly Rambo's book *Spirit and Trauma*. Richard Rohr's and Thomas Keating's theological reflections regarding healing and the human condition will also be examined.

The following chapter will also include, because my research and contextual reality is integral in nature, a brief investigation of the clinical correlations to the biblical and theological exploration held within the boundaries of this research. As with all stories it is likely that what unfolds will be diverse and multifaceted in experience and interpretation. It is my hope that all the wonder, mystery and awe inherent in "story" is contained in what transpires.

Chapter Two

Biblical, Theological and Brief Clinical Foundation of the Research

Introduction

In chapter one I explained I understand that existence, the human story, is narrative and we are spiritual beings. We are story and all of life is spiritual in nature. I further shared in the previous chapter that new and varied behaviors can give birth to new or renewed chapters of our stories and become life affirming in their presence. The framework of our narrative, our life, takes on a spiral imagery with past and present laying claim to and shaping an unknown yet potentially preferred future. As new chapters are written and we continue to evolve as dynamic beings, the invitation to healing and wholeness is present in each moment. I also wrote that we develop in stages and life at its foundation is integral in nature.

I consider that healing, as I have described it in chapter one, is wholeness of life extending beyond the limited definitions of exclusive biomedical assessment. Healing, in the context of this work, is about the entirety of one's self. It is a lifelong journey toward the "true self," the image of God imprinted upon every human being. When I write about the image of God imprinted on each of us, I am describing the "true self." This is self that is uniquely fashioned in each human being. It is not God, but it is what God intends us to be and become.

As indicated in the last chapter I am asking the question, *"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and a fuller life in the participants?"* This is the central question of concern. I will compare two

groups, one from Twelve Step recovery and one with a Christian institutional religious background, in my research of this question. I will explore if and how personal narratives and experience of the "spiritual life" impact change, bring potential healing, and allow for a fuller life experience.

It is time to turn our attention toward the biblical and theological underpinnings for this research. I have selected three biblical texts. Each is a brief passage. I have selected them because each speaks to me in my life story and narrative. The three have informed me and have written themselves into my life. The three texts are the name of God given to Moses at the burning bush as told in Exodus 3:14; the power of silence and stillness before God as poetically revealed in Psalm 46:10; and the story of wholeness and new life as shared in the healing of the "lame" man by the pool in John 5:1-9.

Before moving forward I need to address, briefly, the nature of the texts selected. Some might suggest I selected three isolated passages out of the entire corpus of scripture to support my argument. Or in other words, I had a preconceived answer already in hand and worked backwards to create the "proof." I would dispute any such assertion. The three passages I selected, I believe, are representative of a broad witness in scripture of an ever creating God who draws us toward the center of our being to bring healing. The three texts chosen are only small representations of themes broadly attested to in the Bible. Cursory examination of the biblical story reveals a God who is always creating. A primary theme of Jesus' ministry is one of healing. The Bible tells us repeatedly from Elijah to Jonah, Moses to Jesus, of people who withdrew into desolate and silent places to

listen for the voice of God. Thomas Keating suggests, "Silence is God's first language; everything else is a poor translation."[64]

Theologically, I will engage Shelly Rambo (no relation to Lewis Rambo whose work is found in chapter one). Rambo explores the impact and imprint of trauma in person's lives through the image of "Holy Saturday" and the power of "witness" and "remaining" to bring healing. Accompanying my conversation with Shelly Rambo are Richard Rohr, Thomas Keating, among others from the contemplative tradition and clinical field, as they reflect on the human condition and their interpretation of the human condition as it takes shape. Each, Rambo, Rohr, Keating, and others share the opinion that life, what happens in our narrative, lives on within us and alters the trajectory of each individual and the community as a whole.

The Biblical Stories

The story of God's name given to Moses by God in Exodus is wondrous mystery. Exodus 3:14 may be only one verse in scripture but the narrative possibilities contained in this short, seemingly simple verse are broad and deep. It speaks of hope, presence, and the never ending dynamic creative nature of God. As we experience the name of God, we step into a story, a narrative, which is not and cannot be contained. It opens us to the limitless wonder and awe which is the experience of God and God's presence. The direction God may take, the form God may assume, is unlimited. God is ambiguous and mysterious as is the narrative nature of God. This is the nature of story. William Brown observes, "Overall, the Bible prefers stories over systems, poetry over treaties,

[64] Thomas Keating, *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*, http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/821306-silence-is-god-s-first-language-everything-else-is-a-poor (accessed October 13, 2015).

prayer over creed. . . . It is marveling at the open mystery to which the text points. . . . Because wonder is ambiguous by nature, reading with wonder is at ease with ambiguity and easily accommodates multiple perspectives."[65]

Moses asks for God's name at the burning bush when God calls Moses to lead God's people from slavery in Egypt into liberation in a new and very different land. God continues to write the story of the people of Israel. An emerging narrative is taking shape with its roots in the past, and as it is written, holds the promise of a preferred future for the Israelites who are held in bondage. God's response to Moses' request for a name is, "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' He said further, Thus say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"[66] The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation of the Hebrew text of, "I AM," is undoubtedly a very well-known and widely used translation for the Hebrew verb אהיה (*ehaya*, the transliterations are mine). However, the NRSV translation is a misleading and a far too limiting translation of the Hebrew text.

Remember, in the context of the story, Moses is led to a place beyond himself, "beyond the wilderness," (Exodus 3:1) and into profoundly intimate contact with God (God asks Moses to remove his sandals leaving nothing between them). Moses now shares his desire for an even deeper intimacy in asking for God's name. God's response to the request reveals to Moses, reveals to all who open themselves to this offered intimacy, that human constructs and even the limits of our imagination cannot contain God. God speaks אהיה אשר אהיה *ehaya asher ehaya*, "I WILL CREATE WHAT I WILL

---

[65] William B. Brown, *Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God's Word and World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 11.

[66] *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, gen. ed. Wayne A. Meeks (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), 83. All English translations are taken from this version of the Bible.

CREATE," or "I WILL CAUSE WHAT I WILL CAUSE." This translation is mine but I am not alone in my consideration of the translation from Hebrew to English. My translation, which I believe is an accurate dynamic equivalent rendering of the Hebrew text, conveys the ever creating, uncontained nature of God. A more complete examination of the Hebrew text reveals in a fuller sense the wonder contained in this short phrase.

ehaya is a first person, prefix, Hifel verb. The "story" this verb formation engenders is multiphasic in nature. First, God's name is a verb form. It is action, motion, and dynamic in its revelation and therefore in resultant behavior. Second, it is first person singular underscoring the monotheistic nature of the Creator. Third, it is a "prefix" or "imperfect" form of the verb denoting action in the present but not completed. It continues into the future. The narrative continues to be written! Fourth, it is Hifel, which means the verb is translated as causative in nature.

ehaya, as I render the translation, is a Hifel verb form in the first person singular of the "imperfect" or "prefix" aspect. What does that mean? To understand the fuller nature of the name of God, first we must consider the Hebrew structure of verbs. "Hebrew does not employ a tense system comparable to the tenses in English and most other Indo-European languages. Rather verbs refer to completed action (affix) or incomplete action (prefix)."[67] Kittel uses the terms "affix" and "prefix" verbs for the more commonly used "perfect" and "imperfect" terms utilized in other Hebrew grammar texts to avoid any confusion with the English "tense" system. In the case of אהיה /*ehaya*

[67] Bonnie Pedrotti Kittel, Vicki Hoffer, and Rebecca Abts Wright, *Biblical Hebrew: A Text and Workbook* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 343.

the א, or "alef," is a prefix to the verb אהיה /*ehaya* and connotes the first person singular. Therefore it is a "prefix" or "imperfect" verb formation.

Let us now turn our attention to the "mood" of the verb *ehaya*. Mood means, "That state of a verb which has to do with the speaker's attitude toward the action or state expressed: indicative→statement; interrogative→question; imperative→command. In English some moods, such as subjective, may be expressed by using an auxiliary verb such as might, may, or should. In Hebrew, mood may be expressed by the form but most often is inferred by the context."[68] The mood of the verb *ehaya* is indicative. It is a statement of reality as the narrator of the story accepts and comprehends the nature of God. We also need to take into account the "stem" of the verb. "There are seven major patterns of a verb. The stems other that Qal are called derived stems and are formed either by internal intensification of the root or by the addition of preformatives."[69] *ehaya* is an "indicative mood" with a "Hifel stem."

The Hifel Stem means the verb *ehaya* is translated in the "causative. Hifel is "The stem which, primarily, takes the basic root meaning (Qal) and makes it causative."[70] Therefore, as God's name is revealed, it is revealed as something "causative in nature" or that God, by stating God's own name, connotes that God by nature is "creating," that what "God will create, God will create."

Further, the verb היה /*haya* is the root of *ehaya*. *haya* is not a "verb of being" as such verb forms are understood in English syntax and grammar. The verb of "being" is "understood" when Hebrew is translated. The verb *haya* literally means "fall out, come to

---

[68] Kittel, Hoffer and Wright, 370.

[69] Ibid., 384.

[70] Ibid., 361.

pass, become, come into being, to occur."[71] *haya* is what happens in the totality of the situation to whatever or whomever it is applied.

Although the "vowel pointing" in the Masoretic Text (MT) may indicate that the verb *ehaya* suggests a Qal Stem, we must remember that vowel pointing is a much later addition to the text itself. It is an "interpretation" of the text. Original Hebrew manuscripts did not have "vowel pointing" as "stem indicators." The Hebrew alphabet lacks a complete vowel system. Therefore, a "point" system was introduced in the Masoretic Text (MT) translation. The *Leningrad Codex* from 1008 C.E. is the oldest complete manuscript of the MT.[72] The context of the story and word formation contained within the story told in Exodus 3:14 of God's name does, however, suggest a Hifel verb stem. I am not alone in my suggested interpretation.

> אהיה אשר אהיה (*ehaya asher ehaya)* [Is] "Incomplete action" expressed in the prefix form can imply endless time. Present and/or future tense severely limits the sense of timelessness implied here. אשר *(asher)* can mean "who, what or which. אהיה *(ehaya)* May be a word play on יהוה [the tetragrammaton, or unpronounceable/unspeakable name of God] perhaps stressing that aspect of God which causes to be. (Reading אהיה *(ehaya*) unpointed tempts us to entertain the possibility of a Hifel). In any case, this is a mysterious and elusive answer, stressing God's essence and eternity. It might be best to leave this phrase untranslated.[73]

Walter Brueggeman says this about the name of God found in Exodus 3:14: "This

---

[71] Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The New Brown—Driver—Briggs—Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody: Hendricks Publishers: 1979), 224- 25.

[72] Kittel, Hoffer, and Wright, 369.

[73] Ibid., 273-74.

God is named as the power to create, the one who causes to be."[74] Richard J. Clifford suggests a similar understanding of the word. "The etymology of the name Yahweh is disputed. It is surely a form of the verb . . . *haya* and probably the causative form."[75]

This more complete explanation of God's name illuminates the mystery, wonder and narrative nature of God and those created in God's image. Granted, the name and nature of God is ambiguous. It does, however, allow for the unconstrained and uncontained nature of God. It is a God whose story is always unfolding and dynamic. It shares with us a God who can bring healing and new life where it seems, to logical, conscious intellectual process, impossible. What we *do* in response to the ever creating God matters.

New chapters of our personal and communal narratives are being written with their roots in previous chapters. As expressed in the nature of God's name, existence unfolds in a creative, causative process. These actions, in my opinion, reveal themselves in the chapters of our story, or in "stages of development," stages such as those described in chapter one in the course of human development, conversion and deepening of one's faith. "I WILL CAUSE/CREATE WHAT I WILL CAUSE/CREATE" swings wide the door of wonder and dynamic possibilities for growth and healing. It is an invitation and assurance that the desire to "write" more of the story is not a futile effort. God's name reveals that story is continually being written and rewritten within us. William Brown comments,

---

[74] Walter Bruegemann, "Exodus," *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume*s, ed. Lender K. Keck, et. al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:714.

[75] Richard J. Clifford, "Exodus," *The New Jerome Bible Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 47.

> At its base, wonder is an emotional response; it cannot be willed into existence. It is a response to something unexpected, and that response reflects a potent mix of curiosity and perplexity. On the one hand, wonder carries the unsettling elements of bewilderment. On the other hand, there is the element of insatiable curiosity or the passionate desire to know. Wonder, thus, bears an inner tension.[76]

Let us now turn our attention to Psalm 46:10a (It is Psalm 46:11 in the Hebrew translation as rendered in the MT). Psalm 46 seems to be about a very real siege of a city by enemy forces. Others interpret it more generally as God's protection in the midst of whatever trouble may come. The literary form is poetry, and by the dynamic nature of poetry, both meanings as well as others could and should be considered. Regardless of the exact circumstance, the situation described in the Psalm, in its totality, seems to be dire. What we experience in the poem at its climax is a shift to the first person singular and an imperative command, "Be still and know that I am God."

The Hebrew verb הרפו /*harphu* translated as "Be Still" is an imperative verb form. It is a direct command in the midst of the turmoil present in the Psalm. The verbal root רפה /*raphah* means, literally, "sink, relax, sink down, drop, abate."[77] Further, מרפה /*marphah* is a noun with the same root, and means "healing, cure, health."[78] The word denotes an invitation to surrender into the hand of God and find healing, a God who is revealed as we now know as "I WILL CAUSE/CREATE, WHAT I WILL CAUSE/CREATE."

The verb *harphu* is followed by the Hebrew verb ודעו /*udu* (third person, plural,

---

[76] William Brown, 5.

[77] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 951.

[78] Ibid., 951.

prefix, of the Qal root ידע/*yada*).[79] *udu* has a deeper, more complex meaning than the word "know" frequently communicates in contemporary English idiom. The word translated as "know" [*yada*] indicates deep, intimate knowledge when a more complete meaning of the Hebrew word is considered. y*ada* is a word often used to describe sexual relationships.[80] With a comprehension of the more complete and complex meanings of these verbs we discover that we are invited to enter into a surrender, a "sinking down" into a more intimate knowledge of a God who rescues, heals and changes us, altering our story, our narrative and can bring wholeness.

In his commentary on the Psalms, J. Clinton McCann says this about 46:10a:

> Although the NIV and NRSV retain it [*Be still*] because of its familiarity, "Be Still" . . . is not a good translation. Contemporary readers almost inevitably hear it as a call to meditation or relaxation, when it should be heard in the light of v. 9 as something like "Stop!" or "Throw down your weapons!" In other words, "Depend on God instead of yourself."[81]

Although it might come as a surprise, I agree with McCann's opinion to some degree. I do think it can mean to "Stop" or "Throw down your weapons," literally or metaphorically speaking, or "Depend on God instead of yourself." Where I part ways with McCann is in his apparent understanding of meditation as a practice and discipline. Mediation, from a Christian perspective, is not inaction or a relaxation technique. Admittedly, entering into a meditative period requires a calming and centering phase. One could equate this period to the "warm up" before working out in the weight room or running. The "calming, centering" period is much the same as what is called "grounding"

---

[79] Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), 299.

[80] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, 393-95. The meaning of the root, which is extensive, can be explored in the varied translation possibilities rendered.

[81] J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "Psalms," *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volume*s, ed. Lender K. Keck et. al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 4:867.

in yoga, moments of transition from "getting here" to "being here." The initial phase of a time of meditation allows for the creation of space in one's interior being.

But this calming, centering time is only the initial few minutes. Meditation, as a disciplined practice as I understand it, can allow God to enter one's story in a more unlimited manner. It is a means to come to "know," *yada*, God. Meditation may create an environment which enhances the possibilities and assists as a guide in writing a new chapter or rewriting an older one. Meditation can provide energy for a new and different initiative which then stirs us to action. Psalm 46:10a becomes an invitation to step into healing, step by step, stage by stage, engaging the integral nature of life as a forerunner to a new and preferred existence. "Be still" is an action of surrender. It begins with the action of "Stop!," and the willingness to cease "running the show." It may then lead to more action, new and different behaviors, which spring forth and bring new life. Keating writes that

> The basic thrust of Christian spirituality might be summed up in two texts from the Old Testament which speak to the fundamental situation of the human adventure. The first is from Exodus: "I am who I am" . . . God thus reveals himself as unlimited being. Is-ness. Everything that is must be in relationship to his [sic] infinite being, and in fact, penetrated by it.
>
> The other text is from Psalms 46:11: "Be still and you shall know that I am God." We are thus invited to open ourselves completely to this infinite being, to the reality of the God who is; who penetrates, surrounds, and embraces us at every moment. God is the atmosphere that our spirit needs to breathe in order "to live, move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).[82]

It is time now to turn to our third and final story and explore the wonder and awe present through the incarnation of the Word and healing ministry of Jesus. The story I have selected is Jesus' healing the "lame" man by the pool and is drawn from the fifth

---

[82] Thomas Keating, *The Heart of the World: An Introduction to Contemplative Christianity* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 2008), 95.

chapter in John's Gospel. It is wonderfully illuminative for our discussion. The story, John 5:1-9, shows the power of bodily engagement, new behavior, and how healing is provided not by conscious reasoning, logic, talk therapy or intentional intellectual process but by a change in behavior and the resultant shift in the quality of the man's life.

Jesus encounters a man who has been "lame" for some time. John tells us thirty-eight years. "Lame" was what this man knew. The man was in the right place to be "lame," dwelling in the environment of the "lame." I further suggest that the "lame" man "knew" that nothing was going to change for him. I am using the word "knew" in the same manner I have defined "knowing" previously in my discussion of Psalm 46. It was an intimate "knowing," a part of who he had become. The man made "lame" part of who he was. "Lame" was part of his identity, his "false self."

Jesus asks the lame man, according to the NRSV translation, "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6) However, the NRSV translation is lacking in its provision of a fuller description of what Jesus is actually asking. I will explain just how it is lacking in a moment. At this point, in response to Jesus' question, the "lame" man begins to issue a summary of reasons, excuses perhaps, of why he cannot be anything different than a "lame" man and never will be able to change. One should note, at this point, he does not answer Jesus' question. Perhaps, he cannot even hear the question Jesus has asked.

What Jesus does next is instructive. Instead of engaging in intellectual banter with the man, he directs him to change his behavior. In other words, instead of seeking remedy in talk therapy models or conscious intellectual reflection, Jesus has him actively engage his body, change his behavior, and walk. The man does; he changes his behavior, and

experiences healing. The "lame" man initiates new behavior and his story begins a new and different chapter.

At this point let us go back for a moment to Jesus' question "Do you want to be made well?" and explore what Jesus is asking in more detail. Jesus asks him, in Greek, υγιης γένέσθάί/*uginas genesthai* (John 5:6). γένέσθάι finds its root in γινομάί/*genomai*, "begotten," "be made," "be created," "come to be," "arise," "become."[83] In the context of John's Gospel story the word is about returning to created wholeness, to be and become what God created him to be at the beginning of existence. υγιης/*uginas,* means, in more complete description, "sound," "undamaged" and "healthy."[84] In other words, therefore, Jesus is asking the man "Do you want to be created/come to be sound/healthy?" Or, perhaps, in language I will explore in more detail later, "Do you want to return to your "true self?""

This is a story of *healing.* It tells of a man whose narrative now holds a new and different chapter. It takes place because physical behavior is altered and with a behavioral shift through the felt sense in the moment. It is not the result of an intellectual, intentionally conscious deliberation but because behavior is changed and the body engaged. It is an example of action preceding feeling. As a result the man is changed. I do not think my analysis of this story is a stretch. It points to the reality that Jesus is offering "healing," and healing in this context exceeds what I would consider as "cure."

Healing and God's Gift of Incarnation as Atonement

[83] Walter Baur, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 158.

[84] Ibid., 832.

Healing and cure are not the same things as I understand the concepts. Recall, "Healing and cure are to be distinguished. Curing as a modern biomedical concept focuses on individuals and treatment of disease . . . Healing is . . . directed toward a social effect of illness . . . providing social meaning, resolutions, and restoration . . . finding meaning and purpose, healing is possible even when cure is not an outcome."[85] Each of the three biblical stories contained in this writing can be interpreted, without any undue strain, as invitations to healing and writing a new and different chapter in one's story. We are invited through these stories shared from the Bible into the broader, dynamic creative and re-creative essence which is God. The invitation is to the whole, the totality of who we are as integrated beings. David Aldridge writes, "As human beings we continue to develop. Body and self are narrative constructions, stories that are related to intimates at chosen moments. These meanings are concerned with body, mind and spirit."[86]

Healing, speaking biblically and in the context shared in this work, contains my holistic understand of the word. "Healing" may or may not include a biomedical "cure." It certainly can and it is not my intention to suggest that bodily "cure" is inconsequential in the story of one's life. What I am suggesting is that "healing" is deeper still. It arises from God. Remember, it is a God who names Godself as one who continually creates in new, unexpected and dynamics ways. It arises from a surrender, a willingness to "throw down your weapons" and "stop fighting" the gift of authentic life God desires to write into our narratives.

---

[85] Scott K. Davis, "Healing and Exorcism," *New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 80.

[86] David Aldridge, *Spirituality, Healing and Medicine: Return to Silence* (New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000), 15.

Healing is not limited to some ethereal consideration of what is spiritual. These stories take into account and communicate that we are spiritual in nature; the whole of our being is spiritual. According to Aldridge,

> A soul restored to holiness (wholeness)—the root word of health and healing—was also a healthy body. In these terms wholeness means a return to unity with God and is achieved by action of the spirit. What is important in this early Christian tradition, and particularly for the miracles worked by Jesus, is that these healing miracles, along with others, were examples of spiritual transformations intended to initiate the receiver. The process of healing was instrumental to reunite the person with the divine.[87]

Kathryn Tanner shares this point of view in her examination of incarnation of the Word of God as Jesus. She interprets the incarnation as God's act of atonement. Tanner does not allow the incarnation to be held captive in Bethlehem and the birth event but examines it as God's atoning participation with the whole of Jesus' life, ministry, humanity, death and resurrection. "All of them view incarnation [other atonement 'theories'], understood as the Word's assumption of humanity—the Word's uniting of humanity to itself in such a way as to make humanity its own—as the key to the salvation of humanity. It is in virtue of the incarnation that humanity is saved—first the humanity of Christ himself and then through him that of every other human being, one with him"[88]

Tanner's view of the incarnation as God's act of atonement makes the whole of life, spirit, body and soul meaningful and points toward the integral nature of existence. It illuminates the creative nature of God, who continues to create in unexpected and unimagined ways. It also speaks to the reality that what we do, body, soul, and spirit, matters. The whole of our being writes our story. The lens through which Tanner

---

[87] Aldridge, 33.

[88] Kathryn Tanner, "Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal," *Anglican Theological Review* 86, no. 1(Winter 2004): 41, http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/12166739/incarnation-cross-sacrifice-feminist-inspired-reappraisal (accessed July 21, 2014).

experiences the incarnation as an act of atonement underscores this. "That assumption of humanity by the Word is of course responsible for the fact that the man Jesus exists at all; it is therefore a way of talking about Jesus' birth. But it is also the fact underlying and making sense of what happens over the whole course of Jesus' existence, from his birth to his death and beyond: this whole human life and death is that of Word incarnate."[89]

God's name spoken to Moses at the burning bush, the command to "Be still and know" and Jesus' invitation "pick up your mat and walk" all share the dynamic nature of a God who is always creating, always writing and re-writing the narrative of humanity. They also share that we are invited, out of necessity and grace, to participate in the process. This is made clear in the incarnation of the Word in Jesus as God becomes an active participant in humanity. Each of the three stories underscore the active participation of God and the invitation to active response by humankind.

Healing of wounds and trauma is not something accomplished through sedentary participation by humankind. It is accomplished through a holistic, integral connection of spirit, soul and body. An illustration from the initial stage of the journey of sobriety makes my point. I may pray for God's help to become and stay sober. God is not, however, going to literally reach down and take the beer bottle out of my hand. I have to participate, do something, in the process.

This is the touchstone for my interest in the harmonious integration of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines with the advent of healing and newness of life. Both of the practices of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines, which are connected in nature, may allow for the creative nature of God and self to flow as one in moments of being "still." Each may move the participant away from cognitive, conscious intellectual

[89] Tanner, 45.

barriers, i.e., "I am lame," into new behaviors writing a fresh chapter of existence. Let us focus our attention now on the theology of healing, trauma, and the writing of a new and potentially preferred chapter in one's life.

Theological Perspectives

Shelly Rambo's book entitled *Spirit and Trauma, A Theology of Remaining* concerns itself with the lasting impact and imprint trauma has on persons and communities. Rambo suggests that trauma remains long past the event which created the trauma and leaves a lasting impression on one's identity. One example of lasting trauma she draws upon is Hurricane Katrina and the ongoing effects of the enduring event. Years after the storm has past the devastation of the heart and spirit remains. "Things are not back to normal he [Deacon Julius Lee of New Orleans] tells us. 'People keep telling us to get over it already. The storm is gone, but the 'after the storm' is always here.'"[90]

Rambo guides the reader through stories of trauma and how trauma is a death, of sorts, that continues in one's life and potentially the life story of a community. Biblically she interprets the crucifixion of Jesus as a traumatic event and envisions the cross theologically through the lens of Holy Saturday, the "day in the middle." Holy Saturday is "the day in the middle," standing silently between the cross of Good Friday and the resurrection of Easter morning. Standing in the time in between, the moment in the middle, Rambo invites us to consider, as an act of "witness," that we "remain." She encourages us in order that we understand the necessity of not glossing over the trauma but to remain with it as a witness to what transpired.

---

[90] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 2.

As I have stated, Rambo does not understand trauma as a onetime event, a paragraph or two in a chapter in the ongoing and largely unaffected overall narrative of one's identity. She understands trauma as something which continues as one's story is told and always, in some fashion, informs the narrative.

> Trauma is described as an encounter with death. This encounter is not, however, literal death but a way of describing a radical event or events that shatter all that one knows about the world and all the familiar ways of operating within it. A basic disconnect occurs from what one knows to be true and safe in the world. The event comes to be understood as a radical ending past which it is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of life.[91]

There is no "cure" for trauma. Its mark is indelible and holds an imprint on the remainder of one's life, one's story, and perhaps even the story of entire communities or nations. This stands in tension, in my opinion, with a culture that encourages us to deny, or at the very least move on quickly, from traumatic events, often as if these did not occur. We live in a society, as I experience it, which has very real problems accepting trauma as a continuing phenomenon. I believe we like to "be done with things" and "move on with the rest of life." "Just forget it" seems to me to be a common mantra. Couple this with what I perceive as a societal obsession with being "happy" and it is of little wonder that traumatic events get swept under the carpet and continue to do harm to the quality of one's life. These disrupt healthy stage development and potentially fragment the integral nature of one's story. Rambo's work offers a different path.

Shelly Rambo's suggested path does not deny the event or the enduring pain of the trauma. The effect of trauma is not consumed in a superficial gloss, but it is accepted as a part of the story. For Rambo the pain of the event is real and lasting. It must be

[91] Shelly Rambo, 4.

acknowledged, felt, and understood as a part of who one is and is becoming. It is only through "remaining" that one finds healing.

> The work of this book [*Spirit and Trauma*] is to uncover this middle course— to resist the redemptive gloss that can often be placed, harmfully, over experiences of suffering and to orient us differently to the death-life narrative at the heart of the Christian tradition. Looking from the middle, we are oriented to suffering in a different way—always in its dislocation, its distance, and its fragmentation. This orientation calls for a theology of witness in which we cannot assume presence or straightforward reception of a violent event but, instead, contend with excess of violence and its tenuous reception.[92]

Rambo's examples are drawn from devastating traumatic events. These include war, hurricanes, rape, child abuse and biblically the unjust execution of an innocent man, Jesus, on the cross. I believe, however, that all human experience has trauma at some level. Trauma and traumatic events are part of every story. As Rambo shares, if these are glossed over it is harmful and diminishes the quality of life available to all as each lives his/her story.

Our exploration deepens with Rambo's conversation about witnessing. She feels there are two types of witnessing and labels them as the "proclamation" and "imitation" models. The "proclamation" model is when the witness shares the experience in words. The "imitation" model is body centered.

> The proclamation model is word-centered; the imitation, or sacrifice, model is body-centered. I identify these two models as reflecting a more straightforward relationship to word and body than what can be assumed given what we know about trauma. These models are also primarily identified with the figure of Jesus—with communicating a truth about his words and his body. This communication of word and body is much less stable, if it is understood through a particular conception of what it means to witness between cross and resurrection, death and life.[93]

---

[92] Shelly Rambo, 8.

[93] Ibid., 37-38.

These models and the perspective they generate are what lead us to the "middle placement" between the cross and the first Easter morning. The middle placement muddles the view and perception of self and reality. What "is" and what is "perceived" becomes blurred. Portions of the traumatic story may be eliminated and "delivery refused" with scenes and memory too painful to fully grasp and integrate. A fog settles in the aftermath of the event. "This tenuous middle placement allows the witness to see, but never directly; to hear, but never directly; and to touch, but never directly . . . this tenuous placement also means that the witness is subject to the continual elisions that make it impossible to see, hear, or touch clearly."[94]

What remains as witness within the person, the community, and through Rambo's theological lens is the Spirit. When Jesus has died, he is gone according to Rambo. Nothing bodily remains. Emptiness prevails and hope evaporates. So what is left? It is the Spirit.

> The insights of trauma cast new light on a redemptive narrative indebted to a progressive reading of the relationship between death and life . . . a witness of the Spirit. What would it mean to recast witness primarily in pneumatological terms, in terms of the witness of the Spirt? . . . What if the content of what is being witnessed is continually elided, shifting the focus from the content to the practice of witnessing? Instead of straightforward truth to be proclaimed, the lens of trauma turns us to uncontainable truths to witness . . . This dimension is linked to the figure of the Spirit. At the intersection of death and life, a new orientation to the fractured word and body emerges . . . "What remains in the aftermath of death?" is the central question of witness. Acknowledging the fractured nature of both word and body in witness moves us into distinctively pneumatological territory, in which the Spirit is not a life-giver but is, instead, witness to the emergence of life out of death. We have, through the Spirit, a theological picture of what it means to remain.[95]

---

[94] Shelly Rambo, 40.

[95] Ibid., 43-44.

To remain and bear witness in the wake of trauma and the death to life movement is the work of the Sprit. The Spirit reconfigures, and perhaps in life giving fashion, alters to some degree the elisions and neurological self-deceptions created in the necessary actions of mere survival when faced with trauma. It may be possible that the disciplines of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines may provide a pathway into the subconscious, where brain, mind and body meet, and begin to write a story of new life which does not fully deny or completely elide the previous trauma but accepts their presence and provides a point of embarkation in the process of healing.

A central focus of contact, a middle space, from a Christian theological and biblical point of view is Holy Saturday. Cursory examination of "church life," however, reveals that two other events traditionally hold a nearly exclusive space in the story of faith, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I can recall as a Master of Divinity student a Professor of Systematic Theology asking me whether I consider myself, a "Good Friday Christian," or an "Easter Christian?" He felt those were the only two choices under consideration. I am not arguing against the power and prominence of these two days. But what about Holy Saturday, the day in the middle? Holy Saturday, most often, is the day of the empty church, sometimes Easter egg hunts on the church lawn, or the custodian making preparation to move quickly in unseen ways to transition the worship area from the black drape of Good Friday to the celebration of Easter worship. Holy Saturday, it seems to me, is an orphan. "The problem is that the events of the day are profoundly difficult, if not impossible, to articulate. The promise is that they are not overlooked but witnessed. A puzzling birthing process is taking place in the wake of death, and someone is there to

witness it. This witness marks a more difficult passage between death and resurrection that is not often interpreted theologically."[96]

Holy Saturday, in Rambo's view, is a point of abandonment, of desolation for Jesus. In her theological reflection the time in the middle between the cross and the resurrection on the first Easter morning is not a time of Jesus' triumphant entry into hell to proclaim victory but a time of emptiness and abandonment. "Becoming one of the forsaken, he is without the Father. This translates into a picture of love traveling to the place where there is no love, and this is the central force of Holy Saturday."[97] Alan Lewis adds his thoughts to Rambo's dark potentiality: ". . . we can no longer shut our eyes to the terrible possibility, not that he [Jesus] has failed God in his death, but that in his death God has failed him. Then this sad Saturday would not be a Shabbat of the Lord, still less the final messianic Day of the Lord, but the worst, most diabolical day in history, truly the day of the devil."[98] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, a theologian Rambo frequently sites in her writing, paints and equally disturbing portrait: "You cry into the void: 'Father!' And an echo resounds. The Father has heard nothing. You [Jesus] have sunk too low into the depths: how are those up in heaven to still hear you? . . . instead of gazing into the pupil of God's eye, you stare into the void of a black eye-socket."[99]

Shelly Rambo does not allow the separation of Holy Saturday, of Jesus from God and God from the world, to lose its place to a superficiality held captive in triumphal anesthesia. Jesus' death is real and cannot disappear into a comfortable elision without

---

[96] Shelly Rambo, 59.

[97] Ibid., 68.

[98] Alan E. Lewis, *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 54.

[99] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Heart of the World* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979), 109-10.

consideration. Reconstruction or suppression of memory is what, all too often, happens when facing trauma. People may delude themselves saying, "It did not really happen that way. Everything happens for a good and worthwhile reason as God's will." Reality is elided and only a façade of "what is" prevails. Holy Saturday, taken from the witness of scripture, will not allow this interpretation. Holy Saturday remains and bears witness to emptiness, abandonment and the void created by Jesus' crucifixion.

The hope which dwells within Holy Saturday is not found in ignoring the separation from God experienced in the bodily death of Jesus. It is not found in the recreation of an illusionary story of Jesus' victorious march into hell in the middle time. It is found elsewhere. Rambo says, "There is no place that God does not go. The impact of this point is existentially powerful. We receive in the drama of hell, assurance that there is no place God has not been. God has traveled even to the regions of godforsakenness."[100]

This is good news for those who suffer, whether it is the alcoholic/addict in the depth of her/his disease, persons who have experienced significant trauma and pain, and those who struggle with the simple day in day out trauma which arises from our sinful condition. God knows this place. God does not know it through triumph, but by having been to the genuine pit of despair. "We place the short rope in God's hand. This is the image of resurrection. It is not the victorious image of new life. It is a desperate image, in which the impossibility of a beginning becomes a starting point."[101]

The guide, Rambo suggests, from this starting point is the "middle Spirit." The middle Spirit is what remains in the wake of trauma. "There is no smooth passage from

---

[100] Shelly Rambo, 68.

[101] Ibid., 78.

death to life . . . the middle Spirit provides a vision of God's presence in the abyss."[102] In the space between death and life, in the instance of the cross and in the presence of trauma, the question arises as to how is it that one can be renewed without suppressing events and therefore losing touch with the authentic "self" of personhood?

> What form does the Spirit take between death and life? In this middle territory, the Spirit remains in those who witness to what remains. This remainder is neither death nor life in contrast to each other but, instead the meeting of the two in the landscape of survival, of the middle. In the farewell discourse, Jesus tells them that the Spirit, as paraclete, will abide, remain, and persist in them. This occupation in and by the Spirit means that the Spirit, the divine breath, will find form in them and will continually take form in them as they move in the aftermath of death. With the release of Jesus' breath, the breath of those who remain is altered. The breath powers them, directs them. It powers them to give form to the chaos, to transform it.[103]

Two thoughts should be noted at this point. First, though Jesus is crucified and is absent, the Spirit, in this middle place, is present and remains as witness and to witness. Second is the image of breath which is frequently employed by Rambo as an image of the Holy Spirit. Breath, speaking theologically, means something to her. Take into account that breathing is a central aspect of both many meditation disciplines and in the practice of yoga. In these two disciplines breath is what guides and informs to allow the participant to "remain," not stay "lost in the abyss" of distraction, chaos and busyness, but instead "remain" in the present moment. These disciplines, viewed from Rambo's theological perspective, contain behaviors which reflect the holistic nature of healing and an embodied form of the middle space of witness.

Rambo makes the point of the essential nature of breath in the healing process clear.

---

[102] Shelly Rambo, 113.

[103] Ibid., 122.

> If a person who survives trauma can put word to that experience, the process of healing can take place. In more body-oriented therapies, the process of making visible is somatic. A person literally learns to move in the world again, rather than being paralyzed by it. Theologically, the image of breath speaks to a necessary stage in this process of making visible. Breath is necessary for life. But this witnessing breath is necessary for reconstitution of life in the aftermath of trauma, a kind of rebirthing through suffering.[104]

Reading Rambo's reflection, it is not difficult to also conjure images drawn from Lamaze breathing techniques in the midst of the trauma of childbirth as she describes the power of breath in healing to bring the gift of new life. Breath is a central and life affirming facet of the middle Spirit and is a somatic engagement to refocus the participant and bring one's authentic life force into clearer focus.

I agree with Rambo's assessment of somatic forms of therapy for healing. Exclusive use of talk therapy methods, where conscious intellectual thought process is the prevalent form of "breath," allow for ongoing elisions and self-deception, especially when dealing with trauma. David Benner succinctly points out,

> The human capacity for self-deception is astounding . . . Some people are highly skilled at deceiving others. However, their duplicity pales in comparison with the endlessly creative ways in which each and every one of us deceives our self. Self-deception occurs automatically. This is part of what psychologists mean when they say the defense mechanisms operate in the unconscious. It is also part of what theologians mean when they speak of original sin. We don't really have to choose self-deception. It is—to use contemporary computer jargon—the default option.[105]

Somatic forms of healing allow one to step away from the "default option" of self-deception. Though the brain may deceive as a defense mechanism and response to a

---

[104] Shelly Rambo, 123.

[105] David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 62-63.

perceived continued need to function in a survival mode the body does not as Alice Miller suggests in the corpus of her book by the same title, "*The Body Never Lies*."[106]

The act of remaining as witness takes shape, as suggested by Rambo, in a manner that can, in my experience, create discomfort for many. As an act of witnessing, to remain, she encourages somatic engagement.

> Considering what we know about the ways in which traumatic experiences bypass the cognitive and conceptual pathways in the brain and are registered somatically, we can think about the movement of the middle Spirit as sensual rather than exclusively conceptual. Trauma research also suggests that reconnecting people who have experienced trauma to the world around them cannot be achieved by assuring them that the world is a safe place. Cognitive assurance may be helpful, but it is secondary . . . To reconnect a person to the world in the aftermath of a traumatic event, it is essential to first reconnect a person to the movements of her body, enabling her to reestablish and navigate her physical connection to the world. Reconnecting people to their own breath is an essential first step in trauma healing. The pneumatological possibilities are rich here, given that I have imaged the Spirit as divine breath. For those who experience trauma, regaining access to one's own breath is a gateway to reconnection.[107]

Remaining, for Rambo, is the key element in healing and creating a narrative that brings life rather than suppresses past wounds and trauma. Remaining gives presence, voice and participation in and with traumatic experience and the healing journey. Each human being carries these wounds to varied degrees. However, in my experience more often than not the choice is made to suppress and silence the wounds. We become stuck in a given stage and our integral nature becomes increasingly compartmentalized. The wounds then metastasize in other forms. As we ignore the wounds embedded in our own being, we tend, therefore, not to be able to see them in others. Our self-deception leads to

---

[106] Alice Miller, *The Body Never Lies: The Lingering Effects of Hurtful Parenting*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004). Miller's work relates the lasting trauma of childhood abuse by parents and how it lives on somatically.

[107] Shelly Rambo, 163.

a general "self-distraction." ". . . it is [the pain of traumatic events] a cry that sounds at the heart of every human person: it is a cry that we all share but that we are not attuned to hear in another."[108] As we disconnect with self, we disconnect with others and the community.

Further, "remaining" is not a journey of "factual discovery." It is an act of witnessing to the reality that one has experienced a traumatic event and life is forever altered; a story is dramatically re-written because of the encounter. "Witnessing is not about attaining a correct and true story but, in fact, about a capacity to meet these stories, to hear them for all the ways in which they do not cohere."[109] Bessel Van der Kolk looks through a medical/clinical lens and sees much the same. He says, "Dissociation is the essence of trauma. The overwhelming experience is split off and fragmented, so that the emotions, sounds, images, thoughts, and physical sensations related to the trauma take on a life of their own."[110]

Fragmentation, dissociation, and self-deception create an environment in which conscious, cognitive function often stand in the way of "remaining" and the journey of healing. Addressing this issue from a clinical, integral perspective Eugene Gendlin discovered this problem in his exploration of the difficulty persons have when "looking at themselves" through only the lens of conscious cognitive thought. Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger writes,

> Wondering why psychotherapy didn't succeed more often, Gendlin and his associates studied thousands of taped sessions to identify the factors that made for

---

[108] Shelly Rambo, 150.

[109] Ibid., 151.

[110] Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 66.

> emotional growth. They discovered that successful psychotherapy had less to do with the therapist's theoretical framework, training, or technique, and more to do with how counselees talked about their problems. . . . When we pay attention to our physical bodies, we are able to examine responses that usually lie outside our mental awareness.[111]

Or in Gendlin's own words, "If they did not somehow know right from the start how to approach themselves inside in that special way, they did not achieve major changes, no matter what they or their therapists did or how earnestly or for how long . . . The difference is in how they talk. And that is the only outward sign of the real difference: what the successful patients do inside themselves."[112]

Shelly Rambo addresses the issue of elision and dissociation and their somatic manifestation from a theological perspective. Continuing my line of thought on an integral approach, Eugene Gendlin examines and addresses these same issues from a clinical point of view. Gendlin, drawing from his extensive research, constructed a process he calls "Focusing." "Focusing" invites clients to take a step further within themselves regarding visceral contact and response when compared with other forms of "talk therapy." What "Focusing" entails is this six step engagement. This is a brief description of the "Focusing" process.

- ***Clearing Space***. Look at all the problems. "Stack" them to make room. Ask, "How is my life going?" Let the answer come from the "sense."
- ***Felt Sense***. From what came select one personal problem to focus on. DO NOT GO INSIDE IT. Stand back from it. What does the problem *feel* like?
- ***Handle***. Go back and forth between the felt sense and word, phrase or image. Find the right description of what is happening.
- ***Resonating***. Does the "handle" fit? Work with it for a time until it feels right.

---

[111] Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger, *Pray without Ceasing: Revitalizing Pastoral Care* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 85-86.

[112] Eugene T. Gendlin, *Focusing* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 3-4.

- ***Asking***. What makes this problem have this quality? Don't seek a quick answer, a quick answer is most likely the wrong one. Be with the felt sense until something comes along where you feel a shift.
- ***Receiving***. Receive what comes with the shift in a friendly way. Stay with it a while, even if it is only a slight release.[113]

At this point I suggest a convergence, an integral connection, in what I have previously outlined theologically with clinical theory and the consistency and harmony of the two. Both processes underscore the need of "remaining" to "witness" and bring healing. The function of the conscious center of the brain alone is not who we are as whole and integral beings. We have bodies and our bodies tell us something. Kathryn Tanner also made this abundantly clear with her understanding of incarnation as an act of atonement. Coming into tune with our embodied self, somatic engagement, is an essential part of our journey to wholeness and connection with God who dwells within. As Shelly Rambo also allows, somatic applications and attention in the healing processes can bear much fruit. What we do and what it feels like in our body, beyond what we "think," creates a profound shift in our sense of being.

Shelly Rambo concludes her reflections on trauma with the invitation to "remain in love." She encourages ". . . what if theologians did not perform this rescue [from the abyss]? Perhaps the divine story is neither a tragic one nor a triumphant one but, in fact, a story of divine remaining, the story of love that survives. It is a cry arising from the abyss. The question is: can we witness it?"[114] The question Rambo asks is similar to the underlying foundation of the central question in this research. When gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines are harmoniously applied in one's life, engagement of body and

[113] Gendlin, 58-74. Gendlin provides a complete detailed description in these pages.

[114] Shelly Rambo, 172.

breath, can a deeper access to the core of our being be gained? It is a question with distinct similarities to the one Rambo asks. Can we, through the disciplines of gentle yoga and selected contemplative practices, witness what is present? Can persons "remain" long enough through the disciplines of gentle yoga and contemplative practices to begin to put together a new story from the often elided fragments of a tragic event and create healing space in the narrative of existence?

It is also fair to ask can this apply to those who have not suffered traumatic events at the level of war, rape, incest, devastating hurricanes, etc.? What is outlined, with Shelly Rambo's guidance, is not the exclusive domain of those who have undergone extreme trauma. Previously I have suggested that all human beings are afflicted with the traumatic consequences of the human condition and the trauma it holds because of our fallen sinful state. It is not pressing the issue too far to suggest all of humanity, most of whom having not tasted trauma to the degree that Shelly Rambo's theology engages, can potentially find benefit in this research and theological reflection. Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr as well as other clinical and contemplative voices can help us to explore just how this possibility unfolds.

The Human Condition and the True and False Self

I begin this section of my exploration by calling attention to the "true self" and the "false self." Recall, I have previously used the terms "true self" and "false self." It is necessary, therefore, at this juncture to describe and reflect theologically to the given consideration of the existence and consequences of the "true self" and the "false self." As Thomas Keating, among others, understands these terms, the true self is the part of a human being made in the image of God. The true self is the reflection of God, limited by

finite, fallen humanity, revealed in our gifts which reflect attributes of God. For instance, the ability of a person to compose and perform music which then creates wonder and awe is a reflection of her/his creation in the image of God. It is not the "God portion" of the person emerging but an "image," as "reflected in a mirror dimly" to use the Apostle Paul's terminology, of a glimpse of who God is as creator. Our true self and our gifts are a reflection, a glimmer, of who God is and an exhibition of a grace.

However, the true self does become distorted. The distortion of our creation in the image of God is what Keating, among others, calls the false self. Recalling the first creation story in Genesis, we hear the community of God who speaks forth humanity as created in the image of God. What springs forth is humanity in the state of "perfection," the self-present untainted by sin and the trauma of the human condition. It is a narrative exposition of the true self. As I have described it previously, the true self is not "God" but the image of God as it is extended to finite humanity.

As the creation story unfolds in Eden in the book of Genesis, human kind longs to go its own chosen direction. As a result of this longing, distortions arise in disobedience and a failure to confess and repent. These are distortions of the true self. These same distortions arise when we are born and our story begins to be written within the fallen human condition. The events of the human story, which are directly related to human existence in general, are concerned with fallen humanity and the existence of trauma. The trauma of our fallen condition, I believe, creates the false self as we mature in stages, stages described in chapter one, and fracture our sense of the integral nature of existence as we then continue into adult life.

Thomas Keating provides useful direction in his explanation of how the distortions take shape and create the false self and manifests itself as a longer term destructive force.

> The three instinctual needs of human nature that we're born with are: security and survival; power or control; esteem and approval.…The problem is that the child interprets the gratification of its instinctual needs as happiness, and hence they are frustrated.…In this developing situation, the child's self-conscious begins to build a kind of homemade self. This is called the false self, which is the self as the center of the universe around which his or her faculties, feelings, desires, and expectations circulate like planets around the sun....This is called the false self because it is a self that responds not to reality, but to the emotional programs for happiness that the child formulates very early in life.[115]

The false self takes shape in varied ways. Let us briefly take a look at the case of the alcoholic and the alcoholic story as shared in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*, or "*Boo*k" as an example. We find an expression of the result of the false self-manifested in the alcoholic in this description: "Selfishness—self-centeredness! . . . Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking . . . the alcoholic is an extreme example of self-will run riot, though we usually don't think so."[116] The false self takes center stage in the active alcoholic's life, though the individual would most likely argue to that this is not the case. The delusions of the false self distort reality to a point which is described, in my opinion justifiably, as a form of insanity. Elisions, dissociation and fragmentation of reality abound. What prevails at this point is a nearly complete distortion of the image of God present in the person and has a deep and profound impact not only for the alcoholic but all who enter into a meaningful relationship with the alcoholic.

Myth, Parable, and Healing

---

[115] Thomas Keating, *Divine Therapy: Addiction, Centering Prayer and the Twelve Steps* (New York: Lantern Books, 2009), 70-72.

[116] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 62.

Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley build upon and expand John Dominic Crossan's work regarding the power of "myth" found in Crossan's book, *The Dark Interval*, in their use of images drawn from forms of "narrative" to communicate this same phenomenon. The metaphors Anderson and Foley share draw from narrative composition and connect with my metaphor of the whole of existence as story. Anderson and Foley explain how the construction of "myth" and "parable" and the intersection of the two reveal the false self within and the journey toward the true self. The "Myth(s)" present in our lives create harmony from disruption, tension, brokenness and trauma. "Myth bridges the gap between apparently irreconcilable stances, individuals, or situations and demonstrates that mediation is possible."[117] Often the mediation stemming from the "myth" has its advent in distortions of reality and ego driven desires that Thomas Keating relates above when he explains the creation of the false self.

Anderson and Foley note that "Parable, on the other hand, is not about mediation but about contradiction. It creates irreconcilability where before there was reconciliation."[118] Parables create tension. They call into question our understanding of self and the world we can create through our personal "myth(s)." Parables can give birth to an environment where a new and emerging story of wholeness might begin. As always the emerging story may have deep roots in the past, but it is being rewritten in a different and meaningfully preferred manner.

"Myth" and "parable" are not polar opposites, one preferred over the other. The existence of both is necessary to live a whole, free and joyous life. They do, however,

---

[117] Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories and Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2001), 13.

[118] Ibid., 14.

inform one another and invite new direction; repentance is the theological term for the new and preferred existence I am addressing. Anderson and Foley explain that

> Mythic narrations comfort us and assure us that everything is going to be all right; parables challenge and dispute the reconciliation that our myths have created. Myths allow us to dream and to believe in a future better than the present; parables disallow us from living in a dream world, call us to confront the present, and deter us from trusting in any hope that does not face the hard reality of the present. The irony, of course, is that these are complementary narrative forms, and human beings need them both.[119]

The alcoholic story is a good example of how the metaphor of "myth" and "parable" shape, inform, and potentially alter a person's life. A common myth of the alcoholic, for example, is that he or she only drinks because of the extreme and unique hardships each has faced in life. "If everyone lived the life I have to live, that person would drink like this too" is a common internal conversation and mythology. Coupled with this illusion is the person's myth that says to him/her that each can quit any time she/he wishes. "This just is not the time," the myth continues. There is an imaged, a mythic future of pleasure, material gain, family acceptance and community recognition free from alcohol abuse. When the parable begins to emerge in the alcoholic's life is in the moment where the tension of reality in the present moment collides with the myth and in some fashion settles into place.

The parable writes a different story revealing to the individual that despite repeated attempts to control or stop drinking, she/he cannot. Job, family, friends, community, God— all are moving further away. The parable tells a dismal story of hopelessness, depression, and death in abysmal isolation. This story form creates the condition of desperation, a conflict between the illusion found in the myth she/he has created and the "disillusionment" of the present moment. I would suggest this is the

[119] Anderson and Foley, 15.

beginning of hitting "bottom" as I have described the "bottom" in chapter one. It is the intersection of the false self and the potentiality held in a journey toward the true self.

Moving Toward the True Self

Jon Kabat-Zinn shares a similar observation from a clinical perspective describing how a person can become lost in anxiety and fear and is deluded by the false self: ". . . we can easily become imprisoned in and blinded by our own thoughts and feelings because they are concerned solely with the particulars of our lives and our desires as separate beings."[120] The false self drives a person into an obsession with past wounds and wrongs done to each. These wounds of the past may be real or, as is often the case, greatly inflated or imagined. Life negating behaviors may also be driven by an imagined future that contains visions of foreboding and fearful events. A substantial part of the ego becomes devoted to and is the defender of the false self driving an individual or alcoholic/addict deeper into a detached state or a form of delusion. Eckhart Tolle explains,

> To the ego, the present moment hardly exists. Only past and future are considered important. This is total reversal of the truth [that we live in the present, the "NOW"] and accounts for the fact that in ego mode the mind is so dysfunctional. It is always concerned with keeping the past alive, because without it—who are you? It constantly projects itself into the future to ensure its continued survival and to seek some kind of release or fulfillment . . . it reduces the present to a means to an end.[121]

Is there a way out of such an intense and all-consuming form of "illusion" and fragmented self? This is a challenging question. It appears to me the false self creates a false god(s) driven by an ego which is completely self-absorbed. This leads to a level of

---

[120] Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1990), 165.

[121] Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of NOW: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (Navato: New World Library, 1990), 18-19.

delusion and a fragmented self, complete with selective elisions, which are more than partially detached from reality. But there is hope. As James Nelson points out, "Something must displace the false god—the notions that I am absolutely in control of my life and that alcohol is worthy of trust for its saving powers."[122] This is the same existential dilemma for the non-alcoholic who creates her/his own false gods. The answer, in my opinion, lies in a similar location. It is found in the intimate opening of oneself to God, or a "Higher Power."

Let us continue, using the journey of recovery, and look further at the Steps of recovery suggested by Alcoholics Anonymous as a pathway out of this dilemma. In my opinion it is a method that is based on Christian, Jesuit-influenced theology and contemplative Christian tradition which begins the process of dismantling the false self, the false god(s) we create. The Twelve Steps can lead a person to be able to live and cope with life without turning to alcohol or other mood altering chemicals for assistance. As has been proven over decades, these Steps do indeed work. Consider, also, that the basic stages contained in the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous of admission—confession, the reception of grace, repentance, penance, and disciplined growth—are much the same as those suggested by Reformed Christian Tradition and in my opinion constitute the theological mirror which creates the Steps.

However, a problem returns and resurfaces. How does a person "remain" long enough for healing to take deep root and bear fruit? "Remaining" is a difficult circumstance in which to place one's self. Using the alcoholic once more as an example, the Steps, particularly Step 11, [see appendix A] are often not engaged deeply enough in

---

[122] James B. Nelson, *Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 148.

the inner being to allow for a more complete freedom from the mental, emotional, and psychological slavery induced by years of alcoholic drinking. The same holds true for the non-alcoholic. Disciplines of mature prayer, worship, confession, repentance, service, study, relationship, etc. are often neglected and fullness of life is diminished as these fall to the wayside.

Consider that the trauma experienced by the person through years of active alcoholism is deep and devastating. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* clearly spells out the depth of depravity encountered in active alcoholism. "It is truly awful to admit that, glass in hand, we have warped our minds into such an obsession for destructive drinking that only an act of Providence can remove it."[123] I would further suggest that for fuller healing to take place, the same action of Providence is required for a fuller restoration of any person as one created in the image of God. "The real problem then," Nelson writes, "is not a lack of faith. It is the wrong kind of faith, faith wrongly directed, trust in that which is less than God,"[124] Such redirection requires lifelong, intentional spiritual discipline. This is true whether we are discussing alcoholism or the general description of the human condition.

In my mind breaking down the walls of the false self and restoration of the true self is the path to authentic freedom. Admittedly, restoration of the true self can never be accomplished in its entirety. We are sinful persons who have the imprint of fallenness and original sin. But, breaking down the barriers of the false self which create so many of the thoughts, feelings and attitudes which diminish the promise of a full and joyful life

---

[123] Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1981), 21.

[124] Nelson, 153.

can be accomplished and bring healing. Thomas Merton suggests that "Usually the solution consists in a discovery that they [the walls and barriers] only existed insofar as they were inseparably connected with your own illusionary exterior self. The solution of most such problems come with the dissolution of this false self."[125]

The death of, the dismantling of, the false self and the accompanying grief must be confronted and yes, even embraced, for healing and freedom to take place. According to Merton, "It is the sense of defection and defeat that afflicts a man [sic] who is not facing his own inner truth and is not giving back to life, to God and to his fellow man, a fair return for all that has been given to him."[126] It is a fuller experience of the darkness of one's being where one begins to see the light of new life and hope. "Only when we have descended in dread to the center of our own nothingness, by his [sic] grace and his guidance, can we be led by him, in his own time, to find him in losing ourselves."[127] This is yet another guiding point of my exploration. Can the harmonious connection of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines open the door to "losing ourselves" to find God and the true self created in God's image?

Human beings in general, and certainly the active alcoholic/addict, often flee from the true self. In our childhood the true self and our creation in God's image become distorted for a number of reasons. Without intentional effort it is difficult, if not impossible, to return to our center and at least glimpse our true self. M. Basil Pennington writes, "The reality of what is, of who we are, is so tremendously wonderful. The sad

---

[125] Thomas Merton, *The Inner Expe*rience*: Notes on Contemplation*, ed. William H. Shannon (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 2.

[126] Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), 97.

[127] Ibid.,101.

thing is that most of us are running away from our own reality."[128] The question which continues to press itself is how to do it? How do we return to the center and catch at least a quick peak of our true self? Is there a method by which we can move beyond the mental, ego driven constructs of illusionary reality and become "disillusioned" and see who we actually are? Is active, somatic engagement a worthwhile investment of one's time to begin and augment the process of healing? Again, the research contained in this exploration may hold at least a partial answer to these questions.

"Jesus did not 'cure' people of their mere medical or physical ailment; he actually 'healed' them and sent them on their way or back to society. In other words, he gave them not just new software, but a new 'motherboard.'" [129] Richard Rohr directs his reflections, congruent with my thoughts, that healing and the resultant wholeness extends beyond mere "cure." Recalling and using Shelly Rambo's example of hurricane Katrina, just because a person's house is rebuilt and the storm is now years removed does not necessarily mean healing has taken place. Rebuilding a house, a form of writing a new chapter in one's story, amounts to only the addition of "new software." The elision of events of the past continues unabated. The rebuilt "house" is not the "home" that once was before the trauma of Hurricane Katrina. The story may even become more distorted as life is not altered meaningfully enough to bring enduring freedom. Drawing from Rohr's terminology, the "motherboard" remains unaltered. Using the image of life as story, the addition of only "new software" leaves the narrative disjointed, difficult to follow, and confused. The story breaks down and disintegrates.

---

[128] M. Basil Pennington, *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form* (New York: Image Books, 2001), 92.

[129] Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for the True Self* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bates, 2013), 34-35.

In conjunction with the aforementioned challenge is that often we are deeply invested in the false self. In the wake of trauma, or simply as we experience the human condition, transformation might appear more than difficult. The delusions of living a fragmented and dissociated existence may insist there is no need to change at all despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Recall the power of "myth" without the confrontation of "parable" in one's life which allows the perpetuation of the delusion. It takes, I believe, an intentional process of dismantling the portion of life that is the false self. This is not an easy process. It takes time and patient discipline. As Rohr states, "What the ego [the false self] hates and fears more than anything else is change."[130]

Somatically the effects of trauma and the human condition cannot be hidden though they can and often are ignored or suppressed. Chronic anxiety, overeating, drug/alcohol dependency, sexual addiction, the overwhelming need to be "busy," uncontrolled obsessive spending, compulsive use of technology, just to name a few are somatic symptoms of suppressed and ignored trauma in need of healing. As Richard Rohr details, "The body seems never to stop offering its messages; but fortunately, the body never lies, even though the mind will deceive you constantly."[131] The body tells the truth. We are powerless to change or alter what the body is saying. We may deny or attempt to suppress it, but we cannot control it.

What is suggested, biblically and theologically, is the need and the necessity to journey back to our true self which was fully present when each is born. The returning, the journey back, becomes a journey forward as we return more fully to our image as one

---

[130] Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*, 44.

[131] Richard Rohr, *Breathing Underwater: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps* (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2011), 13.

created in God's image. This journey places us in the role, with our Maker, as co-creators of a preferred future and recreated authentic story. We can deny, suppress, and distort events, chapters, in our story. But like a narrative with disjointed pieces which do not fit together, our lives then become disjointed. This leads us to imagine we are "lame" as the man who lays by the pool in John's Gospel was "lame." We are unable to hear the question, "Do you want to be healed?" because our false self does not allow us to hear it.

On the other hand, if and when we are able to "be still," to cease our fighting and lay down the armaments of the false self, we begin a new, life-affirming chapter in our being. Rohr writes, "As many others have said in different ways, we all seem to suffer from a tragic case of mistaken identity. Life is a matter of becoming fully and consciously who we already are, but it is a self that we largely do not know. It is as though we are all suffering from a giant case of amnesia."[132]

The theological examination of trauma shared by Shelly Rambo of those who experience trauma at the profound and deep level of war, rape, incest, child abuse, devastating hurricanes, etc. does have application to the more "general variety" of trauma which arises from the human condition. Rambo suggests it does. I believe I have demonstrated with clarity direct application does indeed exist. The "level" of trauma encountered in the human experience may not be elevated to the stage and, perhaps, crippling experience of those who have devastating trauma as part of their story. It is nonetheless impactful in its presence. There is an old saying from those who have lived winters on the plains of Nebraska, "After four feet of snow, why keep measuring?" After trauma reaches a certain point, a point exceeded in my opinion by the human condition, it

[132] Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Second Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bates, 2011), 97.

becomes to a significant degree disabling and debilitating as to require intentional effort in the journey toward healing. Trauma, as viewed through the lens of the fallen sinful state and that of the true and false self, alters all stories to a significant degree.

Conclusion

Scott Peck notes, "Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult—once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters."[133] Life was difficult for Moses when God called him to lead God's people from slavery into freedom. Life was difficult for the lame man by the pool in Jerusalem. Life is difficult for those who have experienced extreme and profound traumatic events. The creation and existence of the false self may be necessary for survival, but it makes life difficult.

Life is difficult. In conjunction with this reality is it may feel as if in one's initial exposure to "stillness," "stillness" so that one may come to "know" God more deeply, the experience of trauma appears as if it is exacerbated; the difficulty life holds seems more pronounced because of entry into the intimate presence of God. Such an encounter in the beginning can stir a more painful encounter with the trauma. All of these things, in my observation and direct experience, are true.

It is also a "birthing process." Coming into a closer realization of and accepting a deeper, more authentic reality allows us to continue to write the story, our narrative, in a life-affirming manner. It is key to living a full and whole life. Western culture often suggests we can "think" our way through this problem, through any difficulty. Renee

---

[133] Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), 1.

Descartes' "I think therefore I am" is a foundational mantra of the Enlightenment of Western Civilization. However, in my opinion, it is difficult if not impossible to heal a "thinking problem" by "thinking."

Moses was called to change his behavior and initiate a new chapter by a God whose name is a verb meaning "I WILL CREATE/CAUSE WHAT I WILL CREATE/CAUSE. Moses is commanded to go from that place to another place to bring healing in a manner God will cause/create. There is an abundance of action in this story! Jesus told the man to pick up his mat and walk. Do something different! The psalmist shares God's invitation, imperative invitation, to be "still" to "surrender" into God's presence and then come to an intimacy which allows a new and potentially healing story to unfold. Shelly Rambo, Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr and others reflect upon the distortions present in the human condition and encourage us to somatic action, fuller engagement of self, to create healing.

The incarnation of the Word in Jesus underscores God's desire to bring healing in a full, holistic fashion. In and through Jesus God did not become an idea or a proposition but became flesh. God becomes a whole being. The incarnation of the Living Word is the image and living metaphor of our path toward healing, toward a narrative which tells the story of life lived more fully. Keating explains, "This predicament is identified by a need for escape from the circle of ever-recurring evil habits with their ensuing misery."[134]

The incarnation is the active, living embodiment of hope. What is contained in this chapter is a further illustration of the reasons I want to explore the harmonious connection of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines and the possibilities these may hold for a deepened relationship with God and a fuller life that reflects ongoing healing. I

[134] Keating, *The Heart of the World,* 39.

believe these disciplines may contain a form of incarnational healing. The next chapter will, in detail, share the methodology of the research, the neurological/clinical and theological reasons for its selection, and how participants will engage in the actions and behaviors of gentle yoga and contemplative disciplines as part of their story.

Chapter Three

Neurological, Clinical, and Theological Process Leading to the Selection of the Research Methodology

Introduction

The selection of the research methodology is an integral part of the telling of the story found in this work. The research methodology I choose will, in actuality, partially shape the trajectory of the narrative contained in the research. Additionally, the type of qualitative research method I select also impacts the stories of those who participate in this journey of discovery. This has a direct tie to my belief that human existence is story and it is story in nature. Therefore, it is imperative the research methodology allows a free flowing environment in which individual and communal stories can take their own pace and reveal themselves unfettered by undue outside influence.

Another way to look at this progression is through the lens of developmental stages as described in chapter one. Whether we consider Erik Erikson's model of psychological development or James Fowler's and Benedict Groeschel's stages of faith development or Lewis Rambo's explanation of the conversion experience, all share a construct that reflects human life moving in stages. Developmental stages are not neat and tidy with rigid arithmetic divisions and boundaries. They are overlapping, and the primary tasks of one stage can be and are present in other stages of development. The research methodology selected should allow for a potential return to and growth within underdeveloped or incomplete developmental stages. A freedom must be present within the research structure which more than allows, but encourages participants, to explore fully what each is experiencing as persons and as members within a community.

In some instances, such as those described in the previous chapter by Shelly Rambo in her book *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining,* the fracture penetrates one's story at such a deep level that reality is wholly distorted. When such instances occur, the person's body might become an enemy in any attempt to regain a sense of self and find healing. Such a process can cause a person to relive the trauma in an embodied experience.

On many occasions, whether with trauma of a more profound nature or the "trauma" of the human condition, the existing fragmentation of self renders certain more traditional methods of healing, such as talk therapy or the theological act of "confession," of minimal use. The approach of intentional conscious brain engagement may even create more damage. "Cure," as I have considered the concept, is unattainable. As I explained in chapter two, the condition can never be eliminated from the person's story.

On the other hand I have described an image of a God who cannot be contained by the finite limitations nor the restricted imagination of human capability. I provided an image of a God whose self-given name is "I WILL CAUSE/CREATE WHAT I WILL CAUSE/CREATE. This would seem to suggest that even where healing appears impossible, possibility still exists.

Further, the incarnation event is the prescriptive image of a God who desires to know us and be known by us more intimately than we know ourselves. The incarnation is also a story of healing, of the invitation to return to the self as we were created and journey toward the "true self." Theologically linked to the incarnation event is the invitation heard repeatedly in scripture, told to us time and again in different ways, to

enter silence and in the stillness encounter God. This is the place where the deeper intimacy of coming to "know" self and to "know" God occurs.

I wrote in some detail in the previous chapter of the invitation, present in condensed form, in Psalm 46. The words of God's command are to "be still and know that I am God." Granted this is one brief, isolated phrase, but its thematic content is present throughout the corpus of the Bible. Emerging from the silence we can, perhaps, hear with greater clarity Christ's appeal to "pick up our mat and walk" and thus encounter a form of incarnational healing. Experiences such as these are all part of the Divine desire for healing and for the created to become whole once more.

My research explores a harmonious, interactive method of ancient practices which may break down the walls of the false self formed in the context of human existence. These walls are built through varied encounters with traumatic events and ego distortions. The human story, our journey, is to return to a point through the invitation of grace where one can at least gain a glimpse of the true self which is imprinted upon each person. This is the quest of human existence as I understand it.

Recall the question which I posited is: *"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and a fuller life in the participants?"* This is a very simple, straightforward question with simple requirements necessary to meet and explore the process and the possibilities for healing it may hold. "Simple," however, does not mean easy. Nor does it mean that the underlying foundation of the research question and the selected research methodology, including the prescribed actions and behaviors, do not contain a significant degree of complexity. They do.

What follows, therefore, is a brief outline of some of the underlying obstacles a person faces in this journey to reclaim the true self. It is my belief that writing one's story in a life-affirming manner takes more than a superficial adjustment, making a conscious intellectual decision to do so. One does not just get up and say to oneself "from today forward I am going to be happy, joyous and healthy" and achieve any significant degree of actual change. Very real challenges are present. Often the same gifts God provides for survival, procreation, joy and happiness, etc. can stand in the way and create conflict and tension in the journey toward a life that is whole and complete.

As I have written previously, it is my opinion all of existence is an integrated whole. I have also stated that I believe all of life is spiritual in nature. Building upon this is my belief that human existence for each individual person has interior and exterior "quadrants" of existence.[135] Ken Wilber uses a diagram to explain these "quadrants" of human experience (see figure 1.1).[136] Recall, Wilber explains there are internal and external "quadrants" of life which represent individual internal and external experience as well as internal and external manifestations for communal life. I will restrict my comments for this work to his examination of interior and exterior individual ontological encounter. As I have written, what Wilber suggests is that there is harmonious synthesis between the exterior quadrant of the individual (limbic system, prefrontal cortex, amygdala, etc.) and the interior quadrant of being, or states and stages of consciousness.

It seems to me it is imperative for my research and in the selection of my research methodology that an integrated approach is present and underscores that each side, the

---

[135] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 18-23. Wilber provides a more complete description of his understanding of integral existence and the quadrants that contain the human condition.

[136] Ibid., 21.

interior and exterior, of the human equation is explored. Additionally, the background of these realities, the exterior and interior "quadrants," and how they function practically is required for fuller comprehension; ". . . every level of interior consciousness is accompanied by a level of exterior physical complexity. The greater the consciousness, the more complex the system housing it."[137]

It is required, therefore, to provide a brief neurological, or exterior individual quadrant overview, of some of these challenges. Just how does brain function, the exterior being of an individual, work and how does it impact reaction, response and the resultant behavior of the person? What this exploration reveals is that much of what a person might feel is "free choice" is actually determined, or predetermined, by neuro-function before he or she has the opportunity to make an intentional conscious decision to respond. I believe it is my responsibility to explain why this occurs and the process that takes place which leads to our reaction-response to stimuli.

Also I will discuss the undergirding theological framework involved in the quest for greater consciousness which arises in the interior quadrant of the individual. As an integrated whole a human being is more than predetermined neurological function which is found in the external quadrant. There is interior function which exists in relationship with the exterior quadrant of human experience. Wilber states that "Consciousness is not anything itself, just the degree of openness or emptiness, the clearing in which the phenomena . . . appear (but consciousness is not itself phenomenon—it is the space the phenomena arise)."[138]

---

[137] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 17.

[138] Ibid., 66.

In my opinion one should more deeply understand both quadrants of human existence, at least in cursory form, to comprehend the "why" of my selection of the research methodology. I have stipulated that existence unfolds in the metaphor of narrative story. How do I integrate the whole of being into a research methodology which allows the full nature of the human story an opportunity to be told? The explanation which follows and what I have outlined above provides background for the reason I have selected the research methodology of *Participatory Action Research* [PAR] and why I believe it is the preferred framework for my defined purpose.

The Neurology of Trauma and the Obstacles It Creates

I walk into a dimly lighted barn. It is old and musty with unfamiliar sounds and the accompanying feelings of being in an environment which is perceived as foreboding. As I enter the barn, stepping onto the straw-filled floor, my eyes suddenly catch a figure coiled in a nearby corner. In that instant what I "see" is potentially threatening. It is a snake ready to strike! Instantly my body tenses, and I leap back into the door frame to facilitate a rapid escape. As my eyes continue to focus on the coiled object, however, I come to the realization that it is not a snake poised to strike. It is only an old rope lying coiled up and left by someone on the barn floor. I laugh at myself, wondering why I was ever frightened and shake my head in amazement at my reaction.

This story is one of several text book examples of neuro-body-function-reaction when a person is faced with what is perceived to be a threatening and a dangerous situation. Most, if not all of us, can relate to occurrences similar to the one described above. However, it is a reasonable question to ask what happened here and why? Further,

what does this fun and somewhat silly example mean to us in the course of our stories as human beings?

To understand more fully the process of what happened in my example, let us begin in the brain and examine in cursory form the deep limbic system, as explained by Daniel G. Amen.

> The deep limbic system lies near the center of the brain. Considering its size—about that of a walnut—it is power-packed with functions, all of which are critical for human behavior and survival. From an evolutionary standpoint, this is an "older" part of the mammalian brain that enables animals to experience and express actions. It freed them from the stereotypical behavior and actions dictated by the brain stem, found in the older "reptilian" brain . . . .When the deep limbic system is less active, there is generally a positive, more hopeful state of mind. When it is heated up, or overactive, negativity can take over.[139]

What happened in my example with the rope in the barn is that sensory input is downloaded into the deep limbic system causing a rapid determination of stimuli that created the fight-flight response in the brain stem before conscious intentional, "rational" thought was ever engaged. Neurologically, in very broad, simplistic terms, this is what happened. But a closer, more thorough examination of the neuro-function of my example is necessary. A more complete explanation is required for us to comprehend why our example of the rope in the barn has anything to do with my research and the human story.

When a person faces a situation, whether a "coiled snake" or other stimuli perceived as threatening or dangerous, a message is sent to the brain and it engages. What happens is this, as described by Bessel Van der Kolk.

> When the brain's alarm system is turned on, it automatically triggers preprogrammed physical escape plans in the oldest part of the brain. As in other animals, the nerves and chemicals that make up our basic brain

---

[139] Daniel G. Amen, *Change Your Brain Change Your Life: The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Depression, Obsessiveness, Anger and Impulsiveness* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 37-38.

> structure have a direct connection with our body. When the old brain takes over, it partially shuts down the higher brain, our conscious mind, and propels the body to run, hide, fight, or, on occasion, freeze. By the time we are fully aware of our situation, our body may already be on the move. If the fight/flight/freeze response is successful and we escape the danger, we recover our internal equilibrium and gradually "regain our senses." If for some reason the normal response is blocked . . . the brain keeps secreting stress chemicals, and the brain's electric circuits continue to fire in vain. Long after the actual event has passed, the brain may keep sending signals to the body to escape a threat that no longer exists.[140]

Therefore, when the stimulus of the old rope was perceived as a coiled snake, the survival system of the brain sprang into action. There was no intentional thought process of logical analysis of the stimuli. Survival was brought to the forefront. But we must still look deeper. Therefore, to understand more fully the process let us explore from a neurological stand point what happened when we stepped into the old barn.

What follows is a very basic explanation of what occurred neurologically in the barn. The brain is built from the bottom up. At the base of the brain is the amygdala, or the reptilian brain. This portion of the brain contains the most basic functions of human life, such as the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system, hunger, sleep, feeling of temperature, peeing, pooping, and can, for example, cause an infant to scream if uncomfortable. It is the most developed part of the brain in an infant.

Above the "reptilian brain" is the limbic system or "mammalian brain." This is the part of the brain where we deal with the challenges of life and holds the coping mechanisms of the social networks of human existence. The top layer of the brain is the neocortex. It is the part of the brain which holds conscious thought and rational

[140] Van der Kolk, 54.

reasoning. A portion of the neocortex is the prefrontal cortex, and its function is planning and anticipation, sense of time, inhibitions, and emphatic understanding.[141]

So why did I jump back at the stimuli of the old rope on the floor in the barn? Why didn't the prefrontal cortex inform me it was only a rope and there was no reason to fear? First one needs to understand the speed of processing which takes place within the brain when presented with external or even internal stimuli. The "lower systems" in the brain, the reptilian and mammalian brains, function more quickly than the "higher brain" system of the prefrontal cortex and the conscious brain.[142] Sensory input, the sight of the object on the barn floor, is loaded into the thalamus. Van der Kolk explains,

> Sensory information about the environment and body state received by the eyes, ears, touch, kinesthetic sense, etc. converges on the thalamus, where it is processed, then passed on to the amygdala to interpret its emotional significance. This occurs with lighting speed. If a threat is detected the amygdala sends messages to the hypothalamus to secrete stress hormones to defend against that threat. The neuroscientist Joseph Le Doux calls this the "low road." The second neural pathway, the high road, runs from the thalamus, via the hippocampus and anterior cingulate, to the prefrontal cortex, the rational brain, for a conscious and much more refined interpretation. This takes several microseconds longer. If the interpretation of threat by the amygdala is too intense, and/or the filtering system from the higher areas of the brain are too weak . . . people lose control over automatic emergency responses . . .[143]

Recalling my example of the rope on the barn floor the above provides an explanation of the "why" I behaved as I did. The rope's presence was downloaded much more rapidly to the lower reptilian brain than to the higher conscious brain and was interpreted, from ancient stories present in the brain stem necessary for our survival, as a threat. The hypothalamus gave the command for stress hormones to be released; muscles

---

[141] Van der Kolk, 57-60. Van der Kolk provides a detailed description of the three parts of the brain in this section of his book.

[142] Ibid., 60.

[143] Ibid., 61.

tightened and responded, rapidly moving me out of harm's way before the prefrontal cortex had fully processed, consciously, what I had actually seen. Under "normal" circumstances, however, such as the example I provided, the hippocampus categorized the "threat," lifting it through the anterior cingulate into the prefrontal cortex where further refinement of the stimuli was conducted. I then accurately concluded it was not a snake prepared to strike, but just an old rope and my response deescalated.

What if, however, I had seen my beloved grandfather bitten by a snake when I was younger, and because of his age and fragile health at the time, he had died as a result of the incident? That incident with my grandfather is then a traumatic event imprinted within me that becomes "frozen" in time and I am stuck with that "reality." Let us, then, follow the same incident out to its conclusion, but instead I include my trauma of the past. This time, instead of regaining my composure at the doorframe as my prefrontal cortex interprets the event, my amygdala continues to fire with such intensity as to derail the processing the hippocampus and anterior cingulate in information interpretation. The hypothalamus continues to send messages of extreme danger, grief and a potentially lethal condition to my body. Composure is not regained in the doorframe.

I continue to run, returning to my vehicle, a shivering, crying mass of fear and anxiety. Despite the attempts from my spouse to comfort me, explaining repeatedly that it was only a rope, I cannot accept this reasonable, logical explanation. Any attempt to coax me from the car is met with the bodily response of intense resistance and inner turmoil. My anger and anxiety created by the conversation between my spouse and me intensifies and I freeze, unable to regain any movement in my arms or legs.

It does not matter to my neuro-system that it was only a rope. I have dissociated and reality is fragmented. Elisions present from past trauma preclude any analysis which would indicate that I can safely resume life. I cannot deescalate my hyperactive emotions and bodily response. What promised to be a peaceful day of growth and intimacy between a loving, mutually nurturing couple is now over, and recovery from this specific experience may take hours, days, or even weeks. No amount of conversation and rational thought process can change what has happened in my brain. To my neuro-processors it was a snake and it was going to kill me just as a snake had killed my grandfather. I will never return to that barn, and my relationship with my spouse is potentially damaged.

According to Van der Kolk, "Dissociation is the essence of trauma."[144] "Minor" events can trigger catastrophic responses. The body can become the enemy in any instance of an experience which causes one to relive a traumatic event. What often occurs in many traditional forms of talk therapy is a "reliving" of the event. For example, a common form of talk therapy used frequently with phobias is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). CBT encourages the person to repeatedly relive the event to desensitize the individual. In the case of trauma this approach has the opposite effect. Van der Kolk says that "Not being able to deeply take in what is going on around them makes it impossible to feel fully alive." [145] When faced with traumatic stimuli, whether real or "imagined," the story of one's life takes a turn which to the outside observer makes little sense. It may even make less sense to the person who is having the experience.

This phenomenon, the destructive result of a "talk therapeutic, reliving approach," can include the exclusive application of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous,

[144] Van der Kolk, 66.

[145] Ibid., 67.

especially steps One-Nine. These steps are largely limited by the neuro-processing I have described above even though a behavioral element is present. Unless, in my opinion, a deeper engagement with Step Eleven becomes an integral part of one's program, growth is limited or relapse may occur. Often the result is that one is held captive within the confines of "I'm not drinking," looking at each day as a fight for survival within his/her story of sobriety. The promise of the "Big Book" of "happy, joyous and free" is non-existent. The opportunity for a more complete, whole life story is missed. "As a result," Van der Kolk says, "shame becomes the dominant emotion and hiding the truth the central preoccupation . . . the threat perception system of the brain has changed, and people's physical reactions are dictated by the imprint of the past."[146]

This is where what Bessel Van der Kolk calls bottom up therapy can be an intervention tool. Bottom up therapy engages the body at the deepest, oldest levels such as breathing patterns and bodily encounters. These have a direct impact on heart rate. Bottom up therapy might include rhythmic patterns like tossing a ball back and forth, bouncing on a Pilates Ball, drumming, or dancing to music. It also includes the practice and disciplines of yoga and meditation. "We must most of all help our patients [Van der Kolk's work is with trauma patients] to live fully in the present. In order to do that, we need to help bring those brain structures that deserted them when they were overwhelmed by trauma back."[147]

The combination of yoga and meditation, followed by a time of contemplation of one's experience of God/Higher Power might provide an interaction of neuro-structures which then brings down pre-existing walls and allows a fuller freedom to engage wholly

[146] Van der Kolk, 67.

[147] Ibid., 73.

in life. My exploration of this is designed to discern if this process allows the person not only to alter neuro-function and activity but also develop a deeper state and growth in states of consciousness. Ken Wilber maintains that

> The more you are plunged into authentic higher states of consciousness—such as meditative states—the faster you will grow and develop through any of the stages of consciousness. It is as if higher-states training acts as a lubricant on the spiral development, helping you to disidentify with a lower stage so that the next higher stage can emerge, until you can stably remain at higher levels of awareness on an ongoing basis, whereupon a passing state has become a permanent trait.[148]

The research methodology of PAR allows and facilitates such an exploration in the freedom of being which engages both the exterior but also the interior of one's being and existence.

Theological Underpinning and an Encounter with Deeper Consciousness and Living Story

What I have outlined above is a brief and necessarily cursory explanation of the neurological function of the human brain when it receives sensory input from the outside world. It is the function of the exterior quadrant of existence. But it does not describe the entirety of consciousness in its varied forms. For instance, an EEG may indicate changes in neuro-function, but such a test does not express the quality of the changes nor does it predict the resultant behavioral experience and outcome. Understanding the function of the deep limbic system may bring comprehension regarding the source domain of the area of hope or neurosis, but it does not explain why different cultures or individuals have varied feelings when the same stimuli are encountered.

Consciousness, in all its forms, goes beyond predetermined, objective evolutionary structures. Sages, shaman, yogis, and saints have shared this extended

---

[148] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*. 11.

understanding and experience of consciousness for thousands of years. Wilber writes, "But there is one area . . . an area often forgotten, ignored, or sometimes even suppressed by modernity and postmodernity, and that was the interior of the individual . . . with all its states and stages of consciousness, realization, and spiritual experience."[149] Let us, then, explore through the lens of faith the harmonious, integrally connected counterpart of the exterior quadrant of neuro-function which I have described.

A good starting point for the theological consideration of what I previously described from a neurological perspective begins, in my opinion, with the ancient practice of confession. Confession can be the advent of the process of the letting go of the false self and writing a new and life-affirming chapter in one's life. It is telling the story of "what happened." When I speak of confession, I am not talking about trivial internal conversation regarding minor incidents to appease one's own conscience. Yes, that is a form of confession, but it is not what I am addressing.

Confession, as I understand it, is an act of surrender and release. It is a concrete expression of the invitation present in Psalm 46 to "lay down your weapons and stop fighting." Confession is an opening of the whole of oneself to a God who already knows us more intimately than we know ourselves. David Steer says that "The more honest the confession the greater the empowerment for change. New narratives that emerge in crisis may have a frantic and hopeless character about them at first . . . [over time] a number of possible narratives are beginning to emerge, even in first conversation."[150] Confession is a point of authentic honesty with oneself. Delusions created in the construction of the

---

[149] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*. 44.

[150] David A. Steere, *Rediscovering Confession: The Practices of Forgiveness and Where it Leads* (New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), 30.

false self at least begin to be confronted. Steere asserts that "A full confessional experience involves not only self-confrontation, but also self-formation, which bears the potential for spiritual encounter."[151]

The concept of the power of confession is also evident in the process of sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous. Confession suggested in this program is individual and communal in nature and is a means to help deflect and overcome the potential for self-deception. Steere maintains that "These steps candidly call for the recognition that none of us can unilaterally manage the darker side our lives by ourselves. Through awareness of a Higher Power to which our lives may be attuned, we find grounds for hope."[152]

Coupled with the action of confession is another ancient practice of Christian religious faith. This is the behavioral action of repentance. Commonly repentance is understood as only the feeling of remorse or regret over existing or pre-existing behavior(s). Biblically speaking this is not the case. The Hebrew word שוב ["shuv"],often translated as "repentance," means to "turn back" or "turn around." It is a change of directions. In the New Testament the concept is about becoming a new creation through the discarding of destructive behaviors and the initiation of new, life-affirming behaviors. Remember the text of John 5 which I shared in the previous chapter. The "lame man" by the pool was told by Jesus to "pick up his mat and walk." This is an action and behavior of repentance. Repentance is about action in life, a creation of a new,

---

[151] Steere, 32.

[152] Ibid., 191.

life-affirming story. It may bring healing and the writing of a new and preferred life-affirming story line in one's narrative.[153]

At this point, however, one could effectively argue that I am contradicting my own analysis of neuro-function and how the brain avoids or alters stories when faced with trauma or the result of the human condition rendering confession and the actions contained in repentance of minimal use. A faith journey is not immune to dissociation, fragmentation and self-delusion. The stories of Judas and Peter among many others bear this out.

I would agree, in many circumstances, neuro-function as I described it is most likely a mitigating factor. Often we cannot see our own sin and dysfunction; there are places in our lives which hold gaps, and limitations for healing are present. The action of confession and the resultant repentance as most in the Reformed Tradition exercise the practices are rather limited, in my estimation, in their ability to bring a deeper healing. Weekly public reading of a prayer of confession which contains broad generalities followed by a brief and often uncomfortable silence and then concluded with the sharing of Christ's peace in the context of worship is not wrong. It is simply limited. From a neurological perspective the Reformed Tradition almost exclusively focuses on a brief prefrontal cortex engagement of reasoning and conscious thought. It is, therefore, limited in its healing potential, especially with more traumatic or "shameful" events.

As I have written, I believe that it is nearly impossible to address a "thinking problem" by the exclusive application of "thinking" our way through it. Remember, the default position of the brain is self-deception. Therefore, the commonly practiced forms

---

[153] W.A. Quanbeck, "Repentance," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 31-32. This article provides a complete analysis of the biblical concept of "repentance."

of confession and repentance may have limited application. At the same time I also believe a deeper exploration and engagement of the contemplative tradition may hold the source for release, surrender, and new-found freedom. This is what I mean when I speak of the depth of consciousness which encompasses existence beyond the brain and neuro-function. Consciousness, at all its levels, inform our stories. Therefore, let us briefly examine the kataphatic and apophatic processes of prayer and the human experience of deeper consciousness contact with self and the Divine Presence.

The Kataphatic and Apophatic Traditions

I suggest a harmonious synthesis of kataphatic and apophatic engagement can help break down the barriers which arise as a result of the human condition. These barriers present themselves as I have demonstrated because of the necessity for the defense and survival mechanisms in the human brain. A varied approach within the different, some may say higher, states of consciousness may allow for a fuller response and freedom in the human story.

Kataphatic [cataphatic] prayer and apophatic prayer should be defined at this juncture. I define the two concepts in a theological framework in the course of human experience and as they impact consciousness states of being. Kataphatic and apophatic experience as it pertains to prayer take on different forms of engagement at a varied level of consciousness.

Kataphatic prayer, according to Cynthia Bougeault, is " prayer that makes use of what theologians call our "faculties." It engages our reason, memory, imagination,

feelings and will . . . the normal operating systems that connect us to the outer world and to our own interior life . . . Cataphatic prayer is most of what we hear in church."[154]

This is primarily the use of the conscious brain, the prefrontal cortex, more specifically the medial prefrontal cortex [MPFC]. It is rational, logical interpretive thought process. In instances devoid of high stress, trauma, shame, or repeated exposure to the detrimental effects of the human condition, it is a sound means of prayerful encounter. As a Presbyterian in the Reformed Tradition, much of our order of worship, our theology, interpretation of scripture and proclamation of the Word is kataphatic in nature. *The Spiritual Exercises* and much of Ignatian Spirituality is kataphatic in its approach also. These are, however, of little use by themselves when confronting trauma and deep-seated "sinful" conditions because our "story" will not allow "rational" clarity to come to the forefront in conscious MPRC thought as I have previously described in the example of the "rope in the barn."

Apophatic prayer is something quite different. Apophatic prayer is described by Bourgeault as

> prayer that does not make use of the faculties; in other words, it bypasses our capacities for reason, imagination, visualization, emotion, and memory. . .hence you'll often see this kind of prayer described as "formless," or the *via negativa* (the way of negation). . . In point of fact, once a more subtle discrimination begins to develop within us, we learn apophatic prayer is far from either formless or empty. It, too, makes use of faculties, but ones that are much more subtle than we're used to and which are normally blocked by overreliance on our more usual mental and affective processing modes . . . faculties of perception have traditionally been known in Christian tradition as "spiritual senses."[155]

---

[154] Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Lanham: Cowley Publications, 2004), 31-32.

[155] Ibid., 32.

The apophatic tradition allows for what Joseph Le Doux labels as a "bottom up" approach. It is a process that empties a person. It can open an individual to a deeper level and states of consciousness. It is surrender into the hands of a God whose name is I WILL CREATE/CAUSE WHAT I WILL CREATE/CAUSE and makes the ground more fertile for the ingress of God's ever present grace. An apophatic approach is a process which may allow one to "pick up her/his mat and walk" without undue consideration of the conscience MPFC construct of "I can't do that" or the gut-wrenching fear instigated in the reptilian brain that freezes any response before it is attempted. The apophatic tradition begins the process of a realignment of the essence of our stories at a foundational level.

What I am suggesting is not, however, an either/or decision. Just as a "top down" traditional talk therapy and "bottom up" or physical engagement approaches can be utilized together in a therapeutic environment to write a new and preferred story, the harmonious engagement of the kataphatic and apophatic traditions can, perhaps, bear much fruit. This harmonious, integral relationship is created, in my opinion, in the construction of an environment of mild yoga, a period of meditation, then guided reflection. What can occur here is a kataphatic beginning which journeys toward entry into the apophatic (yoga), followed by deeper apophatic engagement at varied degrees (meditation); then the person re-emerges into a kataphatic process through conscious brain function in guided reflective time.

I do not believe any discipline is purely kataphatic or apophatic in nature, at least for most human beings. There are some who may argue against my point. However, I do accept as axiomatic that certain practices do contain a stronger proclivity toward one

posture or the other. Bringing these practices together, the kataphatic and apophatic postures of prayer traditions, may allow for a fuller interaction with the entirety of the human experience.

The harmonious integration of these processes is intended to create liminal space. Liminal space, in my contextual application, is defined by Merriam Webster as "of, relating to, or being in an intermediate state, phase, or condition."[156] Liminal space is necessary for a new and preferred story to begin to emerge. Peter Steinke explains that "To be separate and to be close are basic needs. One is personal, the other relational."[157] This is the case in communities but also in individuals as they write their stories and encounter the possibility of healing. Varied and new behaviors must emerge to break from the repetitious rut of pain and diminished life capacity. This requires a construction which allows for disciplines which lead to "liminality" within one's life.

The concept of "liminal space" should spark memory. Liminal space is similar in nature to the concept that Shelly Rambo outlines when she described the need to "remain" when faced with trauma in order to bring healing and new life. Or, as William Glasser suggests from a clinical perspective, "Again, these are our choices when we want to stop choosing a painful behavior . . . (1) change what we want, (2) change what we are doing, or (3) change both."[158]

Bringing the neurological and theological faith-based concepts of deeper levels of consciousness together requires me as the researcher to create an environment in which a

---

[156] "Liminal Space," http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/liminal (accessed January 2, 2016).

[157] Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2006), 31.

[158] William Glasser, *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1998), 71.

unique story is given the freedom to reveal itself. It is the attempt to integrate the interior and exterior quadrants of existence creating each unique story. The "unique story" being written can apply to individuals as well as communities. A heavy-handed approach to my question in which the researcher comes in as "expert" to give direction overrides the very foundation of human function which I have described to this point in the chapter. My selection of the research methodology necessitates that the researcher and research participants become partners, co-creators in a journey toward healing and a new and preferred story.

Selection of a Research Methodology

There are a wide variety of qualitative research methodologies available. My research question necessitates an application which allows freedom of discovery because of the context and the complexity of trauma and healing, which directly involves the research participants as co-creators in the journey of as well as the outcome of their unique process. What I have demonstrated in the previous pages is the intricacy of the human condition and possibilities for self-deception and delusion which exist and cause unique and special challenges within this research project.

Further, it must be taken into account when selecting the research methodology that this research is a direct confrontation with modernity's culturally endorsed mantra of "I think, therefore I am." The project by its very nature calls into question the existence of a God or a Higher Power who exclusively functions in the tightly defined realm of conscious, rational, intellectual process and construction. I suggest a deeper essence of existence which reaches beyond the objective, material and intellectual. I see spirituality as an integral whole, not a compartmentalized segment or chapter in one's life. The

concepts, that God extends beyond intellectual constructs, the integral nature of existence, and that the whole of life is spiritual in nature, is difficult for many to accept let alone understand. Ken Wilber describes the dilemma in this way:

> It's a staggering scenario, fully comparable, in its own way, to the extinction of the dinosaurs. The most pervasive notion in human history and prehistory (namely, the existence of some sort of spiritual dimension) was simply pronounced, with the thundering authority of science, put with a zeal that was inversely proportional to its believability, to be a massive collective hallucination. The spiritual dimension, it was solemnly announced, was nothing but a wish-fulfillment of infantile needs (Freud), an opaque ideology for oppressing the masses (Marx), or a projection of human potentials (Feuerbach). Spirituality is thus a deep confusion that apparently plagued humanity for approximately a million years, until just recently, a few centuries ago, when modernity pledged allegiance to sensory science, and then promptly decided that the entire world contained nothing but matter, period."[159]

This is a difficult challenge to overcome, that an exclusive, measurable, objective approach to the whole of existence is all that matters and is all that is "real." This belief is engrained in so many of our stories. "And that," writes Wilber, "is exactly what the Enlightenment—and official modernity—set out to do. But the inherent downsides of this approach are perhaps obvious: it is all too easy to go from saying that all interior states have exterior, objective, material correlates, to saying at all interior states are nothing but material objects."[160] The challenge is to create an environment which allows for the unique individual and communal interior levels of consciousness to blossom and grow while at the same time maintaining and not disavowing exterior states of matter and reality. The methodology must attempt to hold them in balance, each honoring the other.

---

[159] Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 55.

[160] Ibid., 70.

Wilber writes that "As usual, the more we go within, the more we go beyond."[161]

This is the reason for my detailed background explanation of the foundational elements of the human story, how we function, and what these mean in a journey toward healing. What I have described in the previous pages must be understood to more fully grasp the reason I have selected the research methodology chosen. It is the reason why I selected Participatory Action Research (PAR) for this complex project. Alice McIntyre points out that

> there are underlying tenets that are specific to the field of PAR and that inform the majority of PAR projects: (a) a collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem, (b) a desire to engage in self and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation, (c) a joint decision to engage in individual and /or collective action that leads to useful solution that benefits the people involved, and (d) the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process.[162]

PAR fits the framework for the longer term effort and desired outcome of my project. My hope is that what is presented in this project is only the beginning of a multi-year exploration of the process of healing. PAR provides a flexibility to explore as partners, researcher and participants, and potentially attain a preferred future. As McIntyre points out, "there is malleability in how PAR processes are framed and carried out."[163] PAR underscores and helps apply the practical aspects of research in contemplative practice such as yoga and meditation. . . . "[it] suggest[s] that research in the context of PAR is more about building a relationship between theory and practice . . .

---

[161] Wilber, *Integral Psychology*, 106.

[162] Alice McIntyre, *Participatory Action Research*, Qualitative Research Methods Series 52 (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 1.

[163] Ibid., 3.

Sometimes the change comes quickly, sometimes slowly. It is my experience that some kind of change will always materialize if practitioners and participants work for it."[164]

PAR, because of its design, contains a solid framework for overcoming previously described cultural and social obstacles and fits well into a practical theological construct. John Swinton and Harriet Mowat in discussing a PAR research project with the disabled comment that "The research was designed, as far as possible to recognize the possibility of such hidden power dynamics and to enable people."[165] PAR's use with alcoholics, traumatized individuals, and those who experience chronic anxiety and neurosis as a result of the false self which arises from the human condition applies in working with those often marginalized by society or marginalized in their own sense of self-worth.

PAR can be tied to the theological pursuit of God's revelation within the context of justice and healing. It can take the concept of God/Higher Power into a deeper realm that I have previously suggested. Graham, Watson, and Ward contend that "To proclaim that God is not a propositional existential exercise but an event in which God's promise of justice, healing and reconciliation erupts into history, something that cannot be viewed dispassionately but demands a corresponding participation in the renewal of social reality."[166]

PAR allows for an adequate reflection of the spiral nature of my understanding of existence as story and life which progresses in stages. "It is there," McIntrye writes, "in

---

[164] McIntyre, 59.

[165] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 233.

[166] Elaine Graham, Heather Watson, and Frances Ward, *Theological Reflection: Methods* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 197.

that dialectical process of investigation and consciousness-raising, that participants rethink positions, imagine new ways of being, acting, and doing, and grapple with the catalytic energy that infuses PAR projects."[167] The past informs the present and the future. PAR acknowledges that these do not stand wholly apart from one another.

The manner in which the research question arises and finds application in a PAR project fits the parameters of this research also. Hal Lawson et al. contend that "PAR questions are derived mainly from two sources. They emanate from practice and policy and also from the need to address urgent needs and solve pressing problems in real-world contexts."[168] The question of wholeness in the context of existence and the trauma present in the human condition is certainly a pressing, urgent need. Not only is the need urgent, but the research question and problem it addresses falls under the PAR definition of a "Wicked Problem." "Wicked problems are ripe with dilemmas, so much so that they defy ready solutions . . . wicked problems are unique. There is no immediate hope that they can and will be solved . . . .The aim is to make progress toward problem understanding via the successive piloting of potential solutions."[169]

The issue at hand, how to bring a fuller life story into being, is as old as creation. The journey toward the true self and becoming as God created us to be and become is a life-long journey with many variables and pitfalls. No quick and easy answer has yet to arise in the course of human history. What I have described in this chapter, with intricate neurological, bodily, and theological issues in hand, make the complexity of this problem

---

[167] McIntyre, 31.

[168] Hal A. Lawson et. al, *Participatory Action Research* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2015), 29.

[169] Ibid., 22.

and research nearly exceed description. PAR allows the flexibility and input from participants as their unique experience and exposure to a new story arises from their context to bring a more complete vision of what may be possible for healing.

My role in this process is as a guide. I do have greater knowledge in the area I am researching when compared to the research participants. But my role is not to tell the research participants what each should experience, her/his ultimate goal, nor is it to instruct them in a heavy handed manner what is the next step in the journey. This is a process of the creation of their emerging story. Lawson et. al comment that "Critics of this knowledge-as-power hierarchy criticize the unequal relationships it structures and maintains. At the same time, they emphasize PAR's comparative advantages. To reiterate, PAR democratizes relationships among all research participants."[170]

The structure of the project necessitates that the only "pre-constructed questions" asked are those provided at our initial gathering after the first three-week period. After that the direction the group takes and the corresponding descriptive and analytical questions will follow as the group leads. McIntyre says, "As in most PAR projects, the initial research questions lead to the emergence of new questions and new avenues of inquiry, all of which *informed* the research process rather than *demanded* that it flow a certain way."[171]

As the research process continues forward the researcher needs, according to McIntrye, "to include participants in that integration, thus providing them with opportunities to take responsibility for participating in a conscientious, trustworthy, and

[170] Lawson et. al, 32.

[171] McIntyre, 49-50.

ethical process."[172] Further we must continue to guard against rigid and preconceived ideas and judgments of "success" and "failure." "Rather, self-reflection, in conjunction with investigation, critical questioning, dialogue, generative activities, and a determination to take action about issues under exploration, contributes to the development of a project that is judged not against the criterion of an objective truth but against the criterion of whether the people involved are better off because of their experience as participants in a PAR project."[173] It is not necessarily about the "end" but it is about the integrity and energy applied within the context of the "means."

Admittedly, there are challenges and obstacles in the use of PAR. It takes time, patience and effort to allow groups to find their way toward discovery. Persons and groups may struggle to find a sense of personal value and contribution in a process of discovery and their part in the story and the advent of healing. "The process of linking the meaning of participation to the actualization of participation was slow and time consuming."[174] This is certainly the case in the research presented in this project.

Practical Framework and Implementation of the Project

The central research question is:

"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and fuller life in the participants?"

Project Design, Implementation and Evaluation

---

[172] McIntyre, 61.

[173] Ibid., 61-62.

[174] Ibid., 17.

Two groups of research participants were selected. Six persons from the local geographic community were initially invited to participate in each group as research participants. One group was drawn from Twelve Step recovery, primarily from Alcoholics Anonymous, and the other from persons with an institutional Christian religious background but not necessarily from First Presbyterian Church in York, Nebraska. The Twelves Step group was taken from those who are chemically dependent or have an admitted dependency which restricts life. All participate in a Twelve Step Recovery Program. The Christian institutional group reflects persons who have written a story of faith over a period of time but are not chemically dependent in any way (at least as far as my first hand, direct knowledge indicates) and are not engaged in any Twelve Step Program but are active in the institutional church. The two groups will engage in a twelve-week journey into the combined practices of yoga, meditation, and contemplative reflection.

The research participants are part of a larger group setting. The recovery group will participate in an open Alcoholics Anonymous meeting which includes yoga, meditation and reflective contemplation utilizing a reading from Alcoholics Anonymous approved literature. The Christian institutional group of research participants will also participate in a meeting which is open to the community of York, Nebraska, and to some degree, beyond the local community. This meeting is identical to the open meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous in format with the exception of the specifics contained in the contemplative reflection portion. The institutional Christian religious group will use the Bible for their contemplative reflection, utilizing a modified format of Lectio Divina reading with passages drawn from the *Revised Common Lectionary*.

The gatherings begin with the practice of yoga for a twelve to fifteen minute period which includes mild stretching and body awareness emphasis (appendix D). The selection of yoga to begin the process is intentional. It is my belief that yoga creates an environment which prepares persons for a deeper, and perhaps easier, entry into and experience of meditation. Thomas Ryan notes, "That is what yoga does for meditation. It is a way into it, an effective, time tested and enjoyable bridge experience from one state of mind to another . . . Yoga means to unite, to join, but also to harness, to yoke."[175] Yoga seems to lay the groundwork for "letting go." It creates the "bottom up" approach to human existence which is often necessary for healing trauma and the chronic stress in the human condition. It assists in the transition and harmonic flow from the kataphatic to the apophatic and back again. Bede Griffiths writes, "This is the goal of a Christian Yoga. Body and soul are to be transfigured by the divine life and to participate in the divine consciousness. There is a descent of the Spirit into matter and a corresponding ascent, by which matter is transformed by the indwelling power of the Spirit, and the body is transfigured."[176]

Intentionality is also necessary in the selection and physical configuration in the concrete, material environment of the classroom in which the process takes place. There are reasons for this. Van der Kolk points out that "Maybe the most difficult part of having been traumatized is dealing with the triggers that reside inside. The trauma is a thing of

---

[175] Thomas Ryan, *Prayer of the Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 128.

[176] Bede Griffiths, *Bede Griffiths: Essential Writings*, Modern Spiritual Masters Series (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 87.

the past, but your body keeps reacting as if you still are in imminent danger."[177] The room configuration and my approach to teaching needs to be sensitive to the intimate conditions created and any possible reaction to them. I do not know, for certain, what the history of each participant's story holds.

The classroom and the setting are designed to create a sense of safety. Easy access to "escape" is present but at the same time unexpected interruptions are kept to a minimum. Lighting is ample but not glaring. Plenty of space should be provided so that each person can move freely. As a teacher my language should be the language of "invitation" and not "command." A language of inquiry and investigation is applied with the emphasis on using words like "notice" or "allow" or "be curious" when leading the yoga portion of the group gatherings. Assists used, to the extent possible, are kept within the framework of visual (modeling poses) and verbal assists. Physical assists, i.e., physically adjusting a participant's pose, are kept to a bare minimum and used only in the event an unsafe condition arises which might lead to injury. Touch can be a powerful trigger and I will avoid it.

The process intentionally begins with basic direction such as "yoga is about stretch not stain" and that each participant has a choice and can say "no" to any invitation into a pose or process. Often persons who have experienced trauma no longer feel as if choice is an option. This is another advantage of beginning with the practice with yoga, the body and mind rebuilding an understanding of choice. My movements around the classroom are also kept to a minimum. I lead the process of yoga from the front of the classroom in full view of everyone.

---

[177] David Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper, Introduction by Bessel Van der Kolk, *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body* (Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 2011), xxi.

I may at times employ a "count down method" with certain poses to ease the anxiety. For instance, as we move into a sustained pose I will say "three more breaths—three, two, one—now release." This is part of the creation of an environment that feels safe and that the pose will not "last forever" but instead come to a predictable and realized conclusion. This method also promotes the mind-body connection of "distress tolerance," that adverse feelings which occur in the body do come to an end. Because for many, simply showing up is a significant "stretch" in their lives, this gathering is not the time to push persons to move more deeply into a pose or to hold the pose just a few breaths longer to "feel the burn." The emphasis is on breathing, body awareness and what the body is experiencing in the moment.[178]

The yoga sequence utilized for the group gatherings will be identical for both groups and will be the same poses for each successive week. This provides continuity and muscle/mind memory for the participants. It also provides a foundation through repetition if participants desire to use the same format and flow outside the group gatherings. I will also have a handout that provides the list of poses used each week. The poses listed are written in English as opposed to Sanskrit for ease of understanding (appendix D).

When the process of yoga is complete, the groups will then enter a ten minute period of meditation. Two of the primary forms of meditation are drawn from the Christian traditions of Centering Prayer and Concentrative Meditation (appendix E). I will not insist on one "preferred" methodology of meditation. It is about practicing the craft and art of meditation, not reading about or acquiring an all-encompassing knowledge of meditation. As John Main points out, "Everything depends on practice. It is

[178] Emerson and Hopper, 119-41. Emerson provides a detailed explanation on how to create a trauma sensitive yoga environment.

not enough to read books about meditation."[179] I will encourage, however, the methods of Centering Prayer or Concentrative Meditation (use of a "mantra") for the sake of simplicity. I will suggest for the group at large and the research participants that meditation take place at least once a day and should be for a duration of at least ten minutes.

Research has shown as little as ten minutes of meditation a few times a week can alter a person's neuro-system and transform their interactions with self and others. I readily confess the selected time duration for the period of meditation is somewhat arbitrary. Skilled, long term practitioners of Centering Prayer and Concentrative Meditation, such as Thomas Keating and John Main, strongly suggest twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening to produce "good results." It is my experience, however, that when one begins a new and potentially anxiety-producing behavior, it is preferred to create goals which are readily attainable and allow the participant to increase the intensity and depth of the practice as each feels able. Thus, I am asking only for a minimum of ten minutes a day.

The two groups, the Twelve Step group and the institutional Christian religious group, will meet at a regularly scheduled time once a week for twelve weeks to enter the practice of yoga and meditation as a community. The combined practice of these two disciplines will require approximately twenty-five minutes during the regularly scheduled gatherings. After the period of yoga and meditation, a period of discussion and reflection will follow which lasts between thirty-five and forty minutes. The two groups, the institutional Christian religious group and the Twelve Step recovery group, meet

[179] John Main, *Fully Alive: The Daily Path of Christian Meditation*, ed. Laurence Freeman (New York: Orbis Book, 2013), 17.

separately and all functions and participation of one group are autonomous from the other.

As I have stated, these are open groups and other persons who are not research participants are allowed and encouraged to participate. The gatherings will extend beyond the research participant group. Those who participate beyond the research participant groups will ***not*** be included in any reporting of results, information, conversation, or any other exposure that may reveal their identity or the content of their conversation. The open Alcoholics Anonymous meeting will be conducted within "The Traditions," and anonymity is respected. The same holds true for the institutional Christian religious group. The only information reported from the general group gatherings is the total number of weekly participants in attendance, the total length of time of the meeting, and if there were any prohibitive weather conditions.

Every three weeks the research participant groups will meet separately to discuss their experience. In keeping with my chosen research methodology, future desired direction will be open to participant group process and discernment as long as it is within the general structure of the research. Digital audio recordings of the meeting will be made of each gathering and saved on a password protected home computer. These gatherings are strictly limited to those who are research participants and have signed "Human Subject Research Release Forms."

The questions of inquiry for the initial gathering of the two research participant groups after their initial three weeks are:

- *What was your experience of the first three weeks of meditation and yoga?*
- *Describe your practice of the disciplines.*

- *What were your personal discoveries?*
- *How do you want to continue this process?*

Additional follow up questions will probably be necessary to thicken the responses and provide a more vivid picture of each person's and the group's experience. Because Participatory Action Research is my methodology, the inquiry questions in the course of the process of exploration will necessarily be altered as the research continues. In other words, after each three-week period when the groups convene, these question may not, and probably will not, remain the same.

The audio files of these recorded gatherings will also be assessed by two clinically trained persons as well as me. The clinically trained persons will provide their observations on what is transpiring from their professional perspectives. I will conduct a similar analysis. The analysis of the group interview audio files conducted by the two professional clinicians is done independently. The two clinical professionals and I will meet one final time when the research has concluded1 to assess the process and share our observations.

When the two clinicians analyze the audio files they will not have access to any names of the research participants. Again, the weekly group gathering will be open to others who wish to be part of this process. However, only the research participants are invited to the recorded gatherings (held every third week) and these are contained in the study.

Final Evaluation

Much of the evaluation of the project, it seems to me, is contained within the course and chosen direction of the research as it unfolds. The direction and experience of

each group as it applies to their journey of discovery and as it unfolds will, in and of itself, tell a story. There may be certain concrete landmarks. Perhaps an altered view of self and community as well as what self and community has come to mean. I have already revealed my thinking in regard to wholeness and a deeper relationship with God, self and others. The final meeting of the two groups should provide much additional information on what can be labeled "evaluation."

The journeys of the two groups will also be compared in this manner. What changed and what didn't? Did the two groups, one from a "spiritual but not religious" Twelve Step background have a markedly different experience when compared to the "institutional Christian religious group?" Where were the experiences similar and in what ways were they varied?

My research and the suggested practices could provide an avenue toward a more integrated experience of God, self and community. At least that is the intention of this exploration and the reason behind the selection of my research methodology. Yet, this is all to be determined. These are simply initial reflections prior to my research which hold questions I think are worth asking.

Conclusion

The preceding pages have outlined the foundation of the "why" I have selected my research methodology as well as the configuration of the group gatherings. When one considers how the human brain and body work, the exterior quadrant, it is easy to discern why many struggle their entire lives and cannot break free of the trauma which is written into each person's story. The "bottom up" approach I have selected could present an

avenue for healing and may work in harmony with more intellectually driven, conscious brain approaches.

My selection of Participatory Action Research seems to me to be a natural step to research my question. PAR methodology allows for freedom of choice and movement by the participants without an undue heavy "hand" of the "expert" researcher. The direction each group considers, takes, and perhaps then alters will also provide insight into the internal transformations taking place as their story continues to be written.

Information regarding the group gatherings was widely disseminated in the York, Nebraska, area inside the institutional Christian church and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Fliers were posted in several community centers of activity, two alcohol and drug treatment centers, the Office of Probation, health and fitness centers, Four Corners Health Department as well as advertised on local public access television (appendix F). Each research participant has signed his or her consent form and was provided with a general outline of what is expected in the following weeks (appendix G). The groundwork and foundation is now complete.

Context and Concluding Remarks

What I am proposing in my research is an integrated approach which may bring a form of healing. My Christian perspective interprets the process and research I have outlined from the vantage point of the incarnation. The incarnation, viewed through the Christian lens, can be understood as the ultimate form on integration. As Thomas Keating points out, "Becoming a man, Christ annihilated the dichotomy between matter and spirit. In the person of God-man, a continuum between the divine and human has been

established."[180] I believe the harmonious integration of yoga, meditation and contemplative reflection display a consistency with the incarnation event and the vulnerability it entails which potentially leads to a deepened intimacy and a story of healing. We shall see how this process, drawn from ancient spiritual and religious traditions, alters the course of existence for those who choose to enter the journey.

[180] Thomas Keating, *The Heart of the World: An Introduction to Contemplative Christianity* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2008), 84.

Chapter Four

Research Participants Stories and Further Clinical Observations

Introduction and the Confluence of the Process

I began this journey by sharing that it is my story which brings me to this work. I have written of my belief that all of existence is story. My story gives rise to my research question, *"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and a fuller life in the participants?"* Each story is drawn from THE STORY, who is God. My understanding of God is also narrative in nature, with all the awe, wonder, mystery, adventure and paradox narrative holds.

This chapter will illuminate through the voices and reflections of the selected research participants the personal and shared experience of their stories. I will present the results of a suggested integrated methodology of gentle yoga, meditation, and contemplative reflection which may bring healing, fuller life, and closer contact with God and one's true self. This is a story about healing, returning to wholeness as God created each human being in his or her unique form of being.

However, this story of healing and growth does not unfold in a neat, tidy linear manner. The over-arching journey description and desired achievement of development is to move from enmeshment in the false self and journey toward the true self, the essence of who we are as created in God's image. Shelly Rambo, whose book *Spirit and Trauma* was examined in earlier pages, viewed the human condition and the trauma it contains through a theological lens which she focused through Holy Saturday and the need to "remain." Her thoughts and ideas on trauma were in many respects mirrored from a clinical and neurological perspective by Bessel Van der Kolk, M.D. The two

perspectives, one clinical and one theological, demonstrate once again the integrated, often messy nature of the human story.

Viewed from an integral perspective of the human condition, it is easily discernable that healing from imbedded trauma is no simple matter. While Rambo's and Van der Kolk's writing and work primarily focused on elevated forms of traumatic events such as intense storms, sexual assault, combat, etc., there is also the day in and day out trauma of simply being a human being. Such trauma, the trials of daily life, become manifested in the false self and leaves a person with a distinct level of chronic neurosis, anxiety, and a diminished sense of joy and hope which then lessens his or her experience of a fuller life. In these instances authentic engagement in one's life story is replaced with defense and coping mechanisms, such as rationalizations, so one can get through the day. Gerald May points out that "These rationalizations are not intentional lies; the person actually tries to convince herself that they are true."[181]

Earlier I proposed that the dynamic nature of God as revealed in the Bible is described in the call of Moses. I described God from the perspective of God's self-given name: "I WILL CREATE/CAUSE, WHAT I WILL CREATE/CAUSE. As I indicated I understand a God who invites us into silence, to "lay down our weapons and stop fighting." Further, I see God as Living Word inviting us into new and preferred healthy behaviors. This is not an invitation to simply "think about it" but to change our behaviors with bodily engagement. The incarnation of the Word, in and of itself, is an underlying, integral part of the story of what it means to be human. God did not simply become an idea, concept or dogma,but flesh.

---

[181] Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addiction (*New York: HarperOne, 1988), 145.

All of above the leads us into a story of eleven persons, who gathered in two separate and distinct groups, for a shared experience. Over the course of fourteen weeks, which contained twelve open group sessions as well as individual disciplines, the two groups engaged in an attempt to explore an integrated form and practical application of a process directed toward the journey of healing in the synthesized process of gentle yoga, meditation and contemplative reflection. The research participants had varied levels of trauma ranging from the fall out of a life of chemical dependency, pronounced levels of family dysfunction, untimely and tragic deaths of children and grandchildren, suicide, incarceration, sexual abuse, and the trials of daily living in fallen humanity.

One group had five persons of varied ages, from early career age into retirement, with varied levels of education and life experiences. All of the research participants for this group were selected from the congregation of First Presbyterian Church in York, Nebraska. There were two males and three females. This group is called the Christian Institutional Religious Group (CIRG).

The other group, the Twelve Step Group (TSG), had six persons drawn from different forms of Twelve Step recovery and had similar age, educational and life experience variations as the CIRG. The gender balance in the TSG was three females and three males. Both groups engaged in the integrated process of yoga, meditation and contemplative reflection as described in chapter three.

The twelve sessions engaged as part of the process were “open to the public/open AA meeting.” The room in which the integrated process took place was spacious but still intimate. The lighting was soft, but enough was present to see and be seen easily. The music selected was Gregorian chant. The space selected had three entrance/exit doors but

could not be easily viewed by a passerby. Notifications were placed at each end of the hallway asking anyone who did pass to do so quietly. Additional yoga mats or thick towels were available. It was emphasized during the yoga sequence that yoga is about "stretch, not strain," and "invitation, not command." The yoga sequence took between twelve and fourteen minutes and was identical in format each week. The space created was consistent with my explanation of an environment which was sensitive to a pre-existing condition of trauma or anxiety.

When the yoga portion was completed the groups immediately entered the meditation segment of the integrated process. This portion of the integrated process lasted twelve minutes in order to include weekly basic instruction on the meditation methods (the actual meditation period was approximately ten minutes in duration). The meditation segment of the process was also about invitation to potentially step into a varied state of awareness, more apophatic in nature, which included emptying, silence, and focus. Each of the three steps, yoga, meditation and contemplative reflection, took place in the same space as described above.

When mediation concluded the research participants reemerged into intentional conscious thought and a blended kataphatic engagement through Lecito Divina exploration of a Biblical passage (the CIRG) or a reading from the book *Came to Believe* (TSG). We gathered in close proximity as a group, listened to the reading, and offered individual responses as a person felt comfortable. No one was "forced" to speak or offer his or her feelings or thoughts.

The integrated process of gentle yoga, meditation and contemplative reflection took place once a week in a larger group context which was open to others beyond the

selected research participant group as I described in the previous chapter. In this segment of the sequence, the contemplative reflection, all those gathered were invited to share what she or he had heard during the reading or what each had experienced in the process of the yoga and meditation portion of the sequence. Yoga and meditation remained part of the research participant's personal discipline during the week in between the open group gatherings as part of her/his commitment to this study.

My goal was to use gentle yoga and meditation to introduce a broader process of self-understanding. It was an attempt to avoid some of the pitfalls of remaining centered on only one segment of "who" we are and shift exposure to what it means to experience the self as a more fully integrated human being. Wilber says, "Here's my point: you can sit on your meditation mat for decades, and you will NEVER see anything resembling the stages of Spiral Dynamics [stage development in human consciousness]. And you can study Spiral Dynamics till the cows come home, and you will NEVER have a *satori*. And the integral point is, if you don't include both, you will likely never understand human beings or their relation to Reality, divine or otherwise."[182] Therefore, the sequence and selection of the disciplines of yoga, meditation, and contemplative reflection is intentional and is an attempt to engage the fuller experience of being human as an integrated whole.

The research methodology for this work, this story, is Participatory Action Research (PAR). It was my hope this methodology would allow each person and the group as a whole to access each one's inner voice and inner gifts and being to enhance his or her creative essence contained in the scope of the journey and story. My aim was to invite a journey toward one's "Wisdom," the gift of God to each of the wonder of being

[182]Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 38.

alive and a fuller experience of God, self and others. Cynthia Bourgeault points out that "Wisdom is a way of knowing that goes beyond one's mind, one's rational understanding, and embraces the whole of a person: mind, heart and body."[183] Let us now listen to the experiences, the stories, of those bold adventurers who set sail from safe harbor into uncharted waters.

The Evolution of Stories

When I begin my regular yoga classes in the fitness facilities where I teach yoga, I incorporate the phrase "in today's evolution" as I speak about the sequence, emphasis and potential outcomes of the hour which lies ahead. Whatever any participant actually does experience in my yoga class, I believe one thing is certain: she or he will be changed in some manner. Each will "evolve." Her or his story, perhaps only in a minuscule fashion, is altered. The same can be said for those who had the courage and took the risk and accepted the vulnerability to experience the process and journey I have outlined.

The questions posed to each group of research participants were identical for the first and the final interviews and varied for interview sessions two and three. The reason for the variation is the selected research methodology, PAR, which provides freedom of direction for each group and the general feedback arising in conversation from the general open group gatherings. For instance, during weeks three through six the CIRG had a significant amount of conversation regarding interactive relationships and how the general group was functioning with comfort and openness. The TSG had a much different reflection focused on consciousness and shifts many in that research participant group were experiencing. Weeks six through nine the TSG conversation had, again, much more

[183] Cynthia Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 27.

focus on their Higher Power and that relationship while the CIRG was, to a degree, still struggling with individual disciplines and how these general open types of gatherings might apply to worship and church life in general. Thus the questions asked during the periodic interviews were a reflection of the conversation which transpired in open group conversations. Again, the questions given to each group for our initial interview and final interview were identical (see appendix H for a list of questions at each of the four interviews).

The first question asked at the first interview session with the research participants and the first question at the final interview were nearly identical in content. Both questions asked for a fuller reflection on the "whole" of the research participant's experience to that point in the journey. Therefore, let us begin by hearing, comparing and contrasting the research participant's experiences as each wrote another chapter into her or his own personal narrative.

Telling the Story

Final Interview, First Question, with the CIRG

Late winter's shroud of darkness had faded into the fuller light of early spring as the CIRG gathered one final time for a formal interview reflecting on their experience. The atmosphere was light, even cheery. I hunched this stemmed from a feeling of accomplishment; each felt their commitment was achieved and each had reached the conclusion of this segment of their journey. As we settled in and the small talk diminished, I turned on the audio recorder, which at this point was a familiar practice, and asked the first question.

I began by saying, “This question is in three parts, so if we need to go over it again, that’s fine. As you look back at the last twelve weeks, how consistently were you able to maintain your disciplines; what feels and is experienced differently as a result; how do you feel your relationship with God and others was altered?” The first to respond was Elizabeth.

Elizabeth said, “I discovered that I’m totally undisciplined. Getting into a routine has been difficult. If I don’t do it [the yoga and/or meditation] right away I have a difficult time getting it worked in then. And if I do get it worked in, I feel like I’m rushing. It’s been an eye-opener to me, I need to work on my discipline. I need to judge my time better to do things I want to do, because I do want to do this. I have found that it’s very meaningful to me. I miss it when I don’t get it in. I feel there’s a part of my day that if I don’t get it in I feel a little off key. That surprises me because I didn’t feel like it’d have been that important. I’ve incorporated more prayer, so I feel like I’ve become a more prayerful person. I end my meditation with a short prayer. But, then, the rest of my day it seems, it just comes easier to say a quick prayer about something. It just flows easier for me now than it used to.”

I asked her, “So your intentional prayer life has increased?” Elizabeth replied that was the case.

At this point Lisa chimed in. “I’m just going to say I’m glad I said yes to this process. It’s been very good for me. I must say these last two weeks, I’ve been doing it three or four times a week instead of seven [a deep sigh ensued]. And it’s just because I hit the floor running instead of doing my meditation. There’s no excuse. But, anyway,

I'm so glad I did this because it's been easier to handle all these decisions and all this stuff that's been going on [laughing]."

I asked her to "Talk about the 'stuff.'"

Lisa continued, "We're really working hard on this house [she discussed the work and transition of the move into a new home]. I've been really grounded through this. And Ron [her husband] has even commented on it. He says, 'you just make a decision and you don't look back.' I think this meditation, I can't even explain it, but, I think 'grounded' is a good term. I even think for some odd reason I have a little more creativity. I can't even explain it. I hesitated because I thought I was going to be too busy [speaking of her participation in this study]. But, the real bottom line is I really did need to be in this and grounded. I knew that when, when I said 'yes,' so that's the way it is. My relationship with God has become calming, serene; I don't know how to describe it. Closeness, I pay attention to things that I maybe didn't even notice before. I can't even explain it [emphatic nature to her voice]."

Rick slowly began to speak, and he reflectively said, "I have to admit the last couple of weeks I've fallen off . . .When I do meditation, once I use the word about five times I can just fall off into it [Rick was using the 'Center Prayer' method of meditation and is speaking of the single, 'sacred word']. Things do pop into my mind, but it's like they just go on by. Nothing seems to hang on me. Once in a while, there are just too many things on my mind. I get some really funny looks on the yoga part [speaking of the gym where he works out]. I've never really gotten into that routine. But when I go up to Wellness [the gym] before I start my exercises I used to do stretches, well now I do my yoga stuff . . . In my exercises I think I breathe more properly [explains the process he

uses in exercising]. My blood pressure is as low as it's been for a long time. So, I don't know whether it's been from this or what it's from. When she took the reading, I'm usually like 140 over 80 something and this last time I was 117 over 57. So, it was really down. When I get done with my meditation, my prayers may last ten, fifteen minutes. I seem to spend more time in prayer. It's more meaningful. I hope my faith journey has taken me to new places. I feel closer to God."

Jeff begins and adds his thoughts, "I guess, initially, I was a little skeptical about starting this at first. It's not something I normally would do. But, I said I would, so, I did. It been, it's kind of helped me, I don't know, I've got a lot of stress going on in my life right now. Family, and job and stuff. I guess it's kind of helped deal with that stuff a little better. When I started out I think I did decently at it, and as time went along I think I got a little better with it. It was easier for me to do. Starting out was a little rough, but I stuck with it. I'm glad I did.

I asked Jeff to consider, "What about your relationship with God and with others?"

Jeff thought a bit and replied, "I don't know, maybe it's a little better, a little deeper. I don't really know how to explain it. I feel it's a little better."

Rachel jumped in at this point saying, "My participation was stronger in the first half than the second half. Not that I didn't, but I prioritized it more in the beginning. I'd think about it every day. Sometimes life would interfere and routine was important, and it threw me off my routine. Then, it felt difficult to bring it back in. Time became a little bit of an issue there also. Running became my exercise of choice.

I asked her, "Do you run without earbuds?"

Rachel replied, “I do both. I started with always using them years ago. Starting last spring and all of last year I never ran with music. Then, recently, it’s with or without. I know what you mean; it’s an entirely different experience.

Rachel continued, “I think the weekly sessions here, they were, I really didn’t have any expectations, so I think I got so much more out of them than I ever thought I would. Again, on Thursdays I’d think, ‘Oh I have to go to yoga.’ Then when I’d get here I’d think, I’d get so mad at myself for having that thought, that mindset at the beginning of not wanting to come. Because, it’s coming to peace with myself and the community aspect.”

I probed more deeply. “So that was a life-affirming feeling in community?”

Rachel smiled and replied, “Yes, yes. I don’t know how to say it, the community part. Being a part of the group and being engaged with the passage reading. That’s not something I’ve ever really been a part of before. Like a group church activity.”

I invited Rachel to reflect, “Were you able to engage with that? With the scripture reading portion?”

Rachel responded, “Yes. Ya, it was crazy. Like after I did the yoga and meditation and how much I was able to focus on what you were reading, and what you were saying. I guess like doing a reading in church, in worship, my mind’s all over the place. But I was able to focus. I don’t know if it was just because I was in the moment more, or what. And I’m thinking more, like what am I getting out of it, what is it saying to me? That was really interesting. It was something I never really experienced before. I think like if we did that in worship, the same thing, I think that would be great.”

I asked the group, “Was there a general level of fear and anxiety among everyone when this began fourteen weeks ago? I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but I’m wondering.”

Rick quickly added his thoughts, “Ya, yes. The first night when we did the yoga, then the meditation and then the scripture I was pretty hesitant to say what I thought because I thought that’s a really dumb thing. That part has really opened my eyes because I thought everyone should really understand it and say the same thing. And that’s not true. Everyone gets their own meaning out of it.”

Lisa provided her insights, “I had tried yoga classes before. They weren’t ‘grade one,’ they were ‘high school classes’ [laughing]. They were really difficult . . . So, I had tried yoga. And you assured me this was simple yoga. So, you know, I wasn’t concerned about that at all. The meditation part, that [portion] I was interested in. I had been wanting to know more about meditation anyway. I was anxious, a little apprehensive about the time element. That was silly.”

I smiled and assured her, “No, it was what you felt. Part of this is learning not to be so harsh and judgmental about what’s going on inside yourself, to just experience it.”

Elizabeth jumped in at that moment saying, “It’s interesting that you say that, because I’ve struggled with the yoga part, and my back. So, I’ve worked in Tai Chi. But the meditation part, I want to keep working with it. I’m angry with myself because I don’t jump right on [it], and get into it. I let my day get started and then, ‘Oh my gosh, I haven’t gotten it in.’”

Again, I added words of assurance. “I encourage you not to be angry with yourself about it. That can be counter-productive. It defeats the purpose. It can happen.

It's the world we live in, so imagine, what's the point of beating yourself up because you're not becoming peaceful and connected [laughing]?"

Elizabeth continued, "Well, not beating myself up. But, becoming disappointed that, well, I already knew it, but how undisciplined I can be at times."

Rick added, "You had asked me before if the yoga was helping with my exercises. What I have noticed if I have something that has an ache or a pain about it, I avoid those exercises for the day. I never used to do that. I find that out before I get started."

I inquired, "So increased body awareness?

Rick answered, "Yes."

Elizabeth continued with her experience. "I would say, when we start the yoga part, and you're saying, do the bodily inventory, okay, this hurts, and this hurts, and this hurts, oh yes, that hurts too. You know, really easily just crack up when you, it's like, I don't want to inventory at this point. I'm well aware of all the pieces that aren't functioning correctly [laughing]. But, then I know what I have to watch when I'm doing it."

I concluded the first question of the final interview with my observations about body awareness and its connection to general overall awareness of being and of God.

Some research participants in the CIRG reported more intention and time spent with "formalized," more traditional prayer. Varied feelings were presented regarding overall "growth" during the time frame. There were other research participants who felt a great deal of personal growth in connection with others and in their story of faith. Others, though experiencing a sense of gratitude for having agreed to the process, seemed to have a more tepid response in terms of personal growth and growth in relationship with God.

Much attention was given in the conversation regarding the disciplines of yoga and meditation and the struggles with adherence to what each had committed to when he or she began the process. Yoga seemed to pose a particular challenge. What seemed largely absent was an extensive conversation about God in connection with self and others. This observation is consistent with the initial interview which took place after the first three weeks.

The first question at the initial interview was almost identical to the question asked above in the concluding interview. When comparing the first interview with final interview several themes were consistent. For instance Elizabeth said in the first interview, "The yoga part has been difficult with my leg." Lisa confessed, "Well, I'm not doing the yoga." On the other hand Rachel commented that, "I'm doing fine with the yoga . . ."

The meditation portion of the process, as reported at the first interview when compared to the final interview, did show what could be considered growth. Rick offered, "At first the thoughts just ran rampant." In the final interview he had observed that now he had little trouble remaining focused. Lisa said initially, "Has it really been three weeks? I have to say that I'm really quite enjoying it. At first I had a really hard time with ten minutes . . . I really do like it, I think I could find this a forever kind of thing." When you compare this reflection after the first three weeks with her final assessment, it is easily discernable that meditation as a practice, though something she desired from the onset, has become a simpler process for her. This was a common theme throughout the entire CIRG. Now let us turn our attention to the final interview with the TSG.

Final Interview, First Question, TSG

I asked the initial question to this group, and it was, in content, the same question with which I began the final interview with CIRG: "Reflect back over the last twelve weeks, and the question is broken into three parts; it's an all-inclusive question, so, if we have to go over it again, that's fine. How consistently did you maintain your discipline: the yoga, the meditation, and coming to the meetings? What feels and is experienced differently as a result of your participation? How do you feel your relationship with God and others was altered compared to where you began? You might need to take some moments to think about that, I know it's pretty broad." (A long silence ensued).

Brenda was the first to speak. "I think for me it's, I did more meditation than the yoga. For me, I'd say about ninety percent. I'd wished I'd kept track now. In the beginning I was really into it; then there was a little lag; then I got back into it. It's helped me so much. I can't believe it's already been twelve weeks. I just can't believe it. It's just helped me in so many ways, I don't know where to start. I think I'm more calm. I tend to think things through before I react. I can see that in myself. I'm more charitable towards people. My relationship with God has gone a long ways. But, that's always changing anyhow, you know? I feel closer to God now than I ever have. I don't know. There were a few days there, I was having a lot of grief stuff [teary], you know. I did use this. It helped. It helped me with more insight into Sharon's death [her daughter had died in the last year from cancer]. It's just stuff I'm coming to terms with. It's helped me, immensely. It doesn't mean it hurts any less. It's been a Godsend to me, it really has. I know it's something I'm going to continue.

I asked, "As you look back Brenda, is the experience as you anticipated when you walked in the first night?

Brenda replied, “No. When I walked in the first night I wasn’t really wanting to come really bad. I didn’t know what to expect. I’ve been to yoga classes, and I love them. But, that’s among women, mostly. I was worried about the mixed group. But, you made it feel so comfortable. I was able to get into it. After the first night I was thinking this is good . . .”

Cathy slowly began, “I found that, I think I did it about ninety percent too. I remember when I was in Phoenix and at someone else’s house and I did it. I went someplace else, I can’t recall, and I remember doing it, at least part of the time. I can’t remember if I did it all the time I was there. I went through a bunch of different phases [she discussed change in place within her home and time of day, and in the end came to enjoy the process in totally darkness]. In the total darkness, when I closed my eyes there was white light. It wasn’t real bright, but it was there, I knew. How can I, my eyes are totally closed, sitting in the dark, and there’s a white light? Then after a while it toned down and there were these little, and they were brilliant, little white lights. I wondered, how long is this going to last, because, this is different. It’s different than what I experienced it before. I’m glad we did it for three months because for me, that became a habit.”

Cathy spoke of a diverse coffee group she regularly attends and enjoys. She continued, “I did an intervention, not alcohol related, but she was going through some things and her thinking and it was just way off. That’s not like me to do that. We had all listened to her at coffee and everyone is going, ‘Oh my gosh. Something needs to be done. . .’ it’s usually not me to intervene. To me it seems I’m more willing to interact with other people. I feel a closeness not only with my Higher Power but with other

people. It was a journey and I was very happy that we got to experience it. Hopefully, we can keep going."

Tom answered by saying, "Well, for me, my percentage isn't quite as high. My yoga, the stretches, not very good at all. I think I only did it once. The rest of the times were here. Meditation, well, I don't know, it wasn't really large. But, here, in a disciplined setting, you know? So, what's that all about? You know? Maybe that's why a lot of self-help groups and things work. We do it together. There's not one I've come to and said, 'What am I doing here?' I figured it out after a while. The yoga is the exercise that gets you ready for the meditation. The meditation and the breathing, I find that when I get in a stressful situation, I'll use that. I'll do the breathing. I'll calm down. . . I too have a better contact, a better closeness with my Higher Power The yoga, I wouldn't even entertain that, I'd go right to the meditation. And a lot of that wasn't even meditation, it was prayer. I do think it's a good discipline, this program."

John added his comments at a metered pace. "I did the yoga outside of class, two, maybe three weeks at the most. I really want to get back to that. I noticed a difference, it prepared me for meditation. Also, I have too many aches and pains for a person my age [laughing]. The meditation time, eighty-five, ninety percent. At first I had a lot of trouble quieting the mind. Then I got into the phase of 'Oh, look at me, I'm meditating, I'm doing yoga.' Then the last month I got past that and I can slip into it more easily. That place of just kind of being. I began seeing the colors; that became kind of distracting for me. Which color blue will I see this time? Trying not to let it be about that. I get fixated on stuff like that. But, I notice the times that I am distracted, like thinking about work,

and bring myself gently back. It's a place, I'm not there, let me go back there. I can do that now."

I asked John, "So did the process of noticing you were distracted grow?"

John responded, "Ya, more self-awareness. I'm more patient with others, more empathetic with others. Kind of sitting back for the first time in my life thinking this isn't about me as much. The Big Book [the book *Alcoholics Anonymous*] talks about self-centeredness slipping away. I felt a little more of it slipped away. Conscious contact with God, I don't know if this is correlation or causation, but I'm going through a rocky patch right now where I'm struggling with some doubt. You and I have talked about that. And even with my panic issues, before when I've had spells, I've always had to take at least one day off work. I physically couldn't go. I didn't have to do that this time. I was able to be calmer and more centered. I would think, if I could get to classes and be around other people and help them, it would help me. The conscious contact with God, not so much, and I'm kind of scared about that. I'm hopeful if I keep doing this, that will come. This is just a phase [laughing]."

At this point I provided a discussion on stages of consciousness and the disruption which can occur as we journey more deeply toward God; one's "image of God" may be dying while another emerges, and that can be quite unsettling.

Jennifer added her thoughts saying, "I'd say as far as a percentage, seventy percent. Eighty percent before these last couple of weeks, when I kind of fell down. My meditation, it works much better if I have the yoga stretching. I don't attempt the meditation without it."

I asked the group, “Did anyone not find that doing yoga before meditation was helpful?”

There was a strong group affirmation of “yes, doing the yoga first was most helpful.”

Jennifer continued, “If I don’t do yoga it takes too long to get into meditation, too long to get into relaxation of the body. It kind of sets the stage also. And physically, I’d had trouble with my knee for a while. It didn’t take too long, too many sessions, and that was gone. There’s still a tender spot in it, but I seldom notice it. Physically, I consider that I have less aches and pains then it was before. My conscious contact with a Higher Power is different. When I’m sitting at a red light, and people don’t go as they should, I’m getting upset [laughing], I do the breathing. I take a few deep breaths, I close my eyes, I don’t close my eyes when I’m driving [laughing], I take few deep breaths, and quickly, quickly, back to calm again. I am more appreciative about the people and the circumstances of my life than I had been. I think that’s a result of the process of this meditation. I take the time to just thank people. I’d often just hang back. There are a lot of others up there saying thanks, but I’ve come forward to do it. I think that’s a result of the meditation.”

Steve began this way: “As far as sticking with it, I did real well, as far as I’m concerned on that. I was away on vacation, I was eighty percent or more. The yoga not as much. I was fairly disciplined with it. I think my whole attitude, my whole demeanor, you know even before I was looking for something else. Something more. This is another tool. It’s helping me become me. I don’t know if finding myself is the right phrase or not. To me, it’s almost helping me live. Helping me ground myself, center myself, become

myself. You know? It's something I've never, ever felt in my life. But, I've never tried to slide into any type of a meditation or a calmness like this before. Like, I've got a thousand things going on at work. And that usually gets me pretty edgy. The turmoil, not so much. I can get edgy but it's always at that point that where all I have to do is consciously or subconsciously slide back into that place and say, 'Lord, help me.'"

I asked Steve to consider, "There's a level of anxiety that goes along with living. So, you deal with it better?"

Steve said, "Sure. Absolutely. Absolutely. And that's something, I always dove into face first. There is no consequence. Now, maybe it's teaching me to slow down and take a breath. Maybe the whole world's not such a great big deal. It's just a calming effect, a gentler, easier, softer way."

I asked him to then consider this: "Does this fit? Zen Buddhism talks about finding the middle way. Does that fit?"

Steve said, "That, that is it. I mean, there's no bouncing off the bottom or bouncing off the top. You're gliding along in the middle and comfortable about most things that come up."

I asked him, "How about your relationship with God?"

Steve responded, "You know, I've always been a believer. I've had faith but I've never really depended, or that there was a guarantee, maybe not a guarantee, but knowing if I asked if I prayed, there was always a release for me to get that off my chest. God can get me through anything. I've never had that clarity to know it's okay just to ask. It's okay just to talk to God. It's more of a freeing deal; I'm not so, you know, a lot people get nervous with the mention of God. You know, they just stiffen up and say, 'I don't

want to talk about that.' To me, it has to go hand in hand now with how I'm living my life. It's just an easier, softer way with God being in my life more; it makes it that much easier and softer."

I asked Steve to reflect on this thought: "Now I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I'm trying to wrap my mind around these images. Has God moved from kind of a third person relationship, almost like a principal's office relationship, to a more personal, maybe even experienced from within?"

Steve smiled and replied, "Ya, that's it. I need to be part of God and God needs to be part of me. I need that closer relationship. I never knew what that relationship was. I never asked for anything, didn't know how to ask for it, but now it's just free flowing. And with others, you know I've explained to a lot of different people that I'm doing this Eleventh Step deal and some people get it and some people don't. Even the non-alcoholic or non-drug-related people seem to take a big interest. Maybe it's not because of the God thing but because Steve's putting the effort into a little bit of it to better himself? Some of those people knew who I was. Knew the things I did. Maybe they're still having a hard time believing I'm going this route, trying to better myself.

I asked Steve, "So the Steve that they came to absolutely, certainly know is not the Steve they're experiencing or the Steve that you're desiring to become. It confuses them?"

Steve responded, "Yes. Yes. Your first impression with someone, and I put a lot of first impressions with people out there years ago, and that's not the person that I am today."

Steve continued, “I feel I’m a better human being. I’m a better father; a better husband. I don’t want to say it’s made me soft, but it has. I’ve been hard all my life. Hard ground doesn’t grow very much. You’ve got to plant the seed; you’ve got to water it; you’ve got to cultivate it; do all that, and you know it was just time for me to do some of that. You know? This is so much an easier way to live my life. I don’t need to be a hard ass all the time. It doesn’t get me anywhere, most of the time. When you’re being a hard ass, it runs right into family; it runs right into everything. . . Whether it’s a sunrise coming up in the morning, or watch that special spot in the sky, or the darkness, it’s just living. Life is good. . . I didn’t think I’d be this easy to do the meditation, to do the yoga, but once I got into the routine, it’s just like walking down the street. You know? Who’d a thunk [smiling]?”

Cathy reflected on her emotional shifts saying, “When we just started, after the first meeting, I just started crying, for no reason at all. That just happened again the other night. I was reading, and it wasn’t anything sad or anything. Just all of a sudden. And I thought, just let it go. There wasn’t a reason, but it was a good cleansing. You know? I let it go. I’ve always tried to stuff the tears. That was, that was totally unexpected.”

Brenda added, “One thing I have found is that I always use the chant when I meditate [we used Gregorian chant for yoga and meditation as quiet musical background].” Brenda discussed the death of her granddaughter in a car accident and when her daughter died and the intuitive sense of each happening and then talked about buying things for an apartment for her troubled brother at Walmart. She felt her increased awareness was tied to this process.

Cathy added, “I’ve done some different things; it’s the getting out of self. This poor woman, I was going to teach a class and she had one crutch, and a little kid, and he was not about to listen. He was trying to go all over the place. [Cathy told how she offered help.] I just picked up the kid, I didn’t know how that’d go, but I just talked to him, and did that all way into the medical center.” Cathy then discussed another act of compassion with a woman in a wheelchair at church. “It’s just doing things, being more alert to the needs of others.”

I asked, “Anything else?”

Brenda said with a smile, “I’m even more empathetic to my husband [tells story of appreciation of her husband’s love]. I just feel better, about myself and about others. It’s just a great addition to the AA program. I just can’t quit talking about it; it’s been so good.”

There was a struggle present with the TSG, as with the CIRG, with maintaining the level of yoga and meditation as compared to the original commitment when the program began. The TSG participants, however, reported a higher level of compliance, with most maintaining a high level of compliance throughout the duration of the processes time frame. Some did remarkably well. Still, others had limited to nearly non-existent compliance.

As with the CIRG, conversation about the experience of God was varied. The TSG reported changes in this relationship as the process evolved. Many reported an increased calmness and a sense of centeredness as well as a more personal relationship with God/Higher Power. Much more detail flowed from the TSG when compared with the CIRG when discussing their encounter and relationship with God.

Both groups reported what could be considered healing. The range of healing varied in the TSG, as reported, from reduction in aches and pain, to better nights' sleep, to an ongoing alleviation of anxiety and enduring feeling of calm. The participants, as revealed above, attributed this to a combination of yoga and meditation. Little to no discussion of the contemplative reading of the book *I Came to Believe* was present in their conversation and reflections. This was a variant when compared to the CIRG and this group's conversation about Lectio Divina Bible reading.

When the concluding interview of the TSG was compared to an almost identical question posed after the first three weeks of the process many of the same concerns were raised. Several reported difficulty in remaining with the meditative practice and building the discipline of yoga. Discussion of God, of self and interaction with others was far less prevalent after the initial three weeks when compared to the concluding interview. Although, as with the CIRG, growth seemed to be taking place. Brenda's comments echo many in the TSG in their experience. "It's just, it's concentrating on what I'm doing, on what my body is feeling. There's a quiet, I don't want to say nothingness but, I guess, that's I would say it . . . and when I sit down and take a couple of breaths, I find I can get to it a lot faster than I did the first night."

On the other hand, one could suggest that even in the first three weeks an empathy for others had grown in the TSG, though it's reporting was contained within the group interaction. For example Steve said after the first three weeks, "Speaking with my wife, I was saying how these meetings seem a little closer, a little more genuine, a little more sincere." Cathy added a similar sentiment in our first interview session: " we're more apt to share things. It brought us closer together." Jennifer also had a more connected feeling

as she shared after the first three weeks, “I thought a lot about this and the vulnerability of it. Because we became vulnerable to each other, in a way that we haven’t been otherwise. Trust is involved . . . it’s quiet [in the open AA meeting] which is just amazing to me, I think.”

When the two participant groups are compared, both shared similar experiences with the disciplines of yoga and meditation and their struggles with maintaining the practices. From their own personal reporting, it appears the TSG as a whole was able to maintain a more consistent level of discipline though both groups had members who reported each had struggled significantly.

Discussions about God/Higher Power and self appeared to have flowed more freely with the TSG when compared to CIRG. Much more conversation arose in this area from the TSG and in more intimate detail. Both groups appeared to encounter what could be interpreted as growth, however, in the aspects of relationship with God, self and others.

With this information in hand, let’s take a look in more detail at some of the themes I have already examined and some other major themes of this story. The story which emerged took some surprising and provocative turns. In a relatively short span of time, research participants encountered phenomenon and feelings, it seems, they nor I anticipated or expected.

God, Self and Others, a Deeper Look

It seems only natural when speaking of healing in my context to begin with a more specific examination of the experiences of the research participants with the integral connection of God, self and others. The book *Alcoholic Anonymous* states clearly in its

invitation into a journey of healing that "there is one who has all power—that one is God. May you find Him [sic] now."[184] The same book guides the alcoholic, through the suggested Twelve Steps, into a deeper relationship with God, self and community.

The same is true for the Christian story. Here we find that it is God who claims us as our Creator and the One who knew us "before we were formed in the womb." As I have suggested previously, God's love for us as human beings and desire to be in community is revealed in the incarnation of the creative Word as it becomes flesh. In each story, for the alcoholic and the Christian, the central nature of God's initiative and embodied action and response are essential and integral to the story of healing. Therefore, let us look more specifically and in more detail into the stories told about God, self and connection with others as shared by each research participant group.

First I will share reflections from the TSG. Brenda shared her thoughts in this manner. "I feel a deeper, deeper, sense of God being around me most all the time. I've never really felt quite this way ever before." Brenda described an unsettled feeling she had coming to the group gathering that evening which arose earlier that afternoon. She said she had been unsettled. "It's not that I just feel peace [as she was able to release the unsettled feeling] but it's that I feel this presence that showed me, I don't even know how to say it, that God's right here and he opens things up to me more? I'm seeing it, I'm sure he always did, but I have this sense that it is what it is. It's that I don't need to fix things, I don't need to fix anybody. . . This has changed me, it really has. It has changed me from inside. I appreciate it. I'm grateful for it."

[184]Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 58.

Tom added his thoughts. “I’ve grown from this whole, ah, experience. . . Doing this yoga and meditation, not that I do it perfectly, but this Eleventh Step meeting, it’s changed me, that I have grown, by being a part of it.”

Cathy told her experience this way. “I was like some others; there was a week when I was doing the silent meditation, but I was just doing it. There wasn’t a peace that I was getting before. And, uh, I think that’s normal. When I first started it was all new and getting where I want to sit and arranging everything and all. Then experience the silent part, then there’s a going into a wall. Last night, it was late, and I started my meditation and got into it. I got to see blue. Now at first it was just complete black; then this blue came in and it was just more and more and more. . . I’d never seen those colors before. I split mine up; I do intentional prayer in the morning and silent meditation in the evening. I do know from this journey and some silent meditation I’ve done before, I’m improving. . . There are times when I just drop into it. It’s just like anything else. The more you keep doing it, the more it becomes part of you. And I like that. It’s a new journey.”

Brenda talked about a deeply painful issue with her family and her grandchildren. “If something comes up, or if he makes a dig or something, I just don’t respond right away. The old me would be there, in your face. Often, I won’t say anything. I’ll walk away. And if it deserves a reply, and usually it doesn’t, I can think it over and not do anything to make the matter worse. I think that’s the big thing for me, just don’t lunge.”

Tom reflected that his increased compassion toward others may be a gift from God as he explained, “Like with strangers, someone I’ll see at the hospital, I saw a guy with a Korean War Veteran hat on [described a long conversation he had with him on varied subjects]. I don’t know who this guy is, never seen him before in my life. That’s

not me. I thought, isn't that weird? You don't even know this guy. I'm finding myself doing that with people. I'm just talking, about nothing in particular, with others I don't know. And that ain't me. I go to a store for a reason, get the stuff, and get out. But you know what, life is short. So that part has been kind of interesting. Taking the time to talk to somebody and care about somebody, that's not me. God kind of likes that stuff I think, because if he doesn't, he sure puts a lot of good feelings in your heart when I do it. There's just a deeper connection with humanity in general. Absolutely."

Cathy said, "I second that. I have had more conversations with people that I have no idea who they are. . . . And I say 'thank you.' Because, you know what, that isn't said a lot to people. Sometimes people are really taken aback because they haven't heard that for a long time . . . like you throw a pebble in and the circles keep getting bigger going out. 'The Butterfly Effect.'"

Some of John's thoughts were these. "I'm an introvert, all the way. I've had more desire to work on and engage with other people. The time I need alone to refill and recharge myself is great, but I need time with others too. I started going out with a bunch of guys from my church, about twice a month. We talk about faith and life, and just stuff. That's been really good, but it's been challenging too. Most of the people in that group are more extroverts. Thinking, this might be an opportunity to grow too. I've noticed it at work with students and my coworkers as well. I've also started to work on negativity in the workplace. Last semester at school I was very negative. I had a lot of negativity with other people, you know, complaining about institutional politics. This semester I've wanted to make an effort to get away from that, but more I've really wanted to do it and have been able to do it. I was talking with my wife the other day and she said, 'You seem

more at ease and much more willing to say, ‘Ya, let’s go do something with other people.’ I feel like this is a part of that. This is part of my spiritual program now.”

Jennifer shared these thoughts. “The word I use in meditation is ‘awareness.’ So, be aware. I can go through life, you know, busy, and ignoring things. What I’m more aware of is how the God of my understanding puts people in my life every day. They’re there for a reason. Either I’m the reason for them, or they are the reason for me. Either way, they’re there for a reason. I don’t want to miss those opportunities or times. I’m more aware of the people, of my grandchildren, or just the people in my life. I’m grateful for them, so there’s that gratitude that comes from that experience. . . Doing things for people I might not have and being appreciative of the people and their talents. God speaks to me through people. They have value to me.”

Steve shared his thoughts in relationship to day in and day out existence. “I believe that has a lot to do with coming into more contact with God. You know I deal with a lot, a lot of people. And most of them are customers, and most of them are assholes. That gives me a chance to fight back. Well, I don’t need to fight back, you know. I can take that breath and think, ‘Just let this thing be over.’ I’ve never done that before. I wanted to be in the heat of the battle. . . As far as change, I believe I’m changing and this is just another tool to help me change.”

The CIRG was far more limited in their responses about God, self and others. There seemed to be a more limited willingness to divulge more intimate information. But, growth and transformation did seem to occur.

Lisa commented in a manner that reflected several of the members of the CIRG. “The feeling of meditation to me is emptying my vessel; my body. This allows whatever

to come into my body, or whatever, my vessel. I'm hoping that's the job of the Holy Spirit. I keep waiting and listening for it. And I think that, well I know, that I've experienced it. But emptying the vessel, I don't think that I've ever thought of it that way. Emptying the body to let the Holy Spirit come in."

Rick commented, "I think that's why the group session means so much more to me. That it's just not me, and some of the comments that are made wasn't what you even read. But like Lisa was saying, the Holy Spirit moves where it wants to move, and that can be all in different directions. And maybe it's not moving us in different directions; we just think we're moving in different directions."

Lisa also added, "I've found through this process that things that might have, could have, gotten me all twisted up during the day are not all that important. I don't know, I, well, I guess it's just that serenity thing. I can't even explain it."

Several in the CIRG would focus their comments on the Lectio Divina, contemplative reading portion of the sequence when we gathered in a group. Most were, at first, intimidated by the thought of varied experiences in scripture. Some felt that there was a "right" answer for each text that I read. As time progressed, however, comfort seemed to grow and the experience shifted to one of illumination. Elizabeth shared her experience in this way: "I like the Bible part because it's interesting to hear different perspectives. Sometimes, I think, gosh, that's pretty deep. I didn't hear that, I'd missed that completely. Or, sometimes it's pretty funny what's heard. It's non-threatening, considering you're opening up and saying something in front of people you may not know. It's very non-threatening, I think, for most people."

I had asked at one point, “Were you able to engage with that? With the scripture reading portion?” This response is found earlier in this chapter but let me reiterate it at this point to underscore how much the Lectio reading seems to impact the group.

Recall what Rachel had said: “Yes. Ya, it was crazy. Like after I did the yoga and meditation and how much I was able to focus on what you were reading, and what you were saying. I guess like doing a reading in church, in worship, my mind’s all over the place. But I was able to focus. . .”

Although the TSG was more comfortable with personal sharing in regard to God, self and others, it is necessary to make one important note in this area. Not one comment was made about the contemplative reading segment of the process or the book *I Came to Believe* during any interview with the TSG in the course of the formal process. This stands in stark contrast to the primary focus, when it came to “God conversation,” with the CIRG and their far more detailed and expansive exploration of the Lectio Divina portion of our weekly open group process.

There was also conversation, on a more limited basis when compared to the TSG, regarding growth in life-affirming interaction with others. The general focus of their reflection on others was on the range and variety of persons who were attending the open group and the processes’ outreach into the greater community. This was viewed in an encouraging fashion, though when asked if the CIRG understood our gatherings as a worshipping community, a mixed response was present.

Lisa shared an experience which was interesting. I had concluded the final interview and had turned the audio recorder off. Lisa asked that I turn the audio recorder

back on because the feeling she remembered seemed to be very powerful for her. Our conversation and interaction was not one found elsewhere.

Lisa observed, “You asked how our interaction with others had been affected, and through meditation, I can’t even explain it. There are those, I don’t want to say people who waste your time, but you know, they’re not positive. I’ve always known that I don’t know how to handle it. I still don’t, but I just kind of walk away. I don’t want to be around them. It bothers me. I just quietly walk away. Not while they’re talking or anything, but just remove myself from the situation, from the environment.”

Seeking clarity and more information I asked, “Remove yourself from what you feel is a negative situation?”

Lisa responded, “Yes, and I’ve always been bothered by that. But through this meditation I just have no time for that.”

I asked another question of Lisa. “Would it be fair to say you’ve become more jealous of your personal time?”

Lisa said, “Maybe that’s it. I don’t know. But I know that I don’t want to be affected by that [negativity of others].

Lisa continued to describe her insight and the clarity of it. “No. No. Really, I mean our time is limited on this earth, I just don’t want to be a part of it, that negative stuff. I always felt that way, but it’s magnified through the practice of meditation. Is that funny? I can’t explain it, but I have noticed that.”

Jeff concluded the exchange by saying, “I’m kind of that way too. I don’t like to be around the negative people and situations. I’ve removed myself from one in particular.”

Steve, a member of the TSG, offered an insight when asked about what he thought was limiting attendance to the Wednesday evening TSG open AA general meeting. I feel, however, his response might have a broader scope of application than simply a response to my specific question about attendance. He said, "Yoga, and God. I think people are scared to death. I find that just with the people that I deal with, and I ask them about their spiritual ground and it's always I'm working on it. Well, you can see change in people. At least I think I can. I can see when someone is really trying, really digging, really wanting something, really needing that change. The God thing is what I think people get so nervous about. It's like when I first came into the program; I had to surrender, to give in; it's the same thing, I guess in my eyes, as I just need to kneel before God, in whatever form, and say 'help me.' It's easy, but it's just the fear of the unknown."

Trauma and Healing

Much of the story told in this chapter seems to cluster, in some fashion, around trauma and healing. It concerns persons writing a new chapter, a return to the true self. Therefore I want to examine in more detail the impact the holistic, integrated journey of gentle yoga, meditation and contemplative reading had on the research participants as each spoke specifically to this issue.

With each group, the CIRG and the TSG, calming, increased flexibility, an improved general feeling of wellness, better sleep patterns, and ease of relating to life were reported. It has already been noted above about a lowering of blood pressure and increased body awareness and avoidance of potential injury. I have also detailed

conversations about those who are dealing with very difficult, broken family situations and grief resulting in untimely and traumatic death.

Still, there were conversations which ensued in this area which are worth noting. Rachel, a member of the CIRG group, observed about herself: "Tonight's gathering, it was beautiful scripture, but what was sticking out to me was the kind of negative side of it, that love was this, love is not this, and my thought was, 'Oh my gosh, I'm doing this all wrong.' And as I'm sitting there thinking about it I'm thinking, that's the same kind of phrase I was using during meditation. It was going on inside, and I was thinking, 'should I say it,' but then I didn't and now I know I should have. I feel like, wow, I'm counseling myself [lots of laughter]."

Elizabeth also commented on the general environment of the open group setting. Her remark was echoed periodically, in varied ways, by several members of the CIRG. She said, "It's like a safe place. I mean not a safe place, more of a little haven where we get in and focus more."

John, from the TSG, had this to say about his past and what was immediately before him: "I think I'm kind of remembering, recovering, who I am. I've started writing again, and it's been a while since I've done that. The last several years, maybe once a year, I've thought, maybe I'll write a little something. In the last few weeks here I've done more than I have for a while. I'm still in that stage of life where I'm still trying to figure a lot out, like my desires and ambitions, with career and things like that. I feel like I'm starting to get more direction. I had been at a crossroads, trying to decide if I wanted to do something different entirely. I was waiting for that decision to come in and hopefully give me some clarity . . . .That really scared me and excited me at the same

time. To say what it is I want to do, and to say what it is and to work for it. That's incredibly freeing to me. I've been kind of enjoying just being me. With my teaching and my students too, just be a little less self-conscious. Go in and be me, and it will be good. Maybe not perfect, definitely not perfect, but it will be alright. It's been uncomfortable and it's been good."

John also had this to say in response to a question of mine about varied states of consciousness. "I don't know if this is what you're describing, but when I'm deeper, with my eyes closed, breathing, there's like a new setting. It's finding an open space. It was kind of gray and kind of white, and don't know what else. I can kind of get back to it faster now. It sounds kind of cheesy the more I talk about it, but it's like there's another setting available aside from the physical."

It seemed to me as if John is describing a transformative state of consciousness which allows for healing. Remember, as Wilber says, "Consciousness is not anything itself, just the degree of openness or emptiness, the clearing in which the phenomena of the various lines appear (but consciousness is not itself a phenomenon—it is the space in which the phenomena arise)."[185]

Cathy shared a similar experience of an altered state of consciousness. "I had lit a candle; I was praying. As I was praying I could feel this rise in me. At first it felt good; then it scared the heck out of me, because I opened my eyes and I came back down. It was a good experience but it was a scary experience. If I keep going, I still want to be down here for a while. But that's what went through my head; it was just a very different type of experience than anything I've ever had."

---

[185] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 65.

Steve also shared his transformative experience in this way: “I always wanted to grow up and be like by dad. He was an ex-Marine, direct, strict, to the point. You don’t take advice; you give advice. I was that way. It was, follow me. Now, it’s like, man, pull the reigns back and let’s just ease over this deal. I feel like I’m doing the right thing. I feel like I’m giving more to my family. I enjoy most of the time I’m with them, and it wasn’t always that way. I just want to feel good. I don’t have to be at the top and I don’t want to be at the bottom. If I can just slide on through the middle somewhere, and just be okay with everything, I feel pretty confident, you know? . . . Serenity, to me, you know, I just want to live. You know? Drug addiction and alcoholism never let me live, and now I can be free. Enjoy things, enjoy life . . .”

I offered, “It ends the “what if-ing” to death?”

Steve responded, “Yes, it is. Why do I want to spend all this unnecessary energy on stuff that’s not going to get me anywhere anyway?” At this point Steve and I discussed a recent suicide in AA of a person we had both known and the need to simply accept it, not obsess and “what if” it to death.

Steve reflectively offered, “It’s yours God. That’s what goes on with ninety percent of the day. I don’t have that much control over anything. I few things, yes. I understand that. But that’s the joy of it, just being able to say okay, here we go. I don’t have to worry about it, you know? I’m in such a better place, I believe, than I’ve ever been in my life. It isn’t just one thing. It’s part of the program; it’s part of this; it’s part of God. It’s the whole deal.”

It appears to me that significant shifts were made in a relatively short amount of time when it came to awareness regarding traumatic personal events, daily anxiety and

neurosis, and a sense of acceptance and what would fit my previously offered definition of healing. Both groups were forthcoming, with a higher degree of excitement and enthusiasm when these areas of their stories were examined.

Open Group Experience

Each week the research participant group met in the context of a larger group setting (the dates, times and composition of these weekly gatherings are found in appendix I). The TSG open Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, on Wednesday evenings at seven p.m., often only contained the research participants. Others from the recovery community attended from time to time, but the numbers were not largely significant. Conversely, the CIRG was larger and more diverse. The age range in this group was from eighteen years old to a person in her early eighties. Also several denominations were represented, especially in the early weeks of the gatherings.

The TSG was not concerned initially with the attendance at the opening AA meeting group gatherings being contained to almost exclusively the research participant group. A general mood of trust and intimacy was building and there was a "respectful" nature about the process that some were concerned would not exist in a much larger gathering. Tom expressed this concern: ". . . the anonymity thing, that could bother some, maybe even me." These feeling shifted, however, as the end of the pre-designated research period drew to its conclusion. Steve offered, "I'd like to see a bigger group. You know, it's fine and dandy with six or seven people for a while. But, just like a regular meeting it's nice always to have new blood. It's nice to be able to share my experience and how I've come to this point, to enjoy this."

The CIRG seemed to comment more regularly about the open group gatherings held on Thursday evenings at seven p.m. Rick remarked, “For me I’d like to see everyone get comfortable enough to share [speaking about the contemplative Bible reading portion]. I can see them thinking, ‘Ya, I’ve got something to say, but I’m not sure; I’m not going to.’ I think that’s why the group session means so much more to me.”

I asked, “Can you think of a way to invite that, more open sharing?”

Rick replied, “I think, I think people are just that way. Once you get to know people, you’ll say what’s on your mind.”

Lisa offered, “I think it’s wonderful that people are attending who aren’t members of the church.”

Elizabeth chimed in and said, “And that could be holding them back a little right now because they aren’t as comfortable.” And she continued in a later interview saying, “I’m impressed, or amazed; you know, there are quite a few of us who are comfortable with being here. This is our church; this is our space. I’m amazed and I’m pleased that people are coming into the midst, coming from outside and beyond our community. They seem like they fit right in, that they feel comfortable.” Rachel’s take was that the group gatherings seemed to encourage her.

Both groups, the CIRG and the TSG, empathetically affirmed the comfort, safety and necessity of the weekly, open group gatherings. It seemed to assist them in a shared relational experience within the research participant group and in a greater context. Further, it created an accountability function which all research participants found helpful and beneficial.

Adjustments in the Process and Its Potential Future

An essential part of the research and analysis of a project and the selected methodology of Participatory Action Research (PAR) is that the research participants have a strong, clear voice in the direction we take. Both groups had repeated opportunities to alter or change the process. It was my intention from the first week to entertain all ideas to alter the process. During the twelve weeks (fourteen actual calendar weeks in total) no direct suggestions to alter the sequence or content of the weekly process were provided though these were actively solicited. Though many experienced difficulty with consistently maintaining their personal disciplines, attendance at the weekly gatherings was excellent. No one research participant missed more than two sessions. When asked directly what could be changed or altered, the reply was substantively it is working well as it is.

Both groups in the closing session were asked the question, "How would you change the process to make it more effective? The CIRG responded this way:

Lisa began saying, "I had no expectations. . . I like the way it went."

Elizabeth joined, "I'm kind of like, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. I like your voice; for someone who has such a commanding voice, a powerful voice, it changes dramatically when we're doing the yoga and our meditation. It's very soothing. The way it's presented is very non-threatening. For people who are doing something new, it's very important. For me, it was like, whoa, I'm not going to fail at it because this isn't a pass/ fail thing. It was a very calming and a non-threatening environment."

Jeff added, "I'm happy with the way everything has been. I can't think of anything that needs changed."

Rick interjected, “I’d get rid of the background noise. [We used Gregorian chant during yoga and meditation, played very softly] Yes, I’d go silent, silent with the meditation.”

Lisa responded, “Really? See, and I think at home that’s why those ten minutes, or whatever, seems as if it is a little longer than it is here because I like the, I like the chant.”

I added at this point. “Here’s a moment of confession; that was initially going to be the process, silence during the meditation. I left the chant on by accident the first night during meditation. But, since I did it the first night, I left it that way.”

Jeff said, “I like it too. Yes, I was glad it was there.”

Elizabeth offered her observations: “I guess when I get into it, I’m okay. But when it first starts for some strange reason, I try to put some sort of a tune to it.”

Rachel added, “I liked the order; that would have been the order I’d have chosen. I wouldn’t have too many suggestions for changes. I think about how we might want to have a running group to do the same thing [laughing].” Little was offered to change or alter the style and content of the weekly meetings or the overall process.

The TSG had these observations when presented with the same question:

Brenda, often the first to respond, said, “My only thought is if the lights were dimmer. When I meditate I like dim lights.”

Tom express this sentiment: “I was hoping there’d be more participation, more people [this was a different response when compared with the initial interview where Tom felt the attendance level was good]. I would have liked to have seen this grow. It’s worth investigating.”

Cathy offered, “I do feel we became a community within our community. We all experienced different things happening to us than we’ve had before. Also, more personal sharing.”

Jennifer said, “I don’t know that’d I’d have changed anything. If I continue this at home, I might change some things there, but you explained it very well. I think it was the right amount of time for everything. At first [laughing] I thought ten minutes of meditation was going to be a bit much. I adapted to that [laughing].”

Cathy laughingly said, “That’s another thing now; the alarm goes off and I think, ‘Geez, that wasn’t ten minutes.’ It’s so different [compared to when she began].”

Tom voiced agreement: “I think it would be advantageous to expand it, go further [the time for silent meditation]. Like for me, when I sit down, like you mentioned that one time, it takes time just to settle in. It takes about seven of that ten minutes just to get quieted down. I wonder if prolonging it wouldn’t work better.”

John suggested this: “In terms of changes, and this is something you have to learn by doing anyway, so, it took me a couple of times during the meditation time to figure out which method to use. I finally landed on a mantra; how to kind of silence that with my breathing and how that all works. I don’t know if a little more explanation on that would have been helpful or not. About the time, one day I set my timer on my phone but I forgot to take it off mute. I went twenty minutes. After about, oh I guess fifteen, I began to think something’s not right here. Well, I’ll just keep going; it will go off. You’re just having a distracted day or something. I finally looked and my timer was flashing on my phone and the ten minutes was over by ten minutes. Well, okay, I can go twenty minutes!”

Steve's only comment was, "I don't know that I'd do anything differently."

Consistent with the experience of the CIRG, the TSG suggested little of concrete substance that each felt needed to change or be altered.

The final question for both groups was "Where would you like to see the process go from here?" Again, this is consistent with the selected methodology of PAR. Both groups strongly voiced hope the weekly gatherings would continue and their personal desire for growth in their own personal practice and discipline. The CIRG voiced hope that more would attend from the congregation of First Presbyterian Church. Some from the CIRG thought that, perhaps, we should do some yoga in worship. All of the CIRG thought Lectio Divina style of reading of scripture might be a good thing in the context of weekly Sunday worship.

There was, however, a general reluctance on behalf of the CIRG to take any portion of a leadership role in the general weekly group gatherings. I asked them directly if anyone felt comfortable leading and the general consensus was "no." This is in contrast to the TSG. After the research period had concluded I went on vacation and another member of the research participant group led the meeting that evening. This has also occurred a few times after the research period ended.

As I previously stated, the TSG wanted to see the weekly open AA meeting continue. There was concern expressed about the general low level of involvement beyond the research participant group. Several felt it was because yoga was involved. One participant suggest we drop the label "yoga" and simply call it "stretching."

Both groups, the CIRG and the TSG, continued to function after the designated research period. To conclude this portion of our story, let us turn to the observations of

two persons with clinical psychological and therapeutic training and extensive backgrounds in chemical dependency.

Clinical Observations

Two persons, Otto Schultz and Renee Duffek, were asked to provide their observation and listen to the audio recordings of the interviews of the participant research groups. Otto Schultz is a recently retired chaplain with decades of service at a chemical dependency recovery center, the Independence Center in Lincoln, Nebraska. He is an ordained Evangelical Lutheran pastor with a Master of Divinity and is a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LADC). Renee Duffek has a Master of Science in Community Counseling and is a Licensed Mental Health Professional with a focus in her practice on spirituality and spiritual growth. She is also an LADC. Neither was present when the interviews were recorded and therefore could not determine body language, eye contact and general, observable demeanor of the research participants.

The reason two clinically trained professionals were asked to provide their thoughts and feeling was the research contained is, as I have stated, integrated in nature. I believe all of life is spiritual in content and the whole of existence is integral in essence. Recall Ken Wilber's four quadrant diagram and his perspective on integrated life (see figure 1.1 and 1.2). Renee's and Otto's thoughts and input from a clinical, therapeutic vantage point in this process were helpful in rounding out this portion of an integrated story.

Otto Schultz

Otto's general observations of the process and interaction are these. Otto said, "I felt people from each group appear to have been drawn to a greater level of intimacy

within themselves and with each other because of their shared experience. It appears that they are also feeling some connections across the two groups though the two groups never met together and knew very little of each other."

Regarding the CIRG, Otto suggested "that the instructor's coaching for both yoga and meditation appeared helpful and supportive. The reactions of the group appear to be reality-based – e.g., '…handling some of life's craziness better…' or '…meditation helps with mind-racing…'" He further stated that it seemed to him the group "experienced this environment as '…nurturing and safe…'" Otto also said, "I felt that the instructor several times needed to reinforce the idea that people may give up judging themselves." He continued by saying, "Group members seemed to feel comfortable sharing about their struggles in learning to use these experiences."

Otto also observed, "These are significantly more intimate [the sharing in the CIRG interview group] than most worship experiences. In my experience these gatherings are more intimate than any formal worship experiences which I've experienced."

In regard to the TSG he noted, "they spoke of this experience as having helped with anxiety, not by decreasing the anxiety, but by empowering him or herself to deal with it better." Otto felt "The group became closer and more vulnerable to each other." He also observed, "Challenges were similar to the 'Christian' group when it came to doing the sequence on their own, finding the right time and place, getting their minds quieted." He observed that "they all seemed to feel the yoga poses helped them to move into meditation. It made centering easier." He noted, "One participant voiced repeatedly that he does not understand his own resistance to the process." Adding another

reflection, he said, “I felt this group also experienced their time together as a time that is safe. It’s a discipline but it is not yet a habit.”

Otto also noted, “The CIRG group made references to scripture and worship which the TSG group did not.” He said, “The uniform experience that these folks are having with yoga and meditation on a regular basis is as one would expect, quite positive.” He wondered and suggested that “it would be interesting to see how people carry forward these practices after a year or more.”

Renee Duffek

Renee noted that there was “a movement with the TSG from a higher level of anxiety in the early weeks into becoming a closely knit, trusting group in its conclusion.” She also observed “a movement in comfort with yoga and meditation.” She further commented that there was “a struggle of some throughout to maintain a consistent discipline.” Renee offered, “Over time there appears to be a greater willingness to surrender and release control and allowing God to navigate [in the TSG].”

Renee’s comments about the final interview session with the TSG were these. “The interviewees had a noted identification of a more conscious effort and awareness of self and others.” She continued saying, “There wasn’t a great sense of being addicted to chaos and trying to control. I heard insight and introspection. I also heard a desire to transform and control translated into serenity and peace instead of obsessing about the outcome and how to change it was present and there was acceptance.” Renee said, “Generally speaking, I heard a decrease in anxiety and fear. The members of this group seemed to identify how they can use this as a daily way to decrease stress and emotional pain.” She also felt this group encountered “enlightenment and a deeper level of

consciousness. It seemed that less ego was present and an increase in compassion towards others appeared. I felt that some emotions which some may have been blocking were released and triggered. I feel that each needed to be aware of them."

In her discussion of the first two interviews of the CIRG, Renee offered, "This group held some judgmental attitudes toward yoga and difficulty in the utilization of the practice." She felt, "Fears were present and also anxiety about showing vulnerability." Renee said, "Initially, I did not hear a lot of trust in this group. It seemed some research participants appeared hesitant to share their experiences. I feel, to some degree, this continued through the halfway point of the process." Renee continued saying, "Although they were able to find benefits to the practice, some of the research participants seemed not to be forthcoming and sounded reserved when giving feedback. I heard difficulties of participants in shutting their minds off." She did, however, say that as time progressed, "I heard more confidence in the process. Comfort and surprise surfaced and each discovered that by engaging in the yoga and meditation process gave them peace. The members seemed to like participating together instead of by themselves."

In the concluding interview of the CIRG research participants, Renee said, "I still heard about time constraints from some of the participants, though the structure and accountability of the group gatherings was good. Many seemed to have reservations about fully expressing oneself; these reservations were still present. There were varied degrees in levels of consciousness, and some seemed guarded, while others seemed focused and advanced in consciousness. The group focused on their bodies and having a better awareness. I did not hear a lot of insight and introspection from this group. All the

members seemed to have time constraints." Renee also said, "Peace and relaxation were identified."

Renee's concluding remarks were these. "Both groups seem to have progressed to having benefits from the yoga and meditation and defenses seemed to decrease. The TSG had more of a willingness to be more emotionally driven and showed more advanced consciousness and a deeper connection. The CIRG saw the benefits of relaxation, however, did not verbalize any deeper consciousness about themselves. They did, however, like the connection between the yoga, meditation, and the scripture. This study was very interesting and the concept needs to continue. It's a compliment to you [the researcher] that both groups want to continue to practice and want to incorporate this into their daily routines."

Concluding Comments

I believe that a gift was given to me and to all who read this story. Eleven people made the commitment to explore in a disciplined fashion previously unknown space. This takes courage, trust and a willingness to take a risk and enter vulnerability. None, including me, could have visualized with comprehensive accuracy the outcome. For many in western culture, and for most in my current context, to participate in the harmonious, integrated practice of gentle yoga, meditation and contemplative reflection is a bold step. The quantity of material the eight interviews provided was enormous, and I have attempted, to the best of my ability, to distill it faithfully into a manageable portion which can provide a faithful rendering of a deeper, more detailed comprehension of what took place.

In the following chapter I will take what I have written, including the courageous story told above, and reflect on what I have heard. As with all stories, the concluding chapter will attempt to contain but not necessarily resolve the mystery, wonder, awe, surprise and paradox of any worthwhile narrative. Life, as I understand it, is an integral whole. Surrender into the whole brings fullness to all of existence personally and to the greater community. As Bourgeault says, "The word surrender itself means to 'hand oneself over' or 'entrust oneself.' It is not about outer capitulation but about inner opening. It is always voluntary, and rather than an act of weakness, it is always an act of strength."[186]

[186] Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way*, 72.

Chapter Five

Assessment, Conclusions, and Further Possibilities for Exploration

Introduction

A story, a narrative, was told in the previous pages which was framed by the research question, *"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and a fuller life in the participants?"* It is a story that rests, I believe, at the bedrock of human existence. It is a story of the human desire, the yearning for and seeking, to return to the image of God in which we are created. I also accept as axiomatic that this desire is an enacted response to the gift of grace. I believe our stories, personal and communal, are shared stories. I assume that each personal human story is informed in part by the stories of others, and we also write our story onto the hearts and into the stories of others.

Further, it is my belief that our stories are distorted in fallen existence. Still, I perceive there remains a longing for healing and restoration. As our stories unfold, we write them chapter by chapter. I believe that what was written previously may uplift and enliven the next chapter of our life. On the other hand, it could produce decay and create atrophy in the "image of God" imprinted within each person. I have expressed my belief that all stories are multifaceted, including diverse and varied forms of trauma. Our stories further reveal, in my opinion, that development takes places in stages, in chapters, over the course of time. Our story envelopes the whole of one's being. It is an integral whole and contains Living Breath. It carries Spirit. The whole of existence, I believe, in its essence is "spiritual" in nature.

The image and metaphor of "story" is not limited solely to human existence. God, as I understand and have presented God, exists in the same nature, within the living metaphor of story. God is THE STORY as I have come to understand God. God is dynamic as story is dynamic. Further, I experience and have presented God, THE STORY, as One who continually draws us back toward our true self. My contact and encounter with God is largely held within the image of THE STORY. THE STORY is the One who is writing, creating and recreating, always. I believe the dynamic nature of THE STORY is clearly identified in God's self given name, I WILL CAUSE/CREATE, WHAT I WILL CAUSE/CREATE, in the story of the call of Moses.

As THE STORY writes and invites us toward reunion and divine interaction, I believe part of that experience is also an invitation into silence. In silence I think we have the opportunity to accept the invitation to "lay down our arms and quit fighting," to "let go," and encounter a new and preferred script guided by the hand of the Spirit. But there is more. Another facet of our story is a continuing invitation into new and life affirming behaviors. We write new chapters which are enacted and embodied as well as being intellectual in their manifestation.

I accept that The Word became flesh, not only an idea, axiom, confession, or dogma. The metaphor of "The Word" is, in my opinion, a reflection of God as THE STORY. I cannot escape my belief that the incarnation is a story of God's living, active desire for healing. I have come to believe that in its essence the entirety of our story, our narrative, is about healing and a journey toward the true self. I believe it is about becoming whole through the ongoing grace and invitation of THE STORY, the living

God, to grow into new creation. My personal understanding of this leads to what I consider an encounter with the Kingdom of God which is at hand.

Healing and a Movement Toward Wholeness

The entirety of this research could fall under the heading of "healing" as I defined the word. I believe that "healing" extends well beyond "cure," though these terms are commonly and incorrectly used as interchangeable. There can be "cure" and "healing" not take place. Conversely, "healing" can take place beyond the presence and possibility of "cure." L. Robert Keck expresses what I believe and accept about the concepts of "healing" and "cure."

> - *Healing* involves the process of one's total body/mind/spirit moving towards health, wholeness, and holiness. It involves an escalation of meaning and purpose, growth and development. It is an appreciation of mystery and an experience of the miraculous.
> - *Curing*, on the other hand, is a medical term for the prolonged absence of a particular physical disease diagnosis.[187]

This definition is consistent with previous depictions of the concept of "healing" as opposed to "cure." I have stipulated healing is a holistic concept which comes into contact with restoration of the whole of what it means to be human. I think it is difficult to discuss any portion of this story, this research, beyond an interpretation of "healing." Still, I think it is possible to provide a more focused, direct understanding of what can, and in my opinion, should be portrayed as "healing."

In my opinion both groups, the *Christian Institutional Religious Group* (CIRG) and the *Twelve Step Group* (TSG), encountered what I have defined as "healing." I believe physical healing was evident. Participants acknowledged varied types of physical healing as reported through their participation as revealed in improved body flexibility,

---

[187] L. Robert Keck, *Healing as a Sacred Path* (West Chester: Chrysalis Books, 2002), xiv.

reduction in chronic joint pain, and improved sleep patterns. Rick, from the CIRG, spoke of a dramatic reduction in his blood pressure readings. He also told of increased body awareness which he felt arose from his involvement with yoga. Others spoke of the same type of body awareness, a shift in awareness which had not existed beforehand. Elizabeth jokingly reflected on her experience with the opening segment of "grounding" in the yoga sequence. During the initial phase of our yoga sequence a body "inventory" is performed which is called "grounding." She reported how she felt that every part of her body "hurt" and laughed as she said she did not like "grounding." However, she continued to say that this portion of the sequence made her much more aware of her body as being part of her whole being.

It is my interpretation that the CIRG addressed the physical aspects of "healing" more often and in more detail when compared to the TSG. This was not necessarily a surprise to me, but it was not something I anticipated either. Conversation regarding the physical aspects of healing were not absent from the TSG. For example, John laughingly commented on a physical discovery that he needed yoga because he felt he was too young to be as tight and constricted as he felt physically. It is not that the TSG never addressed the physical aspects of the process and experience of healing, but in my interpretation they did not appear as focused on physical restoration when compared to the CIRG.

I imagine a reason for a more pronounced focus of the CIRG on the physical encounter of healing might be because all of the members of this group were more intentionally engaged in physical activity in their daily routines. All the members of the CIRG are members at the local Wellness Center (gym) and Rachel is also a runner. Only

Cathy and Jennifer from the TSG regularly participate in organized, structured intentional physical activity. Whatever the reason might be, both groups, in my opinion, reported the physical benefit of "healing" from the integrated process of gentle yoga, silent meditation and contemplative reading and reflection.

It is also my belief that beyond the physical experience of healing, healing took place in other forms. I heard both groups, TSG and CIRG, broadly report that each experienced a calming effect in their lives. Steve, from the TSG, spoke extensively about his personal history regarding work, family and self and his previous desire to "control" all facets of his life. This desire, as he said, then created an enormous amount of internal strain and stress. He reported, however, a significant shift in his outlook. This shift took place during the research period. Steve reported that he became far more accepting of himself and others. He said that he discovered that he could not separate his life into compartments. Steve divulged that the internal stress in one area flowed into others. It appears to me that his participation in this process brought an awareness of this reality in an embodied form. He was physically more at ease. Steve's comments were not isolated in this arena of experience. Members of the CIRG also reported similar experiences, though in my estimation the CIRG was not as forthcoming with explicit detailing as Steve or the TSG in general.

The results the physical and calming effects of the "healing" process reported in the corpus of this qualitative research are also reflected in what is often labeled as "objective" or "quantitative" research. In a neurological study conducted in 2005, researchers found that ". . . by becoming increasingly more aware of sensory stimuli during formal practice [yoga and meditation], the meditation practitioner is gradually able

to use this self-awareness to more successfully navigate through potentially stressful encounters that arise throughout the day."[188] Further, the reported physical effects of better sleep, improved body awareness and calming were also found in quantitative, objective medical studies as they are tied to respiration. "One of the effects of regular meditation practice is a significant drop in respiration rate during practice."[189] This holds true for the practice of yoga with focused awareness on breathing. Breath/respiration rates and stress are integrally connected in human existence.

I anticipated a shift in life experience as a result of this process. What I did not necessarily anticipate was the accelerated level of the shift in the experience of calming. For me, this is particularly the case in the reported levels of stress reduction. Viewed from the perspective of the research participant's life span, the structured research duration contained in this project is miniscule. Yet, despite several members of both groups reporting higher levels of stress and tension when they entered the research period, all spoke of what I consider to be a significant drop in stress and a deeper experience of "calm."

I now wonder if a more prolonged, integrated practice would induce even more significant levels of stress reduction and a calming effect. It also generates other questions for me. I am asking myself if as a person quiets himself or herself internally, could this produce an environment which allows greater clarity within and then extend

---

[188] Sara W. Lazar, et al., "Meditation Experience is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness," *Neuroreport* 16, no. 17 (November 2005): 1896, http://nslc.wustl.edu/courses/Bio3411/woolsey/Readings/Lecture11/Lazar%20NeurRep'05.pdf 9 (accessed July 7, 2016).

[189] Sara W. Lazar, et al., "Functional Brain Mapping of Relaxation Response to Meditation,"*Neuroreport* 2, no. 7 (May 2000): 1582, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.457.7125&rep=rep1&type=pdf (accessed July 7, 2016).

into the world? Could this form of clarity lead to a different interpretation of his or her context and connection with others and the whole of creation? When one considers the significantly higher levels of distrust, fracture, anger and inability to "hear" another in our present societal context, these are, in my opinion, important questions for the church and pastors in the twenty-first century.

Trauma and Healing

Within each group, the CIRG and the TSG, a significant level of trauma existed. Traumatic events in the personal life experience of the research participants included incarceration, experiences of suicide, premature death of children and grandchildren, sexual abuse, and significant levels of family dysfunction. Also, there is always the day in and day out debilitating exposure to fractured humanity and the human condition.

As I reflected on what I heard from persons in each group, I realized it was, in a sense, a revelation from several participants of what I interpret to be previously buried or repressed feelings and emotions which were set free and to a significant degree brought to the surface. The "removal" of such emotions and feelings from their conscious existences is consistent with the experience of trauma as presented in this work. The ability to access more freely and find expression of these feelings and emotions can, and in my opinion should, be considered a manifestation of healing.

Cathy and Brenda, from the TSG, reported a more free-flowing experience of grief. Steve and others addressed encounters with suicide and the feelings of loss associated with such traumatic events. The emotions of anger and grief because of broken family relationships were expressed in both groups. In my observation and generally speaking, the TSG was more open in the general discussion of this intimate area of

healing. Otto Schultz and more particularly Renee Duffek shared my opinion in this regard. That does not mean, however, such feelings did not arise in the CIRG. These may have manifested themselves in more subtle ways which I did not perceive or detect. I think it would take more time and a longer process and research period to definitively say whether or not such feelings were extensively present within the members of the CIRG.

I previously introduced the theological perspective of the need to "remain" as understood and interpreted by Shelly Rambo. She expresses this through her exegesis of the event of the cross as well as those who fled its shadow. Bessel Van der Kolk in his medical work and research with trauma spoke of a "bottom up" approach to healing that re-introduced wholeness from the brain stem and physical engagement leading toward a place of greater acceptance and ability to cope within the conscious brain. I surmise the exposure of the two groups, the TSG and CIRG, communicates, to some degree, a shift in their ability to "remain," which comes from a "bottom up" approach to healing introduced by the sequence of gentle yoga, silent meditation, and contemplative reflection.

What I interpret from the reporting of research participants in both groups, TSG and CIRG, is the experience of healing from pre-existing trauma. I am not suggesting a complete transition occurred and all members of each group are now free from the historic trauma of their lives. Nor am I suggesting this process necessarily takes the place of other and varied approaches to healing which are based in religious faith or clinical/medical therapies. What I do believe, based on the reported findings, is that the Spirit moves more freely when not blocked by the false self which generates walls and constricts persons and groups from looking more deeply within. I believe this research

demonstrates that the integrated process of "body/silence/conscious brain" creates fertile ground for "healing" as I understand the term. I believe that the integrated process of yoga/meditation/contemplative reflection facilitates a journey toward the true self and a glimpse of our created nature in God's image.

Relationship with God

All participants in both groups had a belief in "God." Although Alcoholics Anonymous only calls for its members to accept a "power greater than ourselves" or "Higher Power," all research participants in the TSG claimed "God" as their Higher Power and, to varying degrees, were influenced by institutional Christian religious faith. That having been said, the concept suggested by Alcoholics Anonymous of a God "of our understanding," in my exposure and life's journey is not limited only to AA. I accept as reality the concept of a God "of our understanding" as part of the human experience. I believe it is nearly impossible, if not impossible, to step completely beyond a "God of our understanding" and this is part of the human condition. To some degree, I believe, we all create God in our own image. Further, it is also my opinion that it is part and parcel of the dynamic nature of God as I have previously described my understanding of God. Therefore, I believe the experiences presented in this research reflect the wide variety of concepts and constructs of God present in the whole of created humanity.

Members in both groups reported a shift in their relationships with God. The details of this reported shift were widely varied. Some, such as Jeff from the CIRG, had to be specifically prompted to ascertain any shift in their relationships with God. Even after prompting, his reporting was short and I would say cursory in nature. Others, such as Brenda who is a member of the TSG, introduced a shift in her relationship with God at

each gathering even when a direct question leading to such a discussion was absent. Generally speaking it is my estimation that the TSG participants were more directly engaged in conversation about their personal relationships with God when compared to the CIRG.

Members of each group did discuss how yoga and meditation had shifted their experience or relationship with God. The bodily encounter with yoga was reported to allow for easier entry into silence. Though this terminology was not specifically used by the research participants, I believe the yoga sequence was a subconscious "paving the road" in an incarnational manner for a freer experience with one's relationship with God as encountered in silence. Jim Marion contends, "We grow spiritually in the body as the yogis have known for centuries. . . .We cannot neglect the body, overruling it with the mind. Doing so during the Age of Reason has caused immense damage to Western psyches."[190] Both groups, the CIRG and the TSG, reported that yoga created an environment that made the silence of meditation a "gentler" transition and experience for each.

Several participants remarked about the aspect of "letting go" and allowing God to move more freely in their existences. Further, participants spoke of God "changing" in their perceptions and how each engaged God in daily life. Brenda, of the TSG, described how her relationship and experience of God had shifted, but also she expressed belief that this was a sign of a lively and ongoing growth in that relationship. John, of the TSG, discussed the unsettling nature of his relationship with God. He reported a shifting of his "image" of God and who God was and was becoming for him.

---

[190] Jim Marion, *The Death of the Mythic God: The Rise of Evolutionary Spirituality* (Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2004), 126.

I believe it is acceptable to trace these experiences to the concept of "surrender" which I also believe is facilitated by this integral process. In the last chapter I submitted, "The word surrender itself means to 'hand oneself over' or 'entrust oneself.' It is not about outer capitulation but about inner opening. It is always voluntary, and rather than an act of weakness, it is always an act of strength."[191] What I believe is described in this research is a surrender, a release and movement in varied degrees and experience, from a more static concept of God to one which is more fluid and alive within. Steve, of the TSG, spoke of this when he talked about God not being detached and a third person experience but as a part of who he is as a human being. Paul Smith says, "God is less like an object and more like a process—the Creative Urge and Evolutionary Impulse."[192]

It appears to me that the CIRG participants primarily focused their conversations about a personal relationship with God primarily through the Lectio Divina portion of the process. The Lectio Divina phase provided the majority of the discussion of God and relationship with God when compared to the general, individual responses from the TSG members when reflecting on their relationships with God. However, this should not be discounted. Rachel recounted that her experience with hearing scripture read in the context of the integral process of yoga, meditation and Lectio Divina reading/reflection was deeper and more enriching when compared to her exposure to Bible reading in Sunday morning worship. The TSG did not appear to have the same response to the readings from the book *Came to Believe*.

---

[191] Bourgeault, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, 72.

[192] Paul R. Smith, *Integral Christianity: The Spirit's Call to Evolve* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2011), 176.

It appears to me both groups, to varying degrees among the participants, experienced growth in their comprehension of God as a loving presence. In my observation conversations in the weekly, open group settings reflected the same experience. This is interesting in that this supposition from both groups, the CIRG and TSG, arose in the open settings as well as the interview periods. I say this because many in Alcoholics Anonymous openly express, particularly when reflecting on their drinking days, the experience of a God who was not caring, kept score and was vengeful. I think the same can be said of the Reformed Tradition of Christianity with its often intentional focus on "purity" of behavior. It seems to me this experience, a relationship with God which is more than intellectually but a viscerally loving presence, eases entry into healing and new life promised in Christ. Remember, Jesus said, "the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21 KJV).

I argue this was further facilitated by the integral process of gentle yoga, silent meditation, and contemplative reflection. I also think that this is necessary to gain an embodied presence, and it becomes an essential component in the human ability to look beyond one's self and toward the entirety of creation. Bishop Desmond Tutu wrote, "Yet before you can love your neighbor—your brother or sister—as yourself, you must first love yourself. And to first love yourself, you must know that God loves you now and loves you always."[193]

I found it interesting that the CIRG participants were generally more subdued, even reluctant, in the discussion of their personal experiences of God when compared to the TSG. Both Renee Duffek and Otto Schultz made similar observations. I wonder if this

[193] Desmond Tutu, *God Has A Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 26.

is because of the tradition, as part of the Presbyterian Church (USA), where such intimate conversation and sharing is not all that common. Still, it needs to be noted that Otto Schultz, a pastor and chaplain, commented that he felt the sharing and intimacy in the CIRG exceeded any formal worship setting which he has experienced. However, I continue to have to ask myself if this would be the same experience and reporting of verbal expression of personal relationship with God if the CIRG were drawn from another tradition of Christian faith such as Pentecostal or Evangelical?

There is little doubt in my mind that a shift in relationship with God took place in both groups. Perhaps the differences in sharing, as described in the preceding paragraph, arose from a "comfort level" for those in Twelve Step recovery programs where such sharing is generally more common. Regardless of the reason or source, I do believe the process of gentle yoga, meditation, and contemplative reflection provide a foundation for a deepened, and necessarily altered, relationship with God.

Relationship with Self and Others

It is my opinion that much of what I have described above also expresses an altered articulation and enactment of a relationship with self. From the physical changes and calming experiences of most, if not all, to those who appear to have encountered shifts which created transcendent moments reported by a few, the research participant's understanding of "who" each was, in my opinion, changed.

One simple yet concrete example of this shift was each participant's adherence to her/his commitment to stick with the process throughout the entire duration of the project. This seems to me to be especially clear when you consider the self-expressed heightened level of anxiety many spoke of when each came to the first night's gathering. I confess

that I thought to myself before the research began that at least one person from each group would discontinue participation despite her/his previous commitment. For me, my guessed "drop out" of at least one participant from each group was drawn from previous experience and my pre-supposition about the context in which we live. To my surprise, not only did all participants remain throughout the research period, but attendance remained high. It is possible that this surprising discovery says more about my pre-drawn conclusion than the research participants shift in self. But I do not believe that is the case. I believe all research participants remained because each experienced an authentic visceral and intellectual transformation of self. The personal reporting of his/her experience appears to me to verify and support this belief.

Another example of the shift in "self" was the participant's reported experience of ability and encounter with stillness both within yoga and meditation. Each group, the CIRG and TSG, unanimously reported a shift in anxiety, "skill" and an altered encounter with these two areas of the process. As I mentioned above, most reported a higher level of anxiety with the initial encounters with these disciplines. Also, it was generally reported that it was difficult to remain "still" during the meditation period in the initial weeks of the research period. All participants recounted how, over the research period duration, they became quite comfortable with process of yoga and an increased ability to quickly transition into the silence of mediation. "Busyness" of brain and body was reported to have calmed suggesting an increase in ability to remain focused and present.

It is my opinion that these practices and the accompanying cessation or lessening of distraction and agitation carried over into other aspects of their lives. Rick and Elizabeth from the CIRG both told of how their intentional prayer lives had shifted and

became more natural. Tom, from the TSG, spoke of the ability to gently confront issues he had avoided, and then after the confrontation, let them go. Tom also spoke of his ability to avoid rapid entry into the emotion of anger and the desire to "fight" in many situations. Brenda of the TSG talked about her increased ability to create space between her thoughts and what she actually spoke. She also told of how she can now more easily walk away from situations which, in her mind, do not require her involvement.

As was the case with the expressed relationship with God, the TSG participants were more forthcoming with intimate details of their experiences of self, as it appeared to me. This observation is, again, corroborated by the clinical observations of Renee Duffek and Otto Schultz. It is possible, as I have previously written, that persons from the CIRG may have reported differently if they were from a different Christian religious tradition. By comparison, as I have said before, such intimate conversations concerning self are frequent at Twelve Step meetings and therefore a greater comfort level comfort concerning this area of existence may already have existed for the research participants from this group.

Several participants reported a distinct transformation in their relationships with others. John, who is a self-described introvert, told of wanting to be with other people more often and was more comfortable with participation in general group gatherings. Tom and Cathy talked with palpable, positive energy about interactions with strangers on a human, caring level. Jeff and Lisa commented on becoming more "jealous" of their time and not remaining involved with those who insist on being negative.

Change was evident not only with "strangers" or "friends" but in closer, personal, family relationships. Lisa told of her interaction with her husband under the stress of a

remodeling and move to a new house and the more positive manner which was sustained as the couple undertook the project. Steve addressed a continuing positive growth in depth and affection with his wife and family. Tom, Rachel, Brenda, and Cathy all addressed not needing to intercede or interact with "family drama," and to allow those situations and relationships to work themselves out. It is my belief that this process has opened the participants to a broader acceptance of the humanity of others and a heightened ability to empathize with another's condition.

This form of empathy may arise, in my estimation, from the introduction of the practiced art of remaining in the present moment and an increased ability to "see" what is happening. Combining these three practices, yoga, meditation, and contemplative reflection, in my opinion is a disciplined method of entering the "whole" of existence beyond what only the conscious brain is pre-conditioned to allow as reality. Eckhart Tolle says, "The present moment holds the key to liberation. But, you cannot find the present moment as long as you are in your mind."[194]

What this potentially brings to the table, in my belief, is space to understand self and others. As I interpret the results of this integrated process, I think it can facilitate growth in the ability to listen authentically and attempt to understand another in the light of understanding oneself and one's relationship with God. This potentially creates an environment where growth in healing and grace can take deeper root and flourish.

When I consider the depth of brokenness and fracture in our current socio-economic, political, racial and religious context, what could be more necessary? Instead of a removed, third person comprehension of God, exposure to the process of gentle yoga, silent meditation and contemplative reflection in sequence appeared to create an

[194]Tolle, 26.

experience for the research participants of a God who is alive within and also a part of each person. This idea, though odd sounding for many in western Christianity, is simply reflective of the Eastern Orthodox concept of "theosis": "In Eastern Orthodoxy deification (**theosis**) is a transformative process whose goal is likeness to or union with God. As a process of transformation, **theosis** is brought about by the effects of katharsis (purification of mind and body) and theoria ('illumination' with the 'vision' of God)."[195]

Further, it seems to me that it removes the concept "heaven" as some faraway location that is to be "earned" and "manipulated" by appropriate beliefs and behaviors. As I have stated previously, the "kingdom of God is within." Cyprian Consiglio writes, "What if heaven is also to be found in our own hearts? . . . When people become aware of this reality—that the kingdom of heaven is inside them—then praying 'the way in,' taking ownership of that reality, becomes a necessity, as it was for the one who found the treasure hidden in the field, or the one who found the pearl of great price and sold everything to buy it."[196] As I understand and interpret the results of this process, the potential application and reported finding contained in this work could to arguable degrees alter the landscape inside the church and within our society.

The Broader Context Discovered

A significant surprise appeared for me when it came to the greater communities' involvement with the process of the synthesis of gentle yoga, silent meditation, and contemplative reflection. The surprise presented itself in the level of participation of others beyond the research participant groups and how persons engaged and participated

---

[195] "Theosis" definition, https://www.google.com/#q=theosis+definition (accessed September 3, 2016).

[196] Cyprian Consiglio, *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart: The Universal Call to Contemplation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 25-26.

in this process in the open, general group gatherings. The open group gatherings which contained the CIRG had a significantly larger as well as broader age range of participation. As identified in the appendices of the previous chapter, the numbers in attendance at the CIRG were higher, with a significant age range, when compared with the open Eleventh Step Alcoholics Anonymous meeting which contained the TSG. Also, there seemed to be more curiosity in the general public about the gentle yoga, silent meditation and Lectio Divina group. Several persons beyond the CIRG who could not participate in these open gatherings for various reasons indicated a desire to become part of the open group meetings in the future. On the other hand, the AA community, beyond the selected research participants, revealed limited involvement. There were some in the AA community, with years of "sobriety," who expressed hostility toward the open Eleventh Step meeting.

I had imagined the converse might be the case when I began the process. York, Nebraska, is a smaller Midwest community, and I felt there might be a suspicion and reluctance among the "churched" community to involve themselves in what some might label "new age stuff." In Lincoln, Nebraska, a retired Roman Catholic bishop recently had an article published in the *Lincoln Journal Star* newspaper declaring that Roman Catholics should not participate in yoga. Yet participation and reception among the "church folks" in the local community were generally good and this group appeared, at least on the surface, to be highly receptive. On the other hand, cursory examination of the AA tradition and the Eleventh Step itself, of openness toward and expanded exploration of oneself and one's Higher Power, seemed to me to be a clear invitation to the pursuit of

something which involved gentle yoga, silent meditation, and contemplative reflection. However, this did not appear to be the end result.

This is what I think happened in regard to participation levels in the process of gentle yoga, silent meditation, and contemplative reflection. Looking back at my own experience, when I began to write "sobriety" into my own story, a counselor at the treatment center told me that my problem was not alcohol. I thought to myself, "Oh? I bet I can get twenty people in here who will swear that it is!" At that point in my journey I "knew" alcohol was my "problem." Therefore, for the first one to two years of my journey of "sobriety," I concentrated almost exclusively on remaining alcohol free. That was necessary. I needed to become "dry." But at a point, somewhere between years three and four, I began to ask myself, "Is this all there is?" The counselor was correct. Alcohol was not the problem; "I" was the problem. At this point in my story, between years three and four, I had completed what I now label as "Phase I" of my journey of sobriety and stood at the precipice staring into the vast region of the open invitation into what I now call "Phase Two" of my story of sobriety.

As I now understand the journey of "sobriety," I believe there are two distinct phases. The initial phase is concrete in nature. It takes place as one more deeply encounters Steps One-Nine. It is concrete and solid in approach and the individual remains, to a significant extent, in control. This involves what I have described in an earlier chapter as the process of becoming "dry," becoming completely free of the substance of dependence. Undoubtedly, it is the beginning of freedom. In my experience, that for some it becomes all that is necessary in their minds and they become satisfied and then do not want to have this satisfaction questioned. Yet, in my opinion, it is not enough

to more wholly accomplish a fuller freedom and more complete healing from the damage and trauma done by years of substance abuse. Going further is required, in my estimation, to enter a life experience in which the promise of "happy, joyous and free" is more fully realized.

The next phase, which I label "Phase Two" of sobriety, is undertaken through a deeper encounter with Steps Ten-Twelve. This is the phase in which the alcoholic/addict enacts a fuller reliance on his/her Higher Power and enters an embodied form of surrender. This kind of surrender is frightening for many. It involves a combination of the conscious brain and subconscious mind in harmonious release, an interacting and integration of the kataphatic and apophatic states, which potentially produces a deeper maturity and healing. Tian Dayton comments,

> The ability to use our thinking minds to organize the feelings and sensory impressions fed to us through our limbic mind is key to developing and maintaining emotional maturity, balance, and sobriety. . . When we can use our thinking mind to make sense and meaning of our limbic mind, we develop a feeling of mastery and self-confidence, know that we can find a way to deal with what life throws in our direction. We feel we have the skills necessary to cope with our lives, and at those moments when we can't, we know how to ask for help.[197]

Bill Wilson, one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, expressed a similar sentiment in regard to a fuller experience of healing. He wrote in his last published article, "This seems to be the primary healing circuit: an outgoing love of God's creation and His [sic] people, by means of which we avail ourselves of His love for us. It is most clear that the current can't flow until our paralyzing dependencies are broken [he

[197] Tian Dayton, *Emotional Sobriety: From Relationship Trauma to Resilience and Balance* (Deerfield Beach: Health Communications, 2007), 66.

included AA as one these dependencies], and broken at depth. Only then can we possibly have a glimmer of what adult love really is."[198]

I would equate the phenomenon described above in the Christian story as the similar/differing experience as one accepts the journey toward a transition between the stages of Purgation and Illumination. It appears to me this chasm, the gulf between what I have outlined as "Phase One" and "Phase Two" of sobriety, is broader than I had anticipated. I find it very interesting, as well as surprising, that in my context the Christian community was apparently more willing to potentially explore and engage this transition when compared to the general Alcoholics Anonymous community.

Stages and States of Consciousness

This area is difficult to accurately assess. It would be a form of hubris, presumptuous and in defiance of thousands of years of spiritual writing to suggest that research participants grew and "moved up" in a "stage" of consciousness. The duration of this study, in my opinion and experience, simply does not permit such a shift. Further, it seems to me to be difficult, if not impossible to measure such a shift through only four interview sessions and the limited exposure to the self-description of the transition of self as reported by the participants.

However, in my opinion it is possible to evaluate potential shifts in "states" of consciousness. Granted, states of consciousness are not necessarily nor directly tied to stages of consciousness development, although states of consciousness are interpreted through the existing stage of consciousness. As described by Ken Wilber, the major states of consciousness are waking-gross state, which is concrete, such as riding a bike or

[198] Bill Wilson, "The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety," AA Grapevine, January, 1958, http://silkworth.net/aahistory/emotionalsobriety.html (accessed August 15, 2016), 2/3.

reading this paper; subtle-dream state, as in a vivid dream or daydream, or visualization exercise; causal-formless state, such as deep dreamless sleep, a vast openness; witnessing states, the ability to "witness" all other states, unbroken attention; and non-dual-ever present state, which is the ever present ground of all states.[199]

I believe that the process itself, gentle yoga, which transitions into silent meditation, then emerges into contemplative reflection, initiates shifts in states of consciousness. My hypothesis is that as the research participants moved into the discipline of yoga, there was an invited shift from Medial Pre-frontal Cortex, or CEO conscious brain control, and "gross state" of consciousness into a "subtle state" of consciousness. The same can be said of movement into silent mediation. I would further suggest that it is possible to go deeper, if only briefly, with meditation into a "causal state" of consciousness. When the participants then enter the phase of contemplative reflection, each then integrated the previous experience into what could be described as a "witnessing state," even if the experience is ever so fleeting.

However, as I have written, each state of consciousness is always interpreted through one's present stage of consciousness development. Therefore such experiences are limited in their durational impact. But, as a person has increased exposure to elevated states of development and consciousness, according to Ken Wilber, these exposures, in essence, "lubricate the rails" allowing a more rapid ascend to a higher stage of consciousness. Continuing this line of reasoning, "this means that these major states of

[199] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 74.

being and consciousness are available, to some degree, to all human beings at virtually any stage of growth."[200]

In my estimation John's discomfort with his image of God and what his faith meant is one indicator of what I have outlined above. Cathy's feeling of being lifted off the ground and ascending before the altar in church is another example. When Rachel said she "heard" the Bible stories more clearly is yet again another instance in a shift in her state of consciousness. Many, including Rick, used the Centering Prayer method of meditation. He traced his experience from the first encounters of being unable to stay "inwardly quiet" at the beginning of the research process, to a self-described freedom of emptiness, which only took a relatively few moments after several weeks of practice and discipline in this combined method. This seems also to reflect a shift in his state of consciousness.

What I believe this means is that as consciousness states shift, the person's interpretation of life also shifts. I think that the perceived separation from God as a part of the human experience and condition, separation from self, separation from others, separation from all of creation begins to disintegrate when this integrated process is engaged and states of consciousness shift. It is my opinion that the person begins to dismantle the false self and gain access to his/her true self. Please do not mistake what I am saying as an intended journey toward a form of "spiritual elitism." Additionally, I believe that an integrated approach, such as the one used in this research, resists the possibility of a participant's descent into narcissism or that he or she may become consumed by a covert form of self-absorption because the "whole" expression of the person is engaged. It is, as I understand and interpret what I heard and witnessed, an entry

[200] Wilber, *Integral Spirituality*, 75.

in varying degrees by the research participants into the true self. I believe the dilemma of the false self is confronted and its walls begin to crumble. I strongly believe this requires an integrated approach such as the one constructed in this research. Jack Kornfield writes,

> The various compartments of our minds and bodies are only semi-permeable to awareness. Awareness of certain aspects does not automatically carry over to the other aspects, especially when our fear, and woundedness are deep. Thus, we frequently find meditators who are deeply aware of breath or body but are almost totally unaware of feelings, and others who understand the mind but have no wise relation to the body.[201]

As I consider and further interpret what I encountered, I have wondered if in many respects the Lord's Supper is not reflective of this same reality. When the Eucharist is celebrated, there is intentional movement of body and mind and invitation into the emptying of self, visual shifts, taste, and conscious engagement of what the ritual and liturgy of communion mean in one's life.

In a similar manner the "ritual and liturgy" of the integrated process of yoga, meditation and contemplative action could be interpreted as present in the "ritual and liturgy" in the course of an AA meeting. "How It Works" is frequently read at the opening of the meeting. People enter into self and reflect on what this reading means in their lives. Eye contact is present, and often there is holding of hands and an affirmation of the means to alter one's life. I am asking myself, for all involved, is it possible the process utilized in this research simply opens the door more broadly and acts as a prompting catalyst for a deeper transformation for those who are willing to participate?

Other General Observations

[201] Jack Kornfield, "Even the Best Meditators Have Old Wounds to Heal: Combining Meditation and Psychotherapy," in *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision*, ed. Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan (New York: Penguin Group, 1993), 67.

There are a few other general observations I think are significant and are an essential part of this story. First is the average time duration of the two open, weekly meetings. The TSG open Eleventh Step AA meetings lasted significantly longer than the open community meetings for the CIRG. The CIRG group was an hour, at most, often holding at forty-five to fifty minutes. The TSG gatherings tended to last well over an hour, often extending toward the ninety minute mark. I confess there were open AA meetings in which I intentionally brought to what some might consider a premature conclusion because it was getting late. What is striking about these results is that the CIRG meetings often were two to even three times larger when compared to the open AA meetings.

I have wondered if the smaller group, the open AA meeting/TSG, invited more intimacy and deeper discussion when compared to the larger, but more reserved, CIRG open gatherings. It has already been noted that there appeared to be a greater intimacy among the TSG. I also wonder if it was because the AA group had, perhaps, a somewhat deeper relationship with one another prior to the advent of this research. Though all the CIRG research participants were members of First Presbyterian Church (FPC) in York, Nebraska, many outside FPC were in attendance. Also, the general type of sharing that takes place in the context of Sunday worship is not at the same depth as what transpires in the setting of most AA meetings.

I believe it may take more time to become vulnerable enough to share more of the entirety of what each felt in the CIRG. I do not think enough time, the course of fourteen weeks, was available to create this type of vulnerability. Brené Brown writes, "Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up and be seen

when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it's our greatest measure of courage."[202] But, growing in the acceptance of "vulnerability" and the risk it involves is part and parcel of the process outlined in this research, and it is my belief that it does not come automatically but takes time and practice. As I have experienced the process, acceptance of "vulnerability" as considered above is required to gain long term sobriety. However, it is not a requirement for membership in most mainline Protestant denominations in my exposure to these traditions.

A second area of interest for me which must be noted is the difficulty many faced with the ongoing disciplines of yoga and meditation outside of the weekly open meetings. Research participants varied in their responses to the ability to maintain the practice of meditation. However, it was almost universal that the research participants from both groups struggled with the commitment to yoga three times a week (the open gatherings counted toward the weekly total). Jennifer, of the TSG, even commented that the reason she felt some resisted coming to the open AA meeting was because of yoga and suggested we relabel it as "stretching." Beyond the fact that yoga was something fairly new to most research participants, I cannot determine the cause of this issue with any definitive clarity. All research participants in each group reported that doing gentle yoga before a period of meditation was beneficial and significantly aided them in entering their practice of meditation. Yet some, such as Tom, rarely engaged in yoga outside the general, open group sessions.

As I look back and consider the pattern and sequence of the yoga poses, something else came to mind which surprised me, though it makes sense to me in

---

[202] Brené Brown, *Rising Strong: The Reckoning. The Rumble. The Revolution* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 4.

hindsight. There was an authentic affirmation from both groups and all participants in the flow and identical weekly pattern of the poses performed. To this date, months after our first meeting and as these open gathering continue on a weekly basis, not once has anyone asked to expand, change or in any fashion alter the sequence or selection of poses presented despite my repeated invitations to explore this option. I could stipulate that yoga for many is an unfamiliar practice and the same poses performed each week provide a sense of comfort. But several participants have now been doing this pattern for months and two research participants are active in the practice of yoga beyond these open gatherings.

What comes to mind for me, and I readily confess my potential bias arising from personal, professional vocational proclivity, is that the substantial pattern of yoga is liturgical in its nature and has formed a sustained "religious," life-affirming ritual for those involved. I still sometimes argue with myself that I should suppress this observation as I internally state, "I am reaching." Perhaps so. But, in the end, I do not think I am overstating the potential influence of what I believe is a hardwired human need for forms of "liturgy" and "ritual."

It is also important to note the significance the participant groups felt toward the weekly open group meetings for both the CIRG and the TSG. All participants emphasized the accountability facet of returning to these meeting each week. I believe the larger open group gatherings also allowed for a needed community aspect of this process. I think it generated a feeling of sharing, of being a part of one another's story and journey. It seems to me that this is another example that the personal and communal aspects of existence cannot and should not be separated and compartmentalized. The

individual and communal aspects of existence feed each other, in my opinion, in synthesized harmony to bring a fuller sense of life.

An additional surprise to me is the continued involvement, or lack thereof, in this process after the conclusion of the research timeframe. All participants from each group affirmed the practice as worthwhile. Each spoke of life-affirming changes in his/her sense of God, self and others. No one expressed regret at her/his willingness to become part of this story and research. Further, there was unanimous hope the groups would continue.

Both open group meeting have continued. Attendance of research participants for both groups after the conclusion of the research period was reduced by nearly half. Of the five who committed to the CIRG, three have continued. I have a commitment from a fourth from this group to resume. The participation from the TSG has held at three of the original six. A fourth has recently resumed his participation intermittently.

I have witnessed a similar phenomenon with cardiac rehabilitation at the Wellness Center of the hospital and with those who begin a physical fitness regimen after the New Year. As I have observed the situation in these similar contexts, they feel good and health and vitality are improved. But after the required time period, or as weather warms, many fall away never to return.

Why does this occur? There was universal positive acclaim in regard to the effects of this integral process. The process in my experience was long enough to produce, at least at an elementary level, the development of "habit." Maybe it is simply the human condition. Richard Foster contends, "Usually people will tolerate a brief dabbling in the 'inward journey,' but then it is time to get on with the *real* business of the *real* world."[203]

[203] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 3.

On the other hand, I could argue that the retention rate after the research period's conclusion is encouraging and positive. My internally generated concern may, in actuality, arise from my personal overestimation of what I consider to be an "acceptable" level of continuation by the research participants.

Concluding Remarks

As I reflect on this story and what is contained in these pages, in many ways, this is a story as old as the Garden of Eden. We are created in the image of God but in fallen creation we become fragmented and the fracture generated gives rise to the false self and it is consumed and consolidated into "who" we are by our ruptured ego. Then, I surmise, when confronted with our broken nature we respond like Adam and Eve. I am paraphrasing Adam and Eve when God questions them about what each has done with the fruit of the tree as Adam declares in response to God's question about his behavior, "No God, it's the ***woman***, who ***you*** gave to me. It's ***her*** fault, and ***your*** fault, not mine!" And Eve continues the same type of adamant denial. "Nah uh! It was the ***serpent***! Not me. Blame the ***snake***!" And all the while, I contend, the gift of grace, forgiveness and new life are present in the outstretched hand of God if only Adam and Eve were willing to grab ahold of it. What is revealed in the Garden story, and is still our struggle, is the ongoing resistance to fuller union with God and the healing grace present and offered; a resistance which then stirs the caldron of brokenness and alienation. In our brokenness and fractured nature the false self is created and in my opinion grows into an emotional fortress.

What I am proposing in my research is an integral approach to a story of healing alive within and readily available to all human beings who desire to free themselves from

the shackles of the false self. However, this journey faces challenges. Barriers, often arising from inherent contextual, cultural issues, stand in the way of integral processes such as the one contained in this research. We live in a society and culture which remains deeply impacted by the "Enlightenment," its scientific advancements, but also the deeply embedded mantra of "I think, therefore I am." I believe that modernity, the Enlightenment, fractured the integration of the internal and external expression of self and being. The Enlightenment did embrace and study the "differentiation" of internal consciousness of self and the external body and the role it plays in life, such as neuro-function or physical, biological operations of self. What was once understood as "magic" and the "supernatural" in pre-modernity was examined under the light of "science" and the roots of many pathologies were discovered to exist within neurological, psychological, and bodily operations as opposed to, let us say, the "magical" intervention of an angry god.

But this "differentiation" and its evolution continued, and in my opinion, disintegrated to a larger degree into "dissociation." As I understand the history and nature of the emergence and manifestation of the Enlightenment and the resultant "dissociation," what began as a comprehension of the "differentiation" of nature, body, and "soul" continued its evolutionary march and in the end resulted in what I understand as "dissociation."

I believe Enlightenment processes pushed integrated realities of existence into separate "boxes" of experience, and these were examined as "detached parts" which were exclusive of each other. I then ascertain what was understood as 'reality" for thousands of years, a greater form and depth of consciousness and contact with what I will call God,

were brushed aside in a matter of decades as modernity unfolded. Enlightenment thinking, as I comprehend its history, viewed concepts of internal consciousness with an integrated coupling of brain/mind/body and a greater, expanded consciousness of being with deep suspicion at best or dismissed such longings as mere superstition at worst. This fractured and diseased evolutionary process of modernity resulted in a nearly complete compartmentalization of what in my estimation must be understood as integrated segments of what it means to be human. Evolutionary differentiation creates space and growth; dissociation is differentiation run wild and is highly destructive in nature.

As modernity and the Enlightenment emerged from pre-modernity and the Dark Ages, advancements in the scientific, social and political arenas took place. There is no arguing that point. A differentiation occurred between the interior mystic, sometimes interpreted as magical, stages of consciousness which were prevalent in pre-modernity and the Dark Ages. The exterior, objective states, such as bio-function and the comprehension of intrusive cultural influence on persons and how individuals and cultures interpreted the world, were more broadly discovered then widely studied and engaged as the Enlightenment emerged. Walls of separation which existed in pre-modernity built on foundations of oppression between genders, culture, race and ethnicity, etc., began to come down and a more egalitarian understanding of creation began to take shape. Medical science took the place of "magic" in the treatment of disease. This is all good stuff!

As I have written above, all the news of the Enlightenment and modernity is not good. A distinction between "differentiation" and "dissociation" is also required for a more complete comprehension of the landscape in which we live. Wilber writes that

> Precisely because evolution proceeds by differentiation and integration, something can go wrong at each and every stage—the greater the depth of the Kosmos, the more diseases there can be. And . . . one of the most prevalent forms of evolutionary pathology occurs when differentiation goes too far into dissociation, whether ontogenetically or phylogenetically. In human evolution, for example, it is one thing to differentiate the mind and body, quite another to dissociate them. It is one thing to differentiate culture and nature, quite another to dissociate them. Differentiation is the prelude to integration; dissociation is the prelude to disaster.[204]

My hope is that the research contained in this project and the integral approach it brings to bear ties together states of being which were fractured, separated or extinguished in the emergence of the Enlightenment. This separation and resultant dissociation continues today, in my opinion, to a significant degree as postmodernity emerges. Much like the dawn of the Enlightenment period, the appearance of "postmodernity" began as a herald of good news. Postmodern thought and reflection, as I understand it, opened the door more widely regarding the deeper influence and impact "cultural imperialism" and its influence over what was considered as "right" and "wrong," "growth" or "degeneration," and "empirical knowledge" when compared to "superstitious magic." Wilber says that

> The entry to postmodernism begins with an understanding of the intrinsic role that *interpretation* plays in human awareness. Postmodernism, in fact, may be credited with making interpretation central to both epistemology and ontology, to both knowing and being. Interpretation, the postmodernists all maintained in their own ways, is not only crucial for understanding the Kosmos, it is an aspect of its very structure.[205]

The postmodernists, in my estimation, looked beyond mere appearance and what modernity, the Enlightenment, postulated as empirical, observable evidence and moved toward a deeper understanding in which the *interpretation* of research results itself were

---

[204] Wilber, *Integral Psychology,* 151.

[205] Ibid., 160.

part and parcel of the research results and the research process. . . "to put it bluntly, Wilber says, "exterior surfaces can be *seen*, but interior depth must be *interpreted*."[206] This allowed and necessitated reflection from a point of view of depth and breadth which accepted and studied cultural overlays in the process of research, investigation and discernment of what was "real." Again, this is good stuff. But, as with the Enlightenment, all the news of postmodernity is not good news. What began as a differentiation of culture and interpretive measure also degenerated into a state of dissociation.

As I understand and "interpret" postmodernity and postmodern approaches to phenomenon, an overemphasis was placed on the "surface," such as the often nearly myopic focus on cultural context, and there was a disavowal of much of what is considered a deeper reality which, in my opinion, dwells within human consciousness. Further, postmodernity seems to nearly dismiss the universal realities of the exterior being such as neuro and biological function. "In fact," Wilber writes, "most postmodernism would eventually go to extraordinary lengths to deny depth in general. It is as if, suffering from the onslaught of flatland aggression, it identified with the aggressors. Postmodernism came to embrace surfaces, champion surfaces, glorify surfaces, everything is a material text, there is nothing under the surface, there is only the surface."[207]

Additionally, as I surmise the position, postmodern approaches, particularly at the extreme, dismiss all forms of hierarchy. As I comprehend the argument of the postmodern, all "truths" and "realities" are of equivalent value and should be measured in this manner. Thus, as I comprehend it, an extreme postmodern approach carried out to its

---

[206] Wilber, *Integral Psychology,* 161.

[207] Ibid., 169.

logical end means a cultural context such as ours, with technological sophistication and potential for improved longevity in life because of medical advancements, should not necessarily provide assistance to a more technologically primitive society where a culture exists which continues to embrace cure as connected directly to ancient concepts of "magic." Within the scope of postmodern evaluation as I have presented it, modern medical technology despite the "objective reality" of the probability of saving thousands of lives would not be "help." The postmodern position, as I interpret it, would view modern medicine from a more "scientifically advanced" culture as encroachment and as an "imperial cultural invasion" of potentially unwanted technology. It would become a form of hierarchical oppression from a society which presumes itself to be "superior" toward a culture which accepts as valid and real supernatural sources for cure.

The postmodern position, with its insistence on the relativity of all truths and the dismissal of hierarchies, also then means, for instance, oppressive forms of government which marginalize women, children, those of different racial ethnic origins, etc. as having equal footing when evaluated against societies and governments in which equality and all human dignity are valued. Hierarchies are false, culturally driven constructions as I understand the postmodern viewpoint.

Postmodernism would, therefore, also most likely disavow the integral approaches I have suggested and utilized in this project. Postmodernism, as I comprehend it, would in all probability assess the integral processes contained in this research as arising from the given confines of a particular culture, and it is that culture which labels the given results as cure or "healing." Such a perspective might propose the findings in this project as purely subjective and the relative creation of an artificial, context driven

hierarchy of wholeness. Of course this outlook and assessment would, like the Enlightenment had before it, ignore thousands of years of human experience and the widely spread cross-cultural acceptance of a macro version of the processes contained in this research.

But here in lies part of the misunderstanding. Wilber explains,

> There are two types of hierarchies, not just one. There are *dominator* hierarchies, and there are *growth* hierarchies. Dominator hierarchies are indeed nasty (oppressive and dominating)—things like the caste system, or hierarchies in criminal organizations. . . But growth hierarchies are exactly the opposite—the higher your level, the more inclusive, the more caring, the more loving and embracing (the less dominating and less oppressing) you are. All of the developmental models we are talking about here. . . are growth hierarchies. . . [208]

There are other problems with the postmodern stance. As I wrote above, postmodernity, as I understand the position, dismisses most if not all of what could be considered as "universal" throughout the human condition. But, in my opinion, herein lies the ultimate fallacy. Under closer scrutiny the postmodern approach and argument, which states that all systems are relative and equal and therefore nothing is universal, crumbles under its own assessment orientation and linguistic weight. As I comprehend it, postmodernism states that there are no universal truths and hierarchies are cultural constructs. However, this in and of itself becomes a universal claim and creates a hierarchical model with postmodern interpretation at the top of the pyramid. In my estimation postmodernism in its development fractured, as had the Enlightenment before it, into a false dichotomy of either/or which ignores the integral nature of the whole of the human condition. What began as a life-affirming process of evolutionary differentiation

[208] Wilber, *Integral Meditation*, 70-71.

and growth disintegrated into dissociation with postmodernism's extreme and nearly exclusive focus on cultural context as an absolute.

I would stipulate that universal claims are possible within the suggested integral approach and examination of the human condition. Further, I believe the research contained in this project displays part of the map for what could be accurately described as a "growth hierarchy." However, I refuse to fall into the same trap of Enlightenment or postmodern thinking as I have presented them. I am not arguing against contextual influence over persons, groups, societies and cultures. What I am stating is that the level of bodily engagement, deeper consciousness, and cognitive focus as they are synthesized here share universal realities for healing, and these realities span the entirety of the human condition and human history.

Because the church exists in fallen and fractured humanity and a given cultural context, I deduce that the obstacles created by both the Enlightenment and postmodernity exist within the walls and framework of the institutional church. Their influential presence, both Enlightenment and postmodern thought, can and does stifle what I have presented and believe is an integral reality of what it means to be human and made in the image of God. Therefore, I believe it is necessary to reintroduce and more deeply reincorporate integrated functions and realities into an environment which has been disconnected, "dissociated," for far too long. I vigorously contend the integral system contained in my research is not a relative subjective cultural construct nor will it create an artificial, oppressive hierarchy but contains within its structure authentic growth hierarchies.

What I introduced in this work and research, what I am talking about, is not something "new." The outlined integral process contained in these pages is not new. It is, in my opinion, very old. We hear it, alive and active, in the Gospels as they tell the story of Jesus' ministry. The Desert Fathers and Mothers participated in this process as part of their lives. Contemplatives throughout two millennia of Christian history have made it part of their stories. Though the specifics may not have been the same, attention to an integrated process of body/silence/brain has always been present. No, this is not something new at all. It is a path back, toward reunion with THE STORY and the true self. It is about dismantling the destructive walls of the false self and healing the trauma of human existence. I believe this story engages an ancient story told in the first words of the Bible as the Living Word, the Breath of God, hovered over the vast, dark abyss. It is a story of the journey home. It is, in my opinion, a story of incarnational grace and healing the fracture of the human condition. It is a story of finding reunion with God, with self, and with all of creation.

The process encountered in this research of gentle yoga, silent meditation and contemplative reflection continues to expand beyond the "walls" of the context of the local churched and the recovery communities. Leaders in my local community context in the fields of oncology, stress conditions, coronary care, and corrections have indicated interest. This work is expanding to include a much larger congregation in Lincoln, Nebraska, which has the ability to reach an even broader, more extensive community. Time will tell whether or not this process continues to grow and expand.

This story, this journey, has raised more questions for me than it has provided concrete answers. I think that is the nature of this type of exploration. Recall, from a PAR

perspective this is a “wicked problem.” What is contained in this research are questions that flow from the wellspring of the enigma of what it means to be human. Further, it is an investigation of the mystery of the interaction and depth of relationship with THE STORY, with God. It seems to me that this type of journey will inherently create more questions and provoke more reflection than it provides concreate resolution.

I am not arguing that the precise structure of gentle yoga, prescribed forms of silent meditation, followed by contemplative reflection is “the” approach to holistic healing. However, I am stating my belief that in a “macro” sense the integral, synthesized engagement of “body/silence/brain” is necessary to produce a “whole” person. It is my opinion this is an embodied expression of the image of God and it reflects the entirety of our being as engaged in our created essence. This process creates, in my belief, an environment in which the invitation to return “home,” to the true self, might be heard and experienced. It could, in my opinion, be an embodied catalyst moving persons more readily toward a more holistic sense of authentic being and relationship with God.

I conclude this story with a varied literary image than that of narrative. However, it is an equally dynamic literary form. I end this story with a poem. It is a poem written by one who is seeking healing, healing as I have revealed the word’s meaning in this story. It reveals the longings of a person who has terminal cancer and is willing to step into the hope that healing can and does manifest itself even when “cure” is no longer an option. The poem is entitled, “Please Come Home.”

> Please come home. Please come home.
> Find the place where your feet know to walk
> And follow your own trail home.
>
> Please come home. Please come into your own body,
> Your own vessel, your own earth.

Please come home into each and every cell
And fully into the space that surrounds you.

Please come home. Please come home to trusting yourself,
and your instincts and your ways and your knowings,
And even the particular quirks of your personality.

Please come home. Please come home and once you are firmly there,
please stay home awhile and come to deep rest within.
Please treasure your home. Please love and embrace your home.
Please get a deep, deep sense of what it's like to be truly home.

Please come home. Please come home and when you're really, really ready,
And there's a detectable urge on the outbreath, then please come out.
Please come home and please come forward.
Please express who you are to us, and please trust us
To see you and hear you and touch you
and recognize you as best we can.

Please come home. Please come home and let us know
all the nooks and crannies that are calling to be seen.
Please come home, and let us know the More
that is there that wants to come out.

Please come home. Please come home,
and when you feel yourself home, please welcome us too.
for we too forget that we belong and are welcome,
and that we are called to express and fully and be who we are.

Please come home. Please come home,
you and you and you and me.

Thank you Earth for welcoming us,
and thank you touch of eyes and ears and skin,
touch of love for welcoming us.

May we wake up and remember who we truly are.

Please come home. Please come home. Please come home.[209]

[209] Jane Hooper, "Please Come Home," A Journey of Heart and Breath, posted Dec. 4, 2011, http://wwwsevaabroad-philoscribe.blogspot.com/2011/12/please-come-home-by-jane-hooper.html (accessed September 12, 2016).

Appendix A

Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him* [sic].
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him [sic] to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take a personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him* [sic], praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.[210]

[210] Alcoholics Anonymous, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, 59-60.

Appendix B

Erikson's Stages of Development

1. INFANCY: *Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust* – the infant struggles with dependency on its mother for love, nurturing, and (oral) sustenance, in the course of which he may develop an underlying sense of hope concerning his place in the cosmos, or failing this, may withdraw from the world of relationships altogether.
2. EARLY CHILDHOOD: *Autonomy vs. Shame, Doubt* – the young child experiences a conflict related to other people (e.g. parents) controlling its bodily functions (anal, urethral), and may come out of this crisis with a developed sense of will or autonomy (the ability to take charge of one's own life), or alternatively, because of deep shame (a sense of being exposed), develop a defensive structure of compulsiveness that tries to control self and others in a manipulative or obsessive way.
3. PLAY AGE: *Initiative vs. Guilt* – the child is now a part of the family matrix and struggles with oedipal desires (locomotion aggression toward the same sex parent, genital attraction toward the opposite sex parent), which may be channeled into a positive drive to take initiative in the social world, or alternatively, may turn in on itself and develop into a sense of pathological guilt related to sexual and aggressive feelings.
4. SCHOOL AGE: *Industry vs. Inferiority* – here the psychosocial world expands to include the neighborhood and the school environment, where the child's efforts to sublimate the drives of the previous stage through work and enterprise (e.g., hobbies, schoolwork, projects, chores etc.), may result in the construction of a personality that feels a sense of competency and ability, or alternatively, may develop into a pervasive aura of inferiority in relationship to the efforts and achievements of others.
5. ADOLESCENCE: *Identity vs. Identity Confusion* – with the advent of puberty, the psychosocial scene focuses upon the teenager's peer group and other groups that model a range of possible identities, which the teen will try on (through intense one-to-one relationships and/or membership in cliques), and through which he will ultimately develop a coherent sense of identity, or alternatively, experience a diffused, undefined, or fragmented sense of self that may result in delinquency, psychosis, or more commonly, the inability to settle upon a occupational identity as he moves into adulthood.
6. YOUNG ADULTHOOD: *Intimacy vs. Isolation* – now that the individual has hopefully developed a stable identity, she moves into the adult world seeking a

partner with whom to share work, sex, friendship, and intimate feelings, failing which, she sinks into exclusivity, elitism, isolation, or other forms of non-intimate social relations.

7. ADULTHOOD: *Generativity vs. Stagnation* – once the adult has found a partner to share intimacy with, he now is faced with the challenge of raising a family, making positive contributions to the workplace and the community, and engaging in other forms of generativity and care, failing which, he will become rigid, inert, and rejecting on the job, in the family, and/or as a citizen, or fall into other forms of stagnation.
8. OLD AGE: *Integrity vs. Despair* – as an adult reaches the end of her life, she looks back at what she has or hasn't accomplished, and feels a deep sense of fulfillment or at least an acceptance of the life she has lived (out of which will come wisdom), or alternatively, she descends into anguish or despair at having not lived a full and vital existence.

In Erikson's last book on the subject, ***The Life Cycle Completed***, his wife, Joan M. Erikson, added a "ninth stage" that applied to people who had become *very* old (as they had). In the book, she wrote: "Old age in one's eighties and nineties brings with it new demands, reevaluations, and daily difficulties" (*The Life Cycle Completed*, p. 105). According to Joan Erikson, in the ninth stage, the despair of stage eight is magnified by the experience of one's deteriorating body and mind, which results in a lowering of self-esteem and confidence. "To face down despair with faith and appropriate humility," she wrote, "is perhaps the wisest course" (*The Life Cycle Completed*, p. 106).[211]

[211] Thomas Armstrong, *The Stages of Life According to Erik Erikson*, American Institute for Learning and Development, posted August 15, 2012, http://institute4learning.com/blog/2012/08/15/the-stages-of-life-according-to-erik-erikson/ (accessed August 20, 2015).

Appendix C

Lewis Rambo's Stages of Conversion

Stage One is "Context." "Context is more than a first stage that is passed through; rather, it is the total environment in which conversion transpires. Context continues its influence throughout the other conversion stages."[212] There is a "marcocontext" and a "microcontext." "Marcocontext refers to the total environment, including such elements as political systems, religious organizations, relevant ecological considerations, transnational corporations, and economics systems."[213] Macrocontext is the big picture perspective. "Microcontext is the more immediate of a person's family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, and neighborhood. These immediate influences play an important role in the creation of a sense of identity and belonging and in shaping a person's thoughts, feelings, and actions."[214]

Stage Two is "Crisis." "Some form of crisis usually precedes conversion; that is acknowledged by most scholars of conversion"[215] The crisis might arise from the direct actions initiated by the individual or it may be that the person is in a passive role and events within his or her context, beyond their control, place them in the position of crisis. "Two basic types of crisis are important to the conversion process; crises that call into question one's fundamental orientation to life, and crisis that in and of themselves are rather mild but are the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back."[216]

Stage Three is "Quest." "Human beings continually engage in the process of world construction and reconstruction in order to generate meaning and purpose, to maintain psychic equilibrium, and to assure continuity . . . One word that embodies this process of building meaning, whatever its impetus, is quest."[217] It is no great leap, at this point, to equate the stage of "Quest" as the same phenomenon of what I have discussed as human existence being interpreted as "narrative." The question that should be asked is what draws persons into quest and a desire for change and transformation? Following Seymour Epstein, Rambo suggests we are drawn by "four basic motivations for human beings; the need to experience pleasure and avoid pain; the need for a conceptual system; the need to enhance self-esteem; and the need to establish and maintain relationships."[218]

---

[212] Lewis Rambo, 20.

[213] Ibid., 21-22.

[214] Ibid., 22.

[215] Ibid., 44.

[216] Ibid., 46.

[217] Ibid., 56.

[218] Ibid., 63

Stage Four is the "Encounter" phase. This phase is the interaction and the interplay between the "Advocate," as Rambo terms, it and the person with whom the story of faith is being shared, or potential "Convert." Rambo discusses this stage in great detail.[219] He understands the stage of "Encounter" as a coming together of "Context," of the "Advocate," and their message with the potential "Convert." It is a mistake to consider this stage as a one-sided proposition. To the contrary, two stories, two narratives, come together and a new and different narrative potentially emerges. "In the past, scholars of conversion have focused their studies almost exclusively on the convert, but in fact a crucial and dynamic interplay exists between the advocate and the potential convert."[220]

Stage Five is the "Interaction Stage." This is the stage of learning more about the religious faith of the "Advocate." It is relational, often has planned or spontaneous activities, and is also commonly intellectual in its foundation. "Some faiths insist on a very long period of education and socialization; others focus more on brief, intense periods during which potential converts are encouraged and/or required to make a decision . . . These processes employ four components: relational, ritual, rhetoric and roles."[221] There is a strong influence present based on the relationships which are developed in this stage. The sharing of story has a marked influence on all parties involved. ". . . stressing of the importance of relationship is not to question the validity and value of these conversions, but rather to observe the actual process of conversion that takes place for many people."[222]

Stage Six is the stage of "Commitment."

> The sixth stage of conversion, commitment, is the fulcrum of the change process. Following a period of intensive interaction, the potential convert face the prospect, the choice, of commitment. Commitment includes several important facets. A specific turning point or decision is often required and/or experienced, and this commitment decision is often dramatized and commemorated—sealed with a public demonstration of the convert's choice. Commitment rituals like baptism and testimony are important, observable events that give witness to the convert's decision.[223]

This is the stage of stepping into, with fuller sense of internal energy, a new or renewed life within a faith tradition. This stage takes shape both inside and beyond institutional religious traditions. For instance here is an example drawn from Alcoholics

---

[219] Lewis Rambo, 66-101. These chapters describe in detail the religious, sociological and relational contact between the "Advocate" and the "Convert."

[220] Ibid., 66.

[221] Ibid., 102, 103.

[222] Ibid., 112.

[223] Ibid., 124.

Anonymous. At a person's first AA meetings, when the words are spoken for the first time "my name is _____ and I'm an alcoholic," a small coin or medallion is often presented as a sign and symbol of new life, a new emerging narrative, and a promise of mutual support in their journey of sobriety.

The final stage, Stage Seven, is "Consequence." This is the stage in which the "Convert" begins to engage in new behavior and commitment that reflects the emerging faith tradition, or narrative, in his or her life. There are many variables which surface in this phase from intensity to duration, personal labeling and self-image to new lifestyle. "The consequences of conversion are determined in part by the nature, intensity, and duration of the conversion and the response of the conversion in a person's or group context."[224]

[224] Lewis Rambo, 144-45.

Appendix D

Yoga Pose Sequence

All breathing in yoga is into and out of the nose. The breath is drawn in, filling the abdomen, lifting it through the diaphragm and into the lungs. The exhale is performed in a reverse manner. Hatha Yoga, balance, the sun and the moon, energy and rest, is about the harmonious combination of balance, alignment and awareness. It is about stretch not strain. Each pose suggested, each evolution suggested, is a choice guided by an invitation. Become aware of the whole of who you are and are becoming. Inhale on the expansion, exhale of the contraction of the poses. All the breath responses are guided.

--Grounding Exercise. Attention drawn to balance, weight breathing and body experience.
--Centering Period. Left hand over your navel (point of center and balance) and right hand on your chest. The left hand should lift first. This is the transition period from "getting here" to "being here."
--Hands into Standing Prayer Pose, one breath, then lifted into Prayer Mountain. Lift and return for three breathes.
--Arms Up Shoulder Height-T Pose. Attention drawn to this as a straight line pose. Also attention directed to the strength and weight bearing of the upper arm muscle structure. Then, return to Mountain Pose.
-Raise arms to Parallel Hands. Return to Mountain Pose.
-Neck Roll. Forward position, right side, rear, left side. Movement guided by breath and breathing as each position is held. Return to Mountain Pose.
--Mild Side Stretch on left and right side. Gentle bend with finger tips reaching to the sky.
--Upper Body Twist. Hips remain forward. Direct awareness also to your feet to insure they remain equally balanced.
--Shoulder Scoops for four breathes. Alternating hands, lift the cupped hands to the ceiling, drawing them back and expanding the chest, returning to Mountain Pose.
--Lifting into Parallel Hands, moving into Modified Forward Fold. Bend is a hinge at the hips, knees bent, gently grasp the elbows and allow the body to sag into the thighs. Release hand to the mat after five breaths, rolling up one vertebrae at a time with attention directed to the abdominal muscles to straighten the spine and return to Mountain Pose.
--Full Side Stretch on the left and the right. Emphasis on flat body with weight evenly balanced of the feet. Return to Mountain Pose.
--Modified Forward Fold. Same as above.
--Mountain Pose to Standing Prayer Pose. Three directed breaths in Standing Prayer Pose, then release to Mountain Pose.

Appendix E

Meditation Methods

Centering Prayer

1. Sit in an upright position, in a straight back chair or on the floor. You should be comfortable but physically engaged.
2. Begin breathing deeply into your stomach then lifting the breath into the lungs. Breathe through your nose.
3. Center yourself with a brief prayer or simply a few moments in time.
4. Select a "sacred word." This should be brief, a one-syllable word such as "hope" or "peace" or "sober" or "Jesus." This Word in not a "mantra"; it simply helps you to center yourself.
5. As you move into your time, drop the sacred word and enter into emptiness and internal silence.
6. Thoughts may rise, but simply let them go returning to emptiness and internal silence.
7. If you've found you've hooked onto a thought, return to your "sacred word" so it can return you to your center then drop it again.
8. As your time concludes, at least ten minutes, close with a brief prayer or simple stretching.

Concentrative Meditation

1. Sit in an upright position, in a straight back chair or on the floor.
2. Begin breathing, deeply into your stomach then lifting the breath into the lungs. Breathe through your nose.
3. Center yourself with a brief prayer or simply a few moments in time.
4. Direct your concentration to a "mantra." This can be single word spoken silently on the inhale or exhale. It can be a short phrase or longer word spoken silently in the inhale and exhale. The "mantra" can be using a number; i.e., counting up to 5 then back to one. The "mantra" may be simply focusing on your breath or a picture, or a lighted candle. The point is your concentration is directed to your "mantra" whatever form it takes and remains there. If other thoughts enter your mind, release them and return to your "mantra."
5. As you time concludes, at least ten minutes, close with a brief prayer, or simple stretching.

Attempt to find a "sacred space." This is a space you can use consistently during this process. I suggest your meditation is done first thing in the morning. But, that is a suggestion. The key is to do it. Mediation is a practiced craft, not learned by in depth reading or study.

Appendix F

Public Access TV and
Fliers for AA and Christian Group
Posted and Distributed

Conscious Contact with God

11th Step Open Alcoholics Anonymous Meeting
Find Healing and New Found Freedom
Wednesday Evening
7:00 p.m.

Mild Yoga . . . if you can stand, sit, and breathe you can do this!

Silent Meditation . . . silence the chaos and listen for your Higher Power

Reading, Reflection and Conversation . . . what is your experience of Higher Power?

First Presbyterian Church
414 North Delaware Avenue
York, NE
The Parlor Area of the Church Building
402-362-5176

Experience the Presence of God

Find Healing and Freedom in Christ's Grace
Thursday Evenings
7:00 p.m.

Mild Yoga . . . if you can stand, sit, and breathe you can do this!

Silent Meditation . . . silence the chaos and listen for the Holy Spirit!
"Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Reading, Reflection and Conversation . . . what is your experience of God?

First Presbyterian Church
414 North Delaware Avenue
York, NE
The Parlor Area of the Church Building
402-362-5176

Experience the Presence of God

Find Healing and New Found Freedom In Christ's Grace

Mild Yoga . . . if you can stand, sit and breathe you can do this!

Christian Meditation . . . silence the chaos and listen for the Holy Spirit! "Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10

Scripture and Reflection . . . what is your experience of God?

First Presbyterian Church
414 North Delaware Avenue/ The Parlor Area of the Building
7:00 p.m., Thursdays, beginning January 14-March 31, 2016

The gathering is approximately one hour long and is led by Pastor Michael Eickhoff, a Certified Yoga Instructor and doctoral candidate in Christian

Spiritual Formation at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. If you have any question you can contact Pastor Mike at 402-362-5176.

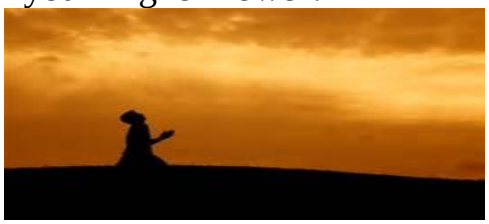
Conscious Contact with God

Find Healing and New Found Freedom Through Step 11 Open AA Meeting

Mild Yoga **. . .** if you can stand, sit and breathe you can do this!

Silent Meditation **. . .** silence the chaos and listen for the movement of your Higher Power!

Reading, Reflection and Conversation . . . what is the experience of your Higher Power?



First Presbyterian Church
414 North Delaware Avenue/ The Parlor Area of the Building
7:00 p.m. Wednesdays beginning January 13, 2016

The gathering is approximately one hour long and the meeting is led by Pastor Michael Eickhoff, a recovering alcoholic, Certified Yoga Instructor

and doctoral candidate in Christian Spiritual Formation at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. If you have any question you can contact Mike at 402-362-5176.

Appendix G

Participant Instructions

Guidelines for Research Participants

--Prioritize weekly group meetings. Your attendance is important.

--Do ten minutes, as a minimum, each day of mediation. I suggest in the mornings. (see reverse of this page for two suggested methods of meditation)

--Do two more sessions of yoga during the week beyond what we do in the group gatherings. These should be, at least, at the level of what we do in the group gatherings. If you'd like to do more, or do yoga for longer periods of time, that's fine. You can attend yoga classes, get a DVD or a book, or simply follow what we do in the group gatherings.

--If you like, you can keep a journal of your thoughts, feelings and reflections. This is for your use only. I will ***NOT*** ask to review or use it in my study unless you speak directly from it.

--Every third week we will gather and discuss as a participant group our experiences over the preceding weeks.

Meditation Methods

Centering Prayer

1. Sit in an upright position, in a straight back chair or on the floor. You should be comfortable but physically engaged.
2. Begin breathing, deeply into your stomach then lifting the breath into the lungs. Breathe through your nose.
3. Center yourself with a brief prayer or simply a few moments in time.
4. Select a “sacred word.” This should be brief, one syllable word such as “hope” or “peace” or “sober” or “Jesus.” This Word in not a “mantra” it simply helps you to center yourself.
5. As you move into your time, drop the sacred word and enter into emptiness and internal silence.

6. Thoughts make rise, but simply let them go returning to emptiness and internal silence.
7. If you've found you've hooked onto a though, return to your "sacred word" so it can return you to your center then drop it again.
8. As you time concludes, at least ten minutes, close with a brief prayer, or simple stretching.

Concentrative Meditation

1. Sit in an upright position, in a straight back chair or on the floor.
2. Begin breathing, deeply into your stomach then lifting the breath into the lungs. Breathe through your nose.
3. Center yourself with a brief prayer or simply a few moments in time.
4. Direct your concentration to a "mantra." This can be single word spoken silently on the inhale or exhale. It can be a short phrase or longer word spoken silently in the inhale and exhale. The "mantra can be using a number; i.e., counting up to 5 then back to one. The "mantra" may be simply focusing on your breath or a picture, or a lighted candle. The point is your concentration is directed to your "mantra" whatever form it takes and remains there. If other thoughts enter your mind, release them and return to your "mantra."
5. As you time concludes, at least ten minutes, close with a brief prayer, or simple stretching.

Attempt to find a "sacred space." This is a space you can use consistently during this process. I suggest your meditation is done first thing in the morning. But, that is a suggestion. The key is to do it. Mediation is a practiced craft, not learned by in depth reading or study.

Appendix H

CIRG and TSG Interview Questions after Three Weeks (questions at week three were identical for both groups).
-What is your experience of the first three weeks of yoga and meditation; reflect on your personal experience, the interaction with others and you experience of God?
-What happened in your private practice of yoga and meditation?
-How do you want to continue with the process? What thoughts do you have to adjust or improve, or provide more clarity with what is taking place?

Questions varied between the CIRG and the TSG based on conversation and feedback present in general weekly, open group gatherings.

TSG Interview Session Two after Six Weeks.
-Reflect on your first six weeks and what feels different in your life.
-Do you feel we are touching a level of consciousness beyond the intellectual, but a consciousness that is beneath intellectual thought? What seems to be emerging?

CIRG Interview Session Two after Six Weeks.
-How has your reflection on yoga and meditation, and how it impacts your relationships, changed these past six weeks?
-How do you encounter the experience as an individual when gathered in the group? How do you experience it as a person when we're in this setting?
-What is the general sense of safety and intimacy in the group gatherings, not only for yourself, but as you interpret the group as a whole.

TSG Interview Session Three after Nine Weeks.
-How is your "conscious contact with God" different now than when we began?
-How have things changed in your life with people close to you and also with casual encounters?
-Talk about your experience with "self" and what feels different.

CIRG Interview Session Three after Nine Weeks.
-How have you experienced the discipline portion of the journey, actually sticking with the practices of yoga and meditation?
-Talk about your experience of God, of Christ, in the context of the group's gatherings and as individuals, when we come together as a group, but also in your individual lives.
-Talk about how you see the possibility of a group like this continuing, at a future point, and its potential influence on others.

CIRG and TSG Session Four after Twelve Weeks (The questions were, as in session one, identical for both groups).
-How consistently did you maintain your disciplines of yoga and meditation; what feels as if it is experienced differently as a result of your participation; how do you feel your relationship with God, self and others is altered as a result of your participation?
-How would you change or adapt the process to make it more effective?

-Where would you like to see the process go from here?

Appendix I

TSG Meeting Notes

Conscious Contact with God
AA Open Step 11 Meeting

January 13
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "New Selves Unfolding, pg. 44
Attendance: 8
Meeting: 7 p.m.-8:21 p.m.
Weather: Overcast. Cold
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

January 20
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "Breakthrough," pg. 55
Attendance: 7
Meeting 7 p.m.-8:15 p.m.
Weather: clear, cold
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

January 27
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "Only One Reason," pg. 97
Attendance: 7
Meeting 7 p.m-8:11 p.m.
Weather: Cloudy, moderate temperatures
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

February 3
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe, "Total Surrender," pg. 29*
Attendance: 7
Meeting 7 p.m.-8:27 p.m.
Weather: Clouds, cold, one day after a blizzard
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

February 10
No Community Meeting, Ash Wednesday Worship

February 17
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "God Found Me," pg. 24.
Attendance: 5
Weather: Mild, cool 2 sick with flu
Meeting 7 p.m.-8:05 p.m.
Closed with serenity prayer

February 24
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "Letting Go," pg. 41
Attendance: 5
Weather: Cold, cloudy. 2 sick with flu, 1 another scheduled item.
Meeting: 7 p.m.-8:02
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

March 2
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "My Friend," pg. 79
Attendance: 7
Weather: Mild, pleasant for early March
Meeting: 7 p.m.-8:12 p.m.
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

March 9
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "In His Own Individual Right," pg. 5
Attendance: 6
Weather: Mild. Two sick with flu
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:26 p.m.
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

March 16
Researcher not present, research participant led. My father's funeral.

March 23
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "Conversation," pg. 85
Attendance: 8 1 Ala-non
Weather: High winds, winter storm coming.
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.- 8:29 p.m.
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

March 30
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: Alcoholics Anonymous, page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "God is Good," pg. 86.
Attendance 9
Weather: Mild, early spring conditions.
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:37 p.m.
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

April 6
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "Inner Voice," pg. 83.
Attendance: 7
Weather: Rainy, cooler.
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:21 p.m.
Closed with the Serenity Prayer

April 13
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reading: *Alcoholics Anonymous,* page 85, first full paragraph; *Came to Believe*, "Destinations," pg. 93.
Attendance: 7 1 Ala-non.
Weather: Warmer, great spring weather.
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:34 p.m.
Closed with the Serenity Prayer.

CIRG Notes

Experience the Presence of God
Open Community Gathering

January 14
Yoga/Meditation/Refection

Reflective Reading: John 2: 1-11
Attendance: 19
Meeting: 7 p.m.-7:58 p.m.
Weather: Clear, cold
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the “Jesus Prayer” threefold.

January 21
Yoga/Meditation/Refection
Reflective Reading: Luke 4:14-21
Attendance: 13
Meeting 7:p.m.-8:01 p.m.
Weather: cold, freezing fog/drizzle
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the “Jesus Prayer” threefold.

January 28
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: I Corinthians 13:1-13
Attendance: 19
Meeting 7 p.m. -7:58 p.m.
Weather: Clear, Cold
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the “Jesus Prayer” threefold.

February 4
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: Luke 9:28-36
Attendance: 23
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-7:51 p.m.
Weather: Light snow
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the “Jesus Prayer” threefold.

February 11
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: Luke 4:1-13
Attendance: 17
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:01 p.m.
Weather: Clear, cold
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the “Jesus Prayer” threefold.

February 18
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: John 5:1-9
Attendance: 18
Meeting: 7:00p.m.-8:04
Weather: Mild winter conditions
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the “Jesus Prayer” threefold.

February 25
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: Exodus 3:13-15
Attendance: 15
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-7:51 p.m.
Weather: Cloudy, cold . . . flu season in full swing
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the "Jesus Prayer" threefold.

March 3
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32
Attendance: 16
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:02 p.m.
Weather: Warmer for early March
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the "Jesus Prayer" threefold.

March 10
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: John 12:1-8
Attendance: 14
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-7:49 p.m.
Weather: Freezing rain
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the "Jesus Prayer" threefold.

March 17
No meeting, my father died.

March 24
No meeting, Maundy Thursday worship.

March 31
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: Revelation 1:4-8
Attendance: 16
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:06 p.m.
Weather: Warmer early spring conditions
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the "Jesus Prayer" threefold.

April 7
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: John 21:1-14
Attendance: 14
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-7:53 p.m.
Weather: Cold, rain
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the "Jesus Prayer" threefold.

April 14
Yoga/Meditation/Reflection
Reflective Reading: Psalm 23
Attendance: 13
Meeting: 7:00 p.m.-8:01 p.m.
Weather: Nice, very fair conditions
Closed meeting with joined hands saying the “Jesus Prayer” threefold.

Most, but not all “reflective readings” were taken from the upcoming week lectionary texts.

The “Jesus Prayer,” spoken while in a circle, holding hands: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.”

Appendix J

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

For Human Subject Research Conducted by Persons Affiliated With
Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Introduction

Mike Eickhoff, Student
Austin Seminary Doctor of Ministry Student Conducting Research Final Doctor of Ministry Project
Phone: 402-710-1188
Email Address: meickhoff@hotmail.com
Research Supervisor: Charles Mendenhall Ph.D.
Phone: 512-404-4800
Email: cmmendenhall@gmail.com
Feel free to contact either of us at any time if you have questions about this study.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to study and explore the question *"Do varied forms of contemplative meditation, including the practice of yoga, enhance healing and fuller life in the participants?"* Two groups of four to six participants, one group from an institutional Christian religious background and one from Twelve Step recovery background, will constitute the research sample.
I am trying to learn more about the process of the spiritual life and healing for those desiring to deepen and expand their experience of self, others and God.

Procedure

If you consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the following ways. There will be a brief training session to outline the requirements of daily meditation/contemplative prayer. You will also be required to enter a ten to twelve minute practice of mild yoga at least three times a week. Each person will be asked to keep, for themselves, a journal of their experience. The groups will meet, separately, once a week for a period of sixty to seventy minutes for the practice of yoga, meditation and reflection. Interviews will be conducted with selected participants in a group setting once every three week. There are four gatherings in total. The interviewer will audio record of the interviews. Four to six persons who actively participate in the congregational life of an institutional religious community and four to six person who are part of a Twelve Step recovery program will be selected. Each person selected with an institutional Christian religious background will be active in Christian faith and worship. The persons selected for the Twelve Step group will have a minimum of four months sobriety. Each group will be asked to explore their experience over the time involved. The participants included are gender and age varied.

Audio & Video Recording

I will make an audio recording of the session.

Notes on the interviews will be kept on file until the Doctor of Ministry process is complete. They will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and the names of the participants will be pseudonyms.

Time Required

The projected begins January 13, 2016 and concludes on May 16, 2016. Persons interviewed should expect a twelve week time commitment. During the twelve weeks participants will be asked for ten to forty minutes a day. They are also required to be present for the weekly gathering and for the interview session which occur once every three weeks. The weekly gatherings will last sixty to seventy minutes. The interview sessions will last forty to sixty minutes.

Voluntary Participation.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study as a whole, you may still decline to participate in any of the sessions or decline to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer; and/or you may withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks.

At this time, there are no apparent risks involved in this study.

Benefits.

Although there is no guarantee of any benefits arising from the project, possible invigoration of the person participating, the community and further awareness of God's presence and calling may arise.

Confidentiality/Anonymity.

Your name will be kept anonymous in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person who sees the interview notes. When I write the paper, I will use pseudonyms (made-up names) for all participants. Two clinically licensed persons will review the audio recordings from the group gatherings. When the audio recordings are reviewed by these two individuals, names will not be disclosed in order to protect the anonymity of the participants. Also, both persons reviewing and evaluating the recordings are bound by professional ethical confidentiality guidelines.

Importance of Candor: It is essential to this kind of research that all responses from the participants be open, candid, forthright, and honest.

Sharing of the Results

A one-two page capsule report will be made available to all direct participants. Classes and other gatherings will also be made available which discuss the results of the research. The anonymity of the participant is strictly observed at all times.

Publication
There is a possibility that I may publish this study or refer to it in published writing in the future. Identifying details will be altered from the beginning of the process to protect anonymity (i.e., names). This research is for an elective course in the Doctor of Ministry program at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

I Will Retain All Consent Forms in a Locked File Cabinet Until One Year After the Completion of the Doctor of Ministry Process.

Before you sign: By signing this form below, you clearly understand and are agreeing to participate in this research project with all conditions noted above and with the possibility of being recorded, and your words quoted or summarized in a class paper or final doctoral thesis or other research purposes stated above. ***Be sure that any questions you have are answered to your full satisfaction before signing this document.*** If you agree to participate in this study, a one-two page capsule summary of this report will be given to you.

Participant's Signature (including minors)

_____
Date:_____

Print Name_____

Parent of guardian's signature (research involving minors required for participants under the age of 18)

_____ Date:_____

Researcher's Signature_____ Date:_____

Print Name_____

This consent form can be revoked at any time. After the request of revocation, no further information provided by you or any allusion to you will be contained in further research. To revoke your permission, please submit a written request to Michael Eickhoff.

Figure 1.1

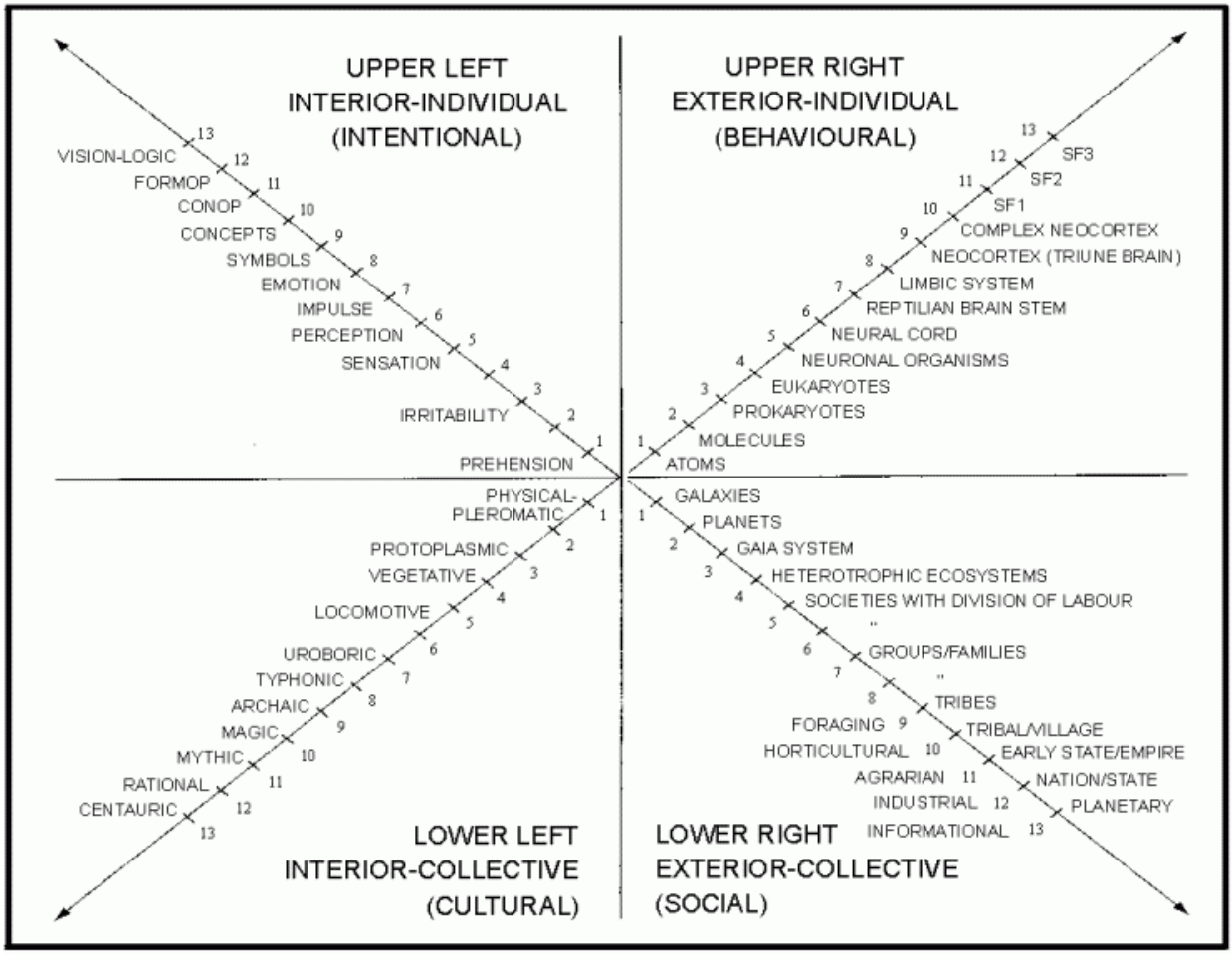
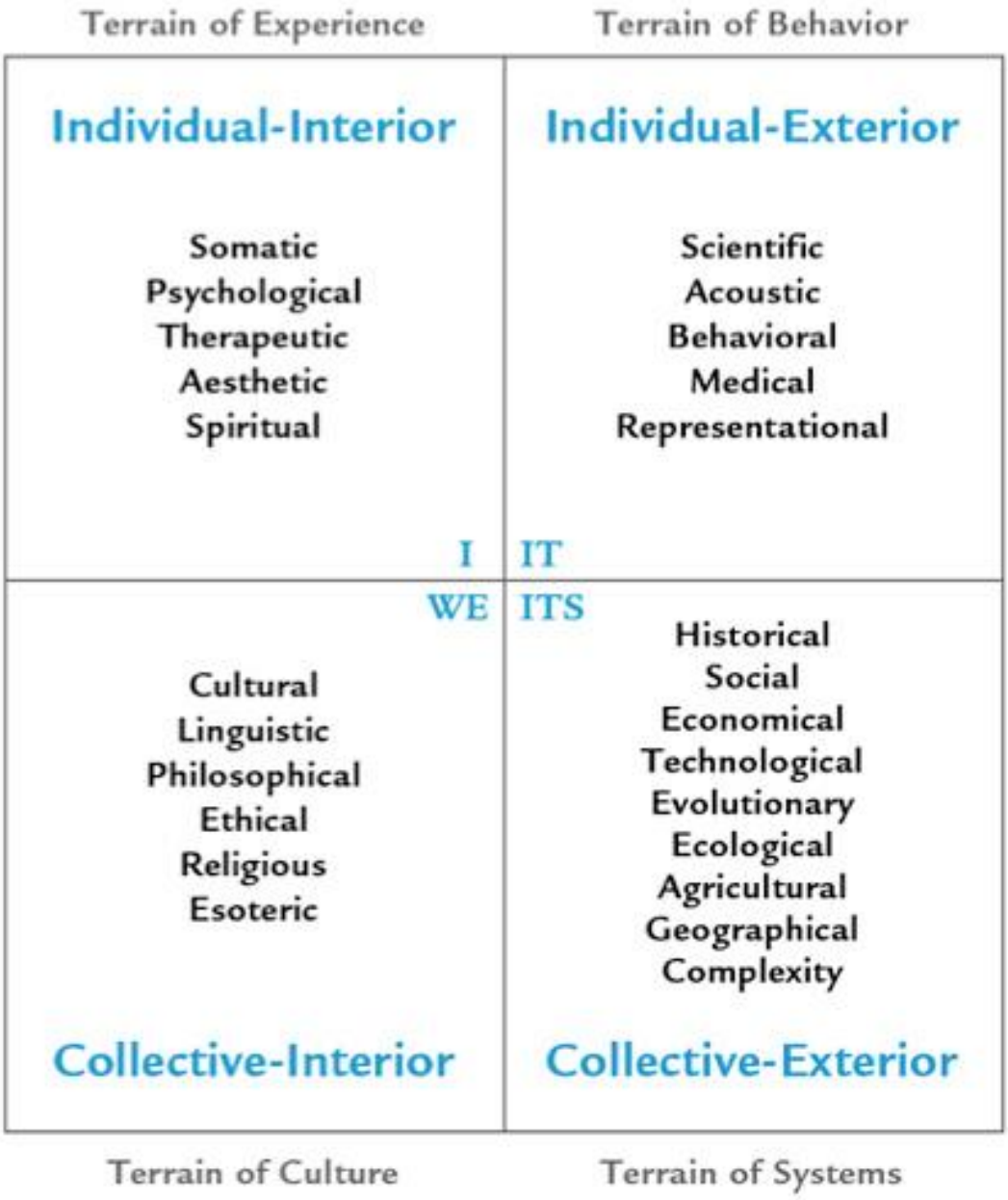

UPPER LEFT
INTERIOR-INDIVIDUAL
(INTENTIONAL)
VISION-LOGIC 13
FORMOP 12
CONOP 11
CONCEPTS 10
SYMBOLS 9
EMOTION 8
IMPULSE 7
PERCEPTION 6
SENSATION 5
IRRITABILITY 4
PREHENSION 3
PHYSICAL-PLEROMATIC 2
PROTOPLASMIC 1
VEGETATIVE
LOCOMOTIVE
UROBORIC
TYPHONIC
ARCHAIC
MAGIC
MYTHIC
RATIONAL
CENTAURIC
LOWER LEFT
INTERIOR-COLLECTIVE
(CULTURAL)
UPPER RIGHT
EXTERIOR-INDIVIDUAL
(BEHAVIOURAL)
SF3 13
SF2 12
SF1 11
COMPLEX NEOCORTEX 10
NEOCORTEX (TRIUNE BRAIN) 9
LIMBIC SYSTEM 8
REPTILIAN BRAIN STEM 7
NEURAL CORD 6
NEURONAL ORGANISMS 5
EUKARYOTES 4
PROKARYOTES 3
MOLECULES 2
ATOMS 1
GALAXIES 1
PLANETS 2
GAIA SYSTEM 3
HETEROTROPHIC ECOSYSTEMS 4
SOCIETIES WITH DIVISION OF LABOUR 5
" 6
GROUPS/FAMILIES 7
" 8
TRIBES 9
TRIBAL/VILLAGE 10
EARLY STATE/EMPIRE 11
NATION/STATE 12
PLANETARY 13
FORAGING
HORTICULTURAL
AGRARIAN
INDUSTRIAL
INFORMATIONAL
LOWER RIGHT
EXTERIOR-COLLECTIVE
(SOCIAL)

Figure 1.2


Terrain of Experience
Terrain of Behavior
Individual-Interior
Somatic
Psychological
Therapeutic
Aesthetic
Spiritual
Individual-Exterior
Scientific
Acoustic
Behavioral
Medical
Representational
I
IT
WE
ITS
Cultural
Linguistic
Philosophical
Ethical
Religious
Esoteric
Historical
Social
Economical
Technological
Evolutionary
Ecological
Agricultural
Geographical
Complexity
Collective-Interior
Collective-Exterior
Terrain of Culture
Terrain of Systems

Bibliography

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. *Alcoholics Anonymous*. 4th ed. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001.

——. *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 1981.

Aldridge, David. *Spirituality, Healing and Medicine*. New York: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004.

Amen, Daniel G. *Change Your Brain Change Your Life: The Breakthrough Program for Conquering Anxiety, Depression, Obsessiveness, Anger, and Impulsiveness*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998.

American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-IV-TR*. Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2000.

Anderson, Herbert, and Edward Foley. *Mighty Stories and Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2001.

Armstrong, Thomas. "Stages of Life According to Erik Erikson." American Institute for Learning and Development. Posted August 15, 2012. http://institute4learning.com/blog/2012/08/15/the-stages-of-life-according-to-erik-erikson/ (accessed August 20, 2015).

Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Heart of the World*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1979.

Barnes, Michael. "Yoga." In *New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Edited by Philip Sheldrake, 653-55. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature*. 2nd edition. Revised and Augmented by F. Wilber Gingrich and Frederik W. Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Benner, David G. *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Edited by A. Alt, O. Eibfeldt, P. Kahle, and R. Kittel. Suttgart: Gesamtherstellung Biblia-Druck Stuttgart, 1967/1977.

Bourgeault, Cynthia. *Centering Prayer and Inner Awaken*ing. Landham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2004.

——. *The Wisdom Way of Knowing, Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to*

Awaken the Heart. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Brown, Brené. *Rising Strong: The Reckoning. The Rumble. The Revolution.* New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015.

Brown, Francis, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The New Brown—Driver—Briggs—Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979.

Brown, William. *Sacred Sense: Discovering the Wonder of God's Word and World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015.

Brueggeman, Walter. "Exodus." In *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 4. Edited by Leader K. Keck, Thomas Long, David L. Peterson, Bruce C. Birch, John J. Collins, Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, Jack A. Keller, Jr., William L. Lane, James Earl Massey, Gail H. O'Day, and Marion L. Soards, 713-15. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Clifford, Richard J. "Exodus." In *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Edited by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer and Roland E. Murphy, 47. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990.

Consiglio, Cyprian. *Prayer in the Cave of the Heart: The Universal Call to Contemplation*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010.

——. *Spirit, Soul, Body: Toward an Integral Christian Spirituality*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2015.

Davidson, Benjamin. *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*. Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986.

Davis, Scott K. "Healing and Exorcism" In *The New Interpreters' Handbook of Preaching*. Edited by Paul Scott Wilson, 79-81. Nashville: Abington Press, 2008.

Dayton, Tian. *Emotional Sobriety: From Relationship Trauma to Resilience and Balance.* Deerfield Beach: Heath Communications, 2007.

Emerson, David, and Elizabeth Hopper. *Overcoming Trauma through Yoga: Reclaiming Your Body*. Forward by Peter A. Levine and Stephen Cope. Introduction by Bessel Van der Kolk. Berkley: North Atlantic Books, 2011.

Erikson, Eric, and Joan Erikson. *The Life Cycle Completed: Extended Version with New Chapters on the Ninth Stage of Development*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997.

Foster, Richard. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth.* San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1981.

Gendlin, Eugene. *Focusing*. New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

Glasser, William. *Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1998.

Graham, Elaine, Heather Walton, and Frances Ward. *Theological Reflection: Methods*. London: SCM Press, 2010.

Griffiths, Bede. *Essential Writings, with an Introduction by Thomas Matus*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

The Greek New Testament. 4th rev. ed. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. Stuggart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, D-Stuttgart, 1994.

Groeschel, Benedict J. *Spiritual Passages: The Psychology of Spiritual Development*. New York: Cross Roads Publishing Company, 1983.

The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books. Gen. ed. Wayne A. Meeks. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989.

Hooper, Jane. "Please Come Home." A Journey of Heart and Breath. Posted Dec. 4, 2011. http://wwwsevaabroad-philoscribe.blogspot.com/2011/12/please-come-home-by-jane-hooper.html (accessed September 12, 2016).

James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. U.S.A.: Seven Treasures Publications, 2009.

Johnson, Vernon E. *Intervention: A Step by Step Guide for Families and Friends of Chemically Dependent Persons*. Center City: Hazelden, 1998.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1990.

Keating, Thomas, with Tom S. *Divine Therapy and Addiction: Centering Prayer and the Twelve Steps.* New York: Lantern Book, 2009.

——. *The Heart of the World: An Introduction to Contemplative Christianity.* New York: Cross Roads Publishing Company, 2008.

——. *Invitation to Love: The Way of Christian Contemplation*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011.

Keck, L. Robert. *Healing as a Sacred Path: A Story of Personal, Medical, and Spiritual Transformation.* West Chester: Chrysalis Books, 2002.

Kittel Pedrotti, Bonnie, Vicki Hoffer, and Rebecca Abts Wright. *Biblical Hebrew: A Text and Workbook*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Kornfield, Jack. "Even the Best Meditators Have Old Wounds to Heal: Combining Meditation and Psychotherapy." In *Paths Beyond Ego: The Transpersonal Vision.* Edited by Roger Walsh and Frances Vaughan, 67-69. New York: Penguin Group (USA), 1993.

Lane, Belden. "Narrative," In *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Edited by Michael Dowey, 696-97. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993.

Lawson, Hal A., James C. Caringi, Loretta Pyles, Janine M. Jurkowski, and Christine T. Bozlak. *Participatory Action Research: Pocket Guides to Social Research Method*s. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Lazar, Sara W., George Bush, Randy L. Gollub, Gregory L. Fricchione, Gurucharan Khalsa, and Herbert Benson. "Functional Brain Mapping of Relaxation Response to Meditation."*Neuroreport* 2, no. 7 (May 15, 2000): 1581-85. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.457.7125&rep=rep1&type=pdf (accessed July 7, 2016).

Lazar, Sara W., C. E. Kerr, R. H. Wasserman, J. R. Gray, D.N. Greve, M.T. Treadway, M. McGarvey, B.T. Quinn, J.A. Dusek, H. Benson, S.L. Rauch, C.I. Moore, and B. Fischl. "Meditation Experience is Associated with Increased Cortical Thickness." *Neuroreport* 16, no.17 (November 28, 2005): 1893-97. http://nslc.wustl.edu/courses/Bio3411/woolsey/Readings/Lecture11/Lazar%20NeurRep'05.pdf (accessed July 7, 2016).

Lewis, Alan E. *Between Cross and Resurrection: A Theology of Holy Saturday*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001.

Lundbald, Barbara K. "Narrative Theory." In *The New Interpreters' Handbook of Preaching*. Edited by Paul Scott Wilson, 203-04. Nashville: Abington Press, 2008.

Main, John. *Fully Alive: The Daily Path of Christian Meditation*. Edited by Laurence Freeman. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013.

Marion, Jim. *The Death of the Mythic God: The Rise of Evolutionary Spirituality*. Charlottesville: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2004.

May, Gerald M. *Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions*. New York: HarperOne, 1988.

McCann, J. Clinton Jr. "Psalms," In *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. 4. Edited by Lender K. Keck, Thomas Long, David L. Petersen, Bruce C. Birch, John J. Collins, Kathryn Pfisterer Darr, Jack A. Keller, Jr., William L. Lane, James Earl Massey, Gail H. O'Day, and Marion L. Soards, 864-66. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

McIntyre, Alice. *Participatory Action Research*. Qualitative Research Methods Series 52. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2008.

McKim, Donald K. *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.

Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer*. New York: Doubleday, 1969.

——. *The Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*. Edited by William H. Shannon. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003.

Miller, Alice. *The Body Never Lies: The Lingering Effects of Hurtful Parenting*. Translated by Andrew Jenkins. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2004.

Nelson, James, B. *Thirst: God and the Alcoholic Experience*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Peck, M. Scott. *The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values* and Spiritual Growth. New York: Touchstone, 1978.

Pennington, M. Basil. *Centering Prayer: Renewing an Ancient Christian Prayer Form.* New York: Image Books, 2001.

Principe, Walter H. "Christian Spirituality." In *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Edited by Michael Dowey, 931-38. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1993.

Quanbeck, W.A. "Repentance." In *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by George Arthur Buttrick, 33-34. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Rambo, Lewis. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.

Rambo, Shelly. *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. *Narrative Analysis.* Qualitative Research Methods Series 30. Newbury Park: Sage Press, 1993.

Rohr, Richard. *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*. Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2011.

——. *Falling Upward: The Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 2011.

——. *Immortal Diamond: The Search for the True Self*. San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 2013.

Ryan, Thomas. *Prayer of Heart and Body: Meditation and Yoga as Christian Spiritual Practice*. New York: Paulist Press, 1995.

Savage, Carl, and William Presnell. *Narrative Research and Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities*. Louisville: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008.

Smith, Paul R. *Integral Christianity: The Spirit's Call to Evolve.* St. Paul: Paragon House, 2011.

Steere, David A. *Rediscovering Confession: The Practice of Forgiveness and Where it Leads*. New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2009.

Steinke, Peter L. *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems*. Hendon: Alban Institute, 2006.

Swinton, John, and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Press, 2011.

Tanner, Kathryn. "Incarnation, Cross, and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal." *Anglican Theological Review* 86, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 35. http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/12166739/incarnation-cross-sacrifice-feminist-inspired-reappraisal (accessed July 21, 2014).

Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of NOW: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*. Navato: New World Library, 1999.

Tutu, Desmond. *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time.* New York: Doubleday, 2004.

Van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.

Van Deusen Hunsinger, Deborah. *Pray without Ceasing: Revitalizing Pastoral Care*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.

Wilber, Ken. *Integral Meditation: Mindfulness as a Path to Grow Up, Wake Up, and Show Up in Your Life*. Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2016.

——. *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000.

——. *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World*. Boston: Integral Books, 2007.

Wilson, Bill. "The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety." AA Grapevine, January 1958. http://silkworth.net/aahistory/emotionalsobriety.html (accessed August 15, 2016).