

## Sermon Series on Spiritual Discipline

**Spiritual Disciplines and the Realization of Christ Consciousness**Jerry Truex; Aug 31, 2008

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**A. Introduction**

Today, we continue our series on spiritual disciplines or religious practices. The spiritual disciplines I'm referring to include such practices as meditation, prayer, fasting, study, purification, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance, celebration, and other such practices.<sup>1</sup>

Today, I am proposing one thing. I believe that spiritual disciplines or practices enable us to transcend *our lower/false selves* and help us to realize *our higher/true selves*. Put differently, each of the different spiritual disciplines have a common purpose and that is to assist us in transcending our (narcissistic, self-centered) ego and realizing our union with God or Christ consciousness.

**B. Our True Self**

Jesus said,

"If any wants to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (NRSV Luke 9:23).

This is one of the "hard" sayings of Jesus. I think the key is found in the next verse:

"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (NRSV Lk 9:24).

It's a riddle. To solve the riddle, it is helpful to introduce the notions of "false self" and "true self". Let's read it again in that light:

"Whoever wants to save his life (false self), will lose it (true self), but whoever loses his life (false self) for me will save it (true self)." (NRSV Lk 9:25)

The false self is the sense of self we construct, or think we, are based on what we do (profession), what we have (possessions), and what image we project for the public (persona).

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<sup>1</sup> These are the main practices expounded on by Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline* (Third Edition, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

The true self is the Self that remains after we recognize we are not what we do, what we have, or what others think of us. If we lost our job, if we lost our possessions, or if we lost our reputation, we would still have a Self.

### C. Our Higher Self

Our true self is also our higher self.

After many years of studying the teachings of Jesus and Paul, I believe God wants God wants to share God's Own Self with human beings, so that human beings share in the divine life here-and-now and in the future. This is our higher self.

To put it another way, the unmanifest, transcendent God wants to manifest God's Own Self in-and-through human beings—in their bodies, in their actions, in their character, in their speech, their thoughts, and their relationships.

#### 1. Colossian 3:1-14

Colossians speaks about our higher self in the terms of putting on Christ.

**Colossians 3:1-14.** <sup>1</sup> So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, <sup>3</sup> for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)...

<sup>8</sup> But now you must get rid of all such things-- anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup> In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

<sup>12</sup> As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (NRSV)

I would like to make three comments about this passage.

## 2. Inner life

First, I believe this passage is about the inner life of every human being.<sup>2</sup> Notice how the passage emphasizes the inner (psycho-spiritual) life: the mind, passions, desires, greed, negative emotions, like anger, and positive qualities like compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love. Paul is talking about the inner life of human beings.

## 3. Inner conflict

Second, the passage points out the inner conflict between *our higher self* and *our lower self*. There is a tension and inner conflict between (a) *our higher self*, which is above, which longs for union with God and (b) *our lower self* or selves (subpersonalities), which is below and seems to subvert *the higher self*.

*Our higher self* has great vision, creativity, compassion, and purpose—has Christ consciousness; however, *our lower selves*—often hidden from our awareness, often driven by fear, selfishness, and ignorance—try to sabotage the aspirations of our higher self.

Our higher self wants to be a conduit of heaven on earth, but our lower self is full of fear, full of ego defense mechanisms, and says, “*Gehenna* is good enough.”<sup>3</sup>

## 4. Inner transformation

Third, the passage is about inner transformation. Paul calls us to put off *our lower self* and to put on *our higher self*. This inner transformation is renewal in the image of the creator (10). Paul uses several metaphors to express this transformation—ascending from lower to higher, putting on new clothes, and moving from death to life.

### a. Ascending from lower to higher

Inner transformation is like ascending from lower to higher. Paul says, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (v. 2). The phrase, “set your minds,” is the Greek word φρονέω. It means “think about or be mindful of.”

Literally, “Have higher mindfulness [of the] things” (τὰ ἄνω φρονεῖτε). Paul is calling us to see things from a higher level.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 11: “Christ is all and in all” (NRSV) or “But Christ *is* all and in all” (KJV); ἀλλὰ [τὰ] πάντα καὶ ἐν πᾶσιν Χριστός.

<sup>3</sup> The word, *Gehenna*, is often translated as “hell” in English translations of the Bible. *Gehenna* (Heb. *gehinom*; גֵּהֶנֶם) referred to the burning garbage dump south of Jerusalem.

Think of a mountain. When we go up the mountain, we transcend the lower levels. We still see the lower part of the mountain, but now we see it from a higher vantage point.

Elsewhere Paul says, "Let the same mind(fullness) be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (NRSV Phil 3:5). Transformation is seeing from a higher consciousness, a Christ consciousness.

### **b. Putting on new clothes**

Inner transformation is like taking off old, dirty clothes and putting on new ones (vs. 8-10, 14). Paul says *clothe* yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and love (vs. 12, 14).

- How often do you change your clothes? Regularly, daily.
- Why do you change your clothes? Dirty, smelly, old.

In the same way, like changing our clothes, we need to, on a daily or regular basis, put off dirty, smelly thoughts and emotions (anger, resentment, fear) and we need to put on positive thoughts and emotions (compassion, kindness, patience).

### **c. Moving from death to life**

Transformation is moving from death to life (3-4). For Paul and Jesus, death comes before life. Really? How so? When they talk about death leading to life, Paul and Jesus are thinking about seeds. Seed were thought to be dead. The dead seeds were planted in the ground and up came new life.

**John 12:24.** <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (NRSV)

Both Jesus and Paul are talking about inner transformation. Something must die for something else to live.

For Jesus, the lower self must be transcended, so that the higher self might live in union with God.

**John 12:25.** <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life (lower self) lose it (the higher self), and those who hate their life (the lower self) in this world will keep it (the higher self) for eternal life. (NRSV)

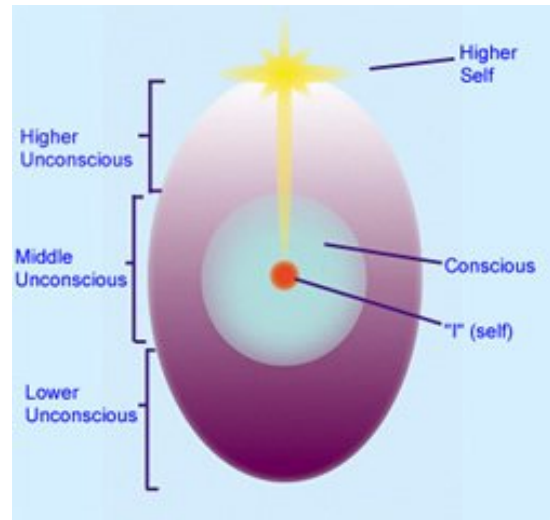
## D. Transpersonal Psychology

Transpersonal psychology, and specifically Psychosynthesis, uses an egg diagram as a map for the psyche.

### 1. Lower Unconscious

The lower 1/3 represents the lower unconscious, the basic psychological activities that influence the body and the self, including:

- Basic drives and urges,
- Emotionally charged complexes,
- Repressed desires and traumas,
- Primitive dreams and images,
- Uncontrolled psychological processes, phobias, obsessions, and compulsive impulses.



### 2. Middle Unconscious

The middle 1/3 contains our waking consciousness where we easily access recent memories and daily activities. Freud called it the “preconscious”.

### 3. Higher Unconscious

The upper 1/3 contains the Higher Unconscious. “It is the realm of experiences that are often difficult to put into words—in which we sense deeper meaning in life, a profound serenity and peace .... [even] a unity between ourselves and the cosmos.”<sup>4</sup>

In the higher unconscious “lies our creativity, intuition, promptings to love, compassion, and service; our highest values and inspirations; our spiritual energies; and emerging growth patterns.”<sup>5</sup>

For various reasons (splitting and repression) most people are only vaguely aware of the higher unconscious.

### 4. Lower Self

In its center, is the conscious lower self or I, “the ego” [the controller].

The circled area is the Field of Consciousness, which contains what we are aware of, such as our thoughts, images, sensations and feelings, desires and impulses. The “I,” or the self, is pure self-awareness or the observing self.

<sup>4</sup> John Firman and Ann Gila, *Psychosynthesis: A Psychology of the Spirit* (University of New York, 2002) 31.

<sup>5</sup> Molly Young Brown, *Unfolding Self: The Practice of Psychosynthesis* (New York: Helios, 2004) 20.

**5. Subpersonalities**

The lower self is primarily controlled by or dominated by the unconscious process of the lower unconscious and by subpersonalities. Subpersonalities are complexes or constellations of behaviors, feelings, and thoughts that take of distinct personalities within ourselves—the protector, the skeptic, fear, anger, the damaged self, the victim, the vulnerable child, desire, the seeker, the parent, etc.

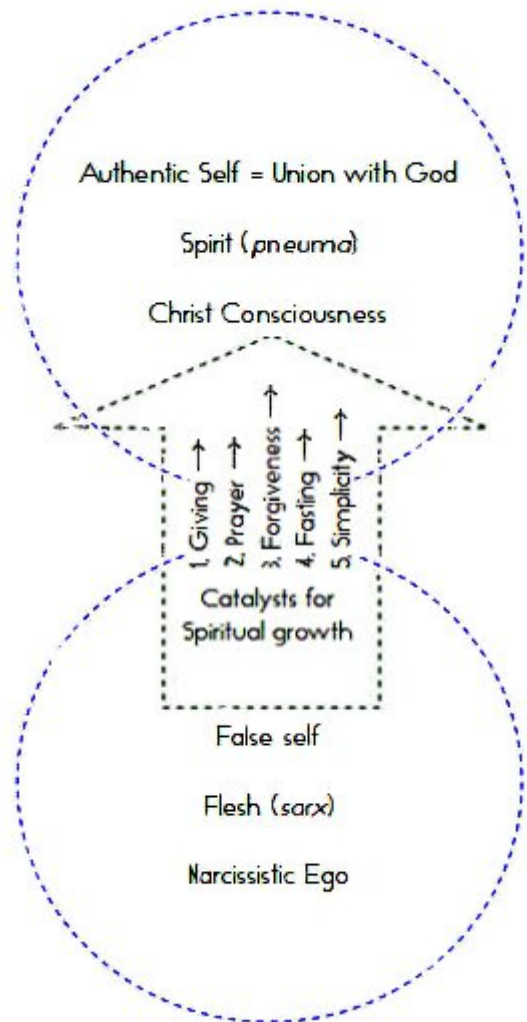
Subpersonalities can undermine our highest aspirations. For example, the voice of fear might sabotage our aspirations to become political candidate, a creative artist, or a generous or magnanimous person.

Voice dialogue is one of the methods we can use to discover and disassociate from subpersonalities that sabotage our highest aspirations.<sup>6</sup>

**6. Higher Self**

Spiritual growth involves moving from *the lower self*, controlled by unconscious complexes, impulses, subpersonalities and pure self-interest, to *the higher self*, a distinct state of consciousness that recognizes its connection to God, other people, and the cosmos as a whole.

The higher self recognizes it is not a separate self, but is a “transpersonal self,” sharing a field of consciousness with all other conscious realities including God. Here is discovered purpose, meaningfulness, understanding, compassion, unconditional love, creativity; in other word, here is cosmic consciousness, Christ consciousness, and mystical union with God.



**E. Spiritual Disciplines**

What is a spiritual discipline? A spiritual discipline is any activity that is engaged in regularly that helps a person transcend the lower self or the (narcissistic) ego and move toward Christ Consciousness (see diagram).

<sup>6</sup> Hal and Sidra Stone, *Embracing Ourselves: The Voice Dialogue Manual* (New World Library, 1998). Dennis Genpo Merzel, *Big Mind, Big Heart* (Salt Lake City, Big Mind Publishing, 2007).

## F. Lovingkindness Meditation

Let us now practice the spiritual discipline of “lovingkindness meditation,” a popular form of Buddhist meditation that fits very well with Jesus’ own attitudes and example. I believe that “lovingkindness meditation” can help people learn to transcend their lower self.<sup>7</sup>

Bring to your mental screen the image of some person, place, object or symbol that helps you get in contact with all that is good in you. Maybe it is someone in your life. Whenever you see them you feel happy. Notice how it affects your body sensations—the opening of the heart, the smile.

Now, think about *someone you will really like or love*—a family member or a friend. See their image. Hear their voice. Intentionally radiate love and good will as you think about that person.

Now, think about someone whom you have a *neutral relationship*. See their image. Hear their voice. Radiate the same lovingkindness toward them. Let the warmth and love fill your body.

Now, think about someone you have a *negative relationship*. If uncomfortable feelings come up, see if you can dissolve them into the energy flow and transmute them into the same feelings of love and compassion. Generate feelings of patience, forgiveness, and radiate unconditional positive regard for that person.

Now, let go of that focus and *abide in the universal positive feeling*. Let the wellspring of human goodness flow within you. And radiate in all directions to all beings, known and unknown.

Now, be aware of loving feelings coming to you from people in your life that care about you... and perhaps from beings unknown to you... receive and reradiate that love that binds you to all creation.

I hope that this meditation has helped you to experience your higher self, your Christ consciousness, and the compassion that naturally flows from that state.

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Shinzen Young; <http://www.shinzen.org>.