



REFLECTIONS ON OUR TRUE IDENTITY

THINGS TO REMEMBER

PETER M. PARR

Things to Remember

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Introduction

Through the ages, there have always been those who, when they looked at another, understood they were looking at themselves. Seers and mystics of all religious traditions have seen through the veil of form and recognised the essential oneness of all things.

But what would be the implications if we held an awareness of the Divine in everyone all of the time? What if we tried genuinely to live this belief day by day, minute by minute, in the encounters we have with our family, with our friends, at work, and in society at large?

This book is an invitation and a challenge to explore these questions.

A note about words

At best, words are pointers. They are tools we can use to describe an experience, but they are no substitute for experience itself. The word 'God', like any other word, is a human construct. It is an attempt to describe what cannot be described. When I use the word 'God', I use it as shorthand for that which is eternal: Being, Essence, Is-ness. Some would call this Light, or Love, or Spirit. If you are uncomfortable with the word 'God', I encourage you to substitute another which speaks to your condition.

I don't ask you to agree with what you read, or to accept it. I invite you to reflect on the words. Read a paragraph or two, a section at most, and then put the book to one side. Close your eyes and become aware of your breathing. Contemplate on what you've read. Consider your own experience, however similar or different to mine. Then take a pen and write down your own reflections. Not the beliefs you were brought up with, or those you've read about elsewhere, but your own. There is a still small voice in all of us, a source of inspiration and guidance. Listen, then, and trust that words will be given to you. What feels true for you?

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am.

Be still and know.

Be still.

Be.

WHO WE ARE

Imagine you are standing on the shore of the ocean, the waves breaking gently at your feet. You wade in a little way, and you take an empty glass and dip it in the water. What are you holding in the glass? It is not the ocean. The ocean is still there and has not been diminished to any visible degree. But the water is of the ocean: from it, and like it. Its essence is the same. For me, God is like the ocean. And God's Spirit within us is like the water in the glass.



In my own understanding, God is what Is. There is nowhere – no time, no place, no situation – where God does not abide. God is our essence but, more than that, God is Essence. Anything which is not God is not real, even though it may appear to be so. At our heart is Love, and that Love is of God. At our core is eternity, which has been, is now and forever will be. When we show kindness, it is God acting through us. Our God-Self is the truth about Who we are.

Are we the 'mad monkey mind' which chatters away, judging others, judging ourselves, never satisfied and always seeking more?

Are we male and female? Young and old? Gay and straight? Black and white? Are we rich and poor? Healthy? Sick? Are we our bodies which live for a while but then return to dust?

Are we the things we own? The jobs we do? The roles we play?

Who are we, when we take off our costumes and masks?



Genesis 1:27 suggests we are created in the image of God. Too often, humanity has turned this around and made a god in the image of man – one who, like human beings, is quick to anger, and whose love is conditional on our behaving in certain ways or believing particular things. That god is separate from us, as we believe we are separate from one another. Our existence is precarious. The world appears a fearful place.

It is worth taking a step back and asking how we came to be here. What created the universe? What caused the big bang? Did a reaction between infinitely small particles trigger the biggest explosion in the history of time and set in train an evolutionary chain of events which led to life on earth, and to you reading this book now? What made those particles and caused them to react? All matter, and time and space itself, was created out of nothing, out of formlessness. And what is formlessness? Energy. Spirit.

According to the Gospel of Thomas, a collection of sayings attributed to Jesus, "If the flesh came into being because of spirit, that is amazing. If spirit came into being because of the body, that would be really amazing". [\[1\]](#) If we accept God is Spirit and that we are created in God's image, does it not follow that our essential nature is Spirit as well?



We seek to use words to describe what is beyond words. It is enough to say, 'I Am'. That which Is, is God.

Then there are the qualities we ascribe to God. God is Love. God is Truth. God is Joy. God is Peace. But here already we are moving a step away from the simple truth, I Am that I Am. The problem is, we each interpret these words in different ways.

Yes, God is all of those things. But even when these qualities *seem* to be lacking, God is still there. He does not cease to Be. He cannot 'go' anywhere, because She Is everywhere. In the midst of the battlefield, God Is. When galaxies collide and stars explode, God Is. Nothing causes God to cease to Be.

That Is-ness – the indestructible Reality beyond time and space and form – is in us also. It is in us, as we are in it. We are part of it. When I speak, then, of the Divine Essence in everyone, I mean that which is, and which will always be. Our roles, dreams and fears, and our bodies too, we experience for a while. But all of them pass.

Are we something temporary, a flame which is snuffed out in a cosmic instant? Or are we that part of us which Is and forever will Be? Are we the form or the formless? Are we that which fears, or that which knows Itself as eternal, and is therefore free to love? It can look on death and see through it. In nature, we see death is not real. Each spring, death is overcome. There is an eternal force for Life. Stars too die, but in doing so they spark the seeds for new life. In the words of *A Course in Miracles*, "nothing real can be threatened" [2]. Our Spiritual Essence is from God, and like God. Eternal. Whole. Lacking nothing. When we are in touch with that core of our Being we come to walk cheerfully over the world, sons and daughters of the living God.

For reflection

These exercises – and the others in this book – can be explored either on your own or with others in small groups. If you want to reflect on them with others, I have found that a creative listening format encourages deep sharing and may bring fresh insights. Through listening to one another in a spirit of acceptance and love, we open ourselves to new light and deeper connections. The format of a creative listening session is described later in this book in the section on Remembering.

If you are doing the exercises on your own, I encourage you to choose a time and a place where you will not be disturbed. Commit to not answer the telephone if it rings. If a dog starts barking outside, simply let it be. If you are not able to give these exercises your full attention now, it is better to schedule a time when you can.

Have a pen and notepad to hand so that you can write down what comes to you.

Sit in stillness for five to ten minutes. To centre yourself, you may wish to concentrate on your breathing. Be aware of the air as it enters through your nose. You may find it helpful to close your eyes. If your mind wanders, return to your breath to help anchor you in the present moment.

When you are ready, open your eyes and reflect on the sentences below.

- If it is true that there is a divine essence in everyone, then...

- If there is a divine essence within me, then...
- If my true Self is made in the image of God, then...

Without thinking too much, complete each of the sentences in your own words. Write down the first thoughts that come to you. Then, rooted in stillness, try to come up with several further responses. Do not censor any response that comes, or judge it. Simply write it down. For example, taking the first statement, I might write, 'If it is true that there is a divine essence in everyone, then each one of us is holy. If there is a divine essence in everyone, then everyone is my brother or sister. If there is a divine essence in everyone, then what unites us is greater than what divides us. ...Everyone has the potential for good...' Let your responses fill a page.

EQUALITY

In a churchyard in East Sussex there is a grave shared by two sisters. Although they had the same parents, Pattie and Catherine died almost a century apart. Catherine lived to be ninety-three. Pattie did not see her second birthday.

On the level of form, some people are blessed with good health, while others suffer physical pain or handicaps or have their lives cut short by disease. In our life situations, some are blessed with loving family relationships, satisfying work and material comforts. For others, life is a more or less constant struggle. Perhaps we lost our parents at an early age; perhaps we've experienced the loss of people we love. We may even lack the most basic needs: clean water, food and shelter.

One thing we all have in common is that, whether after two years or a hundred and two, we will all die. However happy or sad our lives might be, they will be over in a cosmic instant, and our bodies will return to dust.

To me, this cannot be the whole story. If we were only our bodies, God would have plenty to answer for. We say that "God is love" (1 John 4:8), but how would it be loving to create us, let us suffer awhile and then watch us die? My heart and my head both tell me this cannot be so.

If there is divine spirit in everyone, then the Good News is that there is part of us which cannot die, which is eternally safe, and which no harm can ever befall.



Let us return to the analogy I used at the start of this book. You are standing on the shore of the ocean. You take a glass and you dip it in the waves and fill it with water. Then you take a fine china cup, and fill that too. Another person fills an old mug with a broken handle in the same way. Someone standing on the opposite shore fills a plastic bottle from the waves that are breaking on that distant coast.

Glass, cup, mug, bottle: all appear very different. One is attractive, another chipped. One is tall and slender, another stout. But the water they contain – the divine essence within them – is the same.



Intellectual belief in God in everyone counts for nothing if we still make idols out of forms, judging people by their appearance, or the roles they play, or on how they behave. We need to try to see beyond the surface differences to the shared Source – the divine essence – that is in everyone.

Equality is not only about equal opportunities; about overcoming prejudice in its most obvious forms: racism, sexism, homophobia... A commitment to equality means not prejudging anyone. It means treating everyone with equal respect, recognising that we are all children of God. As our Father and Mother, God does not have favourites. She created us all in Her image and no one is any less holy than anyone else.

If we truly saw beyond the veil of form and recognized each person for Who they are, from that changed perception would flow an unswerving resolve to treat all people – all life – with reverence.



When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus is said to have replied, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:37-39.) Notice that the two commandments – I prefer to call them advices – are *like* one another. So much are they alike that in essence they are the same. We cannot demonstrate our love of God other than by loving our neighbour. Who is our neighbour? Whoever is with us or in our awareness at any point in time.

For as long as we identify ourselves as solely our bodies, we will perceive ourselves as separate from, and different to, one another. While we perceive ourselves as separate and different, the suggestion that we love our neighbour as ourselves might appear fanciful. However, when we recognize that of God which is both in us and in our neighbour, we may begin to appreciate that what unites us is greater than the surface differences. If we all have God within us, then we are all part of God. In a sense, our neighbour *is* our Self. What we do (or don’t do) for our sisters and brothers, we do (or don’t do) for the Christ-Self in them – which is indistinguishable from the Christ-Self in ourselves.



To love our neighbour authentically, we must first learn to love ourselves. Not in a conceited or self-indulgent way, but in a way that cherishes that of God within us. Loving myself may mean setting aside time to do those things that make me come alive. It may mean taking more care of my health; minding what foods I eat. It will probably mean letting go of pre-conceived notions of what is best for me, stepping back and letting God’s Spirit lead the way. Certainly we will make mistakes. We have all ‘sinned’ – which means simply that we have failed to act with love. But our failings and shortcomings do not detract from or change in any way the essence of Who we are. And, since that essence is divine, we are all of us worthy of love.



If we truly believe in equality, we will prize others’ happiness as equal to our own. We will not serve our own selfish interests while our brothers and sisters starve.

It is a tall order. How many of us are ready to sell our possessions and give to the poor (Matthew 19:21)? But we can listen to the still small voice within us and let it guide us in how we might serve. Perhaps it will lead us towards a sense of little ways in which we can act with love. If there are only two packets of my favourite biscuits left on the supermarket shelf, do I need to buy both? Or can I content myself with one packet today, so there is still one left for someone else? If I treat myself to a luxury item – something I don’t strictly need – am I willing to donate an equal amount of money to charity, to help those whose need is greater?

We are not asked to sacrifice our own happiness in the service of others. Pause for a minute. Think of spontaneous acts of kindness you have given without thought or expectation of return: kind words, acts of generosity, help you have provided to a friend in need. Recall how you felt immediately afterwards. If we give grudgingly or with resentment, that is not love.

To share God's Love – to be a channel through which It flows into the world – is not a duty, but a joy.



We all have that of God in us – and in that lies our essential equality. Of course we may be living our lives at different levels of awareness. Some of us may be in touch, more of the time, with who we truly are. Jesus, for example, had no doubt he was more than his body: “I am the light that is over all. I am the All. The All has come from me and unfolds toward me. Split a log; I am there. Lift the stone, and you will find me there.” [\[3\]](#)

But the divine essence is not only in Jesus, nor only in people like Ghandi and Mother Theresa, but also in Hitler and Stalin. The difference is in the fullness of our humanity: the degree to which we are ruled by our ego or separated self, or let ourselves be guided by the Spirit. The divine seed, or potential, is there in all of us. If Hitler had experienced pure unconditional love as a child, would he have turned out as he did?



On the level of personality and of form, there will be people who I like and people I may be less keen on. Can I treat them fairly? Am I willing to hold them all in the Light, and to try again and again to see the same Light in them all, however difficult it may be to discern? As Abraham Lincoln said, “I don't like that man. I must get to know him better”.

Equality does not mean sameness. We can love without exclusion, but that love – always accepting, always unconditional – can be shown in different ways. I may love my spouse or my partner. But if they are involved in a disagreement with someone, can I remain present enough to treat the person they disagree with kindly and fairly as well?

We don't all share the same talents and abilities. As such, it is likely that we will be called to serve in different ways. Some may be able to give more time, others more money. Some may have a gift of listening, or of smiling at strangers and making someone's day through that simple act of sharing. What matters is not what we do, or how much, or to whom we give. What matters is that we let our lives be guided by Love. As the Gospel of Matthew reminds us (25:37-40), whoever we give to, whoever we serve, there is ultimately only one recipient. And there is only one Source of the love that we share.

For reflection

- If there is that of God within us, then in a sense our body is a temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). Consider the care you take of yourself. In what ways are you treating yourself lovingly? In what ways are you perhaps not doing so? What small steps might you take to honour the divine within you?
- We might treat people equally regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation or belief. But perhaps our prejudices may be more subtle? Think of the encounters you have had with people in the last week – at work, while out shopping or travelling around. Think also about current events in the world. Are there less obvious ways in which you might be judging other people? When we're judging someone, can we truthfully claim to be treating them with love?

- Reflect on your interactions with people: managers and more junior staff at work; children and older people; the policeman and the dustman and the supermarket cashier. How do you relate to them? Do you treat them with equal kindness and respect, or is your behaviour influenced by the role they happen to be playing?
- Now look at yourself in different situations. Consider your home and social life, any faith community you may belong to, and any paid or voluntary work you do. In which situations do you find it easier or harder to respond to people with love and kindness? Why might this be?
- Jesus challenged us to love our neighbour as our Self; to do to others as we would have them do to us. This 'golden rule' is mirrored in the scriptures of all the major religions. How might you respond to this call? What steps can you take to turn it from an idea into a reality?

SIMPLICITY

There is more than one reason why we might move towards a simpler lifestyle. First, there are concerns related to social justice. When we recognise our essential oneness with others, can we continue to prioritise our own pursuit of luxuries ahead of their basic needs? As Jesus put it, “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.” (Luke 3:11.)

Then there is the environmental imperative. According to research carried out by the Global Footprint Network, humanity uses the equivalent of 1.6 planets to provide the resources we use and to absorb our waste. [\[4\]](#) Our present consumption-oriented lifestyles in Europe, the US and elsewhere in the economically developed world are unsustainable. If everyone in the world consumed the same resources that the lifestyle of the average person in the UK demands, it would require 2.9 earths to support humanity. To sustain the lifestyle of the average US citizen, 4.8 earths would be required. If we take more than our fair share, what will be left for our grandchildren?

When we stop to reflect on this, we may find ourselves led to live more simply for the good of the Whole. But there is also a third, positive, reason to adopt a simpler lifestyle. Simplicity does not only benefit the world. It can also nourish us.



For me, simplicity is about cutting down on what’s not so important to give space to what is. It’s about removing the attachments and distractions – material or otherwise – which prevent the Love or Light of God shining through me in the world.

Some time ago, I facilitated a session on simplicity at my Quaker Meeting’s weekend away. I asked those present to identify something that’s important. We went around the circle and each person tried to think of something different until we had more than twenty words on the flip-chart. One person said love; others said friendships, health and peace of mind. No one suggested their giant-screen television, and no one mentioned promotion at work, or reputation, or ‘being right’ either. When we stop to reflect, we already have a sense of what truly matters. Why then do we invest a disproportionate amount of time and energy focusing on things that don’t matter all that much?



Often, the things we would add to our life situation do not bring us closer to the truth about Who we are, but move us further away from it. First, there is the time and energy we expend in earning the money to pay for the latest gadgets, the new clothes to squeeze into our already brimming wardrobes, or the more modern car. This is time which we could have spent nourishing ourselves spiritually, whether by going within or connecting with others. Then, there is the attention we devote to those things when we do have them: the hours we spend in front of the television or on the internet; the time it takes us to maintain our larger homes. First, we seek after things. Then, for a while, we worship them. Soon the novelty value wears off and we seek after something else. This cycle continues, until one day it may dawn on us that true lasting happiness cannot be found in things that do not last. We may come to a sense of what truly matters: quality time spent with loved ones, acts of kindness given and received,

taking time to listen to and be fully present with another person... Things in themselves are not bad. Money is not the root of evil. But love of money, which is another way of saying attachment to material things, distracts us from what is real. If we seek to find ourselves in things, we lose touch with our Self.



In my early thirties, I switched to working a four-day week. While it has meant less income, it gives me an extra day a week to spend as I choose. I now have more time and energy to do the things which make me come alive. I also have the space to take my time, to give things my full attention, so that I do them more lovingly. Being less tired means I find it easier to remain true to my Self.

For some people, part-time working may not be an option. Some may work long hours in a job which they find rewarding, and where they can make a positive difference. But even in these circumstances, we can benefit from time to recharge our spiritual batteries – ideally every day. I've noticed a real difference since I started switching off my computer at 8 pm and setting aside the last part of the day to re-centre myself. As Caroline Stephen experienced, “Words may help and silence may help, but the one thing needful is that the heart should turn to its Maker as the needle turns to the pole. For this we must be still.” [\[5\]](#) The more centred we are, the more we can make a positive difference in the world.

It's about finding the balance between being and doing that is right for us personally. When I think of being and doing, I'm reminded of the Taoist symbol of yin and yang: both energies are necessary and one feeds the other. If I focus solely on being, I risk becoming self-absorbed or aloof. But if I put too much emphasis on the doing at the expense of my state of being, my actions may be lacking in love.



I no longer have a 'To do' list of tasks that I pursue with stubborn determination. I do though keep a note of 'ideas and possibilities' that emerge during my times of contemplation. I leave space in my life for pursuing these – or not – as I feel led.

Increasingly, a question I ask myself is, 'Can I do this lovingly?' Can I give the person my full attention when I make a phone call? Can I be present as I carry out some voluntary work, or is it a task I'll resent, wishing all the while I was somewhere else, doing something else? If I can't do a particular activity with love, perhaps it might be better to postpone it until I can, or not to do it at all?

This is very much counter to the rat race society in which we live. Even in caring professions, many people feel pressured into seeing more clients, or cramming more and more activities into the working day in pursuit of efficiency. It is a false economy. Yes, they see more clients, but how much assistance will they be to those people if they are overtired and stressed themselves? One patient leaves and the next enters the consulting room before the doctor or counsellor has had time to pause. How present can they be with them? How much loving attention can they give?



Quaker writer Richard J. Foster has set out ten principles for the outward expression of simplicity. Last of these, and in a way the composite of the others, is to "... shun whatever would distract you from your main goal". [\[6\]](#) What is my main goal? Despite what I might

have believed in the past, it is not to pay off my mortgage, or to publish my novel, or to marry the woman of my dreams, or even to change the world. It is the same function that all of us have... To share love. To experience peace and joy by letting them flow through us into the world. In short, to be true to Who we are.

Consider what really matters to you. When have you felt happiest? What have you appreciated most?

For me, it's simple things. Connecting with friends. Quality time with my family. Being present in nature, whether it's watching a sunset, gazing up at a star-filled sky, or seeing a pelican in flight. Sharing with others in the things which are eternal. Doing little things for people, just for the joy of lifting their spirits. Sitting with a glass of green tea and a pack of oat cakes and taking my time over them, present in the moment. Putting to one side my selfish preoccupations and letting God work through me, whatever it is I'm doing.

Why not take some time now to reflect on the moments in your life when you have felt happiest? What warms you when you think of it now?

If your own list is anything like mine, you will find value in simple pleasures which don't cost the earth (metaphorically or literally, in terms of their environmental impacts). And yet we invest a greater proportion of our time and energy in the supposedly bigger things, few of which will count for very much when we look back at the end of our lives. Imagine you are on your death bed, looking back over your life. How would you have spent your time differently? What would you change from this day on?



Busyness and a focus on material things tend to keep us living at a superficial level, but there are also inward distractions to be aware of. How can we hear the still small voice when it is drowned out by another voice in our minds which is anything but still? This voice of the ego dwells on guilt over past actions, anxieties about the future, and judgements about other people and ourselves. It separates us from others and stops us experiencing the peace and joy that is our birthright.

Before we can begin to set this mental clutter aside, we first need to recognise it is there. Once we are aware of it, we can come to appreciate that it does not serve us; that it is not Who we are.

Simplicity is about stripping away what isn't essential to make room for what is. Put another way, it is about letting go of our identification with the ego and allowing our true essence or nature – that of God in us – to shine through.

For reflection

- What is distracting you from your main goal? What may be preventing you from “loving the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37-39)?
- List your current commitments, including any volunteering you do, responsibilities you have taken on, and activities you choose to do in your free time. Then, go through your list and ask yourself: ‘When I do this activity, how do I feel? Do I do it lovingly, giving it my full

attention, or do I sometimes resent the call it places on my time? Do I feel enthusiastic about it? Does it make me come alive? Or am I bored by it? Am I at peace when I do this activity?

- You might do this exercise with your partner or a friend. Invite them to share with you about one activity that they have taken on more through a sense of obligation than as a result of feeling a genuine calling. Then ask them to tell you about another task they are involved in and which they are enthusiastic about. Observe the other person as you listen to them. Do you notice a contrast in how animated they appear as they speak about each task? Then swap roles and ask them to observe you as you speak.
- If it doesn't matter so much what we do, but rather how we do it – our state of being – then the question to ask ourselves is not, 'What should we do?' but rather, 'What can we do lovingly?' Or better still, 'How can we share our love?' That, after all, is how we create the kingdom of heaven. Spend some time reflecting on ways in which you can share the Love that you are.
- List your current goals, big and small. What are you working towards or saving up for? What places would you like to visit? What activities would you like to try? Now, reflecting on each goal, ask yourself, 'Would I rather achieve this goal or be happy?' Consider the cost of each goal, in terms of the time, energy and money you need to invest to attain it. Is it worth this cost?
- It has been said, 'that person is rich who knows he has enough'. Make a list of twenty things (material or otherwise) that you are grateful for. For the next week at least, at the end of each day, add three new things – it doesn't matter how 'big' or 'small' they are. When you're feeling down, ponder on your list. If you feel tempted to acquire something that you don't really need, consider whether you would be prepared to give up one of the things on your list in order to have it.

PEACE

Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is the presence of Love. Peace in our life situations, in the world, flows from an inner peace. And inner peace is a consequence of being true to our Highest Self.

When I hold loving thoughts and let love guide my actions, I feel at peace. The more deeply I am in touch with the wellspring of peace within me, the less likely I am to forget my Self and become angry when outward circumstances don't go according to plan. When we remember Who we are, we realise we are perfectly safe: bodies can kill bodies, egos may wound egos, but Spirit cannot harm Spirit. We also understand that the goals and attachments which used to matter so much to us are not so important after all. Then we can be channels for God's peace in the world.

“Live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is... one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:1-6.) If we are all children of God, then when we attack another person with arms or words or thoughts, we are attacking our brother or sister. God is in us and also in them. We are parts of the same Whole, so in effect we are attacking our Self. Seen from this perspective, waging war is like hitting our left arm with our right hand.



Some of us may feel a calling to be peacemakers in the world, but all of us have a responsibility to practise peace in our relationships with family, colleagues and people we meet.

While I identify as my small separated self – my ego – I will not experience peace of mind or lasting peace in my relationships with others. The ego can never experience true peace, because it perceives itself as separate from others and as cut off from the Whole, and believes itself to be under threat. It is interested only in self-preservation and self-advancement.

When my ego perceives other people as attacking it, it responds in the only way it knows how. It defends itself by attacking back. I may not physically or verbally confront anyone, but I will hold ‘attack thoughts’ – critical judgements about the situation or people involved. The egos in other people react to this, returning like for like, and so the cycle of hostility grows.

Jesus said, “Let the person who is without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7). Acknowledging our own imperfections may enable us to be more forgiving of others’ mistakes. Our own past mistakes cannot alter our true identity as a child of God. Neither do others’ errors affect the glimmering truth about Who they are. How can we avoid reacting to unconsciousness in others? By remaining conscious ourselves. By being present in the moment, and maintaining an awareness of their Identity and ours.



I recall a time when a supermarket sent me a voucher for £4 off my shopping if I spent at least £40. Off I went to the shop, shopping list in hand, intent on cashing in on the token – and determined also to spend as little as possible in excess of the minimum £40. When I

reached the checkout and handed the cashier my token, she examined it and told me she could not accept it because it only became valid from the following day. I disputed this – the wording on the coupon was ambiguous – and I asked to see the supervisor. When she, too, confirmed that the token was not yet valid, I told them both that I didn't wish to proceed with the purchase. I left all the shopping at the checkout, leaving the supervisor to have to load it back in the trolley and return everything to the shelves. Although I did not raise my voice or criticise the women personally, it is likely that my actions upset them and put a dampener on their day. Certainly my response was not a loving one, and it did not bring me peace of mind.

It sounds ridiculous when I reflect on this experience now: to sacrifice peace for £4. But in the heat of the moment I was convinced I was right. Had I remembered my true Self, I would have chosen peace instead.



In my twenties, I used to play competitive miniature golf. I also set up and administered an association to promote the game. At first I enjoyed running the association, and it helped me to grow in confidence. However, I began to have disagreements with other personalities involved, and over time these became increasingly hostile. What should have been a fun activity was becoming a source of conflict.

According to a Quaker legend, when William Penn (founder of the US state of Pennsylvania) asked George Fox for advice on whether it was acceptable to continue to wear his sword in keeping with the fashion of that day, Fox responded that he should wear it for as long as he could. Hostile relations with one or two people and my own attachments to things being a certain way had turned minigolf into my own sword, and after a few months of growing discomfort, I realised – like Penn with his sword a couple of years after his meeting with Fox – I could no longer wear it and be at peace. I stood down from the committee and also stopped playing the game as much as I had in the past: even on the course, I had made my peace of mind dependent on performing well.

In 2010, after five years of partial retirement from the game, I entered a major competition, the British Open, probably for the last time. My local course was staging the event. Even so, I knew that most of the players in the international field were more skilful, or at least better prepared, than me. At the time of the competition, I happened to be reading the book *Good-Bye to Guilt* by Gerald Jampolsky, which is based on the teachings of *A Course in Miracles*. I decided to follow a suggestion in the book and to approach the competition with peace of mind as my only goal. Regardless of how well I played or where I finished in the standings, I would enjoy the two days. I would not let my happiness and inner peace be dependent on my results.

Before each putt, as I prepared to hit the ball, I repeated silently to myself, 'The peace of God is my only goal today'. I told myself sincerely that whether I played a good shot or a poor one, I would not let it affect my peace.

In ten years of playing miniature golf, I must have played over a hundred rounds at that particular course. My best score was 33 (three holes in one, and fifteen par twos). A more typical score for me was around the 40 mark, or perhaps a couple of shots lower with the rub of the green. On that day, though, something amazing happened. Without being attached to the results, my play was beyond all expectations. I found the 'flow', and three of the four rounds I played equalled or improved upon my previous personal best score.

The one time during the day when I lost the flow was when I let outward results become more important than my peace of mind. After a missed putt I became angry, took too little care over the next stroke and missed that as well. I eventually trudged off the green with a six. When, after a few holes, I managed to calm down and compose myself and got back to holding the peace of God as my single goal, the flow returned. In the third round, I finished with three consecutive holes in one to shave a further shot off my new personal best set earlier in the day. I had found my inner Source of strength. Without It, I could not have achieved those results by any effort of my own.

Peace is not only an absence of outer and inner conflict. It is also a positive quality, a manifestation of our natural state of being. I like this quotation from F. B. Meyer: “Joy is peace dancing. Peace is joy at rest”.



As I re-read this chapter, I am aware that in recent days I have not been at peace. Not only am I going to have to pay more for my pension, but I am also going to have to work for an extra eight years to claim it in full. On top of that, the chancellor announced that public sector pay is to be pegged back at one per cent for the next two years, while costs of living continue to rise.

I do not have a choice about these changing circumstances, but I can choose how I view them. As long as I identify as my small transient self, I will see my personal desires and goals – retirement at sixty or being able to afford to work part-time – as under threat. It is only when I still my mind and get back in touch with my Source that I can see things from a different perspective.

I am here to serve the Whole, not my transient self. My purpose is to let God’s love and peace flow through me, by being true to Who I am. Part-time working may be a means I have identified to help me remain centred, and so be more loving, but it is not an end in itself. The moment I become attached to a particular way, I have lost touch with my True Self. If I insist on a particular thing, or try to force a belief or a philosophy or a way of life onto someone, in that moment I am stepping out of alignment with Spirit, and have chosen against peace. I need instead to return to my Centre, to that deep place that is untouched by the turbulent waters on the surface of my life. There I come to rest, peaceful in the knowledge that all will be well.

For reflection

- Reflect for a while on the things which disturb your peace. What situations do you wish were different? Who have you not forgiven? Thinking of people at work, or among your family, or acquaintances, who have you judged or held unloving thoughts about?

As you go through your list, hold each person or situation in the Light for some moments. See the Divine essence at the heart of each person. Allow the possibility that all things happen for a reason, even though they may appear to be senseless or unjust. We cannot change the past, but we can change the way we look on it here, now, in this God-given moment.

- For one day this week, hold peace of mind as your only goal. If someone does something which annoys you, try not to respond by judging them, but see them through the eyes of

Love. How can we know what experiences the other person may have had, or how we might act given their experience of life? Offer a silent blessing from that of God in you to that of God in them, acknowledging that at their Heart is goodness and Love. Repeat this blessing before you go to bed. If you feel able, affirm to yourself, 'I am a child of God. [Person's name] is a child of God too. I am holy. [Person's name] is holy too. God's love for me and for [Person's name] is One.'

TRUTH

Most of us, most of the time, identify with our body, with our personal story (history) and with the various roles that we play. We become the internal commentator in our head, judging situations and other people. What others think of us, outward accomplishments, and what we perceive as injustices or grievances all serve to reinforce our separate identity. But is this transitory self really all that we are?

Look in a mirror. What do you see? Notice any judgments, positive or negative, you hold about yourself. Notice too any tendency to compare yourself with others, or with how you might have appeared in the past.

What you see today in a mirror is different from what you would have seen five years ago, or will see five years from now. But all of these reflections – past, present, future – are illusions. They have no more reality than pictures projected onto a screen in a cinema, or images you made up in your mind.

Become aware of yourself observing the body you have come to identify with. Value it as a “temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:16). Give thanks for the opportunities it provides to extend love, compassion and kindness. But know that your true Self is something changeless and eternal, unbound by space or time, intangible but nonetheless real.



The first of the *Advices & Queries* used by Quakers encourages us to take heed to the promptings of love and truth in our hearts. We are to trust these as leadings of God. [7] If love and truth have the same holy Source, they are intrinsically linked. Any thought or word or deed that falls short of pure unconditional Love cannot be ultimate Truth.

In every moment, I have a choice. Do I snap back at the person who I think has been rude to me, or do I look past the perceived attack and respond with loving kindness? Do I overtake the car which is going a little slower than I would like, or do I show patience? Do I take the last seat on the tube train when I don't really need it, or do I respond with compassion?

It might sound like an unattainable ideal, but love is our natural state of being. The difficulty is we have forgotten this. We have lost touch with our divine nature, and we hold a mistaken image of what we are. From an early age, many of us have been told we are sinful, and so we act the part. If God created us in His image, then our True Self – our divine essence – is like God: sinless and whole. When we live from that divine centre, our essential qualities shine through and we can become channels through which God's Love and Joy and Peace flow into the world. Jesus knew his True Self and his way of living embodied that knowing.



We cannot be true to ourselves if we hold a mistaken idea of what we are. As long as we identify with our separated self – our ego – our concept of truth will be subjective. At best, it will be incomplete. What is true for me will be different from what is true for another. Truth at this level is a dangerous concept. Nations have gone to war in defence of ‘truth’. Religious leaders have launched crusades, held inquisitions and burned at the stake people who disagree with them. We need to be careful. We may have deep convictions, perhaps about climate

change or social injustice, but if we attack the politicians and individuals who we see as responsible for these ills we risk losing sight of a higher truth: that they too are children of God.

Truth is not what we perceive outside ourselves. Each of us sees the world differently, through a different filter which is the product of our past individual experience. Since no two peoples' perceptions are the same, no one can perceive the whole truth. But we can approach Truth by going within and connecting with our Centre. For the Truth that is in you is the same Truth that is in all others. It is that space in you which was not born and will not die.

Truth does not force itself onto others. It does not make them wrong. Truth is patient, forgiving and kind. Truth knows that the world will pass away, but It will remain, forever safe in God.



How can we know if something is True? By letting Love be our guide. If the thought is not loving, it is not from God. If the passage from scripture is not loving, it is not True (or we may be missing its deeper meaning). If the action we take is not loving, it is not the Spirit which gave rise to it, but our ego (false self). Therefore, it is not True.

When I hold an unloving thought about anyone; when I approach a situation with a mind-set of 'what can I get?' rather than 'how may I serve?'; when I fail to show kindness and reverence for another... I am not being true to my Self.

Of course I fall short. Every day I miss the mark. But the more we make space to listen to our Inner Guide, the more practised we become in discerning what is loving and true. At our truest, we are Pure Being, beacons of Light, mirrors reflecting our Source. This is true of every one of us. Indeed, there is only One: one *Is-ness* from which we emerge and which encompasses all. We are not here to serve our small separate self, but for the good of the Whole. The truth that really matters is Love. When we act out of love, we experience Who we are. And when we remember our true identity, it becomes easier to see ourselves in the other, and to act with love.

For reflection

- Reflect on a time when you followed the promptings of love and truth in your heart. What did this prompting feel like? How did you feel during and after you did what you felt called to do?
- Now reflect on a situation where you felt moved to do or to say something, but did not follow the leading. How did you feel afterwards? With hindsight, how might you have felt if you had followed the leading?
- What does it mean to you to be true to your Self? Can you recall situations where remaining true to your Self has put you in conflict with friends, family members or society at large? What might you say to a friend facing a similar choice today?

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

There are two ways of living. One is to be guided by the Spirit, our Inner Light. The other is to be ruled by the ego, our small individual self. One path leads to joy, peace and compassion. The other leads to anxiety, conflict and hurt.

A piece of advice well-known in Quaker circles is to “let your life speak”. The advice is not to ‘*make* your life speak’. The word ‘let’ implies allowing. We let our life speak by allowing Spirit to act through us. Spirit guides us always, but we have to be present to discern Its leadings. When we are caught up in our own thought-processes – judging people and situations, analysing the past, or planning the future – we do not hear the Spirit’s voice, just as a blackbird might be singing outside the window and we do not hear it.

My state of mind (awareness) is central, because I can only choose a loving response in a situation if I am present enough to be able to *choose* my response. When I am not present, my response will be automatic, based on judgements and pre-conceptions. A woman stops me in the street and asks me if I can give her money for her bus fare home. ‘Sorry,’ I say mechanically, ‘I don’t have any change’. And I walk on by without even looking at her properly. It is an unloving response based on a pre-conceived judgment that she isn’t genuinely in need of a bus fare; that it’s merely a confidence-trick, and if I give her my change I’ll have been duped. But what would Love do in this situation? Stop and look at her? Try to see that of God? Is her need genuine? Possibly. If it is a confidence-trick, does it matter? What have I lost but one pound? If her need was genuine, I’d have helped another human being. But in order to react in this loving way, I need to be present in the moment. How can I sense whether she is genuine when I don’t even pause to look her in her eyes?



When we open ourselves to Guidance, we may find that our calling is not necessarily to do ‘great’ things, but simply to let the Light shine through us. How? We have only to let go and let God. To let go of our pre-conceived notions about ourselves and the world, our prejudices based on form, our requirements that things be a certain way. How can we be guided when we think we already know?

Two of the hardest things to let go of are guilt and fear. These are perhaps the greatest barriers to love. At a conscious level, we may not be aware of feeling guilt. However, deep down, we sense that we have turned our back on the One to whom we owe our very being. Like Adam and Eve in the mythical Garden of Eden, or the prodigal son in Jesus’ parable (Luke 15:11-21), we went our own way and cut ourselves off from Love. [8] Feeling guilty brings with it a fear of punishment. Our fear can manifest in many forms: fear of what people will think of us; fear of not being good enough; fear of loss; fear of suffering; fear, ultimately, of death.

Knowing Who we are can help us to release our guilt and our fear. If God created us of, from and like Himself, He created us whole and nothing we could do could exclude us from His Love. Paul, who wrote many of the letters that make up a large part of the New Testament, used to persecute the followers of Jesus. He may have been complicit in the deaths of many people. Yet he became a saint. Whatever our human failings and faults, God will work through us, if we but let Her. If this is so, what place could guilt have? There is no external

god who condemns us, so why should we condemn ourselves? Similarly, if we are Spirit, what harm can befall us? What have we to fear?



Our function here is to embody Who we are; to join with others in living as One. In a word, our function is ‘Love’. But Love which we do not yet comprehend: a love which does not see difference; a love which does not fear; a love without limits and which transcends form. We express it through compassion, through kindness, through relieving suffering... each of us as we are guided. There are as many ways of extending love as there are stars in the universe. Each shines its light.

We are not the first to have walked this path. Jesus recognised the Divine Essence within himself. But he did more than recognise it. He embodied it. He identified with It so completely that he was able to surrender his earthly body and know he was giving up nothing but a garment. He became at one with his Christ Self, his eternal reality: “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30.)

I used to struggle with the divinity of Jesus. Now, I see him as revealing “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). Having faith in his divinity (we might use the expression ‘Eternal Nature’) helps me to appreciate the Divine in everyone – the Eternal Spirit that is not only within us but which is Who we are. If we deny the divinity of Jesus, how can we accept our own?

For me, God is not a being to be believed in or not. God is Being itself, eternal Reality, that which always Is. If Being is not; if there is no Spirit, then what am I?

To believe in eternal Reality is to affirm that, ultimately, all will be well. It is to put my faith in Life, and not in death. In Love, and not in fear. In Joy, and not in pain. How do I know my faith is not mere wishful thinking? Intellectually, I cannot prove (or disprove) that there is more to Reality than what we see with our eyes. But I can catch glimpses of this ‘Something More’ by stilling myself and being open, allowing space for It to make Itself known to me. And make Itself known It does, not (in my own experience) dramatically, but gently, revealing only as much as I am ready for. When I warm to people, it warms my heart. When I offer love, I expand; I feel more fully alive. When I give of my Self, I do receive. This I know experientially.

We are called to know one another beyond surface appearances: to see one another as God sees us, to love one another as God loves us. Then will all forms dissolve as we recognise God in everyone.

For reflection

Imagine a world where we all recognised the holy in one another.

Imagine a world where we saw all ‘others’ as our Self.

What might a Spirit-led life look like? How can you let your life speak?

REMEMBERING

I believe passionately that God is in all of us. That our essence is eternal Spirit. That, at some level beyond my intellectual comprehension, my neighbour *is* my self. But every day I forget this. How easily I forget. I log on to my computer and find that the woman I am attracted to hasn't replied to my message. I go outside and I notice a scratch on my car which was not there before. I get to work and there are a dozen e-mails all requiring my urgent response. I feel vulnerable and under attack. I am Peter Parr again, my transient self, and not eternal Spirit. My peace of mind has disappeared.

How can I remember Who I am? How can I look at another person and see the Light in them, rather than the outward form?

There are no easy answers. It is a lifetime's work, a lifetime of falling down and getting up again and each new day attempting to live with love. This chapter describes some tools that help me remember more of the time. (They are only tools, though, and other people will find that different practices work for them.) It also offers some suggestions for things to try with others. The journey need not be taken alone.

Personal spiritual practices

Periods of stillness

William Penn experienced that "True silence ... is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment". [\[9\]](#) I have found that when I set aside time for quiet contemplation at the end of each day, it reconnects me with my True Self.

Depending on your other commitments, you may find it easier to dedicate this space first thing in the morning, before other family members are awake. Whether you choose mornings or evenings, I would recommend that you set aside a certain time each day and stick to it, so that it becomes an established practice. I would also recommend starting gently. We are more likely to keep to a practice which we find manageable. It is better to allow yourself fifteen minutes every day, than to try to set aside a full hour and give up before the end of the first week.

This quiet time is not for thinking. It is not a time to plan or to daydream, but simply to be. Outward silence will not nourish us if our mind continues to churn over events of the day, or to look ahead to the tasks we need to do next.

At first, you may find it difficult to still your mind. I suggest sitting in an open position – legs uncrossed, palms facing upwards. Focus on your breathing, giving your full attention to each breath. Another way to help stay present is to pay attention to your body. Bring your fingers into your awareness. You may notice a subtle tingling or energy. Next, focus on the sensations in your toes. Slowly, moving upwards, bring your attention to each part of your body in turn. Notice the feeling of the soles of your feet on the floor; your thighs against the seat of the chair. Are your shoulders tense? Allow them to relax. What about your facial muscles? Your jaw? Is your tongue in the roof of your mouth?... If your mind does wander, which it surely will, focus again on your breath. Many of us live our lives at a frantic pace. This is your chance to slow down.

Contemplation/Prayer

As you become more used to silence and stillness, as the internal judge in your head takes time off and gaps open up in your streams of thought, another voice may emerge.

Ask a question. What is love calling you to do now? How might you show love for yourself? How might you share your love with the world?

Don't try to think your way to an answer, but 'let go and let God'. Trust that, at the right moment, guidance will be there. Perhaps later, when you turn your attention to other things, you may be given an intimation: a call to help someone, to buy tea for a homeless person or to contact an old friend.

Douglas Steere describes his own experience: "In prayer, the seeds of concern have a way of appearing. Often enough, a concern begins in a feeling of being personally liable, personally responsible for someone or some event. With it there may come an intimation that one should do some little thing: speak to some person, make an inquiry into a certain situation, write a letter, send some money, send a book. Or it may be a stop in our minds about some pending decision, or a clear directive that now is not the time to rest, or an urge to stay home when we have been meaning to be away; it may be that no more than this will be given us. But this seed is given us to follow, and if we do not follow it, we cannot expect to see what may grow from it. Seeds, not fruit, are given in prayer, but they are given for planting." [\[10\]](#)

Mindfulness

Most of us spend the majority of our time living in the past or the future. Our minds replay past mistakes (our own or other peoples'), dwell on grievances, or perhaps relive former successes. At other times, our focus switches to the future: we worry about upcoming events, or look forward to a golden tomorrow – which never arrives – when all our problems will be solved.

Occasionally something dramatic may jolt us back to the present, or we find ourselves stopped in our tracks by the beauty of a sunset, or a flower poking its head through the snow. But rarely do we live in the present moment, with our attention fully on what is happening now.

It is in the present moment that the Spirit speaks to us; animates us so that we feel truly alive. Only when we are present can we be guided by Its still small Voice, as opposed to the chatterbox voice of our ego-mind. Only when we are present are we released from our judgements and fears. And only when we are present can Spirit speak *through* us and our actions become enthused with a quality of Love.

When we join a gym or begin a new exercise programme, at first it may feel like a struggle. The more we exercise, the easier it becomes. Living in the moment is similar: we need to practice it. I take a routine activity such as making a cup of tea, doing the washing up or ironing, or brushing my teeth – and give my full attention to that task. My mind inevitably wanders, but as soon as I remember, I return my focus to the dishes, or whatever it might be.

There are times when I need to remind myself that life is not a race. Everything has its natural rhythm, from the planets in their orbits to the changing seasons and the life cycle of plants. To rush something – to give insufficient care to a task or to force myself or others to do anything at an unnatural pace – seems to me to be a form of violence. I take a deep breath, and allow myself to slow down.

I have also printed some colourful cards with the words, 'I remember' written on them. I place these cards where I will notice them: inside my front door, on the steering wheel of my car, on the windowsill by the kitchen sink. When I become aware of them I pause, re-centre myself and bring my attention back to the present.

Personal journal and Lectio Divina (spiritual reading)

A few years ago at a difficult time in my life, I would sit in silence at home. Once I had reached a place of inner stillness and felt ready, I would write a question. Then, without thinking, I wrote the answer. This written dialogue with my Higher Self, as I call it, took place over two months and resulted in forty pages of writing, which I still refer to now. Often the words that came were poetic, the style different from what I would have written if I'd thought about the answer to the question. Parts of this book came to me in the same way: I stilled my mind, opened myself to Guidance, and asked – in a state of expectation that I would receive – 'Speak to me about peace', or 'Speak to me about equality'.

I have also collected around 300 inspiring quotations and bound them together in an A5 booklet. When I notice I'm out of alignment with my True Self, I use those writings to re-centre me; to get me back 'in Spirit'. Before reading, I sit quietly for a few minutes. I pay attention to the movement of my breath and become aware, if I can, of the energy field of my body. I then turn to a paragraph at random and read it slowly, as if for the first time. I read the extract more than once, reflecting on the message behind the words. I pause before I move on to the next passage. I find it of more benefit to engage deeply with the message behind the words than to try to read as many extracts as possible in one sitting. I have included a few doorways into contemplation at the end of this book.

Reading a few short extracts from a spiritual book can rekindle our enthusiasm and gently wake us from our sleep. At the moment, *A Course in Miracles* and the writings of Eckhart Tolle particularly resonate with me. I also subscribe to emails from Franciscan friar Richard Rohr, founder of the US-based *Center for Action and Contemplation*, whose reflections provide daily inspiration and a fresh way of looking at the essence of the Christian message. Regardless of what I am reading, I find that less can often be more. A page or two is often enough to return me to my Centre where love and peace abide. At a suitable point, I stop to reflect on what I've read. How does it resonate with my own experience?

Examen

Another worthwhile practice is to set aside an hour or so at the end of each month to reflect on the weeks gone by. After sitting for a while in silence, long enough to ground myself in the present, I ponder three sets of questions and write down the responses that come to me.

First, I ask myself, 'What have I appreciated during this last month? When have I felt most alive? What warms me most when I reflect on it now?'

Next, I ask, 'When have I felt frustrated or disappointed in the last month? When did I feel least alive, or least at ease? What, with hindsight, would I have done differently? What do I regret doing or saying or thinking, or having failed to do or say?' The exercise is not about judging, but simply about being aware.

Finally, I reflect on the following questions: 'How do I respond to these experiences? What does Love require of me now? What actions or first steps can I take? What changes do I commit myself to making in the coming month?'

I record my reflections, so that I can look back on them and have a record of little changes I have made. It is an ongoing process, and every month there are plenty of occasions where I feel I have let myself down. What I have found, though, is a growing awareness of when I am or am not living in harmony with my true Self. The whispers of love have grown louder, or perhaps I have become more sensitive to hearing them. More and more, when I miss the mark or fail to choose the loving response, I feel it. I know when I am out of alignment, and I do not feel at peace.

Discerning if leadings are genuine

We each have our unique part to play in the movie of life. While love is a benchmark all of us can use in making choices, it may call people in different directions. The same love that pushes one person to leave an occupation or resign from a job might call another to move into that line of work or to apply for the very role the other person left. In this life, our task is to be true to ourselves – not to anyone else's self.

Sometimes we may have a clear inner knowing that a particular path is for us. We feel impelled to act out of love. At other times, the way forward is less clear. We may need to consciously ask ourselves, 'What would love do in this situation?' If that question feels too abstract, we might reflect on some aspects of love: joy, peace and compassion. When faced with a decision, imagine that you have made a particular choice. Picture yourself as having followed one or other course. What feelings come up for you? Ask yourself first, 'Would taking this path bring me joy? Second, would I feel a sense of peace if I followed this course? Last, is what I propose to do compassionate, or would it cause harm to another person, or to the planet?' If any of these – joy, peace of mind and compassion – is missing, then love is likely to be lacking too. It might be well to reflect very carefully before proceeding.

Going beyond my comfort zone

While joy, peace and compassion are facets of love, fear is its opposite. Often it is fear that holds us back from living up to our potential, following our dream or acting as a loving presence in the world. I am not by nature a particularly adventurous person. It is tempting for me to take the comfortable option. To avoid the risk of stagnation, I sometimes make a conscious decision to challenge myself and to push out the boundaries of my comfort zone. I am not necessarily talking about doing a sky-dive, but about taking opportunities to do what I really want to. I might submit an article for publication, or stop to chat with a colleague at the tea point at work and connect with them at a deeper level, or push through my social anxieties to attend an exciting event which will give me a chance to meet new people. In this way, I grow, more opportunities open up and, if nothing else, I add more colour to my life.

Things to try with others

A 'Living Our Faith' or spiritual friendship group

Living Our Faith groups provide a safe space for friends to support one another in living their faith day to day. They are about listening to one another, sharing and growing together, and building a spiritual community.

Small groups of around six people agree to meet on a regular basis. The meetings may begin with simple bring-and-share food and time to catch up with one another. Then, each person has the opportunity to share about a current issue in their lives. This may be an ethical dilemma, or a situation in which they are finding it difficult to remain true to themselves. They can invite reflections from others in the group if they wish, to help them discern a way

forward (others may have experienced a similar problem or struggle). Or they may simply use the time to clarify the problem in their own minds, and perhaps ask others to hold them in the Light. Each person has ten to fifteen minutes. Whatever people share remains confidential within the group.

My experience of being part of such a group is that the sharing is very deep and the atmosphere one of trust and love. Our group has found it works best if we meet at a regular time each month and commit to attending each session, unless we genuinely cannot make it. People will get the most benefit from the group if they come to it regularly and if they are willing to share their experiences and talk freely with others in the circle. Practice listening to others in a spirit of acceptance and without judgement.

Creative listening

Creative listening is a powerful tool for connecting with others and with the common Source of inspiration and guidance we all share.

Unlike discussion, which may become rather heated and where a few vocal participants may speak several times while others struggle to get a word in, creative listening sessions are grounded in silence. Space is allowed between contributions, so people have time to reflect on what has been said. Since sufficient time is given for everyone to speak, people know they will have an opportunity to contribute, and so can truly listen to what others are saying. People speak from their own experience and should avoid coming in for a second time unless, after everyone who wishes to speak has done so, there is time left for further contributions. You may find it useful to have a 'talking stick' or stone in the middle of the circle – only the person holding the talking stick can speak.

Creative listening will usually be on a topic agreed in advance. You may wish to explore the themes considered in each chapter of this book.

Seeing God in one another

Every day we have opportunities to practise honouring the divine essence in one another.

Why not seek to make each encounter with another person a holy encounter? Hold the thought, 'This person is my brother or sister, eternal Spirit, a child of God'. You might visualise a light in them. Do this with everyone, even (or especially) anyone who you do not get on with so well. Silently bless them, acknowledging that at their heart is something perfect and whole. Greet them with a smile, look beyond their form and any past experiences you may have had with them, and acknowledge their holiness. Wish for something good for them. Do this silently, in your heart. See the Light in our neighbours, and we will remember it is also in us.

To begin with, you may want to try this practice in a safe space – perhaps at a faith community, such as a Buddhist sangha or Quaker Meeting, or at a social group for people who are attempting to follow a more conscious path (the web-site meetup.com is one way to find such groups). Follow your inner guidance when it comes to choosing a group to attend. Is the group held in a spirit of openness and compassion, or is there an undercurrent of fear, exclusivity or control? As in all things, let love be your guide.

It goes without saying that we can practice seeing the divine in people in any situation: when out and about, in the supermarket checkout person, or the man speaking loudly into his phone on the train; or at home, in members of our family.

A prayer

You created me and sustain me.
You are with me always;
there with each breath I take.
Help me to do Your will.
Lift me up to be the best that I can be.
Each new day, help me to live with Love.

You provide for me materially,
and spiritually
You give me the experiences I need
as I journey through Life.

When I stumble, You forgive me.
Help me also to forgive.

Guide me, so I best can serve You.
Let me recognise You in my sisters
and my brothers,
and let boundaries fall away.

Help me to live as You,
In this moment always
Amen.

At the start of each day...

‘Thank you for this wonder-ful new day;
a chance to start over,
a fresh opportunity to share your Love.’

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Doorways into contemplation

When you eat, eat. When you walk, walk. When another person speaks, really listen to them. Whatever you are doing, do that. Do not be planning the next thing.

Ask yourself two questions. Set aside quiet time to reflect on them. In silence and in stillness, ponder them in your heart. The first question is this: How can I show love for myself? The second question is: How can I show love for others; for the Whole? These questions are two sides of the same coin.

There will be times when we do not feel loving. What are we to do then? Act with kindness – to ourselves and to others. At least, refrain from doing anything that would harm another or ourselves. This is why we have human laws. Children need rules for their own protection. However, when we live consciously with Love, no human laws are required.

“Shun whatever would distract you from your main goal.” (*Quaker Faith & Practice* 25.09)
What is that goal? To let your light shine. To spread God’s Love.

God is Love. We were created in the image of God and it is through us that God’s Love is expressed in the world. Our function and our joy is to let Love flow freely through us. We do this by following leadings and releasing the blocks – fear, prejudice, judgment, our own plans and agendas – that stand in Love’s way.

What matters is not what we do, or to whom we give. What matters is that we let our lives be guided by Love.

A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul. (Therese of Lisieux.)

A question I ask myself is, ‘Can I do this lovingly?’ Can I give the person my full attention when I make a phone call? Can I be present as I do a task? If I can’t do a particular activity with love, perhaps it might be better to postpone it until I can, or not to do it at all?

When we recognize that of God which is both in us and our neighbour, we may begin to appreciate that what unites us is greater than the surface differences. If we all have God within us, then we are all part of God. In a sense, our neighbour is our Self.

There is neither black nor white, there is neither gay nor straight, there is neither male nor female... For, in Spirit, in essence, we are all One. (Adaptation of Galatians 3:28)

We serve the world by being true to Who we are. By being Love. Try not to judge other people, but see them for what they are: a child of God like ourselves – a lost child trying to find their way Home.

We experience the greatest, truest joy not when we serve our selves – our selfish interests – but when we serve the Whole.

Don't live for yourself, live for your Greater Self. Live for the Whole. Don't live as your small, separate self. Live from your Greater Self, Child of God.

What would it take, what changes would I need to make, to be able to say, with Paul, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me'? (Galatians 2:20)

Offer what you would have come to you. Be what you wish to see. You want to be accepted? Accept all others, regardless of what they say or do. You want to be cherished? Treated as special? Treat others as special and cherish every moment you are with them. Give, and you will receive.

Perhaps the question to ask ourselves is not so much, 'What do I want to accomplish?', but 'How do I want to *be*?' If I want to be loving – to live with peace, with compassion, authenticity, kindness – then let that be the primary goal I organise my life around.

Use your time wisely, so that when you look back towards the end of your days you will smile at a life well-lived. Let not your song remain unsung. Do not hold back from sharing your love with the world for fear of lack or thought of a rainy day. If Love calls you, answer.

Don't wallow in regret over past mistakes or missed opportunities for love. Regret helps no one. Rather, from this day forward, moment by moment, discern what love requires of you and attend to that. Whether you are forty, fifty, sixty or a hundred, it is never too late to dedicate your life to Love. All those who work for the Kingdom receive their reward – joy

and peace – however late in the day they begin (Matthew 20:1-16). Even one day lived in Love can make a whole life worthwhile.

Remain in touch with your true Self and the Spirit of Christ will be with you and guide you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in touch with your true Self, that of God within you. (Interpretation of John 15:4)

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Thank you for reading this book. If you enjoyed it, won't you please take a moment to leave me a review at your favourite retailer?

Thanks!

Peter M. Parr

NOTES

1. Gospel of Thomas, saying 29. For a public domain translation of The Gospel of Thomas, see: http://www.academia.edu/15107954/The_Gospel_of_Thomas_A_Public_Domain_Translation

2. *A Course in Miracles*, Introduction 2:2.

3. Gospel of Thomas, saying 77. http://www.academia.edu/15107954/The_Gospel_of_Thomas_A_Public_Domain_Translation

4. 2016 figures. Source: Global Footprint Network.

5. Stephen, Caroline, *Light Arising: Thoughts on the Central Radiance*, 1908.

6. From *Quaker Faith & Practice* 25.09. Britain Yearly Meeting. Quaker Faith & Practice. Fifth edition. London: The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2013.

7. *Quaker Faith & Practice* 1.02: “Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.” Britain Yearly Meeting. Quaker Faith & Practice. Fifth edition. London: The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2013.

8. For a more detailed explanation of guilt as a human condition, see pages 56-63 of Robert Perry’s book *Path of Light: Stepping into Peace with A Course in Miracles*, Circle Publishing, 2004.

9. *Quaker Faith & Practice* 2.13. Britain Yearly Meeting. Quaker Faith & Practice. Fifth edition. London: The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, 2013.

10. Douglas V. Steere, 1962. *Faith & Practice. A Book of Christian Disciple of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting*, Extracts 81.

By the same author

ESCAPE TO REDEMPTION

Only her own forgiveness can set her free.

Josie only had the gun to frighten Curtis Rook, but his son disturbed her. One startled reflex and now he's dead. Josie flees to Poland leaving her boyfriend Snaz to take the rap. A reformed criminal offers her refuge from the police and the chance to begin a new life, but she cannot hide from her guilt. As the stakes rise, Josie begins to realise that only her own forgiveness can set her free.

Fast-paced and original, Peter M. Parr's contemporary take on *Crime and Punishment* challenges traditional ideas about guilt and redemption, and the meaning of forgiveness.

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“Let me state, very simply, that I loved this book... It is a highly addictive, unique story which raises questions of morality, loyalty and the power of forgiveness. From the outset, you're thrown into a nail-biting scene as Josie and Snaz flee Rook's house, unexpectedly leaving two bodies in their wake. What I liked about the set-up was that it was entirely believable. Whether you agree with their actions or not, you can understand how the murder might have happened. The tension rarely lets up as they desperately try to cover their crime – even if that means betraying each other. With twists in the most unexpected of places, I had to remind myself to breathe. ... What drew me to both main characters was that neither was presented as wholly good or bad. They were rich, complex figures who generated mixed emotions throughout every chapter. ... *Escape To Redemption* is truly unputdownable. It's soulful crime fiction which will leave you asking what kind of person you are when the chips are down. I predict big things. 10/10.” – Sarah Ryan, *Cultured Vultures*, <http://culturedvultures.com/book-review-escape-to-redemption-by-peter-m-parr/>

“...Parr's superb understanding of the way human beings justify their sins (especially to themselves) make Josie and Snaz utterly convincing and compelling. An engrossing, realistic morality tale.” – *Kirkus Reviews*

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About the author

Peter M. Parr works part time as a civil servant, which gives him time to indulge his passion for writing. He facilitates workshops to encourage people to reflect on what truly matters. He is a Quaker and a student of *A Course in Miracles*. He lives in Hastings, East Sussex, overlooking the sea.

In 2012, Peter's short book *Answering that of God: discovering Spirit within*, was published as part of the Kindlers series of booklets aimed primarily at Quakers. *Things to Remember* is a revision and update of *Answering that of God* and is intended for a more general (not only Quaker) readership. Peter's first novel, *Escape to Redemption*, was published by Roundfire in 2016.

To connect with Peter, and for more of his writing, visit www.thingstoremember.org.uk



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