



Spiritual Light Center

Newsletter -- June 2013

MESSAGE FROM JIM

Dear SLC Family and Friends:

In last month's message, I concluded with a quote from the book *The Disappearance of the Universe* by Gary Renard, in which he had one of the characters (an ascended master) say, "We may disagree with the teachings of others, but we don't judge them and respect the right of all people to believe what they want." I suggested that we might adopt that as a principle here at SLC – not as something to be included in our bylaws, but rather as a state of mind.

A question that several people have asked me when they find that I am a member of the SLC is, "is it a bible-based church?" Then without a definite, affirmative answer to that question they don't pursue it any further. I'll admit that nobody has taken me to task for it and tried to convert me to their way of thinking. But neither have they asked me why we bother to meet every Sunday for spiritual enlightenment and/or information if we don't claim any basis in the Judeo-Christian scriptures.

I think we do that because we are able to question the many things we have been taught about religion and spirituality in general, and because we have been able to examine alternative explanations of what we have observed in our lives and come to conclusions that "disagree with the teachings of others." Indeed, we may have come to conclusions that disagree with the conclusions of our fellow members – but we do not consign them to hell because of our disagree-

ment! We do not claim that "this is the way it is!" but rather say "this is what I think – what do you think?" And so we come to an understanding of each other, and remain friends and neighbors (and fellow seekers) unfettered by denominational rhetoric and threats of eternal damnation. (And I like that!)

On a somewhat different matter, it isn't too early to begin considering a run for one of the seats on the Board of Trustees that will be up for election in August. I have enjoyed my two terms on the Board, working with the diversity of ideas represented by the members. But – I can't run again, and besides, I am old enough to be retired. Remember, you need to be a member of the SLC, but there is no requirement as to length of membership. Just sign and submit the request for membership, which is available at the back of the Chapel. (Or ask Bill Groves to send you one by email or post, whichever you prefer.)

Namasté!, Jim Swanson, President

OUR VISION STATEMENT

The Spiritual Light Center is a peaceful and joyful fellowship of individuals, centered in love, dedicated to the God within, and honoring the many paths to truth.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

We seek to develop our highest selves by continuous sharing of spiritual ideas, in an environment of unconditional love and respect for others.

ONGOING EVENTS in Fellowship Hall

Every Tuesday at 5:15 pm - Join our insightful group as we watch a selected film of a spiritual nature, followed by discussion to develop our evolution. Afterward we choose a restaurant and go out to eat!

Every other Thursday, 5:15 pm (June 13 and 27) - Please join us for our meditation group led by Dr Richard Kimball. He begins with an informative discussion on the practice of meditation followed by walking and then sitting meditation. Call Richard at 371-3425 for details.

Every Thursday at 6:30pm - Come to a group discussion studying the workbook of A Course in Miracles. This has a powerful message. Expertly led by Arthur Cataldo.

Last Sunday of each Month - Join us following our Sunday Celebration for a pot luck lunch. Bring a covered dish and join us for food and enjoyment.

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

June 2, 11 a.m.

Ubuntu will be joining us again to share their wonderful gift of song, leading us as we celebrate musically. Ubuntu is an a capella spiritual choir directed by Rev. Tom Tyre.

June 9, 11 a.m

Dr. Jim Swanson, our own long standing member and board of trustees president, will be speaking on Creating your Own Reality, Part II, from the material of Abraham.

June 16, 11 a.m.

Rev. Lesley Reifert-Hughes, a Spiritualist minister and hypnotherapist will be joining us with a topic from Carl Jung's research, Psychomanteum: Contacting the Spirit World. This should be fascinating.

June 23, 11 a.m.

Carolyn Buttram, author and a very energetic and humorous speaker, will share more fully about her work The Elders Speak—Channeling Spirit Wisdom,

June 30, 11 a.m.

Rev. Frank Kish, ordained Science of Mind minister of the Creative Thought Center in Waynesville, will share with us on the topic of The Calling—Are You Listening?

July 7, 11 a.m. Arthur Cataldo

July 14, 11a.m. Bill Groves

July 21, 11 a.m. Kim May

July 28, 11 a.m. Thea Summer Deer

Scientists tell us that without the presence of the cohesive forces amongst the atoms that comprise our globe, it would crumble to pieces and we cease to exist. Even as there is cohesive force in blind matter, so must there be in all animate things. The name for that cohesive force is Love. We notice it between father and son, between brother and sister, friend and friend. But we have to learn to use that force among all that lives. In the use of it consists our knowledge of God. Where there is love there is God. —Mahatma Gandhi



BOARD OF TRUSTEES

President..... Dr. Jim Swanson
Vice President Kay Smith
Secretary Bill Groves
Treasurer Clark Kell
Assistant Treasurer Carol Murley
Trustee-at-large..... Dr. Richard Kimball

The Board of Trustees meets at 10 a.m. on the second Sunday of each month.
All members are welcome to attend.

SPIRITUAL LIGHT CENTER INFORMATION

80 Heritage Hollow Drive, Franklin, NC 28734
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God is a Verb

Rev. Steve Bevans, S.V.D. at Catholic Theological Union

Did you ever think that God might best be imagined not by a noun but as a *verb*? This is something that has struck me in the last several years, and I have been fascinated by the discovery. I've begun to think about God as a Movement, an Embrace, a Flow—moving through the cosmos and history, embracing creation, flowing through the smallest subatomic particle as well as the most complex organisms. There is no place in this vast universe or in the hearts of women and men that God is not.

Imagining God as a verb might sound very new, but I don't think it is. Think of

Thomas Aquinas's description of God as "pure act." Or think of Bonaventure's idea that God is "self-diffusive love" (paraphrased by CTU professor Tony Gittins as "love hitting the cosmic fan"). And, of course, most fundamental of all, the First Letter of John says that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Not *one who* loves, but love itself.

From the first nanosecond of creation God has been moving, dancing through the world and through history by the power of Spirit. Imaged in the Bible as uncontrollable wind, gentle breath, raging fire, flowing cool water, oozing oil, we read about how the Spirit gives life, stirs up prophecy, brings healing, offers comfort, works for liberation, re-vivifies what has been dead. God continues to move through the world, inviting women and men to join in the dance.

From God is a Verb

Rabbi David Cooper

What is God? God is not what we think It is. God is not a thing, a being, a noun. It does not exist, as existence is defined, for It takes up no space (or includes all space but is not limited by it) and is not bound by time. Jewish mystics often refer to It as *Ein Sof*, which means Endlessness.

Ein Sof should never be conceptualized in any way. It should not be called Creator, Almighty, Father, Mother, Infinite, the One, Brahma, Buddhamind, Allah, Adonoy, Elohim, El, or Shaddai; and It should never, never be called He. It is none of these names and it has no gender.

When we call It God, what are we talking about? If we say that It is compassionate, full of loving kindness, the source of love, we may be talking about our image of what we think the divine nature *ought* to be but we are not talking about Ein Sof. In the same way, if we say that the God portrayed in the bible is vindictive, jealous, angry, cruel, uncaring, or punitive, we cannot be referring to Ein Sof. Ein Sof includes attribute but cannot be defined by any of them individually or all of them combined.

The mystery of the origin of the universe has fascinated human consciousness from the beginning of recorded history. In all cultures of the world we find the timeless inquiry: Is there a creator and if so what is its nature? If not, how did creation begin and what is its purpose?

Mystics teach that there is a universal connection between all things; modern science offers the same message. This connection has various names, some say it is a soul force, others call it love; the ancients called it ether, science often names it energy. Yet, although there is general agreement that there seems to be a fundamental nature in the continuous unfolding of the universe, our relationship to the core of this nature has been a matter of considerable debate.

Jewish mystics are particularly concerned about naming the universal connection. People confuse names with identities. Many primitive cultures have name-secrets. They will not tell you their names for fear that you will have power over them. Similarly, at times, they will not allow you to take pictures of them. In the primitive mind, the essence of a person can be captured and imprisoned if one has control over a name or the image.

When we give a name to the nameless it is a stumbling block that trips most people. We think that if it has a name, it has an identity. An identity comes with attributes. So we think we know something about it. This is a mistake.

For thousands of years this mistake has become ingrained in the human psyche. The word "God" suggests an embodiment of something that can be grasped. We have given a name to the unknown and unknowable and then have spent endless time trying to know it. We try because it has a name; but we must always fail because it is unknowable. Judaism is so concerned about this misunderstanding; it goes to great lengths to avoid naming God. Yet various names seep through because our minds cannot work without symbols.

What then is the God that is written about in the bible? Kabbalists teach that the very first line of Genesis has been mistranslated. Most people think it says: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." But the actual words in Hebrew can be read another way. A Kabbalist could say: "With a beginning, [It] created God [Elohim], the heavens and the earth."

That is to say, there was an initial creation out of nothingness the potential to begin--Beginningness. Once there was a beginning, God (in a plural form) was created--a God to which the rest of creation could relate. Then the heavens and the earth were created.

The implication of this interpretation profoundly affects our entire relationship with God and creation, for it says that all the names we have for God and all the ways in which we relate to God are a few degrees removed from the source of creation that precedes even nothingness. This is called Ein Sof, which is not the name of a thing but is an on-going process.

EIN SOF

The idea of Ein Sof was first described by Isaac the Blind. He originated the actual use of the word Kabbalah to designate a variety of Jewish mystical teachings and practices. Isaac teaches that Ein Sof precedes thought (*machshavah*), and it even precedes the nothingness (*ayin*) out of which thought is born. Nothingness is viewed as a level of awareness that is the result of the "annihilation of thought."

The idea of the annihilation of thought, of course, is paradoxical. Can we imagine a void without beginning or end? Can we, limited by minds that are finite, imagine infinity? The answer is no, we cannot think of nothing. We may be able to put a name to infinity, we can draw a symbol of a figure eight on its side and say that this represents infinity, but no matter how much we may believe that our imagination is limitless, we remain confined by the boundaries of our own reality. If it can be imagined, it is not infinite.

As infinity is beyond the imagination, what about that which transcends infinity--that which created it? Ein Sof is not "restricted" by infinity. Indeed, we have suddenly run out of words because the idea of "trans-infinite" is a logical absurdity. What can go beyond infinity? Moreover, what can go beyond the Nothingness that surrounds infinity? This is Ein Sof. Although we are informed that Ein Sof is inaccessible through any intellectual endeavor, we may still ask if there is a "knowing" that surpasses the intellect? Does Isaac the Blind have access to a level of awareness through which he can sense, somehow, the unperceivable?

The answer is yes. Jewish mysticism teaches that we can know Ein Sof in ways that transcend thought. The secret teaching in developing this relationship with the unknowable is hidden in the mystical foundation of the nature of relationship itself.

The word "God," and all of its various names in Judaism, such as El, Elohim, Adonoy, Shaddai, and so forth, each represent aspects of Ein Sof. The exploration of these aspects gives us insight into the nature of Ein Sof. Thus, whenever God is discussed, we are not talking about a thing in itself, but a representation of a far deeper mystery.

THE DIVINE KISS

In the Song of Songs, the mystic whispers about the kiss of its lover: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your love is better than wine."

We can feel the aching heart of the lover: "I am sick with love, his left hand is under my head and his right embraces me."

We experience the thrill of anticipation: "My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door and my heart was thrilled; I rose to open to my beloved."

"Ah," we say, "the passion of young love!" But this is not a poem about young lovers. It is about us, about every human being, and it describes our potential relationship with the Divine. Perhaps you do not believe this; perhaps you feel that having an intimate relationship with the Divine is beyond you, reserved for others, or another lifetime. This is not so. It is part of our heritage; it is yours and mine to have. All we need do is learn how to let go of our fear, for fear maintains the barriers of separation.

In many traditions, the mystical expression of our relationship with the Divine is through eros, the flame of a burning heart. Why? Because when we awaken to the realization that the presence of the Divine is revealed in the fullness of each moment, our hearts melt and the floodgates of our inner yearning open wide.

This is a mystical epiphany. It cannot be rationally explained. Although we cannot cross the barrier between us and that which lies beyond infinity, we can experience in the depth of our being the realization that for each step we take, the Divine steps with us; each breath we draw is connected with the breath of the universe; and that lover, beloved, and the essence of love itself *are all reflections of exactly the same thing*. In each of these moments we "know" the presence of the Divine and there is no separation.

One of the great Jewish mystics, Abraham Abulafia (13th century), says about one who has achieved this level of spiritual awareness: "Now we are no longer separated from our source, and behold we *are* the source and the source is us. We are so intimately united with It, we cannot by any means be separated from It, for we are It."

This is described in a lovely Sufi story of a man who constantly cried out to God, but received no response. After a while the devil whispered to this man, "How long will you wait for God to respond 'Here I am' to all of your entreaties?" This broke the man's spirit and he stopped calling out to God. In a dream, however, he envisioned an image of the Divine who asked him why he had stopped. The man said that God had never answered his call. The wise dream-image, representing God, then said, "Did you not realize that every calling of yours IS itself my response?"

The urge to call out to God is *always* answered simultaneously as it is spoken, for ultimately there is no difference between the caller and that to which it calls.

The Kotzker rebbe, Menahem Mendel (19th century), a famous hasidic teacher who lived his last twenty years in voluntary seclusion, asked one of his students, "Where does God dwell?" As the student stumbled in his attempt to respond, the Kotzker rebbe answered his own question, "God resides wherever we let God in!"

Mystics throughout time, in all traditions, have said the same thing. We do not have to search for God because the presence of the Divine permeates all things. If there is a search at all, it is God searching for Itself, so to speak.

GOD IS A VERB

The closest we can come to thinking about God is as a process rather than a being. We can think of it as "be-ing," as verb rather than noun. Perhaps it would help us understand this better if we renamed God. We might call it God-ing, as a process, rather than God, which suggests a noun.

This idea was developed by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, who goes further and explains that the kind of verb that represents God-ing is different from the ones we have in our ordinary language. Most of our verbs are considered transitive, which require a direct object, or intransitive, those that do not. He suggests that God-ing is a mutually interactive verb, one which entails interdependency between two subjects, each being the object for the other.

For example, "communicating" could be such a verb. If I were speaking to an audience, I might not be communicating. I would be engaged in the act of communication, but if the audience were not attentive and were thinking about other things, I would not be communicating no matter how much I talked. My verbal communication is dependent upon a listener; it cannot be a one-way street. Other obvious verbs that fit into this category are loving, sharing, dancing, kissing, hugging, and so forth.

We can relate to God as an interactive verb. It is God-ing. Moreover, from this perspective, creation should not be treated as a noun. It too is an interactive verb; it is con-

stantly creation-ing. And, dear reader, you should not treat yourself as a noun--as Joan, or Bill, or Barbara, or John. With regard to God as an interactive verb, you are also verbs; you are Joan-ing, Bill-ing, Barbara-ing, or John-ing in relation to God-ing, just as I am David-ing. Each part in the universe is in dynamic relationship with every other part. In human interactions, such as marriage, one partner is husband-ing while the other is wife-ing. The two, in this sense, are one. We normally experience relationships in terms of their component parts; we are mistaken, however, when we assume the parts are separate.

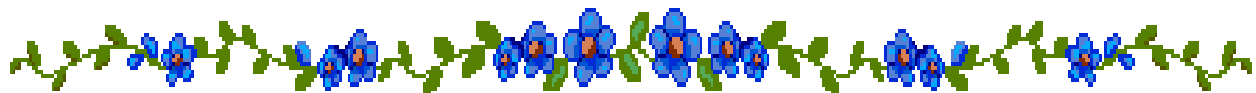
The true discovery of the intimacy of our ongoing relationship with the Divine can dramatically change our lives.. It is not intellectual knowledge, but wisdom--a deep knowing--inexplicable, indescribable and exquisite beyond imagination. This wisdom is the fountain of true mystical experience, the driving force of all spiritual inquiry. It is what sustains us when we are faced with doubts, nourishes us when the world seems bleak, and comforts us when we face the death of loved ones. Without it, where would we turn? What would we be without the awesomeness of the unknowable God?

Consider this from your inner awareness. Not you the noun, the person you may think you are, but you the verb, the process of being in full relationship, continuously, with its creator. When a question arises within you, who is asking the question and to whom is the question addressed? Assume that there is no "me" to ask the question and there is no God out there to answer it. The question is part of the process of David-ing and God-ing in a mutual unfolding.

Try to do this in a way that melts all barriers of separation. No subject and no object. Simply an ever-opening process. No past, no future; only now. Each moment is a fresh opening. Each breath we draw, each move we make is only Now. This is my dance with God-ing. It is an awesome experience.

The unknowable can be discerned. Beginning at an indefinable point as sharp as a needle, it radiates in various ways which can be perceived. This only occurs in the context of process and interaction. We are not an audience watching the God-ing process on stage. We are on stage, ourselves. We mysteriously begin to get a glimmer of God-ing when we succeed in merging with the continuous process of unfolding creation.

We do not have to be prophets to experience God-ing. It is everywhere around us and an aspect of everything we do. It arises when we repeatedly encounter the magical quality of life, the incredible blend and variety of experience, the exquisite unfolding of nature, the intricacies of our minds, and more than anything, the awe, the profound awe we experience when we sense the enormity of this universe. Somehow the awe itself, inefably, draws us into the center of creation. At some point we merge with it.



**Here is God's purpose,
for God to me, it seems,
is a verb
not a noun . . .**

Yes, God is a verb,

**the most active,
connoting the
vast harmonic reordering
of the universe
from unleashed chaos of
energy. R. Buckminster Fuller**