

# Looking for Answers?

## Inquire Within

August 6, 2023



A Beloved Community  
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Sherri Dotter, RScP, & Chris Johnson, RScP

## Taizé

### Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

#### Sherri – Opening Prayer

**Rev. Diana** – Welcome... if you're new with us here this morning, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystical Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. I welcome you home to our Spiritual Community (should you choose it). I welcome you home to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

#### Rev. Diana & Chris – Taizé Chants

 **Welcome Home to Your Mystic Heart**, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 **Dropping Down**, written by Amy Bishop, Karen Drucker, & Gary Lynn Floyd

#### Rev. Diana

We take a moment to breathe...together...as one living organism...to settle into the peace that dwells within and all around us...to experience the Presence in the here and now...and to honor the connection with our global family...We see with the mind's eye a web of consciousness that surrounds and infuses the planet...each of us, an intricate and radiant Light, shining within the web...each of us a reflection of pure radiance...every human, every other-than-human creature, every plant, a shining expression of the One Light...the rocks and minerals, water and wind, stars and planets...each one a unique creation, emanating from One Source...the Light so bright that there is nothing else.

As we come together this morning, we set an intention...to leave a positive imprint on human evolution and on the world, for all time...an imprint of Love, Compassion, Kindness, and Peace.

The flow of Taizé this morning reminds us that **Inquiring Minds Want to Know**...it points us in the direction of Self-Inquiry as the Seventh Pillar for a Spiritual Life.

We each have the capacity to discover the truth of who we really are, whatever our particular story may be. No matter how the events of our lives have been arranged and rearranged, true and lasting value is here, in our presence, in this and every moment.

The place on which we stand is Holy Ground precisely because we are standing upon it.

What is it that gets in your way of recognizing our own value? What blocks your awareness of the peace and fulfillment that are always present at the core of your being? It is the covering you have woven from the threads of past events and memories, from your individual past, as well as the collective human past. In other words, it is your story...and it colors the unfolding of your future.

As we grow and mature, each of us learns how to present ourselves, carefully covered, for both protection and deception. There is nothing wrong with this process...it is simply part of being human. However, we find that if we are willing to stop weaving our story for a period of deep and truthful inquiry, we can explore what is hidden behind or within the stories, and discover who we truly are.

Spiritual Teacher Gangaji suggests that,

We have become practiced at maintaining the threads of our story lines, and we work to cover the unraveling holes that life persistently reveals. This is steady work, requiring our attention day and night. In an instant, if only for an instant, we can stop. When we are exhausted with our labor of covering what we fear we are, we can stop covering. When we are curious about what is unchanging in the midst of constant change, we can stop giving all our attention to what changes...

...and focus instead on that which is eternal, constant...the pure awareness of Presence.

Awareness...what is awareness? Whatever we are experiencing, we are aware of it. We are aware of our thoughts and feelings, and whatever sensations and perceptions may be present. Take a moment to let your imagination go wherever it wants...(Pause) Whatever you encounter, you are aware of it.

Awareness is the constant element in all experience. Everything that we are aware of is continuously changing...thoughts, images, feelings, sensations...are always appearing and disappearing. But the experience of being aware remains constant. The thoughts and sensations that each of us is having now are not the same thought that was present two minutes ago, or two weeks ago. But the experience of being aware is the same as it was two minutes ago, two weeks ago...twenty years ago. Awareness is the only element in our experience that never changes. Everything else we have ever experienced has vanished...every thought, every feeling, every perception, every sensation...are appearing and disappearing all the time. None of them is lasting. But the simple experience of being aware remains constant, unchanging. It is never affected by what we are aware of.

What is the common name we give to the experience of being aware? I. / refers to the simple experience of being aware. We might say, " I am aware of the room I am sitting in. I am aware of my thoughts and feelings." / is the name we give to the one who is

thinking, feeling, sensing, or acting. *I* is the unchanging element that runs throughout all of our experience.

We are normally so fascinated by what we are aware of...by the state of the body, by our thoughts and feelings, by our perceptions about the state of the world...that the simple experience of being aware is overlooked. We don't notice it. The experience of being aware is not something that we can be aware *of* in the same way we are aware of thoughts and perceptions. Nevertheless, each of us has the experience of being aware.

Direct your attention towards your current thought...give that thought your attention...you are able to direct your attention. Now direct your attention to the sensation of your feet meeting the floor...again, you know exactly where to direct your attention. Now direct your attention toward the experience of being aware. Where does your attention go?

We have already admitted that we are aware...awareness is our experience. So what happens when we try to direct our attention towards being aware? Try to turn your attention toward yourself...not toward your thoughts or feelings or bodily sensations...but toward the *I*. Instead of directing your attention toward what you are aware of, direct it toward the experience of being aware.

The more we practice this, the more we realize that it is only possible to direct our attention toward some kind of object...a thought, feeling, sensation, or perception. We can't turn our attention around and shine it back in the other direction toward that which is aware. This would be like shining a flashlight on the lightbulb from which the beam is coming. The lightbulb is the one thing we can never shine the light on...it is the source of the light. It can only be shone.

In the same way, we can give our attention to any object, but we cannot give attention to awareness itself. Awareness is the source of our experience.

How are we going to find out more about ourself...about our beingness...about awareness itself if we cannot direct our attention towards it? Instead of directing your attention, try to relax your attention, allowing it to sink back into its source. (Pause) How long did it take to relax into awareness? The experience of being aware is not inaccessible, buried somewhere in the depths of experience. It is simply there, totally available in any moment. Its presence is completely independent of the conditions.

### **Chris – Guided Meditation**

How do you typically answer the question, "Who are you?"... Many of us respond with what we *do*: "I'm a teacher... an electrician... a nurse."... But *who we are* is so much more than that... a teacher might also be a musician, a mother, a chaplain, and a volunteer... Still, these describe things we *do*...

We *are* more than what we *do*... Right now, we may have the thought, "I am meditating."... That *is* what we are *doing*... but who is the *I* that meditates?... who is the

/ that thinks our thoughts?... that feels our emotions?... Who is the / that is contemplating all these questions?...

Spiritual teachers have long taught that we are Spiritual Beings having a human experience... I am more than my body... I am more than my thoughts, beliefs, and feelings... And all that I am is somehow interconnected to all that you are... and our interbeingness extends to all the rest of Creation...

Each Sunday, we welcome you home to your Mystic Heart... where all of *your* answers are to be found... *Your* Mystic Heart is the very essence of your being... the *I Am* that you are... your unique expression of the One Divine Life of Spirit... Self-Inquiry is the process of dropping down into that essence...

In our three minutes of shared Silent Contemplation today, I invite us to ask, "*Who am I?*"... and listen for the responses that arise from within us... We may encounter a belief that we hold... we are not that... drop down deeper... We may hear an old story about ourself that we believed... we are not that either... Keep dropping deeper, beyond the opinions... the stories... the self-judgment... beyond anything that can be put into words... Our essence is so much more than that... "***Who Am I?***"...

### **Silence – 3:00**

Allowing the music to guide our awareness gently back into the here and now, we gratefully accept the Gift of Insight our Self-Inquiry has bestowed on us... And with profound gratitude for the Love and support of our Beloved Community, we say thank you, God, for everyone and for everything...

Self-Inquiry is an ongoing spiritual practice... we know that our introspection has only just begun... And we realize that we can always return to the well, again and again, diving ever deeper and deeper...

As Rev. Diana continues her inspirational message this morning, we listen with new ears... new minds... new hearts... as we find our own answers by Inquiring Within...

### **Rev. Diana**

At any given moment, you can ask yourself, "Are you aware?" and the answer will be "Yes". You are aware of being aware. Anytime you consciously become aware of being aware, you are practicing one of the highest forms of meditation there is...it is the only form of meditation that does not involve directing our attention toward an object. It is the essence of what we call prayer...practicing the Presence...relaxing into the I Am.

In the state of pure awareness there is only Wholeness...in the state of pure awareness, there is a Peace that passeth understanding...all definitions and limitations disappear...you are simply being that which you truly are...a perfect expression of Divinity...

**Closing Prayer** – Because we know that there is nothing else...One Source, One Life, One Spirit, coming to know Themselves as you...as me...as all of creation. This is Truth and nothing we think, believe, or do can ever change that.

The stories I tell myself may limit my experience, but they will never limit the Truth of Who and Whose I Am. Why not just accept my Divine Birthright? Why not question, and ultimately lay to rest, any and all limiting stories about anything? When my mind offers reasons why I can't, why not turn its power of inquiry back on itself with powerful questions: Where did this belief come from? It is true? What *is* true?

I know, that in any moment, I have the power to come back to Pure Awareness...I have the capacity, and the willingness, to Practice the Presence of God...to remember the Truth of who I Am, and to live from that.

I Am Love...I Am Peace...I Am Joy...I Am Beauty...I Am Power...I Am Light.

Thank you, Spirit, for my ability to constantly evaluate and edit my story. Thank you for the power of choice in how I experience life. Thank you for the many teachers in my life...may I welcome and grow from their ideas and examples. Thank you for the support of Spiritual Community and the sharing of our journeys. And most of all, thank you for this prayer, already received and acted upon by the Great Mystery of Life Itself...in complete faith that all that unfolds from this moment forward is part of this prayer being answered...Divine Order and Timing, always guiding the process...I let it go and let it be...and so it is...Amen.

**Musical Meditation – *I Am Light***, by India Arie

**Rev. Diana** – Coming back into the awareness of our bodies...our senses...the atmosphere in the room, we open our eyes and allow our gaze to take in whatever is before you. Feel free to look around and say good morning to everyone who is here celebrating with you this morning.

This is your Spiritual Family...one of your support systems. These are some of the people who care about you, and are there for you if you need anything.

### **Offering**


As we close our Taizé Meditation, we offer the opportunity for you to share of your financial good in support of the work we do should you choose to do so. If you're joining us online, you can find a Donate Button and our mailing address at [mysticheart.org](http://mysticheart.org). And we thank you in advance for your gifts.

**Offertory Video– *Writing a Better Story***, by Carrie Newcomer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOsE845bVlc>

**Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering**

**Rev. Diana & Chris – Closing Song**


 ***A Soul's Blessing***, written by Chris Johnson

## Conscious Conversation

### Sherri – Opening Prayer

**Rev. Diana** – Good morning and welcome, or welcome back...welcome to those joining online. If you're new with us here this morning... my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, and I am the Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center. We are an Independent Interfaith Community that teaches Universal Principles and Practical Spirituality. We welcome you home to our Gathering Place and to the Guidance and Wisdom of your own Mystic Heart.

### Rev. Diana & Chris – Opening Music

 **Welcome to the Mystic Heart**, written by Diana & Chris Johnson

 **One Big Family**, written by Robin Hackett & Gary Lynn Floyd

 Woke Up This Morning, Traditional Gospel

**Rev. Diana** – Calling Awareness to the Presence of Spirit in the body...join me in the embodiment of living in a **Love-Soaked World...**

...where all humans embody and live from Kindness, Compassion, Peace, Joy, Abundance and Generosity, Freedom and Justice as the Living Principles that guide our every thought, word, and action...where all humans honor and care for one another, for the earth that sustains us, and for every life form that shares this beautiful planet with us.

We are creating a world where all needs are met...where all beings are well-fed, and have the safety and comfort of home...

...where mental/physical health, education, and healthy relationships are ensured by social systems grounded in Wellness and Wholeness... where all beings Serve the greater community doing whatever feeds their souls and are well supported for their time and talent...and by their Service, each one finds a sense of belonging...

A world in which all beings are valued and respected for their uniqueness...where Authenticity and Integrity are the norm...where the Peace and Kindness we cultivate within shows up as a world free of hatred or violence.

With our growing Awareness, and by the Power of our collective intention, we are writing a new story...a story in which greed is a thing of the past, and there is abundance in having enough.

We *do not* lower our Vision, no matter the appearances in the world, knowing with our whole hearts that such a world is not only possible, but *inevitable*. We align our actions to support our vision, and a new world is being born.

We open our hearts, our minds, our doors, and our arms in Radical Welcome, erasing all lines of apparent separation. In keeping with our Vision, we create an open and loving community to which all are invited, and *in* which all have an equal voice. With deep faith

in the Great Mystery that acts upon this prayer, we accept its Graceful unfolding into form and experience, and in Sweet Gratitude, we release it now to the Living, Loving, Lawful Presence.

And so it is...Amen...Sathu...Ashay...Aho!

Let's take a moment to look around to say good morning to your Spiritual Family...some of the people who care about you...people you can count on when you need a hand.

If you were with us at Taizé this morning, you know that our topic this week is **Looking For Answers? Inquire Within**. We briefly acknowledged Self-Inquiry as a seventh pillar for a spiritual life. Self-Inquiry can be defined as "the constant attention to the inner awareness of 'I'". Through Self-Inquiry, one can stop the constant focus on experiences and conditions...and turn our attention back on itself. We tried a quick experiment. I'm going to ask you a question. Answer it silently in your mind. Are you aware? What is it that is aware that you're aware?

We called that Pure Awareness...Practicing the Presence of God. And we noticed that this kind of Presence is at the heart of prayer.

**What is it that gets in the way of our living from Presence? What keeps us from an experience of I-Am-ness?**

(Discussion of community ideas. Stories. That's it, stories.)

I'd like to share some ideas from Gangaji in her book *Hidden Treasure: Uncovering the Truth in Your Life Story*. "All creatures are born inescapably defined by their stories, yet if we remain limited by those definitions, we live a life of inner bondage."

**What does this mean?**

Here's the next section: "When we recognize the stories that generate our definitions of ourselves, we are closer to the discovery of what is indefinable within us. That discovery reveals inner freedom and lasting fulfillment."

**What is this telling us?**

And a page or two later: "We inherit much of our foundation for our story from our families and our communities of birth. We also have the innate ability as an intelligent life-form to consciously cast off much of what has been preordained for us or has previously defined us."

**What does this mean?**

**Read from pages 6-7**

**How does it feel to think of your life as a collection of stories?**

(We tend to want to think of the facts of our lives as 'our truth'. We're pretty attached to the 'reality' of our circumstances, and often determined to prove that they are unchangeable.)

## Read from pages 8-9

Okay, one more quote: “In seemingly mysterious and sometimes unwanted ways, our particular story is also expressing exactly what we need to face if we want to deepen our experience of life. When we recognize what the essential thrust of our life reveals, we can begin to see how the present rendition of our story also offers the essential wisdom needed to evolve into the next phase. Our stories are often ruthless in their insistence upon particular lessons.”

## What does that bring up for you?

## Close by reading from pages 17-18

To be continued next week, when our topic will be “Once Upon a Time”.

**Closing Prayer – know with me now the Truth of this simple prayer:** There is only one Living, Loving, and Lawful Presence...beyond all words, beyond all names...beyond all understanding.

This One is Life Itself, expressing Themselves as all of creation...as you, and as me...as the Intelligence of the Universe, the Divine Order in all that is...as the Self-Expression that gives tirelessly of Itself. We know this aspect of Spirit as Love.

This One is the possibility of Peace, Joy, and Beauty that dwell within us all, and the Freedom to express and experience life in whatever way we choose.

And this One lives in, through and as me now...this is the deepest Truth. This is the Real Story.

And so, I simply accept it as so. I let go of all resistance to the Truth...I let go of my need to be different and special, allowing my story to become a graceful and fluid adventure.

I am grateful to know that, in any moment, I can change my story. And by changing my story, my life is transformed.

I am so grateful for the many gifts of Spirit, for the endless shower of blessings in my life; and to show my gratitude, I make best use of them. I walk consciously in the world, determined to be the authentic expression of Love, Peace, Joy, Beauty, and Freedom that our world so desperately needs...

Thank you, Great Mystery, for my growing awareness...for the courage and willingness to ***Inquire Within***, and to accept and follow Inner Guidance as it comes.

Centered in gratitude, and in the deep faith that all of Life is working for the growth and evolution of all, I release this prayer, trusting in its heartfelt intention...feeling its Truth and calling it done. And so it is. Amen.

I invite you to bring your awareness back to your body, to your senses, to the atmosphere in the room. And when you are ready, open your eyes to re-enter the space. Welcome back.

## Rev. Diana – Affirmation for the Offering



Each Sunday, we invite you to join in the celebration of the work we are doing in the world by sharing of your financial Good, should you choose to.

If you are at home, you can go to **mysticheart.org** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We also have a Gracious Giving Program for those who would like to make a heartfelt monthly commitment of support so that we can more effectively plan for our growth. You can find more information on our website.

As we move into this time of giving, hold these words close to your heart and know how much we appreciate your gifts:

**As I awaken to the God within me and all around me, I see Abundance everywhere I look. I consciously step into that flow of Abundance by this act of giving. I offer this gift freely in the spirit of Love, blessing and sending it forth to heal and prosper. It is evidence of my deep faith. It does good work in the world and blesses all of Creation. I give from a consciousness of Abundance! And so it is! Amen!**







**This beautiful song offers one way to write our stories differently. Enjoy!**

**Offertory Video – *Holy As the Day is Spent*, by Carrie Newcomer**



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxzO8DyY9e8>

**Sherri Blessing for the Offering**

**Sherri – Invitations**

-  There is a lot going on at Mystic Heart. Please take home a copy of the August Bulletin. It has lots of information. I'm going to give a few highlights.
-  Mystic Heart Core Council Meeting, this Tuesday, August 8<sup>th</sup> from 12:30-2:30 pm. All are welcome.
-  The Mystic Heart Book Club is reading ***The Essential Path* by Neale Donald Walsch**, Tuesdays from 3-5 pm. The next book, coming September 5<sup>th</sup> is listed in the Bulletin.
-  ***The Rainmaker, a romantic comedy*. This Wednesday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 pm, curtain at 7:30. Tickets are still available today for \$20.** We are being invited to bring appetizers to share, and beverages will be for sale at the theater.
-  **Metaphysical Bible Study** is meeting with Chris Johnson on Thursdays from 3 – 5 pm. **Drop-ins welcome.**
-  **Kindness Rocks!** In the spirit of Praying in Color, join Rev. Diana on Saturday, August 12<sup>th</sup>, 1:30–4:00 pm at the Mystic Heart Gathering Place, Suite H.

**Looking Ahead...**

-  Saturday, August 19<sup>th</sup>, 10 am – noon, Laurie Buckman will present a *Culinary Herbs Workshop*. Suggested donation: \$20. All materials provided.
-  Tuesday, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 12:30-2:30 pm, *Fast Track to Wellness* will be re-starting.

♥ **Saturday, August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1:30-4:00 pm, Cultivating Soil and Spirit.** Rev. Diana will be offering the second in this series of workshops...starting seeds for your Fall Legumes and more.

♥ ***Common Threads of Truth*, Tuesday, August 29<sup>th</sup>, 6:00-8:00 pm** – Amarjit Singh of the Sikh Tradition, and leader of the Anderson Sikh Centre, will be presenting.

***The announcements for fall classes and other September activities, and a lot more information is in the Bulletin. Please take one home and give it a read.***

**Prayer Requests, Practitioner available after service, Information Cards if new people**

**Rev. Diana, Chris, & Congregation – Closing Song**

♥ ***Love Be With You***, written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP, & Gary Lynn Floyd

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