

Who Am I, Really?

Sunday, October 15, 2023

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Chris Johnson, RScP



A Beloved Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Taizé

Call to Awareness – 3 Bells

Chris J – 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). Even more, I welcome you home to the answers that lie within your own Mystic Heart.

Rev. Diana & Chris J – Taizé Chants

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

 *Pour Yourself in Me*, written by Rickie Byars

Rev. Diana –

We move more deeply into Taizé this morning by sensing the peaceful quality of the space...feeling the shared vibration of joining our voices...and taking a long, slow, deep breath in, and then letting it go...allowing the breath to bring us into the present moment. (Pause) Peace is our native state...Joy is the Truth of our being...forever present, supporting us...offering an opportunity for us to center ourselves, in any moment that we remember...God is...I Am...God is *all* that is...I Am *That*. And so is everyone else...*everything* else.

We take a moment to honor our connection with all of Life. Together, we envision a web of consciousness...a Life Force...a Holy Presence...that surrounds and infuses the planet...each of us, a point of Light, reflecting our Radiance to the many beings that share this space and time with us...every human, every other-than-human creature, every plant...the network of life that lives beneath the soil's surface, invisible to the naked eye...microbes...mycelium...the Light of Spirit at work...the rocks and minerals, water and wind, stars and planets...alive...in relationship...forever connected by our co-existence at this time, in this place...forever one in Spirit.

As we share time in prayer and meditation, we are leaving an imprint of Peace on the world...a ripple of Harmony whose effect we may never know...but we trust that it is making a difference. Take a moment to feel the atmosphere we are creating...

As we come together, we set an intention...that each of us is a beneficial presence on the planet...that each feels, embodies, and lives from our connection with all beings...and that as a community, we use this time to move the world toward a more Kind, Just, Harmonious expression...we walk as Loving Kindness in action.

This morning we use our shared time to experience the Truth of who we are... We begin by asking, “**Who Am I, Really?**”. Beneath the persona...the mask that I present to the world...beyond the thoughts and beliefs that inhabit my mind...besides the roles I play in the world...Who Am I? I Am...you are...a perfect, intentional, irreplaceable expression of God...Spirit showing up in this place and time as you, so that It might more fully know Itself.

This is not an idea that most of us were raised with. It may take some time of grappling with such an idea for us to even begin to understand the implications of such a Truth. And we know that truly, we can never comprehend such a concept with our minds. It is only in our hearts, and as an experience of our being, that we will ever really know...feel...embody our Oneness with the Divine. This is what philosopher and mystic Ken Wilbur calls *Waking Up*.

Remembering prior contemplations, he suggests that the spiritual journey is made up of states and stages. *Growing Up*...moving through the physical stages in the human lifespan...*Cleaning Up*...doing my psychological and emotional work...and *Showing Up*, a willingness or drive to go beyond myself and my own needs and moving into Service of the whole...these he calls stages of the spiritual journey.

Waking Up, according to Wilbur, is a *state* that can occur for anyone, no matter which stage of spiritual development we are experiencing. States and stages are like parallel paths that from time to time, find points of connection. *Waking Up* is an act of Grace. It is a moment in time when we feel and know the Presence of God...a mystical experience of the Divine. It is both unexpected and awe-inspiring. It is a Sacred Gift that brings such a sense of Connection that we can no longer deny the Presence of Something Greater Than Ourselves.

How, then, are the states we experience in *Waking Up* and the stages of *Growing Up*, *Cleaning Up*, and *Showing Up* related? In their parallel journey, what are their points of connection?

Humans grow through predictable stages of physical and psychological growth, at varying rates according to our physical and environmental circumstances, our nature and nurture. In addition, it is suggested that we share consistent stages in our spiritual growth, again at varying rates. Initially, our faith is completely unconscious...innate...and might be defined as the direct experience of connection between ourselves and our caregivers.

As we progress, the building of faith may revolve around the witnessing or taking part in the rituals of a family’s religious community...or by their absence, and the family’s focus on other experiences.

In the next phase of growth, we begin to separate fact from fiction...religious authority expands beyond our parents to other trusted adults...faith is based in the stories told and the rituals practiced, whether religious in nature or not...and we begin to notice that others believe differently.

Moving on in our journey of faith, we develop abstract thinking, bringing the ability to see layers of meaning in the stories, rituals, and symbols of our faith...we may begin to see from others' perspectives...claim our faith as own, even though it is still connected to the faith of the family...and see religious authority as existing outside of ourselves.

Next, we might start to question our own assumptions about our faith tradition, or lack of one...we may question the authority structures of our faith...we may leave a religious community, looking for answers. Greater maturity is gained as we affirm some parts of our faith and reject others, taking greater ownership of our personal faith journey.

In early to mid-adulthood, our struggles and questioning may give way to an acceptance that some answers are not easily found. There might be a shift from the strong need for self-reflection to the importance of community in faith development. And we may become more open to learning from other faith perspectives in deepening our own.

Finally, there are a few humans that reach what is considered the final stage in faith development. These people have the ability to relate to anyone at any stage and from any faith...without condescension, and yet challenging the assumptions of those at other stages. They cherish life but are not too attached. They put their faith into action, challenging the status quo and working to create justice in the world. People at this stage have "a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us." (James Fowler)

The practices we choose throughout the stages of our spiritual development...prayer, meditation, contemplation, self-inquiry...help to create a rich and receptive field in which Spiritual Awakening can occur. This fertile ground stands as an open invitation for *Waking Up*...for Great Spirit to make Itself known...for the mystical experience to unfold.

Chris – Guided Meditation

Who am I, really?... How shall I respond?... I may say, "I am Chris..." but there are at least five Chrises in our community, so that doesn't help much... I am a prayer practitioner... but we have five of those, also... a husband... a father... a teacher... Neither my name nor my roles fully answer that question...

Metaphysically, I could say that I am a soul... an individualization of the One, Divine Life... a spiritual being having an earthly experience... I am a unique expression of the Creator, who dwells within me, as me... but all of that is also true of you... as it is true of a tree, a river, the soil... or even our pets...

When we were born, we *knew* who we were... Over time, those responsible for us gave us their interpretations of us... who they thought we were... or wanted us to be... and

we agreed with them... From their flawed perceptions, expectations, and judgments of us, we created an image of perfection... and then, we tried to live up to it...

don Miguel Ruiz calls this process *domestication*... We are born into a collective dream... a story shared by our families, our communities, and our world... We don't fit the persona that we believe ourself to be... we can never measure up... We may even experience an identity crisis... we simply don't *know* who we are...

But this is actually an opportunity... an invitation to wake up from the dream... and create a new dream... In our three minutes of shared, silent contemplation this morning, let us dismantle the image we project... pierce the egoic veil that hides us, without really protecting us... Let us seek what Zen calls our *original face*... our unique human spirit... who we were before our domestication... without judgment or expectation... the *I Am* at the core of our being... the Divine Human our heart of hearts knows us to be...

Silence – 3:00

We allow the music to gently usher our awareness back into this time and place, giving thanks for the remembrance of our True Self... Grateful for the spiritual journey that has led us to this Beloved Community... to this Mystical Family of Kindred Spirits... Thank you, God, for everyone and for everything...

Growing up, cleaning up, and showing up are stages of development... Waking up is a state change... a glimpse into the Great Mystery... a Gift of Divine Grace... We can't *make* it happen, but we *can* invite it... letting Spirit have their way with us... in complete surrender...

We give thanks for Rev. Diana's words of wisdom and inspiration this morning as she encourages us to become more and more awake... to show up as our authentic selves... to share our unique gifts... and to *absolutely know* who we are... *really*...

Rev. Diana – There are no guarantees in the Spiritual Journey that we call Life. Whether we're talking about physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual stages, there are only tendencies...patterns. Any one of us can be stopped in our tracks at any moment...Life can throw us curve balls, either keeping us agile, or allowing us to get stuck. What will we choose? The answer to this question helps to define our *experience* of being human...determines the trajectory of our lives. But it has nothing to do with Who We Are.

Who Am I, Really?

I close with an excerpt from Rupert Spira's *The Heart of Prayer*:

Before our being is qualified by the content of experience, it knows no limit in itself. The knowledge 'I am' is infinite being's knowledge of itself. In the Old Testament, God says to Moses, 'I Am that I am'. Later God says, 'Tell the people of Israel, "I am has sent me to you."' God's presence shines in each of us as the experience 'I am'. God is the very being of our being, therefore, our knowledge or our self is God's knowledge of itself.

It is for this reason that Meister Eckhart said, 'The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.'

The name 'I' is like a portal through which God passes out of eternity into time and seems to become a finite being, and the same portal, traversed in the opposite direction, through which a finite being passes out of time into eternity. As it passes through that portal, it loses its limited qualities and stands revealed as God's being.

Do not allow yourself to be personalized or limited by experience. No experience has ever qualified, diminished, hurt, changes, or aggrandized you. As Meister Eckhart said, 'There is a place in the soul that has never been wounded'. Our being is in the same condition now as it was before the birth of our body and will remain the same after its death. We are always the same infinite, pristine, self-aware being.

God's being always remains the same perfect, unblemished, indivisible whole, the unqualified 'I am' that shines like a beacon behind and in the midst of all experience, irrespective of its content.

God leaves a trace of itself in each of us as the knowledge 'I' or 'I am'. 'I' or 'I am' is, as such, God's signature in each of our minds. The feeling of being is God's presence in each of our hearts. Thus, 'I' or 'I am' is the divine name, the first form of God.

All that is necessary is to repeat God's name once and listen in the silence that ensues for God's response, 'I am here'. Each of our given names is also a sacred name. When we hear our name, we respond, 'Yes'. What happens in the brief pause between the sound of our name and our response? We refer to ourself. Not to our thoughts and feelings, or a sensation in the body, but to our self, God's being. As such, all names are the names of God. This is what it means in the Old Testament when God says, 'I have called you by name. You are mine.'

Musical Meditation – *God Is, I Am* by Eddie Watkins, Jr.

Rev. Diana Closing Prayer

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.

Rev. Diana – Love Offering

As we close our Taizé Meditation, we offer the opportunity for you to share 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. And we thank you in advance for your gifts.

FYI...We are moving our lunch donations to Ipokne Gardens, one of our nested Ministries led by Heidi Hillesheim. Her home community, First Christian Church, has recently contributed \$360 to be used by Heidi's project to help install Earth Boxes at the local micro-shelters so that those in transitional housing can learn to become more self-sufficient and knowledgeable in the acquiring of their food.

We are still supporting Farmer's Footprint, but on a regular monthly basis through a subscription to *The Garden Club*, which gives us continued access to educational material while supporting their efforts in Regenerative Agriculture.

Offertory Video – *The Garden Club: Farmers' Footprint*

https://youtu.be/Nc_H80tVxUk

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Rev. Diana & Chris J –Closing Song

A Soul's Blessing, written by Chris Johnson

Conscious Conversation

Chris J – 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. Welcome home to our Gathering Place, to our Spiritual Family, and to the answers that lie within your own Mystic Heart. I invite you to get on your feet and join the music.

Rev. Diana & Chris J – Opening Music

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

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

 ***How Can I Serve*** written by Ricki Byars Beckwith

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

...where all humans embody Compassion, Generosity, Love, Peace, and Justice...where all people everywhere 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 gracefully...easily...where all beings are well-fed, and have the safety and comfort of home...where mental/physical health, education, and healthy relationships are promoted and supported by social systems grounded in Wellness and Wholeness...

...a world where every being Serves the greater community doing whatever feeds their souls and are well supported for their time and talent...and by their Service, each one finds meaning...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 there is no greed, and abundance means having all that is required for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual thriving.

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

Our hearts, minds, arms, and doors are open in Radical Welcome. All lines and feelings of separation have been erased. In keeping with the Vision, our community is open and loving...all people who seek belonging find it here.

With deep faith in the Great Mystery that I call God, we trust that our prayer is acted upon...we prepare for its Graceful unfolding in the world...we feel a deep sense of gratitude...we release it to the Holy Presence and give thanks that it is done...And so it is...Amen!

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 month is Ease on Down the Road, and our topic of Conversation this week is ***Who Am I, Really***. For those who are just joining us, let's briefly recap. This morning, we spent time contemplating the idea that, in addition to stages and of physical, mental, and emotional growth, humans move through fairly predictable phases of spiritual growth, as well. In any aspect of our growth, including spiritual development, we move at varying rates and may get stuck at any point in our growth. But the order in which we develop is the similar.

If you're not familiar with James Fowler's stages of spiritual development, and you missed Taizé this morning, you may want to check it out online.

We spent time reflecting on the idea that the stages of spiritual development, *Growing Up*, *Cleaning Up*, and *Showing Up*, run parallel to the change of state that happens with *Waking Up*, which Ken Wilbur defines as the Mystical

Finally, we explored how the spiritual work we do and the stages we move into and through can create a fertile environment for Spirit to show up. In other words, the more attention we give to our prayer, meditation, self-inquiry, and other practices, the greater is the invitation for a Direct Experience of God.

So, in our Conversation this morning, I'd like to begin by asking...

Have you ever had what you would define as a Mystical Experience...a direct experience of the Divine?

Would you like to share anything about that experience?

It is interesting that *Waking Up*, or direct experience, can happen to anyone at any time...that the more we are engaging in our own spiritual lives, or spiritual growth, the more receptive is our awareness. And yet, Mystical Experience can happen whether or not we are fully engaged. It is an act of Grace, and may even be the catalyst for our decision to move into active and conscious study and practice.

Why do you suppose active engagement makes the Direct Experience of the Divine more likely?

I said that Mystical Experience is an act of Grace. What is Grace?

During Taizé, we visited the idea that there are no guarantees in the Spiritual Journey that we call Life. Whether we're talking about physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual stages, there are only tendencies...patterns. Any one of us can be stopped in our tracks at any moment...Life can throw us curve balls. And those curve balls either keep us agile, or allow us to get stuck, depending on our reaction or response; and whether we react or consciously respond defines our *experience* of being human and determines the trajectory of our lives.

And all of this has nothing to do with Who We Are. What do I mean by that?

What are the two most powerful words that we use on a regular basis?

And how do we most often use these words?

Here is a quote from Philosopher and Mystic Rupert Spira. I shared it during Taizé, but it is worthy of repeating. I invite you to take it in as a meditation:

Before our being is qualified by the content of experience, it knows no limit in itself. The knowledge 'I am' is infinite being's knowledge of itself. In the Old Testament, God says to Moses, 'I Am that I am'. Later God says, 'Tell the people of Israel, "I am has sent me to you."' God's presence shines in each of us as the experience 'I am'. God is the very being of our being, therefore, our knowledge or our self is God's knowledge of itself.

It is for this reason that Meister Eckhart said, 'The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.'

The name 'I' is like a portal through which God passes out of eternity into time and seems to become a finite being, and the same portal, traversed in the opposite direction, through which a finite being passes out of time into eternity. As it passes through that portal, it loses its limited qualities and stands revealed as God's being.

Do not allow yourself to be personalized or limited by experience. No experience has ever qualified, diminished, hurt, changes, or aggrandized you. As Meister Eckhart said, 'There is a place in the soul that has never been wounded'. Our being is in the same condition now as it was before the birth of our body and will remain the same after its death. We are always the same infinite, pristine, self-aware being.

God's being always remains the same perfect, unblemished, indivisible whole, the unqualified 'I am' that shines like a beacon behind and in the midst of all experience, irrespective of its content.

God leaves a trace of itself in each of us as the knowledge 'I' or 'I am'. 'I' or 'I am' is, as such, God's signature in each of our minds. The feeling of being is God's presence in each of our hearts. Thus, 'I' or 'I am' is the divine name, the first form of God.

All that is necessary is to repeat God's name once and listen in the silence that ensues for God's response, 'I am here'. Each of our given names is also a sacred name. When we hear our name, we respond, 'Yes'. What happens in the brief pause between the sound of our name and our response? We refer to ourself. Not to our thoughts and feelings, or a sensation in the body, but to our self, God's being. As such, all names are the names of God. This is what it means in the Old Testament when God says, 'I have called you by name. You are mine.'

Love 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 budget and plan for our growth. Those who engage in committed giving are helping to create stability to our community, and we are most grateful. You can find more information on our website...please consider pledging your support.

As we move into this time of giving, I want to express my gratitude for each one who takes part in the Mystic Heart Family, and for all that is offered here today and every day. And thank you, Beloveds, for dedicating your lives to growth and evolution, peace, and unity. We'd like to offer one last song as the basket is being passed...it's a song that reminds us that each of us is unique and can only be what God meant us to be...perfect expression of Divinity, an individual expression of Divinity.

Offertory Music Video

 **You Do You**, by Jason Mraz

<https://youtu.be/xiF48Gp1PVg>

Chris J – Blessing for the Offering

Chris J – Invitations

- ♥ **The Mystic Heart Book Club** is reading *Soul Boom* by Rainn Wilson. Tuesdays, 3-5 pm. Drop-ins are welcome.
- ♥ *There has been a change - Fast Track to Wellness* is now meeting on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays 12:30-2:30 pm. The next meeting will be on October 26th. This is a support circle for physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.
- ♥ **Metaphysical Bible Study** with Chris Johnson, Thursday from 3 – 5 pm.
- ♥ **Saturday, October 21st , The Redding Sikh Center is sponsoring Inviting Cultures Beyond Borders, 10 am – 2 pm.** This is a festival to celebrate our individuality as cultures, and will feature Multicultural Music, Dance, Martial Arts, Native American Practices, International Food, Speakers, and Kids Activities. Mystic Heart will have a booth. We would love to have volunteers.

Mark your calendars...

- ♥ Saturday, November 4th, *Music is Medicine Circle* and a housewarming for Amanda and River Hunter...circle led by April Jimenez-WinterSky, blessing ceremony by Rev. Diana, and hosted by Amanda.
- ♥ Sunday, November 19th, 7:00-8:30 pm, *Shasta Interfaith Thanksgiving Service* at St. Joseph's...Rev. Diana will be presenting for the first time on behalf of Mystic Heart. Please consider joining us for this beautiful Interfaith Experience of Gratitude in the Season of Thanksgiving.

There is more information about all of our events and activities in your Bulletin and on our website.

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

Rev. Diana & Chris J – Closing Song

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



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