

## HOW TO BE A HALF-CHRISTIAN

Please forgive the shameless hyperbole in the title! (Actually, my unrepentant exaggeration could refer also to our brothers and sisters in the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and a number of other world religions, as well.) Despite my slight overstatement, there *is* an important grain of truth in the reference to one's being only *half*-spiritual or *half*-religious. Why? Because the designation 'Christian' *initially* did *not* refer to people who believe creeds and dogmas created by various groups through the centuries. Rather, the word 'Christian' *originally* meant someone who is *a follower of the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth*—someone who sought to follow his way of life. Indeed, in the Judeo-Christian scriptures, the lifestyle taught and incarnated by Jesus was *referred* to as “the Way.”

One aspect of the Way—the life of Jesus—was his emphasis upon the value of prayer, not because it was a ritual that he inherited, but because it was a practice that, if utilized correctly, could make an immensely positive contribution to a person's life and relationships.

As most of you know, CCM is now offering an opportunity for our members and friends to learn meditation. That may sound a bit “new age” and not particularly exciting; but, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, mediation is an indispensable aspect of *authentic* prayer.

In the introduction to our first session on meditation, I reminded our group of something that few of them seemed to know: that there are *two* absolutely necessary facets of *authentic* prayer. The first and most *familiar* facet is what might be called Direct Prayer. That's when *we* talk to God or make requests. The other *less* familiar facet is Indirect Prayer, when we are completely silent and wait for the Sacred to speak to *us*. That latter aspect usually is unknown, forgotten, or totally ignored by the majority of people today.

The *abandonment* of this vitally important *two-part* form of prayer has taken place in contemporary churches, synagogues, and mosques at an extremely high cost. *It has led to an alarming deficit in our AWARENESS of the reality and presence of God.* For most people today, regardless of how observant they might be or the frequency with which they attend worship, it probably is safe to say that God, the Source of Life, is just an intellectual concept rather than an experienced reality. No matter how many times we are *told* that God is with us, we rarely, if ever, are aware of an actual sense of the *presence* of God. Why? Because the *second* vital aspect of communion with God, Indirect Prayer, a time when we give God an opportunity to speak to *us*, is absent.

Think about it: The explicit instruction *for* awareness of the Ultimate, which is to “Be still and *know* that I am God” (in Psalm 46:10), usually is jettisoned. Actually, the Hebrew word translated “know” can also be rendered as “discover;” so the text might more accurately read, “Be still and *discover* that I am God!” The “be still” is a reference to *meditation*—an opportunity for the Source of Life to speak to our consciousness, to give insight or guidance. So the eminent French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, was very much on target when he wrote: Many of “the troubles of life come upon us because we refuse to sit quietly for a while each day in our rooms.” Consequently, many of our physical, emotional, and relational problems remain *unresolved*, not impacted for the better.

The kernel of truth in the title of this article is that our *usual* practice of prayer, if we pray at all, is only *half*-authentic. Jesus discovered in his own experience a major secret to our experiencing life in all its fullness and then passed it on to us. “Ask, seek, knock,” he said, “and it will be opened to you.” In those familiar words about *authentic* prayer, the “ask, seek, knock” refers to Direct Prayer: *We* take action to talk to *God*. But “it will be opened to you” is a referral to Indirect Prayer, when we fall silent so that God can speak to *us*, impinge upon *our* consciousness; and that, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is what *meditation* is! So, according to Jesus, the person

who does not learn how to meditate well (that is, engage in *Indirect Prayer*), is robbing him-or herself of the most important tool one can have to move beyond having God only as an *intellectual concept* toward actually *experiencing* the reality of God in one's own life. That usually can happen only when God "talks back" to us in the silence by giving us insights without which, qualitatively, our life and relationships can be impoverished and unfulfilling.

So, at CCM, we are giving you an opportunity that few if any churches, synagogues, mosques in our area have ever even *thought* about doing: the possibility of acquiring meditation (Indirect Prayer) techniques that potentially can make a huge contribution to the *quality* of your life. If Jesus had not experienced that possibility for himself, as did the Buddha and a number of our other great spiritual leaders, surely he would not have made it a point to show *us* the way to experience this all-important opportunity for a more abundant life.

Fortunately, it is not too late to become involved. Our next once-a month session will be on Sunday, February 15<sup>th</sup>, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon; and our teacher will be Dr. Ronald Siegel, an award-winning professor at Harvard University Medical School who has studied and practiced meditation for over 30 years.

Dr. Siegel will help us to explore a Buddhist form of meditation because it is perhaps the easiest approach for most people to learn; and, except for a theistic understanding of reality, it is virtually identical to the Judeo-Christian approach practiced by Jesus.

If *holistic* prayer—both *talking* to God and *listening* to God—has not been a transformative part of your own experience, I invite you to take advantage of this incredibly helpful opportunity. An invitation issued by the late spiritual teacher, Teilhard de Chardin, still stands: "Let us leave the *surface* and, without having to leave the world, plunge into the *reality* of God!"

Because of our programming here, at CCM, we actually *can*. Here, *nobody* has to be “half-Christian”—half-Jewish, half-Muslim, or half anything spiritually!

**As always, I deeply love and believe in you.**

**Warmly, your pastor and friend,**

**John**

## **IT’S HAPPENING AT CCM**

**Sunday, February 11 (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

**10:00 a.m. WORSHIP**

Obviously, because of Valentine’s Day, February often is referred to as “love month.” Although almost everyone believes in the *value* of love, and most people yearn to be able more fully to give and receive it, love often proves to be an elusive reality. At CCM, we’ve talked a great deal about experiencing love in our interpersonal relationships, but we haven’t talked nearly so much as we might about love as it relates to a perceived enemy—especially terrorists. The question is, is it ever *possible* to love someone whose main objective is to hurt you? And, *if* so, is it even practical? John will help us to think together about that crucial issue this morning and will do it in a way that could be helpful to us in our own decision-making and ways of engaging in communication with others who, themselves, might be unloving. In other words, we’ll be positive look at a potentially negative issue!

As is our custom at CCM, worship will be followed by group discussion of the topic. (Out by about 12 noon)

**Sunday, February 15 (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

**10:00 a.m. MEDITATION**

Please refer to John's article, "How to Be a Half-Christian." This will be only our second session on meditation, so it is not too late for you to become meaningfully involved. Why not do something *positive* for yourself, your life, and all of your relationships? The opportunity is here! (Out by 12:00 noon)

## **Sunday, February 22 (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Month)**

### **10:00 a.m. SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

Our new little volume, *Hungers of the Heart*, is a guide to meaningful spirituality and religion for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It will help you to discover the difference between an outdated faith and one that is relevant and vibrantly alive. This opportunity is primarily a teaching and discussion group that can enable us to be more thoughtful about the spiritual dimension of life—one to which you can bring your very legitimate doubts to the process as *well* as your very significant convictions. The insightful French philosopher, Rene Descartes, inspired many people with the following words: "It is not enough to *have* a good mind. The main thing is to *use* it well! This group is designed to help us all to do precisely that. So come raise your spirits to a higher level while, at the same time, you lift your life! (Out by about 11:30 a.m.)

After lunch together, those who care will visit some oft-forgotten people at Trilight Manor Adult Residential Care to take snacks and offer, for a few moments, a meaningful ministry of presence. Do *you* have time to make a difference in someone's life?