

The Still Presence



Still Presence Spirituality Centre Newsletter

Vol. 1, No. 3 June 2009

www.stillpresence.com

Dear Friends of Still Presence,



We have two new sections in this issue. The first, "*On the Path*," is the place to share your contemplative experiences in the form of personal poems, short stories, essays or art work.

The second, "*Still Points*," is a forum for sharing favourite books, workshops, retreats, websites or other resources.



Deadline for submissions is **August 24**. Send to cedric.cobb@stillpresence.com. The next issue will be emailed on **Aug. 31**.

Upcoming events...

Ongoing Meditation Group

New! The **Monday Ongoing Meditation** practice has been extended. Sessions will now go through to **June 29, 7 to 8 pm**. The last session, June 29, will be a special closing Contemplative Eucharist (followed by "potluck" refreshments!). Ongoing practice sessions resume on **September 14** after the summer break.

Summer Solstice Mini-Retreat:

"Sensing the Energy and Vitality of Your Spirit"

Our **summer solstice mini-retreat** takes place **Saturday, June 20th, 9:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.** Through guided and silent meditations, and space to "just be," we give thanks for the light of the sun which provides life, and thanks for the increase in the life-force that we feel within us. Refreshments provided. Led by Cedric and Michael.

"Still Quotes..."

"The kind of Christian faith that is needed for our time is one that is experiential... The kind of Christian practice that is needed is contemplative: using meditative prayer, liturgy, study, service, and other traditions in order to awaken to the immanence of God in the moment...dwelling within everything."

- Brian C. Taylor

Coming this fall...



Still Presence Open House

 Newcomers and seasoned practitioners alike are welcome to join us for our first anniversary **Open House Saturday, Sept. 14th, 9:15 – 11:30 am.** This is an excellent way for first-time visitors to get a sense of what we offer, and for regulars to re-invigorate their practice after our summer break. Refreshments provided.

Support for Contemplative Living Mini-Series:

“Death and Dying / Life and Living”

New! Mark your fall calendars now for this mini-series, which takes place on four consecutive **Tuesday evenings (Oct. 13, 20, 27, & Nov. 3), 7:15 p.m. – 8:45 p.m.**

Many of us live our lives either fearing death and/or in denial about the reality that we will die. In many ways this inhibits us from living life fully. In a four-part series we will explore how embracing the reality of death can help us to fully embrace and experience life. It is not so much that we fear dying, but that we fear not existing. The sessions will include a time of teaching, a time of quiet meditation and a time of discussion. All are welcome. Led by Michael. **Please pre-register at 514-697-2204 by Friday October 2.**

“Still Quotes...”

“There’s nothing wrong with thinking; it goes on all the time inside our minds. The question is whether the thinking process becomes the sum total of our lives. Are we living in our heads, or are we truly experiencing life in all its richness? The answer to these questions, and to discovering what it means to be fully awake in each moment, lies in mindfulness—perceiving the extraordinary vividness of the here and now—neither in the past nor in the future, but present and fully awake. When we can do this, the quality of our moments and our life actually changes. Mindfulness can enable us to more effectively face life’s challenges and to fully embrace the ups and downs of life’s journey.”

— Michael Toms

On the Path



M u s i n g

It occurred to me the other day, not for the first time, that I have been trying on and off for years to stop the endless chatter that fills my head. Some gurus call it “monkey mind”, but I see no reason to insult our primate cousins. Monkeys jump around a lot, but I bet they don’t have useless thoughts always running through their minds. They look as if they are simply living in the present, following the leading of their bodies.

We humans could learn something from those monkeys, but the question is how do we free ourselves from the negative chatter, while still retaining the creative power of our minds? Many lifetimes ago it seems, when I was working as a psychiatric nurse, patients of the behaviourists on the ward walked around periodically shouting “STOP!” to break their obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behaviour. Some of us dedicated dispensers of TLC were not above giggling in the nurses’ station at some

of those poor beleaguered souls.

Ah, but what goes around, comes around, as they used to say in the ‘hood. I have spent years doing the mental equivalent of those patients, trying to still the mind. Like so many of my generation who came through the social wars of the 60’s, the black revolution, the anti-war movement, I later turned to the East for peace and sanity. But the call to end desire threw me off; the austerity of Zen seemed too severe. In my twenties and thirties, I wanted connection with the ultimate Source, but I also wanted attachment to things and people. Though I was young enough and fit enough to sit for hours facing a wall, following my breath, not even wincing when one of my neighbours was whacked with the great wooden paddle, I never stopped wanting more.

Still, practicing yoga and tai chi chuan brought a measure of self-acceptance. I stopped blaming my parents. Gradually, the kinks in my marriage straightened out. We had good friends, a cool apartment in a cool neighbourhood (Bernard Avenue in Outremont). Still I wanted more. One Easter Sunday, without planning it, I got up, caught the 80 bus and went down Park Avenue to the Anglican Cathedral downtown. The place was full of well-dressed people, but what grabbed me was the altar. It was surrounded by a team of white-robed men, and above their heads I saw a scintillating golden-white light emanating from the mysterious objects on the table. The light shimmered above the heads of the priests; it moved in waves like the aurora borealis. My

heart opened, lifted, sang. I felt complete.

After that day, my life changed for the better, but not without a major snag. I lost the sense of what I was seeking in trying to understand and practice perfectly the new/old faith. Basically, I got caught in trying to be a good girl, to please the parents in my head. It took several years for me to fully realize that the message of those glorious lights above the altar that Sunday was not for me to join up and struggle to turn myself into an artificial saint. Nor did it mean that I had to earn the right to eat that bread and drink that wine.

The message behind the aurora was “Come in, my daughter, welcome Home! The joy, power and love you feel right now is who you really are, is yours forever. Your task is not to bend yourself out of shape to fit some man-made rules, but to open yourself to receive God’s gifts, to learn to use them to enjoy and to serve the world.”

A quote from Frederick Buechner said it more succinctly:

*The place God calls you to is
the place where your deep gladness
and the world’s deep hunger meet.*

—Diana Goodwin Cobb

**All Still Presence events are held at
Christ Church Beaurepaire
455 Church Street, Beaconsfield, QC H9W 3S6
514-697-2204**

Still points



Unfettered Mind

I would introduce you to a personality and a website. I recently had opportunity to participate in a workshop/retreat in Montreal led by Ken McLeod, a practicing Buddhist in the Tibetan tradition and a spiritual teacher/guide. Ken lives in and works from Los Angeles. He has probably done more than anyone else in North America (well, perhaps aside, in my thinking, from Thich Nhat Hahn) to make Buddhist teachings accessible to western minds.

The 4-day workshop/retreat (Thursday night to Sunday morning) focused loosely on “The Four Immeasurables” of Buddhist teaching: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity (for more information about these qualities of living and using

them in meditative practice, a good place to start would be the following website:

http://www.viewonbuddhism.org/immeasurables_love_compassion_equanimity_rejoicing.html.

Through a series of teachings and periods of meditation, we (a group of about 70 – most of whom were MUCH younger than me, and most of who were Yoga practioners who sat cross-legged on the floor for the whole time – I sat on a chair!!) looked at how to use these four immeasurables as a focus for being more at peace – with ourselves, with those whom we know well and love, with those whom we dislike, with our community, and with the world around us.

It was truly a wonderful experience for me personally, and in my personal and professional meditative practice. I both discovered new dimensions of myself, and had many elements of my professional life and practice affirmed.

Ken McLeod is not someone I previously knew or even knew about, until my daughter Meaghan, a practicing Buddhist and a Yoga teacher (in Kitchener, Ontario), advised me that her Yoga teacher had arranged for him to come to Montreal (also to Kitchener). I had the joy of participating in this workshop/retreat with my daughter. To learn more about Ken McLeod go to: <http://www.unfetteredmind.org/um/ken.php>.

To learn more from Ken McLeod about living a meditative life, check the website: <http://www.unfetteredmind.org/index.php>. Many of Ken's teachings, classes and workshop sessions are available as free podcasts on the website. There is also an interesting Q & A page: <http://www.unfetteredmind.org/audio/podquest.php>.

Namaste, Fr. Michael+

L-I-N-K-S

Below you will find links to other websites. We do not necessarily endorse all the ideas in these links. They do, however, provide resources to those who wish to explore the contemplative tradition more deeply.

Centering Prayer:

www.contemplativeoutreach.org

The Empty Bell: www.emptybell.org

Ruah Spirituality Institute:

www.ruahspirit.org

The Shalem Institute: www.shalem.org

Mindfulness Meditation Centre:

www.mindfulnessmeditationcentre.org

SHALOM/SHALEM!
SHALOM/SHALEM!
(Peace/Completeness)

As we move into summer, and experience the fullness of creation, may your hearts rejoice at home in the Presence of God.

Cedric Cobb & Michael Johnson,
Still Presence Spirituality Centre



To be placed on, or taken off, our newsletter list, email: cedric.cobb@stillpresence.com. For a full listing of upcoming events, visit : www.stillpresence.com. Your articles, feedback and comments are appreciated.