

Daily Devotionals for June 1-30, 2008

for the Mystical White Rose Newsletter

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June 1

Mystics truly are out-of-the-ordinary people. We dream dreams, experience visions, and create great masterworks of art, music and literature. We are the metaphysical nonconformists who never fully fit in. Mystics stand apart from the majority of spiritually minded people who seem content to simply go once a week to church or synagogue or wherever their religion meets, listen to the words of their spiritual leaders, say their prayers, make a financial contribution, and then go back to the mundane business of living. By contrast, mystical seekers never feel fully satisfied with the routine of conventional religion, but rather always yearn for something more--a deeper, more intense, more heartfelt spiritual experience.

There is nothing wrong with either path--the ordinary way or the mystical way. (p. 41)

June 2

As an aspiring mystic, you have been called onto a wonderful and unusual path, a path few people will walk. But you are no better or wiser or more spiritual than anyone else, especially not in the eyes of the universe. As a wise guy once said, "You are unique, just like everyone else." The path of mystical spirituality is a unique path--it is different, but different does not mean "better than." (p. 42).

June 3

To understand the way of the mystic, we need to think in terms of relationship. A mystic does not merely think about God, or "believe in" God, or worship the Divine. To be a mystic means *to love*--that is, have a relationship with--the Divine Mystery. Just as we relate to our spouse, our parents, our children, our friends, and our business associates, so too do we find mystical spirituality is an ongoing process of love and intimacy--a relationship.

Relationships are complex matters. They involve agreements and understandings (or, all too often, misunderstandings). They can be helped or hindered by the assumptions and unspoken expectations held by each party in the relationship. They thrive best in an environment of communication--which means not only speaking, but listening. (p. 147)

June 4

Spirituality--our connectedness to the Divine Source--can be an energy pipeline. Think of God as the ultimate power generator in the universe, creating an endless resource of energy in the forms of love and light and joy. When we practice the tools of the aspiring mystic--praying and meditating regularly, spending time in silence, reading sacred scriptures and other useful writings--we are tapping into that energy source. We are allowing the positive energy of the Sacred to enter into us. This energy has two purposes: to provide healing in our own lives, and then to be a resource we can tap into as we love and support others. (p. 50)

June 5

Therefore, no matter where we are on our spiritual journeys, we thrive when we invest time and energy to an ongoing process of learning the skills of prayer and meditation. Every aspiring mystic needs to find the path that works for him or her, and pursue it, both in study and (ideally) in working with a teacher or teachers. Study and training provides ongoing inspiration to persevere in our spiritual practice--on a daily basis, with discipline and regularity. (p.79)

June 6

The daily practice is one of the few things that is truly essential about being an aspiring mystic. For most of us, it is also extraordinarily difficult--but not impossible. You know the challenges we all face: work or school commitments; long, numbing commutes; family or friends with whom we want and need to spend time. Those of us involved with a church or other spiritual organization--or any organization, for that matter--find the organization itself makes a claim on our time. p. 79-80

June 7

Yes, every aspiring mystic needs to find some sort of uninterrupted quiet time when prayer and meditation is possible on a regular, disciplined basis. But we shouldn't give up if that kind of habitual practice seems elusive. Perhaps a regular practice of prayer or meditation may be thought of as a beautiful garden you are tending. If you are having difficulty planting the seeds to get the garden going, it doesn't mean you are a failure as a gardener. Probably the soil just needs some additional tilling. The soil is yourself, of course. And the additional tilling involves things you can do to cultivate a more meditative consciousness within yourself.

The keys to this additional tilling are silence, solitude and interruption. (pp. 81-82)

June 8

What price are you willing to pay for a life shimmering with the radiant presence of the Holy? What price are you willing to pay for wonder and ecstasy to be your constant companions in life? What price are you willing to pay in order to fully enter the Mysteries of life, with all the unknowing and possibility that mysticism implies. (p. 91)

June 9

Sooner or later, most people who feel drawn to the spiritual life are going to find that the glamor of mysticism wears off and the hard work of daily prayer and meditation is just that--a lot of work. Sooner or later, most aspiring mystics will feel it isn't fair that spirituality involves discipline, hard work, and daily commitment, especially since there is never any guarantee that we'll have a gee-whiz mystical experience. (p. 92)

June 10

"But mysticism is like marriage; loving God is like loving a husband or a wife. Sure, there's emotion and intimacy--and there's also dedication, commitment, and the daily diligence of doing what needs to be done.

"Choose to do the work of mysticism, and then commit to it. And commit to a diligence that will see you through the unglamorous times." (p. 92)

June 11

As we become increasingly open to the life of the mystic, we open up to all the glory and beauty and radiance of this universe we live in, this realm of dancing energy and dynamic patterns of light and sound and color and form. To walk the mystical walk means saying "yes" to the mystery of life. (p. 176)

June 12

The mystic inspires us to allow the ordinary and mundane things of life to suddenly be caught up "into the seventh heaven," which is to say, to be caught up into the radiance of Divine presence and meaning and compassion. And when you begin to notice the shimmering presence of the Sacred in the most down-to-earth parts of your life, suddenly the big mysteries become just another portal through which the love of God may be encountered. (p. 176)

June 13

If you want to be a mystic, you need a community. Exactly which form or kind of community you choose is up to you. It can be big or small, formal or informal, under the guidance of a leader or egalitarian in character. But it should meet regularly, and there should be some sense of belonging and commitment to the group. You need the support of others, the guidance of those who have gone before

you, and the safety net of having someone who's willing to challenge you when you're deluding yourself. (p. 101)

June 14

My pastor's apparent belief that Lutheranism is inherently better than Pentecostalism illustrates another common foible of even the best spiritual communities. It seems even the most liberal of groups will harbor some distrust toward ideas and teachings from outsiders. Christians will raise eyebrows when one member of their group starts to study Buddhist meditation. Southern Baptists don't really want members of their church to be devoted to the Virgin Mary. Pagans will get nervous if one of their members admits to reading the Bible. This is a normal dynamic of group membership--we keep our insiders safe by protecting them from whatever is from the outside. This kind of dynamic is not limited to religious organizations--business, government, fraternities and sororities, really all organizations have a tendency to resist anything that is foreign or alien or in any way from outside the tribe. Although this tendency plays a normal part of group dynamics, it puts the aspiring mystic into tension with the group--for most mystics intuitively recognize that spiritual truth may come at us from any direction, including from teachings and cultures outside of what our group considers "orthodox." (pp. 105-106)

June 15

Here's another paradox. The Divine represents unity, and therefore changelessness. Yet the mystical journey will never shield you from change. If anything, it will sensitize you, making change all the more evident in our lives.

Fortunately, mystical change is often glorious. The way of the mystic can inspire even the biggest doubting Thomas to trust that all things are pregnant with Divine ecstasy. As we progress in our practice of meditation, prayer, service, and love, we exercise our spiritual muscles, thereby opening up to notice that Divine ecstasy more and more. (p. 125)

June 16

The various practices of spiritual life--meditation, prayer, study, and reading--precisely because they are inner exercises, can keep us overly focused on the drama of our mental activities. After all, isn't it within the theater of the mind that mystical experiences take place, or that insights about the nature of the Sacred occur, or that moral and ethical issues are struggled with as we attempt to live a good life? In the mind. In the head. As aspiring mystics, we need to make sure we don't get stuck in our heads. (p. 87)

June 17

When we think about it, everything we have, even the things we've earned, are gifts we have received from the universe. It is the marvelous world we live in that provides the food we eat, the resources necessary to create art and technology, the majestic mountains and beaches where we find relaxation and recreation. Everything we have is, on some level, a gift. And all of these gifts come from the Great Mystery, the Goddess, the Universe, God.

So in the majestic love affair of the spiritual life--the love affair between you and the creator of all things--what gifts do you offer? What tokens of your love can you bring to the presence of the mystery, and lay down as an offering to the Sacred? (p. 137)

June 18

As you make your way on the mystical journey, ask yourself what kind of gifts you wish to offer to your loved one--God, the Great Mystery, the Source of all ecstasy and meaning and joy. Each of us, no matter how modest our earthly possessions may be, has much to offer in terms of time and talent, as well as treasure. Reflect on what you have to offer to the Great Mystery. (p. 137)

June 19

Whether you pray, meditate, or do both depends on whether you see the Sacred in personal terms (God, Goddess) or in impersonal terms (like Tao, the Source). Basically, if you approach the Sacred seeking a personal relationship, you pray. If you approach the Sacred seeking an impersonal connectedness, you meditate. But aside from that rather simplistic distinction, the difference between prayer and meditation is pretty fuzzy. At least one form of prayer--contemplative prayer--is virtually indistinguishable from many forms of meditation. Meditation and contemplative prayer both involve taking the time to still your mind, quiet your thoughts, and focus on your breathing and your body, so that you may enter into a silent, relaxed state of awareness. Doing so on a daily basis will revolutionize your spirituality. (p. 78)

June 20

It's a major watershed experience for a mystic to suddenly realize that the Sacred is not full of abusive anger, but is truly the source of life and light and love. For example, consider the experience of Martin Luther, the Catholic monk who ignited the Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century Germany. As a monk, Luther was filled with self-doubt and anxiety in his endless attempts to please a wrathful God. But when he read a passage in the Bible about how God loved and accepted faithful people regardless of how good they are, Luther underwent a major experience of mystical insight. He realized that God was pure love, not the agent of anger and rage that his previous religious training had led him to believe. This experience of Divine love proved so powerful that it inspired Luther to set into motion the chain of events that would transform the Christian religion forever. (p.153)

June 21

Take the time to become familiar with your own hidden assumptions about God--and whenever they are in any way limiting or unloving, cultivate a new assumption, a new thought pattern, a new belief, based on the highest principles of love and forgiveness and splendid radiance that you can muster. But don't assume you now have it all figured out. Remember how beneath all our assumptions, whether positive or negative, there remains the uncharted wilderness of Sacred mystery. Whether we like it or not, all our "knowledge" about spirituality is nothing more than a set of assumptions. The spiritual mysteries lie beyond our ability to capture knowledge or certify theories. (p. 1153-154)

June 22

We need to be humble about what we know and don't know. Choose to regard the Sacred (and yourself (in as loving a light as possible, and you will be rewarded with an increasing intuitive sense that this is true. Knowing something is intuitively true is not the same thing as having all the answers.(p. 154)

June 23

As we progress in the disciplines and practices of spirituality, we do not find our relationship with God settling into some tidy little program that can be easily figured out and understood. What we find is that the mysteries of the spiritual world include many questions that elude the abilities of the rational mind, many "truths" that seem to contradict one another, and many surprises. where things turn out nothing like we expected, but still seem totally in keeping with Divine will. Mystical transformation takes us into the landscape of paradox. This strange and unpredictable country will become our new home, for it is the frontier at the very edge of mystery. Beyond this lies only the unfathomable glories of the mind of God. (p. 174)

June 24

The mystical life will unavoidably challenge us. It will challenge us to evolve, to shed misconceptions and illusions and bad habits, replacing them instead with more mature or evolved or enlightened ways of thinking and seeing and behaving. Whether we like it or not (and I for one tend not to like it when faced with changing something about myself that I would rather not bother to change), the journey on the spiritual path never fails to call forth constructive changes in our lives. These include changes of perception (such as learning to see God in new ways), changes in thoughts and belief (learning to think of the Divine as primarily loving, rather than primarily judgmental), and most challenging of all--changes in behavior. (pp. 185-186)

June 25

In the language of traditional Christianity, the spiritual life includes the call to "repent of our sins"--that is to say, to change our lives in such a way that our negative or destructive behavior stops. Other traditions may use less confrontational language, exhorting us to "wake up from our illusions" or to let go of our negativity," but in the end, all these semantic variations point to the same reality: The Spirit will call each of us to shed those parts of ourselves that don't work, replacing them with more spiritually beneficial qualities and behaviors. (pp. 185-186).

June 26

Whether we are talking about truly harmful behavior such as a tendency toward violence or abuse; or a minor bad habit such as a tendency toward overeating, the mystic recognizes a common principle: Any behavior that separates us from loving ourselves, loving others, or loving the Sacred, sooner or later needs to be burned away by the mystical fires of the Holy One. So be prepared. Your journey will force you to face the parts of yourself you may not like, you may be ashamed of, you may wish would just go away. Your journey will force you to take responsibility for those parts of yourself, and to commit to the long, slow process of growing beyond them. (p. 187)

June 27

Life is good. When I really stop to pay attention, I notice how everything shimmers with a barely perceptible sense of Divine radiance. (p. 202)

June 28

The path of the mystic is the path of nurturing the soul. One of the central mysteries of life is the mystery of the soul, which could be defined as the totality of a person's being. Wondrous and unfathomable, a person's soul consists of body, mind, and spirit, yet somehow more than just the sum of its parts. Since being a mystic means being an explorer of life's mysteries, then a mystic is a person who explores--and nurtures, and celebrates--his or her soul. (p. 61)

June 29

The great mystical traditions regard the soul as infinitely larger than the body. Your soul is not contained within your body, but rather your body exists within your soul. Your soul is not limited by space, or time, or matter. In a nanosecond, your soul can travel from the mundane world of the five senses, into the infinite glories and majestic wonders of the very heart of God. And just as quickly, the soul can bring the Sacred fully back into your body, transforming your entire self into a sudden, shimmering recognition of eternity, right here and right now. (p. 62)

June 30

It's an unfortunate mistake to assume that light and nature and love and wonder are mystical qualities, while fear and doubt and urban grime are therefore "un-mystical." Nothing could be further from the truth. Mystical or numinous experiences can (and do) break through in the dark as well as the light, in times of great fear or doubt or pain just as in times of joy or happiness, in the unglamorous world of a city slum just as easily as on the mountaintop.