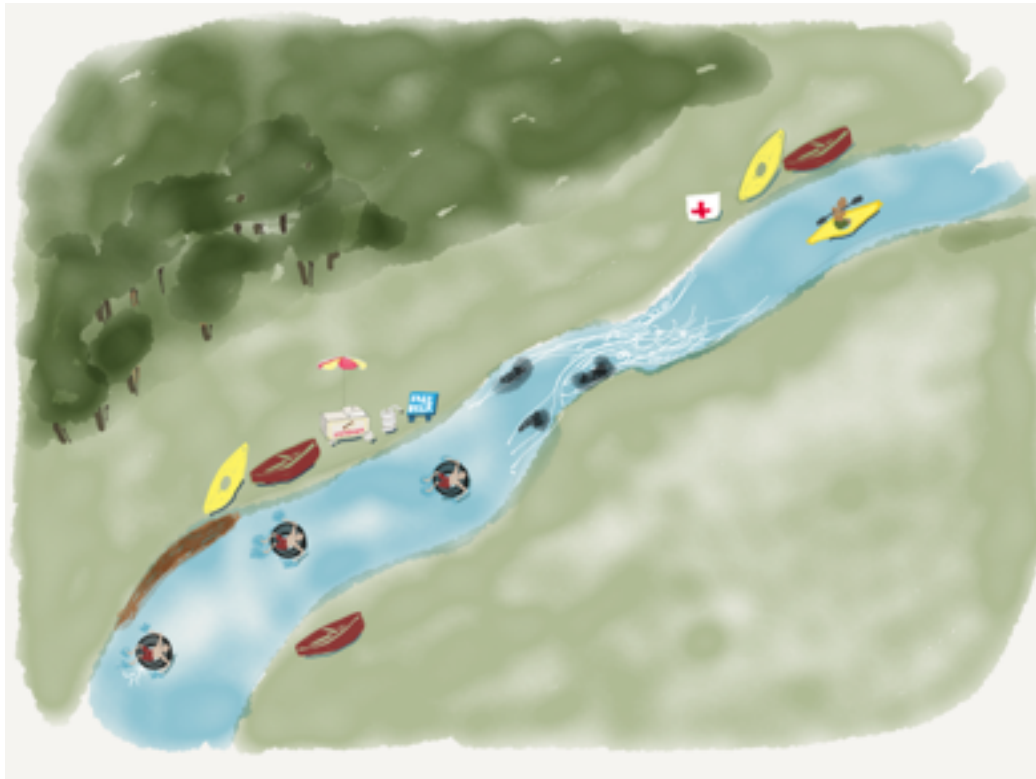


Recent events and this week's readings remind us that it is time to pull back into alignment with the power and grace of the light within and between us. We are called to actively make internal alignments that serve to unite the enemies, neighbors and friends within. This allows us to do the same with those around us and participate in the evolution, the re-uniting of the I AM that exists in all of us. That is, the energy and matter, the water and the air that which gives life and exists in all living things.



### **River of Life, River of Grace**

Randall Sylvester, an Ordinary Life classmate introduced me to see nuances to the metaphor of the river of life that illustrates when, how, and why, we sometimes seek change and how we sometimes don't. It inspired me to create the sketch in slide 1.

We may be in inner tubes, canoes, or kayaks. We are all in this journey back to the source together but we respond differently at different times and under different circumstances.

When we are in the flow we have great tools and balance of movement. We may even have awareness of our journey back to the source, we engage our free will, we're in service to others in ways that are meaningful and appreciated by us and them.

But we don't stay in flow. The river changes, the group changes, the weather changes, something is always changing. We are always changing. Again, we respond in differently at different times and under different circumstances.

We may paddle over to the bank and get some help or learn some new skills to change our ways for various reasons. We float right by the help on the bank, "I'm good, thanks." We might get a hole in the inner tube, crash into the bank or the sharp rocks in the rapids before we are motivated to paddle quickly and stop off for some skills or a better boat. We may stop for an appealing distraction or avoidance (free beer and hot dogs)

We sometimes move with the group and follow the group's decisions.

When we are not in flow with the river we might get angry at the river, try to control the river, give unsolicited advice to others, attempt to steal vessels or try to jump into someone else's ride or mistake their journey for our own. Let's look at the bigger picture and how all of this relates to our personal responsibility on this path back to the source.



**I AM, the Big Bang** and our participation in the wholeness of an unfinished universe

Here are some notes/quotes from Sister Ilia Delio's book, the Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love. (UWB)

What holds us together despite our differences? We need a larger story that can include diversity and difference, and in which our local stories can thrive. (UWB)

Evolution is "whole making" in action, the rise of consciousness that realizes self-separateness is an illusion. (UWB)

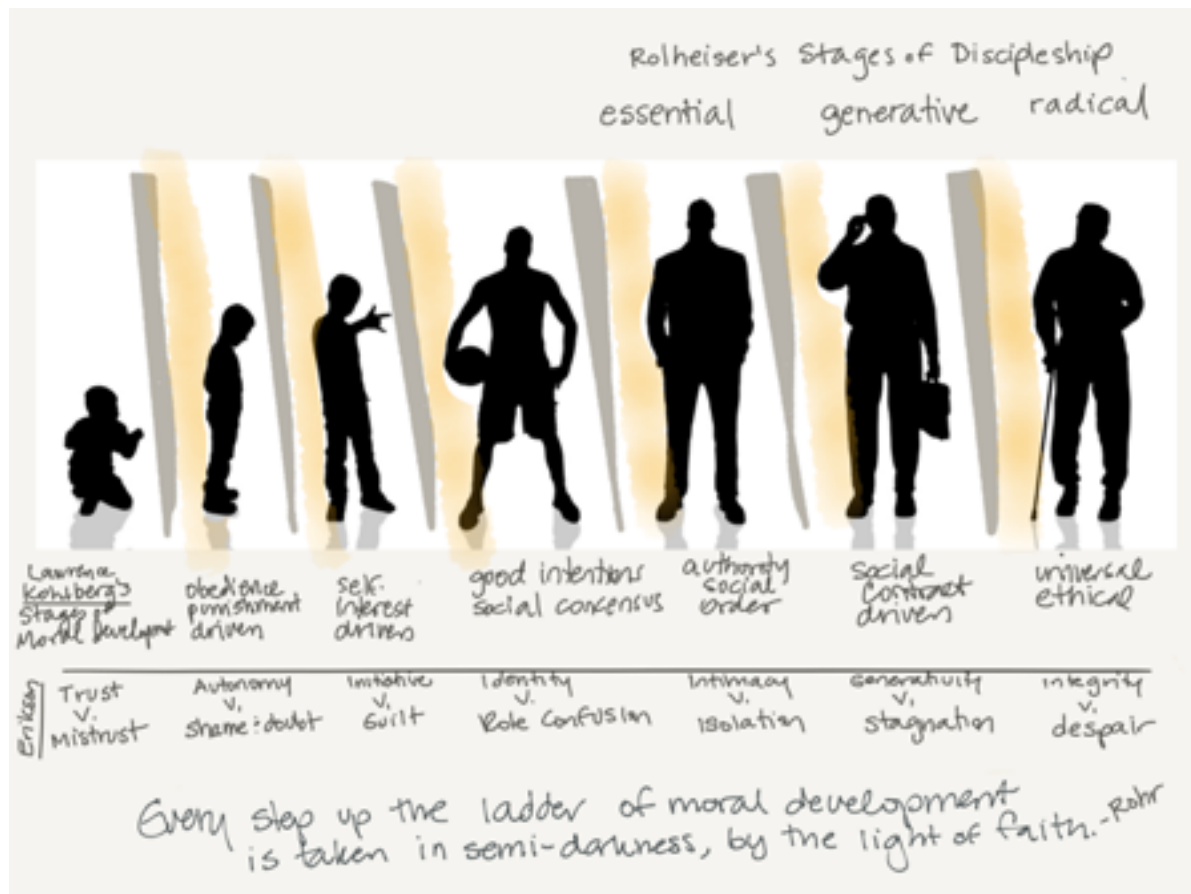
Raimon Panikkar said that when theology is divorced from cosmology, we no longer have a living God but an idea of God. God becomes a thought that can be accepted or rejected rather than the experience of divine ultimacy. (UWB)

It is easier for us to deal with God if we make God a thought - but we are participants in God whether we want to admit it or accept it. We are part of the ongoing evolution.

Evolution thrives not on "rugged individualism" but on communal interdependence. God is the dynamism of love that gathers beings together into a greater unity and consciousness. (UWB)

Love is a consciousness of belonging to another, of being part of a whole. To love is to be on the way toward integral wholeness, to live with an openness of mind and heart, to encounter the other- not as a stranger- but as another part of oneself. (UWB)

We resist this notion, we resist things ideas that suggest that we are interdependent our ego wants the separation and resists the reality of oneness. It thrives in creating the illusion of separateness. As we develop there are struggles and themes that the ego wrestles with as we move from one stage to another. Let's take a brief look at these themes.



**Life Stages** - Some of the obstacles along the journey are predictable or generalized. Let's look at developmental stages. With awareness, we connect with the longing deep inside that pulls us from one level to the next.

These transitions in our lives have something in common. When we move from one stage to the next, the strategies that we have at one level cease being effective. This can happen before we are equipped with new strategies. This leaves us unfulfilled at best, desperate and stuck, broken at worse. Sometimes we move through these stages out of our desire and longing to grow into who we are becoming. Sometimes outside forces, like sudden illness, loss, change in our abilities, strip us of our familiar ways. We spend more time trying to get back what is no longer accessible, trying to get back to normal.

The more we over-identify and are attached to our strategies, the more this feels like dying, the more hopeless we can feel before we begin to find and use new strategies. Many times we have to let go before we can hold new ways of being and doing.

The life stages slide identifies Lawrence Kohlberg's and Erik Erikson's stage labels as well as Ronald Rolheiser's stages of discipleship.

We are focused primarily on spiritual development. **Ronald Rolheiser** provides us with a great insights about the stages of discipleship.

*He tells us this story: As a young man, Nikos Kazantzakis, the famous Greek writer, contemplated becoming a monk and once spent a summer touring monasteries. Years later, writing on the experience, he recounts a marvelous conversation he had with an elderly monk, Fr. Makarios.*

*At one point, he asked the old monk: "Do you still wrestle with the devil, Father Makarios?" The old priest sighed and replied: "Not any longer, my child. I have grown old now, and he has grown old with me. He doesn't have the strength. ... I wrestle with God." "With God!" Kazantzakis exclaimed in astonishment. "And you hope to win?" "I hope to lose, my child," the old man replied, "My bones remain with me still, and they continue to resist."*

*Among other things, this story highlights the fact that our spiritual struggles change as we age and go through life. The struggles of youth are not necessarily the struggles of mid-life and beyond. Maturity is developmental. Different things are asked of us as we move through life. This is also true for spirituality and discipleship.*

*How does our spiritual life change and demand new things from us as we grow?*

*Drawing upon the insights of John of the Cross, I would submit that there are three fundamental stages to our spiritual lives, three levels of discipleship:*

*The first level, which John of the Cross calls the dark night of the senses, might aptly be called Essential Discipleship. In essence, this is the struggle to get our lives together. This struggle begins really at birth but becomes more our own individual struggle when we reach puberty and begin to be driven by powerful inner forces to separate ourselves from our families so as to create a life and a home of our own. During this time we struggle to find ourselves, to get our lives together, to create a new home for ourselves. This can take years and might never be achieved. Indeed, for most everyone, some elements of this struggle will continue throughout their entire lifetime.*

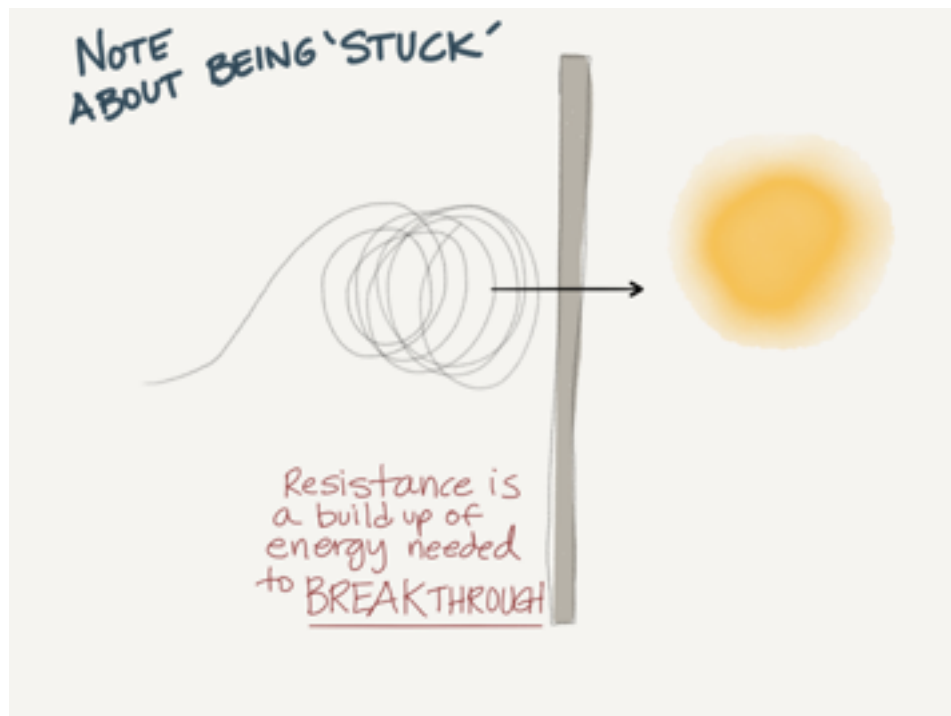
*But, for most people, there comes a time when this is essentially achieved, when there is a sense of being at home again, when the major questions of life are no longer: Who am I? What will I do with my life? Who loves me? Who will marry me? Where should I live? What should I do? At some point, most of us find a place beyond these questions: We have a home, a career, a marriage partner or some peace without one, a vocation,*

*a meaning, a good reason to get up every morning, and a place to return to at night. We have found our way home again.*

*We then enter the second level of discipleship which John of the Cross calls Proficiency and which we might call Generative Discipleship. In essence, this is the struggle to give our lives away. Our main concern now is not so much about what to do with our lives but how to give them away so as to make the world a better place. These are our generative years and they are meant to stretch from the time we land in a vocation, a career, and a home, until our retirement years. And our major questions during these years need to be altruistic ones: How do I give myself over more generously and more purely? How do I remain faithful? How do I sustain myself in my commitments? How do I give my life away?*

*But those are not yet the ultimate questions: At some point, if we are blessed with health and life beyond retirement, a still deeper question begins to arise in us, one which invites us to a third stage of discipleship. As Henri Nouwen puts it: At a certain point in our lives the question is no longer: "What can I still do so that my life makes a contribution?" But: "How can I now live so that when I die my death will be an optimal blessing to my family, the church, and the world?" (RR)*

Richard Rohr says that every step up the ladder of moral development is taken in semi-darkness by the light of faith.



## Resistance

When we are sensing the longing to move to the next level, when we are resisting moving through the change, Sr. Lois Dideon of the Cenacle Sisters says that this resistance helps us. It is a building up of energy that we need to breakthrough.

What (camels) must we let go of in order to make it through the barrier, through the the eye of the needle? How might we learn to see through it with courage, creativity, new eyes?

After this breakthrough, acceptance of the 'new normal' helps us shake loose of the attachment and gives us new energy to be courageous and creative in finding new effective strategies. If we are wise and supported, we will use these without getting as attached to them as we did in the previous stage. We will transcend the patterns to helps us move more freely into who we are in God, no more, no less.

(UWB) Because man wants real transcendence above all else, but because he will not accept the necessary death of his separate self sense, he goes about seeking transcendence in ways that actually prevent it and force symbolic substitutes in all varieties: sex, food, money, fame, knowledge, power- all are ultimately substitute gratifications, simple substitutes for true release in Wholeness.

Because, as Rohr says in "Everything Belongs", Most people spend their entire lives living up to these mental self images instead of living in the primal "I" that is already good in God's eyes. But all I can "pay back" to God or others or myself is *who I really*

*am*. That's the place of utter simplicity. Being nothing has a glorious tradition. When we are nothing, we are in a fine position to receive everything from God. All great traditions use these words. The Buddhists speak of emptiness. Jesus spoke of the desert and going into the closet to pray. That's where we stop living out of other people's response to us. (EB)

Rohr says, "We can then say, I am not who you think I am. Nor am I whom you need me to be. I'm not even who I need myself to be. I must be "nothing" in order to be open to all of reality and new reality.

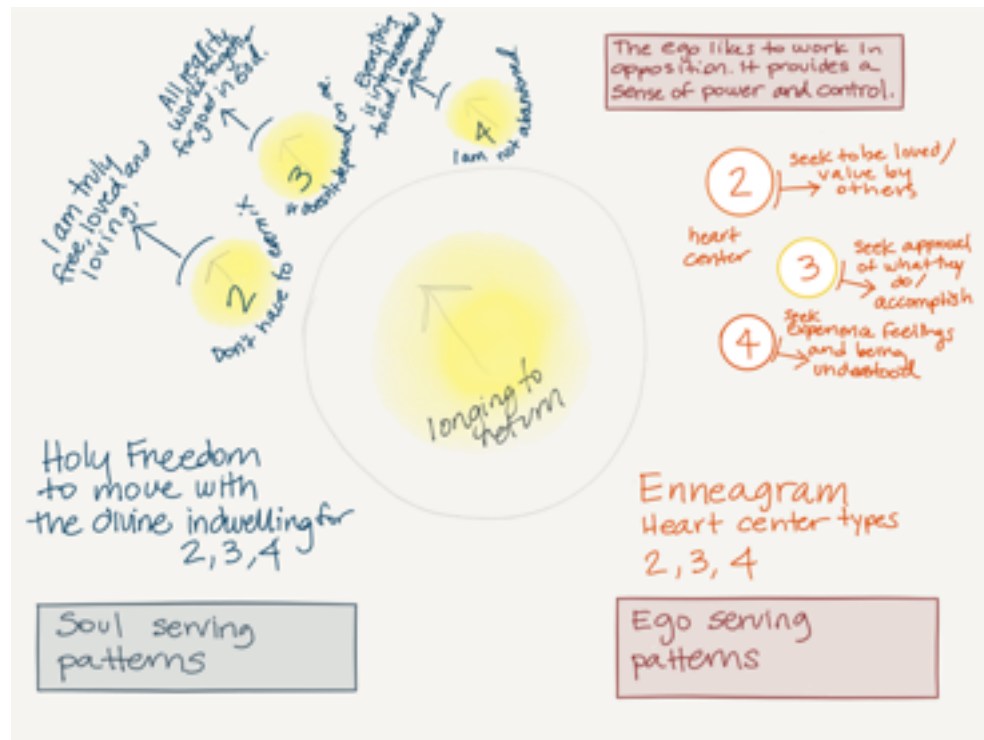
The Zen master calls this state "the face we had before we were born." Paul would call it "in Christ, hidden in God". Rohr says it this way, "who you are before having thought about who you are."

These changes don't miraculously happen - We must become aware and make conscious responses that move us in the direction of love, compassion and unity. Shane Claiborne and Sr. Ilia Delio describe this as our participation in the evolution of our world by making whole, bringing back together what was separated. Rohlheiser describes this as what incarnation means, to put flesh to our prayer, to move with the divine in mind, body, and spirit. Let's look at examples through the study of patterns of movements away through the desires of the ego's illusion of separation and movements towards who we are in God brought on by the longing of God, of energy seeking to reunite itself. I am using the 9 Enneagram types as grouped by the head, heart, and body centers.

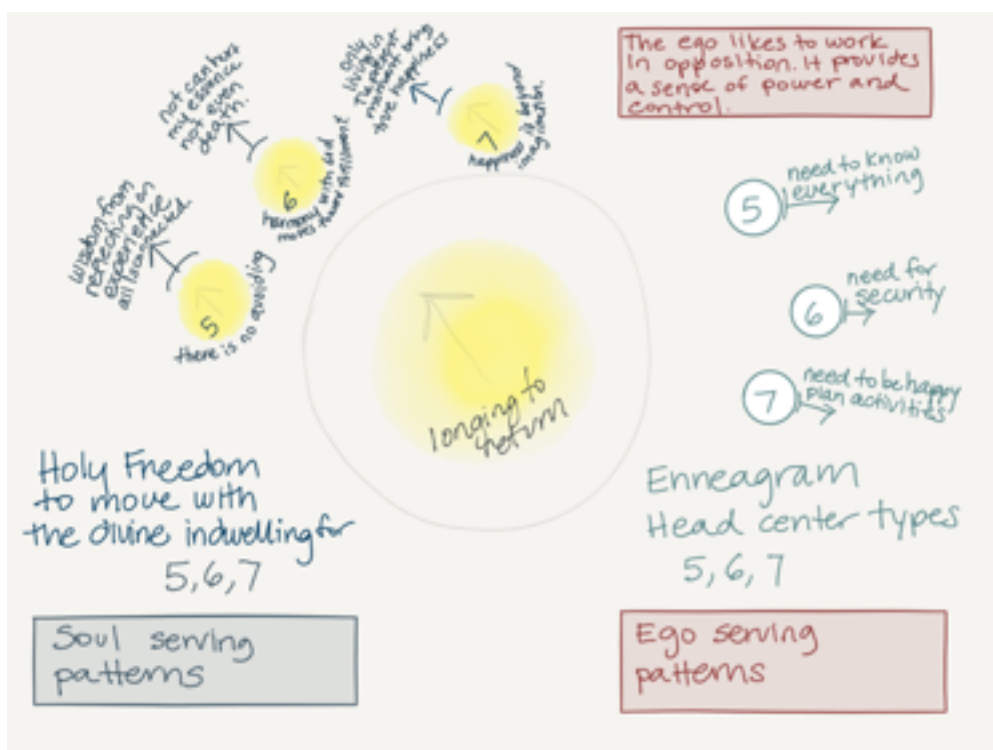


**Review slides** Some patterns that serve the ego and elements of holy freedom that engages the ego on the work of the soul.

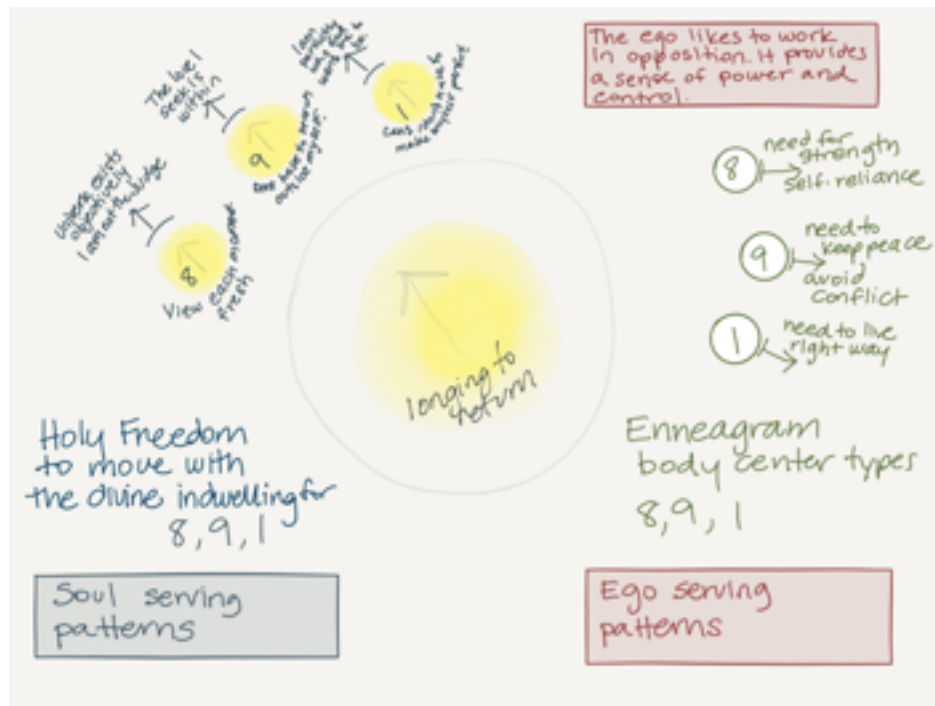
## Heart Types 2, 3, 4



## Head Types 5, 6, 7



## Body Types 8, 9, 1



### Group STUCK - What does this have to do with the problems out there?

The whole is an integrative relational structure (Immanuel Kant) an interplay of parts. The whole provides certain stability but parts continuously develop and the whole is reconfigured as parts change. (UWB)

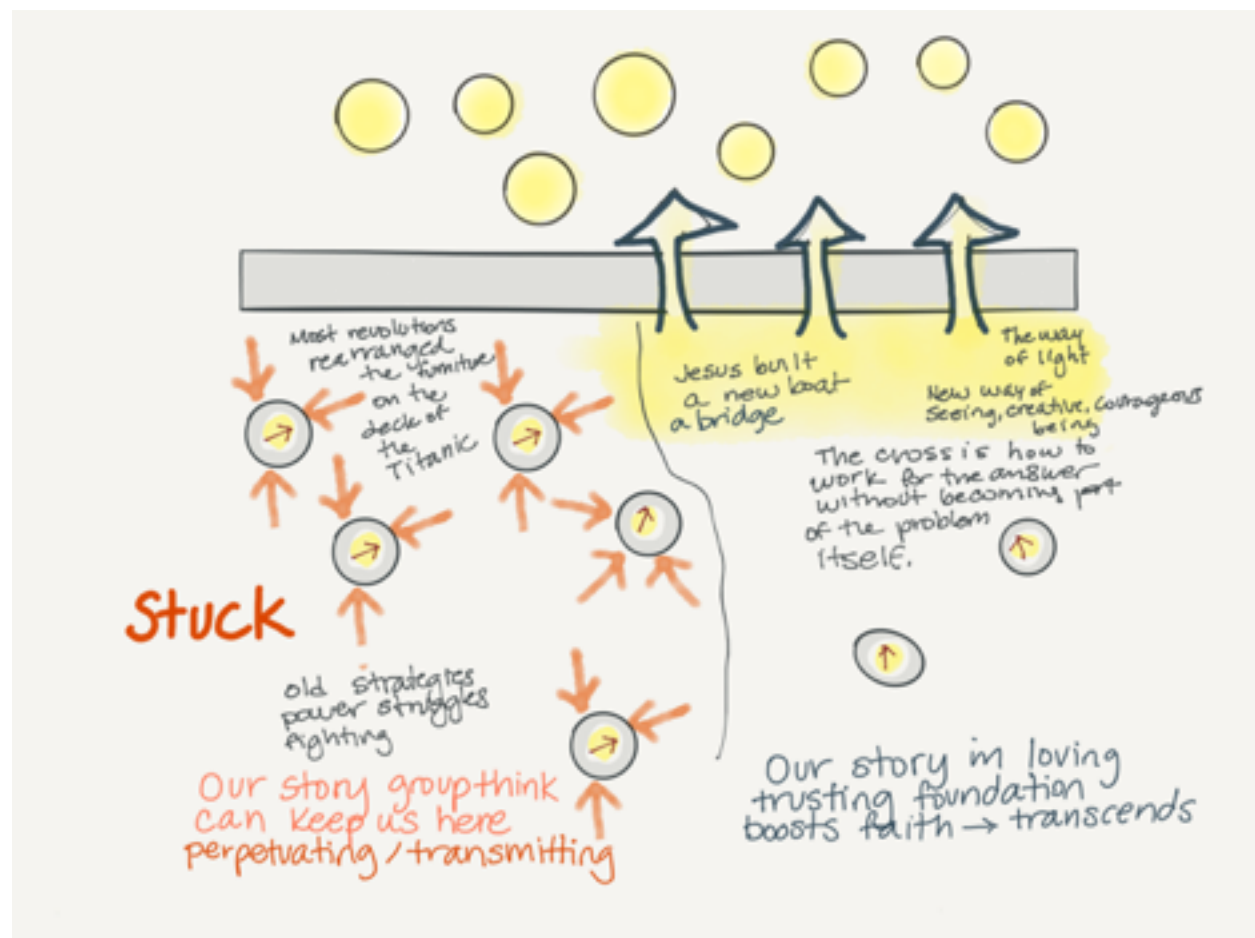
Energy follows attention. Where we put our attention not only changes how we view ourselves and our world, but influences WHO we are in the world. This is why practice is so vital. We are practicing becoming all of the time.

Because our development is multi-dimensional, this is difficult to understand. When our movement and awareness also includes **groupthink**, we can become attached not only to our strategies but attach ourselves to people and our systems of strategies. This is true of effective and ineffective strategies. Patterns of the group have their own dynamics that can keep us from healthy understanding, awareness, letting go, and growth.

We know how routine, repetition, and ritual can limit our vision. We also know through our experience that what is true for individuals is also true for large segments of society who, let us say in good faith, can participate in absurd war. (ZS, CS)

This is the ultimate "stuck" in fear, power struggles, and strategies that don't work. There is no room for creativity, vulnerability and a path to a new shared and common reality found through compassion until a shift away from focus on separation, fear, violence occurs.

Consider the individual patterns, distractions, attachments occurring in groups. Many studies have shown what atrocities individuals are capable of committing in groups that they wouldn't consider on their own. The same is true for groups of compassion and inspired groups of heroes. We live in a world that is more connected than ever. The awareness of these group patterns, trends, and dynamics are increasingly vital if we want to become what John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg labeled "nonviolent revolutionaries."



## **DISTRACTIONS Divine Fire / Restlessness in all of us**

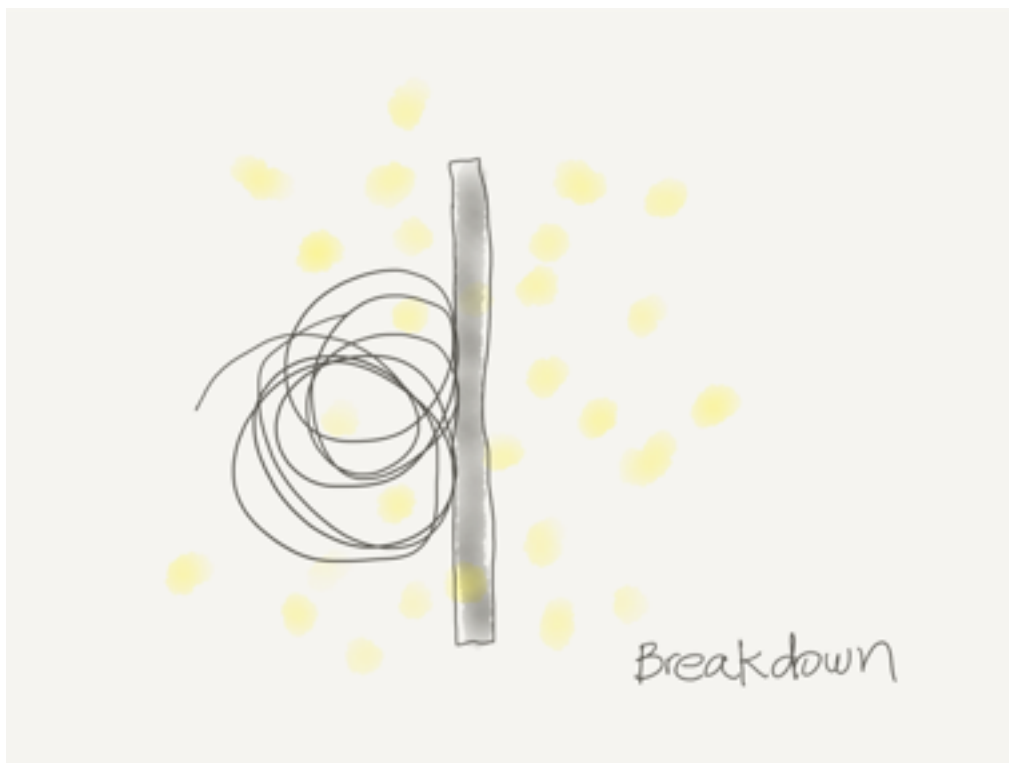
Ronald Rolheiser says There's a divine restlessness written right in our DNA.

And that divine fire is at the root of most of what is problematic in our lives: grandiosity, jealousy, rage, egotism, our incapacity to be satisfied, our constant longing for more, our restless ambitions, our pathological complexities, our greed, and our propensity for addiction. It's difficult to live in this world and be satisfied, humble, chaste, and not jealous of others. It's difficult too to have to share this world with six billion others who are just as special as we are. Something in our very make-up wants always to stand out, to be recognized as unique, to own the world, and to be acknowledged as godly. No wonder there are so many jealousies and wars on this planet.

But this divine fire is also the root of all that's good in us. When we have divine fire inside of us, it's also impossible to be satisfied with mediocrity, with sin, with lack of meaning, with only this world, with what's second best, and with anything less than a full surrender in love to all that's good – others, the world, God. When we're in the image of God it's impossible not to go through life and be relentlessly driven to search for love and to search for God.

Being in the image of God is our greatest blessing and our greatest struggle. Because of it, we search for meaning, give our lives for each other, create magnificent works of art, and bow in worship to God. But because of it we also spend too many sleepless nights, are often furiously jealous of each other, and too often see others as rivals, give in to rage, and murder each other. It's not a simple thing to carry infinity in a finite body and a finite world.

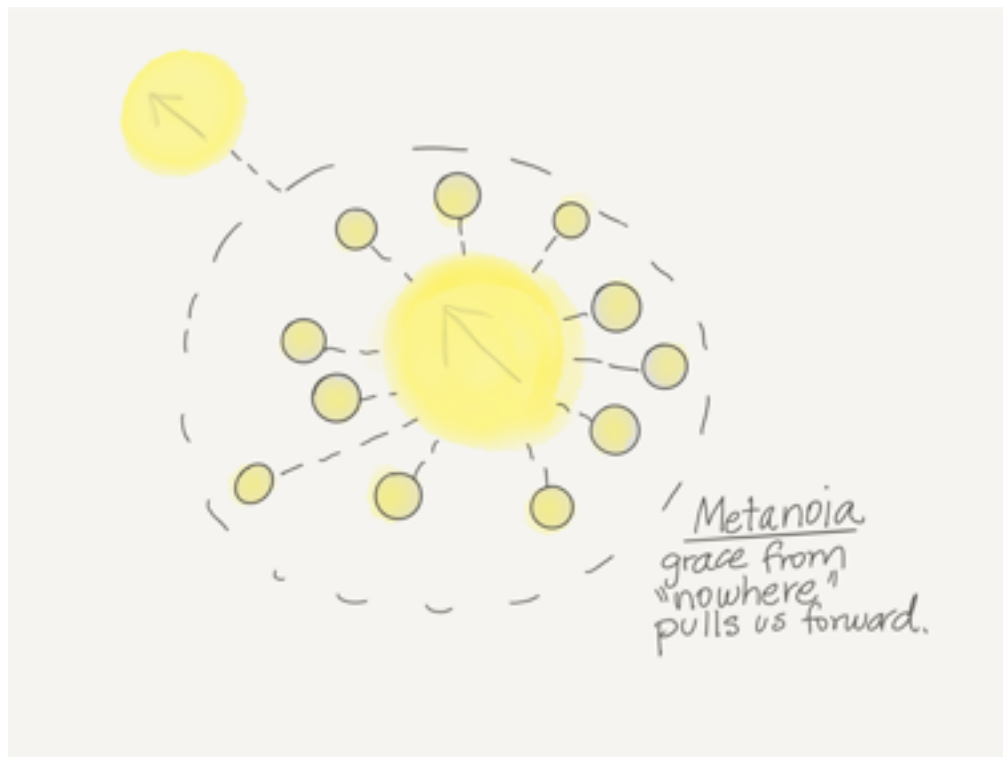
St. Augustine summarized it all in one line: "You have made us for yourself Lord and our hearts are restless until the rest in you." Given the way we're made, it's hard to live in this world and settle for second-best – and, in that, lie the roots for both greatness and self-destruction.



## **BREAKDOWN**

Let's look at the resistance image again. What happens when rapid fire resistance and the feeling of being stuck leads to breakdown instead of breakthrough.

When I crashed, it felt as though pieces of me were scattered far away from me. It certainly felt like death. It also created a rapid release from attachments to patterns of thinking and behavior that no longer served me. Because of that release it felt simultaneously like great loss and ultimate liberation.



## METANOIA

Because I crashed so hard, and was willing to hit the reset button, I have a clear view of how off track I can become.

It may be that the very shedding of the false shell allowed me to follow the longing inside me, it was not longer weighted down, I was pulled to the resources Bill suggested and made connections with others at a level that pulled me onto a new course.

Here is what that time in community with Holly Ebel, a minister here at the time, felt like to me. I was being drawn into a collective I was unable to see before because I spent all my time and attention on the outward, symbolic substitutes.

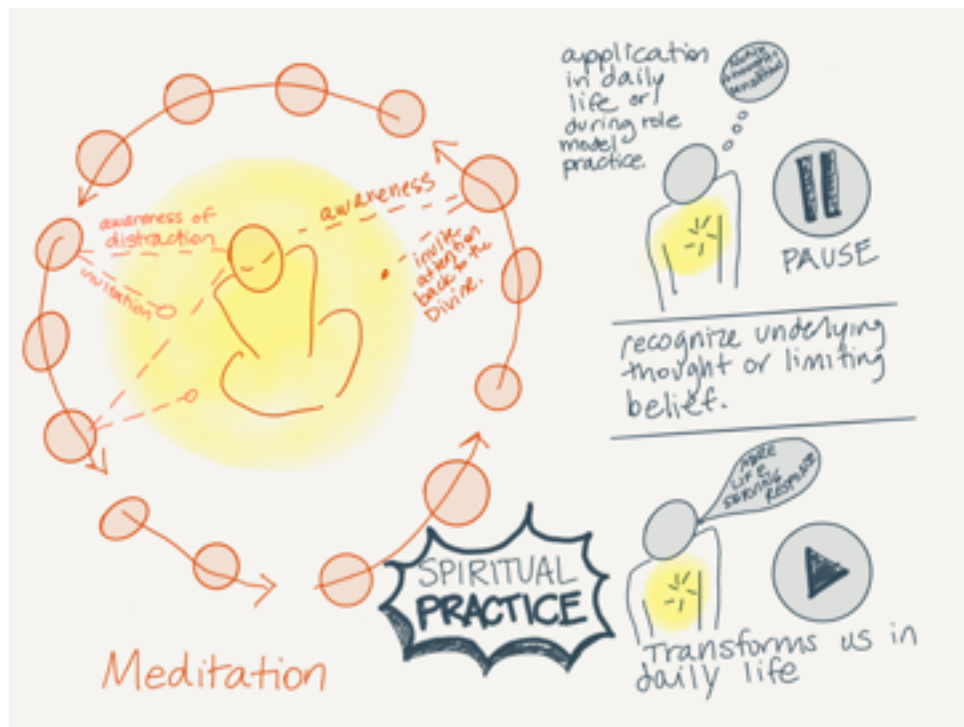
Metanoia- Fundamental transformation of the mind. Until we imagine our world view differently, we will not transform. In metanoia, "a grace from nowhere" pulls us into a new understanding.

Bill Kerley's talks opened my mind to a new (old) understanding of Christianity that looked radically different from what I had previously attached to that label. Holly Ebel listened me into re-discovering and gathering the pieces of me that I no longer recognized but had always been part of who I am and was before I was born.

I remember thinking that all this introspection was selfish, but it ended up being necessary for my survival and for showing me a much larger way to live and give through my being alive. One of the reasons I put myself in position of teaching and

practicing with others is that it holds me accountable for staying in awareness. The push and pull of energy toward and energy away did not stop, thank heavens, that would mean I was dead. It is part of being human and therefore will continue to be the daily evolution, the ebb and flow, the rhythm of life itself.

I love all sorts of practices for a variety of reasons that fill a variety of my human needs. The one I do most consistently is Centering Prayer because it does just that, it reminds me to return to the center again, again, again. Let's look at how I see it working for me.



## MEDITATION

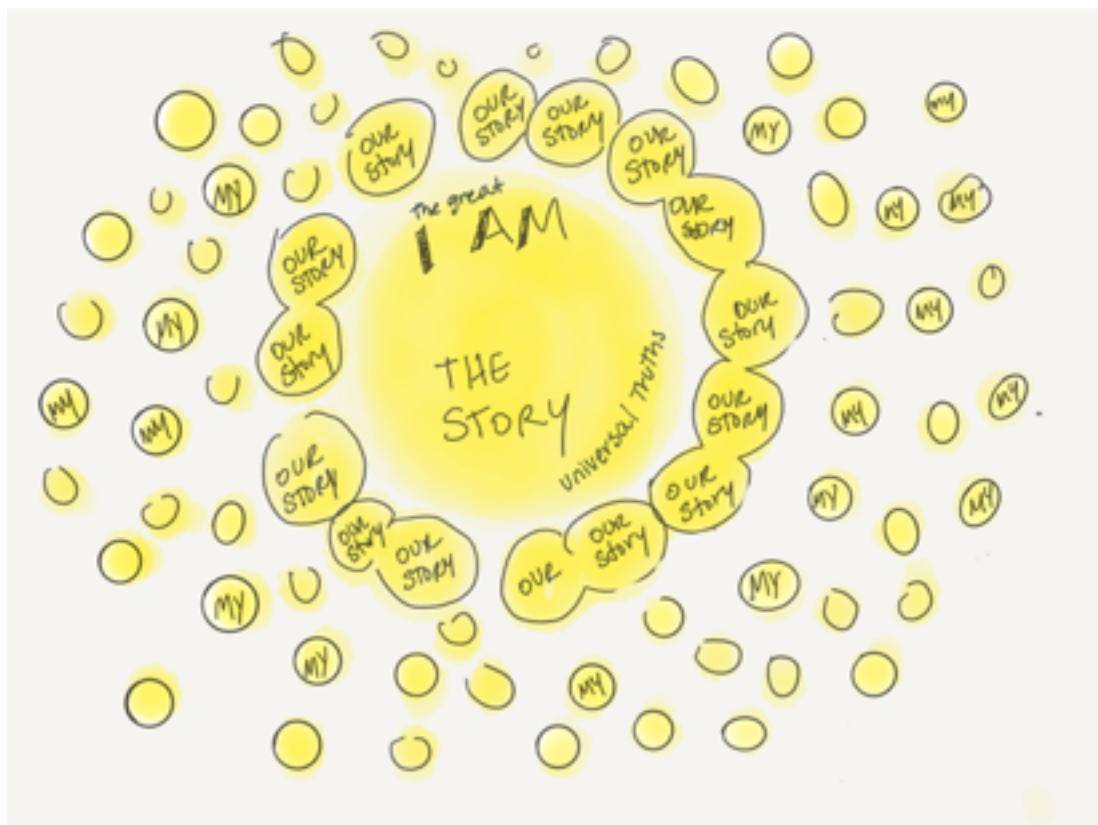
One form of prayer I use is meditation, specifically centering prayer.

When we meditate, we are letting the stream of thoughts and stream of consciousness flow by as we watch. The way I understand it is that we are not trying to stop the flow of thoughts. We are attempting to let them pass by without them carrying us away with them. This is not only practice for not getting carried away outside of meditation, but also a practice in noticing what thoughts shape our view of ourselves and our place in the world. Ultimately, in centering prayer, we choose to open to God's presence, making space for God as we let go of each thought that seeks our attention. Practice for me is an ongoing, repeating invitation to connect with God.



By centering itself on the fundamental energy of love, Christianity (and all religions) can find new meaning and purpose by allowing modern science to challenge its stories and, at the same time, to offer the world of scientific reductionism a creative vision for the world. (UWB)

To do so, we need to pull back, pray, and reflect in our inner worlds who and what we want to be in our outer worlds. This practice helps me see that who I think I am and who I am in God are so very different and has a life changing impact on how I live in each moment.



## **I AM - individuals returning**

What I started getting more aware of was the collective consciousness. Ken Wilber speaks of evolution producing a greater depth and less span as the individual acquires greater depth, the span or the collective gets smaller and smaller. A whole atom is part of a whole molecule; a whole molecule is part of a whole cells a whole cell is part of a whole organism. Similarly, the human person is a whole within self and yet part of a large communal whole that is part within a whole society. (UWB)



We can imagine this the same in individual human growth, in tribes, groups, nations, until we all return to what Teilhard calls Omega Point when the universe, when God has returned all the scattered pieces back to itself through the evolution of love, of life, of energy itself.



## **I AM My and Our Story**

Gravity, electromagnetic interaction, and chemical attraction are fundamental forces of life whose mechanical details can now be described but whose very existence escapes the laws of mathematics. (UWB)

These are all forms of energy, love, that unites, that re-unites.

Nature is an interlocking network of "unbearable wholeness of beings, Stephen Talbot writes. Nature is more flow than fixed. "The body, he states "is a formed stream." (UWB)

By the sheer power of its energy, love draws everything into an endless depth of greater wholeness. (UWB)

Survival of the fittest turns out to be survival of the senders. (UWB)

Our compassionate loving responses are more than love notes to each other, they are letters home to God that tighten the stitches that holds us all as one. Creative, Expanding, Evolving, Entangled.



## I AM RETURN

To be or not to be is NOT the question. For Teilhard, union is the primary category; to be is to be united. (UWB)

I AM, therefore we are. WE are, therefore I AM.

Sources:

**UWB** - Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love, Sr. Ilia Delio

**EB** - Everything Belongs, Richard Rohr

**ZS/CS** - Zen Spirit, Christian Spirit: The Place of Zen in Christian Life, Robert E. Kennedy

**RR** - Ronald Rolheiser essays from [RonRolheiser.com](http://RonRolheiser.com)

iPad app Paper by 53 used for graphics and live drawings in class.