

OOOW Gathering, Thursday, March 27 – Sunday, March 30, 2014

Agenda OOOW March 27-30, 2014 Eat before Thursday night arrival, please bring your robes, labyrinth is open.

Thursday

- 7:00 Evening Intro. Ron & Karen: welcome, schedule, overview of weekend -Fees and funding
Lynn: introduce AMIR and Other details for weekend.
8:00 – 9:00 Amir *Title?*
9:15 Chapel *Amir*

Friday

- 7:30 – 8:15 Breakfast
8:30 – 9:00 Chapel *Amir*
9:00 – 10:00 *Amir*
10:30-11:45 DVD *I AM*
12:00- 12:30 Lunch
12:30 – 2:30 Rest and Personal Reflection
2:30 to 3:30 Discussion Groups (led by Abbots)—*I AM*
3:45 – 4:45 Update on the Order: Lynn
5:00 – 5:30 Stages of Becoming a Monk: Blake
Mentoring skills and coordination: Karen
Working the Resource page with a group: Debbie G
6:00 – 7:00 Dinner
7:00 – 8:45 Plenary *Amir Title?*
9:00 Chapel *Amir*

Saturday

- 7:30 – 8:15 Breakfast
8:30 – 9:00 Chapel *Abbot*
9:00 – 10:00 Rule of life Lynn
10:30 - 12:15 Rule of life Group work 5-6 groups (led by abbots)
12:30 – 1:00 Lunch
1:00 to 3:30 Rest (Abbots available for Rule work w/ individuals)
3:30 – 4:00 Contemplative Pedagogy in the Classroom: [Jim Kennedy](#)
4:00 – 4:30 [Review of Christianity after Religion: Ann](#)
4:30- 5:30 Report on Pilgrimage to India (powerpoint with photos): Sally??
6:00–7:00 Dinner
7 pm Plenary – Reflections on India: Lynn??
8 pm or 8:30 Chapel (Status of anyone to Postulant or monk?)

Sunday

- 7:30 – 8:15 Breakfast
8:30 – 10:30 Flex Time: *Matters for Discussion:*
(1) Ron 2015 Consider Possibilities: Retreat in a more central US location/Pilgrimage in US or alternative
(2) [An experimental Facebook Page for the Order: Blake & Diana](#)
(3) [Giving to the Order: Ron](#)
11:00 – 12:00 Chapel – Eucharist

Will send note to bring or prepare Rule Use OOOW Rule preparation as needed

Thursday, March 27.

Opening Meditation with Abbot Lynn: opening meditation, *In the Name of God* (chant), *Trust in the Living One* (chant).

Welcome by Abbot Karen: welcome, announcements, housekeeping.

Welcome by Abbot Ron: welcome, announcements, sharing of India pilgrimage experience.

Welcome by Abbot Lynn: welcome and introduction of guest, Amir Vahab.

Lecture by Amir Vahab: It is hard to discuss this subject of Islam and mysticism there is much to talk about. This is not the only interfaith, Abrahamic gathering. There has been an increase in this in the last 20 years or so.

I was born and raised in a Sufi family and was told from day one that there was only one God, one Creator. This is the teaching of Islam. All Muslims believe in Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus from Adam to Mohammed were all prophets, each had a mission. All were chosen with a divine task. However five of them are the “greatest” – Noah, Moses, Abraham, Jesus and Mohammed. Out of these five prophets, Muslims believe that Moses was a prophet of God and his task was to the Hebrew people; Jesus was prophet to “the entire planet”.

Sufi comes from the noun, *suf* which means “pure”, “filtered”, “to cleanse”. Those who seek this in Islam are called Sufi. Sufis – both men and women – are seeking to purify themselves to see the face of God. Every authentic religion has this element.

When Moses performed miracles in the court of Pharaoh to demonstrate that his God was different. In the time of Jesus, Romans were very advanced in medicine and yet Jesus could cure people who would be born blind, people who had died, other “healers” of the time could not. Each prophet has a unique name in the Qur'an.

Islam honors the Old and New Testament as a “holy book” although there is an understanding that much of the text is not a historical recording of what happened or an accurate recording of what happened, what was said. Additionally, you have to know the cultural context as well as accurately translate a text from the “original” language. But ultimately, authentic religion/spirituality/Truth is consistent across traditions; this is especially true across the Abrahamic traditions.

Life is the process of learning and experimenting. In order for one to be pure enough, filtered enough to return to the Ocean and to be absorbed into that Unity, reconnected, one must experience this reality for growth, purification, and completion.

In Islam there are many prophets/messenger over the centuries, each with their specific mission, oriented to their time and place. In Islam, there are 5 great prophets: Noah, Moses, Jesus, Abraham, Mohammed. Each prophet has a nickname in the Qu'ran.

- Abraham (“Friend of God”)
- Noah (“The interceder of God”)
- Moses (“Messenger of God”), the “one to God spoke”. He was a prophet of God and also one of the five greatest prophets. His was not a universal task, but for the Hebrew people. Islam often follows the guidelines of Moses (such as not eating pork) out of respect of Moses as prophet. He paved the way to give us the Law, the 10 Commandments, he completed the exoteric path. But, the work was unfinished since without spirituality the exoteric level does not fulfill our spiritual evolution. Moses was the only prophet to directly talk with God (burning bush).
- Jesus (*Issa* – in Aramaic, “Spirit of God”) is a universal prophet to the planet. In mystic Islam, no prophet or saint is higher/closer to God than Jesus. In the Qu’ran, Jesus is named over 100 times, Mohammed only four times. His job was to teach spirituality, the esoteric, mystical way.
- Mohammed (“The Servant of God”). While Jesus brought the message, the message was distorted. Mohammed’s task was to reiterate the message that had been lost and distorted, to bring the unaltered monotheistic truth. The Qu’ran includes the wisdom of the Old and New Testament (no prophet has the right to change the message)

Levels of Understanding: There is both Exoteric and esoteric understanding.

Exoteric – The Law – Sharia – laws and rituals as taught by Moses and practiced by most of Judaism and honored by Islam.

Esoteric Levels (3) – There are three levels of increasing Light and Wisdom – there is elementary, intermediate and advanced. This is true of both Christians and Muslims.

- The Path (to the Creator) -- *Tarighat* – from the word that means “path” or “road” to God, the Creator. Separation is imagined. In the mystical understanding, there is no separation or difference in true Wisdom. Differences between the Abrahamic traditions and within each stream are imagined.
- Knowledge -- *Marefat* – comes from word meaning “learning about who we truly are”, where we have come from, where we are going. We live in this reality, but ultimately we “die” and shed this physical body. Some mystical Muslims believe in reincarnation, successive lives, and transmigration. In Christianity, until the 5th century there was a belief in reincarnation. Interestingly, in the 14th century, the Muslims brought the micro-tonal system (quarter note intervals) to Europe, but this was later banned in the 15ht century by the Pope
- Truth – *Haghīghat* – the Reality of Truth, we have only a limited understanding of the entire truth, but this word implies “The Truth”.

Chapel with Amir: Not recorded at his request.

Friday, March 28.

Morning Chapel with Amir: Not recorded at Amir's request.

Opening comments by Abbot Lynn: We have just experienced deep invocation which we typically do not experience in the modern western church. When we hear in the psalms to praise God with flute, drum and song, what we experienced this morning, the *zikr*, reflects this tradition. This tradition has been held in trust by the Sufis over the centuries and now we have been gifted with it. It is a form of entering into the Divine Presence; one must taste it to experience it.

Conversation with Amir:

Before we move to Q&A, I wish to clarify some conversation last night. When going to "organized" gatherings, it has been decades that gradually, people have begun to leave organized religion. Worship in this traditional setting is not well attended, they do not offer what people need whether a Christian church or a Muslim mosque. Because we are better educated, more sophisticated, we cannot accept the tradition as it has come down to us – whether Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. The traditions have become political, developed tunnel vision, and so forth. None of these organized religions have lost much of the Truth, what is provided is a little Truth and something that smells "terrible". Rumi says we have ten senses, five are copper and five are pure gold. The "sixth sense" is the first of the gold. One can touch everything not only with the body but also with the mind and spirit. The limitations of the physical body were not a hurdle for Jesus and others who have worked to become pure and seek God.

The key is to surrender to the will of God not with the intention of becoming a mystic, but only to open to God's Presence and purpose. There is no problem living with dignity but it is also important to help others do the same. It is not necessary to dress or live like people did centuries ago to be pious. In the 21st century this is not necessary to be present to God. It is not necessary to use fancy words or big ideas to impress others. The Truth is simple but it is difficult to do. That is why when we want to do the real thing and it is so difficult, we back off. We end up seeking the easy things and do not do the hard work. The goal is to become worthy and to be one with God. My answer is that I am not interested in organized religion or organized "Sufi" places. The same people who were abusing or misusing us, controlling us in organized religions (this does not mean everyone in organized traditions is not sincere, and I am grateful they have the strength to do so) are more concerned about pleasing their higher ups.

Religious worship seems to be of less interest, spirituality is on the rise. After teaching for three decades in NYC on Sufism, it is obvious that because it is "popular" it is becoming used as a means of marketing but missing the point. It is hard to find what is "true", what is sincere, what is "real" spirituality whether Sufi, Christian or other. All the ritual and religion in the world may not bring one to the Beloved.

What is critical is intention, intention, intention. If our intention is aligned with God, then God will take care of us. 21 times a day, Muslims pray to be led to the straight path. We seek the "straight path" that we might arrive in the arms of our Beloved sooner not later. The key element is **INTENTION**.

The other thing was, which I briefly touched upon it, was that we are different. Saints in the past had visions and they saw when one of their five senses opened while in prayer. Sometimes in the past, one because inspired and one saw the angels praying. This is why the Sufis sit in a circle.

Sitting in circle intensifies the energy and connects each person in the group to each other. It brings equality to the group and allows eye contact with everyone else. This person who had a vision, who saw the angels, this saint in an ecstatic state had an opening to “heaven” and saw angels dancing, singing and playing instruments while in a circle. Because of this, the circle has been adopted as part of the Sufi tradition.

So much of society is centered on dress and wealth. Historically, those in power or with money were given a place of honor. But, the circle does not place one person in a “place of honor” but all are equal. In the Sufi tradition, the reason for the white overdress is also to mitigate inequality conveyed by dress, etc.

There are many ways to pray, to worship, to seek God. The world around us reflects differences, there is no need that we all should be “the same”; there is no need to impose one way of doing things on everyone. Rumi, at 86, was still dancing in prayer, he could not understand how one could sit in prayer. In rotation, he sensed that one could return to the Sun, to the Source. God pushed us all the way down to below and yet His magnetism pulls us all back toward Himself. We go through the layers above us to re-unite. Rumi says, we are returning, it takes several thousand years to start talking! He starts at the beginning of creation and suggests the evolutionary process of humanity. If your nature tells you to get up and dance like Rumi, then you do what your nature does. If your nature requires that you sit and sing, then this is fine too. We must learn to accept that those around us have their own path. One should not force oneself to do anything in worship. The only thing that matters is that we worship our Creator, we have total freedom. Being exposed to different ways of worship is helpful.

Who were the six advanced beings mentioned in Chapel? Jesus was one. When we say angels, there are many kinds of angels. The Archangels total seven. The Archangels are not the same as the “regular” angels. In Islam, these seven were created by God for a very specific purpose. They are created perfect, they cannot make a mistake, and they are directly connected to the “Central Bank”. Gabriel was the head of the Archangels. Jesus was one of the “shirts” Gabriel took on. Jesus’ essence was Gabriel. After God, Gabriel is the most powerful creation of all. No one can really understand Jesus the way he was; he was too amazing for that.

Friday Morning (con) Viewing of video: I AM <http://www.iamthedoc.com/thefilm/>

Friday Afternoon

Abbot Blake: Questions to consider until small group discussions this afternoon include: What is wrong with the world and what can we do about it?

Small group questions for processing the movie:

1. In the movie, Tom Shadyac comes to the realization that things/stuff did to bring him happiness. Do you agree? When did you come to that realization?
2. Modern cultures around the world live with the assumption that truth is based on scientific facts. What do you think?
3. We all have concerns in our lives. Rank these four from the highest level of concern to the lowest: Personal health and well-being; world peace; the economy; the health of the environment. Do you pattern your life to reflect your primary concern – what do you do?
4. Is your essential nature to dominate or to cooperate? Be truthful!
5. What was the most interesting/astounding thing you learned in this movie?
6. What talents/skills do you have that can be used to make a difference?
7. As a result of this movie, what is one thing you will do to change the world?

Friday afternoon summary of small group discussion with Abbot Blake.

What we can do about the world situation is to do the work of the Order and to always respond in love in our efforts in community, social and political action. The real transformation is in doing the work of the Order.

Friday afternoon: Updates on the Order - The State, Work and Future of the Order with Abbot Lynn

The Abbots gathered in early Jan of this year to think collectively about our work and some of what follows is what came out of that time together. We represent a lineage and we have encapsulated this lineage in the name of the Oriental Orthodox Order of the West. We have lineage within the Christian world and space within the Abrahamic faiths. This has been given to us in an interesting way. As community, we may be approaching a critical mass – large enough to make a difference but small enough to remain flexible.

There is a lot of unfolding and a lot in flux. For example, last year at this gathering Sally Roberts sparked the idea of a pilgrimage to India, she actually made this happen, and it was an amazing outcome of a vision Sally had. We will be talking about this more during this weekend and beyond.

Other things are happening. Gary and Emily are in a new place as are Ron and Karen, Alice Despard, and Michael and his future. This is a rapidly unfolding work that we are involved with, each of you are energetically engaged in this work. We are shaping this so there is an effect when we leave the planet. What do we leave? What do we give to this work that will continue on?

The particular strand of Christianity that we represent came out of the Orient, it is an Order. The Order was born out of great trauma with the early death of an abbot after a conversation about continuation

of the stream (but outside ecclesiastical framework) with Abbot Lynn. This new birth was born out of much difficulty and suffering. Out of that has come this gathering of people who have a lot of energy but who also have been through the fire of things, realizing that the world is not an easy world. We are here to shape something that will be gift.

We are creating an alternative to the Occidental tradition because what was missing was a voice from another direction. In India, we could see the colonization of Spirit by the Occidental stream in Oriental Christianity. And yet, Oriental Christians have begun to develop alternative ways to Western, standard Christianity.

This original wisdom, the original voice of Jesus disappeared, had been co-opted by Imperial Rome is being recovered as best we can 2000 years later. Each monk of the Order is giving voice to this way of seeing which is rooted in the Abrahamic tradition and the early Jewish Christianity which moved East. The stream moved into Syria, modern day Medina and modern day Iran. The original form of Jewish Christianity survived only briefly in Jerusalem, but continued for a long time in Southern India into at least the 3rd or 4th centuries CE. This alternative community is called the Nasrani Christians, which means Christians from Nazareth, or Jewish Christian. The forms and effects of this lineage can still be seen in parts of India.

In the West, we are attempting to bring another voice, bringing forth the Jewish nature of early Christianity and the Oriental stream. The Order is reflective of this Eastern stream, this different form, this alternative form, and we are given the task to recover it, help it to bloom, and to offer it to the larger community.

Peter Berger (Boston University, Department of Religion) calls this the “heretical imperative”. This is an alternative to “correct belief”. The term, “orthodox”, is often taken out of context since the word actually implies a positive aspect – a willingness to “walk in beauty” of “right practice”. The word means “beautiful practice”. In other words, there is a right way to walk through the world; there is a beautiful way to be in the world. This is what, in fact, orthodoxy means. There is no requirement that everyone walk in lock step, that there is an “absolute” right way. An alternative is being developed through liturgy, community, scriptures, chants, and so forth. There is a sense that there is a way that liberates. We want to be different but we also are not trying to draw attention to ourselves as being “different” in an effort to stand-out. We do not want to emphasize the exoteric differences but to focus on the esoteric.

This is privilege and takes the creative energies of each of us.

The work of the Order is to create an openness; a new way of being in the world and a new “type” of liturgy, an acceptance of diverse interpretations and voices. The name of the Oriental Orthodox Order of the West enshrines this openness, the luminosity. It provides as alternative voice, the Order is different but does not seek to “stand out as different”. One way to understand this is through

concepts of the Alpha (Jewish, Syriac, prophetic, Semitic) form and Beta form (Western, Pauline). So, as we move forward we want to further frame what this means, the context which we are working within and the shaping of the future. The communities are central to this shaping, we gather as community but then move “back into the world” to do the work we are each called to do. Monks come from numerous denominations of the Christian tradition as well as Buddhist, Islam, Judaism, Wiccan and Native traditions.

What follows is a community discussion of individual experience as members of the Order and individual involvement/experience in traditional, Occidental faith communities. There is an invitation that we each bring the richness of our own experience and individual diversity.

Becoming a Monk with Abbot Blake:

We are approaching 50 members of the Order. We are not setting a goal or all that concerned about numbers but we need to be mindful of future growth and interest in affiliating with the community. Practically, we want to think about that process. This concern was discussed and the process of becoming a monk was been reviewed by the Abbots and the following process was approved in January 2014. Information is provided for those wishing to consider vows in the Order:

Becoming a Monk Oriental Orthodox Order in the West

Entry Points to Aspirant stage

- Website
- Personal associations with monks and friends of the Order
- Wisdom Schools, Seminars
- Other

Aspirant Stage

- The aspirant stage begins with the submission to the Order's abbots of a letter of intent. It is received with care and discernment.
- The Novice Master assigns a mentor (either a monk or an abbot) to the aspirant.
- The mentor assists the aspirant in working through the study guide, **For Interested Individuals Wanting to Know More about the Order**, which is found on the OOOW website. The text, **A Wisdom Way of Knowing**, is also recommended.
- The aspirant, if at all possible, should attend a seminar of the Order.

Postulant Stage

- This stage begins with a ceremony of commitment to postulancy at the Order's annual gathering.
- The main work during the postulant stage is the preparation of a Rule of Life in consultation with their mentor. An extensive **Guidelines for a Rule of Life** is found on the Order's website although the final Rule will likely be shorter and more focused.

- In addition to guiding the selection of readings from the **Study Guide for Postulants Preparing to Enter the Order**, the mentor will assist the postulant in developing an office of daily prayer and meditation.
- When the mentor and the postulant are ready to move to consecration, the postulant submits his/her Rule of Life to the abbots for review/approval. This should be done at least one month prior to the Order's annual gathering.
- Upon approval by the abbots, the postulant is consecrated as a monk at the Order's annual gathering.

The process is not about sifting out individuals; it is about helping those in inquiry to determine if this is right for them. It is about the aspirant and then the postulant being clear that this is what is necessary for them for their path.

Mentoring with Abbot Karen:

Abbot Karen suggests that this is a process of attraction. It is what calls to us in our heart. It is a process of self-selection. As far as the mentoring goes, the process has been organic and been on-going as an informal process. But last year was the first time that choosing a mentor has come about. Therefore, having a Novice Master is new. This will be an evolving process. It is a gift to read letters from those who send in a letter of intent, try to assess what is needed and to invite monks to mentor the aspirant/postulate. It is much about being present to someone else on the journey, it is an opportunity. The Novice Master and others in the Order are present to help mentors and aspirants as needed.

There are lots of resources on the website. The updated study guide is available for download on the website at <http://www.theooow.com/the-order/> Scroll to bottom of page to **An Outline and Study Guide for Postulants to the Order** for download and is included below beginning on page 10 for convenience.

Extended discussion of how monks who are working in the world can develop small groups, communities, etc., while being supported by the members of the Order in this process and ministry past the annual meeting. Monks are looking for assistance creating contemplative communities that are small enough to care for each other but are focused enough to move change. It is hoped that there is a way to train the monks as well as specific tools to allow sustained outreach once the annual gathering is completed. Suggested is the concept of a directory of activities that members are already do in-the-world so that their effort and "best practice" can be catalogued and available to the community-at-large. Concerns were raised that we remain mindful of the contemplative nature of the process and trust that Spirit will continue the support necessary for community-based groups. Abbot Ron offers that the abbots are available to assist monks and communities in their development. Please ask for help and assistance. Action: The Abbots need to further discuss and address these concerns and how they could be addressed in the future.

Small Group Formation and Support with Priest Debbie: Beginning this spring, Debbie will start offering a small group for study of on-line website materials (<http://www.theooow.com/resources/>). This will be a telecom-based conference call and the specific topic and frequency to be determined. It would also provide the option to support those who have questions and concerns about their practice and their outreach to the larger world. Please look at the website and consider if this would be of interest to you. If so, please sign up or let Debbie know by email. If there is enough interest, more than one group can be developed and formed.

Friday Evening: Closing Conversation with Amir: After being here for three days, I feel as if you are all my spiritual family. We will cross paths, hopefully again. Please let me know if you ever come to New York. Before I forget, we have a very early flight, but I would like to thank all of you but especially Lynn and Gail, who are responsible for bringing us together, and of course, Alec as well as Karen and Ron who have been most kind.

We touched upon Abrahamic religions, on Islam, on Sufism. We can barely scratch the surface in the few hours we have had. This is a talk that continues for the rest of our lives, finding about these beautiful stories and the truth.

In 1976, when I attended the Christian school in London, it was the first time the idea from those who were involved in the Church, said that Jesus is the way, and the truth, and one can come only to the Father except through me. I smiled and said, well....since I believe that parts of the OT and NT are distorted since humans' ability to recollect is not always accurate. I thought we will just wait until we are in the other dimension. Several years later I return to Tehran and I go to visit my spiritual teacher. In sharing with him, I tell him that I have been told that I had been told that "Jesus was the only Way", and what about other traditions? My Sufi teacher said to me, Amir you are right but THIS is not one of the distortions. But he said in the world of spirituality there is a city of religion. The gate to that city is Jesus. But it does not matter what your affiliation is, you will recognize that Being when you die. Everyone will know. That Being is indeed the Gate. But you do not need to know him as "Jesus". If you know him as a Christian as Jesus, that is fine. If you are of another tradition, then that is fine too, since everything is intention, intention, intention. Names are not important, what is important is what is in the heart. Jesus has no egoic needs, he accepted the mission to come and guide us that is all he is interested in accomplishing. I am sharing this since there are so many distortions in the Bible but this is not one of them. If you said this to an average Muslim, they would disagree but they approach this exoterically, not esoterically.

What about other traditions? There are so many of them, we are called to respect them. Anyone who wishes to be a man or woman of God deserves respect. If their beliefs are not consistent with the teachings of the Abrahamic traditions, then one would have to consider this as a distortion. If you put the three Abrahamic traditions together, they cover A to Z, they cover everything. There is no need for anything else.

It is not a good idea to be “all over the place”. It is OK to be curious, but the Abrahamic traditions contain the total truth. If other traditional teaching is contradictory, then it is questionable.

If there had been no distortion, there would be no Islam. Islam is “undistorted” Christianity and Judaism. Other things were asked of Abraham is included in the Qu’ran. Two thirds of Qu’ran is not needed because the laws have continued through the tradition from the OT. An example is the “test” of Abraham to sacrifice his son, and yet there was never any risk. So Muslims to this day go to Mecca, they sacrifice a lamb and then gift the food to the poor. This sacrifice is meant to be for God, on the path to God, to be given to the poor. In talking about how to help the poor, one can ask the government to help but in the meantime, like the film said, just pick one person at a time to help. IN NYC the winters are miserable, and the poor and homeless struggle to survive whereas one rarely sees stray cats and dogs. Across from the UN, people live in cartons and often die during the winter. The film I AM shows us we can make a difference.

Let me tell you another story, the Islamic version, at the time of our grandfather Abraham, there was a king, Nimrod. Like our Presidents, many of the leaders in ancient times felt they were God. Nimrod called Abraham to him, saying “do you not see I am God?” Abraham says “you are not God”, this infuriates Nimrod. Abraham says “God has control of life and death”, Nimrod says “but I have the same power over you”. The situation escalates. Nimrod orders a bonfire which burned for seven days and nights and for Abraham to be carried to the top of a tower and thrown into the fire. This may be metaphor but it depends on one’s faith...there is tale that a bee repeatedly drops water drop by drop onto the fire in an effort to put the fire out. He is told that this will not work by bystanders. The bee answers “I know but that is all I can do”. The lesson is that helping one person at a time is what God expects. Do the best you can in any situation and then leave the rest to God. It is a matter of surrender with happiness and trust the rest to God. We should always welcome whatever comes our way.

I would like to open this to questions and answers since this is the last night.

Some of us were talking about Hagar and Ishmael, would you talk more about that? What lesson is there that is beneficial to us? People for some reason always point out differences instead of pointing to the similarities. Look at the similarities across the three traditions, the differences are minor, the principal is the same. The differences are to be celebrated; the backbone is always the same.

The story of Abraham, God tests us I am afraid, it is difficult, it is not easy. If saints have a hard time dealing with tests, imagine where we stand? We consist of two different poles – one from God, heaven/celestial; the other from earth – devil/temptation/darkness/the animalistic – it has so many names. There are really only two powers – that from God and from the animalistic. The mineral world is present in our physical body in our teeth and bones, the vegetarian world is present in our hair and nails, and our body is a reflection of our animalistic aspects. We have both an animal soul and an angelic soul. Because we have an angelic soul, we will be judged. With this angelic soul, this particle of God,

comes great responsibility, we understand so much more and so much more is expected of us. There is no judgment of the mineral, vegetable, or animal worlds.

Spirituality does not need to be so serious. We believe that God has the most complete sense of humor. To think God is lacking any attribute is not true; God is complete in every way. In Sufism, we learn that God never comes and punishes, neither personally. God is not a punishing God, God is an educator. God created the world in such a way that for every action there is a reaction, possibly karma in other traditions. All the mystics talk to this. It is true; it is not that God says "you have to be punished". We are not important enough for God to come and punish us. He gave us existence, the POTENTIAL to evolve spirituality, to reconnect.

In some Christian streams, the belief that Jesus died for my sins and that everything is OK, and nothing more is necessary, this is silly. It is important to little by little change into a better person, moving away from the animalistic and moving toward the angelic, the celestial. Just believing in Jesus and yet lying, cheating, and such...is not enough.

No one can forgive you but God. A priest cannot forgive you. This confession thing is a problem for me. People like Jesus, is dear to God. He has been given the power and the task, but he is special to God. Jesus wants us to do our best, not powerless to one's animal self.

You use the word, purification, and this implies we are to rid ourselves of our impurities. When you talk of God, you talk of God as all-powerful, all inclusive Being. Inside that Being is everything. If that is so, both good and evil co-exist within God. There is some potential support in Isaiah and Matthew for this idea. If purification is my work, in some ways I am not acknowledging the completeness of God.

This is an excellent question. When we have questions we are advancing, if we do not have questions we are stagnating. As one moves forward one encounters new things. When we say "evil" we have to understand an interesting thing. I agree God has everything in its perfection, in its completion. When we talk about darkness, it does not exist, it is where there is no light. Where there is no light, there is darkness, it is not an entity in itself, a lack of light, lack of Divinity, will make what we call evil.

In the Qu'ran, God says all creation is made in pairs. This applies to male and female, but also up/down, black/white, course/smooth and the list goes on forever. Only the one God of Abraham is One. Everything else is created, is paired. You can only understand light if there is darkness. In order to remember, for God to be an educator, we have to experience. Why do Muslims fast? First, if done properly you save one meal a day and at the end of the month, you give the food or the money that would have been spent to the poor. In addition to that, you experience hunger and this makes you more compassionate toward those who are hungry and poor. There are so many reasons to fast although it is often disappearing in the modern world. It is a beautiful tradition. It is also healthy. And, when you obey the order of God, it is good for our soul.

Every time you buy something there is a bookless, the manufacturer's manual. So, why not follow the manufacturer's manual that God has given us... what do you think the Bible is? The Old Testament is? The Qu'ran?

Islam has three meanings: Taslim (surrender); Salam (peace or surrender). Jews and Muslims are half-brothers. As an aside, not all Arabs are Muslim, today less than 30% of Muslims are also Arabs. Islam is a religion concerned with Salamat (well-being/health of body and soul).

When there is no light, there is darkness. Where there is not the blessing of God, the Love of God, there is evil. In the Sufi tradition, yes, the devil is mentioned, but it is not metaphoric. Shatan, Satan, in Arabic means an "untamed horse". And it is referring...now the classic story of Satan... In Islam, in addition to humanity, there are more ancient beings – genies – which are created from fire. Dogs and cats can see them although humans cannot see them. They are harmless; they were not created from dust but from fire. There are other creations made from the other elements too. So once, a group of "regular" angels came to earth, came across a baby genie, and took the baby to heaven. The genie grows up with the angels. The angels in their innocence and purity were not wise like the Archangels and could make mistakes like an infant is pure. Being pure is not good enough, that is why God makes us good through all these layers, to become polished and pure. This baby genie grew up and matured, (genies have more potential than regular angels). When the time comes and God creates humans, the angels are told to prostate to humanity because God says that humanity has so much potential. Azazeal (Shatan) argues with God, saying they are from soil, I am from fire, and I am superior. God says you do not know the whole story, I am God, you are supposed to obey. Satan's pride gets in the way, and even after several chances to change his ways, to obey, Satan is cast out. Shatan asks for the power to penetrate the human heart and God gives this power, but God says those that believe in me you will never penetrate. This is why our faith is so important.

Now that negative, the lack of light, is darkness. So every attribute that humanity has must be moderated, it must be balanced, it must be poised. When it is not balanced, when it is too much or too little, then there is evil.

We all have a right to basic needs, but when we trample over others, when greed drives us, there is a lack of balance. In the movie, this was demonstrated. This happens every day, evil is where there is no God. There is only one God; nothing else can compete with the God of Abraham. Where there is no light, there is darkness.

Are other areas of Islam open as Sufis toward Christians? No, because often traditions approach things from exoteric. Only when one moves into the mystical stream – whether Christian, Muslim, or other – is there acceptance. There is also three levels of the esoteric path. It depends on the level. For every person that is a "real" Sufi, there are 99 that are not. Even with the "real Sufis" there are different levels.

Does Islam allow the possibility that God could be a woman? God says clearly in Arabic “he did not give birth nor was he born nor did he come into existence through birth. God is clearly genderless. We are limited by our understanding – how does one understand “limitless”, “perfection”, “genderless”? All creation is created in pairs, God is neither male nor female, but according to time/place they had to relate the concept to one of the two options (male/female). Only because of the culture and the society of the time was the “male” pronoun used to describe God. Our souls do not have gender. For the kosmos to work, we have a “gender” body.

Saturday, March 29

Saturday Morning.

Rule of Life with Abbot Lynn: There are key terms and concepts that are important to our understanding of the concept of a Rule of Life.

Monaxos – Monastic. Jesus used the term in some way, probably in Aramaic, meaning single and united. The word *monaxos* helped create this concept of monastic. As monastics, we are not hermits nor are we cloistered, we are not closed from the world. There were traditions both east and west for monastics to be shut off “from the world” but that experiment has run its course.

In the Order, we practice a heretical imperative of a different type. Paul Evokimov (http://orthodoxwiki.org/Paul_Evokimov) suggested that the intentionality needed to be called to the interior, toward interiorization, which on the OOOW website we call “interior monasticism”. This is very close to what Jeshua discussed as interiorized monasticism. Each of us makes this essence one’s own, each person’s rule of life reflects this unique and individual monastic space as well as allows each of us to establish stability in the world around us. This is one of the reason cloistered communities were so important in the past, to provide stability in a chaotic world. But, we do not have that luxury, the luxury to remove ourselves from the world although we do know we are called to create stability within our own space to the degree we can. How do we create order in the messiness of life that we experience?

Stabilitas – Stability. A Rule of Life helps one create order in a world of chaos and messiness, so it is important to revisit it periodically to make sure the “rule” is still working as things change in and around us. You have to revisit it, it is like canoeing; you have to change your pace to stay afloat in the rapids. That is the reason that thinking about the rule of life in this way is important, how do I maintain both inward and outward stability? One can consider this “dynamic stability” especially since things are always in chaos, it is a matter of remaining stable when under pressure. One must think of the “rule” as dynamic stability, thinking intentionally about the guidelines that inform our lives and allow us to respond as “priests to the world”. Our Rule also empowers us, giving us the ability not to be undone, to respond to the world in the most appropriate way, so we can serve the world.

The third word is **Sapience – Wisdom**. We are attempting to create a wisdom form vs a religious form not that the two do not have a connection to each other. Although religion is valuable and there is much information, it is not sufficient. Integral knowledge at this core, this Wisdom, connects the dots and draws in insight... not just more information. It is balanced. We are attempting to embody sapience, integral knowledge. This is so that what we then take into the world is balanced, wise and informed. A Rule of Life is a kind of guideline, a guiding principal that reflects an individual's presence in place-time, attempting to bring Wisdom to the "game" of life.

To help me keep the pieces in place, I like to think in pictures and have created this diagram (see page 20) that might help us put these pieces together. So, let us consider that one can have the bigger picture but still not be overwhelmed by all the details. This may help us effectively integrate in an unstable world, embracing an interior dimension that affects the outer world. So, before we disperse, this diagram perhaps can help us understand what all this might be about, it should be more than the Abbot saying, "you must do X". We do not work this way, we are creating an alternative that places a lot of responsibility on the individual.

I like to think of this as creating "wisdom Christianity". What does this look like? What does this mean? This is "co-templing" or "con-templing" wisdom...a wisdom that creates a temple in which the human and Divine dwell. This is a contemplative space, where human and Divine unite, where heaven and earth come together. The "con-temple" is not outside in Jerusalem, it is inside. You can consider this image a *mandala* (even though this term is not present in the New Testament!) of the Abrahamic stream, consider this a mandala of personal integration.

In a Tibetan Buddhist temple in India, I discovered that the mandala was in fact three-dimensional – not just two (heaven, earth) like we usually think. So, think of this "mandala" as a diagram of what a rule of life is attempting to integrate. This is personal, no one can do it for you; you must do it for yourself.

The **first frame** is that of **Sophia Perennis**, the Divine has shared this gift across all wisdom traditions (Jewish, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, and so forth). We share this Wisdom with all sacred traditions. This universal form connects to four universal questions/issues.

1. Who are you really? This is personal and practical.
2. Where did you come from, what is your source? Are you simply a product of space-time or are you an eternal creature? There is a whole wisdom teaching on the origin.
3. What are you doing on this planet?
4. Where is this taking you? What is this experience leading to? What is your ultimate destiny? What is the ultimate destiny of humanity? Depending on your stability, you can either get lost or be centered and connected.

The **second frame** is that of the Abrahamic or Jewish wisdom (5000-6000 years old). It is this Wisdom in which Christianity is grounded and that we have inherited. In the middle of that experience, there was the enlightenment of the axial age that upended the viewpoint that the Divine was made in humanity's

image. The wisdom of the Axial age teaches that the Divine transcends everything and yet It is immanent in us. This wisdom created:

- 1) visionary, prophetic view point of the Universe;
- 2) a cosmological framework;
- 3) and the mystical underpinnings of Judaism.

Jesus inherited the prophetic, the mystical and wisdom (*Sophia*) streams. You can go to Jesus' teachings and find the essence of the future Kabbalah's teaching. Jesus repeatedly created Wisdom from a chaotic world and turns it into something of value. Out of this root, came the teachings of Jesus/Yeshua and James/Ya'akov. In Judaism, one finds the visionary and mystical but also the practical.

The **Circle** represents the "Oneness", unfragmented, whole and united. *Monaxos*, unitive understanding. Nothing is left out. This is a very advanced form of wisdom, Jesus brings this to us. We are to become united, unfragmented, one. It is a shared spirituality.

Within this is the **Heart**. What may be unique to Jesus is the "kardial core" of unitive understanding. You cannot be integrated without the kardial center being united and whole. This center is the "operating system" and has to be operative for the "heart center" or heart chakra to be the driving force of this energy and power. How to operate through the kardial center is the question, it must be the center that which unites heaven and earth, the human (*Anthropos*) and the Divine. In the chakra system of Hinduism, the lower three chakras work with the physical and the upper three chakras work with the spiritual, the heart connects the physical with the spiritual, the horizontal to the vertical.

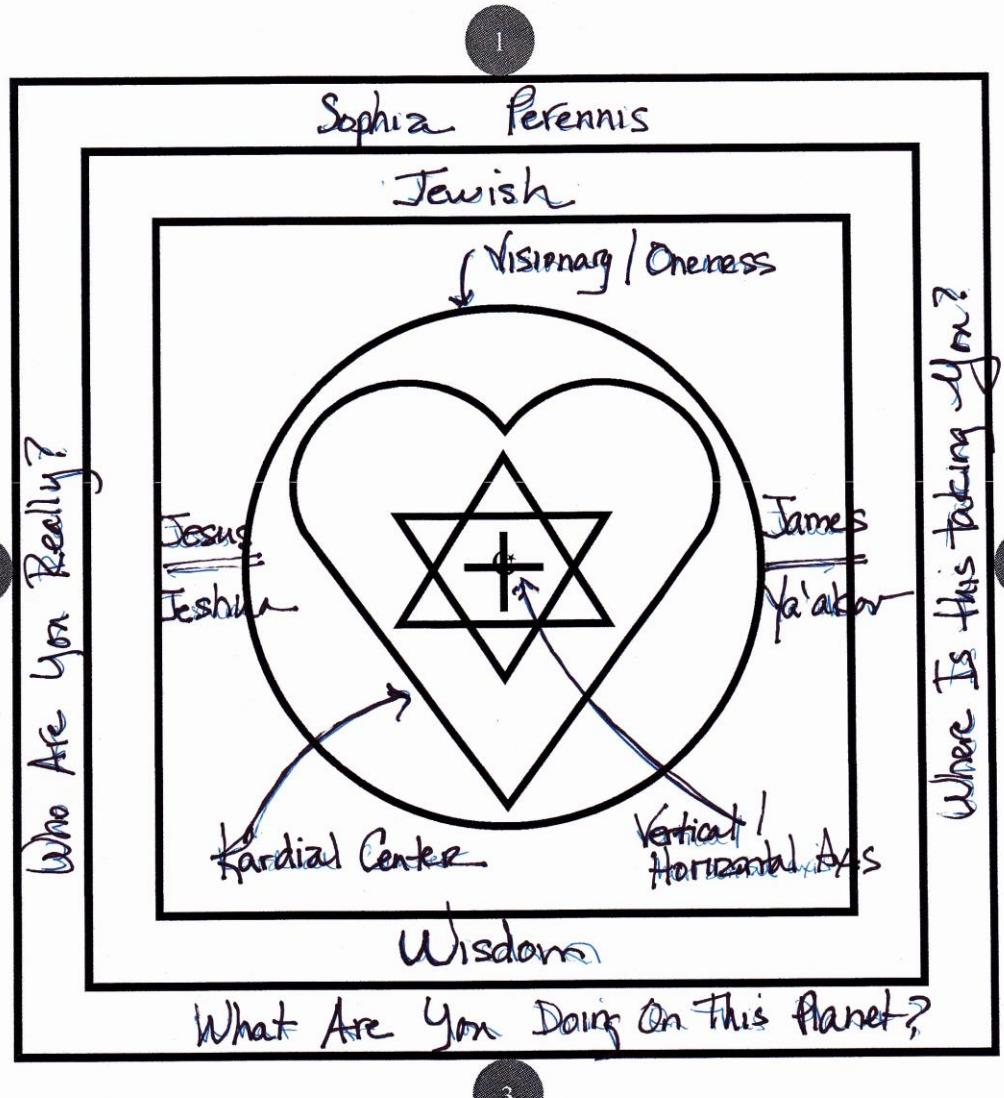
Because this image is only two dimensional, it is hard to convey. We move across time and space as well as exist within our unique social history. In the middle of that, I have connection to the vertical access. It has to be inside of me.

The sign of this unity is this **Star** within the level of the heart. Within the Heart is the **Star of Judaism** and the **Crescent of Islam**, this reminds us of our Abrahamic connection. These images represent both radiant light and reflective light. The Star of David is the image of the integration of Heaven and Earth, Divine and Human, in a con-templed image, a united Whole. Even prior to the concept of incarnation in Christianity, there was the concept that an unfragmented whole in Judaism.

When the experience of unification occurs, there is light. This is a metaphor for what the Sufi tradition contributes to us. This frame of Judaism is Abrahamic wisdom which was then integrated by Jeshua and Ya'akov, and we have been "gifted with Light". We are called to become both radiant and reflective of the Divine's Light. This images of radiant and reflective light bubbles up through Wisdom and is prevalent in the Psalms, in Rumi, in the Qu'r'an.

Within this is the **Cross**, the integration of the vertical and horizontal, in which our lives unfold. The cross in the middle of the heart is the intersection of multi-dimensional realities. We are called to live deeply, consciously and yet not become bogged down in the details of the daily woof and weave of life.

A MANDALA OF
CONTEMPLATIVE WISDOM
From an Abrahamic Perspective



L. Bauman 2014

This is what makes a Rule of Life possible and necessary. It helps us navigate both the detail and the chaos of the individual story. Integration necessarily requires community for support to do the work, for the priesting of the world, and to be integral in our own way as monks. To do this alone would be daunting, but to hear your story, your integration, the silk painting of your life is great. That is the reason interiorized monasticism is not without community but is not cloistered. We come together so we know we are not alone, so that we can support each other as we do this work and in the priesting of the world.

Small Group Discussion regarding individual development of one's Rule of Life. Question for small group discussion:

Thinking about my Rule

1. What is my life mission in a sentence?
2. Can I put my rule onto one page?
3. Does my rule touch on the following areas:
 - (1) Inner work
 - (2) Outer work
 - (3) Vocational practice
4. How do I contribute to the work of the Order?

Keep the core values of the Order in mind: "Our core values as an Order are, first, an authentic transmission of the wisdom of Jesus as an expression of Sophia perennis (Perennial Wisdom). Second, we are committed to the transformation of human consciousness and being through the practice of Interiorized Monasticism. Third, we work for the creation of a culture of contemplative wisdom that cares both for the world as a whole while serving the individual and the local community as the necessary ground of its work. The Order is inclusive and is composed of monks, postulants and many friends who gather in the contemplative study, prayer and practice."

5. How often should I update/review my Rule?
6. With whom should I share my Rule? Has anyone given me feedback on my Rule?

Saturday Afternoon:

Jim Kennedy, Postulant: Sharing his work as a professor at Baylor University and his use of contemplative practices in the college classroom. Discussion includes additional observations by Abbot Blake Burleson and Postulant Julie Robinson.

Ann Johnson, Abbot: Sharing Diana Butler Bass' book, Christianity after Religion, which suggests there is a new worldwide movement where faith in institutions breaks down and new ways of thinking and doing comes into being. There have been three prior "Awakenings". Bass proposes that we are part of the fourth "Great Awakening". She says there are small groups of dedicated people who are wrestling with ancient texts who are trying to find a new way of doing things, to rescue the institution, and to become vessels of the Divine. The book is a "recommended read". Books are available for the taking, donations appreciated.

Sally Roberts, Monk: Sharing the recent pilgrimage of members of the Order to India with stories of welcome and hospitality throughout India. Sally proposes that Order members and friends support St Thomas Cathedral School which was visited during the pilgrimage to help with building maintenance, specifically a new roof for the school. If one wishes to contribute, checks can be made to

“Contemplative Wisdom, Inc.” which will allow for a tax deduction. Sally also provided a photo video narrative of the India trip.

Saturday Evening

The Sufi Tradition and Discovering Thomas in India – Abbot Lynn: We have tasted a melding of Persian culture in the teaching of Amir. Community discussion of impressions, observations with a special focus on the courtesy and gentleness in relating to others coming from the Sufi tradition. There is discussion about the circular nature of Oriental wisdom and its influence on communication cycle. He presented a sweet spirit, a demeanor of courtesy, sincerity and relational consistent with Sufi *adab*. His ability to conform and morph with the situation is consistent with Persian culture. His teaching style was very circular and consistent with the Oriental tradition. The experience with Amir baptizes us into the Persian-Sufi-Oriental tradition.

One of the new theological strands that was identified is “angelology” that was prevalent in ancient Judaism, early Christianity, and Islam. This theology suggests that the prophets manifest/channel the archangels. The Epistle of the Apostles addresses this and it is alluded to in the book of Hebrews.

In Islam, the texts that are used in Christianity are perceived to be problematic because they appear to create a doctrine of the Trinity, create an atonement theory, and make Jesus Divine. In Islam, the view is unitive, Jesus is a prophet but he is not the Divine.

Sufism is multi-faceted and there are numerous orders. There is common ground but substantial differences between them.

He introduced the concept of angelology that the prophets are channeling the angels, grounded in Jewish mysticism. Jesus as the manifestation of the Angel Gabriel was an example of this view. This is a different than our Western theological construct.

The Islamic understanding is that Christian tradition is that the West took it off into another direction and was to refocus back to the Unity of God much like the Ebionites, the Jewish-Christian beliefs.

In *Zikr (remembrance)*, there is contemplation with the invocation being a crescendo of energy and sound, conversely to the silence that is common in Western prayer. When we think of contemplative prayer, we generally cycle into silence and then cycle back into the world. This is a mode with which we are very familiar. There is another side, where the sine wave goes up, invocation (not silence) is at the center, and the one drops into contemplative prayer.

Lynn also shared his experiences and will forward photo essay on trip to India which is archived at <http://www.theooow.com/ponderings-on-the-pilgrimage-to-southern-india-the-land-of-apostle-thomas-january-23-february-6-2014/> What India holds for us as Christians is a new way of understanding. Thomas appears to have traveled by ship down the spice coast, along the Indian Ocean, stopping at Jewish communities, visiting synagogues, until reaching southern India in 52CE.

In the tradition, Thaddeus, Bartholomew and Thomas journeyed East as missionaries. From 33 CE until 350CE (the time of the Council of Nicaea), there were more Christian churches in the East than in the West. However, these communities in southern India remained Jewish for centuries. Today, in southern India, you still see Christina churches of numerous denominations, many of Roman Catholic lineage but also streams of Christianity that reflects its Jewish roots (Nasarani). Later, Syrian Christians immigrated into the area (Syrian Jewish liturgy). When the Portuguese arrived, they colonized southern Indian and attempted to force Western stream of Christianity.

Around 350 CE, Christian churches developed in S India. Until the 1500s when the Portuguese, they followed Jewish tradition, used Syrian language. When the Portuguese arrived and colonized the local peoples, they destroyed the local Christian churches, their sacred texts, their liturgies. This “conversion” lasted about a century before the local population rose up against the Portuguese and re-established strands of early Christianity within the Oriental tradition. The result is Eastern Syriac Christian churches (of Persian lineage or Jacobite) and Western Syriac Christians. The Christians of the area aligned with different streams of Western Christian tradition. Still today there are strands of this early influence which still influences Christianity in India today. More information can be found here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Thomas_Christians

Saturday Evening Chapel was not recorded but the order of worship is provided below:

**A Contemplative Service
of Eucharistic Remembrance
(Master of Transformation)**

Opening Prayer: (*A prayer offered on behalf of the whole community which is a calling out to the divine Reality. See **The Book of Prayers***)

A Hymn of Acclamation
Holy, Holy, Holy One (*See alternatives*)

*Spirit of truth enter my mind
So-o love wisdom enter my heart*

A Reading and Instruction

(Silence kept after the reading followed by a sermon, guided meditation, or personal reflection)

A Psalm or reading
(Chanted or antiphonal Psalms)

Bind my head And my heart in you
Holy One
Holy One
Holy One

A Reading (*Optional. If there are two readings, then silence is kept after each reading and a sermon, guided meditation or personal reflection should follow the readings*)

St Patrick Creed 5th C (Revised OOW)

There is no other God except God the Source of all,, nor has there ever been in time past, nor will there ever be in the future. God is the origin of all things, and has no beginning. God possesses all things, but is possessed by none... He has poured down The Spirit upon us, and we overflow with The Spirit. It is this Spirit which brings us the covenant of eternal life. Through The Spirit we learn to trust and seek the Source and with and through Yeshua become sons and daughters of God. in our wholeness.

Prayers for the Creation

*O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer When I call, answer me
O Lord hear my prayer, O Lord hear my prayer Come and listen to me.*

O God we remember this day all in your creation we see and do not see. We give you thanks for life, and all that is. We pray that your blessing, peace and presence will pass into all things, transforming them into your likeness. Make us channels of your blessing, guardians of your peace, and guides to your holy Presence. AMEN

This day we remember...

Kyrie, kyrie, eleison

Nai kyrie, nai, nai kyrie

Nai kyrie, nai, nai kyrie

In compassion, hear our prayer.

(A prayer of confession may be said by one voice or spoken by all. Suggested forms are in The Book of Prayers or from traditional liturgies. The prayer of confession is followed by assurance of forgiveness).

Offertory Prayer

Thanksgiving, blessing and praise be yours, God of the universe; because you care for us and for our prayer. May our love for you and our likeness to you be strengthened by this our offering. AMEN

Praise to you, our gracious God, for when we ask, you give; when we seek, you show the way, when we knock, you answer. Praise to you for your unfailing grace, In this communion through your Son, Make us one, we pray. AMEN

The Prayer of Remembrance

Prayer to the Master of Transformation

**This life is One, our God, the food is One.
Our inner fire of hunger is One with yours, O God, for you are One.
This bread and wine we offer here all come from you,
for Christ is yours and you are his,
and we exist as One with you within the Son.**

**Son-star, bright blaze of Morning!
You are rising now at the end of time
to appear at dawn;
And this dark night (day)
changes into a day beyond all reckoning,
beyond any earthly light.**

This is our night (day)of union,
*We hear the drum-beat of your resurrection
deep in our hearts and in the depths of the cosmos.*
The drums of your coming are beating, beating;
and all the pathways back to you you're sweeping clean.
Your joy is now,
And this is the time of union!
Yours is the day of grace,
And this is the time of vision!
Yours is the day of forgiveness,
And this is the time of resurrection!
Yours is the day of mercy and compassion,
And the gift and treasure from your hand is here.

You breathe and new forms appear across the curtain of eternity; a world choked on thorns dissolves and disappears.
You breathe and tear away the shroud from the stone-cold corpse of humanity.
You breathe, and glory flashes out as fire across creation's face, burning away its evil and its sin.
You breathe "Be," and we feel the artistry coming from your hand, your creative word moving out through everything again.

We hear the trumpet's call to come away,
to free ourselves to serve you and the restoration.
The time has come to dance,
*in the fire, in the blood,
in this new wine that will forever change the world.*

Our dance is the joy of existence around your bright image,
the dazzling brilliance at the center of all being.
The dawn of blessing is at hand,
and we are filled with you.
There is no longer room for lack of trust or faith,
there's nothing left for us in this existence now but you.

It is all and everything,
this body and this blood,
this bone and brain and soul.
For the source of living water is in your eyes,
the sword of fire is in your hand.

You clothe the world in robes of light,
both heaven and earth fill up with you.
The dawn of joy arrives at last!

O God we remember this day all in your creation we see and do not see. We give you thanks for life, and all that is. We pray that your blessing, peace and presence will pass into all things, transforming them into your likeness. Make us channels of your blessing, guardians of your peace, and guides to your holy Presence. AMEN

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**Son-star, bright blaze of Morning!
You are rising now at the end of time
to appear at dawn;
And this dark night (day)
changes into a day beyond all reckoning,
beyond any earthly light.**

Sunday, March 30

Sunday Morning

Contemplative Rap: John, Monk Contemplative “rap”, for video go to: http://www.theooow.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/IMG_2568-1.mov (It may take a few seconds to load). Enjoy!

Also, TAMU has a sustainable eco-sensitive ag program in its infancy, donations to the program would be helpful. Go to: <http://aggiefunding.com/> to donate.

Pilgrimages and Retreats: Ron and Lynn, Abbots

There is an on-going conversation about future (possible) pilgrimages/retreats. In considering options, we would like to assess interest for group travel in 2015/2016 for pilgrimage and contemplative time in community. In discussing, a rough survey was taken of those present. If you have an interest in any of these and were unable to be with us, please email us so we know of your interest.

Return to S India (10) – Catherine Crews may volunteer to organize.

USA (Native American roots – Chaco Canyon and other options) (18): Jim K & Ann will begin planning for Fall 2015.

Eastern Turkey, North Turkey, including both Christian and Islamic sites (13)

Iran w/Amir (15) - Since the Persian church played such a critical role to the Christianity's movement to India and China.

Options for the Order, Abbot Blake:

The community already has a robe, medallion and icon as symbols to represent us. These are optional for use in homes, prayer spaces and chapels. As the Order has evolved, we have made “official” certain symbols of one’s commitment to the Order and its work. After some discussion, there has been general agreement among the Abbots to develop a tunic that would be available to members of the community. This will be an optional item, the idea behind it is to identify one as a member of community when we are “in the world” doing “monks work”. It would not replace the robes worn to chapel. This is an evolving project and more information will be sent out as it becomes available.

Upcoming Retreats and Schools of Wisdom, Abbots Blake and Lynn:

June 1-7: detailed information on upcoming School with Abbot Blake at Ellwood Retreat Center

July 13-19: EHOP – Alpha Christianity and the Wisdom of Ya’akov

August 7-11: St Andrews Episcopal Retreat Center near Bainbridge Island, WA - Alpha Christianity

August 17-23: Ellwood Retreat Center with Monk Sharon Grimes presents abstract form of acrylics, contemplative wisdom through art.

Financial Support of the Order, Abbot Ron:

Although minimum funds are needed to operate the Order, funds received are used for outreach, scholarships, etc. Checks made to "Contemplative Wisdom, Inc." are tax deductible and should be mailed care of Ron Poidevin at Way of the Wolf. A process enabling the Order to receive direct transfers from bank accounts (direct deposit drafts) is being developed. Donations can be identified for the Indian school project, etc., if the donator prefers. Members are encouraged to keep the OOOW as a preferred non-profit on their "giving" list.

Mentoring, Abbot Lynn:

Wisdom cannot be taught but we can all be mentors. No matter how far you have traveled on your spiritual path, you can speak to it, you can share it, you can guide others who are walking a similar path. Guidelines for Mentoring (handout) are general only. There is material on the website that can be used. This is designed to give an initial introduction to this concept. A workshop may be offered on this topic in the future, in the meantime we can mentor in the Wisdom tradition. The guidelines are provided below on pages 27-30.

Social Networking, Abbot Blake: There have been requests in the past to have more connection with each other. It is not the same as being together at the annual gathering however use of the internet can help us connect. This is an experimental approach and we are going to stand up "Anamachara" a Facebook page. There is a rich body of material on spiritual friendship available to us and these guidelines are derived from those materials. Before posting, consider whether the posting will contribute to "soul friendship" and the idea is to be intentional about the posting. Abbot Blake is the "gate-keeper" and has control of the page. If one wishes to participate, then let Diana know so she can "friend" you so you can access the page. There is some risk of "leaking" information posted on the page if personal settings are not "tight". Pictures have the greatest chance of leaking because they tend to be "public domain". You can participate with a very basic Facebook personal page, if you need help setting one up, please contact Diana at orientalorthodoxorder@gmail.com for help. See guidelines below on page 31.

OOOW Webpage, Monk (Hostmaster) Diana:

Update on new links from the "home page" <http://www.theooow.com/> to both back-up pages and the Resources page. During the last year the site has been restructured and updated. New material includes many of the community chants, downloadable study guides, upcoming seminars/retreats, bibliographies, articles of interest and MP3 recordings of recent seminars as well as notes/transcripts of the seminars materials. There is also a special page for monks and Order members only. If you are a member of the Order and do not have this information, please contact us for access.

OOOW Retreat Center, Closing Comments by Abbot Lynn. In consideration of the future and with Ron and Karen's decision to sell Way of the Wolf, Lynn has decided to leave the Praxis Retreat Center to the Order in the future for its use. It will be owned/directed by the Order. Much work is to be done on this, there will be need for a director and there are lots of details to be worked out in the future.

Practical Guidelines for Mentors and Mentoring

The Demeanor of a Mentor

1. Show up and be present in the life of another.
2. Give the gift of your own being and your presence without the imposition of your own personal agendas.
3. Be vulnerable, open, and without the pretense of self-importance.
4. Keep your perspective and a sense of humor about the human condition.
5. Be available without being intrusive.
6. Model the wisdom path through the practice of hospitality and compassion.
7. Learn when to speak and when to stay silent; when to act and when to remain still; remember the “a baby will be born when it is ready” not necessarily when you are, and that you are a mid-wife.
8. Do no harm, but risk for the sake of love.

Basic Approach to Mentoring

1. Start where they are versus where you are.
2. Start with their questions and concerns.
3. Set a moderate pace—neither too slow nor too fast, be flexible but also consistent in your guidance.
4. Provide a measure of safety for a risky adventure into new and sometimes threatening territory.
5. Emphasize practice over words, but balance action and contemplation.
6. Leave the person stronger, wiser and more empowered than before you entered their lives.
7. Don’t do the work for another, but be regularly available to assist where needed, and encourage an individual to explore beyond their normal limits. Remember you are providing guidance into new territory.

Text-Based Mentoring

1. Mentoring done around the mutual study and sharing of a text (or some other course of guided study) provides a platform for both mentoring one-on-one or in a group setting. It may be the easiest entry-point so that Praxis-Oriented mentoring may be introduced.
2. First, assign a text or study series through your awareness of need, or through a mutual decision (see “Teaching Materials” on the resource page of the OOOW website).
3. Introduce and give guidance for individual study.
4. Agree on the pace of completion and the schedule of contact.
5. Work through the study either one-on-one or in a group setting.

Suggestions for Independent Study

1. Ask a student to read through a chapter or a lesson over a certain assigned period of time and to mark place of insight and understanding as well as places of questioning, confusion or concern. Have the student read and study each lesson or chapter until they feel they understand the main points.
2. The student may want to take notes, write a journal, or make an outline of items of insight and importance as well as things that raise questions. But the purpose of the individual work is to allow the principles and the ideas in the lesson or chapter to sink deeply into an individual's mind, heart, and being.
3. Ask each student to apply the lessons and concepts of the material to actual circumstances that individual is facing in daily life. But also to allow the events of each day to illustrate the principles and challenges they face and to stimulate new thinking, understanding and insight.
4. Before retiring for the night, take time each day to review what has been experienced and learned—what he or she have understood and learned throughout the day. Journaling these personal insights would be invaluable.
5. After completing a chapter or a lesson, an individual then may schedule a mentoring session and assess what is next, or how to continue with the material.

Suggestions for Group Study

1. Group work enriches and builds the experience of individuals and allows both expanded understanding and practice through the insights of other people who are also working and learning at the same time.
2. If the Mentor wishes to assign leadership other than him or herself for the group study, then each group should have a designated leader or facilitator who has some familiarity with the material, and who has perhaps already worked through the material in another group. If this is not possible, then the group leader should have experience in group facilitation and a demonstrated degree of maturity and balance in daily life.
3. A regular meeting time (weekly is probably optimal) should be chosen which will allow the participants at least one and a half hours of uninterrupted discussion and work together. This time period should be carefully kept, and breaks allowed only for holidays and summer vacations.
4. The lessons or chapters should be presented in sequence (or if taken out of sequence an understanding by the Mentor for this modification), each lesson building on the one before it. Participants should be encouraged not to range ahead in the material in anticipation. However, material from past lessons can be readily integrated into each new section as is necessary and helpful.
5. It is suggested that the group **not** try to complete one lesson or one chapter each session, but allow at least two or even three sessions for each to given broader experience and integration. Working through the material too rapidly will not allow enough time for personal practice or the steady reflection which is necessary to integrate the many layers of significance at each step.
6. If a two-week cycle for each lesson is adopted, additional weeks can certainly be added as they are needed. In the introductory session of the lesson, the material should be read

together out loud in the session (the introduction and the commentary), in addition to the readers' questions raised concerning the meaning of concepts, sentences and ideas. Next, insights can then begin to be shared from the members of the group concerning their initial understanding of the material.

7. It may be that in the introductory week for each lesson, one or more questions out of the study itself or created by the Mentor as **Questions for Reflection** may also be asked prior to personal reading and personal work. Discussion concerning these questions works best when members have had the opportunity to write and personally reflect personally for at least a week.
8. In the second week of a chapter or a lesson, the mentor may wish to choose the specific content or question that will initiate the discussion. It need not be in the order in which they are presented in the lesson or chapter however—something later in the chapter or lesson may need to be understood first. Neither is it necessary to answer every question raised in the lesson or suggested earlier by the mentor. Some questions may also be grouped together for discussion. It is suggested that for at least one question every member should have the opportunity to give his or her answer, passing from speaker to speaker around the group. This may be prove to be impractical for every question, however.
9. Other sections of the lesson (for example other **Readings for Understanding, Daily Exercises and Daily Prayer** which might be part of a lesson or devised by a mentor) are to be used as supplemental material to illustrate the principles of the lesson, heighten awareness of their application and meaning, and support the discussion. After the second week of discussion, **Daily Exercises** in the lesson or created by the mentor can be suggested as the focus of individual practice during the week, and this practice may then be shared on the third week, or prior to introducing another lesson.
10. A certain pattern or rhythm will develop in the group work that will fit the needs of its members. This pattern should be allowed a certain freedom to evolve as the group's members become more familiar and comfortable with one another.
11. In addition to writing their own responses to questions raised, members are encouraged to keep a journal of insight and their learnings as well as to record discoveries they are making as a result of their use of the **Daily Exercises**.
12. A mentor is encouraged to be creative and to "play" with the material and possibilities in order to create interest and new possibilities. Other readings may be assigned, and it might be necessary to the mentor to do his or her own prior investigations of the material in order to bring new and personal insights to the lessons or chapters.

Praxis Oriented Mentoring

1. There are many other areas of mentoring that are not based on study, teaching, or instruction through texts and formal lessons. These have to do with daily life and practice, contemplative prayer, and service to the world. A person needs a mentor in these areas specifically because they are practical and are a part of the normal path of spiritual pilgrimage.
2. With each choice of possible praxis, there needs to be given clear, step-by-step instructions for the particular practice accompanied by a demonstration. Guided instruction where each step is explained is often useful at the beginning, which is then suspended so that individual practical work may be done.

3. If possible instruction and instruction might be accompanied by a diagram to explain the various elements or parts, as well as with a recitation of personal examples and anecdotes to illustrate both the possibilities and difficulties of a particular practice.
4. After each instruction and demonstration followed by practical experience of the practice, it is important that there be a space and time for individual and group reflection on the experience itself. By sharing what each individual has experienced and learned new avenues of practice arise, and people are willing to learn from each other and have courage to overcome difficulties.
5. Follow-up and check-ins of various kinds that give individuals time to develop their skills while returning to share their difficulties or problems in practice is essential.

Anamchara
an experimental Facebook Page of the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West

“We work for the creation of a culture of contemplative wisdom
that cares both for the world as a whole
while serving the individual and the local community as the necessary ground of its work.”¹

Foundational to the creation of a culture of contemplative wisdom is the development of the *anamchara* or soul-friend. There is a rich body of patristic and medieval spiritual writing on friendship as form of the Christian virtue of love. One rich text on the subject is Aelred of Rievaulx's *Spiritual Friendship*. Aelred (1110-1167) was abbot of Rievaulx, Yorkshire, England. The rules of the Anamchara Facebook Page are derived in large part from the rich and complex guidelines for spiritual friendship in Aelred's text.

Membership to this facebook page is limited to the members of the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West. The page, managed by the abbots, is intended to foster soul-friendship among the members of the Order. As monks in the world we are scattered across the North American continent but linked in prayer, contemplation, study, and work through an annual gathering, wisdom schools, workshops, retreats, and electronic communication. As the internet becomes more integrated into monastic praxis worldwide, the Order has elected to experiment with this mode of communication in order to determine its usefulness in our contemplative culture.

Praxis Rules

Before you post, ask yourself: Will this post contribute to soul-friendship in the Order?

What to post:

- Current and on-going personal spiritual practices (e.g., prayer, meditation, reading).
- Reflections on Order gatherings, wisdom schools, and other events.
- appropriate personal information about and photos of you and your family (e.g., life changes, travel, graduations, weddings, illnesses, deaths)

What not to post:

- advice of any kind (unless asked specifically and then only in moderation).
- partisan political perspectives or commentary. (The Order has diverse political representation and while many of our monk's are called to be politically engaged, this page is restricted to non-partisan posts.)
- trivial or negative comments. (Jokes, cartoons, and generally silliness is strictly prohibited! ☺)
- debate of OOO business or suggestions for OOO future direction (which might create factions and favoritism or disturb the unity of the monastic family)

Further Expectations

- All posts should be considered confidential.