

“Living Wisdom” – An Appreciation

by Jack Lloyd / Originally published in Spirit Journal April 2017

As you may know, Contemplative Outreach - Chicago recently launched a new program known as *Living Wisdom*, to give interested members an opportunity to explore “the wisdom tradition.” So far, the program has offered four all-day Saturday workshops, one per month, January through April. After participating in the four workshops, I am starting to form an idea of what the wisdom tradition has to offer, and I have a strong interest in learning more.

How would you describe wisdom? Many people might give a definition similar to the following, which comes from the crowd-sourced online *Urban Dictionary*: “Wisdom is knowing the secrets of the world and knowing how to deal with everything in it. Knowing the cause and effect of living a certain way in this world. You can’t get wisdom by being on the honor roll or reading numerous books, it comes with age and experience.”

Maybe so. On the other hand, Cynthia Bourgeault has written that wisdom “describes a lineage of spiritual knowledge and practice that is principally concerned with transformation. It is not about knowing more, but about knowing more deeply, and can be recognized by an alert, present-moment awareness and a compassionate intelligence. Wisdom teaching builds on a strong foundation of traditional Christian mystical teaching and contemplative practice, approaching them through the contemporary lenses of mindfulness, nondual awakening, and interspiritual dialogue.”

The latter definition, with its strong spiritual focus, aligns closely with the work we’ve been doing in the *Living Wisdom* program. But, ultimately, I’ve come to feel that finding out what wisdom means is a gradual process. Each workshop in the series has added a new piece of the puzzle, another layer of awareness.

In the first *Living Wisdom* workshop in January, Bill Redfield showed us that the way to access wisdom is unlike the approaches used to acquire other types of knowledge. This is because, rather than a body of information, theory, or doctrine, the wisdom tradition offers “a way of knowing,” which must be *practiced* rather than merely studied. The key learning I took away from Bill’s teaching is that each of us, at least potentially, can have direct access to some of the deepest wisdom humankind has ever discovered. Next, Darlene Franz’s workshop in February focused on “sacred breath and sacred chant,” giving us the opportunity to explore contemplative chanting through guided group practice. For me, Darlene’s gift was to connect our search for meaning directly to the breath, the body, and the emotional resonance of song.

A month later, in March, Jim McElroy taught the Welcoming Prayer. This practice takes centering prayer’s fundamental step of consenting to God’s presence and action within us and creates a way to express that consent through our physical and emotional reactions to events and occurrences of daily life. My take on the Welcoming Prayer, which is new to me, is that it is a challenging practice, but that it may offer a needed step forward toward experiencing contemplative awareness as a fulltime way of being. In the final workshop in early April, with Easter approaching, Beth O’Brien explored the story of Mary Magdalene’s

pure presence and devotion throughout the passion of Christ – bringing out the lesson that conscious love can be a transforming force in our own lives, as well. Her teaching connected wisdom directly to the gospel in a very compelling way.

We *Living Wisdom* participants have experienced four wonderful teachers, offering four clear windows into particular facets of the wisdom tradition. During these few months, I felt that a cohesive feeling took hold and deepened among us – the feeling of being on a unique spiritual journey together. At the end of the last session, I know there were others who felt, as I did, that they didn't want the journey to end.

So, for me at least, the new program proved to be a meaningful and enriching experience, perhaps more so than we could have anticipated at the start. If you would like to learn more about the wisdom tradition, you can start by following this link to [*A Very Short Course in Wisdom*](#).