



LCG Newsletter

Fall & Winter 2011

Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

Welcome to the LCG newsletter!

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide the most current information from our local community leaders, area coordinators, members, and friends.

If you wish to submit to the newsletter, you can send your piece at any time to jhvandermey@aol.com. You might find it convenient to appoint someone within your group or region to keep a notebook for news and other related events that would be suitable for the newsletter.

There is really not a set time for the publication of the newsletter, but if there is enough information forwarded, I can create one as we gather submissions.

Supporting the LCG

We request your annual support check to LCG. While the majority of our LCG efforts are to enhance our relationship with God - and to this end place great emphasis on contemplation, meditation and reading of sacred works - another piece of our dedication and devotion as lay Cistercians is our financial support of LCG.

LCG financial needs are modest, but contributions from members and friends enable us to support and enhance our effectiveness and devotion to the Cistercian charism. Donations are graciously accepted and appreciated. Please take a moment now to write your check payable to:

Lay Cistercians of Gethsemani Abbey

Please send it to:

Robert V. Johnson, Treasurer, LCG
5648 S. Dorchester Avenue
Chicago, IL 60637-1751

On behalf of the LCG we thank you,

Bob Johnson

Coordinator's Corner

Distractions

Recently a member wrote to inquire about a seeming increase in LCG meetings, communications, travel, and other elements which so dominate our lives as laypersons. The writer is wise and alert to the presence of distractions—indeed, a reason why I and many gather at Gethsemani and are active in LCG is to avoid or minimize distractions of the world.

A facile reply would admit the truth in her observation but rationalize and justify that such elements are the indicia of a thriving and active lay community. Indeed our email list of nearly 300, eight local communities most of which with increasing membership (increasing, I may add, not only in number but in depth of devotion to the Cistercian charism), a leadership council meeting more frequently with active committees including one seeking to fashion a consistent formation Guide for LCG candidates, offering additional support for continuing Member formation, and to assist and work with lay Cistercians around the world who, like we in LCG, sense a rich opportunity for conversion and nourishment as we better learn and live the Cistercian charism. All to the good, my writer may reply. But aren't these the distractions of the world which many seek to displace?

Here I am called to some soul-searching. (Or is it dithering: yes and no.) Yet, I consider the words at Gethsemani: *Ora et labora*. Might we laypeople gain some insight by less separation of these two elements and consider them as two sides of the same coin? Or, perhaps, "work as prayer?"

Our Chicago community recently began reading the first four chapters of Martin Laird's new book *A Sunlit Absence* (an excellent book, by the way.)

Laird views our lives existing and surrounded and infused with God's love. Laird suggests we, in reality, are porous as we live amid this grace. Not unlike the sponge in the sea through which and in which the nourishing water ever flows.

How does this help answer my writer's insistent inquiry? Perhaps by acting and living amid those seeming "nuts and bolts" distractions but not letting them distract from awareness of the ever-presence of God's love. A simple reply might be that our world includes both our contemplation and the distractions; Laird even suggests the silence includes and embraces the noise. On my better days, the seeming distractions are engulfed and subsumed by awareness of my living amid God's abundant and ever immersive love. Not apart but one.

I admit it is easier than taking out the garbage or dealing with a burst bathroom drainpipe when some of the "nuts and bolts" include LCG and efforts to consider an agenda for our Council meeting, discuss ways to enhance our nourishment as lay Cistercians, travel to a Council meeting, or work with our trusty Editor to gather materials for this Newsletter. But, isn't that a clue: our seeming distractions become less demanding and invasive when, like a sponge in the ocean, we become aware and live amid the surrounding flow and vastness of God's love?

Thank you,

Bob Johnson



LCG Local Community Reports

Chicago Local Community

At each meeting we continue to balance devotion to and exploration of Cistercian history with application to our lives. It is a struggle for members and friends to regularly attend all meetings but we all strive to achieve a greater sense of LCG stability and discipline. We continue to be blessed by meeting at a Franciscan monastery in Chicago loop where we attend noon Mass, eat a quick sandwich, and meet as a community for another three hours.

Recently we became acquainted with Cistercian saint Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) and were inspired using Basil Pennington's book of edited works: *The Way of Friendship*. Pennington's edition neatly bridged some turgid writing yet well captured Aelred's sense-filled style. Last week we completed the first half of Martin Laird's new book *A Sunlit Absence* and it is a real "keeper" to assist us to better engage in the contemplative life. Perhaps better to devote each meeting to only one chapter—but we all know, there is much to learn.

As always, however, we devote nearly one hour at each meeting for lectio—a member-selected piece is read aloud, ten minutes given to silent meditation, then individual response to a particular word or passage; read aloud again followed by additional silent meditation and sharing. We spend some brief time on community and LCG business, self-review and sharing, and close our meeting by bonding with the Gethsemani monks using the form used that day at Gethsemani for the liturgical hour of None.

Kentucky Local Community

The KY Saturday Group is currently studying *Spiritual Friendship* by Aelred of Riveaulx. They have two new people, and Bill Doyle has taken over the formation.

The KY Sunday Group is currently reading and discussing Martin Laird's *Into the Silent Land*.

Greater Cincinnati Local Community

This year our community continues to focus deeper on the elements of the LCG Plan of Life during our community formation days. Our group reflection has given us more insight and deepens our sense of community and commitment in living the Cistercian charism. The community is increasing in size. We now have six candidates in the two year discernment period. During our Fall Day of Prayer on Saturday, October 8, we welcomed Kim Gibbons and Nancy Feverston as candidates for our community with a special blessing prayer. We have finalized our 2012 schedule of community meetings and events. The Monastery of St. Clare will be the site for our days of prayer. The Mercy Center at Winton Woods will be our meeting place for community formation days.

Indiana Local Community

Indiana's annual LCG retreat will be held in October at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church, focusing on the theme of "Letting Go". It will be a day for quiet, solitude and prayer. It will also be a time for reflecting on what is keeping me from a closer relationship with God. We also come together for fellowship and reaffirmation of our promise to God.

Northeast Local Community

The Northeast Community has been reading the Exordium. We have had wonderful discussions about the early life of the Trappists, and the deep sense of Spirit they must have had. The Exordium has led us into deep discussions over the importance of silence, meditation, prayer, and trust in God.

We also held a picnic in August at the Sacred Heart Villa in Reading, PA. Sacred Heart Villa is also the location of the mother house of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The day we visited was also the anniversary of the martyrdom in 1904 of 5 Sisters and a Trappist monk. Our group joined with the sisters and visitors and were recognized at the Eucharistic celebration. The Sisters were thrilled that our LCG group could be present to share in this memorial celebration. Their hospitality was overwhelming.

Columbus, OH area Local Community

Each month our group meets at the home of Mary Guilbert in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, which is a suburb of Columbus. Our meeting day is the second Saturday of the month at 10:30 a.m. The number of attendees varies, but generally the number ranges from 10 to 15, though there have been occasions when there were more. I began attending four years ago and have assumed the role of "scribe" for our meetings. This consists of writing down the prayer requests of those gathered, along with other information deemed pertinent, and later on in the week organizing and typing it all out. Afterward I send it to Mary who distributes it to the other group members. We agree that this enables us to remember each others needs, throughout the month of separation, during our personal prayer time.

For years we began our gatherings with ten minutes of Centering Prayer, but recently we have altered this practice. We have been reciting Vigils instead, alternating from one side of the circle to the other...modeling our prayer according to the way the monks pray at Gethsemani. There is enthusiasm for reading The Hours and so we plan to adhere to this prayer form for the time being, as the change seems spiritually edifying.

We continue to study The Cistercian Way by Louf, but also supplement readings from other sources. During October's meeting we read a handout containing writings from The Desert Fathers. We had a lengthy and fruitful discussion about a particular line.....it was, "the desert fathers knew that the desert was a place to come to fight with daemons; but those daemons are at their most powerful when they are in accord with our own will." There were many takes on what that is supposed to mean. In general, we tended to agree that it means you are probably better off not to get to comfortable.

Many times Larry Charles, one of our members reads and teaches a chapter of the Rule and opens it up for group discussion. It is all of our goals to reap the rewards of belonging to this Lay Cistercian Group. By learning and living the Wisdom offered in The Rule, we are trying to see past The World, which of course, is always right there. But also to embrace the mystery of our need to love and live in the world. With God's help, we will someday see His face. Pray for us as we will you.

- Jerry Felty



“Ora et labora.”

— St. Benedict of Nursia



Thoughts, writings, and “creatives”

A MOTHER'S EYES

Lyric: Randy Cox

Music: Regi Stone

Alone among the crowds and jeers
The shouting lies and mournful tears
Alone among these dying men
How far she's come from Bethlehem
The cries of pain remind her when
The cries were hers and life began
Too short the time, some thirty years
What started there is finished here
Mary's saddened, tearful eyes
Look for hope where hope's disguised
In ravaged, dying form on wood
a Mother's son who bleeds her blood
The broken body, taken down
An laid upon that holy ground
She takes his head into her hands
And knows this is what love demands
Alone among the few who stay
Alone in mem'ries swept away
Her eyes now turn to what will be
When Jesus, son alive she sees

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE A CISTERCAIN VOCATION IN THE WORLD?

By Larry Wilson (Midland MI local community)

"It means I live a life of prayer (my office) dispersed throughout the day, every day, as best I can. It is what I am! I live in a monastery. It is my home, family, friends, community and parish. These are my brother and sister monks. We live together; we work together to create this place I call home. My stability is to stay here with them all, when I am happy and when everything inside me says, "Run from this place." I stay, I work, I pray. "God Alone". I must seek out God in solitude somewhere. I find places of quiet and silence where I can. Sometimes strange places where I can speak and most of all "listen" to Him. My monastery can be a noisy place and I must find quiet and solitude, if not in a place, I must find it in

my heart. I live a simpler life every day, to be more free, to be me.

The Cistercians live by the bells calling them to prayer....to life...I, too, as a lay Cistercian live by those same bells that ring, just as loud, in my own heart as they ring at Gethsemane...calling me to prayer... and life right here where I am...In the world.



The following are two journal entries from Bill Fahrenkrug (Wild Rose, Wisconsin)

Self-Image

Do we every really know who we are? Many spiritual writers talk about the importance of being aware of our perceptions of our self, of others, and of the world we have our being in. This is even more important when one intentionally sets out on the spiritual quest for an authentic meaning, purpose and goal for one's existence. It's not only important to be aware of this, but one needs to realize that it is dangerous in that self-images do not like to be exposed. One will rationalize and thus distort the truth of one's real self, and this is a real seedbed for trouble, especially for others who come in contact with that false-self. We don't like the truth and will do all sorts of things to keep the truth at bay. It is most dangerous when one follows methods and techniques of the spiritual journey but does not really accept the truth of what one finds at the depths of his being where real change can and must take place. The real truth is in fact seen, acknowledged and accepted on the surface.....the image one has put much time and effort into creating; the image that society has helped create and which consequently reinforces with titles, rewards and a sense of self-worth and importance and does not, as Thomas Keating says "Drop dead upon request". There may be some surface change, but when push comes to shove, the false-self will spring into action. One can only hope that he/she is not caught in the path of this false-self.

Humility & Humor

Humility, honesty and a good sense of humor are some of the necessary ingredients of a healthy authentic contemplative spirituality! When one begins to think and feel as though he/she is "almost there" on the journey to

God, love, compassion, forgiveness etc. and suddenly catches a reflection of that self in the mirror of reality, and if one has just one authentic bone in his/her body, an unrepressed roar of laughter will echo throughout the

halls of one's illusory sanctuary. One would then hear the chorus of laughter chime in from all of those spiritual seekers who have gone before and caught their reflection in the same mirror of reality. What a blessing and relief it is to have this experience! One can imagine that even God is having a good chuckle.

Thought & meditations on the Vigils non-scriptural readings

I rise very early to pray and Fr. James has been providing me with these readings for a long time now. It is often the non-scriptural readings that bring a light of clarity to the Vigil bible reading, or to the Feast of the day. The reading for Christmas Eve is almost always "Holy Night," by Karl Rahner, S.J., and it is wonderful; it teases out the deepest meanings in ways that very few people could realize on their own. That is why the Church has appointed non-scriptural readings for Office of Readings, or Vigils, whichever approach you take to your early morning prayers. I find myself more often doing Lectio on the non-scriptural reading for it too has deep meaning. We all do Lectio on the scriptures, but these readings teach us that there is more to our heritage as Christians and/or Catholics than we suspected. How many will actually buy a book of theology written by Karl Rahner? How many of us will read the works of St. Gregory of Nazianzus? The non-scriptural readings bring to our hands the treasures of Christianity without having to do all the digging to find them.

Peace and Joy in our Redemption

Stephen Taylor

<http://www.hermitofbardstown.com>

Seeds of Life

Ordinary, 8 October 2011

When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles!"

– Mark 6.2

Questions are tricky things. They are the result of true curiosity and they invite the other person into our inner person. However, questions can also be used to keep others at a distance. There is a real regression of questioning that follows this pattern – curiosity becomes caution becomes callousness. With too many questions we can deflate the excitement and stave off the real immediacy of what is amazing among us. Read the following verses in the passage, Mark 6.1 – 6, to see the effects of continuing our questions. Pseudo-intellectual questions keep Jesus at bay; thoughts such as “are the Gospels actually eye witness accounts?” usually have the purpose of suppressing the authority of Jesus in our lives. Too many questions move us from genuine interest to rationalization.

When was the last time that we were “amazed” by Jesus? Amazement begs to be acted out, to be acted on; it is a sign of youthfulness and part of the command to make ourselves like children. When we are amazed by beautiful scenery, we gasp, we take pictures, and we point. When we see an amazing athletic or artistic performance, we clap, we stand, and we plead for an encore. Do we see so little action in our lives, so meager following of him in our words and deeds, because we have ceased to be amazed by this man who held authority and humility in perfect balance? A question acts like a door within our spiritual lives. We are either led through the door by amazement, intrigue, and curiosity, into a deeper realization of who we are in light of who is Jesus. Or, we bring ourselves into intellectual paralysis by closing the door, barring ourselves from the love and fellowship of Jesus, while continuing to ask “the next good question.” May we ask good questions, and may we have the faith to follow Jesus through the door of our questions by living into the answer.

– mcf, 8 oct 11

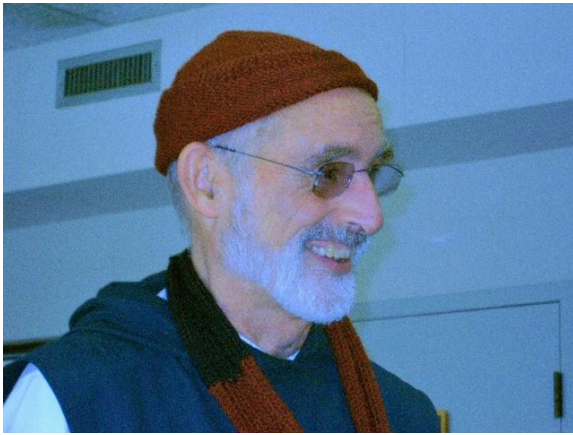


HOW BEAUTIFUL YOUR DWELLING PLACE

*Words and Music by Randy Cox &
Russell Mauldin
Arranged by Russell Mauldin*

How beautiful your dwelling place
To which we come and seek your face
And find there is no space or time
No past, no future to design
But stillness, silence, holiness
Replace, restore our nothingness
And fill it with unfailing grace
How beautiful your dwelling place
How beautiful your dwelling place
To which we bring unfinished grace
A place where your refining fire
Makes burnished hearts, your heart's desire
Until a beauty, yet unknown
Until perfected, all is clear
Through eyes and ears and joys and tears
Your image ours and ours, your own

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Personal Prayer, Poverty and Creativity *by Br. Paul Quenon*

Monks do not talk much about their personal meditation, outside of discussions with their spiritual director. Contemplation is anything but a hot topic around the chopping table in the kitchen, or on the packing line in the cheese factory. This for many reasons. It is too personal, for one; and there is little to talk about for another. Contemplation is too poor, too empty and obscure. It is mostly an entrance and abiding in the emptiness of Christ. And that largely without being aware it is Christ's emptiness. Gradually one ceases to think of it as one's own as well. The self and its sense of well-being, or lack thereof, is incidental. This unnamed emptiness attaches to no one and is not even a possession.

Here is an entry from my journal that fell off my desk onto my lap and opened to this page.

It is March 2, 2002

I wake up at 2:40 and begin saying the Jesus Prayer, and sit up in my sleeping bag and dangle my feet over the side of the porch.

It seems trite to start invoking the name of Jesus- something I do habitually, but what am I doing? Now I stop before saying the name, before I even pronounce the first letter. In my mind I stop. I need prayer that is before prayer, the prayer which is not any prayer that can be said, which leaves me with no need to say any prayer. It is too pure and brief for me to dwell on. Yet it is the very truth of any religious act.

It's of a depth of confidentiality and trust that makes repetition of prayer and the holy name superfluous. But what am I doing indeed, since nothing needs to be done? The real issue is to know God's acceptance.

In God my own name, the name which cannot be articulated in human words, is already spoken; spoken in silence, in this moonlit night in early spring weather, in this year 2002. As the coming year develops, what I do and what comes about is also the spelling out of that inarticulate name - be it only in some confused and garbled way.

The truth of my name is already spoken in the silence, where the true name of Jesus and my own name are inarticulate in the Un-nameable-the Presence that defeats all prayer before it begins.

Lord, keep me from the blasphemy of any prayer that hides and trivializes your presence. The prayer that makes itself important, that burdens and encloses the soul, that does not and cannot really know any name - but only makes words that no one listens to except myself, and does no one good, least of all myself.

You might ask at this point, what does this kind of personal prayer, deep as it is, have to do with community?

I would answer that it has nothing to do with creation of community because here there is no disunity to begin with. It is at the root of community. It is where community already exists. Where there is no distinction between my name and the name of Jesus, there is no distinction between my name and your name. We are one in Christ. This is the true home for every person, the home of us all. We are all persons created in the person of the Only Begotten; each one is an image and likeness of God in the Divine Person generated from all eternity. The unique love God has for me is unique in you. Christ reveals the unique, himself the only Son, the first born. All this is experienced in the depth of the heart when solitude sings a song for nobody. It is not my song, it is not your song, nor can it be possessed and therefore is exclusive of no one.

One of Thomas Merton's most spare and yet most suggestive poems is symbolic of this realization.

Song for Nobody

A yellow flower
(light and spirit)
sings by itself
For nobody.

A golden spirit
(light and emptiness)
sings without a word
by itself.

Let no one touch this gentle sun
In whose dark eye
someone is awake.

(No light, no gold, no name, no color
and no thought:
O, wide awake!)

A golden heaven
sings by itself
a song for nobody.

For such music God is not an object. For such music, the person is not a subject. The song hides itself in the dark center of silence, which is the womb of all creativity. Who sings? Who listens? The song already contains all hearing; all joy and sorrow and rapture are already stirred to voice in such silence. In the beginning was the Song, and the Song was with God and the Song was God. All other songs are a variation on the theme - even if the song be only a small Black-eyed Susan alongside the gravel road to Merton's hermitage.

Such is the grandeur and the poverty of interior prayer. By entering into its silence and poverty I gain detachment and the freedom that makes creativity possible. True creativity does not need an excuse. It is its own motivation. It is spontaneous. It need not win public recognition, and its aim is not success.

Perhaps one of the finest examples of this pure creativity is Emily Dickenson who shunned offers for her publication from leading writers of her time. She made her principles clear in the following words:

Publication - is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man –
Poverty - be justifying
For so foul a thing

Possibly - but We - would rather
From Our Garret go
White - unto the White Creator –
Than invest - Our Snow -

Thought belong to Him who gave it -
Then - to Him Who bear
It's corporeal illustration - sell
The Royal Air -

In the Parcel - Be the Merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace –
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price -

She requested her housekeeper to burn the poems after she died. Fortunately the woman disobeyed, and we can thank God for all these gems of originality and creative detachment. For Dickenson, poetry was a form of prayer: "Thought belongs to Him who gave it". It is grounded in the sacred and shares in the sacred.

Success is not the goal of creativity. Success can be a threat to creativity and become an end in itself. As Merton said: *If you have learned only how to be a success, your life has probably been wasted.* Creativity, as life itself, is grounded in and shares in the sacred. For that reason meditation, detached and free of ego, is a healthy training for creativity. It tones up and conditions the mind and heart: will is straightened, imagination disciplined, enthusiasm moderated. Thinking is reined in, and one gives over to the asceticism of listening, that the mind may be free, open and flexible for the truth. St. Benedict's Rule for Monasteries opens with an appeal: Listen. Perhaps it is the most important word in the Rule. Listen, obaudire, also means obey. In listening something new can emerge, something beyond my own assumptions, control and agenda. Rainer Rilke spoke of writing as an obedience to the moment, to what is given in the present. He would not find it strange if this were called a monastic approach to writing. He aspired to carry the cloister within him, although he knew he could not live in a monastery.

In listening, words are silenced that what is unspoken may emerge; emerge in a new formulation, one without cliché and preconceptions. Or perhaps the simplest of words may take on a new weight and dignity, one where language returns to the rudimentary, to primal wonder that you can speak at all. This is what Rainer Rilke suggested was "the hidden purpose of this cunning earth":

Are we, perhaps, *here* just to utter: house, bridge, fountain, gate, jug, fruit tree, window – at most: column, tower... but to *utter* them, remember, to speak in a way which the named never dreamed they could *be*?

(*Duino Elegy Ninth*, tr. William H. Gass, **Reflections on the Problems of Translation** Basic Books 1999 p.214)

Through poetic obedience you become co-creator with the world, its promptings become your poetry. Creation is taken up into a new creation, and is recreated in a form of human consciousness it does not have of its own. Any contemplative consciousness, be it of a poet or not, raises the world in a form that only the mind can give. To dwell all afternoon by a lake and be fully aware, to slow your mind to the pace of life that continually stirs, to watch the light that subtly shifts, hides and emerges- this is to bring an awareness that only you can afford. The beauty that abides there goes undetected unless you complete it in awareness.

But the wonder of it is that the exchange is mutual, you are recreated by the lake, because as Wendell Berry expressed it: "*After many years you come with no thought of these, because they themselves are your thoughts*". My mind will exist in a form that only the lake and its elusive, shifting features can afford me.

All beings exist in the mind of God, but even God's vast awareness needs your human awareness, however limited it be. Your awareness, the one you bring to the lake, gives the place its particular human beauty, one that can exist in your sensibility alone. And this in turn exists in the mind of God, as your awareness in the comprehensive awareness of God.

The form of the place, the song it sings to itself, whose song is it? Does it any longer really matter? Distinctions fall away, and the song the place sings in you is the song you sing in God and the song in God is ~never exclusive of any and is the same song sung in you. This is the grandeur of personal prayer; the poverty is that it can never be possessed.

Decades ago I put something of this into words which were inspired by an Igbo name I was given by Nigerian monks when I was at the monastery of Mt. Calvary in Anambra State. I was named Chukwuma, which means: *God Knows*. As I read this poem now, it speaks of this mutual coincidence - what I would call a circumincession, to borrow a word from the theology, the

circumincessions of the three equal persons in the Blessed Trinity. In this case it is of unequals, it is a threefold coincidence of consciousness in God, in myself and in the creative expression. A coincidence that is really quite simple, the more perfect the simpler it is. I express this in a prayer, a short one: based on my given name in Igbo: *God Knows*.

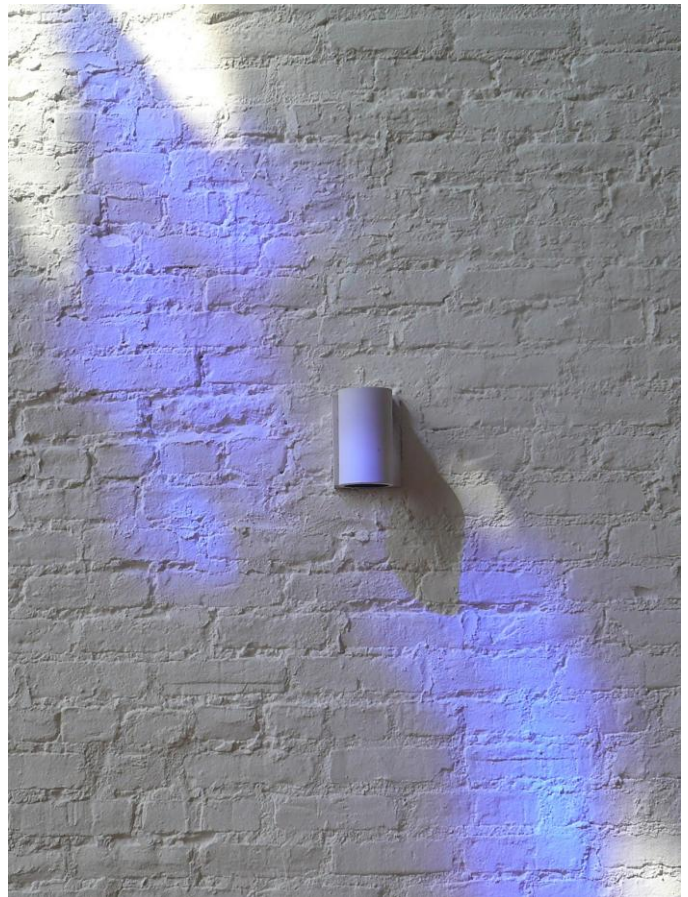
Final Vision

In your Oneness I am one
In your eye, the pupil am I
Not seen except by seeing
Unheard except by hearing

What song will be my music?
What utterance be my name?

God knowing - such may I be.
Love loving unto love.

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Editor's note: A very special thanks to my very good friend Brad Mischler for his permission to use one of his excellent photographs for the header of the newsletter. www.bwmimages.com