Chalice Companions Journal

Name _____

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My Chalice Companions Covenant[1]

Each Day I will:

Take care of my temple (body).
Pray the Lord's Prayer at noon.
Take my hurts and hopes to God in prayer.
Set aside time for silence.
Read a portion of Scripture.

Each Week I will:

Attend a worship service.
Greet someone new each Sunday.
Do an act of love: call, visit, e-mail, or contact someone I know.

Each Month I Will:

Share with my Chalice Companions.
Give intentionally and proportionally of my time, talent, and treasure.
Do some form of outreach (service beyond my family).
Try to make peace with those with whom I am not in accord.

Each Year

I will pursue some form of spiritual formation.

[1] *Adapted from St. George's Episcopal Church, Urban Abbey Rule of Life*

What is the Purpose of Chalice Companions?

To provide encouragement and support for those who yearn for a deeper, more intimate relationship with our God and thus experience a healthy, spiritual life.

What Do We Believe?

We believe that God wants to have a close relationship with all God's children.

We believe that our happiness is intimately connected to the closeness of our relationship with our God.

We believe that we must be intentional about growing this relationship or it will simply slip out of our immediate list of concerns.

We believe that by following the Rule of life, we will find a deeper, more satisfying relationship with our God.

Therefore, we come together to explore our relationship with our God and to be held accountable in intentionally following the Rule of Life

What Do I Have To Do?

Like any other discipline, you will benefit from your participation in Chalice Companions to the extent that you invest yourself in it. To get the most out of it, you will want to;

Follow the Rule of Life

Actively Participate in a Small Group

Follow-up your desire for spiritual health with daily actions

Live each day grounded in prayer

Offer encouragement and support to your fellow companions in the journey

My Chalice Companions

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What is a healthy spiritual life?

How does one know whether their spiritual life is healthy? This is a simple, and apparently straight forward question that is easily asked and nearly impossible to answer. And yet, as a foundational question, when unanswered it makes subsequent questions like, "Am I progressing I my spiritual journey?" impossible to answer as well.

This brief article is intended to help untangle the mystery surrounding the interior life of the human spirit and suggest some benchmarks for a healthy spiritual life.

Before entering the fray of the discussion I want to clarify an important issue. I am a Christian Minister. Therefore, I understand the spiritual life from my own journey in the Christian faith. However, I do believe that spirituality is a human quality and can be explored through many different ways, including Christianity. Others explore and understand their interior life through other religious traditions as well as through philosophical or even secular systems of thought and action. Spirituality is not a religious province, but a very human one that extends into the human heart and mind. Spiritual living seeks to derive meaning for and guidance of everyday living. It finds expression in the things we do and say. It provides the context for the interior dialogue with the self as well as the interior experience of the self. Therefore, I urge the reader to not assume that since I am a Christian Pastor that I believe that Spirituality must be Christian Spirituality. This article is seeking to suggest a few marks of a healthy spiritual life regardless of the particular journey or historical frame of reference.

Why write this?

Why is it necessary to write this article? There is, in my opinion, a great deal of confusion about spirituality. For many people, a healthy spiritual life is defined by how often they pray or how often they attend religious services. For others, a healthy spirit is defined by how obedient they are to a particular set of ethical guidelines. Some people define a healthy spirit as one that can quote sacred writings and whose life is shaped by those writings. Each of these perspectives distorts the spiritual life through their own lens of experience and belief. Further, they overstate, in my opinion, the role of religion in the spiritual life of an individual. Lastly, they underestimate the human capacity for self-deception.

Spirituality can be understood as the context through which the interior experience of life is processed and understood. Human beings are, by nature, self-aware. We can speak to and about ourselves in the third person. We can make ourselves into an object for understanding and exploration. In fact, we have a constant dialogue with ourselves that is complete with words, feelings, and underlying assumptions. In short, spirituality is the context in which we have a relationship with our self.

However, spirituality does not simply happen within the human mind and heart. It is also expressed in and influenced by the world beyond the self. Relationships with others help us determine our relationship with ourselves. If others who are significant to us believe we are untrustworthy, then that may influence how we view ourselves. We may take this information into our spirit and struggle to understand and incorporate it into our self-image. Or we may reject it and strive to understand why someone would say such a thing. Spirituality is influenced by and influences our relationships with others in our everyday living.

And yet, there is a third relationship that influences and is influenced by the spiritual life. This is the relationship we have with what Rudolf Otto described as that which inspires both fear and

awe. (*mysterium tremendum et fascinans)* Otto called this experience the *numinous*. It manifests itself when our thoughts and beliefs we are overwhelmed by some experience. Perhaps a sunset renders you speechless or a tragic circumstance takes your life captive. This power beyond the self may be viewed in sacred terms (divinity) or in secular terms (nature). But regardless of how we understand it, we are in a relationship with it as well. Thus our spiritual life is the context in which we experience life through our relationship with ourselves, those around us, and the power beyond ourselves.

As we seek to integrate and understand these three special relationships (self, other, and the power beyond) we engage in spiritual living. A healthy spiritual life will bring these three relationships together in ways that promotes a good quality of life.

Healthy Spiritual Living

There are four keys to a healthy spiritual life. These keys unlock healthy relationships with our selves, others, and our God. These keys are love, joy, hope, and trust.

A brief review of these four keys will provide a foundation for establishing marks of a healthy spiritual life.

Love

A healthy spiritual life in relationship with our selves, others, and our God will first of all reflect the highest expression of love. This love is the sort of caring and compassion that Jesus described in the Sermon on the Mount. It is the love that turns the other cheek to the enemy, offers his garment as well as the cloak to reconcile a broken relationship, walking the second mile with one who forces us to walk the first mile, praying for the welfare of those who would persecute you.[2] It is a love that refuses to turn their relationship with God through prayer or fasting or extend a helping hand to the poor into opportunities to impress others.[3]

This sort of love is an overriding concern for and commitment to the welfare of others, friend and foe alike. It is the sort of love described by Jesus when he said "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."[4] This sort of love places the needs and welfare of the other above the needs of the self. It seeks to reconcile broken relationships.

A healthy spiritual life will find such love a daily companion. It will constantly challenge them to care for those around them, offering themselves to others if they believe that such love will truly help the other. It is not interested in mere gestures of love.[5] Rather, the healthy spirit will seek to measure their relationships according to a love that seeks the welfare of others even at the expense of the self.

Joy

A second reflection of a healthy spirit is the individual's capacity to celebrate the gift of life regardless of our situation. This capacity for joy is best described in the beatitudes, or statements of genuine happiness. Happy are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek.[6]

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[2] Matthew 5:38-48
[3] Matthew 6:1-18
[4] John 15:13
[5] Matthew 7:6
[6] Matthew 5:3-5

Luke's gospel is even more plainspoken. Happy are those who are poor, hungry, and weeping.[7] The healthy spirit is able to find joy in life.

This sort of joy is not an empty, knee-jerk kind of joy that refuses to acknowledge evil in the world. Rather, it is an "eyes-wide-open" kind of joy that understands the situation but is able to celebrate life anyway. It is able to see the hidden treasure in the field, and it leads us to sell all that we have so that we might have it.[8] This joy understands that even though the present may not be to our liking, this is no reason to condemn all of life.

Further, the healthy spirit is able to find joy in their own acts of mercy, their single hearted love, their struggles to make peace, their persecutions and even in the words of those who speak ill of them and their faith. Joy comes to the healthy spirit as a cleansing wave. When the healthy spirit is tempted to self-pity, their sense of joy provides a fresh perspective. Joy in the healthy spirit always challenges the temptation to give up on ourselves or others. Joy is a reflection of a healthy spirit struggling with each day, just as it is.

Hope

A third reflection of a healthy spirit is hope, the ability to look forward to the future with anticipation. In common usage, hope has become a wish word. If we say we hope for such and such, we mean that it would be nice if such and such occurred but we really do not expect it. In everyday language, the word hope is more like an empty dream rather than an anticipated future. But, for the healthy spirit, hope is the ability to look forward to the future, not merely dream about it.

When I was studying sociology in undergraduate school, I learned about a phenomenon called "anticipatory socialization." This occurs when a student begins to anticipate the profession they are about to enter by taking on the mannerisms, dress, and attitudes of that profession. Future professors began smoking a pipe and wearing tweed. Future police officers grew moustaches and began to swagger when they walked. Their expected future began to influence the way they lived in the present. In short they had genuine hope of entering the profession. That hope led them to live their lives in the present in a particular way.

Persons with a healthy spiritual life have a hope that influences how they live their present lives. Their positive expectations for the future allows them to live their lives anticipating a good outcome. They trust in the outcome. They act as if the battle is already won. A healthy spirit dares to believe that the future is bright.

In times when things are going well they are able to accept the silver cloud without searching out a dark lining. When times are difficult, they have no problem seeing the silver lining of the darkened cloud. Nor is this some kind of knee-jerk cockeyed optimism that ignores the facts of life. It simply refuses to give in to despair because we cannot see a way through the darkness of the moment.

A healthy spirit dares to hope, to have an eager longing for the future because they believe that in the end, God wins.

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[7] Luke 6:20-21
[8] Matthew 13:44

Trust

As creatures we are vulnerable to all of the limitations and risks of creation. The human spirit is all to aware of this vulnerability and struggles to find happiness in the face of the dangers we face. **The healthy spirit is able to find that happiness by placing their welfare and the welfare of others in the hands of God.** The healthy spirit is able to entrust themselves and those they love to God and those whom God has offered to us.

This capacity to trust others rises out of our experience of others who have cared for us when we were unable to do so for ourselves. At first our parents taught us that we could trust. Later on, as our needs expanded beyond food and shelter we learned to trust our friends who we discovered truly cared for us. The circle of trust expanded until we discovered that not everyone lives up to the trust we place in them. When our trust is betrayed, we begin to draw back our capacity to trust.

As our Spirit grows and begins to experience the vulnerability of death itself, we begin to search for someone in whom we can invest our trust for life itself. The healthy spirit discovers that it can trust God to provide for our needs, even in the face of death itself. In the Christian tradition we hear the words of Jesus and discover one in whom we can ultimately entrust with our lives and the lives of those we care about.[9]

Marks of a Healthy Spiritual Life – a life at peace

What would be some of the indications that a person has a healthy spiritual life. I believe there are at least five marks of the healthy spirit. They are:

- ✓ Capacity to Show Compassion for Others – Love of others
- ✓ A Realistic and Accepting Sense of Self – Joy in life
- ✓ Ability to Hope in the midst of the Suffering of Self and Others – Hope and Trust amid suffering
- ✓ Demonstrates a Level of Anxiety or Satisfaction that is appropriate to the life situation – Peace with life
- ✓ Tolerance for others beliefs and opinions without compromising their values – Peace in midst of pluralism

An unhealthy spirit would carry some of these marks.

- ✓ An over-riding concern for self that results in an apathy for others
- ✓ An unrealistic view of self (negative or positive) that causes a recurring sadness in our being about who we are
- ✓ Inability to deal with the suffering of the self or others that leads to a constant cynicism about the future.
- ✓ A constant or recurring dissatisfaction with our day to day living.
- ✓ Inability to tolerate the views of others without feeling that our own ideas or beliefs are in error which leads to a sense of restlessness with own beliefs and opinions

Love vs. Apathy

Love simply represents a concern for and acting out of the welfare of the other. The polar opposite of love is apathy or a lack of concern or caring. The continuum may include:

[9] Matthew 6:25-34

Total unawareness of self and others

An awareness of self and others but lack of concern for either

A concern for self but a lack of concern for others

A concern for self and an acting in one's best interests but a lack of concern for others

A concern for self and acting in one's best interest and a concern for others

A concern for others and an acting in the best interest of the other as long as it does not conflict with acting on concern for self

Acting in the best interest of others at the expense of the best interest of the self.

Joy vs. Sadness

Joy is the capacity to celebrate one's existence. It's polar opposite is a sadness of spirit, a sense of over-riding loss or failure leading to an inability to celebrate. Points along this continuum may include:

A sadness that grows out of a lack of a sense of value or self-worth.

Sadness that grows out of a sense of failure of the self in living day to day.

A sadness that grows out of a sense of defeat by others in living day to day.

An sadness that grows out of the belief that day by day is harder than we expect it to be.

A sense of joy that celebrates life's small victories day by day.

A sense of joy that sees and celebrates one's self-growth day-by-day

A sense of joy that celebrates each and every moment as an opportunity for abundant living.

Hope/Trust vs. Cynicism

Hope/Trust is the capacity to draw strength from one's faith in times of struggle and suffering. It sees beyond the present tragic moments and is able to place oneself or another in the hands of one who has their best interest at heart. The continuum may include:

A pervasive despair that grows out of a sense of complete isolation in the midst of suffering or loss

Moments of doubt make it difficult to make decisions about the future or to trust others

Doubts about the future are a consistent source of worry

Trusting other people comes easily because one has a generally hopeful attitude about the future

A sense of hope that enables the person to continue to trust a power beyond themselves even in a time of extreme suffering or loss

Peace vs. Dissatisfaction

Peace is that capacity to align one's expectations and one's life situation. A sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction is the primary indicator of personal peace. The continuum may include:

- ✓ A constant sense of dissatisfaction and anxiety with one's day-to-day living
- ✓ Daily living feels very difficult to bear because one's expectations far exceed reality.
- ✓ Satisfaction and dissatisfaction come and go with neither dominating their life

- ✓ A general sense of satisfaction with day to day living exists because one's expectations are close to reality.
- ✓ A constant sense of satisfaction with one's day-to-day living because one has made peace with one's situation

Tolerance vs. Intolerance

Tolerance refers to the capacity to disagree with others about core beliefs without compromising one's beliefs. In short, this is the ability to agree to disagree over important beliefs. However, it also involves the ability to be open to other's points of view and maintaining the ability to change one's beliefs based on one's own internal standards. The continuum may include:

A complete lack of foundational beliefs because those beliefs are constantly changing to please others

Difficulty in describing one's foundational beliefs

See one's beliefs as right and all other systems as wrong

Ability to state one's beliefs but unable to state an opposing belief to the satisfaction of the another who holds that belief

An ability to state one's beliefs clearly to someone known to disagree with those beliefs

Moving From Dis-ease Toward a Healthy Spirit

Thus far, I have simply been striving to describe a healthy spirit. However, as interesting as description may be, it does not offer any practical ways of moving a spirit toward health. In this section I will be suggesting a few principles that enable us to move toward a healthy spirit.

Health vs. Dis-ease

The spiritual life is the inner experience of a reality beyond ourselves. This reality may cause us comfort and encouragement or it my create within us a sense of dis-ease, or discomfort. Such discomfort will lead us to strive to compensate or over-compensate in other ways. For example, the person who fears that their beliefs may be wrong, may overstate their rightness to avoid facing the inner dis-ease. They may be driven to having to convince others of the rightness of their beliefs in order to compensate for their own lack of conviction.

The extent to which we are uncomfortable or in a state of dis-ease within ourselves indicates the growing edge of our spiritual life. I am not sure that anyone ever reaches a complete healing of the spirit. Though I certainly would like to hope that it is at least a possibility. Most folks are in the continuum moving toward a sense of health or dis-ease.

Responsible Spiritual Health

Just as physical health requires that people take responsibility for how they care for their body, spiritual health also involves personal responsibility. Our daily activities and relationships affect our spiritual life. Who we choose to associate with and how we choose to spend our time has a direct and predictable result on our inner experiences of our selves. If we spend our time with people who constantly remind us of our failures then we will likely begin to see ourselves as a failure. If we associate with folks whose lifestyle reflects where we wish we could be but never will, then we are likely to feel dissatisfied with our day-to-day living. Or, if we spend our day doing things that we really do not want to do, then we will face each new day with resentment, despair and even anger.

Therefore, a responsible approach to spiritual help would involve developing relationships with people that promote our health. It involves doing those things that lead us toward the positive end of the continuums. For centuries, Christians have used the traditional spiritual disciplines (prayer, study, etc) to promote spiritual health. Other traditions have used similar activities. But, I believe the essential elements are who we choose to associate with either through direct face-to-face encounters or study and reading as well as how we spend our time. Spiritual health requires that we accept responsibility for ourselves and develop those relationships and activities that nurture and develop the marks of a healthy spirit.

Can Anyone Help, Or Am I On My Own

The nature of the spiritual life encourages a sort of personal blindness to our dis-ease and sources of our unhappiness. The human spirit is essentially near-sighted and unaware that the world beyond is out of focus. Further, the world grows out of focus so gradually that we never notice the change. Therefore, we need someone who can describe what the world does look like and show us how we can discover the full sight of a healthy spirit.

Buddhist tradition calls these people gurus. Jewish tradition calls them rabbis. In Christian tradition they are called shepherds or pastors. These are simply teachers, people who seek to share the journey toward spiritual health with us. We all need people who can show us what we cannot see in ourselves. Whether they are a formal spiritual leader or simply a friend, they provide the mirror in which we see our spirits and the world that surrounds us. They offer the encouragement to help us accept responsibility for our own spiritual health. They provide the point of accountability that enables us to continue down a road that may be uncomfortable or unfamiliar. Spiritual companions are essential for developing a healthy spiritual life.

What Should I Expect As I Move Toward Spiritual Health?

The journey toward spiritual health is not always easy or comfortable. Sometimes it requires that we face uncomfortable truths about ourselves and the world around us. Most likely it will require that we critically examine our core beliefs and make changes in them. A journey toward spiritual health may cost us some long standing relationships and alter the future as we have envisioned it. In short, a journey toward spiritual health is not an easy stroll into new life.

The Benefits of a Healthy Spiritual Life

The short answer to the question, “What is the benefit of a Healthy Spiritual Life?” is simply, happiness. By this I do not mean a general giddiness or a constant smile. This type of happiness is more akin to the scientific use of the word than the more common usage.

In high school chemistry, I learned that all atoms have their own level of happiness or stability. Some elements are more stable (happy) than others. It seems that because of the number of electrons circling the nucleus, some will seek to steal electrons from nearby atoms while others atoms are more likely to give up electrons. Once an atom acquires or loses a sufficient number of atoms, it becomes stable, or happy. It neither wants to acquire nor give up any of its electrons. It is happy.

I believe that spiritual health enables us to find a place of happiness, satisfaction, fulfillment with our life. Earlier I defined spirituality as the inner experience of a power beyond ourselves. Spiritual health could then be described as experiencing a sense of completeness, fulfillment and satisfaction with the power beyond ourselves.

Spiritual Health will enable us to give and receive love in new ways. It will create within us a deep inner joy that celebrates day-to-day living. It offers us a lasting hope that enable us to live with anticipation rather than fear and dread. It offers the human spirit a deep reservoir of peace that grows out of a trust of the creator of life. In short, a healthy spirit will make possible the blessedness, the happiness described in Matthew 5:3-11.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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