

Awareness of God's Presence is Fundamental to True Self

"Spiritual apartheid is very dangerous for our spiritual health for it tends to limit spirituality; restricting it to certain "holy" places and "sacred" times."

— William Shannon, *Silence on Fire*

As Shannon would then have us believe, being in the presence of God is no problem for us at all since it is not something we have to achieve. We are, because God is; we are in the presence of God simply because God's presence is the fundamental condition for any form of life to exist, for this world to exist.

Our problem is in being aware of that presence of God in all things, at all times. As Shannon also emphasizes:

"Awareness of God, at its deepest level, is not so much something we do, but something we are."

This awareness is not just something we think about, calling to mind periodically, as we must do at times. This sense of awareness of the presence of God is that which firmly **unites us with God**. Practicing the presence of God as prayer and a form of spirituality should move us into this awareness more and more.

But where? And when? And how is this to take place?

These questions are all answered when we begin to allow ourselves the true gift received from our practices and prayers — greater awareness of the intimacy shared with us by God. Begin to realize that our awareness is not so much in our doing as it is in our being.

"It means communion, oneness. In fact, in a deep experience of attentive awareness, the subject-object dichotomy disappears. I am not aware of something. I am simply aware."

The where, when, and how questions are answered in our cognizance of God in all things at all times — in our belief that "God Is." In our understanding that the question truly is "Who am I?" in union with God and with all of creation. But first, let us consider the understanding of awareness as posed by Shannon.

Shannon suggests there exist three levels of awareness. It is important that we consider these if we are to come to a grasp future study which will lead us consider our "True Self."



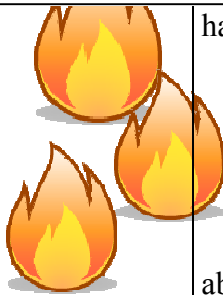
Ontological Awareness, also seen as **unconscious awareness**, is, as simply stated as possible, built into us. It is part of being a creature. It is required. We cannot live without it. Thomas Merton has referred to this reality in us as "The Hidden Ground of Love."

It basically says, that if we truly understand ourselves, we are nothing without God. The deep ontological awareness is that which

GOD FIRST

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The Prayer of Awareness



has driven humankind from its conception to seek an understanding of God, the higher power, whatever God has been called since before civilization took form.

Unfortunately, as Shannon says, few of us delve into this unconscious level of our being.

Because of this, God remains something thought about, something spoken, rather than in deep personal union with us. This is the contemplative dimension of our lives where our own words and thoughts are of no value. God speaks, and we listen.

Because of our inability to delve into union with God at this level, we as individuals, often find it a struggle, or an impossibility to grow in union with God through a communal sharing and identity with God at the center. But this awareness is essential for us if we are to grasp our true identity, the "True Self."

Conscious Awareness also seen as attentive awareness, is our "coming alive" or "waking up" to the fundamental reality found in the unconscious awareness discussed above. It is learning to silence ourselves so God can speak. It is emptying ourselves so that nothing else interferes with God's plan or God's word.

In various ways we have discussed this in past issues since September. Brother Lawrence brought us to such an awareness in his own teachings, albeit, in a

distinctly different teaching.

Ours at this time is to free ourselves from the “false self” identified with what is seen, how we are perceived, what we own, our position in life, etc., etc. Our “True Self” can only be seen when it is first seen rooted in the “Hidden Ground of Love” — in union with God.



This is always gift. Contrary to what some would teach, it is a gift that can be received by every person at one time or another. Growing in awareness of our “being” and God “being” moves us to greater openness to the God who is rather than the God we have created.

What we learned early on in our practice of the awareness of the presence of God was basic to our growing in understanding God and of our union with God. The simple phrases to help in bringing us to a more constant awareness, “*Praise be to you, Lord,*” “*Glory and honor to you, O God,*” “*Thank you, O Lord God*” were tools to help us move into this unconscious thinking, in our preparing for an almost unconscious meeting with God. This is a God whose likeness we have not carved or painted in our minds or in the world for others to see. It is a God who is experienced, whose presence goes beyond definition. The “True Self” will ultimately be found experiencing God as God is truly meant to be realized. My “True Self” is found in perfected union in and with and through Jesus Christ.

So, as unworthy as we may be, when we direct our efforts at developing this awareness of God, while never earned, is given as God chooses, when God chooses. Alertness to these times of giftedness needs to be developed as we cannot choose the time or length of these experiences of unity. One second will seem like a very long time and provide more peace than a thousand seconds doing what we like to do best of all. When they do occur, and we are aware of their deep union, they become for us later moments of prayer. Prayer leads to prayer; awareness to greater desire; and greater desire to greater union. This is the basic prayer of awareness.

General Awareness is where most of us can be found in our prayer and in our union with God. This awareness as Shannon says, “...flows from our prayer

and becomes an element of the way we live our lives.” We go about our daily chores and duties, but with a greater sense of God’s presence with us at all times. It is a thoughtful response to God, which is prayer.

These are those practices we developed early on and spoken about previously. They help us be present to God as God is to us — not in a particular place or time — but in “being”, existing, in oneness.

It is through these practices, growing prayerful experiences, and deliberate desire, we find our lives become more and more prayer, us more and more joyful, or joy-filled. Our responses to life and the many situations faced, become responses that God would provide rather than ourselves. These awaken within us that same presence of God that has always existed.

Shannon suggests the following prayer that may become a mantra, a phrase which can be repeated over and over during the course of the day.

“Help me live in Your Presence.”

He reminds us that the word “live” is important. We might want to say, “be”, which would be terribly wrong since we are always in his presence.

God’s presence is always with us, since God is forever and always with us. We must choose to live in union with God, be aware of God always and in all ways. This is the fundamental choice of faith and life.

