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**Finding the Key -  
The Practice of Consent  
on the Path of Transformation**

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**FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT**



**FINDING THE KEY:  
THE PRACTICE OF CONSENT  
ON THE  
PATH OF TRANSFORMATION**

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## **Introduction**

There are myriad facets to consent. Today we can explore but a few. Join me on this journey of inquiry. We will cover ground that you already know, but I hope that we will also traverse some as yet undiscovered terrain.

## **Transformation**

A short introductory word on transformation. To be transformed is to be changed, to become something or someone new. Transformation is therefore about rebirth, recreation and renewal. The idea of transformation is therefore inherently hopeful. It implies that change can happen. That we can have a say in what directions transformation can take, is also therefore extremely empowering. In many ways, the mere possibility of transformation is a cause for celebration. Change becomes a friend, not a foe; the future full of opportunities, not something to be feared.

## **Of Keys and Consent**

'Keys' are a universal symbol for the idea of opening and unlocking – whether of doors, treasure chests or hearts.

'Consent' is usually defined either as: 'permission for something to happen or agreement to do something' (as a noun); or (as a verb) to 'give permission for something to happen'. Synonyms for consent typically include phrases such as: to agree to, to assent to, to allow, to approve.

The etymology of consent is interesting. It comes from the Latin 'con' (together) and 'sentire' (feel); forming, 'consentire' – hence 'to feel together'.

This etymological insight of consent as 'coming together' gives us, for our purposes today, an excellent entry point into the exploration of our topic: 'Finding the Key – The Practice of Consent on the Path of Transformation'.

## **Consent as Union**

Consent as a key to transformation involves coming together, uniting as one; and doing so not just at cognitive levels, but most importantly also at all levels including felt-sense levels of being. To truly consent to someone, is not merely to agree, it is really to join together, to unite in a common cause.

Yes, consent requires agreement, which involves acts of volition – the affirmative movement of both intention and will; as well as understanding - the cognitive function, if it is to be freely and fully given; but it also involves much, much more. True consent, for our purposes, is 'heart-felt' connection. Indeed, it is ultimately a 'union of hearts' – a coming together as one. A lived sense of Oneness.

## **One Flesh**

In Genesis (2:24), when it is said that 'a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to (hold fast to) his wife (and be joined to his wife), and they shall become one flesh', this is the ultimate metaphor of consent. So central is this motif of union and consent, that the Genesis text is repeated and adopted by Jesus (in the Gospels of Matthew, 19:5 and Mark, 10:7) and by Paul (in his letter to the Ephesians, 5:31). Of course, today these texts would be considered politically incorrect and gender biased! A more enlightened and modern reading would be: 'a man and woman (or even more liberal – 'two persons') shall leave their families and be joined to each other, and they shall become one'. 'One flesh', is a profound symbol of consent as union, that honours all aspects of being.

Consent is the key to Transformation, because at its centre is the unity of body, mind, heart and spirit, joined together for a common purpose. Cognition, volition, emotion and spirit, aligned, between and among beings, in furtherance of a common goal.

'Yes' is therefore not just a state of mind or an act of will; 'yes', is movement of both will and heart and a union of body and spirit.

When we say that we are consenting to the presence and action of God within and among us – what we are really agreeing to is a union, a unity of flesh and spirit, of intent and action, of self and Divine – aligned in fulfillment of Goodness (God-ness).

### **Sr. Paul and the Practice of Consent**

On Sunday October 14<sup>th</sup> 2012, at 11:05am Sr. Paul sent me an email, which included the following statements (which I have redacted somewhat):

“My Dear Peter,

I have given as my departure year 2015. I might be here until 2020 and beyond – who knows? But within the confines of 2015 there are some things I think I need to do and to pass on to others.

...

We also need to think in terms of a meeting of the Vision Circle. This Circle will need to be forged into some sense of unity, to have a clear understanding of the past and a shared vision for the future.

...

Many questions that do not need immediate answers. Today is Sabbath, a day of rest. Let them be until there is time and energy.

Love, blessings and gratitude.

Srpaul.”

Was it that Sr. Paul knew intuitively in 2012 that her ‘departure year’ would be 2015? Which for all intents and purposes it was. If so, how she lived those last three years of her life are most significant, because she would have lived them in the awareness of her impending passing from this world.

As between the two of us, one of the things that we discussed over and over again in those last three years, was the insight that the practice of consent was not just part of the method

of centering prayer, but really and truly, it was a way of living a fully human and transformative life.

I believe that the central key to Sr. Paul's life of transformation, was the practice of consent. And that, that consent was fundamentally the consent to life as it unfolded from moment to moment, including 'in the ordinary and everyday experiences of life'. (Glimpses, p. 39)

### **Consent and Centering Prayer**

As you are all aware, the four core instructions for the practice of centering prayer are:

1. Choose a sacred word (or gaze, or the breath) as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's Presence and Action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's Presence and Action within.
3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to your sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

The ontological basis for the prayer is the Divine Indwelling. As Fr. Keating explains:

"The grace of Pentecost affirms that the risen Jesus is among us as the glorified Christ. Christ lives in each of us as the Enlightened One, present everywhere and at all times. He is the living Master who continuously sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and to bear witness to His resurrection by empowering us to experience and manifest the fruits of the Spirit and the Beatitudes both in prayer and action."

Fr. Keating explains further, in relation to the sacred word/gaze/breath: “The sacred word (gaze/breath) expresses our intention to be in God’s presence and to yield to the divine action.”

Consent is thus, in Fr. Keating’s understanding, linked to both intention and yielding during prayer.

However, Sr’s insight went further. Through our explorations, drawing on the Scriptures and our lived experiences, consent to God’s presence and action was not to be limited to only formal periods of prayer, or only to the Divine Presence within the individual per se. Consent to God’s Presence and Action was a Way of Being and of Living as one comes into relationship with others and the world. And, it is so for both individuals and for communities.

### **God Within or Among?**

The Gospel of Luke ascribes to Jesus the following statement: ‘... the kingdom of God is in your midst’ (Lk. 17:21). Some translations say ‘within you’, others say ‘among you’. Textually, the Greek word being translated is ‘entos’ – a Greek preposition, which has entered the English language as the prefix, ‘ento –’ or ‘endo –’, meaning ‘within’ or ‘inner’ or ‘inside’(eg. ‘endoderm’ – the inner layer of skin). Yet some translations still prefer to use ‘among’, or ‘in the midst of’. How can we reconcile this? Does it make a difference?

In Ezekiel 36:26-28, we are told that the LORD said to the People of Israel:

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh ...

And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them.

And you shall dwell in the Land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people and I will be your God.”

This dilemma of ‘within’ or ‘among’, is easily resolved by a contextual understanding of the words used. In the Old Testament, for the Israelites, ‘you’, as in ‘I will put my spirit within YOU’, does not really or exclusively refer to the individual, but to the collective – to the community of the faithful, to the People of Israel. Thus the idea, and more importantly the experience, of God Within, has never been limited to being exclusively within the individual per se. Indeed, in Genesis (Ch. 3: 8-10) God is portrayed as ‘walking in the garden’ (of Eden) in the ‘cool of the evening’. That is, being in the midst of and among Creation. We do well to remind ourselves that our preoccupation with the individual is a particularly modern phenomenon. For earlier generations the community was paramount.

In the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 17:20), the line that precedes ‘the kingdom of God is within/among you’, says: “The Kingdom of God shall not come with observation: they shall not say ‘look here’, or ‘look there’, for behold, the kingdom of God is within (‘entos’) you’.

Thus the use of ‘within’ is used textually in relation to ‘without’ as external observable phenomena. Within does not mean only within an individual. ‘You’ includes the community. Within therefore includes ‘among’ or ‘in the midst of’ – as on the day of Pentecost. That is, whenever a community is gathered in God’s Presence and seeking God’s action. Hence Jesus says: ‘where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Mt. 18:20). This understanding has important implications for the practice of consent as a path of transformation, as I hope we all shall soon appreciate.

### **Reality is Relational**

What is at stake here is the key insight of contemporary psychologists and of eternal spirituality that Reality is Relational.

Psychologists have been studying what they call the 'we-space' of relationships for several decades. Their conclusions point to the insight that we are inherently relational beings. Reality is relational. Further, and building on this insight, psychologists have found that good relationships are the most essential feature of our happiness and flourishing. An insight that all of us can come to with a little bit of introspection!

Thus, psychologists have concluded that humans are intrinsically relational; on this they concur with the natural scientists, who have for a long time understood the deeply relational nature of all living systems. To be human is to be a part of a living, evolving, changing and dynamic eco system, where all is One.

Sr. Paul has expressed the same insight as follows:

"Life is a web of relationships and at the heart, the centre, we connect. It is in this centre of connectedness that we ourselves find our true life, our vitality, and the energy to live and to die. What is this connectivity? It is the connectivity of love, which is also the connectivity of life." (Glimpses, p. 7)

"Connection is what we need to wake up to. We live as if we are separate beings, separate from each other and all others, separate from creation and the cosmos. This is a lie; an illusion that we believe is real. We are a web of interconnection. Reality is a web of interconnection." (Glimpses, p. 7)

"We are all called to live out of this reality of interconnection, if we are to live out of truth. ... In this is the mystery of life, that all is One! This we must discover and live out of, the Oneness of all creation, the inter-connectedness of all life." (Glimpses, p. 8)

### **Consent as Consenting to Life**

To speak of 'within' and 'in the midst of', is to point to a reality beyond the superficial, to a deeper reality at the core or heart of our beings – both individually and collectively.

Indeed, it is to point to a reality at the centre and circumference of all creation: “In God we live and move and have our very existence” (Acts 17:28).

Thus consenting to the Divine Indwelling, includes the Divine within both the individual and the community, and as well in all of Creation; and really points to the deepest, truest core of our beings (again, individually and collectively) and of all Creation. We can come into God’s presence as individuals and as a community. We can come into God’s presence in the midst of creation. And therefore, there is a group discernment of God’s will that must be held in tension with individual insights that come to us while on our own. Consenting to God’s Presence and Action is in part a community activity. We must also seek for God’s Will, together. Transformation is never only about the individual; it has always included the entire society.

Thus, to rephrase Fr. Keating: Our consent is our intention and choice to live in and out of God’s presence, present everywhere and at all times, and to align our lives with the Divine impulses, moment to moment, discerned both individually and collectively, for the good of all.

In this way, we fulfill the apostle Paul’s instruction to the Romans (Rom. 12:1): “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, ... to offer your lives as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship”.

This then is at the heart of consent – the living of life aligned with the Divine Will. And notice that the apostle Paul explains in the very next verse, that the consequence of this life of consent is transformation: ‘ ... be transformed by the reviewing of your minds’ (Rom 12:2). Which for Paul is simply alignment with the Will of God: ‘Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will’ (Rom. 12:2). Is this not the free choice that Jesus made in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mt. 26:39): “Going a little farther, he fell with his face on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.’”? Thus consent is sacrificial,

because we surrender our wills so as to do God's will; and it is holy, because in our sacrifice we become One with God; finally it is pleasing, because through this sacrificial alignment, we become transformed into the likeness of the Divine, we become the 'Glory of God'.

Furthermore, by making consent to God's will a way of being and doing, a way of living, we also fulfill the apostle Paul's injunction to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5: 16-18), to pray continuously:

'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'

How do we 'pray continually'? Not so much by extending our periods of centering prayer for hours on end, but by learning to consent, moment by moment, both as individuals and as communities, to God's Presence and to the Divine Impulses that are always present at the deepest and truest centres of our beings – within us.

Little wonder Sr. Paul says to us:

'And also learn to find the Spirit within and how to consent to its presence and impulses.' (Glimpses, p 21)

This task of discovery and of choice, is at the heart of both consent and transformation. It is the work that we are invited to do on this path of transformation that we have chosen to walk.

### **Consent and Transformation**

Sr. Paul seems to be lovingly and invitationally pleading with us, when she says:

'I want to tell you that there is a depth of happiness, of freedom, of fulfillment and of joy that is available to you in this life, if you can choose to consent to the process of transformation'. (Glimpses, p. 25)

Clearly for Sr. Paul, consent was both the essential key to transformation and at the heart of living a life of joy, happiness and fulfillment.

Developmentally we can say that consent means: 'let go and let grow'. Sr. Paul has explained the essence of this process as follows:

'It is this process of conscious self-emptying that is at the heart of transformation into love. This is how we consent to the presence and action of the Divine and follow the lead of Spirit in our lives.' (Glimpses, p. 38)

Using the metaphor of death, Sr. Paul explains further:

"What we need to learn, is how to die throughout our lives, so that we can truly live. Learning to discover and accept our truths including our lies and then let go of it all and open ourselves to Spirit so that we can evolve in new directions and embrace new levels of being, helps in this process of dying into new life." (Glimpses, p. 38)

Notice that this letting go in order to grow, is a letting go to something specific – to the lead of Spirit in our lives. Transformation is thus the consequence of the Union of Consent.

### **A Process**

Consent and transformation are therefore a process. How do we engage this process? How do we discover and live out of our truest centre? How do we consent to the Ground of Being, to Life itself?

Sr. Paul counsels us as follows:

"Find and inhabit the spaciousness within yourself. Do not be afraid to do so. When you let go of everything, the emptiness, the nothingness we so fear opens into a fullness that can only be known through experiencing it." (Glimpses, p. 35)

Even in this context, Sr. Paul reminds us about the relationality of being, and of the Divine among us:

“Let there also be spaciousness between you. Space to be. Space to allow the other to be. In this way there are centres of spaciousness within and among us, centres where the Spirit is free to move. It is out of these centres of spaciousness that we must live. These are the centres of true life and healing. Find and know them for yourself.” (Glimpses, p. 35)

### **Fear is Our Greatest Block**

Letting go is at the heart of this process of consent as a path of transformation. Fear is our greatest block. Courage is necessary. Faith is essential. As Sr. Paul explains:

“As we come to empty ourselves and open to pure mystery, we discover a centre that is rooted in God. To find our way there takes courage and a willingness to let go of all that we hold dear, of all that we value, of all that we know. What makes this letting go so difficult is the surrender to the unknown. It is a leap of faith” (Glimpses, p. 33)

### **A Hopi Elder Speaks (2012)**

The word ‘Hopi’ means ‘One who follows the path’. The Hopi Indians have for centuries been considered as a visionary and prophetic community. In 2012 an esteemed Hopi Elder, intuiting the future in metaphoric idiom, was recorded as sharing the following revelation:

“Then he clasped his hands together, smiled, and said, “This could be a good time!’

‘There is a river flowing now very fast. It is so great and swift that there are those who will be afraid. They will try to hold on to the shore. They will feel they are torn apart and will suffer greatly.’

‘Know that the river has its destination. The elders say we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water.’

‘And, I say, see who is in there with you and celebrate. At this time, we are to take nothing personally, least of all ourselves. For the moment that we do, our spiritual growth and journey comes to a halt.’

‘The time for the lone wolf is over. Gather yourselves! Banish the word struggle from your attitude and vocabulary. All that we do now must be done in a sacred manner and in celebration.’

‘We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.’”

### **Racing Clothes Pin Boats**

As young boys, living in Vista Bella (‘Beautiful View’), on the western coastline of Trinidad, we used to race wooden ‘clothes pin boats’ along a large drain that ran into the Gulf of Paria. It was our ‘little river’!

We would launch our ‘boats’ into the drain, hundreds of yards from their destination, run alongside them with sticks in our hands to push them away from the sides of the drain, where they could get stuck. The centre of the drain is where the water was the deepest and ran the fastest. It was where we wanted our boats to be, as we raced for glory. You see, the sides of the drain with their mossy tentacles were where the water flowed more slowly and often times stagnated in circular eddies. Staying on the sides simply slowed down progress in our frenetic journeys towards our goal.

In the centre the water was free; it ran swiftly, sometimes too swiftly even for little, barefooted boys with fearless abandon. Boats could quickly become out of control and disappear out of sight. Many chose the ‘in-between’ waters, the ‘safe’ places. Always

however, it was those who had the courage to push off from the sides and race their boats in the centre of the rapidly flowing water, who squealed in joyous delight and could boast of final victory. For the victors, sunburnt and smiling, to push their boats into the 'great unknown' was really the only choice that they could make; all others, doomed even their most valiant efforts to unhappy failure.

Maybe now you can understand why the Hopi Elder's words of wisdom resonate so deeply with me.

### **The Flowing River**

The flowing river is a metaphor for both consent and transformation. Notice five key elements in the Hopi Elder's revelation:

1. There is a river flowing, that has a destination.
2. It is great and swift and there are those who will be afraid.
3. Those who are afraid will try to hold on to the shore, and they will feel torn apart and suffer greatly.
4. If what we seek is freedom, fulfillment and flourishing, then we must let go of the shore, push off into the middle of the river, keep our eyes open and our heads above the water.
5. Once in the middle, see who is there with you, and celebrate; because the river has a destination.

Using the metaphor of the flowing river, here we have the process of consent explained – including its blocks. Take careful note, that this 'flowing river' is a symbol of our lives. This path is the way of an incarnational spirituality; a way of transformation grounded in life and living, here and now, as we come into relationship with both, moment to moment.

## **Buddha's Brain**

This is the title of a 2009 publication by Rich Hanson, PhD, a neuropsychologist and meditation teacher. The book itself explores the intersection of psychology, neurology and contemplative practices, in order to answer two essential questions: (i) what are the brain states that underlie happiness, love and wisdom?; and (ii) can the mind be developed to stimulate and strengthen these brain states?

What I want to draw on today, is the information about three default modalities ('brain states') of the human brain that are blocks to consenting to the lead of Spirit. These three deep seated 'brain states' are the result of our evolutionary journey and experiences, primarily around the instincts for survival and security (of the species). These states are reinforced in our current individual and collective life experiences, as we struggle to survive and to find security in this modern, fast paced and unpredictable world. As strategies for survival they have worked, but at a price and with great suffering, both individually and collectively.

## **Three Underlying Brain States: the What and Why of Fear**

What then are these underlying brain states? They are in fact strategies for survival that have brought us this far as a species and as individuals; that have become default patterns of thinking and behaving.

1. Separating what is actually connected. This is about seeing and experiencing reality as separate and not as one interconnected living system. Thus we create boundaries and distinctions, that allow for self-preservation and self-actualization over and against others. This applies both individually, in relation to other individuals; and collectively in relation to other groups (whether it is based on geography, ethnicity, religion, race, culture, politics, status, education, class, colour, sexual orientation, gender etc). This inclination to separation is generally the root of comparison and competition, and the seed of violence and destruction.

2. Stabilizing what keeps changing. This involves trying to keep things exactly as they are; it is about resisting change. It is done in order to try to maintain power and control; to try to achieve certainty and predictability; to try to feel secure. This inclination applies in relation to all domains of existence. At the individual levels, we are always trying to stabilize our body, emotions, mind and spirit. At the institutional level, we are constantly trying to stabilize our systems, customs and traditions (the so called 'status quo'). At the family, community and tribal levels, we are always trying to stabilize existing relationships and to keep them intact; closed to outsiders and outside influences. This inclination to stabilization is generally the root of authoritarianism. Force, manipulation and dogma are its agencies.
  
3. Preferential pleasure selection. This is the seeking of and holding onto pleasures in order to avoid or negate pain and suffering; in order to avoid threats and so to access opportunities. We see challenges as threats and uncertainty as risk. It is the inclination to choose what is comfortable, which is also often what is known. Thus we stay within the parameters of subjective gratification and of safe boundaries. Non-gratification of desires and frustration of expectations are experienced as pain and suffering. This inclination to preferential pleasure selection is the root of many addictions and inhibitions.

These three 'mind-sets' have brought us to this point in our collective and individual existences, but have done so at an enormous price. And, as long as we hold onto them as our best strategies for living, they will only continue to cause great pain, suffering and destruction. Let us therefore interrogate these three 'mind-sets' a bit more and try to understand why they operate as blocks to transformation and as barriers to consent.

### **Stabilization**

Reality is in a constant state of flux. Change is the only certainty. Nothing remains the same. These are all truisms that make us uncomfortable. What is our response? In a word, stabilization; the mind state that strives to keep things the same.

Stabilization is therefore the attempt to change the nature of reality and to avoid or deny its effects. That is, to avoid the unavoidable realities of uncertainty and impermanence, of flux and of change. It is like trying to tread water in a fast moving current. It is one way by which we try to hold on to the shore!

How much time do we invest in trying to prevent aging or to reverse its effects? How much money do we spend trying to stabilize our physical appearances at some ideal image? At what cost? We know we are doomed to fail, yet we try, over and over, year after year, and submit ourselves to such suffering! Mortality is inevitable; aging is unavoidable – ‘from dust, to dust!’.

To consent to life, is to gracefully accept the reality of change, of impermanence, and go with its flow. Consent manifests as the acceptance of allowing things to be as they are, constantly in flux, and not to try and keep them always one way.

This mind-set, born out of the fear of impermanence, is not limited to trying to control the ageing process. It applies equally to our emotions, our thoughts and ideas, even to our beliefs. Always we are trying to hold on to the shore, afraid to let go to the flow of the river, and to allow it to take us to its destination. Even when we are being torn away, we cling on, until our finger nails are ripped out! Can we not accept that joy flows into sorrow and sorrow into joy? That thoughts come and go and come again? That beliefs change over time – today the earth is flat, tomorrow it is round? This is the nature of life! Allow it to be. Consent to its inevitable flow.

Whole societies are holding on to the shore, clinging to cultures, traditions, norms and conventions. But life is rushing on, and the ‘good old days’ have already passed, never to return.

To consent to the flow of the river, to the movement of Spirit, is to let go of our clinging onto the need for stabilization.

### **Holding On, Letting Go**

Sr. Paul explains this well in *Glimpses*, in the chapter 'On Holding On and Letting Go' (*Glimpses*, pp. 23-25), as follows (citing Jesus' post-crucifixion encounter with Mary Magdalene - Jn. 20:17):

"Jesus says to Mary Magdalene: 'do not cling to me'. In this, there is an essential teaching for transformation. We cannot change without learning to let go. Letting go is at the heart of growth and development. It is an essential part of consent, of consenting to 'die' for the sake of transformation. To truly consent, to unconditionally say 'yes', one must be able to let go of all that we are clinging to."

It really cannot be put more clearly! Consent as letting go, a capacity that is so essential for transformation, requires that we let go of clinging to the shore and push ourselves out into the middle of the free flowing waters at the centre of the river.

Sr. Paul continues (*Glimpses*, p. 34):

"To grow and develop, to change, to be transformed we have to learn when to stop holding on to the security blankets that we so desperately cling onto. How else can we free ourselves to become something more? If the caterpillar cannot let go of being a caterpillar, it will never become a butterfly!"

For Sr. Paul, the centrality of 'letting go' to the practice of consent was so important, that she dwells on the matter at length (*Glimpses*, pp. 24 – 25):

"St. Irenaeus reminds us: 'The Glory of God is the human fully alive.' Letting go is of fundamental importance if we truly desire to realize our deepest potential ... It is only by learning to let go, that we can become all that we are intended to be. In letting go, we open to the Great Mystery that is I AM and discover truly who and what we are. What a glorious possibility; one that is available to each one of us."

Notice the optimism and hope. Like the Hopi Elder, who urges us to stop clinging to the shore and to push off into the free flowing centre of the river, reassuring us that you can trust the river because it has a destination, Sr. Paul invites us to practice consent as letting go. Try it, by just pushing off, and remember to keep your eyes open and celebrate with those who are with you on the journey.

Like the Hopi Elder, Sr. Paul locates the main block to letting go, to consenting, in our fear and lack of faith (Glimpses, p. 25):

“Yet so few embrace the opportunity. Why is this so? Essentially the main reason is fear ... We do not really believe ... We doubt ...”

“And so one settles for the crumbs of creation, for appearances that mask reality, for illusions that deceive us. Holding on to our beliefs, afraid to let go, we are never really open to the possibility of something more.”

There can simply be no true openness and receptivity, no real union and alignment, as long as we keep clinging onto the metaphoric shores of our lives – whatever these may be. Clinging on condemns us to always being caterpillars and to never becoming butterflies.

### **Preferential Pleasure Selection**

This commentary on stabilization applies equally to our ‘mind-set’ to always seek preferential pleasure selection, because we also cling to what we experience as pleasurable, to our desires, and to our expectations. Short term pleasure will never be a substitute for enduring joy. The pleasures of the shore are filled with pain. We think that we are avoiding suffering and danger, but in reality we are perpetuating them all. The ensnaring tentacles of preferential pleasure selection, with its concomitant avoidance of all things painful, is one of the most seductive means by which we avoid consent and transformation.

Take for example some of our usual addictions, to sleeping, TV, food, sex, social media, gossip, criticism, procrastination etc., all of which consume our attention to the exclusion of

everything else, including the work of transformation. Always choosing what is pleasurable keeps us imprisoned within the realms of what is subjectively known and pleasing. However, the path of transformation is a journey into the unknown, full of unpredictability. It is for the truly adventurous, not the timid. Preferential pleasure selection inhibits us from choosing to step out into the 'Great Unknown'. The end result is actually an avoidance of God!

The relentless pursuit of pleasure also keeps us from the inevitable pain that accompanies all transformative growth and development. As children must endure the discomforts of teething and of growing pains, so must we who are on the path of transformation bear the 'stripping' that Sr. Paul so often spoke of: "I know that it is not an easy path, littered with many deaths along the way as it is – strippings of who and what we believe ourselves to be until there is nothing left to strip away." (Glimpses, pp. 15 – 16)

Why should we subject ourselves to this kind of suffering, especially when our preferential pleasure selection mind-set says to avoid it at all cost? Sr. Paul explains why (Glimpses, p. 16): "But if we can endure and persevere, what emerges is ... a joyous and wondrous state of being, when all there is, is love."

### **Separation**

As to the mind-set of seeing reality as separate, and in so doing avoiding the implications of the nature of reality as one interconnected, interdependent whole, Sr. Paul tells us (Glimpses, p. 8):

"Separation is death. It is suffering. It is pain and Anxiety. When we believe that we are separate beings, we live in ways that are destructive.

We compare ourselves to, compete with and try to exercise power and control over others. We live out of an 'us versus them' world view. Fear, suspicion, mis-trust and ultimately, violence are the result; or frustration, despair, depression and even suicide our reward."

Lao-Tzu, in the Tao Te Ching (v. 8) also tells us: “Only when there is no competition will we all live in peace.”

I need say no more!

So we let go; we let go of our inclinations towards stabilization, preferential pleasure selection and separation. Consent as letting go! But this is only the first movement, the second is consent as connection.

### **Consent as Loving Connection**

Having consented by letting go of our clinging onto the shore, now we must push off, into the centre of the river, there to practise the consent of connection. Both our letting go and our pushing off are purposeful – that is why our eyes are open and our heads are above water. What we seek is consent as loving connection. As Sr. Paul puts it:

“I have discovered that one way out is to reconnect with the web of life and to do so from the centre, which is through love.” (Glimpses, p. 8)

“To truly live and experience a meaningful and fulfilling life we must live out of the interconnectedness of being. When we connect to true centre, something miraculous happens which is beyond effort. Connected to Spirit, we come alive and become life giving: vibrant, resonant, radiant. Presence fills us and ‘in-forms’ all that we are and do ...

Activity has meaning and motion direction. Purpose and fulfillment blossom and bloom. Togetherness flourishes. Life is worth living.” (Glimpses, p. 9)

This then is the reward for letting go of the shore and pushing off into the middle of the river – ‘life is worth living’. As Jesus explains and promises: ‘The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that you should have life and have it in abundance’ (Jn.

10:10). How do we gain this abundant life? By letting go of everything and lovingly connecting to the Source of Life, the Spirit within and among us.

We consent to living out of our deepest and truest centre, so as to allow ourselves the opportunities to truly live and be life-giving. In fact, the consent that we are speaking of is a consent to Truth, to Reality as it really is, to Love and to Life. This is what consenting to Spirit brings – but it means also consenting to letting go of all that we cling to so dearly, of all that we use to stabilize our lives, of all the short term pleasures that we believe bring enduring joy, and to the very notion that we are somehow separate beings.

We are not alone. Look around. There are others with us on this journey of consent. Together we are One in Spirit, one in flesh. Smile and celebrate, for we are already on the path. Our destination beckons.

### **A Single Breath**

In the end, consent is always only a moment away, a single breath away. How long does it take to exhale (to let go) and to inhale (to connect)? Only a moment!

And so, if Spirit is ever present, within and in the midst of us all, to let go of the shore and push out into the middle of the free flowing river of Spirit, takes only a single action – that of consent. Ultimately, consent is both letting go and connecting – a single unbroken moment. A breath without a pause. Once we push off, once we let go, we are already in the centre. How so? Our intention carries us there. All we need to do then, is stay there connected to centre. As the Hopi elder puts it: “... keep our eyes open, and our heads above the water. See who is there with you and celebrate”.

### **Following the Lead of Spirit**

In maybe more traditional language, Sr. Paul explains (Glimpses, p. 2): “Led by Spirit, we are born to soar to heights as yet unknown and unfathomed.” She shares her own life experience, her own choice to consent to the call of the Divine, as follows (Glimpses, p. 3):

“Long ago, my spirit longed to soar in places as yet unknown and unfathomed. Following the impulse of Spirit, I ventured out, like a bird that feels the light of dawn before it is as yet seen. I chose my freedom. It takes courage to follow the lead of Spirit ... But follow it we must, if what we seek is freedom!”

### **Faith**

In the final analysis, consent takes faith. The unwavering belief that when we push off from the shore and leave behind all that seems so safe and secure, that in fact we will journey through transformation into fulfilment and flourishing, abundant life and living, love and joy – here and now. Many have walked this way before us. All that is required is our consent.

Consent is at the heart and centre of the path of transformation. Ultimately it is consent to Spirit, which is no less than the union of spirit with Spirit, a coming together as one, self and God, flowing and flourishing towards a common destiny.

And so, I leave you with the words of Sr. Paul (Glimpses, p. 4): “Open to Spirit moving in you, and have the courage to respond; your vocation and purpose and your fulfillment and freedom beckon.” How can we do this? How can we open to Spirit? In a word: Consent. It is the key on the path of transformation.

### **Three Movements of Greeting**

I would like to end with a series of movements that I hope can embody some of what we have explored today. I call these the Three Movements of Greeting.

In the Far East many people greet each other with a simple bow. Facing one another, heads slightly bowed, eyes cast downwards, hands at their sides (or sometimes clasped at their hearts), they bow to each other from their waists.

In the Middle East most people greet each other with a heartfelt embrace. Facing the other, eyes engage accompanied by broad smiles, then the embrace, three times, alternating sides, chests touching and arms hugging the other (sometimes accompanied by an intentional pat). (In some of Europe, this appears as an abridged form, of 'kissing' by touching cheeks on alternating sides.)

In the West, almost all people greet one another with a hand shake. Stepping intentionally towards the other, eyes looking directly and intently at the other, a single arm is extended, palms grasp each other and the hand shake ensues.

### **Three Moments in Consent**

These three movements can be imagined to embody the following three moments in the practice of consenting to life.

1. The Bow - Acknowledging the present moment. Opening to and welcoming whatever is happening here and now. Humility is the underpinning attitude, in recognition and acknowledgment of the Teacher present in the present moment – Spirit within and among us, offering to lead us. This is consent as opening to and welcoming the present moment – opening to and welcoming God-in-All.
2. The Embrace - Engaging and embracing the present moment. Knowing that the present moment is infused with the Divine Presence, there is agreement to yield to Its impulses. Engaging whatever is happening here and now. Receptivity is the underpinning attitude, evidencing the desire and willingness to be led by Spirit. This is consent as abiding in the present moment – abiding in God-in-All.
3. The Handshake - Moving forward purposefully. Knowing that the river has a destination, there is the firm commitment to stay in the centre and go with the flow. Resoluteness is the underpinning attitude. It is built on faith, trusting that all will be

well, even in the face of uncertainty and change. This is consent as staying connected  
– connected to God-in-All.

With deep gratitude and appreciation.

Peter Jamadar

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