

Jesus Points to the Moon:
Hearing the Parables and
Sayings of Jesus
as Zen Christian Koans

Becoming Intimate with Your Life

The kingdom of God is near...Mark 1: 14, 15

Following his baptism in Jordan River and his time in the wilderness Jesus emerges into his ministry. His first words? "The time is come. The Realm of God is near." You can almost feel it in Jesus' words, finding fulfillment in your hearing. It is here. Now. Present. There is nowhere to look, no far off and away to get to. God is present here, in life. That is the good news.

God is here in your life. So, repent, re-turn then to the Holy, to perceive the divine in your midst. To come home to God is to come home to your life as it is, the realm of God present in the midst of your



full life, all of it, the joys and sorrows, pains and celebrations. The realm of God has no fixed address, explanations fall short. As soon as you think you've grasped it, it slips from your hands. This realm is a like a son, lost and found or an over achieving mustard seed or a bit of corrupting leaven. It is a compassionate outcast walking the road, stopping to help a stranger. It is a precious pearl, a treasure hidden. Lose it and you find it, try to save it and it eludes your grasp. Here kinship is redefined and the dead are left to bury the dead. To get it you give it up. Life here is not exactly as it seems and it is precisely as it is. Consider the birds of the air, it is present. Look at the lilies and it is there too. It is received just

as a child, wide-eyed, accepts a gift.. This is an upside down world where the poor, those who mourn, the persecuted, are blessed. Here, Jesus is slow to explain. He points. Like a kindly docent at the local observatory, Jesus only points to the moon. It is there for us to see. Near. At hand. In the very midst of living.

As we embark upon this journey of discovery we find that we participate in the great love and compassion that is the Source of love and compassion in the world. It is the foundation for our living and the root of our hope. Along Jesus' way we walk paths of righteousness and we notice: captives are free, the lame walk and the blind see. As we encounter life intimately we see this as present reality, an affirmation of resurrection in life. We can say with Paul, "O death where is your victory. O death were is your sting."

Meditating with koans is an opportunity to become intimate with your life, to enter fully, the thoughts, feelings, sensations, to look deeply and discover the One who is at the heart of things, at the foundation. Revealed here, in the moment, is a great love and compassion that is the Source of all love and compassion. Here we find that our lives are fully Christ's life in us.



Here you will find resources for a journey that can open hearts and minds, lead to a transformation of life and consciousness.

- An overview of the use of koans, parables, the sayings of Jesus as they can be useful to contemplative small groups
- A description of the process for small group study of Christian koans
- A compilation of a number of sayings of Jesus well suited to this study

So, welcome to the journey, one like none you have ever experienced before. With no fixed destination, you come home to the One who is all and in all. You begin to perceive things anew so that you can say with Paul, "It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

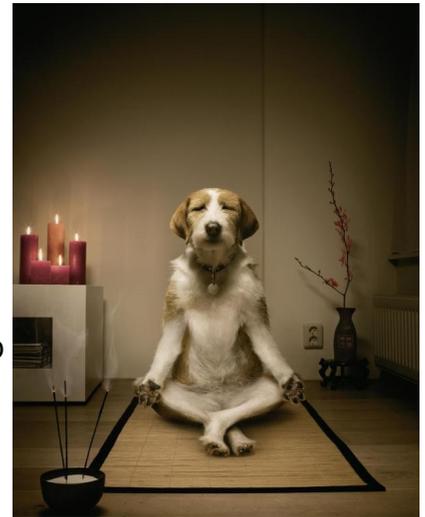
Jesus Points to the Moon: Koans, Parables and the Realm of God

Christian Koan Groups rely on a spiritual tool discovered in China through the development of Ch'an Buddhism. Koans, are dialogs between Ch'an masters and their students, found helpful in leading students to a perception of life as it is rather than as it is imagined, hoped or wished to be. An example of a koan is Zhaozhou's Dog:

A monk asked Zhaozhou, "Does a dog have Buddha nature or not?"

Zhaozhou: "No."

This makes no sense. Dogs, cats, elephants, people and bears all have Buddha nature but here is an answer, "no." This little koan enables the student to study her life closely as she discovers that her map of the world, her sense of herself, learned and carried through the years, does not necessarily correspond to the territory as it is presently. She might be further perplexed when she learns that once when asked the same question at another time, Zhaozhou responds, "Yes."



This koan takes something that all people know and turns it on its head. Convention, your fixed idea of self and world no longer helps you to understand. The koan world is vast and mysterious with no clear handles. It is only by stepping outside of the perceived bounds of your understanding that things open and become clear. In so stepping, you discover a freedom and an identity hitherto undiscovered.

Jesus works like this. In Jesus' world things are upside down, the poor blessed, the grief stricken comforted, peacemakers inheriting the earth. Jesus, recognizes the realm of God in all, keeping company with those seen as outcast by others. He teaches using parables, often taking ordinary objects and circumstances suggesting that in these is the realm of God. If we take the Parable of the Good Samaritan as an example, we find a societal and religious outcast, a Samaritan, having compassion upon a stricken traveler. As Jesus speaks parables, living life as a parable, conventional and current understandings of self and world do not fit. The map is incorrect. Only as his hearers experience a change in their consciousness, the freedom to step outside of the strait jacket of their conventional understanding and identity are they able to experience God's realm. This change of consciousness is, of course, earth shattering, identity shaking. For as one's view of reality is transformed, ideas of self image and identity fall away as well. Therein all is made new, life experienced and lived differently. Of this transformation Paul said, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."



Our life in Christ is deeply personal as it is profoundly communal. As consciousness is transformed, our identities loosened, we find that life itself is seamless, naturally expansive. You can begin to speak, as did Saint Francis, of Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wolf and Sister Bird. You will find companions in life joined not by personal preference but by common identity. Together, we are Christ's body. The study of Jesus' parables and sayings is well suited to group study. As we become more familiar with our lives, discovering a new identity in Christ, we further discover that we are a part of one another. Our groups are a place to discover our "together life" trusting our togetherness to lead us into a deeper appreciation of this seamless reality.

Christian Koan Groups

The Christian Koan Group Process is based on a group process founded by John Tarrant and collaborators at the Pacific Zen Institute in Santa Rosa, CA. As it is here envisioned the group process has two main components to foster the transformation of consciousness and community. These are Meditation and Conversation.

Meditation: Shining the Light Within



What woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully till she finds it? — Luke 15:8

Meditation is a choice to become intimate with your own life. In meditation, we are quiet and alert, open and available to what is happening now. In meditation we shine our light, our attention, within and notice. As we sit, there may be thoughts or emotions that rise. There may be bodily sensations. We may find our minds easily distracted. In meditation the grace is to notice all of this and accept whatever is happening for you in the moment. This means acceptance without judgment, without prejudice, without evaluation, an acceptance of whatever is happening, whatever arises, without finding fault. Simply being aware. As this light shines on your experience, as your life rises to meet you, you will find a kindness and a compassion that will move you deeper into this land of discovery. To help we have the parables and sayings of Jesus.

Meditation: Introducing the Word

At a point early in the meditation, the Word is introduced. Take for example, Jesus' "Love your enemies." This Word is spoken into the silence, "Love your enemies," with the instruction, "There is nothing you need to do with these words. Simply keep company with them, be aware and allow them their own life. No need to manipulate, or understand or exegete. These words are for you, see how your life, you, rise to meet them. Simply allow these words to enter your consciousness. They will go where they go, do what they do. Simply keep company with the word.

Conversation

When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. — Luke 15:9



In meditation discoveries of what was thought to be lost are made. Conversation is an opportunity to share in our discoveries while continuing in an awareness that more discoveries are to be made, even as we converse. Though each group will have a convener the assumption here is that Spirit is the facilitator of the group. She will guide the process as she will. The conversation becomes a sort of group meditation with awareness focused on Spirit alive in the midst. The convener may introduce the Word into the group setting, encouraging the discussion to unfold. Here the participants are reminded that the discussion is about how their lives rise to meet the Word, not on the meaning of the chosen passages. This could be phrased, "How are these words alive in you?"

Timetable for small groups

An hour and a half is set aside for the meeting. The room is set up with chairs in a circle, a low table with fabric, symbols, candles etc..., in the center.

- The first 5 minutes can be for welcoming one another, a short check-in etc....
- 30 minutes for Meditation using the "Word for the week"
- Conversation begins, facilitator speaking the Word into the room. Conversation will find its own length, total time not to go over the 1.5 hour mark.

Last 5 minutes can be taken for announcements and a closing prayer of your choice..

A Few Words of Jesus for Meditation

Hearing the Parables and Sayings of Jesus as Zen Christian Koans

Love your enemies.

You are the light of the world *or perhaps as it is recorded of Jesus in John,*

I am the light of the world.

Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.

Once Jesus was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, and he answered, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!" For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you.'

Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it.

'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost."

And again he said, 'To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

He said therefore, 'What is the kingdom of God like? And to what should I compare it? 19It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in the garden; it grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.'

Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.

So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! . . . it is easier for a camel (rope) to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

