Introduction

### A Pious One with a Hundred Beads on Your Rosary

A pious one with a hundred beads on your rosary,  
or a drunkard in a tavern,  
any gift you bring the Beloved will be accepted  
as long as you come in longing.  
It is this most secret pain,  
this bleeding separation,  
which will guide you to your Heart of Hearts.[[1]](#endnote-1) ~[Abu-Said Abil-Kheir](http://www.Poetry-Chaikhana.com/A/AbilKheirAbu/index.htm)

### **THE FIERCE BROTHER WOLF**

When Francis was living in the city of Gubbio, a terrible fierce wolf appeared, devouring animals and preying on humans. The people were frightened, and went about armed as if going to battle. Even so, if any ever met the wolf alone, he was sure to be devoured. All defense was useless. In fear they dared not go beyond the city walls.

Francis in compassion decided against the advise of all to meet the wolf. He went alone to where the wolf was known to be, while many people followed at a distance witnessing what occurred. The wolf, jaws wide open, ran towards Francis who cried out, “Come to me, Brother Wolf. I command you. Come with peace like Christ who is peace even though he knows suffering. Come neither to harm me nor anybody else.”

The terrible wolf stopped running, and coming to Francis, sat down, his wary eyes intent upon the man. Francis spoke, “Brother Wolf, you have done much evil in this land. You devour in anger and greed, not just your need, those made after the image of God. All cry out against you, dogs pursue you, and all the people are your enemies. I will make peace between them and you, Brother Wolf, if you harm them no more. They in turn will forgive you your past offences. Neither men nor dogs will pursue you anymore.

I promise that you will be fed every day by the people of this land so long as you shall live among them. You will no longer suffer that hunger that made you do so much evil. If I obtain all this, you must promise, on your side, never again to attack any animal or human being. Do you make this promise?” The wolf bowed his head in consent.

“Brother Wolf, follow me immediately, without hesitation or doubting.” The wolf walked peaceably by his side. As the news of this spread quickly, all the town’s astonished inhabitants crowded the marketplace to see the man and the wolf.

Francis spoke saying that when we miss the mark by our actions, and are unwilling to change our ways and be forgiven, God permits the consequences of such calamities. But change is possible for us all. How much greater is the sorrow of isolation from our divine source and each other, than the rage of a wolf, which can kill the body only, If the jaws of so small an animal as a wolf can make a whole city tremble through fear, how much we ought to dread that the living hell that isolates us from eternal love.

“This wolf consents to make peace and do no more harm. You must promise to give him each day his necessary food. If you do I promise in his name that he will faithfully keep this compact.” All the people promised to feed the wolf for the rest of his life, and the wolf bowed his head to indicate he was willing to hold true as well.

All cried out praising and blessing God. The wolf lived many years at Gubbio. He went familiarly from door to door without harming anyone, fiercer in his integrity and trust than he ever was in his rage. All the people received him with courtesy, feeding him with great pleasure, and no dog barked at him as he went about.

At last he died of old age, and the people of Gubbio mourned his loss greatly for he was their own little brother. When they saw him going about so gently among them, in the face of a world’s capacity to betray, he reminded them by his very presence of their own capacity for integrity, their own choice to fiercely trust. Of the very early companions he is among the most honored, loved, and remembered.[[2]](#endnote-2)

### **INTRODUCTION**

The name is the fourth order of Francis and Clare of Assisi, which sounds both Christian and denominational, but it is multi-faith and has nothing to do with any denomination. If you are Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, practice indigenous spirituality, or choose to avoid religious systems, you are welcome. If you feel called to answer the need for diverse people to pray and be together at this time in history, you are in the right place.

Eight hundred years ago in a time of mystic renewal the first, second, and third orders of Franciscan Christians were formed. These troubadours sang and danced the mystical praises of love and God throughout Europe. On the Iberian Peninsula of Spain, Jewish, Muslim and Christian mysticism flowered together. The mystic text of Kabbalah, the Zohar, the Book of Splendor, was written.

The great Iranian Sufi saint, Shams of Tabriz, and the Afghani-Turk Jalal-ad-Din Rumi began the conversation of heart that has nourished the world for centuries, an amazing invocation of the Beloved. In India, Kabir and Lalleshwari roamed the streets singing of union with the holy one.

The Tibetan Buddhist saint, Milarepa, came from his meditation cave with songs that pierce illusion and open the heart. The world experienced a great movement of spirit over the course of one hundred and fifty years that shattered rigid codified patterns and restructured its way of experiencing the divine. A similar movement of spirit enlivens the turbulent world of today.

In Chaos Theory first order is a recognizable energetic pattern; second order, the pattern expands yet remains close to its original with subtle difference; third order, the pattern evolves in an unexpected flowering with recognizable connections to the first. There is slickness here where form becomes motion.

We who are poised at the end of one millennium and the beginning of another recognize that slickness. At the poised edge of chaos the seed of the original pattern is stressed by increasing intense turbulence, reorganizing into something totally unforeseen, yet hidden within all the time. The greatest freedom and creativity are found here. In that shift new ways of being, new identities, and worldviews become possible, and whole universes are formed.

Companions of the fourth order have entered this liminal space of transformation through portals of relationship with the divine that have been activated by our own natural dispositions, the depths of our traditions, experiences of relationship with self and others, or by suffering and trauma. These doorways of dynamic co-creative tension and turbulence lead us to a new level of participation in and awareness of the union inherent in the relationship of all beings.

The fourth order of Francis and Clare is a transfaith community that holds the paradox of order and chaos. It requires the great double initiation: the first through the bloody waters of birth; the second, through the refining fires of your life. Our identifying spiritual clothing is our humanity. This community is not for idealists or those with causes. It is composed of people who have been chewed on by life, yet live to tell their tale. We don't have to change classes like our mentors, Francis and Clare of Assisi. In one way or another, that has already been done for us by life. We have no place to go. We just are. It is a being state. You know it if you have got it. It is both the end of the road, and a daily beginning.

What this book offers is the discipline and freedom of ruthless compassion with yourself and others. You will find here an old spirituality whose wisdom is found in many traditions. This joyous path demands rigorous self- awareness and commitment to life, with its paradoxes, its illusions, delusions and inspirations.

If you are asking yourself, “What the hell am I doing reading this book?” this book is for you. If you have lost all your dignity more than once, you are home. If there is a little madness in you, if you are rough and gruff, and you have seen yourself mentally wielding a machete at someone just when you thought that old rage was gone, welcome.

This book challenges the spiritually pious of any age. This is the basic text of a community of men and women who have decided to step out of the box. Actually most of them were evicted from collective conditioning and have been thrown into the territory of transformation of mind and heart and into a state of compassionate presence with self and others. If you hope to bliss out or somehow take the quick road to enlightenment, or avoid life’s sorrows, or solve the world’s problems, or know “the truth” at last, close the book now, it won’t help.

There are four guidelines for our community included in this basic text: the fourth order Mission and Traditions, the Condition of Being and the Guidelines for Gathering. There are also suggested conditions and practices that promote the spiritual life of fourth order companions. Readings, prayer, meditations, reflections, and activities are found at the end of each chapter, as well as a glossary of terms in the Appendix. Although not in any way officially related to twelve step programs, the reflections in this book may be useful for informal eleventh step meetings.

If what you have read so far is driving you nuts or makes no sense, just close the book and give it to the Salvation Army store of your choice. It will find someone there ready for it. But then again, if you read this book it is our hope that it will drive you out of the collective insanity into true madness. There alone will you be ready to understand the godly folly contained herein.

### **HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

The chapters are arranged for individual or group use in a sequence to lead us in deepening levels of understanding, contemplation, and silence. Yet each section within a chapter is a doorway, an appropriate entrance. So for the orderly we have the sequence. For the chaotic we offer the play of entering each chapter as intuition leads. This text is the foundational reading for fourth order groups, and can be used in varying ways for group practice. See the Appendix for further information.

The reflective and active exercises within each chapter appeal to the senses, the faculties of reason, intuition, and wonder. We fully expect that certain elements will appeal to one person and other elements to another. Each chapter uses a multi-faith approach and contains

Poem

Story

Narrative

Coming into Silence

Sound

Reflections/Contemplations

Story Activities

Blessing

### **INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES**

**Coming into Silence and Sound**

In your spiritual tradition you have sacred sounds or short repetitive phrases. Listen for one that wants to repeat in you. Say it out loud. Let it become a chant. Feel it resonate within your body. Feel it ride on your breath connecting you to a deeper experience of who you really are. Chant it for a few minutes and then let it become an internal chant until there is quiet within you. You can internally chant this as you move through your day. If you have no faith community just make humming sounds on the breath. We of the fourth order love to hum alone or with each other. Sometimes the hum leads to other beautiful sounds that just arise. We rest in these sounds.

It is good to share these with each other at the end of the day, to chant them together. The different chants of the many traditions make beautiful sounds together when the intent of the heart is true.

**Contemplation: Purity of Heart**

Purity of heart is not achieved by brute force or by becoming tense about it. We must simply lose ourselves completely. Sweep away everything, even the sharp perception of our distress. We must make room for God. We must accept our poverty. We must renounce all that weighs us down, even the weight of our own faults...

~ Brother Francis of Assisi

**Story**

Tell a story of a time of transformation in your own life. How did it begin? What did it feel like? Were there stages? What was the end result in the transformation?

#### **The Blessing**

Most High, Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of our minds. Give us a right faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity, so that we may always and in all things act according to your holy and good will. ~Brother Francis

1. Sheikh Abu-Saeed Abhil Kheir, translated by Vraje Abramian, *Nobody Son of Nobody*. Hohm Press. Prescott 2006. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Flaherty, Barbara. Contemporary adaptation from *The Little Flowers of Francis* by Fra Ugolino da Santa Maria, 14th century. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)