

## **The 'Passover' of Contemplative Evolution**

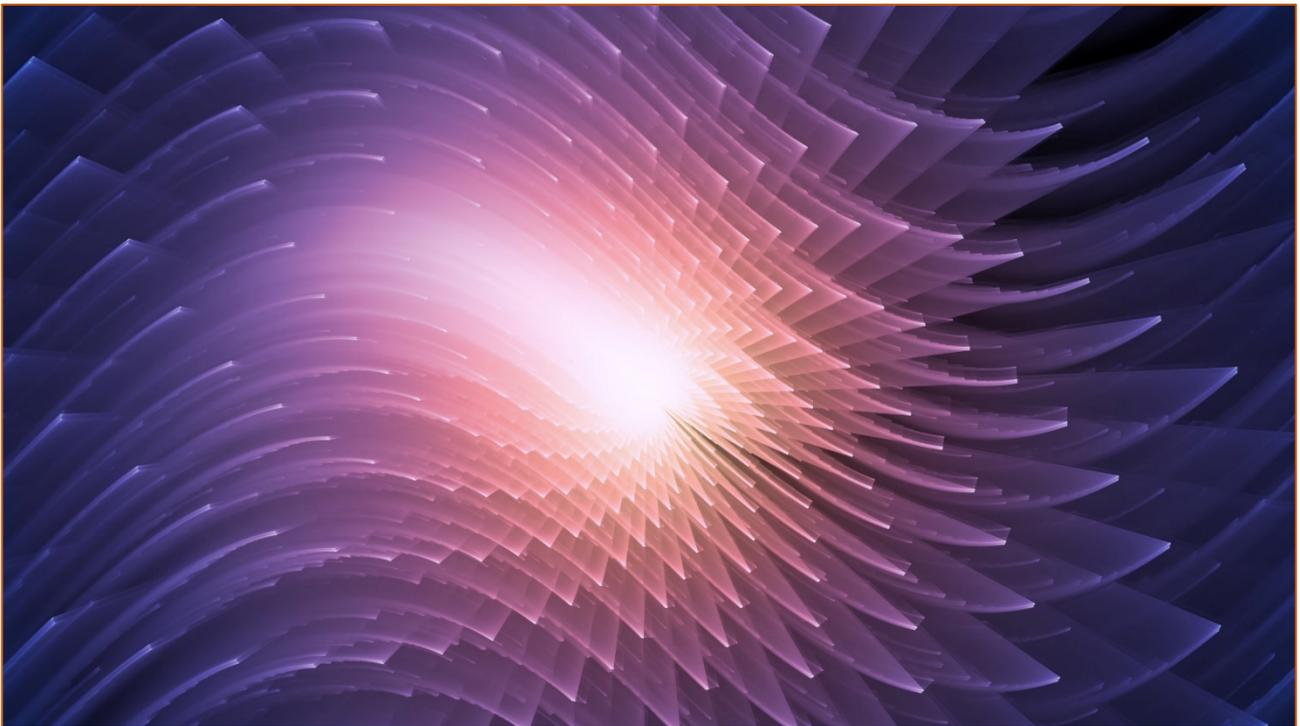
*Anne O'Connell rsj*

*'And so, we've come right around the sun  
To April again. It's unique again  
Like each month. each year.'* Les Murray

It's true. April 2019 is unique! No doubt our diaries are already dotted with commitments – and also with the promise of new experiences.

As CEN members there will also be unique ways in which we continue to 'help evolve the world through Love'. (*Homepage CEN*).

In fact, I would dare to suggest that April is OUR month - the month of all months when we can celebrate our sacred hour, our sacred intention, our sacred 'holding of the violent and hurtful situations of our world'.



In this month we are called to be immersed and to evolve into the Mystery of the New Passover, the New Covenant, the New Exodus – the deepest of all Mysteries – the very cauldron of Love itself. It is within this cauldron that we hold firmly, yet gently, the violent and hurtful situations of our own lives, our own world, our own universe.

Two aspects of the New Passover and the New Covenant that have evolved from the ancient Jewish Passover apply, I believe, especially to CEN. These are the 'Bread of the Presence' and the 'Drinking of the Fourth Cup'.<sup>i</sup>

## The Bread of the Presence - The Bread of the Everlasting Covenant.

(Exodus 25 Leviticus 24:5-7)

Each day between 4pm and 5pm we intentionally bring our prayer-filled presence to the 'violent and hurtful situations of our world'. We bring the 'bread of our presence'.

The ancient Bread of the Presence, which was housed in the Ark of the Covenant was a constant sign to the Jewish people that God was with them. Jesus, like all practising Jews, would have been present at the festivals when the priests of the Temple would lift up the Bread of the Presence for the pilgrims and cry out: **Behold, God's Love for You!**<sup>ii</sup>



When Jesus wanted to give them/us a sign of the NEW Covenant of the NEW Passover, he chose the bread and wine of his own Presence. By doing so he said. **Behold God's love – behold my love - for you!** This is the NEW Covenant and NEW Passover that he would seal with his last breath and the drinking of the fourth Passover cup.

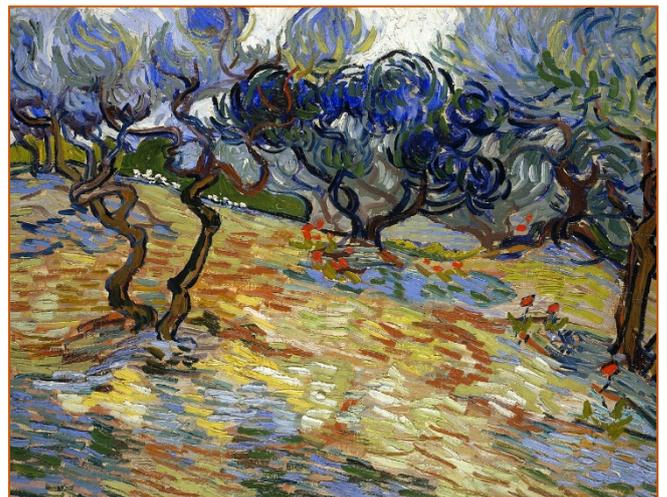
What a privilege is ours as CEN members to be living signs - who gather to give the daily bread of our presence and to say – by our very presence: **Behold God's love for you!** **Behold our love for you!**

### The Drinking of the Fourth Cup.<sup>iii</sup>

During the ancient Jewish Passover there were four cups of wine drunk at different stages of the liturgy. It seems the third cup was the Blessing Cup (*berakah*) and the one over which Jesus said, 'This cup is the NEW covenant in my blood...' (1 Cor. 11: 25). There is however a fourth cup – the cup of Praise, the cup of Consummation. This cup followed the final singing of the Hallel Psalms and indicated that the Passover was complete.

If we look carefully at the gospels of Mark and Matthew, we see that after the Blessing cup, 'they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives'. Jesus would have known that he had not drunk the fourth cup and this would have been evident to those with him, as they had celebrated this Passover each year and were very familiar with the closing rites of this Jewish liturgy.

Jesus prayed in the garden 'Let this cup pass me by...' He would have known that



what awaited him was the 'drinking of the fourth cup' and he would have sensed what would happen before he would drink it. Jesus refused the sedative wine offered him just before the crucifixion but chose instead to wait until: 'It is finished' - until the NEW Covenant had been sealed in his blood and in the giving of his life.



***'When Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfil the scripture) 'I am thirsty'. A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, (the fourth cup of the NEW Passover) he said, 'It is finished.'** Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19: 28 – 30)*

So too... we, as CEN members are called to drink the fourth cup. This is the most difficult cup to drink. What do I find most difficult as I carve out this sacred hour each day? Is it the pressing commitments; the fact that 'sitting' still can sometimes be boring? Is it that perhaps I wonder why I even give time to this practice – nothing seems to change? Perhaps I just don't feel like it - after all it takes quite a degree of faithfulness to the practice. These are our challenges to our drinking of the cup of our CEN commitment - challenges to drinking the fourth cup – to bringing forth the NEW Covenant in the violent and hurtful situations of our world. Do we **really** believe that our CEN practice is bringing to our world, our universe, the LOVE forged in NEW Covenant, the NEW Passover?

Perhaps as we go to our CEN practice either physically or spiritually, we can know that **YES**, we **are** now going to enter into the sufferings of our world, to

drink the fourth cup, to renew the NEW covenant. As we sit... and the violent and hurting situations come before us – situations of fear, anger, oppression - we can truly repeat with the bread of our presence:



***Take heart: Behold how your God loves you! How we love you!***

***O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good,  
For God, who is steadfast Love endures forever.***

*(Ps 118 v 29 the final verse of the Hallel Psalms).*

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<sup>i</sup> This reflection arose from a reading of the text: Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper*, Image Press, 2016 - easily available from Book Depository. Pitre has made an extensive study of Judaism and references both the Scriptures and ancient Jewish writings to support his work.

<sup>ii</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Menahoth 29A.

<sup>iii</sup> Mishnah, Pesahim 10:1.

Pg. 2 artwork: "The Garden of Gethsemene on the Mountain of Olives" Oil painting by Vincent Van Gogh