

## **Consciousness and the Four Consents (Adapted from Thomas Keating)**

### **The First Steps in Spiritual Growth**

We take the first real step in spiritual growth when we allow ourselves to encounter the reality of ourselves and of our lives:

- a. We begin to come to some acceptance of ourselves just as we are with all our gifts, our faults and our failings, our limitations and our life story.
- b. We begin to come to some acceptance of our relationships, our life circumstances and our environment as they are.
- c. We need to understand to some degree how we see the Greater Power in life, the Supreme Being, the Ground of Our Being, the Ultimate Reality, God.

### **The Four Consents**

Using the writings of theologian John S. Dunne, Thomas Keating identifies four consents that challenge us in our development:

1. Consent to the **basic goodness** of our nature (Childhood)  
By the acceptance of our basic goodness Keating is not referring to what we can do or do better than others, but to “the goodness of our being before we do anything” Unfortunately, in childhood we begin to doubt that basic goodness.
2. Consent to the **full development** of our being, talents and creative energies (Early Adolescence)  
In activating our gifts, our creative energies and our sexual energy, we begin to take responsibility for ourselves and for our relationships. However, fear of those energies can assert itself and our emotional development does not always progress smoothly.
3. Consent to non-being and to the **diminution of self** through illness, old age and death. (Early adulthood)  
As we grow into and through adulthood, we eventually face the diminution of ourselves and are witness to the reality of death.
4. Consent to **transformation** and to the death of the false self. (Maturity)  
We come to realise that our deepest and truest self is not the self that we are familiar with in our daily living, so, if we wish our true self to grow we are faced with the prospect of allowing our false self to die.

“We do not make these consents as ends in themselves, but rather to the will of God present in these things. We consent to God and to his will both in the enjoyment and in the surrender of his gifts. Each consent involves a kind of death.” (Thomas Keating, Ch. 7 “Invitation to Love”)