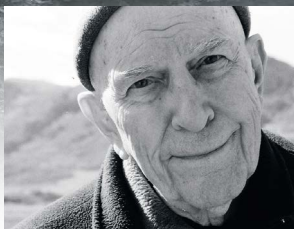




A Great Presence Arises



Note: Fr. Thomas has graced us with a posthumous gift of another previously unpublished essay to deepen our understanding of the spiritual journey.

THOMAS KEATING

For those progressing on the spiritual journey, even when the consoling aspect of the Divine Presence dissipates because of excessive activity or too much thinking, an interior presence arises that becomes more and more permanent. A shift in consciousness begins to take place. Our rational consciousness is transcended by the awakening of intuitive consciousness. The rational level is not rejected; we simply become free of its limitations. Reason remains available and functional for ordinary daily life, human relationships, and all the needs of embodied activity, but does not overshadow or take away the deeper and abiding awareness of the Divine Presence.

How can we be thinking beings and not think? The Divine Presence beyond all thought is a state that flows from being one with what happens in each nanosecond of time. The divine activity is taking place everywhere all at once. No one owns it or possesses it. It just is without any limit or boundaries. The presence and action of the Spirit embraces perfect unity and infinite diversity.

To seek for enlightenment is to pray for the reward of one's efforts to serve God. It is not yet complete detachment from self. The dissolution of the false self is the opening to true freedom and union with God. It leads to the experience of inner resurrection, which is to be taken over more and more completely by the Spirit.

To know the living God we have to share the sorrow of the Divine Heart. God puts up with endless human error, excess, and sometimes malice, in order to get across to us the most important realities of life, of which God's unconditional forgiveness and love for everyone is the foremost.

We have to be humbled and ground to dust for this experience of divine love to manifest in us. It also happens with varying degrees of intensity. The stages of consciousness are one way to describe the process of spiritual evolution. This is the experiential conviction of God as a Presence of extraordinary tenderness and exquisite thoughtfulness, beyond any human conception or expectation.

Perhaps the infinite gratuity of God's unconditional love, beyond all love as we know it, is the best way to express it. In any case, there is no end to divine love. As the Psalmist cries out, "His love is everlasting" (Psalm 135). ☪

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The Spirit of Service

DENIS SHEEHAN

It has been said “a problem shared is a problem halved.” This slogan usually refers to people sharing their burdens with one another and having their emotional discomforts eased. I believe there is another way to view this slogan as “an opportunity shared is a joy multiplied.”

Earlier this year I attended a dual-track intensive retreat at Santa Rita Abby in Sonoita, Arizona. The retreat was led by three volunteers from Contemplative Outreach of Phoenix who provided leadership for Centering Prayer, prepared and served all the wonderful and tasty meals, and met the various needs of those in attendance.

Prior to the retreat they managed the registration and did all the shopping for 10 people for eight days, as the retreat was in a very isolated location. There is so much more to what these precious servants do that I simply cannot put it all into words.

At the end of the retreat I met with the three volunteers to understand why they continue to do this selfless service, and this is what I learned:

Two of these volunteers had been facilitating retreats for over 20 years and the third person for nearly 15. Some worked full-time, while others were retired, but all still lived very active lives. They generally serve two retreats per year, donating their personal time off, and they do all this work out of the kindness of their hearts.

“An opportunity shared is a joy multiplied”; the servant leaders who volunteer all over the world have realized the joy of serving. Selfless-

service seems to provide a reward that cannot be compared to anything else.

The fourth Guideline for Contemplative Service states:

Those who serve in leadership ordinarily do so in a voluntary capacity. We employ staff and contractors as needed.

We depend on the enormous generosity of those serving Contemplative Outreach and performing innumerable tasks without remuneration. We invite members of the community to serve in ways best suited to their call and special qualifications. All who serve seek to be attuned to the needs and concerns of the whole community, whether individuals, small prayer groups, or local chapters. We may employ staff and contractors with special or necessary skills as needed.

When I first read this guideline, my business sense thought having a volunteer population was wise because we just couldn't afford to pay for all the services needed. If there was a charge for everything the network provides, I am afraid that many with limited means could not afford to partake.

Because of my experience on retreat, my understanding of this spiritual guideline has been broadened by seeing volunteer service as a “reward” in itself, as it helps to relieve us of our self-centered nature.

There are a few servants who receive nominal compensation throughout the network for their contributions to Contemplative Outreach and we are grateful for their commitment to serve the communities. These servants provide

specialty services that few others can and the compensation they receive is only fair and reasonable so as not to place an undue burden on those providing these vital services.

For practitioners of Centering Prayer, the natural trajectory of the transformative process is a movement toward service; the volunteers who have been giving of themselves for decades live this every day.

Let me encourage all those who have been serving in a volunteer capacity to mentor someone else along the way. Share this joy of servant leadership with someone else and watch the fruits of the Spirit transform the life of another. If you are a servant leader who has been volunteering for a long time, we need you to support tomorrow's leaders by providing gentle direction and the confidence you have gleaned from many years of experience.

To all those who have served so many for so long, thank you. Thank you for saying yes whenever the call for assistance went out. Thank you for giving of your time and your resources when no one else could or would. Thank you for the sacrifice of denying yourself to serve another, even when it wasn't convenient; and thank you for your part in transforming this world. The community of Contemplative Outreach would not be what it is today if it wasn't for you who serve. ☸

May you all be richly rewarded in this life and the next.

Your servant administrator,
Denis Sheehan

Centering Prayer: Embracing Every Moment of Silence and the Presence

CARL MCCOLMAN

Like many people who are blessed with material abundance, I have more books than I have time to read them. I was so gratified when I recently learned of the Japanese word *tsundoku*, which loosely translated means “books piling up faster than you can read them.” The idea is that owning lots of unread books can be a sign of curiosity and intellectual humility: knowing that there is more knowledge out there than you can ever fully digest.

It might just be a rationalization for all of us bibliomaniacs, but I’ll take it.

I bring this up because I want to mention a book in my library that, as yet, remains unread. The title alone is noteworthy: it’s called *Each Moment is the Universe: Zen and the Way of Being Time* by Dainin Katagiri. It’s a commentary on a 13th-century Zen Buddhist text about the nature of time, exploring how time is not a commodity (we talk about “saving” or “spending” time), but rather an essential component of existence. Time, like space, is a dimension of reality, the container in which we “live and move and have our being.”

One of these days I’ll get around to reading Katagiri’s book, but in the meantime its provocative title reminds me of another book that I *have* read: *The Cloud of Unknowing*. One of the more charming aspects of that medieval manual on contemplative prayer is its use of the word “atom.”

When I think of an atom I think of the smallest, most basic unit of matter: the building block of the elements. Different atoms make up the difference between hydrogen, helium, lithium, and so forth. But for the anonymous author of *The Cloud*, an atom is not the smallest unit of *matter* but the smallest unit of *time*.

“Some people believe contemplation is time-consuming, but it’s not. In fact, it takes

less time than anything else you’ll ever do. It’s as brief as an atom, which excellent philosophers in the science of astronomy define as the smallest particle of time. An atom’s littleness makes it indivisible, nearly inconceivable, and also invaluable. On this subject, it has been written, ‘Every moment of time is a gift to you, and one day you’ll be asked how you spent each one.’”¹

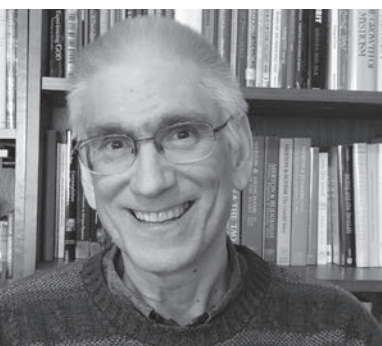
What is the Cloud-author saying? Each moment of time is a gift. Each tiniest moment of time, he goes on to say, is enough time for the human will to act.

Now, connect that to the title of Katagiri Roshi’s book: Each moment of time is the universe: it contains all things. In each moment we can act, we can choose, we can direct our will. In a single moment we can fall in love with God. In each moment, we are available to receive the grace of contemplation.

This has beautiful implications for Centering Prayer. In *The Heart of Centering Prayer*, Cynthia Bourgeault suggests that “the real work of Centering Prayer is to lay the inner foundations for an entirely different kind of spiritual attentiveness.”² She goes on to say “the purpose of Centering Prayer is to deepen your relationship with God (and at the same time your own deepest self) in that bandwidth of formless, objectless awareness that is the foundation of nondual consciousness.”³

In other words, Centering Prayer teaches us a new way of seeing, of knowing, of attentiveness, of awareness. Moment by moment, breath by breath, by each glimmer of silence between thoughts, we are invited into that expansive place where silence, bigger on the inside than it is on

[1] Butcher, Carmen Acevedo. *The Cloud of Unknowing: A New Translation* (p. 13). Shambhala. Kindle Edition.



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including *The Big Book
of Christian Mysticism*
and the forthcoming
Unteachable Lessons.

the outside, ushers us in to the very presence of God — perceived only nondually, without subject or object, in that spacious openness Bourgeault calls “objectless awareness.”

Centering Prayer invites us to deepen our relationship with God. But how can we “deepen” what is the most intimate reality of our lives already? Centering Prayer does not make our connection with God deeper than it already was — rather, it opens us up to the Divine reality that is already there.

And it only takes a moment for us to behold what is always, already present.

Every moment of Centering Prayer is an invitation into the very heart of God — or, perhaps better said, an invitation to recognize the heart of God, in which our lives are already immersed. Each moment is the universe, but also each moment is eternity — for just like the erstwhile atom, what is the smallest unit of space is also, simultaneously, the smallest unit of time.

Every moment of prayer is also heaven — for what is heaven, other than the “container” in which we meet the presence of God? For that matter, your heart is heaven (see Romans 5:5), your breath is heaven, your body is heaven.

This also reminds me of Thomas Merton’s concept of *le point vierge*, which he writes about in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*.

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us.⁴

Between Merton, Katagiri, Bourgeault, and *The Cloud*, the common thread seems to be this: the present moment is the heart of all things: it’s the only place we will ever meet the God who loves us. But because it is just a single moment: an “atom” of time, there is not enough time to get all worked up about it. We do not *achieve* the present moment: but with every breath, with every return of our attention to silence, with every return to the sacred word, we are invited once again to *receive* it.

To receive the universe. To receive heaven, and eternity. To receive the gift of the eternal now. To receive the grace of objectless awareness. To receive the presence of God.

As I write these words, I’m struck by the irony of it — for I’m using words (thoughts) to point us to that which lies beyond all thought. Even the most elevated concept or erudite strand of mystical theology just gets in the way, or pulls us away from the gift of the silent. Which is why we return to the sacred word, for it in turn invites us back into the moment.

Hmmm. One of these days I really must read Katagiri’s book. If I can get so much out of a book’s title, who knows what treasures may be found within? ☸

[2] Bourgeault, Cynthia. *The Heart of Centering Prayer: Nondual Christianity in Theory and Practice* (p. 16). Shambhala. Kindle Edition.

[3] *ibid.*, p. 40.

[4] Merton, Thomas. *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Image Classics)(p. 155). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

God's Hints of Non-Dual Love Within Science and Nature

JOY ANDREWS HAYTER, PH.D.

"Science is becoming more and more a prophet for our time, telling us things about God we never knew and about how the universe works."

Thomas Keating, *That We May Be One*

In his later years, Thomas Keating often referred to science in his teachings, seeing hope in the new physics as describing a greater connection between us and God, among the human family and all creation. He recognized science's contribution to evolving the cosmology that prevailed when the Bible was written: we were "bad" people on a flat earth with Heaven above and Hell below, stranded far from a judging God, and we needed to exert great effort to earn the right to go to Heaven. As a scientist, I'd like to briefly point to a couple of the concepts of the new cosmology that may have inspired Fr. Thomas from the scientific point of view, and explain why I think they are relevant to our practice of Centering Prayer.

The cosmology of modern physics brings us outside of dualistic concepts such as here or there, good or bad, me or not-me. It presents instead some revelatory concepts: all the "stuff" we are made of is actually condensed energy (Einstein's $E = mc^2$) rather than solid balls. And the open, timeless manifestations of the particles we are made of overlap and interact intimately. (This is not "woo-woo" thinking: a lot of our modern technology, including leading edge developments in medicine and electronics, is based on quantum mechanics.) And as described by Stephen Hawking in *The Grand Design*, all this mysterious

matter we are made of arises from fields spanning the universe, intimately connected and even holographic. Each point contains all the others, in a hyper-dimensional reality. A rough analogy for this cosmic web might look like a spider's web after the rain; glistening in the sun with droplets of water, each droplet reflecting all the others. This is distinctly non-dual: in a web where each point contains all others, there is no separation. In other words, we can say that all is intimately connected, part of a single whole. Mystics, as well as scientists, perceive this oneness. And often, it is called Love.

We are never left out of this Love. God opens experiences of this mystery to all of us: perhaps as a fleeting sense of deep connection, of timelessness, or of being fully a part of the incredible love-bearing beauty in nature. And in the context of the new cosmology, this mysterious, intimately connected reality, Jesus' teachings can begin to make sense to us on a deeper level. Rather than our needing to do all sorts of good works to go to a Heaven later, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is at hand, and that it is inside of us (Luke 17:21). And he tells us that we are intimately connected: we must love one another, as he has loved us (John 13:34). He even tells us that our neighbor, the one we should love as ourselves, is not the one who

looks like us or prays like us: in this hyper-connected field, everyone is our neighbor. And no one is separate from God.

One of the gifts emerging from Centering Prayer is that as we let go of our conditioned dualistic thinking, we discover this field of Love, connection, timelessness and open possibility that has always been there. With the eyes of contemplation, a gift from God deepened by our practice of surrender to God's presence and action, we can begin to feel embraced, rather than confused, by non-duality. Moment by moment in Centering Prayer, we can experience a dynamic interplay between a non-dual openness, manifested by surrendering and consenting to God, and a dualistic grabbing, pushing away, or failing to even notice how caught up we are in our own drama. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one who has "woken up" during Centering Prayer to notice that I'd been lost in thoughts for quite a while! But over time, I've slowly been graced with a deeper trust in God and a faith that *God is there, right in the middle of whatever I am experiencing*. That in the midst of my grabbing, my turning away, the open field of Love is always being offered. I can say yes again and again to that open, loving field: to lie down, to rest, to let go of my heavy burdens. As human beings we are not defined by sin, but by a Love that is birthing and holding us in every moment. Thanks be to God! ☸

Joy Andrews Hayter holds a PhD in Physical Chemistry from UC Berkeley, and has always been fascinated by the mysteries of the cosmos and how they reflect on the mystery of our own being. Also a spiritual director, she teaches Centering Prayer and leads prayer workshops and retreats at Mercy Center in Burlingame, California and other locations.

Non-Conceptual Seeing as Contemplative Practice

RONALD BARNETT

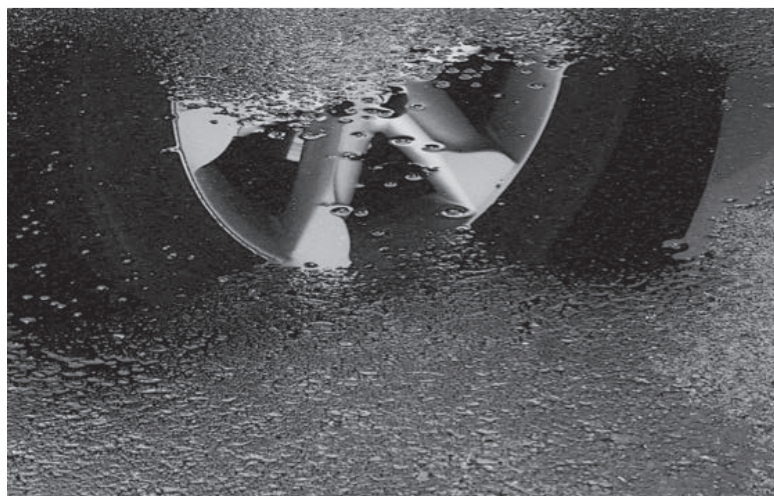
As a man is, so he sees.

- WILLIAM BLAKE

The visual world is ever present to us and we increasingly photograph it. We photograph our children, pets, parties, sunrises, sunsets, and ourselves - the selfie. An estimated 1.3 trillion photographs were made globally in 2017. This proliferation of photo-making, available to everyone, is primarily due to the appearance of the camera phone that requires little if any photographic skill to use.

Fr. Thomas Keating acknowledged a contemplative dimension of life and by virtue of our humanity, we can awaken to it via religion, science, art, and nature (Re-Awakening to the Contemplative Dimension of Life, Annual Meeting of Contemplative Outreach [CO], San Francisco, 2011). Since a significant dimension of life involves our perceptions of the visual world, it represents a rich, ever-present source in which to awaken. In response to his “invitation”, I began to question, what is a contemplative photograph? What makes it different from a photograph that is not “contemplative”? Is it the subject matter? Does it result from some contemplative state in the viewer? And, is a contemplative photograph “taken” or received?

Of the photographic prints in my home, one in particular seemed to catalyze these questions. It was a nature scene and to my eye it transmitted qualities of stillness, silence and presence. However, these qualities did not seem tightly defined by the content of the photo or from my mental associations to it - they just were. A Google search led me to an influential book, *The Practice of Contemplative Photography: Seeing the World with Fresh Eyes*, by Andy

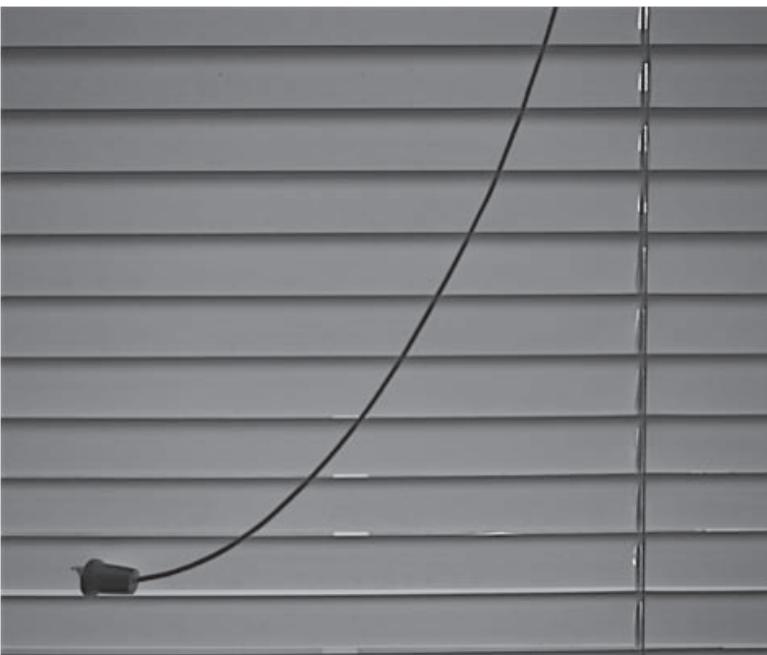


Miksang teaching emphasizes letting go of conceptual mind in order to see what is manifesting visually in the here and now, as it is rather than what it is thought to be.

Carr and Michael Wood. I was delighted to learn that others were interested in similar questions and had even written on them. The book, in turn, led me to study with Michael Wood, at The Miksang Institute of Contemplative Photography (MICP). The word miksang is Tibetan and translates as “pure eye”.

At the MICP, I encountered a contemplative teaching that is rooted in a Buddhist understanding of the human mind and the nature of artistic expression. I discovered a new contemplative practice, commonalities with and complementarities to the Centering Prayer practice, and an inspiring avenue in which to awaken more fully to the perceived world.

Miksang teaching acknowledges an innate human capacity in everyone (not just in special people such as artists) to experience moments when the richness and beauty of the visual world presents itself free of the influence of thinking (labels, beliefs, concepts, judgments, opinions, memories). In such moments, the eye and mind are synchronized. Everyone has such moments, but they are typically ignored or glossed over. Miksang teaching emphasizes letting go of conceptual mind in order to see what is manifesting visually in the here and now, as it is rather than what it is thought to be. One lays aside concepts of what is beautiful or not, what would be liked by others or not, or a consideration of what is artistic or not. One takes photos of perceptions, not necessarily objects or forms per se, though they may obviously appear wholly or in part in what is perceived. As a teacher replied when asked why his photo of a person did not include the person's head, the response was, "because I didn't see it."



Usually, through habit and to meet the demands of living, the mind is useful in order to get things done, to survive, and even to thrive. But in so doing, visual "gifts" are overlooked. Likewise, we cannot rely only on our thoughts about Ultimate Being to define all that there is. Such a practice of letting go of thinking is similar to what is done in Centering Prayer as we let go of thinking and concepts, and in consenting, we permit Ultimate Being to reveal itself as it is in the intimacy of relationship.

The practice of Miksang consists of three steps. First, one experiences an unbidden "flash of perception", and hence it is fresh, pure, direct and unconditional. It is pure for the same reason as the practice of Centering Prayer is considered pure prayer - sans thinking and conceptualization. Such perceptions are typically sudden and can be a little disorienting. I often find myself reacting inwardly with an exclamation of surprise, an "oh!" Second, there is discernment when one stops and receptively clarifies what was seen. How much of the surroundings are included? Is the perception vertical or horizontal? It is this second step that I find the most challenging, as they simply appear on their own. This is a time to stop, to slow down and receive perceptual understanding. Third, with clarity of what was seen, I express it with a photograph - "true perception, true expression."

As I awaken to the abundance of beauty and elegance around me, I am discovering that Miksang complements my Christian contemplative path whenever and wherever I open to what is present in the here and now, unfiltered by constructions of thought, "beyond words, thoughts, and emotions". In so doing, I am allowing what is to reveal itself in the intimacy of lived experience. As with grace, or perhaps as grace, what comes is unbidden, not of my making, and a delight for which to give thanks. ☸

Ronald Barnett lives in Germantown, MD, USA and has served CO as a chapter coordinator and a board member/trustee, and shares his photographs with CO. He is a Centering Prayer presenter, and group and retreat facilitator. Ronald has completed the MICP curriculum and is in its teacher training program.

Vestibules to the Practice of Centering Prayer

The Five-Dimensional Approach

JIM REALE

On the path to divine union through the practice of Centering Prayer, a variety of vestibules are now available to help prepare ourselves on many levels for prayer. Let's begin with the experience of these vestibules from a retreatant during the retreat Sacred Pathways Into Centering Prayer. After all, what changes a person's choices in life, internally and externally, is his or her own experience.

"The vestibules prepared my body, mind and heart, especially my body. My religious upbringing kept my body (bad) and mind/intellect (good) separated. It took a long process to reintegrate the two and to experience the divine spirit in all of me. The vestibules allowed me to learn ways to experience my body and breath in a gentle and beautiful way. It deepened my Centering Prayer practice and brought me joy."

This testimonial captures two important issues that have been part of the Christian dilemma for centuries. The body is bad, an impediment to our spiritual life, and the mind is good, the pinnacle, the only worthy conduit for the growth of spiritual life. Neither statement is truly accurate or helpful. When we bring ourselves to prayer, we are invited to show up as an integrated whole person with all that we were given, consenting to the presence and action of God within. Can we come to prayer knowing we are made in God's image and likeness?

The vestibules give us tools to integrate the different dimensions of ourselves – our body, breath, mind, intellect and emotions – so that in wholeness we can proceed in one direction, towards our Union with God.

The vestibules give us tools to integrate the different dimensions of ourselves – our body, breath, mind, intellect and emotions – so that in wholeness we can proceed in one direction, towards our Union with God.

Let us examine these five dimensions and the vestibule(s) that correlate to each part of our humanity.

Our physical body is our most external dimension. The primary vestibule of influence is simple body movements or postures. They are performed in a slow sequence, moving the arms overhead to a gentle arching of the chest, forward bending and safely twisting the upper body. These movements can be done standing, seated, or on the floor according to age, ability, limitations and past injuries. The sole purpose is to reduce or remove any tension accumulated during the normal course of our daily lives, so that sitting for longer periods in prayer can be as comfortable as possible. All postures can be modified to accommodate each individual. Stability and comfort are paramount. Without these qualities the postures are reduced from vestibule, an entrance to prayer, to a physical workout with the increased possibility of injury. Stability and comfort are sought in body, breath and mind. It is a gradual process achieved over time through the appropriate choice of movements and with the intention of preparing for Centering Prayer.

Our energy or life force is the next dimension of our human system. It is influenced by breathing practices. Different breathing techniques will produce different results depending on our objective. If we are feeling agitated, a focus on exhalation will be the guiding intervention to prepare for prayer. If we are feeling tired, an emphasis on inhalation will keep us alert. Conscious breathing will also have a profound, quieting and clarifying effect on the mind. Over time, with the proper guidance, we can move from a state of distraction to one of attention. And so, the "surface of the river," our random thoughts, is calmed prior to our prayer period.

The mind is another dimension of our human system. Preparing for Centering Prayer and following the example of the monastic tradition, chanting is the chosen primary vestibule used to reign the mind. Chant, which uses simple melodic tones, offers us a way to direct the mind especially when the words have meaning of a spiritual nature complementing Centering Prayer. Unlike simply using the spoken word, chant produces vibration that reverberates throughout us. Saying versus chanting the Our Father are two very different experiences. Chant is a systemic experience touching all our dimensions. It also has the added benefit of creating a devotional spirit within ourselves prior to prayer. Chanting “God is love, all who live in love, live in God” or “Jesus open my heart, Jesus come into my heart, Jesus rest inside my heart” creates a receptivity, an invitation, a call to the Divine that adds something special, something sacred to our intention of consent in the prayer. It is best understood if experienced for oneself.

Moving inward to our intellect. There is a distinction between the mind and the intellect. The mind is where we store our information, our learning, our cultural programming, etc.; the intellect is the dimension from which we, as individuals, prefer and choose a specific direction based on our personalities, our nature, our patterns of expression, our past impressions in life, our deeper mind. We are attracted to specific vestibules based on our deeper mind. We choose what vestibule resonates best with our intellect. In truth, it is because of our deeper mind that we have chosen

Centering Prayer over other forms of prayer.

Our deepest and most intimate dimension, where our emotions reside, presents a great gift to the inner life, and at times a great challenge. All healthy relationships where there is a desire to remain connected are beneficial, including the relationship with the Centering Prayer community and with the Divine.

However, if we pause for a moment and examine ourselves, we may discover a negative emotion either dormant, just on the surface or perhaps full blown for all to see. Our emotions can affect all the other dimensions and so careful consideration is needed here. Depression, anger, sadness or fear are some of the most common emotions that can be an obstacle. Chanting with slow movements and positive feelings of joy, love and/or gratitude, may be introduced to transform a negative emotion into a positive one that benefits and prepares us for prayer. We need to recognize that on the continuum of emotions, after self-examination, we are rarely neutral.

Applying these vestibules minimizes the obstacles residing in our different human dimensions, whether physical, energetic, mental or emotional. They can initiate a process of purification and may well reduce, remove or replace the obstacle with an unimpeded opening to the practice and benefits of Centering Prayer. These vestibules accelerate what Fr. Thomas calls, “Divine Therapy” and can assist us in moving closer to our true self and finally, to “presume we are in divine union.” ☸

For more information on the Centering Prayer vestibules: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/article/sacred-pathways-centering-prayer>



Jim Reale has been teaching contemplative practice for 20 years. He created The Five - Dimensional Approach to prayer incorporating movement, breath, and chant. He has taught with Fr. Thomas Keating and Fr. Richard Rohr. Besides his CD *Doorway to Devotion* (2005), he is currently composing his second chanting CD based on the writings of Fr. Thomas Keating.

Jim is a Registered Nurse, a certified yoga teacher, yoga therapist, published researcher and filmmaker. He continues to integrate eastern wisdom practices into western spirituality.

Contemplative Spiritual Direction

JULIE SAAD

"How hard it is to listen; how healing to be heard."

When I am asked what spiritual direction is, this quote is the first thing that comes to mind. Have you ever experienced being really heard when you shared from the heart and someone simply listened? It's a powerful, life-giving experience.

I first heard this quote in my spiritual direction training program when one of my teachers, who taught a class called "The Art of Listening," referenced it to emphasize that listening was at the heart of spiritual direction. She saw it in her church bulletin, and it made a deep impression on her. When I heard it, it made the same impression on me because it rang true.

Spiritual directors practice "holy listening" or "sacred listening", what Joyce Rupp calls generous listening. We listen for the Spirit in the silence, sometimes in the space between the words, in the interweaving threads of what is being said. John Philip Newell calls it listening for the heartbeat of God – within ourselves, within one another, within the earth. The spiritual director not only practices this deep listening, but also models it. We all have the ability to listen in this way; it's part of our intuitive faculty. But when we are stressed, traumatized, suffering in some way, or just new to spiritual experiences, our faculties sometimes get muddled.

Spiritual direction is not psychotherapy or any of the many other counseling therapies. We all may experience a need for psychotherapy, marriage counseling or some sort of cognitive-behavioral therapy in our lives, and we should seek the treatment most appropriate for what we are experiencing. Most spiritual directors have been trained to recognize what is outside the realm of the spiritual direction relationship, and when to make a referral for another type of counseling.

So, what is within the realm of the spiritual direction relationship? Spiritual direction is not a form of "treatment." It is more a spiritual companioning or journeying, sometimes an intuitive guiding. For

contemplatives on the spiritual journey spiritual direction might be a way to maintain our awareness of God in all of life and see how we respond – or don't respond – to God's presence and action in our lives. Our spiritual and ordinary lives are not separate and so the content of spiritual direction is derived from our whole life experience and can even help integrate what was previously separated.

In the early 1990's at a conference in Denver, Fr. Thomas said that he didn't think that contemplatives needed spiritual direction, that the Spirit was the spiritual director. As the Contemplative Outreach community evolved, he understood the need for guidance for those on the contemplative path, especially for those not living in religious community. In *Intimacy with God* he devotes a chapter to the spiritual direction of contemplatives. For Centering Prayer practitioners, it is helpful to have a spiritual director that practices Centering Prayer or some other contemplative prayer practice because the spiritual director needs to have the personal knowledge and experience of this path. It's not enough to have read or studied about contemplative practice.

When I was in my spiritual direction program, I was required to be receiving spiritual direction. At that time very few members of Contemplative Outreach were doing spiritual direction. I first chose a spiritual director who taught one of our classes and with whom I felt an immediate connection. She did not have a contemplative practice and by the second session I found that I was spending too much time explaining my experience on the contemplative path and that our time together was not helpful. I then found a spiritual director who was a long-time Centering Prayer practitioner and this made all the difference in the world. Even though I had been doing Centering Prayer for about 12 years at the time, I found it immensely helpful to have a contemplative sharing from his own experience and helping me understand my own experience and struggles.

Even after having been on this journey for some time, the divine therapy continues. In his book *Spiritual Friend*, Tilden Edwards, one of the founders of the Shalem Institute's spiritual direction training program, says that all forms of spiritual guidance exist to reveal to us our human condition (which in simple terms could be called the feeling of separation from God) and to encourage our transformation to the experience of oneness with our Source. Divine therapy typically starts out as the healing process known as the unloading of the unconscious and the evacuation of the emotional junk of a lifetime. This can be a challenging, often painful time. We may be tempted to think that things are getting worse. In his book, *Into the Silent Land*, Martin Laird says, "We do not journey far along the spiritual path before we get some sense of the wound of the human condition, and this is precisely why not a few abandon a contemplative practice like meditation as soon as it begins to expose this wound." A spiritual director who has experienced the divine therapy can encourage us to persevere in the practice and to trust the process. This is God's process, not ours.

Along this journey most of us experience what St. John of the Cross calls the Dark Night of the Soul. We may experience dryness in our prayer or feel that we are no longer able to pray. We may no longer experience the "felt presence" of God or the consolation that we felt in the beginning. This loss can cause a period of mourning. To someone not on the contemplative path this may look like depression, when really nothing is clinically wrong. During that time, we are developing our spiritual muscle to face our shadow self and gain an even greater trust in God. During the dark nights God is preparing us for an even deeper relationship with the Ultimate Mystery, which is part of our transformation.

Throughout the history of the Christian tradition, the mystics described an experience similar to what Fr. Thomas teaches about the human condition and

How to find a spiritual director?

The best way to find a contemplative spiritual director is a personal recommendation from fellow contemplatives, by contacting the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation
<https://shalem.org>, or
Spiritual Directors International
<https://www.sdiworld.org/>.

You can also email:
isabelle@coutreach.org for other suggestions.

Some directors are willing to use Zoom video or other technology to connect with their clients remotely.

divine therapy. Even St. Paul in Romans 7:15 expresses the distress we sometimes feel about our human condition: "What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate." Fr. Thomas had the benefit of psychology to describe this experience in modern language. When we give ourselves over to this contemplative journey, consenting to the presence and action of God within, most of us will have similar experiences along the way. This is not an individualized journey; it is a human journey. A contemplative spiritual director can help us normalize our experiences and reassure us that what we are experiencing is the result of God's love for us and our consent to God's presence and action within. ☸



Julie has been involved with Contemplative Outreach for over 25 years and is a commissioned presenter in Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina and the Welcoming Prayer. She is the coordinator of the Contemplative Living Experience program in Denver, a program modeled after the Nine-Month Course. She completed the Benedictine Spiritual Formation Program in 2008, a two-year training program in spiritual direction offered by Benet Hill Monastery in Colorado Springs. Julie currently serves on the Governing Board of Contemplative Outreach Ltd.

The 12th Principle Fund

MARU LADRÓN DE GUEVARA



"The love of God is so powerful that no one can just sit on it. It is bound to express itself. We have to think not just of praying together but how we can reach out and support each other in helping those in prison, the homeless, the hungry, the oppressed, everyone in need. Above all, direct attention to the most unbearable problem in the world today, which is the destitution of the poor...The Spirit may be asking the Christian denominations to join forces with each other and with other world religions in addressing human needs and social issues. The God in us is calling us to serve the God in others."

Thomas Keating, *The Better Part*

A few months ago now, Contemplative Outreach received a generous donation requesting that the funds be used to honor Fr. Thomas' teaching embodied in the 12th Theological Principle of Contemplative Outreach's Vision. For those who do not read it frequently, here is what it says:

12. The practice of Centering Prayer deepens our awareness of the oneness of all creation and our compassion for the whole human family.

Centering Prayer inspires ever-increasing regard for others, especially for the poor and those abandoned or exploited in the various throw-away cultures of our time. We are invited to make available the gift of Centering Prayer to everyone, particularly to the needy and the marginalized. Centering Prayer also enables us to respond to the Divine presence in the whole human family, and in all of creation.

It is the desire of our donor that funds be readily available to offer Centering Prayer to the needy in the United States and in countries served by Extensión Contemplativa, our Spanish and Portuguese-speaking branch. An administrator of the 12th Principle fund was requested and has been chosen.

We were immediately challenged by the realization of the difficulties involved in living this principle. It will not be a matter of just throwing some kind of event together and fulfilling a simple request. This gift brings with it a call, deep soul searching and intentional prayer for guidance and inspiration. How shall we bring Centering Prayer to the disenfranchised, needy and marginalized when their cries for survival and security are so deafening? Basic needs must be attended first before we can meet their spiritual hunger. This will mean identifying individuals or groups whose skill set and mission is to serve the survival and primary needs of the destitute, and then, finding ways to synergize with them and offer what we are uniquely equipped and called to share.

We are grateful that members of our communities are called in many different ways to embody Spirit and that there are many among us deeply committed to prayer and transformation who are already contemplative activists in various dimensions of life and service.

Thanks to the generosity and vision of one donor, this fund has now been established and is open for further donations to sustain and grow this work. We are inviting your prayerful participation in this initiative by sharing your inspiration and collective wisdom on how the 12th Theological Principle of the Vision can be lived and encouraged in our chapters and regions.

We look forward to hearing from you. Please feel free to call or email ideas, suggestions, or requests to participate in this endeavor to me at rahamin@aol.com or (727) 580-4673. ☸

Serving and loving our common Vision,
Maru Ladrón de Guevara
on behalf of The Governing Board of Contemplative Outreach

A Blessing from Fr. Carl Arico



Father, Son and Holy Spirit
stir up within us all the graces and blessings that you want for us.

Enlarge our territory
our minds,
our hearts
and our whole being,
to do your will in ways far beyond our wildest imaginings.

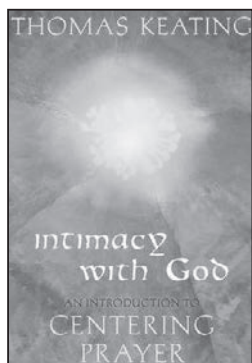
We need your help; we cannot do this without you.
Keep us from being discouraged and second guessing ourselves.

In our desire to do good may we not cause too much harm.

May all our deceased relatives and friends
who are gazing upon the face of God cheer us on
as we enter more deeply into the mystery of the Blessed Trinity
with the Blessed Mother through Christ Our Lord.

Amen

RESOURCES IN OUR ONLINE STORE



Intimacy with God

Thomas Keating

Transformation through Contemplation—a deeper understanding of the Spiritual Journey. An in-depth look at the origins, theology and

method of Centering Prayer as prayer and method to divine transformation. Fr. Thomas puts forth his teaching on what might be the deepening experience of Centering Prayer and a contemplative vision for our times. **\$16.95 USD**



Meditations on the Parables of Jesus

Thomas Keating

Includes insightful commentary on the parables of the bible, including the Mustard Seed, the Narrow Door, the Penitent Woman, the Sower, the Prodigal Son and others. This collection of

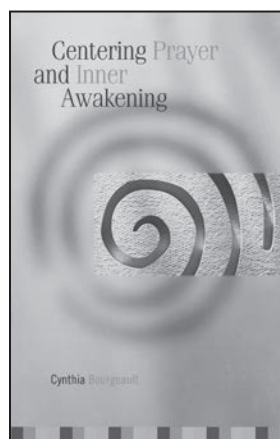
meditations renews the voice and vigor of each parable's deeper meaning. **\$16.95 USD**

ONLINE COURSES

You may wish to try one of these self-guided online courses to learn a contemplative practice and be supported in your journey:

- Centering Prayer as Practice as Process
- Embracing Living: The Welcoming Prayer
- Lectio Divina: Heart-to-Heart Listening and Living with God
- Contemplative Discernment
- The Transformation of Suffering
- And more.

You can find a full list of courses at <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/online-courses>



Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening

Cynthia Bourgeault

A complete guidebook for those who wish to learn about the practice of Centering Prayer. Bourgeault goes further than offering an introduction. She examines how the practice is related to the classic tradition

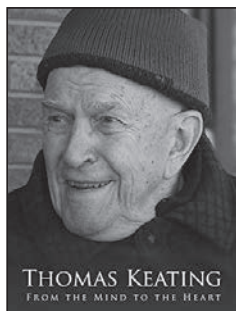
of Christian contemplation, looks at the distinct nuances of its method, and explores its revolutionary potential to transform Christian life. With a foreword by Thomas Keating. **\$16.95 USD**



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RESOURCES FROM OUR FRIENDS

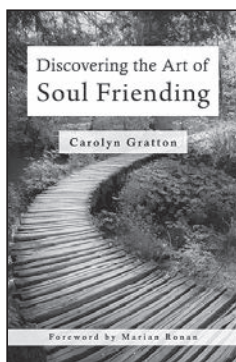


Thomas Keating: From the Mind to the Heart

In this new film Thomas Keating engages in a profound, revealing spiritual dialogue ranging spiritual transformation to

transcendence to death and dying.

The film, **only available in digital format**, is comprised of a series of in-depth spiritual conversations between Fr. Thomas and John Osborne that were shot in New York and Snowmass from 2006 to 2010. <https://amzn.to/200x89q>



Discovering the Art of Soul Friending

Carolyn Gratton

This friendly, accessible book is about the age-old hunger in human hearts to open, and deepen, and grow towards faithful intimacy with the Source of all that is. This spiritual journey is radically

personal, but it is not meant to be entirely solitary. It can be supported at crucial times by friendship with someone who has learned how to listen, through a life of prayer, for the guidance of God's Spirit in their own soul and in the soul of another.

DIRECTORY

For a complete listing of the Contemplative Outreach worldwide contacts, please visit the Community section of our website at www.contemplativeoutreach.org > Community. Choose US or International Contacts.

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Please send your comments, suggestions and content submissions to Isabelle Robinson, isabelle@coutreach.org



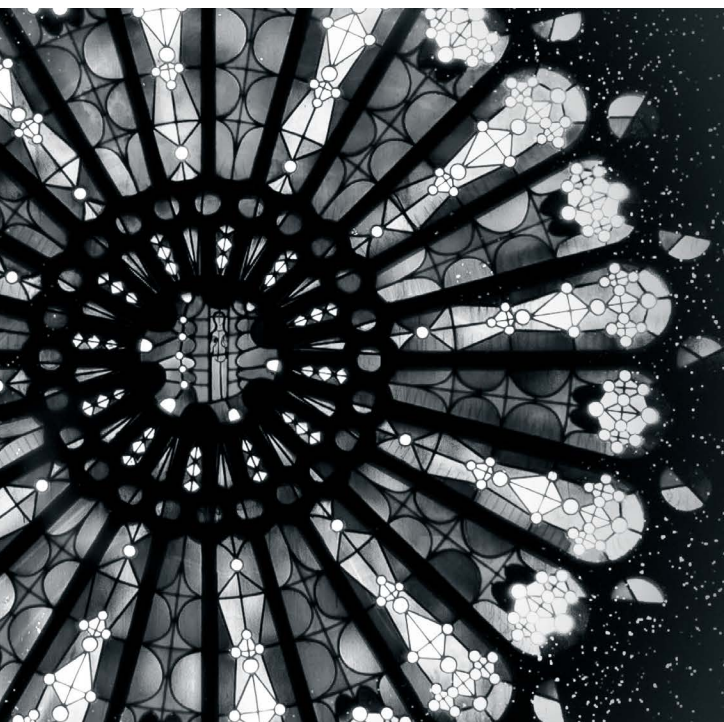
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**The indwelling Divine Presence affirms our
innate core of goodness and is expressed fully
in the theology of the Most Holy Trinity.**

CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE #5