



# CENTERING PRAYER

Workbook

THOMAS KEATING



CENTERING  
PRAYER



CENTERING  
PRAYER

A Training Course  
*for* Opening to the  
Presence of God

THOMAS KEATING



SOUNDS TRUE  
*Many voices. One journey.*

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Boulder CO 80306

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Design by Jennifer Miles

The tracks on *The Inner Room* are excerpted from the complete album *The Inner Room*, available at:

Aunyx Productions, Inc.

[aunyx.com](http://aunyx.com)

303-252-1270

[Blair@aunyx.com](mailto:Blair@aunyx.com)

Printed in China

ISBN 978-1-59179-736-4 (pbk.)



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## *Introduction*

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*“Be still and know that I am God.”*

—PSALM 46:10 (KJV)

**T**HIS SIMPLE WISDOM saying is an invitation given to you by God. It is a call to set aside all activity, rest in silence, and come into an intimate relationship with the Beloved. We at Contemplative Outreach are honored to be your guides on this journey to explore the rich wisdom and teachings of the contemplative Christian tradition. It is our hope that this journey will transform your relationship with yourself, others, and, most importantly, with God.

Blessings,

Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler, Father Carl Arico, and Pamela Begeman  
at Contemplative Outreach

## PRAYER AS RELATIONSHIP

Throughout the ages, most cultures and religions have practiced some form of prayer as a way of relating to God or spirit. In the modern Western world, we tend to think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed through words. Often these prayers become supplications to a God “out there”—a God that we perceive to be somewhere else. Although these prayers are those most commonly practiced, they are not the only expressions of prayer.

In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, the word for prayer is *shela*. *Shela* can be interpreted to mean “to open oneself and listen to the Divine Presence.” In this sense, prayer is not necessarily words being spoken; rather, it is closer to what, in the Christian tradition, is called contemplation. We’ll explore the concept of contemplation in a moment, but first it’s important for you to be open to a new understanding of prayer in the context of the contemplative Christian tradition.

In the contemplative sense, prayer is not something you do, but is instead a relationship between you and the Divine Indwelling. To pray is to accept God’s invitation to turn your mind and heart inward and open to the realization that you are not separate from God. God is always with you, whether you know it or not. This understanding of prayer as a relationship with God is a primary foundation of the practice of Centering Prayer. As you undertake this course and learn more about silent prayer in the contemplative Christian tradition, remain open to this new paradigm of prayer.

## THE CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

What is contemplation? In a literal sense, to contemplate is “to look thoughtfully for a long time.” In a spiritual sense, contemplation is to enter into silence and come into a knowledge of the Divine. A contemplative state can be cultivated for the purpose of pondering the nature of God, but it can also happen spontaneously in the presence of something that inspires awe or wonder. You may have experienced a moment of contemplation while gazing at the stars or when losing yourself in the presence of a loved one. This experience of oneness breaks through your sense of separation and may invite you into a deep experience of unity with God.

*“For the first 1,600 years, contemplation was the goal of Christian prayer.”*

—FATHER THOMAS  
KEATING

From a classical Christian perspective, contemplation is thought of as “the narrow way that leads to life”—one of simplicity, solitude, silence, and the willingness to surrender to the presence and action of God within. This is a radical idea to those who are heavily invested in the promises of the material world. As the Gospel points out, “. . . the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it (Matthew 7:14 NASB).” Contemplation is the narrow way, the simple way. The love of God draws you to momentarily give up your normal preoccupations—your thoughts, emotions, worldly desires, and concerns—draws you within, and allows you to willingly consent to the Beloved. It’s so simple that it is easy to miss. Yet this narrow way can be found if you are willing to be still—to be silent, to consent. As Father Keating writes in his book *Open Mind, Open Heart*, “Contemplation is a fundamental part of our

human nature and hence available to every human being. It is accessed by letting go of our own ideas about ourselves, turning our will over to God, and resting in the Divine Indwelling that is already present within us and waiting to reveal itself to us.”

St. Gregory the Great (circa 540–604), a bishop of Rome, is considered one of the great teachers in early Christianity. He described contemplation as “the deep knowledge of God that is impregnated with love.” For St. Gregory, the state of contemplation was both the fruit of reflecting on the word of God in Scripture and the precious gift of God, a state he called “resting in God.” This idea of rest is woven throughout the Scripture by means of the Sabbath ritual. The sacred Sabbath was a time characterized by attention, surrender, and an honoring of the healing forces of grace and spirit. In contemplation, the mind and heart are not so much *seeking* God as *resting in* God.

The early Christians understood the importance of resting in the Divine and sought ways to continually deepen their relationship with God. By rooting themselves in the person of Jesus Christ, the study of Scripture, and the willingness to consent to the Divine Indwelling, they came to a relationship of oneness, which is now called *contemplative prayer*. This state of residing in pure relationship with God signified the opening of the mind and heart to God, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. In a moment of grace, the practitioner’s awareness of God became closer than the breath, closer than thought, closer than consciousness itself. As Father Keating points out in his book *Manifesting God*, “God of course does not actually come closer; rather, God’s actual closeness at all times and in every place begins to penetrate our ordinary consciousness.”

Contrary to some meditative states, contemplative prayer is not the suspension of all activity. Rather, it is the letting go of obstacles and simply consenting to God's presence and action within. It is not something you can force to happen; it is becoming present at the very core of your being. This revelation comes to light as you open and become receptive to a deeper relationship with God. What a relief to know that contemplative prayer is not based on your efforts or strivings, your past actions or future resolutions, or your virtuous actions or behaviors. Contemplative prayer is a gift given when you say "yes" with your whole being to a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

## CHRIST CALLS US TO RELATIONSHIP

You can see contemplation in action through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As the Son of the God of Christian faith incarnates into human form, He becomes one with the human family and its individual members. There are numerous passages in Scripture alluding to Jesus' intimate knowledge of God. In the same way, you are invited to know God as Jesus did—in the intimate setting of experience itself, mirroring Christ's relationship to God the Father as *Abba*, the Aramaic word for "daddy."

How does this relationship get started? God, in unconditional love, takes the initiative in relation to you. At the same time your desire for God is also God's gift to you. "We love [God] because [God] first loved us (1 John 4:19 KJV)." God initiates the desire and the Divine Spark within you responds. Deep calls to deep. As Scripture says:

*“For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons [and daughters] of God.*

*For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons [and daughters], by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’*

*The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”*

—ROMANS 8: 14-16 NASB

This call to commune with God has attracted spiritual seekers throughout the ages. As a child of God, you are invited to participate in this deeply rooted Christian tradition of contemplation.

## THE BIRTH OF CENTERING PRAYER

Many of the great Christian mystics have forged the contemplative path that is before you. Throughout the centuries, contemplative prayer has been cultivated by the Desert Fathers of Egypt, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and Thomas Merton—to name only a few. It has been called by various names, corresponding to the different forms it has taken, including Prayer of Faith, Prayer of the Heart, Pure Prayer, Prayer of Simplicity, Active Quiet, and Acquired Contemplation. In recent years, a number of initiatives have been taken by various religious orders to renew this long-established contemplative orientation and share it with contemporary seekers, just like you.

In the 1970s, answering the call of Vatican II to revive the contemplative tradition in modern-day Christianity, three Trappist monks—Fathers William Meninger, Basil Pennington, and Thomas

Keating—looked to these ancient sources to develop a simple method of contemplative prayer for contemporary people. This method came to be known as Centering Prayer—a reference to Thomas Merton’s description of prayer that is “centered entirely on the presence of God.” Over time, the monks offered Centering Prayer workshops and retreats to both clergy members and laypeople. Interest in the method spread, and shortly after the first Centering Prayer intensive retreat in 1983, the Contemplative Outreach organization was formed to support the growing network of Centering Prayer practitioners. Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler and Father Carl Arico were at the first retreat in 1983 and subsequently dedicated their lives to the teachings of Centering Prayer and the work of Father Keating in an effort to renew the lost riches of the contemplative Christian tradition. Gail is currently the president of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., and Father Carl is the organization’s vice president.

Today Centering Prayer is practiced by people all around the world, creating local and global networks of Christians in communion with Christ and each other and contributing to the renewal of the contemplative dimension of Christianity. It is the fulfillment of our true nature and our true destiny, as St. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians:

*“In love, God destined us for adoption through Jesus Christ,  
in accord with the favor of His will,*

*“God is therefore hidden  
within the soul, and the true  
contemplative will seek Him  
there in love, saying, “Where  
have You hidden Yourself?”*

—ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

*. . . In all wisdom and insight, God has made known to us the mystery of His will . . .*

*In God we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One who accomplishes all things according to the intention of His will, so that we might exist for the praise of His glory, we who first hoped in Christ.”*

—CF EPHESIANS 1: 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12

## WHAT IS CENTERING PRAYER?

Centering Prayer is rooted in the word of God, both through Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. Anchored in four basic guidelines, the method is designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing you to receive it. The method presents the teachings of our ancient predecessors in an updated form. Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer; rather, it casts a new light and depth of meaning on them. This method of prayer is a movement beyond conversation with Christ and into communion with Him. The source of Centering Prayer is Trinitarian—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The focus of Centering Prayer is Christ. The effect of the method is ecclesial; that is, it builds communities of faith and bonds the members together in love.

Centering Prayer is fundamentally two things at the same time: first, the deepening of your personal relationship with Christ; and second, a method of freeing you from obstacles that prevent faith, hope, and love from unfolding within you. It reduces the tendency for over-activity in prayer and excessive dependence on concepts or



ideas in order to think your way to God. In short, it allows you to become sensitive to the subtle inspirations of the Holy Spirit that lead to intimate relationship.

### *The Wisdom Saying of Jesus*

Centering Prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the “Sermon on the Mount”:

*“ . . . When you pray,  
go to your inner room,  
close the door,  
and pray to your Father in secret.  
And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

—MATTHEW 6:6 (NAB)

The inner room is that place within you that is always accessible to you, wherever you are, whenever you choose to access it. The method and discipline of Centering Prayer teaches you to relax and open in this inner room. What happens in the inner room is a process of growing in “the deep knowledge of God” referred to in Colossians 1:11.

This interpretation of Matthew 6:6 was taught and encouraged as early as the fourth century. Most notable are the teachings of John Cassian (circa 360–435), a Father of the ancient church who brought much of the Christian spirituality of the east to Western monasteries. In his book *Conferences*, he quotes Abbot Isaac as saying, “We need to especially be careful to follow the Gospel precept which instructs us to go to our private room (some texts say ‘closet’) and bolt the door so that we may pray to our Father, and this is how we can do it. We pray

in our private room whenever we withdraw our hearts completely from the turmoil and noise of our thoughts and our worries and then secretly and intimately we offer our prayers to God. We pray with the door shut when without opening our mouths (the interior dialogue) in the perfect silence, we offer our petitions to the One who pays no attention to the words but looks hard at our hearts.”

## HOW TO USE THIS PROGRAM

This program is an introductory training course in the method of Centering Prayer. It was developed for those seeking a deeper relationship with God—a way of accessing your inner room. Many Christians look to the Eastern spiritual traditions for meditative practices, not knowing that Christianity has always had a tradition of silent prayer. This was exactly why Centering Prayer was created; Fathers Meninger, Pennington, and Keating met all kinds of disenfranchised Christians who, dissatisfied with the formality and lack of spirituality of religion, traveled East to find alternative teachings and practices to help them experience a true sense of spirituality, oneness, and peace.

This course is designed to support your learning experience and to help you integrate the practice into daily life. Here are some tips to help you get started:

1. **Plan ahead.** Set aside the time in your schedule when you can engage with each chapter in this book. Try to find a regular time each week when you can devote your attention and intention to the materials.

2. **Start with this workbook.** Each section of this course is divided into chapters. Begin by reading a chapter; then take time to reflect and write answers to the questions at the end of each section. When you are finished, engage with the corresponding audio or video session.
3. **Pace yourself.** The principles of this program have been developed over decades. Take as much time as you need to read, reflect, and practice what you have learned before moving on to the next chapter.
4. **Make use of the support materials.** When you begin to pray on your own, use the prayer cards and guided Centering Prayer audio sessions to support your ongoing practice.

## WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY

You are beginning a very important journey, perhaps one of the most important you'll ever make. Keep in mind that as you enter into this relationship with the Mystery of God that millions of others have made this same journey before you—and millions are making it now. You are not alone.

Trust the process and be faithful to it. Give it time to unfold. This is the way of the heart. Don't make any snap judgments about what is happening. Don't spend time trying to figure it out. Allow the interior work of the Spirit to work within you. So much is possible when you let go and consent. Most of all, remember that this silent prayer practice is not meant to replace other forms of prayer and

worship, but it will likely increase the meaning and inspiration you receive from your usual prayer practices. Be open to new insights and experiences that come as a result of Centering Prayer. No one was more passionate and eloquent than St. Paul at encouraging his fellow seekers scattered all over Greece and Asia Minor. Our wish for you is echoed in his words:

*“I give thanks to God at every remembrance of you,  
praying always with joy in my every prayer for you,  
I am confident of this, that the One who began a good work in  
you will continue to complete it.*

*It is right that I should think this way,  
because I hold you in my heart,  
you who are companions with me in Grace.”*

—CF PHILIPPIANS 1: 3-7

In faith and in joy, we know God will complete His good work in you. We are so grateful for your participation in this course. Welcome to this lifelong journey.

Ponder the following questions as you finish this chapter. If possible, write your answers in a notebook or journal to be specifically used for this course.

## REFLECTIONS

1. What does prayer mean to you? What attitudes do you have about prayer?
2. What positive or negative memories do you have around prayer?
3. Do you have any attraction or resistance to prayer? Are there any obstacles to prayer in you to become aware of and to release?
4. Let this idea sink in: *Prayer is relationship*. How does this match up with your attitudes and reflections on prayer?
5. Take time to reconnect with your intention for taking this course. Why did you feel called to participate in this course now?
6. Are you willing to open yourself to a new relationship with God? How would you describe your relationship with God now?
7. Are you willing to engage in daily practice? What can you do to support your daily practice?

8. Do you have other resistance or concerns? If so, simply acknowledge them and jot them down, but don't let them deter you from your original intentions and desires.



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## WATCH SESSION 1

*The Ultimate Reality*



# I

## *Prayer as Relationship*

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**I**N THE CONTEMPLATIVE Christian tradition, when we say “let us pray,” we are actually saying “let us have a relationship with God” or “let us open to a deeper relationship with God.” This is the key to understanding Centering Prayer. That is, Centering Prayer is simultaneously a *relationship with God* and a *discipline* to continually foster that relationship. It is a method that prepares you to receive the gift of contemplative prayer—that intimate communion with God. In this way, Centering Prayer becomes the act of deepening your relationship with God. We revisit Matthew 6:6 as the reminder of how we can begin to do this:

*“ . . . When you pray,  
go to your inner room,  
close the door,*

*and pray to your Father in secret.  
And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”*

—MATTHEW 6:6 (NAB)

Through the method of Centering Prayer, this sacred relationship begins to unfold. First, you are invited into the inner room—the spiritual level of your being. This room is always available to you, because it is *within* you. It’s a place where you are not doing anything, but rather, just being—resting in relationship with the Divine Indwelling. As you allow yourself to simply rest, you close the door to the physical world; that is, you let go of your attachment to ordinary occupations—to the immediate environment, the people in your life, and your endless list of activities and distractions. You leave your interior dialogue outside the door—your thoughts, emotional reactions, and perceptions. You lower the curtains on all of your usual psychological imagery, preoccupations, and rationalizations so that finally, in this private place, you may even cease thinking about yourself.

In the inner room, you pray to your Father in secret—without words, but with intention. Seeing the intention of your heart in secret, the Father rewards you. In Aramaic, the word for reward is *nepreok* and can be interpreted to mean “blossom” or “flourish.” In this way, your reward is a blossoming in the presence of the Beloved. This process continually unfolds: you open your heart, God reads your heart, and the relationship is deepened further. There is no effort required except your consent. In fact, the heart and soul of Centering Prayer is the act of consenting to God’s presence and action within.

Centering Prayer becomes a practical way of implementing Jesus’ recommendation for how to pray, as revealed in Matthew 6:6 (above).



The method guides you through this movement into your private room, into the willingness to close the door and enter into a silent solitude with God.

## GROWING IN INTIMACY

All human relationships develop through a process of growing intimacy. As a relationship deepens, it progresses through four stages: acquaintanceship, friendliness, friendship, and intimacy (see Figure 1, pg. 18). As you look over the chart in Figure 1, you can intuit from your own experience that an overlapping movement takes place through each level of relationship. This progression reflects a similar growth process in your relationship with Christ. Ultimately, this maturation is one of continual deepening, one that has no definitive end. Thus, the rewards of engaging in this process are limitless.

Think about your own relationships. Call one into mind now, perhaps someone with whom you are intimate now or someone with whom you had an intimate relationship in the past. How did you become acquainted with that person? How did the circumstances of your original meeting feel? How long did it take to become friendly with that person—did you have lunch with him or her, talk on the phone, or chat at a party? Now think about the growth of that relationship into a friendship—the point where you began to trust this person—perhaps sharing secrets, vulnerabilities, joys, and challenges. What did it take for you to forge a solid friendship with this person? Perhaps your phone conversations got longer or you went through a difficult situation together, supporting one another throughout. Perhaps you each matured as time went by, and were able

— FIGURE I —

## GROWTH IN A RELATIONSHIP

| LEVEL OF RELATIONSHIP          | CHARACTERISTICS  | EXPRESSION IN PRAYER   |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <p><b>Acquaintanceship</b></p> | <p>Informational<br/>Formal/awkward</p>  | <p><b>Saying our prayers</b><br/>Opens you to stay in contact with Christ, e.g., grace before meals, going to church or Sunday school</p>  |
| <p><b>Friendliness</b></p>     | <p>Conversational<br/>Informal/at ease</p>   | <p><b>Pondering our prayers</b><br/>Opens you for God to speak to you, e.g., experiencing God in nature, prayerful reading of Scripture</p>  |
| <p><b>Friendship</b></p>       | <p>Commitment<br/>Self-disclosure<br/>Spontaneity/freedom<br/>Growth of faith/trust/love</p>   | <p><b>Praying in our own words</b><br/>Opens your heart, feelings, and emotions completely to Christ, e.g., frequent and spontaneous prayer, self-disclosure, a growth of faith, trust and love in Christ, a sense of wonder</p> |
| <p><b>Intimacy</b></p>         | <p>Confidence/gratitude<br/>Shared joy/suffering<br/>Self-surrender<br/>Experience of oneness<br/>Fidelity to the relationship<br/>Being with the other with no need to say, prove, or do anything</p> | <p><b>Being present to God</b><br/>Opens you to the pure gift of God's presence beyond thoughts, words, and emotions, e.g., resting in God</p>   |

to share your life experiences and wisdom with one another. Now call to mind the stage in this relationship where you became truly intimate with this person; where you felt you knew them so well that you could practically read each other's minds and finish each other's sentences. At this stage you enjoyed just being together. You felt a deep trust, knowing you could count on the other person, knowing that they would be there for you, even if not physically present. This level of intimacy, where you truly carry another in your heart, is an excellent human analogy for the experience of contemplation with God. God becomes our trusted companioning presence.

True intimacy with God is something that develops gradually, over time. As Father Keating notes in *Open Mind, Open Heart*:

“The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from God. If we get rid of that thought, our troubles will be greatly reduced. We fail to believe that we are always with God and that God is part of every reality. The present moment, every object we see, our inmost nature, is rooted in God. But we hesitate to believe this until personal experience gives us the confidence to believe it. This involves the gradual development of intimacy with God. God speaks to us through each other as well as from within. The interior experience of God's presence activates our capacity to perceive God in everything else—in people, in events, in nature.”

By learning and engaging in the method of Centering Prayer, this notion of separateness can eventually dissolve. God's companioning

presence can become part of your everyday life. Your seeking a God “out there” will cease because God is already here. This can be a very strengthening, healing, and enlivening experience, not only for you, but for those around you. By committing to deepening your relationship with God, you may find that your relationships with others are deepened, building communities of faith, mutual friendship, and love. Thus the intimacy you experience in your inner room becomes manifest in your outer world. You may also find that your other prayers and devotional practices are deepened and enlivened.

Don't be confused; Centering Prayer is not a “magic carpet” to bliss. It's a transformative process that involves our consent to God's presence and action. As your relationship with the living

*“So much depends on our idea of God! Yet no idea of Him, however pure and perfect, is adequate to express Him as He really is. Our idea of God tells us more about ourselves than about Him.”*

— THOMAS MERTON  
from *New Seeds of Contemplation*

Christ within deepens, transformation happens. You're not *trying* to change; you *are* changed—by the presence and action of the Spirit of God within. This happens little by little, gradually over time. The growing intimacy with God, the source of love, is what transforms you. Love heals. Love grows. Love transforms.

## REFLECTIONS

Ponder the following questions as you finish this chapter and write your answers in your notebook or journal.

1. How do you view God? Explore your attitudes and perceptions about God; is God a judge, a policeman, a benevolent being? What are your characterizations of God?
2. Review the Growth in a Relationship Chart (see Figure 1, pg. 18). Without judgment, notice what level of relationship you are currently experiencing with God. Identify the obstacles within yourself that keep you from becoming more intimate.
3. How does your relationship with God mirror your relationship with others? You may want to reflect and ponder on any similarities and differences.
4. What is the deepest desire of your heart for your relationship with God right now?
5. As you relate to the process in which human relationships develop, imagine your own relationship with God developing in this manner. How does that make you feel? Be open and let whatever thoughts and feelings arise without censoring them.

6. How do you feel about the idea of consent in this practice? Has anything changed in your motivation to learn the Centering Prayer method?



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WATCH SESSION 2

*Prayer as Relationship*



## 2

# *The Method of Centering Prayer*

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**T**HE METHOD OF Centering Prayer is based on four simple guidelines. These guidelines are not rigid rules, but rather a way to nurture the deepening of your relationship with Christ. These principles are designed to help you prepare for, sit in, and come out of a Centering Prayer period. A typical Centering Prayer period is twenty minutes long. As you mature in practice you may decide to undertake longer prayer periods, but in this course we will work with twenty-minute periods.

Here are the four guidelines of the Centering Prayer method:

## THE GUIDELINES

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

***Guideline #1: Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.***

Before beginning Centering Prayer, you'll need to choose your sacred word. This single word symbolizes your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. It is sacred not because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning you give it. In Session Three, part one, you will be guided through a brief exercise to help you choose your sacred word. You'll begin with a brief prayer to the Holy Spirit asking for inspiration in selecting your sacred word.

What makes an appropriate sacred word? There are no strict guidelines, but a word of one or two syllables is recommended in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a 14th-century contemplative Christian classic that was part of the inspiration behind the creation of Centering Prayer. The important thing to keep in mind is the intention the word carries for you—to consent to the presence of God. Examples of sacred words include:



|        |        |       |
|--------|--------|-------|
| Jesus  | Abba   | mercy |
| yes    | peace  | love  |
| Mother | Father | trust |

You can even choose a word from another language if that word best symbolizes your intention to consent, such as *Kyrie* (Lord), *Lumen* (Light), *Dios* (God), or *Ye'su* (Jesus).

There isn't a good word, a bad word, a better word, or a more sacred word. Remember, the sacred word is a symbol that expresses your intention to consent, so whatever word you choose is the right word for you. This becomes your grounding point during prayer when you are challenged by thoughts. You can gently return to your sacred word and reestablish your original intention to be with God as often as needed during your Centering Prayer time. That's the simple purpose of the sacred word. It has no surprise meaning, no trick effect on your psyche, no profound stirring of the subconscious or the unconscious. It simply signifies your intention—that you are willing and open to be with God during the time of Centering Prayer.

Once you choose your sacred word, make a commitment to use it for a period of time. Many people choose a sacred word and when they find their Centering Prayer period is filled with thoughts, they think that the word “isn't working” and move on to choosing a new word. Don't get caught up in the misunderstanding that the word has some special power and that choosing the “right word” will catapult your Centering Prayer into unimaginable depths. The sacred word is nothing more than the meaning you give to it. This doesn't mean your sacred word won't change over time. Most importantly, don't change your sacred word in the middle of the Centering Prayer

period. To do this would be to engage with thoughts and cease the process of consenting.

*Guideline #2: Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.*

The second guideline helps you begin the formal period of Centering Prayer and prepare your body and mind for the practice. Sitting comfortably means finding a posture where your body can be relatively comfortable, but not so relaxed as to encourage sleep during the time of prayer. With a straight-yet-soft back, your exterior position is one of relaxed comfort while your interior disposition is one of alert receptivity. Your hands can rest gently in any position. Once you find the right posture, gently close your eyes as a symbol of letting go of everything around and within you. Then, begin to introduce the sacred word inwardly, as if you were gently laying a feather on a piece of soft cotton. Notice that the gestures described in Guideline #2—a relaxed, receptive posture, closed eyes, and the introduction of the sacred word—are all symbolic acts of your intention to consent. By engaging in these acts, you lay the groundwork for the only activity that you will engage in during prayer—consenting to God's presence within.

A good analogy for the process this guideline describes is that of marriage. At first, one becomes engaged to their beloved, pledging the intention to consent to the intimate relationship of marriage. The ring becomes a concrete symbol of this intention; it carries no real meaning in itself, except of the intention it symbolizes. The "I do" of the marriage ceremony becomes the continual act of consent, not

only at the ceremony, but throughout the entire marriage relationship. Like marriage, this commitment to consent is at the heart and soul of Centering Prayer. For this reason, Centering Prayer is sometimes called the Prayer of Consent.

***Guideline #3: When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.***

The third guideline helps you let go of thoughts and return to your commitment to consent throughout the Centering Prayer period. The word “thoughts” is an umbrella term for every perception, including body sensations, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and even spiritual experiences. Thoughts are an inevitable, integral, and normal part of Centering Prayer. They aren’t thought of as “bad” or something to punish yourself for when they arise. By following this guideline, you are directed gently back to the activity of consent. The sacred word serves as a reminding gesture to let go of thoughts, to open, and to consent once again.

Notice that returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word indicates a minimum effort. There is no fighting or struggling, no judging or punishing. Returning to the sacred word is what we call, “the return,” and is the only activity you initiate on your own during the time of Centering Prayer. At times, the sacred word may become vague or even seem to disappear. Don’t worry; your intention is still there. Guideline #3 is a reminder to simply notice when you’ve become engaged with your thoughts and to return ever-so-gently to your sacred word. We will take a deeper look at how to do this in the next chapter.

*Guideline #4: At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.*

This last movement in the method of Centering Prayer offers you a reverent and peaceful transition out of your Centering Prayer period. Think of Centering Prayer as your special time with God. After spending sacred time resting in God's presence, it only seems natural to gently close that special time with a few moments of silence. This also enables you to gently bring the atmosphere of silence and stillness into the activity of your everyday life.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

Now that you have a better understanding of the method of Centering Prayer through the four guidelines, here are a few practical points to help you get started with your Centering Prayer practice:

- Practice two periods of Centering Prayer each day, one first thing in the morning and the other in the afternoon or early evening. Schedule your prayer time when you are most alert and find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted for twenty minutes.
- When you begin, read a short verse of Scripture or do a very brief relaxation exercise like yoga, breathing, or stretching to help relax the body and dispose the mind for prayer.
- Use a clock, set a timer, or listen to a guided audio practice specifically designed to take you through your Centering Prayer period. The minimum time for this prayer is twenty minutes,

but you can extend the time if you desire. This course contains two twenty-minute guided audio Centering Prayer sessions to support your practice.

- During the prayer period, it is not unusual to experience physical discomforts or distractions. You may notice slight pains, itches, twitches, or general restlessness. These are often an expression of unraveling emotional knots in the body. You may notice heaviness or lightness in the extremities, which can occur due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness. Whatever the symptom, remember that these are the thoughts referred to in Guideline #3, so don't judge them or react to them; simply return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. Let them come and let them go.
- At the end of the prayer period gently turn off your timer or audio device and sit in silence with your eyes closed for a few moments. You may consider ending the prayer time by slowly praying the "The Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9). When you feel ready, open your eyes and move into the activity of your day.

## UNDERSTANDING CENTERING PRAYER

Before you begin your practice of Centering Prayer, it's important to have a clear understanding of what Centering Prayer is and what it is not:

- It **is not** a "technique," but instead a way of cultivating a relationship with God.

- It **is not** a relaxation exercise, though it may help you release stress and feel refreshed.
- It **is not** a form of self-hypnosis, but rather is a way to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness.
- It **is** a path of transformation in and through Christ.
- It **is** an exercise of faith, hope, and selfless love.
- It **is** simply resting in God—beyond thoughts, emotions, sensations, or any felt experience of God.

As we stated in the beginning of this program, Centering Prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to foster the development of the relationship. The contemplative disposition of *discipline* means “to do in love” and *foster* means “to keep alive within oneself.” In other words, you make time for your relationship with God, just like you would with a loved one or close friend, because you enjoy and value the relationship. You sit in silence, inspired by your love of God. This discipline, twice a day every day, is in total service to the relationship.

Your daily practice of Centering Prayer also connects you in silence to a worldwide community of prayer. Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler describes it this way: “Each day, as Centering Prayer practitioners worldwide connect together in the silence we share, we are known and welcomed as loved ones. I am together in God with my brothers and sisters who understand that oneness is the fruit of contemplative life. There are no separations in God.”

## REFLECTIONS

1. Review the four guidelines of Centering Prayer stated at the beginning of this chapter. Do any of the guidelines seem confusing or challenging? If so, go back to the explanation in the chapter and reread it to help familiarize yourself with the concept(s).
  
2. As you prepare for your first Centering Prayer period, how do you feel? Are you nervous, excited, scared, or apathetic? Do you have any resistance? Write down your initial feelings about beginning the practice.

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### WATCH SESSION 3, PART 1

*Practicing Centering Prayer: The Method of Centering Prayer*

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### LISTEN TO THE GUIDED CENTERING PRAYER AUDIO, SESSION 1, TRACK 1

*Consenting to the Presence of God*

### AND TRACK 2

*Centering Prayer*







# 3

## *Thoughts and Use of the Sacred Word*

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**B**Y NOW YOU'VE had your first experience of Centering Prayer. If you're like most people, you may have noticed moments where you were so engaged with thoughts, you forgot your sacred word, or perhaps even forgot you were in your Centering Prayer period. If this is true for you, take heart, you're not alone. Thoughts are not only inevitable, but actually an integral and normal part of the process. They are there to help you let go of them. In this chapter, we will focus on the role of thoughts in Centering Prayer, the relationship of thoughts to the sacred word, and the dynamic between thoughts and the sacred word. With this new understanding, you will be able to let go of unnecessary struggle and take a friendlier attitude toward thoughts during the practice of the prayer.

Recall Guideline #3: *When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.* The sacred word is the symbol that

expresses your intention to consent—the one activity you enter into during Centering Prayer. However, when you realize that you are engaging in thoughts, this is the time to initiate the return; that is, you re-introduce the sacred word as a reminder of your intention to consent. In so doing, you perform an act of love—a reiteration of your commitment to be in relationship with the Beloved.

## A DEEPER LOOK AT THOUGHTS

Remember, “thoughts” is an umbrella term for all perceptions, including physical and sensory observations, emotions, memories, reflections, commentaries, and spiritual experiences. In other words, any conscious perception is considered a thought. Even the effort to try and calm the mind is considered a thought. The good news is that thoughts are a necessary part of Centering Prayer. In Centering Prayer, thoughts are not viewed as a failure, as something to struggle against, or as something to control or cease altogether. Instead, by learning to let them come and let them go, you begin to unconditionally consent to God’s presence and action within. Over time, it becomes easier to notice thoughts as they arise and to simply let them pass by, like clouds floating in the sky.

## THE FIVE KINDS OF THOUGHTS

We have classified thoughts into five categories to help you become more aware of them when they surface and subsequently learn to release them. These categories are not meant to give you more thoughts to ponder during the prayer; in other words, you are not

asked to identify these types of thoughts during the prayer period. They simply provide a useful context to understand what is meant by the term “thoughts” in the context of Centering Prayer periods:

1. **Ordinary distractions or wanderings of the imagination.**

These thoughts may consist of sensory perceptions, flights of imaginative fancy, or things you were thinking about prior to the time of prayer. Treat these as background music in a supermarket—don’t get sidetracked by these meanderings of consciousness.

2. **Thoughts that give rise to attractions or aversions.** Some thoughts have an attractive or aversive quality to them that, when engaged, can trigger your emotions. Depending on whether these are pleasant or unpleasant, you will feel spontaneous likes or dislikes that are often attached to people, events, memories, or future plans. Resist the overwhelming urge to latch onto these emotionally charged thoughts.

3. **Self-reflections.** As humans, it is natural for us to want to assess how we are doing when taking on new endeavors. These assessments include thoughts such as, “How am I doing?” or, “This peace feels so great!” Rather than resting in a surrendered relationship with God, self-reflections become an attempt to possess or control the experience. When these thoughts arise, keep in mind that the presence of God is like the air you breathe—you can have all you want as long as you don’t try to possess it.

4. **Insights.** When you allow yourself to quiet down in Centering Prayer, it is not uncommon for theological insights, discoveries about the spiritual journey, or psychological breakthroughs to come into your awareness. These may come in the form of a solution to a pressing problem, a call to help someone in need, or even an insight about the nature of life. Even the most altruistic feelings or realizations are considered thoughts in the context of Centering Prayer. While these are the most tempting to follow, while in prayer, allow yourself to come back to the one activity again and again—consent, by returning to your sacred word.

5. **Thoughts and feelings arising from the unconscious.**

Centering Prayer encourages a purely receptive disposition toward God. For this reason, thoughts and feelings arising from the unconscious may immediately arise in your prayer period. This “unloading of the unconscious” is explained in great detail in Session Four. As the unconscious becomes purged of painful or repressed memories, surges of primitive emotions, physical tension and pain, and even mental anxiety may begin to surface. These unconscious blocks are all a very normal and healing aspect of Centering Prayer. As you notice these types of thoughts when they arise, let them go as if watching water wash over and cleanse the surface of a muddy rock.

As we said before, thoughts are an integral, inevitable, and normal part of Centering Prayer. They contribute to the unloading and healing of our childhood wounds and help clear the emotional debris of a lifetime. While it’s important to let them go when they arise, it’s

also important to maintain the right attitude toward them. To help practitioners remember not to struggle against thoughts, we've created a handy mnemonic device called "the Four R's of Centering Prayer."

*The Four R's of Centering Prayer*

- **Resist** no thought.
- **Retain** no thought.
- **React** emotionally to no thought.
- **Return** ever-so-gently to the sacred word when engaged with your thoughts.

**Resist no thought:** Don't try to reach a state of no thoughts. Don't push away thoughts. Don't struggle against the thoughts that arise.

**Retain no thought:** Don't become attached or attracted to certain thoughts, however pleasant, inspired, or meaningful. Like boats on a river, simply let them float by.

**React emotionally to no thought:** Don't get attached to the positive or negative emotions that might arise during the prayer or to the positive or negative sensations in the body.

**Return ever-so-gently to the sacred word when engaged with your thoughts:** When you realize that you are engaged to any one of the different kinds of thought, simply return to the sacred word without judgment or undue energy. This simple return to our intention to consent opens us to the indwelling presence of God.

Frank Tuoti, a Centering Prayer practitioner, describes the right attitude toward thoughts in a way that makes fellow practitioners laugh with recognition and relief:

“In wordless prayer we hand these lower faculties (memory, imagination, and rational mind) a ‘pink slip’ informing them that their services are no longer needed. They rebel and immediately begin to ‘entertain us’ with an ongoing ‘theater of the absurd’ on the screen of our mind—coming attractions, cartoons, newsreels, short subjects, and perhaps a ‘feature presentation’ . . . How we respond will determine whether or not we progress in prayer and advance along the spiritual journey. As soon as we learn to allow our stream of consciousness to simply amble on through and out of our mind and remain at peace . . . our time will be well spent and extremely fruitful . . . It is our sincere intention to be in God’s presence at the time of our prayer that is important and at the heart of all contemplative prayer practices.”

—From *Why Not Be a Mystic?*

Generally, having expectations about what should happen during Centering Prayer is an attempt to control the relationship with God. The method of Centering Prayer helps you to open and become receptive to the Divine Indwelling. It is the consent of your will which opens you to the Divine presence and action within. You have no human faculty to perceive this mystery. Therefore, do not judge your periods of prayer by your psychological experiences. Your experience in Centering Prayer

becomes a means by which to deepen your faith in God's abiding presence.

The discipline in Centering Prayer is indicated by the promptness with which you return to the sacred word when engaged with your thoughts. Progress in the practice is not marked by an elimination of all thoughts, but rather is the willingness to detach from thoughts and return to the one activity of consent. Regardless of the amount of thoughts that emerge, understand that thoughts cannot interrupt this prayer unless you deliberately engage them or get up and walk out. You are not aiming for any results, such as a state of no thoughts or elevated spiritual experience. In this way, you are relieved of the burden of placing either value or judgment on your prayer time. So let go, consent, and simply allow the mystery of God's presence and action within penetrate you.

Father Keating captured this idea well when he said:

“Thoughts have a way of getting in, even after we've ‘closed the door to our inner room.’ They don't respect doors, windows, or bolts! So when an attractive thought comes down, then return to the sacred word. In the beginning, you may have to say the sacred word almost constantly to maintain that intention, because of the bombardment of our ordinary thinking apparatus. But you don't say it with impatience; you say it *ever-so-gently* to emphasize that you don't have a negative attitude toward these thoughts, because that won't help.

*“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”*

—ROMANS 8:26 (NASB)

Thoughts are inevitable. It's our *attitude* to the thoughts, *not having no thoughts*, that is the sign of progress. And the proper attitude is to let them all go by without paying attention to them at all."

—FATHER THOMAS KEATING

*Six Follow-up Sessions to the Introduction to Centering Prayer*

## REFLECTIONS

1. Review the four simple guidelines of the method of Centering Prayer. Has your understanding of these guidelines grown by engaging in the prayer? What guidelines are most challenging for you?
2. Review the Four R's of Centering Prayer. Which of the four R's seem easier to do? Which are more challenging?
3. How would you explain the importance of this statement: "It's not the experience of Centering Prayer, but our fidelity to its regular practice that is important"?
4. Observe whether you are bringing any expectations or goals to your practice of Centering Prayer. Become aware of them . . . and let them go.
5. Connect with the idea that returning to the sacred word is an act of love. How does that feel to you?



6. To release your thoughts is to let go of your self, your self-interests, and become present to God. Ponder this idea. What resistance and potential possibilities do you think can come from this abandonment of self?

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WATCH SESSION 3, PART 2

*Practicing Centering Prayer:*

*Thoughts and Use of the Sacred Word*

AND SESSION 4

*The Human Condition* with Father Thomas Keating

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LISTEN TO THE GUIDED CENTERING PRAYER AUDIO, SESSION I, TRACK 3

*Preparing with the Breath*

AND TRACK 4

*Centering Prayer*





# 4

## *Deepening Your Relationship with God*

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### TRANSFORMING THE HUMAN CONDITION

As discussed in Session Four, “The Human Condition,” there is an undeniable angst at the core of the human condition—the experience of being separate from God. In Father Keating’s book *The Human Condition*, he says that the dissolution of this angst begins when we question, “Where am I in relation to God, to myself, and to others?” He states that, “As soon as we answer honestly, we have begun our spiritual search for God, which is also the search for ourselves. God is asking us to face the reality of the human condition, to come out of the woods into the full light of intimacy with Him. That is the state of mind that Adam and Eve had . . . before their disobedience. As soon as they became aware of their separation from God, they headed for the woods. They had to hide from God because the loss

of the intimacy with Him in paradise was so painful.” In the same way, when you become willing to come out of the woods and question the validity of being separate from God, you are confronted with the truth: that you are never separated from God.

An intimacy of this nature develops gradually. As your prayer practice matures, the obstacles of your culturally conditioned attitudes and psychological feelings slowly begin to dissolve. God’s companioning presence becomes a visceral part of your everyday life. There’s no place to go to find God because God is already within you. As you let go of interior obstacles, you awaken to this truth and a growing relationship with the Divine Indwelling.

## FIDELITY TO THE PRACTICE

The practice of Centering Prayer is one of continual growth and a deepening of your relationship with God. The single most effective way to do this is through fidelity to the practice. Here are some practical tips to help support your commitment to an ongoing practice.

- Commit to two twenty-minute periods of Centering Prayer each day. Plan ahead and schedule the time into your daily routine. Over time, increase the length of your prayer periods to thirty minutes or more.
- Although Centering Prayer can be done anywhere and at anytime, it may help to create a sacred space in your home specifically for

prayer time. Keep it simple—a quiet room with a chair or cushion and a small candle or icon on a table.

- Join a Centering Prayer support group, which encourages the members of the group to persevere in their individual practice. You can search for a local group at [contemplativeoutreach.org](http://contemplativeoutreach.org).
- Listen to the Word of God in Scripture. *Lectio Divina*, literally translated as “divine reading,” is another contemplative practice of listening to how God speaks to you personally through Scripture texts. The audio session “The Inner Room” is designed to hold the space for this contemplative practice. You can also learn more about this practice on the Contemplative Outreach website.
- Go to Further Resources (pg. 65) for recommended books, audio, and video programs to help support your practice.

## THE FRUITS OF CENTERING PRAYER

As your fidelity to Centering Prayer becomes more established, the fruits of the practice will begin to spontaneously manifest in your daily life. These gifts are not actions you do, but a state of being that expresses what you are becoming through transformation. The people in your life may begin to notice these fruits even before you do. As your compassion grows, expanding your ability to understand

*“The Fruits of the Spirit are indications of God’s presence at work in us at varying degrees and forms. Through the Fruits, the Spirit is becoming a reality in our lives.”*

—THOMAS KEATING  
from *Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*

the greater needs of the human family, you become able to live in the present moment and respond with mercy and compassion. In this way, you begin to carry out Christ's words in Matthew 25:40 (NASB), "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers [and sisters] of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me."

You may begin to experience the common contemplative values of silence, solitude, simplicity, and service.

- In **silence**, you embrace stillness in daily life and widen your capacity to listen.
- In **solitude**, you courageously engage in the sometimes painful process of self-discovery.
- Embodying **simplicity**, you learn to "let go" throughout the course of daily activities, become open to giving and receiving, and offer gratitude for all creation beyond possessions or status.
- In humble **service**, you develop a non-judgmental attitude toward others and yourself and allow a practical care for all creation to emerge. This leads to a growing awareness of the social application of the Gospel, which we will explore in more detail in the next chapter.

## THE BASIC CORE OF GOODNESS, REVEALED

Perhaps one of the gifts you will receive from your Centering Prayer practice is the realization that at your core is a basic goodness—you

were created in the image of God. This is a fundamental truth of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Therefore nothing can ever change this inherent goodness within you, not even your own negative attitudes of unworthiness, woundedness, or self-loathing—the primary obstacles to deepening your relationship with God.

*“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”*

—GALATIANS 5:22 NASB

In the Hebrew Scripture it is stated that man and woman were created in the image and likeness of God. God subsequently declared that creation as “very good”: “So God created humankind in God’s image. In the divine image God created them. Male and female God created them . . . God saw everything that God had made and indeed it was very good (cf Genesis 1:27, 31). This idea of human goodness continues in the Christian Scripture, “Everything created by God is good (1 Timothy 4:4 NASB).”

Nothing can ever change the inherent goodness within you. It is a source of dignity for every human being. To accept this as your true identity, your true destiny, is to take a quantum leap. Yet, you have the innate capacity to do so. You were made for intimacy, for oneness with God, because God is the source of who you are at your core. Your ongoing commitment to the daily practice of Centering Prayer is a means by which to open, surrender, and live from this basic core of goodness. In his book *Intimacy with God*, Father Keating reveals how this works:

“Each time we return to our sacred word, we allow the Spirit to affirm our basic core of goodness, gradually reducing the

unconscious obstacles to a deeper relationship with God and others. We have to climb up to this kind of silence . . . we have to teach ourselves. The primary teaching of Centering Prayer is basically very simple and can be expressed in two words: ‘Do it!’ It will then do you. But it requires doing it every day. That is extremely important when we consider the other influences that are bearing down upon us. At times in our lives we have to make choices and set up priorities.”

As you continue to engage in the practice of Centering Prayer, revel in the fact that you are undertaking a process of stripping down all of the obstacles between you and God—a practice of total self-surrender. You may want to start using the prayer cards before your Centering Prayer periods to allow Scripture and other inspired writings to enrich your practice. Now is the time to reiterate your commitment to a regular daily practice. Your fidelity to Centering Prayer will transform you, manifesting the Fruits of the Spirit that will permeate your daily life.

## REFLECTIONS

1. What inspires you about the content of this chapter? Is there anything in particular that fuels your desire for relationship with God or your commitment to this prayer practice?
2. Review the list of practical ways to support your commitment to Centering Prayer. What is the one next step you can take right now to support your practice?



3. You may have noticed fruits of your prayer practice that have already emerged. What are they and how have they changed your attitudes toward yourself, God, and others?
4. Ponder this truth: At your core exists a basic core of goodness. What does that bring up in you?
5. As you solidify your intention to deepen your relationship with God, what intentions can you formulate for yourself? What is your greatest wish as you continue on this adventure with God?
6. What is the role of Scripture in your life now? Can you be open to a new possibility in what Scripture has to offer you?

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### WATCH SESSION 5

*Deepening Our Relationship with God*



Pick one prayer card before each of your Centering Prayer periods. Read it slowly and allow it to permeate your being. Then, listen to the guided audio practice on Session 1, Track 2, *Centering Prayer*.

You may wish to slowly read the prayer card again at the end of your practice.



To deepen your practice even more, pick one track from “The Inner Room” audio session, and ponder the Scripture read by Father Keating as you allow the

accompanying music track to hold the space while you reflect and listen to how the Spirit is speaking to you in the moment.



# 5

## *Practicing in Community*

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**F**IDELITY TO A Centering Prayer practice gradually builds community. It's a natural expression of your growing relationship with God, as God is love. As your relationship with God deepens, your desire to share your experience, your growing self-knowledge, and the fruits of your practice will naturally extend out toward others. As more people come together to sit in silence together, over time the collective human condition begins to transform and the entire human family—past, present, and future—becomes the beneficiary.

When you practice Centering Prayer within a group, you become tangibly aware of the Mystical Body of Christ—of a oneness rooted in God, that transcends form, time, and cultural identification. Out of the collective silence comes the awareness that you are part of a greater whole. One long-time Centering Prayer practitioner put it

this way: “There is an intimacy among those who practice Centering Prayer together that transcends mere social togetherness. This closeness emerges from the shared silence of Centering Prayer. It is as if each person’s consent to God’s presence and action within deepens the prayer for all the others. Each experiences an almost palpable unity in the group. And the group itself forms an identity that is grounded in prayer.” Practitioners who pray together often report feeling as though they know each other better than anyone else in their life, and yet they’ve hardly discussed any of the normal topics of conversation that occur in most social relationships. Today, there are more than 800 Centering Prayer groups meeting and praying

*“Right now there are about two billion Christians on the planet. If a significant portion of them were to embrace the contemplative dimension of the Gospel, the emerging global society would experience a powerful surge toward enduring peace.”*

—THOMAS KEATING  
from *Manifesting God*

together around the world committed to this intimate and transformational path. See the Further Resources section (pg. 65) or visit [contemplativeoutreach.org](http://contemplativeoutreach.org) for more information about how to join a Centering Prayer group.

Contemplative Outreach’s mission is to foster the process of transformation in Christ in one another through Centering Prayer. As such, we have created the following principles not only as guiding lights for the organization, but also to point to the unifying possibility of what a simple, silent, receptive practice can bring to society.

These principles include:

- The contemplative dimension of the Gospel manifests as an ever-deepening union with Christ and a practical caring for others that flows from this relationship. It reveals the deeper meaning of Christ's life and teaching.
- Our relationship with the living Christ is the bond uniting us together in mutual love.
- While formed by our respective denominations, we are united in our common search for God and our experience of Christ through Centering Prayer.
- We identify with the contemplative Christian heritage in which Centering Prayer is rooted. We recognize this heritage as the common ground for Christian unity.
- We affirm our solidarity with the contemplative dimension of other religions and sacred traditions.
- Through the continuing practice of Centering Prayer, we experience a deepening commitment to the needs and rights of each member of the human family and an increasing respect for the interdependence of all creation.
- We foster a spirit of unity, generosity, and utmost charity in all our relationships.

In other words, as Centering Prayer practitioners, growing in awareness and the experience of oneness with all creation, we wish to share and live from this experience of oneness with society. As this oneness becomes more and more apparent, we as a human family will find that it is possible to live an ordinary life with extraordinary love—God’s love made manifest through us.

Father Keating put it this way:

“Once we begin the spiritual journey, there is no longer merely private prayer. Our prayer becomes a participation in the groanings of the Spirit for all the intentions and needs of the human family . . . During the periods of Centering Prayer we enter into a sense of oneness with everyone else who is experiencing grace, and with the whole human family. At times we may actually feel this bonding. This bonding is the heart and soul of a Christian community . . . Every little drop of that experience is of almost inconceivable value and vastly transcends the assembled community itself. In other words, the divine energy that is accessed by each one’s participation in Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection becomes a kind of universal prayer for the needs of the whole human family. It has a radiation that is truly apostolic, apostolic in the sense of transmitting the grace of Christ into this world.”

—FATHER THOMAS KEATING

from *Intimacy with God*

“Be still and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10 KJV).” This course began with this simple and ancient invitation given to us by God. It is still very much alive today. It is our sincere wish that you accept this invitation and enjoy the lifelong journey of silence, stillness, solitude, and simplicity—“[to] be still and know God.” As this program comes to an end, know that the adventure is only beginning. The practice of Centering Prayer will undoubtedly become a never-ending path of transformation for you and ultimately, for the entire human race. The Contemplative Outreach family holds you in prayer as you enter this adventure.

*“No speech, no word, no voice is heard  
yet their span extends through all the earth,  
their message throughout space and time.”*

—CF PSALM 19



## WATCH SESSION 6

*A Lifelong Journey*



Continue working with the prayer cards, reading one before each of your Centering Prayer periods.



Work through each of the tracks from “The Inner Room” audio session.







# 6

## *FAQs and Glossary of Terms*

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### **May I use something other than the sacred word as a symbol of consent?**

Instead of a sacred word, a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence or noticing one's breath may be more suitable for some persons. A simple inward glance is a turning of the will toward the Divine Presence within. It should be a general or undifferentiated image, not clear and specific, e.g., a combination of colors in movement. Noticing the breath implies the recognition of the breath as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. You do not follow the breath physiologically, as in many Eastern techniques of meditation, but simply notice it. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.

**What is supposed to happen during the prayer time?**

**How do I know I am making progress—is it working?**

Let go of any expectations you may have for your period of Centering Prayer. The whole prayer is an exercise in letting go. Even “to try” is a thought! To struggle is to want to achieve some goal in the future. The prayer is about letting go of all exterior and interior preoccupations and bringing you into the present moment with God. The present moment is the only place where God is. There is only one activity in Centering Prayer—your consent. When engaged with any thought—including those of expectations and future results, renew your consent by returning ever-so-gently to your sacred word. Remember that the fruits of the prayer are not experienced in the prayer period itself, but in the ordinary events and relationships of daily life.

**I am so aware of how busy my mind is! What can I do to make the thoughts go away?**

This is a common question and a common frustration. When you finally commit to the daily practice of Centering Prayer, you suddenly become aware of a barrage of thoughts—sometimes called “monkey mind”—thoughts that are always present, but you don’t notice them. In silence, they seem at first to be magnified. But remember, thoughts are an integral, inevitable, and normal part of Centering Prayer. You are not trying to get rid of your thoughts, decrease your thoughts, or change the kinds of thoughts that come up. Instead, you let them come and let them go, by returning ever-so-gently to your sacred word. Review Chapter Three: Thoughts and Use of the Sacred Word (pg. 33), especially the section on the Four R’s.

### **Is Centering Prayer a “new age” meditation?**

#### **Where does it come from?**

Centering Prayer is not a new age phenomenon. It is an attempt to renew the ancient contemplative Christian heritage for modern times. Centering Prayer is rooted in the word of God, both through Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ. For a detailed history of contemplative Christian tradition and the method of Centering Prayer, see Chapter Eleven in *Open Mind, Open Heart* (new revised edition), or you may want to review the Introduction (pg. 1) to this course.

### **What is the difference between Centering Prayer and contemplative prayer?**

Centering Prayer is a method that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer. The two are distinct—one is a method of prayer and one is a gift of prayer. Over time, Centering Prayer can remove interior obstacles and open one to receive the gift of contemplative prayer. For more details, see the glossary of terms and review the Introduction (pg. 1) in this workbook.

### **What is the difference between Centering Prayer and Eastern prayer practices ?**

It is important not to confuse Centering Prayer with Eastern techniques of meditation such as transcendental meditation. The use of the sacred word in Centering Prayer does not have the particular calming or focusing effect attributed to some mantras. Many Eastern practices are concentrative and include techniques for focusing the mind. Centering Prayer is completely receptive: the sacred word is the symbol of our intention to consent to the presence and action

of God within. Throughout the period of Centering Prayer, your intention predominates—that is, the movement of your will to consent to God’s intention. Hence, Centering Prayer is a personal relationship with God, not a technique. At the center of this practice is Divine love. This distinguishes Centering Prayer from Eastern methods that are primarily concerned with awareness. Eastern traditions tend to put greater emphasis on what the self can do. The Christian tradition, on the other hand, puts a greater emphasis on what God can do.

It might be said by some that the contemplative Christian journey is the path of heartfulness, while Eastern traditions are the path of mindfulness.

### **What am I consenting to?**

You are consenting to the *presence* and *action* of God in your life. Consenting to the presence of God acknowledges the participation of the Divine life within you while embracing the basic goodness at the core of your being. The action is the healing that occurs on multiple levels of your being as you consent.

### **What is the value of other prayers and devotions?**

It is important to remember that Centering Prayer does not take the place of other prayers, devotions, and church services. These other types of prayer codify your relationship with God by encouraging you to embody it with your whole being. Your voice participates in praise and song; your mind ponders and reflects on your prayers; your heart expresses affection and love for God; and your whole being rests in the healing presence of God. All of this manifests a desire to live out

the commandment to love God, neighbor, and self. Centering Prayer is just the rest of the story—a prayer that builds on all other prayers and enriches each of them.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Attention** The focusing on a particular object such as the breath, an image, or a concept.

**Awareness** The act of being aware of a particular or general perception; another term for consciousness.

**Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–10)** A further exploration of the idea of the Fruits of the Spirit.

**Centering Prayer** A contemporary form of Prayer of the Heart, Prayer of Simplicity, Prayer of Faith, Prayer of Simple Regard; a method of reducing the obstacles to the gift of contemplative prayer and of facilitating the development of habits conducive to responding to the inspirations of the Spirit.

**Consent** An act of the will that expresses acceptance of someone, something, or some course of action; the manifestation of one's intention.

**Contemplation** The act of entering into silence and coming into a true knowledge of the Divine; sometimes used as a synonym for contemplative prayer.

**Contemplative living** Activity in daily life prompted by the Gifts of the Spirit; the Fruit of a contemplative attitude.

**Contemplative prayer** The development of one's relationship with Christ to the point of communing beyond words, thoughts, feelings, and the multiplication of particular acts; a process moving from the simplified activity of waiting upon God to the ever-increasing predominance of the Gifts of the Spirit as the source of one's prayer.

**Divine Union** A term describing a single experience of the union of all the faculties in God or the permanent state of union called transforming union.

**Fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22–24)** Nine aspects of the “mind of Christ” manifesting the growth of the Divine life in us.

**False self** The self developed in our own likeness rather than in the likeness of God; the self-image developed to cope with the emotional trauma of early childhood, which seeks happiness in satisfying the instinctual needs of survival/security, affection/esteem, and power/control, and which bases its self-worth on cultural or group identification.

**Intention** The choice of the will in regard to some goal or purpose.

**Interior silence** The quieting of the imagination, feelings, and rational faculties in the process of recollection; the general, loving attentiveness to God in pure faith.

**Lectio Divina** Reading, or more precisely, listening to the book we believe to be divinely inspired; the most ancient method of developing the friendship of Christ, using Scripture texts as topics of conversation with Christ.

**Method of contemplative prayer** Any prayer practice that spontaneously evolves or is deliberately designed to free the mind of excessive dependence on thinking to go to God.

**Mystical prayer** A synonym for contemplative prayer.

**Purification** An essential part of the process of contemplation through which the dark side of one's personality, mixed motivation, and the emotional pain of a lifetime stored in the unconscious are gradually evacuated; necessary preparation for transforming union.

**Spiritual attentiveness** The general loving attention to the undifferentiated presence of God in pure faith.

**Thoughts** In the context of the specific method of Centering Prayer, a technical term for any perception at all, including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, commentaries, and particular spiritual perceptions.

**Transformation (transforming union)** The stable conviction of the abiding presence of God rather than a particular experience or set of experiences; a restructuring of consciousness in which the Divine reality is perceived to be present in oneself and in all that is.

**True self** The image of God in which every human being is created; our participation in the Divine life manifested in our uniqueness.

**Ultimate mystery / ultimate reality** The ground of infinite potentiality and actualization; a term emphasizing the Divine transcendence.

**Unloading the unconscious** The coming to awareness of previously unconscious emotional material from early childhood in the form of primitive feelings or a barrage of images, especially during the time of prayer.





# Appendix I

## *Further Resources*

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### NEXT STEPS IN THE JOURNEY

As you continue in your journey, you may want to expand your understanding of Centering Prayer and the contemplative journey. Below is a list of resources to help you deepen your practice:

- The six continuing video sessions of the *Introduction to the Centering Prayer Practice*, available at the Contemplative Outreach online bookstore. These follow-up sessions give a deeper understanding of the psychological and spiritual underpinnings of Centering Prayer as you participate with the Divine Therapist in this prayer practice.

- Father Thomas Keating's *The Contemplative Journey I & II* audio series. These programs explore the conceptual background of the spiritual journey and the role Centering Prayer plays in opening one to relationship with God and the purification of the Divine Therapist over time. This series is available at the Sounds True online bookstore at [soundstrue.com](http://soundstrue.com).
- *Open Mind, Open Heart* by Father Thomas Keating. Even if you've read this book before, read it again to absorb a deeper context of your prayer practice and any experiences you may or may not be having. New understandings will surface that you weren't able to hear or assimilate in prior readings of this book.
- One-day or multi-day Centering Prayer retreats are a good way to take your practice and your relationship with God a step deeper. These intensives provide time and space away from the busyness and demands of daily life, and allow the mind, body, and spirit to surrender to God's presence and action within. Retreats are a common practice in many spiritual traditions and are a valuable tool to aid one's interior transformation. For a full list of retreats, visit [contemplativeoutreach.org](http://contemplativeoutreach.org) and view the Calendar of Events.
- The Contemplative Life Program (CLP): This in-home program explores how to be a practicing contemplative, abiding in the presence of God in the midst of ordinary life. The CLP provides the tools, the contemplative Christian teachings, and the community support necessary to live and embody the

contemplative dimension of the Gospel. Find more information on the Contemplative Outreach website.

## SUGGESTED READINGS

*A Taste of Silence*. Carl J. Arico, New York: Continuum, 1999.

Articles by Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler: “The Spiritual Network of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd.,” *Sewanee Theological Review* (Pentecost, 2000); *Annual Merton Journal* (Winter, 2004).

### ***Other books by Father Thomas Keating***

*Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit*. New York: Lantern Books, 2000.

*Heart of the World, The*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2008.

*Human Condition, The*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

*Intimacy with God*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996.

*Manifesting God*. New York: Lantern Books, 2005.

### ***Other Modern Authors***

Bourgeault, Cynthia. *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2004.

Hall, Thelma. *Too Deep for Words*. New York: Paulist Press, 1988.

- Johnston, William. *The Mysticism of the Cloud of Unknowing*. Bronx, NY: Fordham University, 2000.
- Main, John. *The Way of Unknowing*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004.
- Maloney, George. *Prayer of the Heart*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria, 2008.
- May, Gerald. *Will and Spirit*. New York: HarperOne, 1987.
- McGinn, Bernard. *The Foundations of Mysticism: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004.
- Meninger, William. *The Loving Search for God: Contemplative Prayer and The Cloud of Unknowing*. New York: Continuum, 1995.
- Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer*. Doubleday, Image, 1971; New Seeds of Contemplation, rev. ed., New Directions, 1972.
- Pennington, Basil. *Centering Prayer*. Image, 1982.
- Ware, Timothy. *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*. Salem, NH: Faber & Faber, 1966.
- Wiseman, James A., and Louis Dupre. *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*. New York: Paulist Press, 2001.

### *Some Classic Sources*

In addition to contemporary resources, it's also helpful to explore the classic works inspired by and created throughout the contemplative Christian tradition. Here is a short list of valuable resources:

Anonymous author. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. Edited by William Johnston, New York: Doubleday, 1973.

Cassian, John. *Conferences in Western Asceticism*. Selected, translated, and introduced by Owen Chadwick. Philadelphia Westminster Press, 1958. See especially the first conference, in which this fifth-century monk develops his understanding of contemplation, and the ninth and tenth conferences, in which he deals explicitly with ways of praying.

de Caussade, Jean Pierre. *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. Garden City, NY: Image Books (a Division of Doubleday & Co.), 1975.

St. Teresa of Avila. "The Interior Castle" in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, vol.2*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1980.

St. John of the Cross. *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D., Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1979.





# Appendix II

## *Track Lists and Illustrations*

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### DVD CHAPTER LIST

#### SESSION 1

##### *The Ultimate Reality*

FATHER THOMAS KEATING

1. The Great Mystery
2. The revelation of God
3. The Inner Room
4. Listening at the level of being
5. Service: Unifying prayer and action

## SESSION 2

### *Prayer as Relationship*

1. Be still and know *Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler*
2. The rest of the story *Father Carl Arico*
3. The indwelling spirit *Father Thomas Keating*

## SESSION 3

### *Practicing Centering Prayer*

#### Part one: The method of Centering Prayer

1. The four basic guidelines *Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler*  
It all begins by saying “yes” *Father Carl Arico*

#### Part two: Thoughts and use of the sacred word

2. The power of the return *Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler*
3. Finding freedom *Father Carl Arico*

## SESSION 4

### *The Human Condition*

#### FATHER THOMAS KEATING

1. Return to the Source
2. The human family is one
3. The development of the false self
4. The seven moments of Centering Prayer
5. The evolution toward oneness



## SESSION 5

*Deepening Your Relationship with God*

1. The Fruits of Centering Prayer *Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler*
2. The two-armed embrace *Father Carl Arico*
3. The future of inter-spiritual relationship *Father Thomas Keating*

## SESSION 6

*A Lifelong Journey*

1. The basic core of goodness *Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler*
2. Consent is the only response *Father Carl Arico*
3. An interview *Father Thomas Keating*

## AUDIO TRACK LIST

## SESSION I

*Guided Centering Prayer*

FATHER THOMAS KEATING

1. Consenting to the Presence of God
2. Centering Prayer
3. Preparing with the breath
4. Centering Prayer

## SESSION II

*The Inner Room*

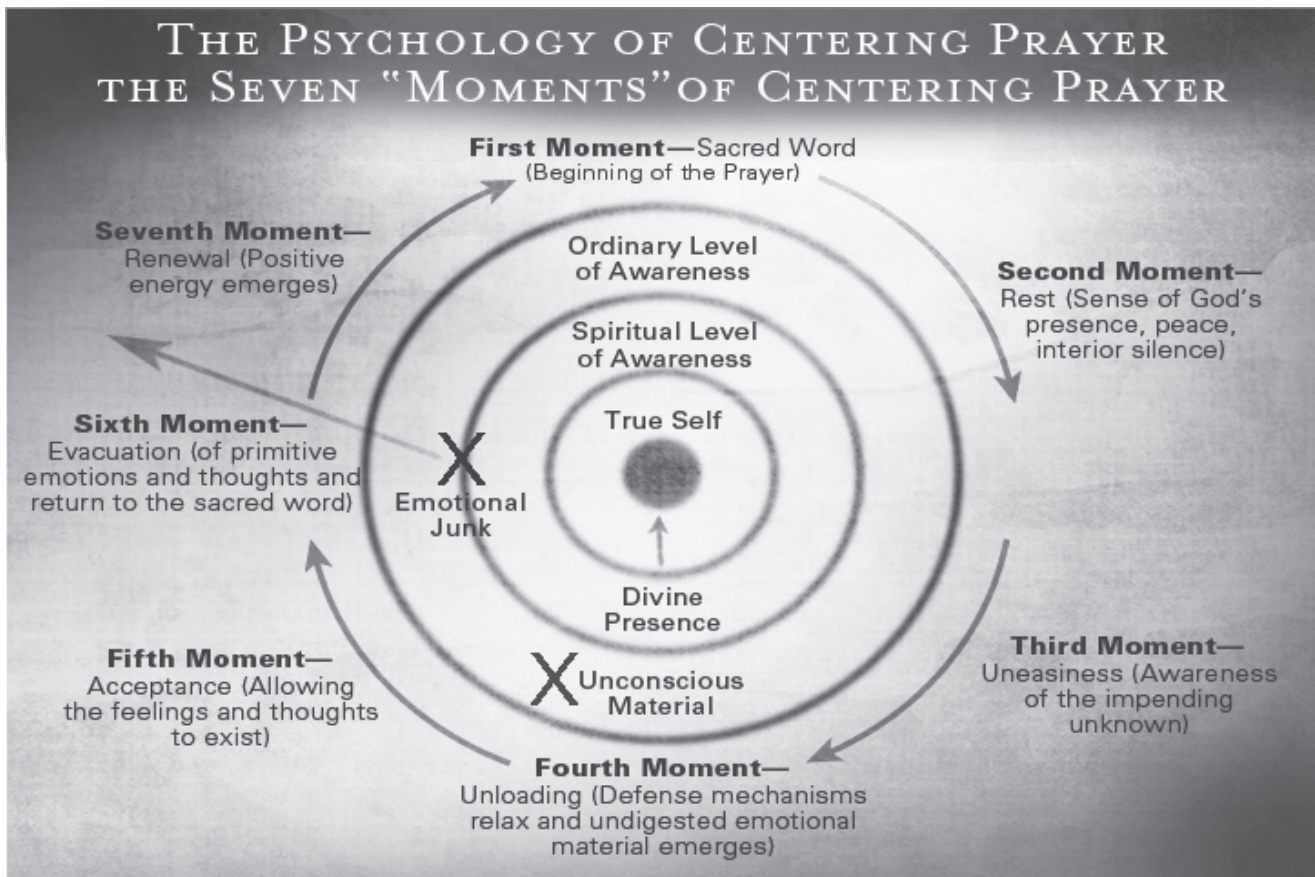
FATHER THOMAS KEATING

1. Kyrie Eleison (Reading: Luke 15:20b)

2. Ibilumeka Byose Bigushime (Let Everything That Has Breath Praise You)
3. Pax Christi (Reading: 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:2-3)

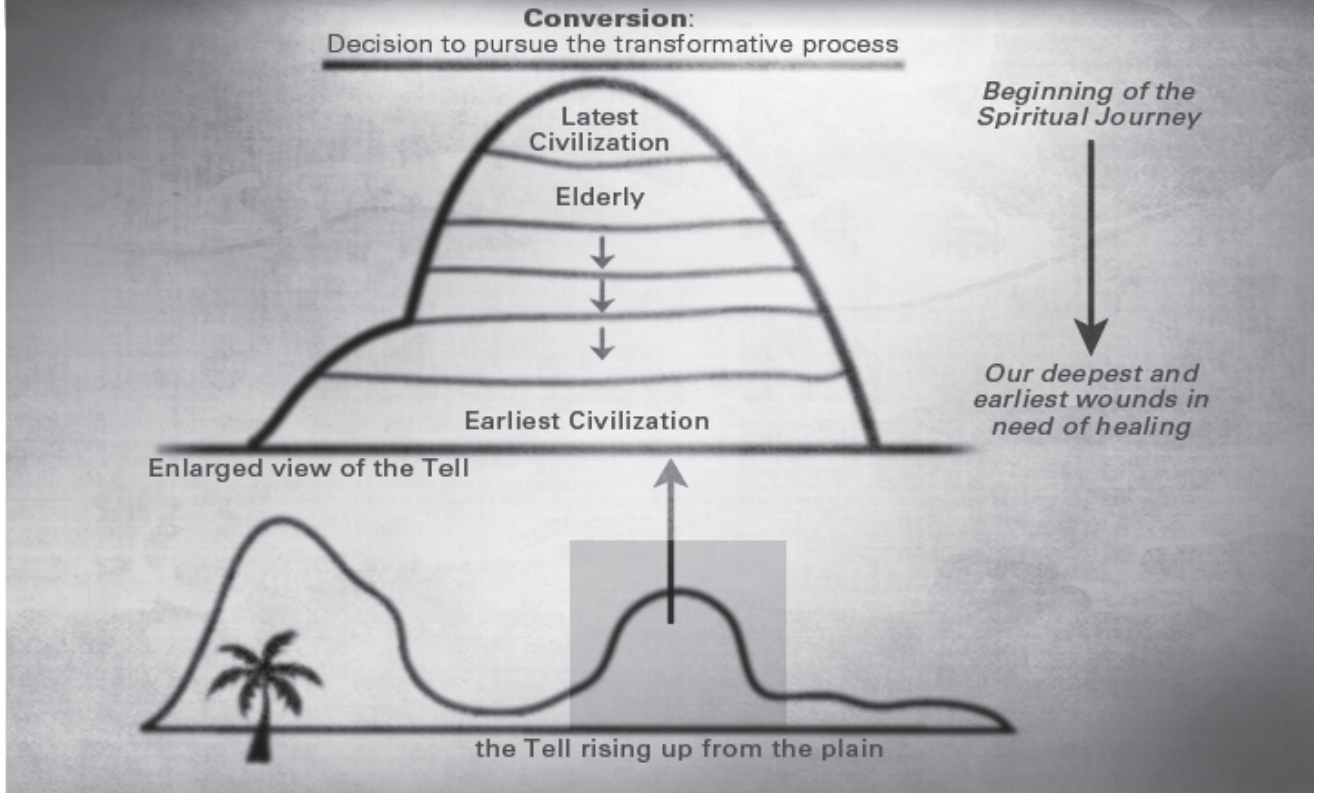
The tracks on *The Inner Room* are excerpted from the complete album *The Inner Room*, available at Aunyx Productions, Inc., aunyx.com, 303-252-1270, Blair@aunyx.com.

## ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SESSIONS 4, 5, AND 6



—FIGURE I—  
THE SEVEN "MOMENTS" OF CENTERING PRAYER

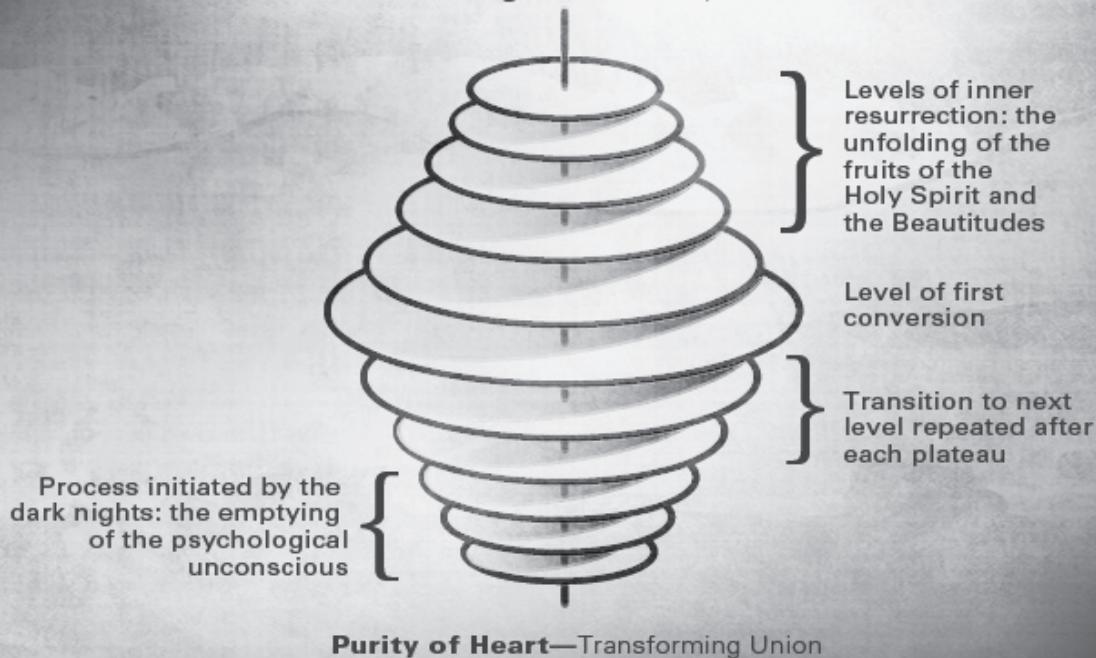
# ANALOGY OF THE TELL & THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG



—FIGURE 2—  
ANALOGY OF THE TELL

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CENTERING PRAYER THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE

**Transforming Union—Purity of Love**



—FIGURE 3—  
THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE



# Appendix III

## *Bibliography and References*

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Arico, Carl J. *A Taste of Silence*. New York: Continuum, 1999.

Cassian, John, Owen Chadwick (cont.), Colm Luibhéid (trans.),  
and Eugène Pichery (trans.). *Conferences* (Conference 9, Chapter  
XXXV). Paulist Press: Mahwah, N.J., 1985.

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Benedict Zimmerman, electronic edition with modernization of  
English by Harry Plantinga, 1995. *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul  
and the Bridegroom Christ* (passage from St. John of the Cross,  
Stanza I). Prior of St. Luke's: Wincanton, UK, 1909.

Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation* (page 15). New Directions: New York, 1972.

Schmidt, Richard H., and Phyllis Tickle (cont.). *God Seekers: Twenty Centuries of Christian Spiritualities*. Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 2008.

Tuoti, Frank, and George A. Maloney (cont.). *Why Not Be a Mystic?* The Crossroad: New York, 1995.

## PRAYER CARD REFERENCES

*And the peace of God, which surpasses every understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts by Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:7 (Darby Translation [DARBY]).

*As gentle silence enveloped all things, and night swiftly descended, Your all-powerful Word leaped from heaven into the midst of my heart . . .*

cf. Wisdom 18:14-15.

*Be still and know that I am God.*

Psalms 46:10 (King James Version [KJV]).

*By accepting all things from God I receive His joy into my soul, not because things are what they are but because God is Who He is, and His love has willed my joy in them.*

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, 1972 edition, published by New Directions Publishing.

*Come, for you are yourself the desire that is within me. Come, my breath and my life.*

St. Symeon the New Theologian, from *The Path of Prayer: Four Sermons on Prayer by Saint Theophan the Recluse* by Feofan, Theophanes, Theophan the Recluse, Robin Amis, Esther Williams; Translated by Esther Williams; Published by Praxis Research Institute, 1992.

*Courage, then, O soul most beautiful, you know now that your Beloved, Whom you desire, dwells hidden within your breast; strive, therefore, to be truly hidden with Him, and then you shall embrace Him.*

Lewis, David (trans.), with corrections and an introduction by Benedict Zimmerman, electronic edition with modernization of English by Harry Plantinga, 1995. *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ* (passage from St. John of the Cross, Stanza I). Prior of St. Luke's: Wincanton, UK, 1909.

*Create in me a clean heart, O Gracious One, and put a new and right spirit within me. Enfold me in the arms of love, and fill me with your Holy Spirit.*  
Psalm 51, *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* by Nan C. Merrill, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997.



*Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

1 Corinthians 3:16 (New American Standard Bible [NASB]).

*“I AM” can be spoken by no creature, but by God alone. I must become God and God must become me, so completely that we share the same “I” eternally. Our truest “I” is God.*

Meister Eckhart, *The Wisdom of the Christian Mystics*, Ed T. Freke, Tuttle Publishing, 1998.

*I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you dear in my heart, you who are my companions in grace.*

cf. Philippians 1: 6-7, 9-11.

*In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.*  
Isaiah 30:15 (NASB).

*In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*  
John 14:20 (NASB).

*In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*

Romans 8:26 (NASB).



*My soul waits in silence for God only; from God is my salvation.*

Psalm 62:1 (NASB).

*O Lord, My God, You will illumine my darkness.*

St. Issac the Syrian, from *The Path of Prayer: Four Sermons on Prayer by Saint Theophan the Recluse* by Æofan, Theophanes, Theophan the Recluse, Robin Amis, Esther Williams; Translated by Esther Williams; Published by Praxis Research Institute, 1992.

*Oh God, ignite within me the living flame of Your Love. Amen.*

cf. St. John of the Cross.

*Pitch Your tent within me, gracious Master; take up Your dwelling in me now and remain in Your servant unceasingly, inseparably, to the end.*

St. Symeon the New Theologian, from *The Path of Prayer: Four Sermons on Prayer by Saint Theophan the Recluse* by Æofan, Theophanes, Theophan the Recluse, Robin Amis, Esther Williams; Translated by Esther Williams; Published by Praxis Research Institute, 1992.

*Quench my troubles, for no one else can soothe them; and let my eyes behold You, for You are their light, and I will keep them for You alone.*

Lewis, David (trans.), with corrections and an introduction by Benedict Zimmerman, electronic edition with modernization of English by Harry Plantinga, 1995. *A Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ* (passage from St. John of the Cross, Stanza I). Prior of St. Luke's: Wincanton, UK, 1909.

*Thou hast made us for thyself and restless is our heart until it comes to rest in thee.*

St. Augustine, *Confessions* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press [1955], Library of Christian Classics, v. 7).

*Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:10, KJV).

*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding.*

Proverbs 3:5 (KJV).

*Wait for the LORD: be strong, take heart: wait for the LORD.*

cf. Psalm 27:14.

*What God arranges for us to experience at each moment is the best and holiest thing that could happen to us.*

Jean-Pierre de Cassaude. *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, Book 1, Ch. 1, Section IV.

*Whoever has God lacks nothing: God alone is enough.*

St. Teresa of Avila, Poesias 30 in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. III, tr. K. Kavanaugh OCD and O. Rodriguez OCD (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1985), 386 no. 9, tr. John Wall).

*You who are hidden and concealed within me, reveal within me Your hidden mystery; manifest to me Your beauty that is within me . . .*

St. John the Elder, from *The Letters of John of Dalyatha* by John, Mary Hansbury, published by Gorgias Press LLC, 2006.



## *About the Authors*

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FATHER THOMAS KEATING is a founding member and spiritual guide of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. He has served the organization since its beginning and is currently serving as its spiritual guide and animator. Father Keating is one of the principal architects and teachers of the contemplative Christian prayer movement, and, in many ways, Contemplative Outreach is a manifestation of his longtime desire to contribute to the recovery of the contemplative dimension of Christianity.

Father Keating's interest in contemplative prayer began during his freshman year at Yale University in 1940 when he became aware of the Church's history and of the writings of Christian mystics. Prompted by these studies and time spent in prayer and meditation, he experienced a profound realization that, on a spiritual level, the Scriptures call people to a personal relationship with God.

Father Keating took this call to heart. He transferred to Fordham University in New York and, while waiting to be drafted for service in World War II, he received a deferment to enter seminary. Shortly after graduating from an accelerated program at Fordham, Father Keating entered an austere monastic community of the Trappist Order in Valley Falls, Rhode Island, in January of 1944, at the age of 20. He was ordained a priest in June of 1949.

In March of 1950 the monastery in Valley Falls burned down and, as a result, the community moved to Spencer, Massachusetts. Father Keating was sent to Snowmass, Colorado, in April of 1958 to help start a new monastic community called St. Benedict's. He remained in Snowmass until 1961, when he was elected abbot of St. Joseph's in Spencer, prompting his move back to Massachusetts. He served as abbot of St. Joseph's for 20 years until he retired in 1981 and returned to Snowmass, where he still resides today.

During Father Keating's term as abbot at St. Joseph's and in response to the reforms of Vatican II, he invited teachers from the East to the monastery. As a result of this dialogue with Eastern spiritual traditions, and their desire to renew contemplative practices for our time, Father Keating and some of the monks at St. Joseph's were led to develop the modern form of contemplative Christian prayer called Centering Prayer. Father Keating was a central figure in the initiation of the Centering Prayer movement. He offered Centering Prayer workshops and retreats to clergy and laypeople and authored articles and books on the method and fruits of Centering Prayer. In 1983, he presented a two-week intensive Centering Prayer retreat at the Lama Foundation in San Cristobal, New Mexico, which proved to be a watershed event. Many of the people prominent in the

Centering Prayer movement today attended this retreat. Contemplative Outreach was created in 1984 to support the growing spiritual network of Centering Prayer practitioners. Father Keating became the community's president in 1985, a position he held until 1999.

Father Keating is an accomplished author. He has traveled the world to speak with laypeople and communities about contemplative Christian practices and the psychology of the spiritual journey, which is the subject of his *Spiritual Journey* video and DVD series. Since the reforms of Vatican II, Father Keating has been a core participant in and supporter of interreligious dialogue. He helped found the Snowmass Interreligious Conference, which had its first meeting in the fall of 1983 and continues to meet each spring. Father Keating also is a past president of the Temple of Understanding and of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue.

Father Keating's life is lived in the service of sharing the gifts God gave him with others.

GAIL FITZPATRICK-HOPLER is a founding member and the current president of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. Led by her desire to make transformation through Centering Prayer available to others like herself, Gail has served Contemplative Outreach in many ways throughout the years. Since 1984 to the present, Gail has served on the Board of Trustees. In 1985, she balanced her private psychotherapy practice and her position as an art therapist/special educator with her new role as part-time executive director of Contemplative Outreach. In 1987, she resigned from her teaching position to serve full time as executive director, a position she held until she was appointed president in October of 1999. She is an

international speaker and retreat director, and has overseen and participated in the production of many Contemplative Outreach programs, including the Contemplative Life Program, for which she currently is serving as both a contributor and an editor. Gail also serves as a faculty advisor for the formation of the essential teachings for the Introduction to Centering Prayer Workshop. Currently, she, along with Father Carl Arico and others, comprise the Gift Committee, which is dedicated to ensuring the legacy of Father Thomas Keating.

Gail's journey to contemplative Christianity is rooted in the ritual and mystery she experienced in the Catholic Church as a child in the 1950s and early 1960s, and is informed by her study of Tibetan Buddhism in the 1970s and early 1980s. She found the convergence of her Christian background and her Buddhist contemplative experience in the contemplative Christian heritage and the practice of Centering Prayer. Gail attended the first intensive Centering Prayer retreat that Father Thomas Keating offered at the Lama Foundation in San Cristobal, New Mexico, in 1983. As a result, she became a devoted Centering Prayer practitioner and a founding member of Contemplative Outreach.

As a laywoman, Gail represents the essence of the community that Contemplative Outreach serves: Christians wishing for a deeper relationship with God through transformation lived out in ordinary life, outside the monastic cloister. Gail is a mother and grandmother and had a private psychotherapy practice from 1984–1992—all at a time when she was engaging more deeply in the practice of Centering Prayer and laying the foundations for what would become the worldwide community of Contemplative Outreach. She understands

the difficulties of balancing the activities of an ordinary life with the attraction to silence, solitude, and service.

Commenting on her journey to a contemplative life and her involvement in Contemplative Outreach, Gail observes, “Looking back, I can see that all of this was God’s way of leading me; I realize that I was called and sent. Through my dedication to the practice of Centering Prayer, God activated a deeper consent in me. I learned to wait, stay awake, and listen deeply for how God was calling me to take the next step.”

FATHER CARL ARICO is a founding member and the vice president of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. Since Contemplative Outreach’s beginnings in 1984, Father Arico has been an integral part of the organization’s growth and development. As vice president, Father Arico considers himself as the “middle linebacker” of the organization, ready as needed to perform various duties.

Among his many contributions throughout the years, Father Arico served on the Board of Trustees from 1984 to 2000 and has been on the Board of Advisors since 2001. Father Arico has traveled extensively in the United States and internationally to present workshops and direct retreats for both priests and laypeople. In addition, he has been continually involved in the enrichment of Contemplative Outreach chapters and in the conception and implementation of many of the organization’s programs. He has been part of the Lectio Divina Service Team since its beginning in 1998 and is a participating team member for the Contemplative Life Program, the Heartfulness Program, and the Gift Committee. Father Arico oversees the production of the Contemplative Outreach Annual

Conference videos and the United in Prayer video series.

Father Arico is known for his humor and his ability to bridge the linguistic gap between the clergy and laity. He credits this ability to the positions he held following his ordination as a diocesan priest for the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, in 1960. From 1960 to 1969, Father Arico served as a parish priest at a suburban church in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey. He also served as a part-time teacher from 1960 to 1971 at Union Catholic High School, an all-girls school in Scotch Plains, New Jersey, where his students officially recognized him as an “honorary one-of-the-girls.” Between 1969 and 1979, Father Arico was actively involved in the marriage and family ministry in the Archdiocese of Newark and the Province of New Jersey. He returned to life as a parish priest in 1979 and soon was named the director of priest personnel for the Archdiocese of Newark in 1980. In 1986, he took a sabbatical for further studies and to co-author a book, *Living Our Priesthood Today*, with Father Basil Pennington. When he returned from his sabbatical, Father Arico accepted the full-time responsibility of becoming a staff member of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., at the request of Father Thomas Keating and with the permission of Archbishop McCarrick.

Father Arico is honored to have known Father Keating since 1969 and believes whole-heartedly in the purpose of Contemplative Outreach, which Father Keating has outlined. As testament to his faith in the power of contemplative prayer, Father Arico has practiced Centering Prayer since 1975 and taught the prayer since 1978. He also was present for the first intensive Centering Prayer retreat that Father Keating offered at the Lama Foundation in San Cristobal, New Mexico, in 1983, which many founding members



of Contemplative Outreach attended. Father Arico has seen Contemplative Outreach develop from a wish to the organization it is today. “The growth that has taken place in Contemplative Outreach,” he observes, “is a miracle of God’s grace and the power of prayer.”

## ABOUT CONTEMPLATIVE OUTREACH, LTD

Contemplative Outreach is a worldwide organization that supports the teaching and practice of Centering Prayer and the teachings of Father Thomas Keating. It is dedicated to renewing and supporting the practices and teachings of the contemplative Christian tradition. Contemplative Outreach has its roots in the wish of three monks living at St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, in the early 1970s. Inspired by the decree of Vatican II, the monks wished to develop a method of contemplative Christian prayer that was appealing and accessible to laypeople. With no idea that their wish would eventually result in an international organization, Fathers Thomas Keating, William Meninger, and Basil Pennington embarked on an experiment. Today their experiment is called Contemplative Outreach.

As abbot of St. Joseph’s Abbey, Father Keating attended a meeting in Rome in 1971. At the meeting, Pope Paul VI called on the members of the clergy to revive the contemplative dimension of the Gospel in the lives of both monastic and laypeople. Believing in the importance of this revival, Father Keating encouraged the

*“The intent of Contemplative Outreach is to foster the process of transformation in Christ in one another through the practice of Centering Prayer.”*

—VISION STATEMENT  
FOR CONTEMPLATIVE  
OUTREACH

monks at St. Joseph's to develop a method of contemplative Christian prayer with the same appeal and accessibility that Eastern meditation practices seemed to have for modern people. A monk at the abbey named William Meninger found the background for such a method in the anonymous fourteenth-century classic *The Cloud of the Unknowing*. Using this and other contemplative literature, Meninger developed a simple method of silent prayer he called "The Prayer of the Cloud."

Meninger began to offer instruction on the Prayer of the Cloud to priests who came to the monastery for retreats. The prayer was well received, and as word got out, more people wanted to learn it. Father Basil Pennington also began to teach the Prayer of the Cloud to priests and sisters at retreats away from St. Joseph's. At one retreat, someone suggested that the name of the prayer be changed to Centering Prayer, alluding to Thomas Merton's description of contemplative prayer as prayer that is "centered entirely on the presence of God . . . His will . . . His love . . . [and] Faith by which alone we can know the presence of God." From then on, the prayer was called Centering Prayer.

In 1983, Father Keating gave the first "intensive" Centering Prayer retreat at the Lama Foundation in San Cristobal, New Mexico. One of the participants of the retreat, Gustave Reininger, previously had met with Father Keating and a man named Edward Bednar to discuss starting a contemplative network. After their meeting, Bednar wrote a grant proposal, which he called Contemplative Outreach, and received funds to start parish-based programs in New York City that offered introductions to Centering Prayer. This marked the beginning of the Contemplative Outreach

Centering Prayer Program and a milestone in Contemplative Outreach's birth as an organization.

Other participants of the retreat at the Lama Foundation also played a large part in the growth of Contemplative Outreach. In 1985, participants David Frenette and Mary Mrozowski, along with Bob Bartel, established a live-in community in the eastern United States called Chrysalis House. For eleven years, Chrysalis House provided a consistent place to hold Centering Prayer workshops and retreats. Many Centering Prayer practitioners and teachers who now carry on the work of Contemplative Outreach were trained and inspired at Chrysalis House.

In 1986, the three monks' experiment was incorporated as Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., and the first official board of directors was named. Father Keating served as the first president, Father Carl Arico as vice president, Gustave Reininger as treasurer, and Mary Mrozowski and Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler as directors. At first, the organization was run from Gail Fitzpatrick-Hopler's dining-room table. After several necessary expansions, the headquarters now offices in two-thousand square feet of space in downtown Butler, New Jersey, with the help of nine full-time employees, four part-time employees, and thousands of worldwide volunteers, who together, serve the growing contemplative needs of the practitioners, under the support and guidance of the Holy Spirit. For more information about this community of practitioners, please visit [contemplativeoutreach.org](http://contemplativeoutreach.org).



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