



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## 72: What Contemplation is Not (cont.)



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*He brought me to the banquet hall  
and his glance at me  
signaled love.  
- Song of Songs 2:4*

"Some people are invited into the Interior Castle of St. Teresa through the front stairs, but others are referred to the service entrance, the back stairs. And so, they climb through the back stairs, the hidden entrance which is not known even to themselves. And that's really hidden. What difference does it make?! As long as you get in the house and start climbing! So, to make the front stairs everything and to disregard the back stairs is to make a serious mistake. The divine light of faith, sheer energy, is entirely ours by consent. And by giving ourselves to that Presence, it heals the wounds of a lifetime and brings us secretly, step by step, to the transforming union and then to all the Fruits of the Spirit and the Beatitudes, along with the immense energy to serve our community, ... and the whole human family and to enter into fully Christ's redemptive program, which is to transmit to every human being the divine light, life and love in its maximum."

- Thomas Keating, from the Session 71 video

## A Meditation

"The work of 'bringing the mind down into the heart' is a combined meeting of human effort and divine grace... The yearning to fall to center is itself the result of a force of gravity already drawing us to center, and this gravity is God. 'The eye with which you seek God is the eye with which God seeks you,' as Meister Eckhart puts it. Or, as it is beautifully expressed in the Merton quote:

'This act of total surrender is not merely a fantastic intellectual and mystical gamble; it is something much more serious. It is an act of love for this unseen person, who, in the very gift of love by which we surrender ourselves to his reality also makes his presence known to us.'

-Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in A World of Action*

"...I enter the cave of the heart and discover there that God is alive and interpenetrating, in, of, and around, illumining and enflaming all. My own heart is a hologram of the divine triune heart, love in motion, and the finite and infinite realms are connected by an unbreakable bond of mutual yearning. This 'in here' vision of God is not only closer to the vision of Jesus and the mystics; it is also increasingly confirmed by the discoveries of contemporary scientific understanding. As the popular Episcopal preacher and theologian Barbara Brown Taylor writes, regarding the radical shift in her image of God brought about by her exposure to quantum physics:

'Where is God in this picture? God is all over the place. God is up there, down here, inside my skin and out. God is the web, the energy, the space, the light – not captured in them, as if any of those concepts were more real than what unites them – but revealed in that singular, vast net of relationships that animates everything there is.'

-Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Luminous We: Essays on Science and Religion*

Contemplation, understood in the light of a hologram universe, is not a special gift. It is simply seeing from the perspective of oneness, or in other words, from the level of our spiritual awareness. It can indeed be practiced, and over time, with sincerity and persistence, it becomes an abiding state of consciousness. At times this unitive seeing may sweep you up into rapt adoration; at other times, it simply deposits you powerfully and nakedly in the present moment. Either form is an expression of the same underlying consciousness. It is this consciousness itself that is the attained state of contemplation, and it is neither infused nor acquired, because it was never absent – only unrecognized.

- Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*

## **To Practice**

- Cynthia Bourgeault has stated that to list impediments that might block the onset of contemplation might be viewing contemplation as an "add-on," not intrinsic to human nature, but bestowed or denied according to the inscrutable will of God – a God "out there." But that is countermanded by the contemplative experience itself. Where are you in moving from a God "out there" to God within, the Indwelling Presence?

## **Resources for Further Study:**

You may wish to read Chapter 20 "The Essence of Centering Prayer," and 21 "A Pure Faith" from *Invitation to Love*, Chapter 19 in older editions.

You may also wish to read Chapter 7 "The Loss and Recovery of the Christian Contemplative Tradition" from *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* by Cynthia Bourgeault.

## **Notes and Reflections:**