



# THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

## "Centering Prayer and Divine Therapy" Excerpted from *Invitation from God*

**Thomas Keating and Marie Louise Lefèvre**

Keating: The term "Divine Therapy" is the deliberate effort to introduce into this spiritual journey, in the Christian sense at least, the discoveries of contemporary psychology about the unconscious and how that works and how it's treated, because this is a piece of information that is invaluable for the spiritual life.

The Divine Therapy sets to work in healing the deepest wounds of human nature, all the way back from the time we were in the womb. Let's take a look at not so much an individual period of Centering Prayer; but think of this rather as the period of some months, or even years of a process and it might look something like this. [Fr. Thomas shares a diagram of a session of Centering Prayer].

We start our prayer at this point. We start here with our introducing the word [sacred word]. If this is working a little bit, the second moment, you might say, would be some feeling of interior rest, and even though thoughts are going by, they are not going by with the same intensity or preoccupation or concentration as they do in everyday life. The rest itself loosens up the hard-pan around the weeds in the unconscious, consisting of traumatic experiences from early childhood that we have repressed. Some of them are liable to slip into our awareness, and so as we continue on this cycle, we come to the third moment, which we call "unloading." It's emotions that have never been processed, that are sitting there on our psychological tummy, so to speak, like a meal we haven't digested. Without our being aware of it, we're very uncomfortable, and, hence, to get rid of it would be a very great blessing and assistance to our health. As this process continues, you come to this third – or [rather] fourth – moment, which is evacuation, thoughts or feelings or a state of utter distress.

Lefèvre: The more rest, the more evacuation, do you say that?

Keating: Exactly, that's the point I wanted to make. The more enjoyable the prayer, the more likely it is the next one is going to be toughie – not because God is changed, but because the process is so successful that the body now feels it can get rid of this.

These are pockets of emotional stress, repressed into the unconscious at an early life, which are strewn through our psyche, and so when we evacuate something – let's suppose it was this one here -- [pointing to diagram] – now that glob of negative energy is gone, and the Holy Spirit rushes in to fill this place with positive energy. As soon as some piece of junk is evacuated, that space opens up; Holy Spirit runs in, so that when we start the prayer again you're in a new place that is closer to the center than when you started the process. You now recycle again, second movement, third movement, some unloading, evacuation, more space – that one evacuated. Now you start the next prayer closer to the center. Now as we recycle, we're getting closer and closer to the center, to the ground of our being, and to the inmost center, until finally, everything is emptied-out that was junk, so there's no obstacle now in our awareness to the direct intuition of our own ground of being, the image of God in us.

Naturally, we're still going to feel annoyed; we're going to feel angry, still going to feel defensive. Through contemplative prayer, those spontaneous movements are relaxed, and they lose their dominating power, and one feels the human hurt or offense without it affecting the depth of our commitment to the transformative process, and to our accountability for everyone, which is what Christ did.