



# Contemplative Outreach

***Heart Intention Practice:  
Grounding Prayer of the Cloud in the Prayer of the Heart  
with David Frenette***

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Transcript**

Grounding the Prayer of the Cloud in the Prayer of the Heart. That is, grounding Centering Prayer in heart intention is our topic for today. So what is the Prayer of the Cloud?

*The Cloud of Unknowing* is a text in the classic Christian contemplative heritage that comes from the 14th century, written by an anonymous author, that is a source of great wisdom and simple advice on how to practice. How to practice letting go, opening up to the reality of God here and now, beyond concepts -- the unknowing that's referred to in the title, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, is the unknowing of the dualistic mind, the mind that easily splits in reality into me and other, self and other, subject and object. So *The Cloud of Unknowing* is oriented towards oneness, the experience of oneness that's beyond the intellect, beyond the memory and beyond effort. It's a matter of just being, pure being. As a matter of fact, it's opening up to the ground of being itself, which could be called God. The ground of being that is timeless yet bursts into time. And of course, this is not just abstract or philosophical. This is real, living, a living experience of contemplation, mystical contemplation, that's very simple and always available. And relevant for every era, especially relevant for our era, which is plagued by separation and struggle and effort to try to solve the great, great problems of our time, the climate crisis, environmental crises, political crises, war, economics, rapid technological change.

What if we were able to find a unifying reality at the ground of being that allows us to move into this world over and over again, the world of separation from this point of union with God? The God that's the source of everything that is -- other people, the environment, the created world -- we're all rooted in a common oneness at the ground of our being, the ground of our being, and *The Cloud of Unknowing* is one way to awaken to that reality. Centering Prayer, of course, is our common practice, articulated in this era to open us to this oneness, this cloud of unknowing and being and life and eternity breaking into this moment of here and now, *this* moment of here and now.

And you're working with the metaphor, the image of the cloud, can you think of anything more ungrounded than a cloud? Just think, a cloud is like fog that settles on the earth and obscures sight, obscures the light of day, but it's also on the top of the ground. It's ungrounded. And so the cloud of unknowing, the practice of pure contemplation that Centering Prayer opens us to in the history and the heritage and the lineage of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, needs to be grounded. The cloud needs to be grounded in life, needs to be grounded in the heart, in the body, in the intellectual mind, so that we can live and move and have our being in this life and not just space out into vastness, but to embody and incarnate the existence of pure being into action, into doing, through body, mind, and heart.

This is what the parallel tradition in Christian contemplative heritage of the Prayer of the Heart is about, also called the Jesus prayer. It's an approach to meditative practice that works with the body, the breath, and intentionality and prayer and words, and concentration of mind and surrender into the heart and then releases into pure being, the cloud of pure being, in a wonderful surrender of amen, let it be. The fullness of our human existence is still retained in this mystery of being, but it's grounded and recycled and returned into life.

So this is really what the founders of Centering Prayer, the monks, particularly Father Thomas Keating, the Trappist monk, who was my spiritual father, perhaps your spiritual father too, in the late 20th century. Their insight was not only to share the monastic contemplative heritage, teachings on *The Cloud of Unknowing* updated in the practice of Centering Prayer, but also to invite us, especially people living in the world outside the monastery, to embody the Centering Prayer, to integrate it into daily life, into body, mind, heart, and return to the pure being that is the pure consent of Centering Prayer.

So this has been the invitation of Centering Prayer, and the usual recommendation that Father Thomas Keating made was for folks to practice a particular form of spiritual reading, or sacred reading, or Lectio Divina, the Latin word for this tradition, and to use the body and the mind in the imagination and the heart and the emotions in order to cultivate a deep understanding of spiritual text, while perfecting and expressing the cloud, the pure being of God into life.

The Prayer of the Heart is a parallel practice that also does the same thing. So whether we're grounding the Prayer of the Cloud in our humanity and in our service and in our presence in the world through spiritual reading, according to the sacred teachings of Lectio Divina, or the Prayer of the Heart through a contemporary practice like heart intention, the point is to have a fully rounded and fully grounded spiritual practice to give us the resources that we need to live in this world. And this is what heart intention is about and Centering Prayer is about and when they go together, they can provide the foundation for living this contemplative life in this world.

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For more information about David's teachings and offerings, visit [www.davidfrenette.com](http://www.davidfrenette.com)