



Contemplative Outreach

***Heart Intention Practice:
Letting Intention and Meaning Flow into Your Daily Life
with David Frenette***

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Transcript**

So heart intention as a practice for daily life, as a way of grounding the Prayer of the Cloud in the Prayer of the Heart, the spacious stillness of a practice like Centering Prayer, into this body, into this breath, into this mind, into this heart, into my life and our life together in this crazy, [00:00:30] joyous, and suffering world. Heart intention does this, first of all, through intentionality and meaning and purpose. Too often, we're buffeted by the winds of secularism, of consumerism, of materialism, of the separation mind. And we're thrown from our deepest sense of inter-being [00:01:00] or the unity of life and divine life that's our true purpose and our true nature. So heart intention animates our deepest sense of meaning and purpose, to live a life of conscious practice and to be transformed in daily life into greater and greater selfless presence to the world.

Let me just share an example or little story about this, to [00:01:30] begin to unpack the practice of heart intention. So one of the folks who visits with me for spiritual direction monthly learned heart intention on an online course, and he connected with it. He felt it was a good way of practice for him. And so, in the ensuing months of spiritual direction, we would talk about both his Centering Prayer and his heart intention practice together. And he told me how he [00:02:00] connected with the Jesus prayer, one of the forms or ways that heart intention can be practiced, like in the traditional teachings and the Prayer of the Heart.

One form of the Jesus prayer is this. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of God, amen. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of God, amen." [00:02:30] And my spiritual directee found that the devotion, the sense of relationship, the I/thou relationship with his way of spiritual practice through Christ, through Jesus Christ, was reanimated when he was praying the words of the Jesus prayer, especially opening towards mercy and love, which is the heart [00:03:00] of the Christ revelation.

So he would practice this amidst the ordinary routines of his daily life, coming back again and again when he was distracted, to focus his mind, not only on the task he was doing -- washing dishes or caring for his spouse or waiting for the bus to go to work, but on the meaning of the words. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of God, [00:03:30] amen". And every time he renewed that prayer, he was letting his own deepest intention for life flow into the corners of his existence and counteract the winds, the storms of materialism and secularism and the media culture of technology.

So month by month, my directee would [00:04:00] tell me his progress with that. And as that took off for him, as that became a way of integrated practice, allowing meaning and purpose to be renewed in his day, to complement what was happening in Centering Prayer with his daily practice of the heart intention, I began to encourage him to go further with the teachings on the Prayer of the Heart. [00:04:30] There's the Jesus prayer in this tradition, and then there's the Prayer of the Heart. And there's a distinction made between the words of the Jesus prayer and the deeper contemplative movement about how to unite those words with one's breath, with one's focused mind, with the surrender into one's heart and release into pure being.

And here, just to make that graphically real, [00:05:00] just like to share my screen here. Here on this little chart, "Heart Intention: Joining Meaningful Words of Intentionality, Intention, or Purpose with Inner Movements of Consciousness". So the two rows and their little boxes describe the progress of the deepening movements of the Jesus [00:05:30] prayer in the first top row, "Intention as the Jesus prayer". The first part of the Jesus prayer is calling on the name of Jesus, "Lord Jesus Christ". The second heart is the petition to have mercy, have mercy on us, or have mercy on me. The third is "Son of God", the affirmation of the mystery behind Jesus and surrendering into that mystery. And then the fourth [00:06:00] in this way of praying the words of the Jesus prayer is the release into "amen", so be it, let it be. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of God, amen".

You'll remember that that's what my spiritual directee connected with, to express his deepest intention for his spiritual journey and for his life and his relationship with God. [00:06:30] And over time then, in spiritual direction, we began to unite or join the words of that phrase, that beautiful prayer, with movements of consciousness. And that's what the Prayer of the Heart is about, letting the words of the prayer be anchored in interiority and in the living life of God, in our body, mind, heart, and being. And that's done through attention [00:07:00] to the body, to the breath, the engaging and the focusing of the mind, rather than rambling distraction, the surrender into the heart, putting the mind into the heart as the tradition says, and then resting in being. Pure being. Stillness, or as the prayer of the heart teaching says, Hesychia, stillness, contemplation.

So that was the progress of my companion, my spiritual directee, my spiritual friend, of his practice month to month. And it came to a head for him one time when he was on a walk and he was practicing the Jesus prayer, and he could experience how his attention, his awareness settled through the words of the prayer, into his breath, [00:08:00] into his body, and how his body opened up into his heart space. And he could feel an enkindling of devotion when he

thought of God, and a sense of love that awakened in him that was then released into stillness. In other words, the prayer that the Jesus prayer, the words of the Jesus prayer described, began to become a living prayer [00:08:30] through the interiorization of it and his experience of integrating this into his life. So he was more open to compassion, to both receiving compassion, but also expressing compassion to others in his world. And it greatly enriched his Centering Prayer, and Centering Prayer greatly enriched his practice of the Jesus prayer and the [00:09:00] Prayer of the Heart. So a good example of how this goes together, Centering Prayer and the heart intention in the integration and transformation of who we are as human beings, with our life in the world.

So my directee was quite touched and encouraged on his own path, so much so that he thought about sharing this way of prayer, the heart intention, with his daughter [00:09:30] who was a mother and living a full life in responsibility and work in the world. And he told me once, one meeting, about how he encouraged her in the heart intention practice. And I said, "Well, how did that go for her?" And he said, "Well, she doesn't connect with the words of the Jesus prayer. She's more spiritual than religious. And she appreciates Christ [00:10:00] and the Christian contemplative tradition, but the scriptural focus of that Jesus prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of God, amen' -- it was not a point of connection for her. It did not express adequately her deepest intentionality for her spiritual life. And so, she was experiencing a bit of conflict with it."

And I said, "Well, that's not the point of the practice. Just [00:10:30] encourage her to relax around her practice, her exploration of the heart intention. We have a meditation. And give her this option, that she could pray heart intention with this intentional phrase, "Life, radiating love in being. Life is radiating love in being. [00:11:00] Life, radiating love in being."

And so my directee went off, and he did encourage her in that approach. And the next month, he told me that she did connect with this. This was more of a meaningful phrase for her, as an affirmation of the interwoven unity of life that's rooted in love [00:11:30] and bursting and flowing and radiating into life itself, that every aspect of life and her life was expressive of this underlying oneness in love, in pure being. And it was much more meaningful than the words of the Jesus prayer. So in other words, with this heart intention phrase, his daughter was going to the essence of the practice of this [00:12:00] approach through a different doorway. The doorway of the Jesus prayer was the right doorway for him, my directee, but the doorway of this spiritual, more religious form of intention -- an affirmation of unity -- was more appropriate for his daughter. And sure enough, with time, my directee said that this heart [00:12:30] intention phrase began not only to anchor his daughter in intentional meeting and the motivation that gave her a focus for her conscious life during the day, but it began to take life in her body and in her breath, and even in her heart, in the love that was expressed in the words of that heart intention affirmation.

So, we were very happy about this, [00:13:00] grateful to the living God, to the mystery of life, for providing something for his daughter. And my directee came back the next month, and what would you know, but he said his daughter encouraged her son, her college-age student

son, to practice heart intention too. So there was a generational thing happening here between [00:13:30] the grandfather, father, my directee, his son who was a middle aged worker, and then her son who was in college.

But wouldn't you know, her son didn't connect with either the Jesus prayer or with the practice that she was doing, the heart intention phrase, spiritual more religious. Her son [00:14:00] wanted something else, something that was more Christocentric, but not associated with salvation redemption theology, like the Jesus prayer. He was tuning into a different facet of the mystery of Christ than what the Jesus prayer evoked for him. There was a block in his mind for that practice. So we had a doorway for him too, [00:14:30] and I encouraged his grandfather then to tell him this form of heart intention and to pray with it and to practice with it Yeshua Maranatha Hesed Amen. Yeshua Maranatha Hesed Amen. Yeshua Maranatha Hesed Amen.

So this is [00:15:00] Christocentric. Yeshua is the name that Jesus was called 2000 years ago in Aramaic. It's calling on the name of Jesus. "Maranatha" means come or come God, come spirit in Aramaic. Hesed is the Hebrew word rooted in ancient Aramaic language for loving kindness or compassion. And amen, of course again, the word that ends all prayer [00:15:30] in the Judeo Christian and Islamic traditions, "let it be, so be it". And sure enough, this phrase worked for the grandson. This inter-spiritually inclined young man who still wanted something that was mantric and could bring forth this sense of meaning and purpose.

A mantra, of course, [00:16:00] has a certain resonance, as sacred languages do, Sanskrit, Hebrew, Aramaic -- a resonance in one's consciousness. So he was repeating something, the grandson was repeating something that was intentional, but also an entry into the interiority of resonance silence that a mantra invites one to, and it was really wonderful for him.

And just to complete this story, [00:16:30] could you imagine that there was a fourth version? The son was impacted by the heart intention so much that he wanted to share it with his dog, and he gave this heart intention version to the dog: Ball, fetch, kibble, good boy. Ball, fetch, kibble, good boy. So whether you're a human being or [00:17:00] a dog, heart intention has its diverse doorways that you can enter into the practice from.

And let me just bring forth and other screen share to illustrate this: "Choosing one of three intentions" for the heart intention [00:17:30] practice. Again, on the first or topmost line intention is the Jesus prayer, what we explored before: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of God, amen. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of God, amen". That was the grandfather's practice, the Jesus prayer that brought forth meaning and purpose and the transformation, the restructuring of consciousness [00:18:00] that the prayer of the heart initiated in him.

The second or middle row, intention as a spiritual affirmation, was the daughter's practice: "Life, radiating love in being. Life is radiating love in being" -- that affirmation of unity and oneness. Spiritual language more than religious, [00:18:30] that's what appealed to her.

And then the third or the bottom most line, intention as a Christian mantra: “Yeshua Maranatha Hesed Amen”. That was the grandson's heart intention. That was his meaningful entry into the world. Now you can tell there's no fourth line. I don't have the dog's heart intention up there, but this is a class for human beings, to make us [00:19:00] more and more human.

So one of the problems in our culture or the challenges in our society is that we have a diversity of approaches where live in a pluralistic world. There doesn't seem to be one path of meditation that's suitable for everyone. Now this, of course, speaks to the plurality of the spiritual traditions, the world religions. [00:19:30] For the first time in human history, all these wonderful traditions are existing side by side. The world religions have come together, and one can feel drawn to one's own relationship with Ultimate Mystery, through a tradition that one's spouse may not have the same path with. But what about having respect for the diversity, the plurality of [00:20:00] our spiritual approaches, but also a groundedness in the union, in the interiority that awakens through the Prayer of the Heart. So that compassion is the greatest thing, whether it's found through mercy, through love, through Hesed, through loving kindness. What about if we open up to a transcendent mystery, whether we find that through Jesus Christ, through life [00:20:30] itself, or through Yeshua, the name of Jesus that has a certain Aramaic sacred resonance to it. This is really what the family was doing with the heart intention practice. Everyone had their own slightly different version of the words of their heart intention. They were using different words, but *the heart* of [00:21:00] the heart intention practice was the same for each of them. Love, radiating presence in the world, a life that gives joy and meaning and openness to service, and the surrender into pure being, let it be, so be it.

So rather than avoid this challenge in our pluralistic, rapidly [00:21:30] changing world, heart intention confronts it right off, right at the beginning. And we are invited to choose one of these three intentions for practice of heart intention. And you can continue to refer to them on the handout that accompanies this video. [takes down screen share] I just want to have some more person to person contact with [00:22:00] you.

So how would you know which version of the heart intention practice that most clearly touches your heart as a doorway into the interior transformation? That's really the point of the practice. Well, you might have already felt a connection with one or the other. The Jesus prayer might have landed right in your spiritual center because of your relationship [00:22:30] with Jesus and your orientation towards his saving love and mercy. Or like the mother, the middle generation mother, you might have already connected with her phrase, life is radiating love in being, because of your spiritual than religious upbringing. Or like the grandson, you might have already connected with Yeshua Maranatha Hesed Amen.

The other option is that you could practice and explore in your daily life for a day or a few days each of these versions of heart intention -- the prayer, the affirmation, or the mantra -- and see what happens in your own relationship with God, with *your* God. [00:23:30] People sometimes ask me, "Well, what about choosing and using my own version? What about constructing my own version of heart intention and praying in that way and practicing in that way?" And my

response is, "That's fine. That's wonderful. That's a great inspiration." My suggestion is to allow that to happen from your sense of God out, rather than from your mind, your intellectual [00:24:00] mind, that wants to try to figure out and construct, and maybe even control how this works for you. In other words, get into the practice itself with one of those phrases, one of those affirmation or the prayer or the mantra, let it make a home in you for a little while, and let your breath [00:24:30] and let your focused mind and let your surrendered heart and the presence of God and pure awareness open you to it, rather than your separate self being in control of the process.

Because most people do, who practice heart intention, do come to their own best way [00:25:00] of practicing it. In other words, there are a few different versions of the Jesus prayer, and I'm watching with my spiritual directee to see if one of the other versions of the Jesus prayer begins to become more appropriate and meaningful for him, rather than the one that we started with, that he started with. And there are other forms of spiritual intentional affirmation, like the one [00:25:30] that the daughter was connecting with. And there are other mantras. But the idea is to get into the practice and let it change you, let God change you, and then you'll be inspired and drawn to something greater.

Just to go back one more time to that screen share. [00:26:00] You'll see that the three versions of the heart intention all are constructed in a similar way. Under the Roman numeral one, whether it's Lord Jesus Christ, life, or Yeshua, there's an object, a noun in [00:26:30] that sentence or that phrase, Lord Jesus Christ, life, or Yeshua. The mercy, the radiating, and the Maranatha are a verb. There's a verb, an action quality there, reflected in that phrase. Son of God, love, and Hesus are actually the subjects of [00:27:00] the prayer or mantra or affirmation itself. And the fourth Roman numeral under that, the amen, the in being and the amen, are an exclamation point or closing period. So, each heart intention phrase has an object, a verb, a subject, and [00:27:30] a closing exclamation point. And the theology and the deeper explanation of the way of being with this is a little bit beyond our discussion here. But it is rather important, once we open up to the deeper interiority of this practice. So just to remember that,

Okay, let's see, what else to do here? Just concluding. So the invitation here is to let one of those intentions capture you. Practice it as a way of affirming the deepest purpose and the motivation for your life. Let your [00:28:30] life become prayer. Let each step of your daily activity be expressive of your heart intention, your heart's intention, your meaning for life, which could be the relationship with Jesus, your savior, which could be the affirmation of the oneness of all love and life, rooted in oneness, which could be a mantra which opens [00:29:00] you to the resonant life of the Trinity interior to your heart.

Live that prayer, let it live you. Let it become in the words of the Prayer of the Heart "self-arising" in you, so that your deepest purpose in life is more accessible to you in every breath, in every movement, and in every ordinary failure and forgetting. [00:29:30] I constantly forget my heart intention practice, but the grace and the beauty and the gift of it is that I can always come back. I can always let the prayer come back to me. "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Son of

God, amen.” I can always let a new discovery arise in me of the oneness and the love that unites all [00:30:00] of created life beneath it, all the turmoil and the politicization and the conflict. Life is radiating love in being. That can come back to me out of the gift of oneness in an encounter with another person. And I can always let the mantra, the resonant energy of life resound in my heart, in my mind, “Yeshua Maranatha Hesed Amen”.

My heart's intention is that this would be something meaningful for you. At this time of your life, if this is what God is leading you to, may you have a blessed exploration of it. And I look forward to seeing you on another video session where we talk about some of the interior dimensions of the practice. Good wishes.

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