



Contemplative Outreach

Grounding the Prayer of the Cloud in the Prayer of the Heart Heart Intention for Centering Prayer with David Frenette

Supporting notes, session 2 e-course
May 2022

Bring the intellectual mind within ourselves by means of the breath. Pay attention to the exhalation and inhalation of the breath, so that while we are watching it, the intellectual mind too may be held in balance.

- St Gregory Palamas, quoted in session two longer video

+

Drop your attention into the breath
Anchoring your attention with your breath
On the inhale and the exhale
With the name of the divine from your Heart Intention phrase
“Lord Jesus Christ”...or,
“Life”...or,
“Yeshua.”

+

Some definitions:

- Omphaloskepis: In the Prayer of the Heart tradition, this is the Greek term for the practice of attentively watching the area behind and below the navel, a breathing-through and awareness-of the area behind the navel, (similar to the area of the body called the “hara” in Zen Buddhism) as a meditational practice. In Heart Intention practice, this ancient practice is the inspiration for anchoring our name for the Divine

(Life, Lord Jesus Christ, or Yeshua) as an embodied prayer, in the bottom of the breath cycle, behind and below the navel.

- Attention is directed awareness
- Awareness is the field in which attention resides.
- The presence of God in pure awareness is the spaciousness represented around the body in an icon, known as a nimbus or halo. It might be described as a luminous cloud or a halo of energy surrounding a saint or someone in deep contemplation. [See the Visio Divina meditation here](#) on the universal recognition and manifestation of nimbus energy.



Other:

Let your breath resonate in your heart space with your name for the Divine.

Centering Prayer involves the **intention** to consent to the presence and action of God, rather than **attention** per se. So, Heart Intention with its focus on attention and awareness is a good complement to Centering Prayer, and visa versa.

How can one expect to be in relationship with another person when your mind is not focused on the conversation with them? And how much more important this is with God.

- Evagrius Ponticus, quoted in session two shorter video

+

They who abide in Me, and I in them, bear much fruit.

- John 15: 5

Heart Intention and Centering Prayer

Although Heart Intention can be practiced as a path on its own, we've found the easiest way for Centering Prayer practitioners to get a sense of Heart Intention is as an approach for integrating Centering Prayer into daily life, by opening to God in unity consciousness. Heart Intention is a path of active as well as sitting meditation; it can fruitfully be done prior to or after Centering Prayer.

There are different ways of practicing Heart Intention; one that is "spiritual more than religious," and another that is a more Christian, religious contemplative expression. The spiritual more than religious seeker receives a taste of the essence of the Judeo-Christian contemplative prayer experience, as a benefit for their everyday life, as a grounding in activity and crisis. This is a blessing in itself. However, some of these folks go on to "download" and practice the religiously contemplative path that Heart Intention comes from.

Whereas Centering Prayer's primary inspiration in the Christian contemplative tradition is *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Heart Intention's primary inspiration is The Prayer of the Heart, the contemplative path from the Christian East that includes the Jesus Prayer. When followed in complement, Centering Prayer and Heart Intention unite two primary contemplative practice traditions, East and West, in the Christian heritage.

Heart Intention complements rather than replaces the essential practices we developed at Chrysalis House 35 years ago for integrating Centering Prayer into everyday life (Lectio Divina, Attention-Intention, Active Prayer, Forgiveness Prayer, Welcoming Prayer) in a singular approach. I have practiced these approaches, along with Heart Intention, and find them all fruitful and complementary.

Getting Started with Heart Intention, and Going Deeper

Heart Intention is a meditation practice that awakens us to *unity with life*, opens us to begin healing our *separation wounds*, and inspires us to *act with greater compassion*.

Our felt isolation—the trap of "I, me, mine"—in which we are separate from other people, caught in the contracted egoic self that suffers, dies and acts in neglectful ways – is transformed when we discover our true nature in relationship with other people and life. "I, me, mine" yields to "us, we, ours"—the intuition of unity consciousness from which compassionate action more easily arises.

Heart Intention joins words that are directed towards unitive meaning with inner movements of consciousness in order to shift, and begin transforming our separate self- sense, in life and in activity.

A first step in the practice involves solidifying our motivation for the life of unity. We choose an intention in words that expresses the meaning of unity for us, personally.

Intentions can be expressed in different ways. Often people think of intentions as being the words of an affirmation. Heart Intention can be wonderfully practiced with an affirmation, if the affirmation is of unity. The following Heart Intention affirms the unity of life in a simple, direct way, a way that sets the stage for going deeper by joining the subtle movements of unity consciousness to these words:

Life, radiating love, in being

If that affirmation is meaningful, if it somehow, subtly, expressed a sense of life's unity, use it to begin Heart Intention practice by repeating it, and briefly pondering its meaning in life.

- For example, what does this intention affirm about the natural world, creation, and how does it motivate you to act towards, and in, nature?
- For example, what does this intention affirm about humanity, and how does it motivate you to act towards other people who look, act or believe differently than you?
- For example, what does this intention affirm about all your own complex and diverse emotions, parts and actions? How does this intention imply you act towards your own humanity, and others?

As you open to and animate the sense of unity in your experience, in your current life, you then repeat, with a gentle sense of trust, *Life radiating love, in being*.

Other examples of Heart Intention Phrases

In addition to affirmations, aspirations, prayers or mantras can also be used as intentions that express unity. Here are some more examples of intentions you can use to ponder, and then repeat to solidify your motivation to live by, in and with unity. Which intention below is most helpful for you, most expressive of unity?

A Christian prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us, Son of God, Amen*

A Christian mantra: *Yeshua, Maranatha, Hesed, Amen*

Heart Intention: Engaged, Embodied, Human, Nuanced

Heart Intention is a practice done during activity as well as during regular periods of sitting meditation, thereby helping to create more skillfulness in everyday life. So, we can reaffirm, ponder and apply our specific intention, for example, *Life, radiating love, in being*, during the day. By doing so, we are more anchored, more motivated towards unity in our world of separation.

But the real significance of Heart Intention comes after we have chosen and begun practicing with our affirmation, aspiration, prayer or mantra. Beginning and nuanced Heart Intention practice is based on deepening awakening to unity consciousness. Choosing an intention and laying a foundation of motivation towards unity is important, and also a preliminary foundation for deeper practice.

- When the words of a Heart Intention are united with our breath, feelings and awareness, we can act in the busy distracted world with greater embodied heartfelt presence.

- When the words of a Heart Intention are directed in the mind towards our apprehension of Oneness, or the Divine, we are able to act in the complex technological world with greater focus and skill.

- When the words of a Heart Intention are surrendered in the heart to our own sense of Oneness, or the Divine, greater solidarity with others is borne.

- When the words of a Heart Intention evoke witnessing consciousness, we open into the timeless now of pure Being.