



Contemplative Outreach

Heart Intention Practice for Everyday and the Apocalypse
with David Frenette

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Transcript

The other day I saw a friend of mine for the first time in quite a few months; hadn't seen this friend because he and his spouse, his wife, had a new baby and they were taken up with all the events of caring for this birth, preparing for the birth, bringing a child into the world and because their new child had some medical concerns, its first weeks and months in this world were in the ICU and my friend had to manage that. And that was his life and his focus. And he said that in the ICU, there were so much stressful information and tests and pressures and late nights that were happening, he didn't feel like he was adequate, he was up to the job, without his prayer, without his practice. And he described this wonderful image that stayed with me ever since, of him holding his newborn baby in his arms, walking back and forth in the ICU with this very vulnerable, vulnerable life. This child in his arms was teetering in the edge of a medical emergency, and my friend was praying the Jesus prayer. "Lord, Jesus Christ have mercy on us, Son of God, amen." This is what the Heart Intention is about! So this is a wonderful little living story, a living icon of a father and child. And this is the only thing that my friend could do. The other events and decisions and things, he didn't feel like he was adequate to make those choices without this kind of practice. Without this continual return to his, what we would call here in our progress or our approach, his Heart Intention, in a particular way that focused his mind, joining it with the interior movements of consciousness so that his mind was settled into this pure, simple act of contact with this life. This very vulnerable life, like a Madonna and child, but it was a father and child. And this is what sustained him through those days and weeks in the ICU. And when he met with me and my friends the other day, he shared this image.

I just wanted to start this particular video, this topic by describing this very, very real encounter with life and in its everyday aspect just being immersed in the routines of life and its edginess, its crises of life and death because we seem in our world to be pushed to more and more to issues of great concern. Our civilization seems to be unwinding, disintegrating. The climate is getting very, very dire. The balance of life on earth, political discord, war, food shortages. We

seem to be tumbling into a world of separation and things are falling apart in an apocalyptic way it would seem. So what do we do? How do we navigate this new world that we're handing on to our children, if we have children? How do we carry ourselves in this world?

One of the great Christian mystics from the middle ages, John Ruysbroeck [or Ruusbroec], had a wonderful, simple little teaching that's one of my favorite sources of wisdom from the tradition. He said, "God breathes us out to love and act with kindness, and God breathes us into rest in fruition." "God breathes us out to love and act with kindness and God breathes us into rest in fruition." What a wonderful insight into the unitive dimension of life that we're riding on the breath of God -- we live and move and have our being in this divine mystery of God. And we're riding on God's breath so to speak. God breathing us into life, into the world. God, out breathing us to love and act with kindness. Like my friend, caring for this child, just giving it contact and caring for his own broken heart and for his spouse and for his family in the moment of ordinary life.

And then God breathes us in Ruysbroeck says to rest in fruition -- this is the movement of Centering Prayer and Heart Intention is really concerned primarily with the out breath of God, with being in life with a continual prayerful meditative stance, engaged, active meditation. Heart Intention involves immersion in life, but it's a unitive expression of life in which we're being breathed out by God. In our practice, our invitation in Heart Intention is to continually come back to those inner movements of consciousness. The breath, the concentrated engaged mind, the surrender into the heart, the release into pure being that the four movements of Heart Intention describe while in activity, while engaged in the everyday and the encounter with the crises that seems to be so prevalent in our world. The precarious teetering of a child, a newborn child's health or engagement with justice concerns, and service and action.

Father Thomas Keating said quite aptly, "Contemplative service is God in us serving God in other people." God, in us serving God and other people. So this comes from a deep insight into the indwelling presence of God, that God dwells in us and Ruysbroeck's quote about riding on the breath of God complements this insight by Thomas Keating by saying that not only does God dwell in us, but we dwell in God. We dwell in God's breathing in the world and it's this unitive experience and insight and living reality that I believe is the answer towards my day to day navigating the difficulties and the ordinary challenges and the joys and the connections of life in this era.

So Centering Prayer is really the resting and fruition. Heart Intention is the out breath into the world to act with greater love and kindness in a unitive experience of what contemplative service is -- meditative action which is being present to the Divine in life and other people and being in that divine interconnectivity more and more.

Just to give another real example of this a few years ago, I was deeply touched by young people, teens and high schoolers and college students' immersion in the climate crises and the Friday protests and witnesses to the need to heal the planet and change our lifestyles and return to a sense of balance with the created natural world -- [all] were a great inspiration to

me. So I would take the bus downtown and on Fridays at noon for many Fridays and witness with the young people, with the teenagers, the Fridays for Future movement.

I didn't decide to go into a more active protest and witness nonviolently to this cause, this was my discernment that I could be a prayerful presence for these young people who were putting themselves on the front line. But the key to my engagement with that practice was a meditative stance. This was my rescue, like my friend in the hospital with his child in his arms. The only thing that he could do and the only thing that I could do in the trip downtown, and my witness with the young people was to continually come back to my meditative stance. My Heart Intention, anchoring my attention in the breath and the bottom of the breath cycle with my name of God -- Yeshua, or Lord Jesus Christ or Life.

Anchoring that attempted move towards presence in the divine presence, and I could feel I was more present to the concerns of the youth and the issue that was before me in life. So the engaged meditation stance, and then I would return on the bus exhausted because of my particular health condition. And I would rest and then come to my meditation shack here and rest in fruition, not only physical rest, but more importantly, the rest that's Centering Prayer can provide. And so these two breaths of God, two breaths of the Divine go together as a call into our world to live more and more a life of unity with other people and with our own deepest intention for life, for purpose.

Life, life is radiating love in being. This is my or one of my affirmations of unity that anchors me with my intention, my purpose in the world. Life is radiating love in being, and I joined that affirmation of unity, my Heart's Intention with my breath focusing on the words, especially the second phrase, *radiating, radiating, radiating, radiating* in order to settle my mind and open my heart to the moment, to the sense of interconnection with other people. To the other people who are not of the same orientation as I. My friends or my family who are not seeing the same issues with the same urgency perhaps that I do, or with the same action to invitation to action that I do. Polarization and the splitting up of friends and family, this is one manifestation of the disease of the separation wound that we're living through.

So my practice, our practice, the invitation is to be not only present to the moment with breath and attention and awareness, not only focused in the mind so that we can handle the decisions that are made, that are coming up, but also surrendering into the heart, the source of love and forgiveness and compassion. So this is why the fruition of the Jesus prayer is a prayer for mercy. And the Heart Intention says that the inspiration to pray the Jesus prayer *to have mercy on us* unites us with this movement of interconnectivity no matter who we're engaged in. I may not be able to be present in the same way to someone that's of a completely different political or spiritual or religious perspective than I, but I can be present to them with my compassion and my love and my kindness and my prayerfulness. When I can't engage in words with another person of a different political persuasion, I can engage with them in a prayer of presence, my presence, my surrender into the heart in love, in Hesed, in loving kindness, in mercy for us, uniting us with the great out breath of Divine.

So Jesus said in the canonical gospels that anything that's done to the least of the people around us, the least of them we do to him. So if we're engaged in a relationship with Jesus, with Christ, with the Divine, however the Divine is expressed in our world, in our path or spiritual path, it's an invitation to remember that this Divine is in everyone and we are in it together, we're in this mess together. And the least that we do to anyone else we're doing to our own God. [pauses, breathes]

There's a way in which Heart Intention and the unitive experience of life and Centering Prayer opens us to the reality that we wake up, we're enlightened, where we're brought to fullness of union together. It's not an isolated act. We're not climbing the interior castle alone. We're not climbing the mountain into the divine Godhead by ourselves. We're on the journey together, especially in our era, now, the era that we're living in. So perhaps I can just share a screen [brings up document].

So Heart Intention, joining meaningful words of intention, inner movements of consciousness and a deeper form of action. So in the first row, row A, one of the intentions we've been exploring throughout our video course is a spiritual affirmation, not a religious prayer, but a spiritual affirmation. "Life is radiating love and being." And this affirmation unfolds into deeper and deeper, more penetrating, very simple one or two words that express more and more awareness of unity and oneness. The column, or excuse me, row B, we're joining that in the Heart Intention practice with inner movements of consciousness, with the breath, with the concentrated mind, with surrendering it into the heart and with resting and pure being.

And now here in this video, we're emphasizing that the Heart Intention, its fullness, is to be expressed as a spiritual practice in meditative action where we're orienting ourselves to God acting for all of us, in being. That we are in unity acting for all of us in unity, in being. And the more and more one practices this Heart Intention approach by joining that awareness of being in activity to others, as a prayer we're offering our prayer. We're living our prayer. We're walking our prayer like my friend was when he was walking up and down the hallway outside the ICU. He was practicing the Jesus prayer form of this approach of Heart Intention. And with each step, with each contact with his infant child, his child on his heart, he was praying the prayer of heart, the prayer of the heart in unity. And the child, the infant child actually is doing much better now. They have to watch the course of the next months, his family and his parents, but came through a crisis and his father did too through his practice and his love and his being carried on the breath of God, transparent to God's love, to Jesus and Christ for my friend.

So whatever intention one uses, whether it's a spiritual intention, such as "Life is radiating love and being" or religious intention like the Jesus prayer, "Lord, Jesus Christ have mercy Son of God, amen." Or Christian mantra, "Yeshua, Maranatha Hased, amen." The idea with Heart Intention is to use the words, we communicate by words and actions. Heart Intention settles into this realization that our speech and our body and our mind, as some Buddhists would say, are all ways of communicating in communion with the underlying unity of life. So to use the words, the gift of speech and purpose and intentionality and learn how to join that word that

expresses one deepest motivation for life, either as a prayer or as an affirmation or as a mantra with actions like picking up and caring for a child, like taking a bus down to a protest, like researching how best to be involved in the actions of the world that we're facing, how one can do that in balance with one's own commitments and realistic life and health and situation in the world. To be continually called forth out of complacency into a greater awareness of the interconnection and union and unity of all life. And to rest in fruition, we need that too, I need the periods of silence and solitude. This is what Centering Prayer provides.

And I suggest that the era that we're living in, if we listen to the signs of the times, the era that we're living in, an era of unraveling, somewhat dystopic, perhaps with pandemics and war and climate crisis, we need to have a different paradigm of meditation that engages with the world and also rests with fruition, in a practice like Centering Prayer. So all the many years, if you're a Centering Prayer practitioner, that you've balanced life and Centering Prayer -- continue in that I suggest, continue with that balance of action and prayer. And if you're a newcomer to meditation practice, either in the Christian contemplative tradition or in a spiritual and less religious way, you might connect with the inspiration that's transmitted through Centering Prayer and the Prayer of the Heart and find inspiration there for your practice in the world in an engaged way, and coming back to a place of rest and repose and realizing the oneness of all reality and living out that oneness in the world.

So "Heart Intention for Everyday and the Apocalypse" is a dramatic title, but it's a real and telling and rich symbol that needs to be complemented in hope and love and trust by the image, say that my friend communicated to me of him caring for his newborn infant. That as the breath of the Divine unfolded into his heart, centered in his Heart Intention or the Jesus prayer in a focused way, joining that with his actions and his inner movements of consciousness. He was doing what he needed to do, what he could do in the moment. This is all that we can really expect of each other and ourselves to do what we can do in the moment from a meditative, compassionate, kind mind, and forgive ourselves when we forget to do it, which is my practice.

The wonderful thing about the Heart Intention is that with whatever intention we're using, there's love, there's mercy, there's loving kindness woven into the practice when we surrender into one's heart, the heart of God, and live and breathe into the world from that deepening awareness.

So thank you so much for your attention and your practice as you contribute to the unity of life and the healing of the world moment by moment. Thank you.

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For more information about David's teachings and offerings, visit www.davidfrenette.com