



Contemplative Outreach

Heart Intention Practice: Live Practice Session 2 **with David Frenette**

May 2022
Transcript

Well, hello and welcome to the live practice session. Hi folks, from all over the network, the community network of Contemplative Outreach, and from around the world, new folks and old timers. Hope you're having a good day.

That music is so evocative and so beautiful. Thank you, Pamela, for curating our wonderful introductory music.

So today's session is going to be structured similarly to last week's. I'll have some opening remarks. We'll move into some practice with Heart Intention, especially around the breath, the topic of this week's class. We have some questions, [some] leftover questions from last week, and then [we'll] get into any new questions that you might have that you can submit in the chat function. Then we'll have another longer period of practice, silent practice. At the end or towards the end, [we'll] go into breakout groups as we did last week. Our timeline is to finish by 90 minutes or even earlier.

So we're exploring Heart Intention, which is inspired by the Jesus Prayer, the Prayer of the Heart, the tradition that comes from the Eastern Orthodox Christian heritage primarily, that involves practicing during activity, praying unceasingly during the engaged times of our life. This is why it's a wonderful complement to Centering Prayer, which is of course a sitting, receptive practice meant to be done in silence, when we can withdraw and let go of the distractions and the busyness of life. So Heart Intention is meant to be engaged, engaged particularly in service, where we can touch into the body, our body, mind, heart and our being, in activity, and offer ourselves to the Divine Mystery, to God, in the midst of action. Because our body, our mind and our heart and our being are both receptive, we get in touch with those aspects of the divine and human nature in us through receptive practice, like Centering Prayer, but we can do it in an active way too.

We wanted to take a few weeks in order to unpack and experience this type of practice. You may have had contact, or you may be a practitioner of the Prayer of the Heart, the Jesus Prayer, or something like it. The actual tradition that Heart Intention finds its inspiration is the Jesus Prayer, says to pray that prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us, Son of God, amen," or some version of that simple prayer in words, and to let it become the focusing and animating purpose of one's life, this relationship with Jesus, opening up to mercy and salvation and transformation. The Prayer of the Heart tradition says pray *that* prayer, pray that prayer centered on the name of Jesus and calling out for mercy.

Well, Heart Intention finds its inspiration in that teaching, but it's not the Jesus Prayer of the Heart per se, because I felt over the decades of sharing this type of spiritual meditative practice, that many people in our spiritual-but-less-religious world are paradoxically hindered by that particular Jesus Prayer. So is it possible to have a similar kind of inspiration for an active prayer that's less religious, less tied into salvation redemption, a masculine imagery, letting the Bible slowly come alive through experience rather than starting with it? This is what I found with Heart Intentions.

So last week we talked about how we can take another intention, more of an affirmation of the unity of our life, such as "Life, radiating love in being, life is radiating love in being," and use *that* as one's intention, one's anchor in life, to bring forth the deepest meaning and purpose. Perhaps you've been practicing with, in the last week, either the Jesus Prayer or that affirmation of unity. There's a third option that I like to mention, and we talked about this last week and in the first two videos, the second video particularly, more of a Christian mantra, "Yeshua, Maranatha, Hesed, amen. Yeshua, Maranatha, Hesed, amen." Yeshua is the name of Jesus in Aramaic. Maranatha means come God or come Spirit. Hesed means loving kindness, and amen means to let it go and be in the pure being of God.

Now, the Prayer of the Heart teaching very importantly says to unite one's prayer or one's affirmation or one's mantra -- the Heart intention -- say, with the breath or the focused mind or the surrendered heart. You start with the words that express deep purpose and meaning, and then as you get into the practice, there's an invitation to embody it through the breath so that your breath, which we're always with, the breath we're always breathing, from the moment of birth to the instant of death, is always available, the breath. So why not make your Heart Intention phrase, whatever it is, embodied with your breath.

In the readings and in the two videos, number three and number four this week, we talked about how to do that in a beginning kind of way. Rather than talk about it right now, I'd like to go right to experience. So let's do a little guided meditation around Heart Intention with the breath. So allow your body to come to your awareness, your attention. Notice how you're sitting, and simply breathe. Bring your conscious attention to your breath.

Attention is an embodied act rather than a conceptual act, so rather than thinking about breathing, feel your breath as you inhale and as you exhale. Let your awareness sink into the center of your body, the area at the bottom of your diaphragm, which you can breathe into

with your breath. Let your breath simply and gently flow to the area at the bottom of your diaphragm, just behind and below the navel. So it's as if you're dropping anchor into the center of your body with your breath and your attention. Join this movement of attention with the name of the divine that's expressed in your Heart Intention phrase, which could be "Lord Jesus Christ."

So as you breathe and let your breath-attention anchor you in the bottom of the breath cycle, call upon the name of Jesus, or in that spiritual-but-less-religious phrase, "Life is radiating love in being." Let the word Life help anchor you in that area behind and below the navel. Or the Aramaic name for Jesus, "Yeshua, Yeshua." Hear and see and feel Yeshua sinking down into the breath, the sense of awareness settling behind and below the navel, so that rather than trying to get there as a location, you're kind of there already in the center of your being, the center of your body, even while I'm speaking, with the name, the divine name.

Of course thoughts keep coming, the sound of my voice, other bodily perceptions and just simple, in a simple way, just return to being anchored in the center of your body and your being with God. So you can just hear the divine name in a gentle way. It's not like you have to breathe and for each breath you anchor it with the divine name. If that's helpful, then go ahead and do that, but you can also be very gentle and just let the name and that sense of anchoring in the center of your body come to you. "Yeshua, Yeshua, Yeshua. Life, life, life. Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ, Lord Jesus Christ."

You might have the experience, when you let go of effort and just rest in your center with the name, the divine name, you might have the sense of presence, of being present, so you let go of effort and you just come back. Let your breath take you back to center. In a way, you can listen with your whole body, with a sense of attention and awareness awakened in your whole body, through God.

So this is a very simple and gentle way of practice. Attention is directed sometimes towards that area. Feel it again, just behind and slightly below the navel. You breathe in and towards and through that area. The breath cycle for most people is complete a little above that area behind the navel. Our lungs don't extend all that way, but the breath can be access, a point of access, to the center of your body, and your attention can take you further. If you practice other forms of meditation, you might recognize this part of the body. It's universal, somewhat universal in spiritual traditions, like the dantian in Taoism, the area behind and below the navel, the hara in Zen Buddhism, and in the Christian Prayer of the Heart tradition this is called omphaloskepsis.

Just for a moment, let your breath be fuller and inhale. Let your awareness come up into your chest in an exhale as you let go with your belly. Your name for the divine, "Yeshua, Life, Lord Jesus Christ," can also circulate on your in-breath and your out-breath. See what that's like for a moment. For example, on the in-breath, "Lord Jesus Christ," and on the out-breath, quiet. On the in-breath, "Life," and on the out-breath, quiet. On the in-breath, "Yeshua." On the out-breath, quiet.

You can also breathe into your heart space. That is, in the area of your chest on the left side of your body where your heart resides. You can even touch it now on your heart, above your heart, and feel what it's like to breathe. Let your attention resonate in your heart space as your breath expands there in a gentle way. "Yeshua, Life, Lord Jesus Christ." As you drop your hand, come back to a sense of attention in your breath that is directed awareness as you breathe and follow your breath from the belly, all the way up to your nostrils and the tip of your nostrils and the top of your nostrils that is the area between your eyes, with the name of God. So your breath is long and deep and gentle, anchored in the center of your being behind the navel and fully and awake and alive in an upward way as you breathe in and exhale.

Now finally have a sense of your whole body. Let your awareness move from your breath to the sense of your whole body and your awareness. You're wearing it like an overcoat, all around your body. You can feel your skin and the clothes on your skin in a general way. As you come back to the divine name, "Yeshua, Life, Lord Jesus Christ," let that awareness spread out from your body and beyond it. Feel your body enclosed and enfolded by Presence. You can hear the name of God too. The wonderful thing is, you can have this sense of anchoring too as you return once again to that area behind and below the navel. The whole body is animated and alive with the presence of God in awareness, "Lord Jesus Christ, Life, Yeshua."

To close out this guided meditation, just take a moment and highlight for yourself where in your body throughout that little exercise your breath felt most natural. How did it feel most easy and prayerful and simple to be breathing in this way with the Heart Intention practice? Perhaps anchoring it behind and below the navel or on the in-breath and the out-breath, or in the heart space or at the top of the breath cycle, the top of your nose, your nostrils, or the space around your being, around your body, or perhaps all of it.

As we continue talking, I just invite you -- you could stay with your simple practice of Heart Intention as you're returning to the Presence, being present to the presence of God in the moment, through your body, the gift of this body and this moment, that we're usually not awake and alive to because we're so distracted. What about returning in a simple way to presence and the name of God, whichever of those three versions of the Heart Intention phrase you're using, the name of God is a wonderful anchor to help with the breath. Because the name of God in our practice, the faith and trust dimension of our practice, can come back to us and guide us through the sense of joining attention with intention.

So the question is, how does one practice Heart Intention with the breath? So the inspiration that comes out of the Prayer of the Heart is that there are different ways to do it, and we just did the primary ones. Sometimes a writer from the Prayer of the Heart tradition, or teacher, will talk about the omphaloskepsis, the anchoring, the breathing through and into the area behind the navel, because that's so simple and so grounded. Right now it can come back to you With the name of God.

The quote that I included in the notes from St. Gregory Palamas, he talked about the inhalation and the exhalation of the breath, so that while we are watching the breath, the intellectual

mind may be held in balance. So inhalation and exhalation. One of my friends and colleagues, the spiritual teacher, Matthew Wright, he talks about breathing, simply inhale and exhale, "Jesus" on the inhale, "mercy" on the exhale, practicing the Prayer of the Heart that way.

So I encourage people to really give a little bit of time and space to the omphaloskepsis, the anchoring in the area behind and below the navel, and then letting that burst into awareness in a simple way. We talked about this in the little video, number three this week. The halo is depicted in iconic art, art of iconography, and represented as a space around the body, around the head, that sometimes radiates, as depicted symbolically, radiating around the whole body, that Jesus or a holy person or someone in deep contemplation, represents their union with God, deepening union with God. Because God is incarnational, meaning the human and the divine come together, and so there's an embodied aspect of the Divine Presence when it's breaks into pure awareness. So being able to rest in that area around the body can be a simple way to let the Heart Intention practice come alive.

It's very receptive, so it may not be something that you experience right away. I remember when I was doing spiritual direction with someone in Denver at the Center for Contemplative Living, someone who came every month, she was naturally drawn to resting in that area with her active practice, that area of the body, the nimbus or the halo. So we reinforced that over time and it became very, very real and rich for her. She would still need to anchor her attention in the breath with the name of God, but with that sense of anchoring behind and below the navel, she could then readily embrace or be embraced by God. At that expression of awareness, we're united, I think, with God's presence in everyone, in all of life.

So this is not esoteric, necessarily. It's something that can open up over a period of time as a source of one's presence to other people, to listen to another person from a sense of presence and unitive oneness, united in God's presence in them and in oneself is a great gift to oneself and to the other person.

So while you think of any questions that you might have on this interesting topic of practicing Heart Intention with the breath, let me just answer a couple of leftover ones from last week, respond to a few that we're talking about, the intention. Someone asked, "do I have to use only one of those three phrases that we talked about at length last week and just reinforced today?" Someone wants to know, basically could they practice with the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us, Son of God, amen," and with the spiritual affirmation of unity, "Life is radiating love, amen," and with "Yeshua, Maranatha, Hesed, amen."

Well, I think it is possible. I do, depending on who and what I'm doing ... I mean, who I'm engaged with. In other words, if I do spiritual direction with somebody and they're drawn and they're practicing with one of those phrases themselves, then that's the one I do in my interior life when I'm present to them and listening and responding to them. If I'm in church, I'll pray the Jesus Prayer, because it helps me open up to the sacred dimension of scripture and the salvific action of Christ that's communicated in worship in church.

The challenge to practicing with more than one of those phrases is that it gets a little complicated. So I suggest that you just stick with one while you get into the practice of Heart Intention, and then let the Spirit draw you into a little bit of diversity, especially if you're engaged in different things, aspects of life, with other people who might be doing the practice too. The principle is very similar to the idea of a sacred word or a sacred symbol in Centering Prayer. In Centering Prayer, it's most valuable to have one sacred symbol, one sacred word, and let ourselves get into the practice. Then a lot is associated in terms of consent and surrender and presence by the return to that word, the way that we return to the symbol, rather than the symbol itself.

So it's not about having the best sacred symbol. It's about how you return to it in Centering Prayer, and a little bit similar with Heart Intention. It's not about having the ideal phrase. It's about the way we practice with it, with attentiveness and wholeheartedness. So let those qualities come alive with one of those phrases from Heart Intention, and then you might branch off your practice in a little different way.

Yes, as we said, in someone else's question leftover from last week, "can I choose my own heart intention phrase?" In the second video we touched in on this question. Many people do choose their own, but again, it's more fruitfully done once you have a chance to let the interior practice that's associated with this way of prayer come alive. Then the Spirit, your God, will direct you into what might need to be changed in the Heart Intention phrase, a different name for God. But I suggest give it a chance to get going on it, because there is a little bit of theology and psychology behind the way that those phrases are constructed, the three that we're using.

There's a comment from last week about the imagery of a cloud, and someone was saying that they grew up, and as a child the clouds in the sky were a part of the unfolding of life and a wonderful symbol, a living symbol for God, that was not formless but rich and alive. I think that's a wonderful comment. I kind of remember that myself. I used to lay on the grass as a child and look up at the clouds, the clouds in the sky, and it was my kind of awakening into a sense of mystery and presence and beauty.

The Cloud of Unknowing uses the imagery of a cloud almost in a technical way, because in the cloud, we are letting go of clear perception, dualistic perception, perception that's intellectual and codified and language-based, and opening up to something experiential. So [in] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the cloud is really a positive image that someone might be a little bit groundless with, but that's why it's good to have a little bit of heart and devotion coming alive there too.

Okay, so those are a few of the questions from last week. What questions might we explore this week, Pamela?

Pamela Begeman: We do have a few. Theresa will start us off. She asks, what does one do who is a Benedictine oblate and now has difficulty in praying the divine office twice daily since the grace of both Centering Prayer and the Jesus Prayer have blossomed within?

David Frenette: Well, we can consider that as a problem but it's also a gift. Wow, Theresa, that's wonderful that the grace is blossoming. The thing is, it's blossoming through the Jesus Prayer, Heart Intention, and Centering Prayer. How do you relate to your old or your established practices, that's a good question. I suggest that you not abandon the prayer of the office, the divine office, while this newer development, this unfolding, is happening through Centering Prayer and the Heart Intention practice, and you take a little while, and I'm sure the Spirit will integrate them in time.

It is true that sometimes God draws us into different expressions of contemplative life, so you might come back at some time to the divine office, having taken a little vacation, a little respite, but have a sense of trust about the process, and you could pray to God too and ask God to either animate your practice of the divine office, because there's a lot associated with it in terms of your rule of life and your community, your oblate community, and you don't want to let go of that too quickly or at all.

What else, Pamela? What else do we have?

Pamela Begeman: From Jurgen, he asks, how do you combine Centering Prayer and Heart Intention, in what order and how much time for each?

David Frenette: That's a great question, Jurgen. Good to hear from you. I suggest you continue with your Centering Prayer practice just as it is, and then before or after your daily practice, or both, for say three or four or five minutes before and three or four or five minutes after Centering Prayer, do the Heart Intention. So the Heart Intention for three or four minutes before anchoring in your breath, remembering your deepest intention for meaning in your life. Next week we'll talk about praying it into the heart. That can help prepare you for the receptivity of Centering Prayer. Then when you start Centering Prayer, you just let the Heart Intention go. Then at the end of Centering Prayer, when you would have this vestibule or emerging time of a few minutes to transition as a bridge back into activity, come back to the Heart Intention, because Heart Intention is really meant to be an anchor in activity for Centering Prayer.

So doing it on the way out of Centering Prayer will make Heart Intention more available to you in the active routines that are coming next in your day. So a little before, a little after, and then most importantly, during the day. So during the day, you can put a post-it note on your mirror in the bathroom, remember my Heart Intention, or write out the Jesus Prayer if that's what it is. Then you see that when you go to wash your hands and -- that's your speed bump. That's your prayer bump, that little note on the mirror, and you slow down and you take a moment. You say your Jesus prayer phrase, your Heart Intention phrase. Let it settle into your breath, and boy, you come out of that bathroom refreshed and centered in God, ready to meet the day. Do some little things to help you remember it during the day.

Some people like to get into the Heart Intention practice by doing it when they're walking, like outdoors on a walk, walking the dog, or just walking yourself, and being awake and alive to the

beauty of nature and your body as you're walking, and your breath and God. It's a simple activity. Don't put the headphones on too quickly. Make a compact with yourself, and remember it each morning when you're doing your spiritual practice, your Centering Prayer, that this day, this ensuing day, you're going to remember your intention and practice it so that you are not going to get as involved in the details of life.

This means letting go of media a little bit. This means for your own sanity, letting go of a little bit of social networking, for your own wellbeing and the wellbeing of those around you, beginning to see the iPhone in a different way, not being trapped by it, but you have a resource to help you come out of that distraction cycle with media, with a cell phone, with texting, with turning on the radio first thing you get into a car. You have something that's going to help you develop a new relationship with life, which is your heart intention practice, your own calling upon the name of God with your breath and dropping it into your heart and focusing in your mind.

So there'll be a little transition period where you might fail, as I do. I might forget during the day, and oh my God, oh my God, I just got lost in texting or I saw that headline. I made a vow only to look at the headlines at the end of the day, and I saw the headline to remember what to pray about, and it just trapped me, and I started reading articles. Now's the time to come back to your practice, your Heart Intention practice, and remember the mercy and the love and the loving kindness that's woven into your intentionality and let that carry you.

Oh, I'm sorry, I got on a roll there, Pamela.

Pamela Begeman: Okay. Well, we do have several more. Inge is playing around with words of the Heart Intention prayer. None of the three examples speak to her, so she is experimenting with her own, but she does want to respect the theology and psychology built into the form of them. So she asks, the one that she's come up with is "Divine love, (the noun), radiating within, (the verb) in all," divine love radiating within in all, and she's asking if that's respectable.

David Frenette: Yeah. Well, Inge, okay, well, that's a good question. I think you do have a sense of the underlying structure of what the Heart Intention phrases, the three that we're talking about, primarily, what they're about. In other words, calling upon God by the name of Jesus or "divine name" I think was yours. "Radiating" brings forth the action in a verbiage way. "All in all" brings forth a little bit of the mystery that the deep subject behind the phrase, behind the prayer, is actually a mystery that we can't conceive of, and we need to surrender to. All of this stuff makes a lot more sense and has a lot more meaning if one really gets into this practice, and then there are different dimensions to it.

That's one of the gifts of the Prayer of the Heart teaching. It's an introductory teaching on praying unceasingly, but the way to really do that in that tradition has a lot of subtlety depending on the stage and the... Well, for Heart Intention, I've been doing this and studying it for decades, and there's all kinds of material that could be developed if we ever have the time. So in other words, Inge, I think you have an insight to it. I would offer a hesitant blessing on that

phrase. The one addition would be a fourth symbol at the end that represents the release, which could be “amen” or saying “in being.” See what it's like just to add amen at the end to what you just told us about.

Okay, what else, Pamela?

Pamela Begeman: Kimberly says, I like the Jesus Prayer. When I say “Son of God,” I find myself sighing deeply into my heart the sensation of healing injury or wound. My friend who is a counselor said it sounds like healing from trauma. Kimberly's wondering if you have thoughts on this, about her experience.

David Frenette: I think that's a profound effect of the prayer, that sense of healing and tenderness and love. I think it's the best source of healing for trauma. I don't specifically know if it is associated with trauma in your history, but I do know that trauma is healed by love and connection and that sense of presence in the heart. The heart is, we'll talk about next week, is the seat of identity and the seat of the Divine Presence and the seat of divine love in us. So that movement into the heart and the awakening of the heart is a wonderful answer to the woundedness that life tends to inflict on us, but also the source of love for other people and forgiveness. So I'm grateful, Kimberly, thank you.

Pamela Begeman: Bill resonated with what you shared from another participant about the cloud. He says, “similar to the other cloud, growing up as a young boy, I often had a dream of a cloud following me. I now understand that the Cloud was protecting me.”

David Frenette: That's beautiful. Following you and protecting you. Yeah, this mystery, this presence. Yeah, great.

Pamela Begeman: Amen. Sharon Rose asks, “is the word sustaining or radiating?”

David Frenette: The word that I'm suggesting is “radiating, radiating.” Part of the reason for that is that it's a euphonious gentle sound of four syllables that can be a good expression of Heart Intention for focusing of the mind, which we'll probably talk about next week, but the word is radiating.

Let's take one more and then maybe we'll do some more practice.

Pamela Begeman: Okay. Mary asks for some clarification on the practicality of attention/awareness. She says, “the attention is me saying in my mind, I want to see, feel experience union with God in me and me in him, and the awareness is me allowing surrendering to my desire to have my attention of that union in my body, and then repeating it all over again, attention, falling back into awareness, back into attention, back into awareness, by anchoring, saying out loud or under my breath or in my mind, Yeshua.”

David Frenette: This is Kimberly?

Pamela Begeman: Mary.

David Frenette: Oh, Mary. That's a good question, Mary. I think if I understand you, you're talking about something that's focused and then receptive, focused and then receptive. It's like a focusing and a release, kind of like if you're paddling a kayak, you dip your paddle into the water, and then you need to take a focused stroke and then you release and you just glide for a while, and that's what directed attention is, and the release into more spacious awareness. It's like attention can be directed. Right now I can attend in a directed way to the chair, to my breath, and then I can release into awareness, which is the field, the general field of perception and sensation in which God dwells.

So that two-stroke kind of activity can be meaningful. There's a way that we can attend to awareness itself, because we need to sometimes be directing to this general field of awareness. But because we practice with Centering Prayer, which is so much about receptive release, I find that a lot of Centering Prayer people can move more easily into the release -- pure awareness -- without having to focus a lot on directed attention as maybe someone who's trained in Buddhist vipassana practice. So I think you have a handle on it, Mary, and please continue. Yeah.

So, with the sense that the best way to learn is to practice, I want to return again to that invitation to practice. Then I'm going to talk for about a minute, and I'd like to invite you right now when I'm speaking to bring your attention to your body. Drop your attention into your breath, with your name for the divine, "Yeshua, Lord Jesus Christ, Life," that first term in the Heart Intention phrase. So you are listening to me and at the same time you're turning within and attentive to the Divine. When my voice is active with words, there's a sense in which your attention goes to my words, but because I'm speaking slowly, there's silent pauses, like now, when you can drop your attention and be more present to what's going on everywhere right now -- the name of God, the breath breathing into that area behind and below the navel. And then I start talking again.

So in the video, the fourth video, I described how this can be done as an anchoring sense of contemplative presence to all or any of one's interactions and relationships. Just think what it's like to, when you're fully present to another person or when they're present to you, the sense of sacred encounter that is in such an ordinary way, that you're awake and alive or they're awake and alive to you.

I think I talked about how we're on the phone, say, talking to somebody, and you can tell, I can tell when they're multitasking on the other end of the iPhone, when they're answering texts, even if they're muting themselves. There's just a quality of attention and aliveness that's more available and communicated when we are practicing presence, in whatever way we do that, and Heart Intention is one way to do it, and the doorway into aliveness and into a relationship that is centered in the divine for Heart Intention is the name of God calling upon God, rooting and directing one's attention now in the breath, letting it come to you.

Like on my screen, if your eyes are open, you can become even more aware of what's in the room with me. Oh my God, look at that plant [pointing]. Has that been there the whole time? Every talk, is he surrounded by that plant? And what is that on the side [pointing]? That's actually my globe. That's the world. And up there [pointing], that icon, I've been looking at that for weeks. Who is that in the icon? Well, that's Mary Magdalene and Jesus, one of my favorite icons, because they're both equal. They're both exchanging sacred presence with each other. You can let your vision expand into the room beyond the screen. Look at your world and come back to presence, come back to being present.

So in order to continue practicing, we're going to move into some Zoom breakout groups in a minute. What I'm going to invite us to do is to share a little bit of our experience around this practice, Heart Intention. What is your experience like with this Heart Intention practice? So you're going to be in a group of three or maybe two or maybe four. Introduce yourself, just say your name, where you're from, and share. If you are not sharing, if you're not speaking and you're the listener, listen with your whole body. Listen with your whole being. Listen with your heart and your presence through this little practice.

So, you'll be on a screen, but just like before, just like three minutes ago when you were listening to me, be present to the other person with full attention, and anchor your awareness with the name of God in your breath, in your heart, in the area behind and below your navel, whatever way the breath is arising in you, releasing into pure awareness. The speaker, just don't worry about what's going on in their practice. Just keep true to your own little sharing.

So we're just going to do a little bit of sharing, but sharing from the heart and from sacred presence. I think we could do that for about 12 minutes, Pamela, so everyone gets about three or four minutes.

[everyone goes to breakout sessions]

Pamela Begeman: Okay. Everybody's back, David.

David Frenette: Okay. Well, welcome back everyone from your breakout group. As a way just to transition from the small groups back into our final minutes here in the larger session, I invite anyone just to put in the chat function what your experience was of that exercise of listening in a small group on Zoom, no less, listening from the body and from attention and from presence to another person sharing. If you'd like just to write out a phrase, and maybe I'll read them.

Oh, Kimberly says, I felt fully present. Adeline's headline says, freeing. Anyone else have an experience they want to share? Grateful for the sacred space, affirming. Amazing to be more fully present.

Oh, Pamela, I just lost my little chat function. Was there any other one that was significant?

Pamela Begeman: Welcomed and welcoming from Elizabeth. Good connecting. Lots of use of the word connecting. Martha said, it's still mysterious. Norma said it was welcome and safe. Sharon Rose said she found it difficult to practice when she was speaking.

David Frenette: Ah, yeah. Well, I just want to encourage you, Sharon. That makes sense. It is. Being a listener is a stance by itself of being present, but we're not usually as present as the listening might invite us to, but speaking and then being present in a listening sense to the environment and to another person is kind of like graduate school for me, at least.

Pamela Begeman: Judy said, it was encouraging that there were people from other countries, and it helps to know God is truly global. Roger said his experience was recognizing the divine in myself and the other.

David Frenette: Great. Great, Roger. Well, thank you for those comments and also for others that we don't have the time to read, but actually I do look at all the chat comments later, and Pamela curates them so that we can have some continuity from week to week. So we appreciate your sharing.

One question that came up that I do want to respond to from Joanne earlier in the session -- Hi, Joanne, nice to have you with us. Joanne wonders that with her established active prayer practice, practice of the active prayer, would this be a replacement from that active prayer practice? So should she do the Heart Intention instead of active prayer?

Joanne, that's a good question. I suggest that for the time of the course and a few weeks afterwards, if you feel the invitation to give the Heart Intention practice a little trial for your activity, the active prayer is, I know, as a long term practitioner, is well established in your prayer life and in your consciousness and I'm sure has many, many fruits, so don't abandon it. But just welcome a new friend into your world for a little while and then trust God and see what happens.

Again, the little Heart Intention is similar to the active prayer in some ways, because Heart Intention can be practiced with that kind of gentle focused mind during mundane activities as a way of settling the thoughts and opening up one's presence to the moment. But this dimension of sinking it into the heart, which is what we're going to talk about next week, the Heart Intention into the heart, and also uniting it with the breath, is something a little complementary to the active prayer, and see how that works for you in the next weeks. Then if you have a question, just email me. It'd be nice to hear from you.

So final remarks: thanks for joining and thanks for contributing both your questions and your prayer and your presence to each other, especially in the little groups. This class on Heart Intention is kind of like being in a cooking class. So it's like we're learning how to cook a stew over the course of three weeks. It's going to be a big stew. Rather than having a perfect recipe that I communicate to you at the beginning of the class and then you get the ingredients and you execute it with the spices and everything, and you get a perfect replica of David's stew,

what we're doing in this cooking class is that we're assembling some ingredients one week and we're cooking a little bit, and then you're tasting it. You're tasting as we go along. Then you're going to adjust and add a little bit based on God's presence in you in your own experience. Then the next week we're going to test the recipe a little bit more, and you're going to taste it some more. Then by the final week and afterwards, you're going to have your own stew that's going to be reinforcing your own sense of taste and nourishing you in the unique way that God wants for your life.

So the point is that it's the experience. I invite you to practice this approach, and we're building week to week. So the first week was really about intention, talking about these three options, which is a little different from the Jesus Prayer, the Jesus Prayer emphasis is one option, but because of our time, our era and the need to reach out to people in the spiritual-but-less-religious world and the dominance in Christianity of a kind of spirituality that's not really contemplative, and the Christian message is sometimes heavily fundamentalist, heavily patriarchal and heavily dualistic. So some people, some of us need a different entry into the experience in order to taste the real point of what this is about with their own God.

So that's why we took a little time right at the beginning to talk about intention and the different ways that we can let intention flow into our lives. Then this week we're joining that intention with the breath, the sense of sacred presence in the midst of activity, and to each other and to ourselves and to life. Next week it's going to be about sinking this intention into the heart and surrender and what that means for navigating our life in our crisis driven world.

So thank you for joining us. It's an experiment doing this online. I've shared Heart Intention live here in Portland [Oregon, USA] with a group and classes before the pandemic, and I've shared it online before. But this inspiration is to do it for a week, one week at a time, for three weeks. So we're all part of that experiment, and much gratitude to Pamela Begeman and the staff and the volunteers at Contemplative Outreach. So we're going to close and wish you well and see you next week. There'll be an email coming out on Tuesday.

[everyone says their goodbyes]

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