

Contemplative Outreach

Spiritual Journey with Thomas Keating

Part 1 Tape 0(a)



Attitudes Towards God

God as a rather dangerous character.

- *The right attitude toward God is essential to one's progress on the spiritual journey.*

A Good Idea of God.

- *Fear of God equals Trust in God.*

God Out There (Descartes and Newton)

The Western Model

Self-outside-of-God and God-outside-of-self.

The self initiates all good intentions.

God will reward us in heaven.

- *In Christianity motivation is everything*
- *Jesus condemns religious practices motivated only by external show.*
- *The idea that we must earn God's love is contrary to scripture.*

The Scriptural Model

Emphatic endorsement by Vatican II.

- *Our era has the most comprehensive texts and understanding of scripture since the Apostolic era.*
- *Thanks to modern scripture scholars, we have more insight into the original meaning of the sacred authors.*

The self-in-God and God-in-the-self.

Listening and responding to the Spirit.

We are on a journey to God right now and are called to serve others right now.

- *The Western model misleads us into thinking that God must reward us now.*

Union with and love of God is for the present not the future.

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Two Attitudes

The self-in-God (Scriptural Model) and the self-outside of God (Western Model). God is neither policeman, judge or tyrant demanding instant obedience. These images carry an emotional charge. They have overtones of fear.

Fear is Useless

Fear of God in Scripture means having a right relationship with God and the right relationship with God is one of trust and service.

- *The spiritual journey progresses through actions based on a contemplative response to the gospel.*

In Centering Prayer, as in contemplation, we are “resting in God” and move beyond concepts.

A Vacation from Oneself

The self that we know best is a false self. The false self system rests on our instinctual need for affection, approval, esteem, control, safety and security. These needs eventually become fixations and a misguided programme for our happiness. This programme is further complicated by the emotional and moral attitudes we take from our parents and the cultural attitudes we take from our peers.

- *Our emotional reactions and selfish motives waste our energies.*

Value System

- *Contemplative prayer channels energy towards positive service of others.*
- *Centering prayer penetrates the hardened false-self.....*
- *....to find the light of God.*
- *Centering prayer reduces obstacles to the grace of contemplation.*

A New Way of Looking at Ourselves

- *Contemplation brings rest and opens us to the values of our spiritual nature.*
- *Contemplation heals the emotional wounds of early life and liberates us for union with God.*
- *Truth, scientific and religious, has one source – God.*

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The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel

Prayer is not just the means of relationship with God, it is the relationship.

| Stages of Relationship | Prayer as Relationship | Lectio Divina |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Acquaintance (formal and informational) | Vocal and Formal (routine) | Reading of scripture |
| Friendliness (informal and conversational) | Reflection (on scripture, nature and life events) | Reflection on scripture |
| Friendship (trust and commitment) | Responsive and spontaneous (feelings) | Spontaneous prayer |
| Intimacy (oneness and knowing) | Contemplative (gift, presence and 'resting') | Contemplation and 'resting in God' |

A Subject of Conversation

In scripture God discloses his inmost being to us
Our interaction has to be personal

No One Will Do It For You

We sit with the scripture text as if we were listening to the Lord.
The Spirit who inspired scripture also dwells in us and inspires us.

Here's the Topic

We owe a debt of gratitude to the biblical scholars of the last century.
A conversation can take any turn or direction and can surprise us as we learn to talk to God in our own words.

Growing Up is a Risk

So growing up and conversing with the Lord involves risk and taking a chance.
The energy in the relationship will expand our capacities for divine consciousness and divine union beyond anything we can dream.
Self-disclosure will mean recognition of the dark side of our personality and our weakness.

There has to be Bonding

A certain spontaneous movement of gratitude pours out of one's heart.
Only the sense of being loved can bring us into full life and existence.
When friendliness turns to friendship, commitment and trust is called for.
The relationship is now long-term or even permanent.

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Part I Tape 1(b)



Should I Back Out?

If you decide a friend is reliable you take the risk of developing the relationship. There is no certitude in this. You rely on intuition. You may even feel at times that God has deserted or abandoned you.

A Crisis of Growth

Forging any relationship, even one with God, is hard work. But, grace is the presence and action of Christ in this very minute. We project onto God the bad thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves. There is no subject of which there is more ignorance in the world than the spiritual journey.

Resting in God

Resting in God is beyond concepts, beyond feelings, beyond particular acts. It is knowing God well enough not to have to say anything. The Ultimate Reality is a community. Life at the deepest level is self-giving, sacrifice, self-surrender and the joy of doing so.

A Place to Start

Use the scripture.

| Stages of Relationship | Prayer as Relationship | Lectio Divina |
|--|---|---|
| Acquaintance (formal and informational) | Vocal and Formal (routine) | Reading of scripture (slowly and line by line) |
| Friendliness (informal and conversational) | Reflection (on scripture, nature and life events) | Reflection on scripture (give it even more time) |
| Friendship (trust and commitment) | Responsive and spontaneous (feelings) | Spontaneous prayer (use your own words) |
| Intimacy (oneness and knowing) | Contemplative (gift, presence and 'resting') | Contemplation and 'resting in God' (the most important part) |

The Lord "Dandleth" Me

St. Thomas More felt he was bouncing on God's knee. Resting in God goes beyond prayer and is possible even in immense activity. There is a hunger for a deeper experience of prayer and some kind of community support system all across the Christian denominations.

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Part I Tape 2(a)



| Stages of Relationship | Lectio Divina | Senses of Scripture |
|--|---|---|
| Acquaintance (formal and informational) | Reading of scripture (slowly and line by line) | LITERAL (Teachings of Christ) |
| Friendliness (informal and conversational) | Reflection on scripture (give it even more time) | MORAL (Putting into practice) |
| Friendship (trust and commitment) | Spontaneous prayer (use your own words) | ALLEGORICAL (Spiritual listening) |
| Intimacy (oneness and knowing) | Contemplation and 'resting in God' (the most important part) | UNITIVE (Spirit acts in me) |

The Penetrating Knowledge of God

Listening to scripture is total attentiveness – for insight rather than information.

We seek a penetrating knowledge of God, a tasting knowledge of God.

Tasting God means experiencing God inside myself.

Tasting God means laying to the rest the emotional programmes for happiness.

Four Ways

Christian consciousness traditionally involved four ways of listening to scripture.

- LITERAL: studying the text, the teachings of Christ.
- MORAL: putting the teaching into practice.
- ALLEGORICAL: spiritual level of listening required.
- UNITIVE: spirit is acting in you completely.

The teaching and parables of Jesus are designed to help us see reality differently.

The Good Samaritan

Moral is not so much to love your neighbour as to think differently of people.

If you listen to Jesus you have to be open to change.

Different Kinds of Hearing Apparatus

We don't hear the Gospel for we are invested in our programmes for happiness.

This is why the good seed when scattered does not always find good soil.

The Gospel offers us enormous energy for life if we can bring ourselves to listen.

It tells us, in all kinds of ways, that if we are to really enjoy life, it will mean the dismantling of our so-called programmes for happiness.

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Part I Tape 2(b)



My Burden is Light

Jesus says that his burden is light and that he will give us rest. Rest is relief from our programmes for happiness and their intrusion on others. Rest is relief from our programmes for happiness and their emotional swings. The deepest rest is the Unitive state which is the normal, natural evolution of listening to the word of God and relating to the Incarnate Word in the Gospel.

Who Thought That Up?

As we listen more deeply to the Word our lives resonate. The Moral Level of Scripture is the capacity to live it to some degree. What matters is not how much we read but how much we put into practice. The Allegorical Level is the spiritual level of listening as the scripture becomes a mirror in which we see our own lives.

- LITERAL: studying the text, the teachings of Christ.
- MORAL: putting the teaching into practice.
- ALLEGORICAL: spiritual level of listening required.
- UNITIVE: spirit is acting in you completely.

Oh My God, They're Writing About Me!

We begin to realize that our lives are reflected in the scriptures. The Four Senses of Scripture are Four Levels of Consciousness and Four Levels of Developing Faith, each of which transforms our view of reality.

Come and See

Is Jesus being somewhat humorous when he names Peter, the "Rock"?

Peter, Let's Go Somewhere Else.

Jesus is not interested in what people generally think of him, he is interested in what Peter thinks, what Peter wants of him, who Peter says he is. But, at the Allegorical Level, the story is not about Peter is about me. Jesus is pursuing me and he will not let up.

Night of the Spirit

Therapy is helpful in identifying the false-self. In healing us, God works backwards from where we are now.

The Blueprint is There

By virtue of Baptism the Unitive State is already there waiting activation. Sadly, the atmosphere, at the moment, is filled with negativity. Modern conditions make difficult an environment conducive to Lectio. Lectio goes best if you can give big chunks of time.

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Part I Tape 3(a)



There's No Up or Down, Right or Left

View as a descending into our interior or an ascending to higher consciousness.

| Baptist Minister | Lectio Divina | Road to Emmaus |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| "First I read myself full..." | Reading of scripture (slowly and line by line) | Jesus begins to go through the scriptures. |
| "Then, I think myself clear...." | Reflection on scripture (give it even more time) | Their hearts begin to burn within them. |
| "Then I pray myself hot...." | Spontaneous prayer (use your own words) | "Stay with us, the day is late," they implore. |
| "And then I let myself go...." | Contemplation and 'resting in God' (the most important part) | Their eyes were opened and they recognized him. |

You Start Walking Away

THE WAY TO EMMAUS MEANS OPENING ONESELF TO BE TRANSFORMED

Just Like a Programme on Television

Science and religion are beginning to agree that all creation is one.

The false self is like the snow that blurs your television reception.

More static is provided by cultural, behavioural and emotional conditioning.

Harmony

Anthropology, psychology, the developmental and social sciences all need to influence our world view along with our own ascetical and mystical Christian tradition.

Scared to Death of Silence

Some people are genuinely frightened of silence and that may mean postponing the introduction to centering prayer.

Others experience moments of silence and are at a loss as to what it means.

Hopelessly Inadequate

The psychiatric profession and many clergy are hopelessly inadequate in helping people with real transcendent experiences of Ultimate Reality.

This can result in the spiritual journey being a lonely one for some.

Many Catholics have drifted away to Eastern spiritual communities faced with the God of fear and moral demand presented by the Church.

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Part I Tape 3(b)



The Fear of God is a Technical Term

- Fear of God means having the right relationship with God.
- The right relationship with God is a relationship of trust.
- A relationship of deep emotional fear leads us to flee God and will easily nullify other more adult and intellectually acceptable images of God.
- However, God, like the sun is always shining if we can pull the curtains.
- Centering Prayer helps heal emotional wounds and build a relationship of trust.

We're Always Thinking of Something

The false self involves constant emotional reaction to our incessant thoughts, includes our ordinary awareness along with unconscious defence-mechanisms and repressed material.

Our Core Self is Our True Self (our sharing in the boundless field of energy which is Life, Light, Love and the Ultimate Mystery called God)

Our Ordinary Awareness (consists of our own idea of ourselves, drawn from personal, childhood experience and built into a hard shell or crust)

The Emotional Junk of a Lifetime

Prevents us from looking inward at our true self and at our spiritual nature. The spiritual journey is about quieting the mind so we can access our true self.

Begin to Spread Out the Boats

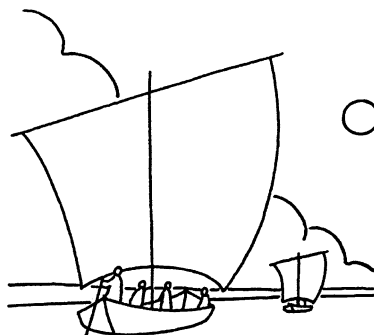
The River as a Metaphor of the True Self

We cannot see the river for the number of boats (thoughts)

We choose a Sacred Word (or Symbol of our intention)

The Sacred Word helps to Spread Out the other boats (thoughts)

Our intention is to open to the presence of God in faith and love in our inmost being.



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Part I Tape 4(a)



The Fourth Stage of Lectio

The sacred word penetrates the shell of the false-self system, the superficial, psychological self and disrupts its normal way of thinking for a time.
The sacred word ideally reduces all thoughts to one.
Its purpose is to dissolve all other thoughts and affirm our original intention.
We float this little boat to let go of other thoughts or at least spread them out.

Secondary Purpose

The sacred word has a secondary purpose to point to the depths.
The Hindu mantra is different as it calms the mind.
The Jesus Prayer is different as it is a concentrative method.
Soto Zen Buddhism is different as it concentrates on the posture and breathing.
Icon gazing is also different and it too calms the mind.

A Receptive Method

Concentrative methods are useful for active minds.
The receptive method presupposes a profound trust in God.
The deepest communication of God is totally unfelt.

Extraordinary Deep level of Rest

Ordinary rest does not touch repressed unconscious material.
Ordinary thought flow reinforces the false self and helps maintain repression.
Centering loosens the emotional junk and releases a flood of thoughts.
Eventually it helps to stop the usually incessant interior dialogue.
The brain is freed up (from lower consciousness) to work at maximum capacity.
The enormous energy of divine light, life and love is also freed up.

The Seven Gifts of the Spirit

Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, Fear of the Lord.

Counsel: What we should do at every moment in life.

Wisdom & Understanding: Penetrates the contemplative dimension of journey.

Fortitude: Enables us to keep the journey going in difficulty.



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Part I Tape 4(b)



Everything comes from God

As our attachment to the false self is dismantled we are ever more open to the mystery hidden from all ages in Christ, which is our union with him.

We spend more time below the surface of the river in the depths.
We learn to let go and to enter into the “cloud of unknowing.”
We are liberated from the constant melodrama of emotional reaction.
We begin to know God – that mysterious undifferentiated presence.

Just an Arrow

The sacred word is the arrow that points the way.
The faculty at work is our will, our consent to God’s presence.
Actual use of the sacred word becomes ever more subtle and delicate.

Choosing a Sacred Word

Choose a sacred word that does not trigger a whole association of ideas.
The brain’s “receptionist” regulates what has access to our consciousness.
So too do our “repressive apparatus” and our defence mechanisms.
When centering the receptionist is given a break and our consciousness is wide open for invasion.

They Can’t Find You

The sacred word is a button to a trap door allowing us to escape the invasion.
It allows us dis-identify with the interior dialogue and the false self and taste true interior freedom.

Three Factors

Receptionist, repressive apparatus and even the tempter (the personification of evil) can do us no harm if we are practicing faithfully our prayer.
Letting go – “Here I am. Whatever you say!” – is, however, difficult.
Remember transformation is always a gift.

Jump I’ll Catch You!

A real act of trust is needed.
God will not miss the catch, though.
Whatever the unconscious unloads will enable our healing and will facilitate our growth if we trust in Him.



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Part I Tape 5(A)



The Auditory or Visual Image or Symbol

Use a general but not detailed visual image – a loving look.

Use an auditory image or symbol.

Use a sensory image or symbol – following one's breath.

With eyes open, gaze unseeing at a point in front of you.

We may use it a lot at the start but when peaceful, calm, or quiet, allow that.

We are at That Lower Level

"We are not just speaking of centering our attention; we're more concerned with moving towards the center of our being which is God, the God of pure faith, and we're leaving behind the peripheral or surface attention of consciousness that is the ordinary consciousness of life."

You do not think about the content of the sacred word or symbol, however holy.

It Really is an Interruption

Centering is a prayer that embraces everyone and all of creation so you need never feel that you should have prayed instead in some other way for someone or something.

We should not, however, during centering stay with an emotional reaction to any perception, thought or feeling.

If you feel peaceful and calm that may be a good sign that the emotions have experienced some necessary healing and become quieter.

There is Going to Be a Lot of Starting Over

Constant need to return to the sacred word requires us to exercise faith, trust and love of God.

Deep spiritual experience may make distractions actually feel painful.

It may also result in spiritual insight but this means we should return to the sacred word and trust that the insight will be available to us after our prayer.

You Suddenly Solve the Mystery of the Holy Trinity

Theological insight should similarly be shelved as we return to the sacred word.

John of the Cross tells us that visions etc are instant and overwhelming and short of that anything else is just an ego trip.

DIVINE UNION = SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Centering "...directs itself like an arrow to the heart of the problem of human transformation; the resistance in us to trust God completely or the resistance to let go of our props...shoring up our fragile egos..."

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Part I Tape 5(b)



The Three R's

1. RESIST NO THOUGHT for that could constitute a thought in itself.
2. RETAIN NO THOUGHT for that thought then becomes a distraction.
3. REACT EMOTIONALLY TO NO THOUGHT for the emotion is then a distraction.

The bottom line here is letting go and dis-identifying from our self -image and our world-view. Gradually, rather than dramatically, our prayer allows us to transcend struggle/desolation or affirmation/consolation for instead a deep peace.

Oh Boy, At last I'm Getting Some Place

Any reflection on an experience during prayer is actually a step away from that experience. You do not have to think about your experience if you are really in union with God.

Divine love is the surrender of self. The non-possessive attitude is simply the right use of everything – which is to enjoy it while it's present and to let go when it isn't.

Trees Take a While to Grow

The word for God in the Hebrew text means an event – something that happens in you, to you and around you.

When you have no thoughts during centering and you are just aware that is a preview of divine union.

It is Totally Imperceptible

The only way to judge a practice is by its long-range effects in your dispositions, attitudes and behaviour.

Our sense of responsibility grows proportionately with divine love.
The cry of the poor is then the cry of God.

Genuine love of self and respect for our human dignity and our capacities to serve – these are qualities that are often diminished under a false sense of guilt, a false sense of human weakness, a sense of low self-worth.

