

Contemplative Outreach Spiritual Journey with Thomas Keating Part 4 Tape 18(a)



The Biblical Desert

The Christian Model for Growth and Transformation (Chart)

The Evolutionary and Philosophical models are really ideals of how human nature should gradually unfold. The Existential Model showed how development, however, malformed. The Christian Model addresses human nature just as it is by means of contemplative prayer.

The Call to Friendship

We feel the call of friendship when spontaneous or affective prayer has reached a certain habitual state in our daily Lection Divina period. A time comes, however, when we experience the absence of God instead of God's presence and this is the night of sense. It is a transition, a call to growth.



Security/Survival: need is safety; emotion is fear/anger; antidote is trust.

When the security centre is starved of certitude which is what it wants most a "dizziness" results, says John of the Cross. There is an inability to decide anything for sure and doubts about faith, the benefit of religious exercises, spiritual reading etc arise.

Esteem/Affection: need is love; emotion is boredom; antidote is simplicity.

Sexuality is a strong drive in our need for affection so we may experience intense temptation here and the dark side of our motivation which prefers our own personal satisfaction to the rights and needs of others.

Power/Control: need is recognition; emotion is anger/rage; antidote is humility. This centre is our need for power and control over events, people and even God - if we can get away with it. But God is, in a sense, behind everything that happens in life and knowing this we can become very angry with God when we feel things are outside our control.

"The Night of Sense, then is designed to bring about the death of the false self, the dismantling of the energy centers, and the enormous freedom of being able to decide what to do with our lives, with everything that happens, without the compulsions, the routines, and the fixations of the false self system." (T. Keating)

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The Door

The Night of Sense releases the energy of the unconscious and opens the way to higher consciousness along with dismantling the false self system. Mental egoic consciousness is only the door to higher states of consciousness.

As the false self diminishes and energy is released by the unconscious we need to be disciplined and faithful to our spiritual practice (devotion to God) and we need to be engaged in the service of our neighbour (devotion to others) otherwise we could experience a flood.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE TWO BANKS OF THE SPIRITUAL PATH IS MOST IMPORTANT

Two Banks for the River

These provide two banks for the river so that stable and steady practice prepares you for the full benefit of the Night of Sense and helps channel any release of energy into consciousness.

The Night of Sense provides maximum opportunity for healing and development and transition from a reflective and spontaneous relationship with God to a relationship of communion.

GOD OFFERS HIMSELF TO US AT OUR LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Our religious, cultural and social conditioning also begins to come under question and scrutiny as do our mixed motivation and the images we hold of God. We need to sustain our commitment to the spiritual path, be faithful to prayer and to trust in God.

INTERIOR SILENCE RELEASES IMMENSE ENERGY TO SERVE OTHERS AND TO RELATE TO GOD

Love Makes one Vulnerable

Difficulties will arise and the dark side of our personality will reveal itself. We will also be tempted to just give up call a halt. Again, commitment is crucial even though it is not a characteristic of our times.

"The present moment is always full of infinite treasure. It contains far more than you have the capacity to hold. Faith is the measure; what you find in the present moment will be according to the measure of your faith. Love also is the measure; the more your heart loves, the more it desires, and the more it desire, the more it finds."

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Silence is the First Language of God

Characteristic of the Night of Sense is the inclination towards solitude and silence even when you don't find satisfaction there.

The Grace of Pure Faith

The Night of Sense results in greater humility, unwillingness to judge and more awareness of our mixed motivation as faith deepens.

Teresa (The Felt Experience of God's Presence): Infused Recollection; Prayer of Quiet; Prayer of Union; Prayer of Full Union.

Infused Recollection: One feels the presence of grace not from the senses but from our deepest Self, God within. (*Teresa's discursive meditation*)

The Prayer of Quiet: As grace deepens the will is absorbed in God though the imagination and memory remain undisciplined persecutors. (*Centering: Teresa says many reach this but few get beyond*)

Prayer of Full Union: When even the imagination and the memory become still and all the faculties are resting in God, along with awareness of the Presence of God and with no self-reflection, this is Full Union. (*Teresa actually describes the Prayer of Union in these terms and the Prayer of Full Union is said to be a state when the senses are so occupied with joy that they cannot experience any other interior or exterior thing.*)

John of the Cross describes a parallel path to the Felt Experience of God's Presence (contemplation) and that is the Path of Pure Faith.

This path is a path up the back stairs, as it were and both paths lead to Transforming Union. This hidden path is experienced not as a felt experience but as a restructuring of consciousness. "Hence what is most valuable, then, is the practice itself, not the psychological content. And it people could only grasp that truth, it would make the spiritual journey so much easier."

The False Self is Still Present

Further purification is needed and so the Night of the Spirit follows as the false self actually transfers its desire for satisfaction to the spiritual journey itself as the love of God invites us to review our childish emotional judgements and accept in gratitude ourselves, the circumstances we find ourselves in, others and the cosmos.

Felt Experiences are not necessary to be Contemplative.

N.B. Words in italics are my own interpretation of Teresa and not that of Thomas Keating.

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When spiritual consolation diminishes the pain of our separate identity increases

Those who are spiritually gifted as leaders, teachers, prophets etc are in danger of identification with their role. The Night of the Spirit however is an experience of oneself as capable of every evil and of being abandoned by God.

The real hallmark of someone who is sent is always that of service and Jesus was aware of this in respect of himself.. "I have come because I was sent."

Five Fruits of the Night of the Spirit

1. "...Freedom from the attraction of assuming a role because of one's special gift or charisms that one has been freely given by God."
2. ".....Freedom from the domination of any emotion." Such domination, with moods and swings, is what is characteristic of the false self system
3. Purification and growth in our idea and image of God. This may be accompanied by the collapse of other supports that have characterized our spiritual identity and we may feel totally abandoned by God.
4. Now we can allow God be himself..... "it's a total act of self surrender and abandonment that is being developed and made available to us in the Night of Spirit, where the divine light is so pure that it is imperceptible to any of our faculties; hence it's experienced as a ray of darkness, according to John of the Cross."
5. Trust also grows..... "simply trust in the infinite mercy of God because he is infinite, and mercy reaches out to weakness and to need of its very nature."

The big "I" of the ego diminishes and is replaced by the "I AM" of scripture, of the risen life of Christ, of the Spirit. Transformed, we live our ordinary lives with "extraordinary motivation." We experience *apatheia* which is not indifference but concern for everything without the emotional baggage of the false self system. We are free and available to others without emotional drama, anxiety, or desire to change them. Our consciousness has been restructured. We can use the good things of life without any desire to possess.

Service of others is at the heart of reality and is a deep human need.

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Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Put your trust in God rather than in possessions or symbols of security for the demands of the energy center for safety and security will prove insatiable. Set yourself free and the kingdom is yours.

Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.

To demand from the legitimate relationships and pleasures of life an absolute happiness is idolatry. We need to learn to let go and to accept loss for the affection, esteem and pleasure we experience now cannot substitute for God.

Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.

Happiness consists in the freedom not to have to be in control of every situation. We are able to accept insults and injustice and even people we do not really like without being driven to distraction.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled. Be free from too much dependence on peer and social pressure, cultural, and family conditioning and early religious training and open yourself to the Spirit, to the demands of the Gospel and a personal relationship with Jesus. Courage is demanded here.

Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy.

Accept people as they are and actively love your neighbour not just as you love yourself but as Jesus loves them. Allow your compassion to extend to yourself.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

Our sensitivity to God speaks to us now in our neighbour, in service, in nature, in art, in music and in all of life. We intuitively sense God's presence all around us.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.

Those who are at peace within themselves. They experience integration of the emotional life and rational life into the intuitive life will be able to bring peace and be a source of peace to others.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Even when you are persecuted and suffer for truth, justice and Jesus' name, you will experience the kingdom because your happiness has now become rooted in the truth.

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Part 4 Tape 21(a)



The Spiritual Senses

In the story of Mary and Martha entertaining Jesus at their house at Bethany, Mary exemplifies an attitude of listening attentiveness. She sits in rapt attention at the feet of Jesus oblivious of everything else except his words and his person.

Lectio Divina

In Lectio Divina we too can sometimes move beyond the actual words we are reading to the person of the eternal Word of God incarnate in Jesus Christ disclosing himself to us in the text and offering us the Gospel narrative for conversation.

We can begin to lose track of images and reflections and the thoughts which were helpful become blurred as the process deepens and we begin to wait upon God, listening to his person and his presence and entering into union with him. We move beyond concepts, beyond feelings, beyond particular acts.

The Sacred Word

In Centering Prayer, the sacred word does not create God's presence or hold it in place. "It simply holds us in the attitude of waiting upon God in general loving attentiveness. Not to his words, not to concepts, but to the Presence itself."

The Cloud of Unknowing

"The 'cloud of unknowing' means we no longer during the time of prayer are knowing or trying to know God through concept, symbol, gesture, ritual. But we're trying to know him as he is in himself through pure faith, opening ourselves to his presence within us at the deepest level of our being, the source of our being, a presence that has always been there but is covered over by the layers of the false self system that hide from us this greatest reality of life."

Our movement into spiritual attentiveness can be triggered by nature, reading, service, scripture, liturgy, meditation, sharing, art and all kinds of prayer.

The Icon

Traditionally, an icon contains something of the mystery it depicts in the sacred image, so, the sacred glance or gaze is another trigger for spiritual attentiveness.

The Sacred Breath

Breath is *pneuma*, spirit, or, life force. The Fathers and Sisters of the desert spoke of the Holy Spirit as the sacred kiss between the Father and the Son, that "is not an aspiration for oneness as it is in human love, but is a sigh of infinite bliss and satisfaction because they possess each other."

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Part 4 Tape 21(b)



The Spiritual Senses

Once spiritual attentiveness is awakened by listening with a sacred word, or looking with a sacred glance, or breathing with a sacred breath, this unknowing attentiveness becomes more habitual.

The Prayer of Quiet

The first spiritual experience is the “**perfume of God**” which is the attraction we have to interior silence, stillness, solitude and rest in God (**the Prayer of Quiet**). Jesus invited us to come to him for rest. This rest frees us from the domination of emotional turmoil and from the division of our energies.

First of all, the attraction, which is received, is the experience of the undifferentiated Presence of God. Secondly, it is “a dynamic and marvelous life, friendship, union that unfolds and unfolds and deepens and becomes more intimate, more unifying, more profound, and, hence, more energizing for service and presence to other people and their needs.”

The Prayer of Union

When the attraction is persistent and leads to commitment to prayer regardless of the daily circumstances, it is a sign that we have the grace of Contemplative Prayer. As we let go into this divine union we experience God’s embrace, the “**touch**” of God (**the Prayer of Union**).

The Prayer of Full Union

Then, there is an interpenetration of spirits and God is a decisive presence living within us and living our life. This is the most intimate of experiences, a “**taste**” of God (**the Prayer of Full Union**). All that remains is knowing God through love, total attentiveness and pure consciousness. At the deepest level, our idea of God is changed.

Restructuring of Consciousness

Finally, there is the grace of the **restructuring of consciousness**. We move beyond experiences to a conviction in daily life of always “being in God and God in union with us.” The gift of God’s person is manifest even in our most ordinary activities during the day. This is total freedom and infinite possibility.

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Infused Recollection

Sometimes called “slaying in the Spirit” it can be induced in others by some charismatics. You have the choice to resist. If you consent, the external senses are slightly suspended and you fall down. In Teresa’s terms it is a first experience of the perfume of God and is meant to attract you to God.

Psychic Gifts

Energy stuck in the nervous system can manifest as psychic gifts. Such energy is usually dissipated in the body by the ordinary physical demands of the day. There is no guarantee that psychic or charismatic gifts make you any better. The Night of Spirit and some freedom from the false self system is required before one can exercise the gifts of God without them going to one’s head and ending in pride. You cannot short-circuit the painful path of purification.

Para-Mystical Phenomena

Visions, locutions and levitations etc are probably meant to encourage a person on the spiritual journey or call the people to conversion. They are by-products and are not seen by the great writers as of the essence of contemplation. By way of contrast we need wise and properly experienced spiritual guides to encourage us along the way.

**Look for the essence of contemplative
prayer, not in external phenomena, but in
pure faith.**



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Part 4 Tape 22(b)



What is the Essence of Contemplative Prayer?

Within the Christian tradition, contemplative prayer has, at times, been equated to, **“the interior unfolding of the spiritual senses and the interior unfolding of deeper levels of absorption that one experiences or feels.”**

This is the kind of “exuberant mysticism” described by Teresa of Avila, for example. However, this view raises questions around who can really be described as a contemplative and what of those who dedicate their lives to prayer and seem not to experience this exuberance, or, this felt presence of God. **Cannot, contemplative prayer also be described in terms of pure faith?**

The Secret Staircase

Teresa, may also be interpreted as saying that what she describes is a shortcut to divine union, however, and John of the Cross suggests that contemplation is already present in the Night of Sense, when the programmes for happiness begin to loosen their grip to be gradually and painfully replaced by an unlimited need for truth and love which only God can satisfy. This is John’s secret staircase, the narrow way.

It is a great freedom to be rid of the effort to extract absolute happiness from things outside God.

A Ray of Darkness

Based upon the work of Pseudo-Dionysius, John sees contemplative prayer as a ray of darkness and “the radiance of God’s action in us.”

“What we see as light is only the reflection of energy, And what we perceive as spiritual light is only the reflection of the divine energy. And what we feel in our spirit, even, is only a reflection. It’s pure faith that accesses the whole of God, provided you consent, and providing you don’t demand of it some experience which would be localizing.”

We consent to knowing God in the darkness of faith. We are utterly convinced of his presence during our prayer and in this darkness of faith arises the transforming union and the restructuring of consciousness. A grasp of this insight could free many spiritual searchers from the suffering of unfulfilled expectations. The only danger is that taking this slower elevator to the top, as it were, we can become absorbed by the view from one of the floors along the way.

It is commitment to the journey and fidelity to the practice that leads to transforming union, not experiences.

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**“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.”**

Between the ages of four and seven we develop mythic membership consciousness and take on the values of our surrounding culture and our peers. But this is a very limited level of reasoning and consciousness. It is influenced by bias, prejudice, illusion, the false-self and the programmes for happiness. Racist attitudes are a case in point. To respond as adults to the gospel, we have to be able to question these values and take a personal responsibility for our attitudes towards God, people, the earth and the great social problems of our time.

The Innocent and Rights

Do the innocent have rights? What happens when those rights come into conflict with the the agendas of big business or governments or world powers? What happens when government passes an unjust law? Who is responsible for the starving and impoverished millions?

**The way nations solve their problems
is destructive of the innocent**

Resolving problems by violence is inhuman. Spirituality could provide the necessary perspective towards a more human approach to world problems, but, though the major world religions share the great human values, they do not have a forum to effectively challenge world problems.

**The role of world religions is to speak as one voice
about the source of all that is**

The mental egoic state of consciousness demands of us greater responsibility and creative and positive action and as we move on towards the intuitive level of consciousness *we become even more clear on the human necessity for harmony, negotiation, forgiveness and compassion.*

**Jesus speaks of showing mercy
as the greatest wisdom**

It takes courage, or, fortitude to walk away from our preconceived ideas and our peer group. It takes personal responsibility under the inspiration of the Spirit. A person of prayer is “... evolving into personal responsibility and a sensitivity not only to act in a human way, but under the higher gifts of the Spirit which give the energy to work, not just to accept what is, but to change what is unjust.”

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What can we do in the area of justice as individuals? We do not have to wait for something big. "Somebody in need is right next door, in your family, at work, on the subway, everywhere you turn, if you're sensitive. And also if you take the first step, sometimes the whole journey opens up."

**Charity, that is, showing love,
is the greatest investment there is.**

Dom Helder Camara among the poor in Brazil and Franz Jagerstaetter in Nazi Germany are two outstanding examples of action for justice in very extreme circumstances.

**Every prejudice is afraid of peace-makers,
but not of peace-lovers.**

Neither do we have to wait until we are transformed in order to take action. Our very failure can teach us that all our efforts are dependent on God and that what we do, we do simply to serve and without demanding success or applause. Our effort without our expectation is what changes the world.

Review

"Last time we discovered what Contemplative Prayer is not: it is not self-hypnosis, a trance state, a magic carpet to bliss, charismatic gifts, psychic gifts, para-psychological phenomena, para-mystical phenomena, or a "felt" experience of God. We also looked at what the essence of Contemplative Prayer is according to St. John of the Cross's teaching and as the way of pure faith. We saw that the narrow way of pure faith is to persevere in Contemplative Prayer and the service of others without thinking of self, or worrying about where one is on the journey or about how one's spiritual situation compares with anyone else. The essence of Contemplative Prayer is to accept God as he is and to surrender oneself to him, whatever the psychological content of one's prayer."

