

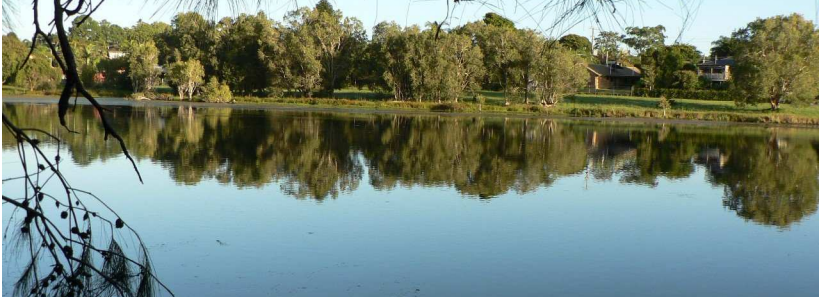


# **Journey to the Divine Within**

**Through  
Silence,  
Stillness and  
Simplicity**

**Alexander & Eva Peck**





# **Journey to the Divine Within**

Through Silence, Stillness  
and Simplicity

Alexander Peck  
and Eva Peck

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Photography: Alexander Peck  
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ISBN 978-0-9870905-5-3

Themes:  
The Divine within  
Prayer of the heart  
Meditation  
Silence, stillness and simplicity

First edition - illustrated with color photographs

This book was produced using the Blurb creative publishing service. It can be purchased online through the website <http://www.spirituality-for-life.org>.





## DEDICATION

To Eva,  
 whose life reflects  
 the Life, Light, and Love within.  
 “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things,  
 to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Romans 11:36, NKJV).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Pay to all what is due them . . . respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (Romans 13:7, NRSV). Many people have guided us to where this small book became possible.

First of all, we are indebted to each author quoted in the book and listed in the bibliography. In particular, the writings of John Main have led to the life-changing experience of prayer of the heart. Indeed, as he writes, “everyone who perseveres in meditation discovers that although during the time of meditation it might appear that nothing happens, yet gradually the whole of one’s life is changed.” At the very beginning of our journey into the contemplative life we were also inspired and helped by the writings of Thomas Keating and his method of Centering Prayer.

Secondly, we need to thank Dianne Ramsden and Margaret Stone who first introduced us to the practice, and have faithfully continued to lead our local meditation group that meets at the Carmelite Monastery, located in an idyllic setting overlooking the sea in Ormiston, Queensland, Australia. The weekly sharing in the experience of meditation has been encouraging and supportive.

Thirdly, Eva’s graphic design work must be acknowledged. Her painstaking effort in selecting and arranging the photographs has significantly enhanced the book. Furthermore, with her editorial skill, she took the pages of research notes and first drafts and reorganized the content into a coherent and unified whole.

Finally, we are grateful for both the World Community for Christian Meditation ([www.wccm.org](http://www.wccm.org)), under the direction of Fr. Laurence Freeman, and the Australian Christian Meditation Community whose programs have been an invaluable means of continuing education as well as strengthening our commitment to meditation.

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## INTRODUCTION

This small volume is about a journey into the realm of the heart, the abode of the Divine within. Three aspects of this journey are silence, stillness, and simplicity. In short, the book deals with the *prayer of the heart* or meditation, dealt with from a mostly Christian perspective.

### The Divine Within

Understood by various religions and experienced by mystics, beyond everything that exists is an eternal Divine Being – One in whom all things exist. This Being – God, Brahman, universal Consciousness, the absolute Reality, the Source of all, the true Self, the ground of one's being, the divine Mystery, and so forth – is both immanent and transcendent. The power and majesty of this One are beyond grasp. This Divine Oneness penetrates the entire universe, being present within everything. All things, animate and inanimate, originate from and exist in God. Physical realities veil this one ultimate transcendent Reality, yet are manifestations of it. Because the One is all that exists, all created forms are connected to God and also mutually inter-connected.

Humankind was created as a vessel to receive the Divine, that spiritual Light which pervades the universe. Every man and woman bears the image of God and carries the omnipresent God-life in the sanctuary of their heart. In the Hindu tradition, the *Upanishads* refer to the spirit of the One who created the universe as dwelling in a person's heart. This divine aspect within each person – also referred to as the soul – is understood as the source of infinite love within us.

According to Christian understanding based on the New Testament, the Spirit of God – the life and love of God – is found in the heart. Romans 5:5 states: “*God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*”. According to Galatians 4:6: “*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts,*

the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father’”. Also, the apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians that God “*put his Spirit in our hearts* as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). Finally, Luke records Jesus saying when asked when the kingdom of God would come: “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because *the kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:20-21). [Emphasis ours.]

### **Revealed by Grace**

The Spirit of life – the divine spark, heavenly light, or true Self – is hidden deep within and remains inaccessible to those attached to materialistic thinking or blindly driven by egoistical desires. Ultimately, awareness of the Divine is awakened by grace. Humans of and by themselves are unable to achieve spiritual enlightenment or, in biblical language, cannot “see the Kingdom of God” (see John 3:1-8). The path of illumination involves recognizing the limitations of thinking based only on observation and judgments. The language of the heart is an intuitive and non-conceptual way of knowing. In other words, the affections of the heart are separate from cognition, and the intuitive way in which the soul perceives is different from relying on external perception. By divine grace, and in personal surrender to the loving Divine, delusions of the mind and senses are discerned as the eyes of the heart are opened.

The great spiritual traditions understand that in profound stillness the human spirit begins to be aware of its Source. Also, according to the Eastern way of thinking, personal surrender to God can be achieved through meditation. Consequently, both the practice of meditation (prayer of the heart) and the grace of God allow one to become conscious of the Self.

The *Katha Upanishad* states: “Not by the scriptures, not by the intellect, not by much study is this Self to be known. He whom the Self chooses by him the Self is attained.” And also: “It reveals itself to the



seers, those who are pure at heart, and have focused their concentration solely upon Brahman.” Similarly, Jesus says to Peter who understood his identity: “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 16:17). He also states: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8; see also John 6:44, 65; 1 Corinthians 2:10 and Colossians 1:27 for the role of divine grace).

Nevertheless, the Holy Scriptures offer the following hope: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened” (Matthew 7:7-8). And, in ancient times, the prophet Isaiah exhorted: “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; . . . Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you” (Isaiah 55:1, 3).

### **Two Approaches Toward the Divine**

Prayer is the essential means to connect with the Divine. Over the centuries, two approaches have been recognized: verbal prayer and nonverbal prayer of the heart.

Verbal prayer falls into the category of *cataphatic* theology which attempts to describe the divine attributes and activities of God on the level of reason. (Nonetheless, there are also nonverbal aspects as seen in the use of religious art, music, and architecture to communicate God’s nature.) The understanding and visualization of the Divine as something to be rationally reflected upon, as in discursive meditation – without compromising the transcendence of God – is possible and has a role to play. For example, in the Incarnation, Jesus makes God known in a visible and even tangible manner (see Colossians 1:15). Also, the creation reflects the character of the divine Creator (see Romans 1:19-20). The sacraments, too, are important signs of God’s presence and grace.

Many forms of verbal or vocal prayer exist. These include petitions, intercessions, praise and thanksgiving, as well as formal prayers in worship services. The book of Psalms, representing Israel's prayer and worship, includes hymns of praise and thanksgiving, individual and community laments, liturgical and wisdom psalms, as well as royal psalms. These different types of prayer all involve thoughts, words, feelings, and even actions.

Prayer of the heart falls into the category of *apophatic* theology wherein the limitations of human knowledge and concepts of God are emphasized. According to the apophatic tradition, the Divine – the indescribable and incomprehensible – is beyond concepts, thoughts, symbols, and words. Care is necessary to distinguish between images of God and the reality of God, since the Divine Other is totally different from everything in the visible world and therefore cannot be represented by anything. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Italian theologian, concluded that the human mind can comprehend only that God is, not what God is. Apophaticism is rooted in Scripture (see for example Ecclesiastes 3:11, 11:5; Psalm 145:3; John 6:46; 1 Timothy 1:17, 6:15-16; 1 Corinthians 2:11; Colossians 1:15).

This book focuses on the prayer of the heart but recognizes that neither tradition is superior – the two complement each other. Both have a part in the search for and understanding of God. While there is value in the visualization of the Divine, its limitations must also be understood. All prayer – prayer of the heart (meditation), as well as vocal, scriptural, or liturgical aspects of prayer – leads the consciousness of the person praying from off the self toward the Divine Other.

### **Prayer of the Heart**

The prayer of the heart involves communing with the Divine beyond words, concepts, images, feelings, and acts. It is any practice designed to quieten one's mind and to free it from dependence on thinking in entering the presence of, or renewing one's intimacy with,

God. Over the centuries of church history, prayer of the heart (meditation) has been variously alluded to as contemplative prayer, mystical prayer, pure prayer, deep prayer, contemplation, centering prayer, or Christian meditation. The prayer of the heart has been generally neglected in Christian churches in the West, and yet it is grounded in the Scriptures and potentially available to all believers.

A mantra, or another point of focus (object of attention), is used as a tool to draw us away from our own thoughts, imaginations, and concerns. The English word *mantra* comes from the Sanskrit *mantram* which means “a sacred word or syllable”. The repetition of a mantra focuses the attention beyond thoughts and emotions, and over time leads to a still, wakeful presence to the reality of God. The psalmist wrote: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). The use of a mantra in Christian prayer can be traced back through Western monasticism, St. Benedict, John Cassian, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, even to apostolic times.

John Cassian (ca. 360-ca. 432), in his work *Conferences*, describes with scriptural support the Christian perspective on using the mantra. By continually repeating a scriptural verse, in time the chronic distractions of the mind and the instability of the emotions recede. By grace, one experiences a peace beyond the self-centered consciousness of the ego. Cassian taught that no other words are needed while praying in this way in that the mantra “embraces all the feelings of human nature”. By reciting the mantra, the verse becomes rooted in the heart and gradually leads to the state of continuous prayer mentioned by Christ (Luke 18:1) and by Paul (1 Thessalonians 5:17). One may conclude that the mantra is a way to *kenosis*, that is, an emptying of egoism which can then lead to being “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19; see also Colossians 2:9-10).

As one goes beyond thoughts and images, a different focus emerges – that of *being* with God. In prayer of the heart, we seek to be with the Triune Godhead – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In our

being with God, by faith we know that the Spirit prays within – “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will” (Romans 8:26-27). While some aspects of prayer of the heart may be difficult to express in words, one can be confident that the Teacher, the Spirit of truth, lives within and guides us into truth (John 14:16-17; 16:13).

The Scriptures do not teach a specific method of meditation or discipline for quieting the mind. Each person should choose a practice suited to their temperament and disposition. The guidance of the Spirit remains above every method. Important, however, is consistency. The following guidelines are offered for those desiring to embrace prayer of the heart.

Choose a mantra – a word, phrase, or short verse – as the symbol of your intention to be in God’s presence. In making your selection, ask the Holy Spirit for inspiration. Examples of a sacred word are: Lord, Jesus, *Abba*, Father, Mother, Love, Peace, *Shalom*, or *Maranatha*. A short verse from the Bible could be “The Lord is my shepherd” (Ps 23: 1), “Be still, and know” (Ps 46:10), or “My grace is sufficient” (2 Corinthians 12:9). An alternative to a mantra to still the mind can be focusing on a candle, mandala, icon (such as a cross or sacred picture), or on one’s breathing.

Begin your prayer of the heart (meditation) by briefly asking for God’s presence. A short piece of quiet, reflective music can be conducive to getting into a prayerful frame of mind.

Sit comfortably, still and upright – it may be cross-legged or on a chair. Eyes may be lightly closed with attention focused inward, or open looking at an object of focus. Remain relaxed, but wakeful and alert.

Repeat your mantra gently and silently in your mind throughout the

period of prayer, and listen to it as you say it interiorly. Alternatively, rather than saying the mantra continuously, return to it (or your point of focus) whenever you become aware of thoughts, perceptions, feelings, images, memories, or reflections.

Try not to think or imagine anything – spiritual or otherwise. Whenever inevitable distractions through thoughts and images come, keep gently returning to the mantra.

At the end of the prayer period, remain silent for a moment or two to readjust before transitioning to other activities.

Some recommend to meditate each morning and evening for twenty to thirty minutes. The principle, however, is to pray as one can, not as one can't. Beginning meditators may like to start with five to ten minutes and gradually build up. Again, the regularity of the practice is essential.

Prayer of the heart can also occur spontaneously when something transcendent breaks into our consciousness and we become aware of God at the heart level. Such “moments of grace” may be a spectacular rainbow, the birth of one's child, protection when disaster was certain, or meeting a special person. The mystery of grace can also invade our lives in situations that test our limits such as personal calamity, unexpected death of a loved one, or terminal illness. While difficult to deal with, these experiences may evoke spontaneous prayer of the heart when in our darkest hour we sense being upheld and supported.

Prayer is a personal and individual matter and, as mentioned, the prayer of the heart is not intended to replace other forms of prayer. The Scriptures allude to many types of prayer where both the head and the heart are involved at different times (see for example, 1 Timothy 2: 1; Ephesians 6:18). Some may favor forms of verbal prayer at certain times, while others prefer to commune with God solely via the prayer of the heart (meditation). Believers may begin with forms of verbal prayer on their spiritual journey. Later they may be introduced to contemplative approaches such as the prayer of the heart and find that



this provides new depth and meaning in prayer. However, there is no right or wrong way in this matter, and one should resist the natural tendency to judge or look down on those whose practice varies from one's own.

As with other aspects of spiritual life, the prayer of the heart has its stages. After initial enthusiasm, a time may come when even the practice itself is questioned. With time, however, a calmness, joy, and peace are experienced. These phases tend to occur more in a cyclical pattern than in a linear form of progress.

### **Silence, Stillness and Simplicity and the Prayer of the Heart**

In the prayer of the heart, silence, stillness, and simplicity facilitate the journey into the dimension of the heart, where divine life, light, and love dwells.

*Silence* is absence of sounds which continually invade our lives such as traffic noises, television, radio, phones, and people coming and going. Within our minds are also voices of anxieties, fears and worries. When we retreat to a silent setting, the external noises diminish. This becomes conducive to quieting the mind from its constant cares and concerns. An inner calm and tranquility begin to arise.

*Stillness* can be linked with absence of activity. With a hectic pace of life, we may have competing commitments and obligations. Internally may be contending voices of “should do” and “must do”. Stillness can be experienced in solitude, in a place with minimal activity. This is favorable for both body and mind becoming still. Through outer stillness we start to experience an inner stillness – the ability to remain calm, peaceful, and centered, and to later maintain this equanimity amidst daily hustle and bustle.

*Simplicity* can help achieve, as well as emerges from, the experience of silence and stillness. Externally, we try to limit unnecessary noise, activities, and distractions in life's routines. Internally, simplicity

involves changing our habitual self-conscious and self-reflective states. We learn to sustain attention away from the self (ego) and to understand our true Self as inseparable from God. We recognize the tyranny of the ego that wants to continually compare, judge, possess, and control. This awareness lessens yielding to the ego's demands and leads to increased freedom from complexity and pretentiousness. Masks worn to impress others are gradually taken off, resulting in greater ease and naturalness. As a result, we become simpler in our approach to life, kinder to ourselves, and more compassionate toward others. Simplicity also reflects itself in an ordered and uncluttered living environment.

In addition to discipline, our part in the prayer of the heart is *faith* – entering the stillness and silence of the heart with the assurance that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts (John 16:7; Romans 5:5). In doing so, we leave our human ego-consciousness with its thinking and analysis behind, and by faith enter into the mystery of God. (Of course, there is a place for a healthy ego.) It is a journey into a “beyond” that is infinite in its scope – a journey to the heart of God. We then allow God to work in the soul according to his grace.

### **Prayer of the Heart and *Lectio Divina***

A comprehensive method of communing with God – which incorporates both verbal and nonverbal prayer – is *lectio divina* (a Latin term meaning “divine reading”). It begins with reading a scripture passage, followed by discursively reflecting on the text, moving into prayer (talking to God about what one has read), and then resting in the presence of God (prayer of the heart).

*Lectio divina* can be described in four steps as follows.

*Lectio* (reading). Read a passage in the Word of God slowly several times to become familiar with it, allowing the words to flow from head to heart.

*Meditatio* (meditation). Note which words or phrases you are

attracted to, and repeat them, letting them flood your whole being. Ponder and reflect on the ideas, ruminating on them as a cow chews its cud.

*Oratio* (prayer). Respond to the work of the divine Spirit and speak to God from the heart in relation to the ideas drawn out. Later, as you go about your activities, let the scripture-based thoughts mingle with your actions and experiences during the day.

*Contemplatio* (contemplation). Rest in silence and solitude, rather than talking to or thinking about God. Let go of your own ideas, plans, and reflections, surrendering to the transforming divine mystery and embracing the unknown with love.

Through the practice of *lectio divina*, our intimacy with Jesus will deepen in our journey to the Father. And, our life will gradually change as we are “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Romans 12:2).

### **Outcomes of the Prayer of the Heart**

During meditation (prayer of the heart) nothing much seems to occur. No altered or extraordinary states of consciousness are experienced. Rather, one enters more fully into the present and ordinary, appreciating the wonder of it.

Nonetheless, inner changes do take place through faithful prayer of the heart over time, noticed personally and by others. These include growth in the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23) – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control; growth in self-knowledge; inner healing; as well as a fuller integration of body, mind, and spirit.

Through prayer of the heart, ordinary living takes on deeper meaning and purpose, and there is growth in faith, hope, and love. People comment, for example, that they have become more aware of the needs of others; experience more joy in daily routines; see improvement in relationships; are growing in compassion; and feel

more capable of handling the life's ups and downs.

Moreover, as a result of prayer of the heart, we begin to see the world not only with physical eyes or the mind's eye, but also with the *eye of the heart*. This is a way of perceiving the world with spiritual vision. It includes having a sense of oneness with others and the universe – a unitive way of knowing and seeing. Such consciousness is intuitive and lies beyond rational thinking of the mind. It is characterized by cooperation, forgiveness, reconciliation, harmony, negotiation to resolve differences, and mutuality rather than competitiveness.

Unitive consciousness is an important outcome of prayer of the heart. In reality, we *are* all one and connected to the Soul that created the entire universe. The illusion of separateness is a major cause of human problems. Through prayer of the heart, we intuitively catch glimpses of being connected to everyone and everything – through the Divine within where we are all one. From that place we can embody the spirit of love, forgiveness, concern for others, and care for our earthly home.

### **Maintaining the Outcomes of Prayer of the Heart**

The prayer of the heart in our inward journey to the true Self is the way to divine love. The following practices are offered to help maintain the outcomes of prayer of the heart in daily life.

*Continue the daily practice.* Be faithful to the daily discipline of prayer of the heart, setting aside periods of silence and solitude to quiet the psyche and nourish the spirit.

*Listen to the Word of God.* Set aside time each day for the reading and reflecting on Scripture (or spiritual writing that speaks to your heart) using *lectio divina*.

*Use affirmations.* Select short sentences (five to nine syllables) from Scripture, or aspirations drawn from Scripture, and gradually work them into your subconscious by mentally repeating them when your mind is relatively free (such as when walking or waiting). Eventually, the affirmations will erase “old tapes” of fear, anger, judging, self-recrimination, and so forth. Examples include: “O God, make haste to help me”; “Lord increase my faith”; “Your will be done”; “the LORD is my shepherd”; and “I will fear no evil”.

*Recognize the goodness of human nature.* Realize that our true Self within is the basic core of goodness. While we are not divine, God and our true Self are the same. This fundamental goodness is capable of transforming our imperfect human nature into a loving divine nature.

*Accept yourself.* With love and compassion, accept who and what you are, just as you are – your thoughts, feelings, behaviours, appearance, and life situation. Do this with a welcoming attitude of non-judgement and non-attachment. People with self-acceptance are alert, present, and aware in the moment; feel gratitude and reverence for life; sense a connection to life and God; and treat others with respect, care, and kindness.

*Accept others.* Unconditionally allow people the freedom to be who they are with all their idiosyncrasies. The Scriptures teach: “accept one another” (Romans 15:7). Jesus taught to love without judgment, stating: “do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matthew 7:1). This is because judging closes our hearts to love and compassion.

*Love yourself and others.* Jesus taught to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 19:19; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). We are unable to love another person any more than we love ourselves. So we need to learn how to love ourselves unconditionally, without undue or needless self-judgment – and then to love others without judgment.

*Meet with a group.* Join or set up a support group that meets weekly to practice the prayer of the heart in order to encourage one



another in commitment to the contemplative dimension of the Gospel.

*Cultivate spiritual friendship.* Seek spiritual friendships where there is equality without feelings of superiority or inferiority; honesty, including genuine self-disclosure; mutual yielding to the advice of one another; and love and peace, where if needed, differences are set aside.

*Trust in Christ's presence.* Remember the words of Jesus, "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20) and "surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Also "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for Me" (Matthew 25:40). Christ is present in a community of faith and in a special way, in important events or crises in our lives.

*Practice mindfulness.* Consciously bring awareness to your here-and-now experiences with interest, openness, and receptiveness. Learn to pay attention non-judgmentally in the present moment.

*Keep an open mind.* Be willing to let go of preconceived ideas and unhelpful cultural conditioning. Rather, keep openness to change, to spiritual growth beyond group loyalties, and to whatever the future holds.

### **Prayer of the Heart in the Words of Others**

This introduction has sketched the journey to the realm of one's heart, the abode of the Divine, through the prayer of the heart (meditation) involving silence, stillness and simplicity. Other ways to the heart lie outside the scope of this small volume. They include setting aside one day a week for physical and spiritual rejuvenation; spending time in nature, appreciating its sacredness and interconnection; and in compassion offering oneself to others in service.

The remaining part of the book continues the theme of entering the heart in the reflections of a variety of spiritual writers. There is material for both newcomers on the journey and seasoned pilgrims.

The quotations are organized as follows:

Chapter one addresses the *need for simplicity, silence and stillness* in our Western world increasingly characterized by noise, clamor, and complexity. Ever-present distractions lure us into stressful living. Practical tips for achieving greater tranquility include: remembering that the human spirit needs quietness to thrive; getting away for a while; learning the art of silence; exploring meditation; and trying to live in a creative and meditative way.

Chapter two focuses on *simplifying life*. It begins by showing simplicity as the essence of spiritual practice and suggests ways of cultivating it. Important is the childlike mindset behind simplicity. A simplified life brings freedom from the tyranny of the ego, as well as peace, contentment, and humility. The simplicity of the Desert Fathers and Mothers is also instructive.

Chapter three presents *a way to achieve silence and stillness – the path of meditation, or prayer of the heart*. In the silence, stillness, and simplicity of meditation, one begins to experience the inner quietness of the heart. The outcomes of regular meditation over a period of time include greater serenity, peace, and joy. This chapter specifically touches on the discipline and simplicity of meditation as well as the practice of repeating Scripture in the silence of the heart.

Chapter four deals with developing an *awareness of the Divine presence within*, in the depth of our being, through meditation.

Chapter five touches on *encountering God*. It explains how in silence, stillness, and solitude, we may perceive the voice of love in our heart. Moreover, God speaks in diverse situations and one may become aware of Divinity in daily living. Such encounters with God are always by grace.

Chapter six addresses our *hearing and responding to the Divine presence*. It shows the need to guard the life of the Spirit within and what it means to be totally abandoned to God in our response to him. The chapter also deals with the ministry of divine silence and how in

heartfelt listening the heart is reached. It concludes with the ultimate test of the practice of meditation: growth in love.

The photographic images from natural settings are intended to augment reflection on the principles found in the texts.

The book is not intended for a rapid read-through from cover to cover (although a good overview can be gotten that way). Rather, many of the 49 selections lend themselves to pondering, with their meaning unfolding over time. One way is to take a text each day, read it before or after meditating, and then let the thoughts nurture the mind during the day. Meditation group leaders may find that sharing a passage with their group provides a springboard for follow-up conversation after meditating.

May the thoughts shared in this book bring us into the sacred and silent sanctuary of our hearts where the divine Spirit of life, light, and love is ready to lead us into greater joy and fullness of life.

Alexander and Eva Peck  
Redland City, Australia

## **NEED FOR SIMPLICITY, SILENCE AND STILLNESS**



Counteracting the Incessant Noise

The Human Spirit Needs Silence

Be Still and Get Perspective

Spiritual Path Requires Silence

Way to Find Stillness

From Stillness to Enhanced Life

Silence, Stillness, Simplicity – the Scriptures Speak



### **Counteracting the Incessant Noise**

Our contemporary world is the cybernetic age of speed and frenetic activity, where we are now bombarded with an information superhighway that in some countries provides 500 television channels. Add to this the raucous clamour of non-stop radio, advertising, an inundation of e-mail, subliminal electronic advertising and supersonic jets and we have overkill with excessive noise and activity. Our society seems to be geared to business, productivity, speed, material success and noise. Thomas Merton succinctly commented on the noisy pandemonium of our age when he said, “I am up to my eyeballs in angst.”

To counteract this age of too many decibels, the way of silence and stillness in prayer speaks to us of a deep human need and a spiritual path that is rooted in the “inner desert” of the heart where the Spirit is waiting.

Psychologists, social scientists, poets, writers and saints through the centuries have all understood the need for inner silence in our lives. They describe silence as a many-faceted diamond, for example:

Nothing is so like God as silence. (Meister Eckhart)

There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak. (Ecclesiastes 3:7)

If we really want to pray we must first learn to listen, for in the silence of the heart God speaks. (T. S. Eliot)

Paul T. Harris, *Frequently Asked Questions about Christian Meditation*, 84, 86-89.



## The Human Spirit Needs Silence

Silence is really absolutely necessary for the human spirit if it really is to thrive. Not only just to thrive, but to be creative, to have a creative response to life, to our environment, to our friends. Because the silence gives our spirit room to breathe, room to *be*. In silence, you don't have to be justifying yourself, apologizing for yourself, trying to impress anyone. You just have to be. It's a most marvelous experience when you come to it. The wonder of it is that, in that experience, you are completely free. You are not trying to play any role; you are not trying to fulfill anyone's expectations.

Peter Ng, ed., *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, 160.





### **Be Still and Get Perspective**

We have to withdraw from time to time to be silent and still – to get perspective, to look beyond this world and to search for the origin and purpose of all. . . .

Be silent and still, look and listen, then, as St Paul wrote to the Romans, from things visible we come to the knowledge of the one who is beyond the experiences of our senses.

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). That is a profound truth – that ever since the creation of this world God’s everlasting power and deity, however invisible, have been there for the mind to see in the things he has made.

Basil Hume, *Cardinal Hume: A Spiritual Companion*, 74-75.

## Spiritual Path Requires Silence

To tread the spiritual path, we must learn to be silent. What is required of us is a journey into profound silence. Part of the problem of the weakening of religion in our times is that religion uses words for its prayers and rituals, but those words have to be charged with meaning. And they can only be charged with meaning sufficient to move our hearts, to set us out in new directions, to change our lives, if they spring from spirit. And spirit requires silence. We all need to use words, but to use them with power, we all need to be silent. Meditation is the way to silence, the way of silence. It is the way of the mantra, the word that leads us to such a silence that ultimately charges all words with meaning.

Peter Ng, ed., *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, 159.





### Way to Find Stillness

A working definition of stillness is as follows. Stillness is accomplished through the act of meditation, which is stilling of the physical/conscious mind to all external stimuli. Continuous, contemplative thought given to truth. A steady effort of the mind to know and hear the voice of God from within the being. The act of “not doing” in an attempt to expand the awareness of “being”. When we quiet the conscious mind to hear the Divine presence.

You are not “doing nothing”. You are plugging in. You are activating the power. You are remembering from whence you came. You are moving yourself out of the way and allowing the divine force of life to move into your being . . . “Be still and know!” Stillness is the key. Still the mind. Still the body.

*Be still and know* there is nothing more important than the time you spend in the presence of the universal power . . . The results of this stillness, silence, and act of trust will be growth. You will grow in mental ability and spiritual understanding. You will grow in awareness and ability. You will grow in consciousness. You will grow in your divinity.

Iyanla Vanzant, *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up*, 44-47.

## From Stillness to Enhanced Life

Periods of quiet, undistracted meditation provide precious opportunities to get in touch with qualities that will gradually grow through cultivation and pervade even your busiest activities. With practice you will find that any activity can become an opportunity to train your mind, develop concentration, refine your awareness, deepen your insight, practice patience or loving kindness.

There are many simple ways to weave meditation practice into your daily life. Properly understood, every activity and every moment of the day offers an invitation to open the door of your heart-mind to a deeper quality of aliveness, relationship, and inspiration. See how many of the mindless moments of your day can be transformed into opportunities to strengthen concentration, develop mindfulness, deepen insight, expand creativity, and open your heart. Live in a creative and meditative way, as though your life were a dream within which you are awakening.

Joel and Michelle Levey, *Luminous Mind*, 224-226.



## **Silence, Stillness, Simplicity – the Scriptures Speak**

### **Silence**

A time to be silent and a time to speak (Ecclesiastes 3:7).

Be silent, and I will teach you wisdom (Job 33:33).

When you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent (Ps. 4:4).

Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue (Proverbs 17:28).

### **Stillness**

Be still, and know that I am God (Psalm 46:10).

Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him (Psalm 37:7).

The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still (Exodus 14:14).

But I have stilled and quieted my soul . . . like a weaned child is my soul within me (Psalm 131:2).

### **Simplicity**

You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed (Luke 10:41-42).

Do not worry about your life . . . Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? (Matthew 6:25, 27).

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have (Hebrews 13:5).

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).

*The NIV Study Bible: New International Version*





## SIMPLIFYING LIFE



Simplicity – the Essence of Spiritual Practice

Simplicity in a Nutshell

The Mindset Behind Simplicity

Childlike Simplicity

Freedom from Tyranny of the Ego

Simplicity Creates Peace and Contentment

Single-Mindedness of Simplicity

Simplicity of Spiritual Maturity

Simplicity of the Desert Fathers and Mothers



## **Simplicity – the Essence of Spiritual Practice**

Lao Tzu offers us the following recipe for living a satisfying and successful life: “Manifest plainness, embrace simplicity, reduce selfishness, and have few desires.” Regrettably, our lives, our societies, and our world are much more complex than this, and generally operate in a completely opposite manner. . . . [However] we can choose to embrace the beauty and richness of simplicity, and live more serene and satisfying lives.

Simplicity is the essence of any spiritual practice. To over complicate, over accumulate and over analyze, leaves us with an underlying feeling of being overwhelmed. This anxious and frantic state of mind is made up of ruinous delusions that will subtly lead you away from all that is spiritual. To simply be, living devoid of all the chaos caused by external demands, is the path to ultimate liberation and pure joy.

Thich Nhat Hanh offers a suggestion that will help you to apply simplicity in your own life, “Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry . . . Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those in need.”

Richard A. Springer, Jr., *Eastern Wisdom for Your Soul*, 86-87



## Simplicity in a Nutshell

Simplicity is the state of being simple, uncompounded, or uncomplicated. Clear. Direct. Existing in the most basic form. Free of judgment or perception.

Today, I realize the *simple* truth that God loves me. Today, I acknowledge the *simple* truth that I am a creative being, made in the image and likeness of God. Today, I realize the *simple* truth that I choose my world by what I think, what I say, and what I do. Today, I understand the *simple* truth that there is no need for my life to be difficult. Nor is there any reason for me to lack any good thing. Nor can I be denied what is mine by Divine right. Today, I accept the *simple* truth, that *simple* faith, grounded in *simple* trust, grounded by *simple* prayer, will yield *simply* fantastic results! For the knowledge of these *simple* truths I am so grateful! And so it is!

Finally, let me remember . . . God *simply* loves me. Love is not complicated. Fear complicates all matters. Willingness and truth lead to *simplicity*. I can choose *simplicity* over complication.

Iyanla Vanzant, *One Day My Soul Just Opened Up*, 70-75.





### **The Mindset Behind Simplicity**

Simplicity dwells within the core of your being. It's the simplicity that we once experienced as innocent and inquisitive children, first appreciating the simple beauty and wonder of all of our surroundings. It is living in the moment, feeling all of the bliss and ecstasy that the Universe has to offer us. Exploring the world with complete faith, without debilitating worry, regret, anxiety, self-consciousness, and all other remaining conditioned states we have adopted from society. Simplicity is enjoying the pure essence of a beautiful object and feeling the “specialness” within it, without having to amass a pile of all the best objects in the world in order to feel worthy. To become a simple and innocent child again, is to become a spiritual being.

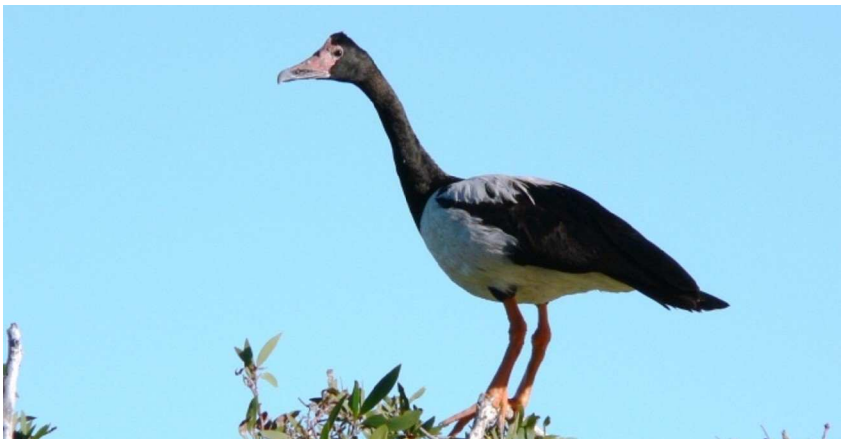
Richard A. Springer, Jr., *Eastern Wisdom for Your Soul*, 86.

## Childlike Simplicity

“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

Jesus was not saying we should be childish and become immature, undisciplined, and uneducated. Instead he was referring to being childlike, which is nonjudgmental, loving, accepting, and incapable of placing labels on anyone or anything . . . It is the child who is full and the adult who is usually empty. The fullness of the child is evident in peace, love, non-judgment, and allowing. The emptiness of the adult reveals itself in fear, anxiety, prejudice, and fighting. Enlightenment can be seen as a process of remembering that in the heart of a little child there is purity, and it is this pure divine love and acceptance that is the ticket to the kingdom of heaven . . . When we do, we become *childlike* and leave behind our *childish* adult ways, which are the ways that prevent us from entering the eternal kingdom of heaven. That kingdom is available to you here now on earth, as it is in heaven.

Wayne W. Dyer, *Wisdom of the Ages*, 27-29.





### **Freedom from Tyranny of the Ego**

The ego is a demanding force that's never satisfied: It constantly requires that we seek more money, power, acquisitions, glory, and prestige to provide the fuel it thinks it must have. . . . It tells you to think of yourself first and "get yours" before someone else beats you to it. The main problem with listening to ego is that you're always caught in the trap of striving and never arriving. Thus, you can never feel complete.

Wayne W. Dyer, *Change Your Thoughts – Change Your Life*, 36.

Living a life of simplicity means no longer falsely identifying ourselves with our ego. We recognize that ego's desire to possess and control leads only to suffering in relationships. As we go beyond the false identification with ego life becomes simpler – we're no longer driven by the need to prove ourselves, to always be right, to impress, and to dominate. Rather, we can put others first, wholeheartedly serve, give and ask nothing in return.

Alexander Peck

## **Simplicity Creates Peace and Contentment**

Magnificent works of brilliance are all created from simplicity. Overwhelming ourselves with the intricacy and complexity of unnecessary tasks in our life is the easiest way to fall into the trap of procrastination and stagnation. Any task, whether ordinary or extraordinary, consists of simple steps from the beginning to the end. Create a life of simplicity and live completely in the eternal present, then you can truly possess all that you have ever imagined. Most importantly, you will have discovered the peace and contentment that lies in living the simple life.

Simplicity is not easy to apply in our overly intricate and intellectual world, but it is indeed feasible. We must gently slip away from all the ego's desires and demands, and begin to recognize that life is not how large our salary is, how much knowledge we amass, how big and exquisite our home is, or how many and, what type of, cars we drive.

Richard A. Springer, Jr., *Eastern Wisdom for Your Soul*, 89, 87.





### **Single-Mindedness of Simplicity**

For believers, authentic Christian simplicity finds its source and inspiration in God. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, people are called to a generous, wholehearted, and integral response toward God who has first loved us wholeheartedly, and toward others out of love for, and in imitation of, this same God. Jesus reaffirms the absolute priority of God and God's kingdom over all other concerns, thus proclaiming a radically simplified vision of life's purpose, often hidden from the rich and learned yet open especially to the simple and lowly. . . . Everything is reprioritized around the coming of the reign of God. At the same time, "inner simplicity" means little without some practical outward manifestation; recent movements for social justice and ecological responsibility have reminded us that the cultivation of a simple lifestyle is no merely private spiritual exercise to increase personal holiness but a necessary component of responsible Christian stewardship for God's creation.

Steven Payne, "Simplicity" in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 888-889.



## **Simplicity of Spiritual Maturity**

It is a fact of experience across all religious traditions that certain kinds of “simplification” predictably occur as one spiritually matures: conflicting energies and desires are calmed, reconciled, and focused on “the one thing necessary”; a multiplicity of devotions, discursive prayers, and pious thoughts gradually give way to a simple loving attention; and one surrenders more and more to the transforming activity of God in every aspect of one’s life. It should not surprise Christians that the process is analogous to what one finds in any healthy love relationship, as the many words, gestures, and conflicting thoughts and feelings of early infatuation evolve into a silent, loving presence to each other. From such a perspective, the pursuit of authentic Christian simplicity becomes no longer an effort to escape our creaturehood but rather, as the Scriptures affirm, a readiness to walk with God in the simple human integrity that the Creator intended from the beginning.

Steven Payne, “Simplicity” in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 889.



## **Simplicity of the Desert Fathers and Mothers**

The Desert Fathers and Mothers who lived in the Egyptian desert during the fourth and fifth centuries, as well as other early Christian contemplatives, offer us important perspectives on simplicity for our lives as Christians living in the twenty-first century. Here are three selections:

Set your mind on following the path of saints. Prefer a simple style of life. Wear unremarkable clothes. Eat simple food. Behave in an unaffected manner. Don't strut around as if you were important. Speak from your heart. (Abba Philemon)

Let all your prayer be completely simple. Both the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) and the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) were reconciled to God by one simple phrase – one said: God have mercy on me, a sinner; and the other: Father, I have sinned against you. (John Klimakos)

If you want a life of discipleship, do not allow the desire for material possessions to get a grip on you. A disciple with many possessions is like a ship that has been too heavily laden. It is lashed by the storms of cares and sinks in the deep waters of distress. The love of money gives birth to many evil obsessions and has rightly been called the “root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). (Theodoros the Ascetic)

John Anthony McGuckin, trans., *The Book of Mystical Chapters*, 17-18, 43, 58-59.





## **ACHIEVING SILENCE AND STILLNESS THROUGH MEDITATION**



Meditation or the Prayer of the Heart

How to Enter into Silence

The Discipline of Meditation

Repeating Scripture in the Silence of the Heart

Alert Stillness

Accepting the Simplicity of Meditation

Simplicity of the Prayer of the Heart

Prayer of the Heart Is Not Merely “Sitting Still”

A Prayer for Silence in the Heart



### **Meditation or the Prayer of the Heart**

Early Christians defined prayer as “the raising of the mind and heart to God”. Our *mind* is what thinks – it questions, worries, plans, and is busy with constant mental noise. This mental chatter prevents us from experiencing inner stillness. In order to assist us to come to stillness we use a sacred word or phrase (a mantra). And so we can calm our mind and bring our attention to the heart. The *heart* knows; it loves. What matters most in our life is beyond the mind and dwells in the heart. The “prayer of the heart” or meditation is simply being with God. “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26).

Our part in meditation is to enter the stillness and to wait for God there. To meditate: Sit down. Sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Breathe calmly and regularly. Silently, interiorly begin to say a single word or phrase (for example, the prayer phrase “Maranatha”, meaning “Come, O Lord” or “Come, Lord Jesus”). Listen to it as you say it, gently, with love and continuously. Do not think or imagine anything – spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts or images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so keep returning to simply saying the word or phrase. Meditate each morning and evening for between twenty and thirty minutes.

Adapted from The Australian Christian Meditation Community

## How to Enter into Silence

I think what all of us have to learn is not so much that we have to create silence. The silence is there, within us. What we have to do is to enter into it, to become silent, to become the silence. The purpose of meditation and the challenge of meditation is to allow ourselves to become silent enough to allow this interior silence to emerge. Silence is the language of the spirit.

Learning to say your mantra, learning to say your word, leaving behind all other words, ideas, imaginations and fantasies, is learning to enter into the presence of the Spirit who dwells in our inner heart, who dwells there in love. The Spirit of God dwells in our hearts in silence. In humility and in faith, we must enter into that silent presence.

Peter Ng, ed., *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, 160-161.





## The Discipline of Meditation

Listening to the voice of love requires that we direct our minds and hearts toward that voice with all our attention. How can we do that? The most fruitful way – in my experience – is to take a simple prayer, a sentence or a word, and slowly repeat it. We can use the Lord's Prayer, the Jesus Prayer, the name of Jesus, or any word that reminds us of God's love and put it in the centre of our inner room, like a candle in a dark space. Obviously we will be constantly distracted. . . . Still, as long as we keep the candle in our dark room burning, we can return to that light and see clearly the presence of the One who offers us what we most desire. This is not always a satisfying experience. Often we are so restless and so unable to find inner quietude that we can't wait to get busy again. . . . Still, when we remain faithful to our discipline, even if it is only ten minutes a day, we gradually come to see – by the candlelight of our prayers – that there is a space within us where God dwells and where we are invited to dwell with God. Once we come to know that inner, holy place, a place more beautiful and precious than any place we can travel to, we want to be there and be spiritually fed.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*, 7-8.

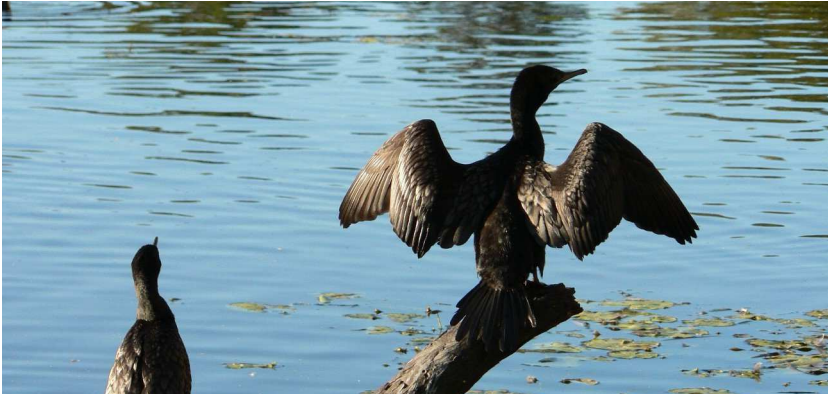
## Repeating Scripture in the Silence of the Heart

The oldest forms of meditative prayer in Christian practice consist simply of a repetition of words from Scripture in the silence of the heart. In Celtic spirituality this discipline of silent meditation is viewed as opening the eyes of the heart in order to see God in all things.

There has always been a great love of Scripture in the Celtic stream of spirituality. . . . The Psalms and the Gospels in fact occupy a special place in Celtic artwork and teachings, most notably the Gospel according to St John, whom it is said Jesus “especially loved”. He was remembered as having leaned against Jesus at the last supper. Celtic legend thereby came to refer to him as the one who had heard the heartbeat of God. He became a symbol of the meditative practice of listening for the Word of Love at the heart of life, the Word that is deeper than any fears and sufferings that we will also hear within us when we listen.

J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Benediction: Morning and Night Prayer*, ix.





### Alert Stillness

Alert stillness is not a state of consciousness familiar to most Westerners. We tend either to be alert or relaxed. Rarely are the two states combined in most of us. But in meditation, we come to experience ourselves as at one and the same time totally relaxed and totally alert. This stillness is not the stillness of sleep, but rather of totally awakened concentration.

If you look at a watchmaker about to perform some deft movement with a fine pair of tweezers, you will notice how still and poised he is as he scrutinizes the inside of the watch through his eyeglass. His stillness, however, is one of complete concentration, serious absorption in what he is doing. Similarly in meditation, our stillness is not a state of mere passivity but a state of full openness, full wakefulness to the wonder of our own being, full openness to the wonder of God, the author and sustainer of our being, and a full awareness that we are at one with God.

Peter Ng, ed., *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, 164.



## Accepting the Simplicity of Meditation

The way of meditation is a way of great simplicity. . . . We have all been brought up to trust really complex things. So when we approach something like meditation, we tend to get interested in the techniques that are involved. Well, the techniques have their place. But it is not the first thing to turn your mind to when you are learning to meditate. The most important thing when you are beginning is to understand the absolute simplicity of it. Then, to remain faithful to the simplicity of the practice.

We should come to our meditation with no demands and no expectations, but just that generosity of spirit that summons us to be as present as we can, to ourselves and to God. The task we face is to become simple enough, humble enough simply to say our word, simply to return to saying our word and leaving behind all thought and imagination at the time of meditation. There are other times for reflection, for analysis, but those times are not the times of meditation. Saying our mantra, every morning and every evening, . . . we place our full confidence and trust in God. Whatever gift he gives us, we receive with simplicity and joy. Whatever barrenness he leads us through, we accept with the same simplicity and joy. And the greatest joy there is, is to enter into this oneness, a oneness in which all desire leaves us, a oneness that brings us into complete harmony, a harmony with our own spirit, with the Spirit of God, and with all creation.

Peter Ng, ed., *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, 165-167.





### **Simplicity of the Prayer of the Heart**

The “prayer of the heart” (also known as contemplative prayer or meditation) has an inherent simplicity. It is the prayer of silence, simplicity, contemplative and meditative unity – a deep personal integration in an attentive, watchful listening of “the heart”. The response such prayer calls forth is a wordless and total surrender of the heart in silence.

In “prayer of the heart” one should not look for a “method” or “system” – rather one ought to cultivate an “attitude”, an “outlook”: faith, openness, attention, reverence, expectation, supplication, trust, joy. All these finally permeate our being with love in so far as our living faith tells us we are in the presence of God, that we live in Christ, that in the Spirit of God we “see” God our Father without “seeing”. We know him in “unknowing”. Faith is the bond that unites us to him in the Spirit who give us light and love.

The “prayer of the heart”, then, introduces us into deep interior silence so that we learn to experience its power. For that reason the “prayer of the heart” has to be always very simple, confined to the simplest of acts and often making use of no words and no thoughts at all.

Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 5, 10, 19.



## **Prayer of the Heart Is Not Merely “Sitting Still”**

We must not take a purely quietistic view of contemplative prayer. It is not mere negation. Nor can a person become a contemplative merely by “blacking out” sensible realities and remaining alone with himself in darkness. First of all, one who does this of set purpose, as a conclusion to practical reasoning on the subject and without an interior vocation, simply enters into an artificial darkness of his own making. He is not alone with God, but alone with himself. He is not in the presence of the Transcendent One, but of an idol: his own complacent identity. He becomes immersed and lost in himself, in a state of inert, primitive and infantile narcissism. His life is “nothing”. . . . It is purely the nothingness of a finite being left to himself and absorbed in his own triviality.

The trouble with quietism is . . . it makes a cult out of “sitting still”, as if this in itself had a magic power to solve all problems and bring man into contact with God. But in actual fact it is simply an evasion. It is a lack of honesty and seriousness, a trifling with grace and a flight from God.

The contemplative way is, in fact, not a way. Christ alone is the way, and he is invisible. The “desert” of contemplation is simply a metaphor to explain the state of emptiness which we experience when we have left all ways, forgotten ourselves and taken the invisible Christ as our way.

Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 68-71.



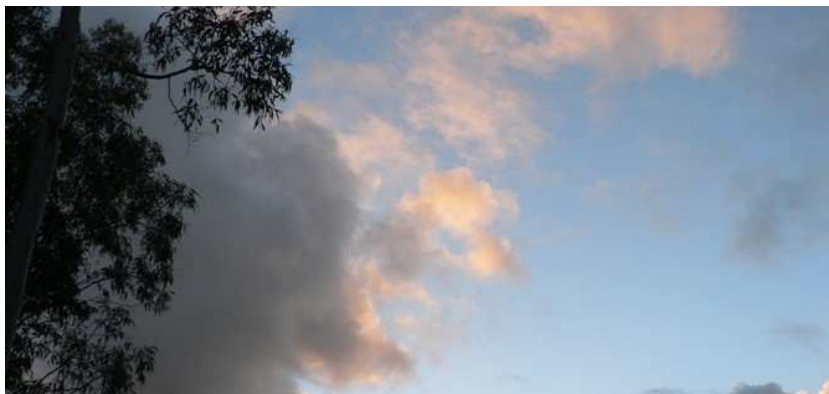
### **A Prayer for Silence in the Heart**

O Lord Jesus, your words to your Father were born out of your silence. Lead me into this silence, so that my words may be spoken in your name and thus be fruitful. It is so hard to be silent, silent with my mouth, but even more, silent with my heart. There is so much talking going on within me. It seems that I am always involved in inner debates with myself, my friends, my enemies, my supporters, my opponents, my colleagues, and my rivals. But this inner debate reveals how far my heart is from you. If I were simply to rest at your feet and realize that I belong to you and you alone, I would easily stop arguing with all the real and imagined people around me. These arguments show my insecurity, my fear, my apprehensions, and my need for being recognized and receiving attention. You, O Lord, will give me all the attention I need if I would simply stop talking and start listening to you. I know that in the silence of my heart you will speak to me and show me your love. Give me, O Lord, that silence. Let me be patient and grow slowly into this silence in which I can be with you. Amen.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from Genesee.*



## AWARENESS OF THE DIVINE WITHIN



Meditation as a Form of Prayer

Opening our Awareness to God

Becoming Aware of God's Presence Within

A Way to Closer Connection with God

Stillness Brings an Awareness of God Within

Silence Leads to Awareness of the Divine

Being Open to God's Presence in the Heart

Awareness of Divine Power and Mysteries

Opening our Heart to the Indwelling Presence of Christ



### **Meditation as a Form of Prayer**

Silent prayer, sometimes known as meditation, has been practiced by saints and sages from all the spiritual traditions of the world. It may sound less personal than verbal prayer, but actually it is more intimate. Like the relaxed silence between two familiar lovers, anything said would just break the spell of the unspoken closeness. The Hindu sage Swami Chetananda describes this state in beautiful everyday language when he writes: “When you are with someone you love very much, you can talk and it is pleasant, but the reality is not in the conversation. It is in simply being together. Meditation is the highest form of prayer. In it you are so close to God that you don’t need to say a thing – it is just great to be together.”

Timothy Freke, *Encyclopedia of Spirituality*, 67.

## Opening our Awareness to God

Silent meditation, without thoughts, totally open, awake, and aware, this is absolute prayer” (Lama Thubten Yeshe).

Contemplative prayer [meditation], rightly understood, is the normal development of grace. . . . It is the opening of mind and heart – our whole being – to God beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Moved by God’s preeminent grace, we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing – closer than consciousness itself. Contemplative prayer is a process of interior transformation, a relationship initiated by God and leading, if we consent, to divine union (Thomas Keating).

Taken from Joel and Michelle Levey, *Luminous Mind*, 188-190.





### **Becoming Aware of God's Presence Within**

Personally, I find that meditation, morning and evening, every day, is the best and most direct method of getting in touch with reality. In meditation, I try to let go of everything of the outer world of the senses, of the inner world of thoughts, and listen to the inner voice, the voice of the Word, which comes in the silence, in the stillness when all activity of body and mind cease. Then, in the silence, I become aware of the presence of God, and I try to keep that awareness during the day. In a bus or a train or travelling by air, in work or study or talking and relating to others, I try to be aware of this presence in everyone and in everything. And the Jesus prayer is what keeps me aware of this presence.

Bede Griffiths, from the *Inner Directions Journal*, Summer 1996.



## **A Way to Closer Connection with God**

“Learn to be silent. Let your quiet mind listen and absorb” (Pythagoras, 580 B.C. – 500 B.C.).

“All man’s miseries derive from not being able to sit quietly in a room alone” (Blaise Pascal, 1623-1662).

These two scientists both speak to the importance of silence and the value of meditation – that there is tremendous value in creating alone time in your life that is spent in silence.

Meditation also affects the quality of our non-silent activities. The daily practice of meditation is the single thing in my life that gives me a greater sense of well-being, increased energy, higher productivity at a more conscious level, more satisfying relationships, and a closer connection to God.

No amount of my writing about the value of daily meditation will ever convince you. You will never know the value of this practice unless you make the commitment to do it.

Wayne W. Dyer, *Wisdom of the Ages*, 1-4.





### **Stillness Brings an Awareness of God Within**

Stillness and simply being creates peace and serenity, and allows the Universe to gently guide you along your precious journey. The Universal consciousness patiently awaits your departure from the chaos of the illusory world and your arrival through the Universal corridor of quietude. . . . One of the most spiritual tasks in life is to discover stillness in the midst of the chaos around us. We possess this immense power. No one can force us to become involved in the chaos of society and the melodramas of daily living. You always have the capacity to tap into your inherent state of equanimity, and avoid the noise that fills your environment. Practice stillness in all of your affairs. When you are interrupted by your demanding ego, simply acknowledge the intrusion, and return to the stillness and tranquility of the Universe.

Richard A. Springer, Jr., *Eastern Wisdom for Your Soul*, 96.



### **Silence Leads to Awareness of the Divine**

Silence enables us to be aware of God, to let mind and imagination dwell upon his truth, to let prayer be listening before it is talking, and to discover our own selves in a way that is not always possible when we are making or listening to noise. There comes sometimes an inner silence in which the soul discovers itself in a new dimension of energy and peace, a dimension which the restless life can miss. . . . Into the Christian's use of silence there may flow the wonder of God the creator, the recollection of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, the recalling of scenes in his life, often a passage of the Bible, the glories of nature in which the finger of God is present, gratitude for personal blessings or the words of poets who tell of wonder and beauty.

Arthur Michael Ramsey, *Be Still and Know*, 83-4.





### **Being Open to God's Presence in the Heart**

In the stillness of my heart, I realize that my heart is the core of myself as a human person – the centre of my thinking, feeling, and deciding. It is the locus of my consciousness – the place where I ponder the mystery of myself, human existence, and God. It is where my experiences are treasured. The language of my heart presents a *non-conceptual way of knowing*, separate from cognition. My heart is a sacred space where I can get in touch with the truth of my being, and yet the word *heart* also points beyond itself to mystery – it is the place where I can be open to God's presence in my life. Finally, I have learnt that I can dispose myself to open or awaken my heart, such as sitting quietly in a still, peaceful setting.

Annice Callahan, "Heart", in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 469.

## Awareness of Divine Power and Mysteries

The Desert Father Ammonas, disciple of St. Anthony, said: “Behold, my beloved, I have shown you the power of silence, how thoroughly it heals and how fully pleasing it is to God. Wherefore I have written to you to show yourselves strong in this work you have undertaken, so that you may know that it is by silence that the saints grew, that it was because of silence that the power of God dwelt in them, because of silence that the mysteries of God were known to them” (Letter XII, P. O.XI, 606). The prayer of the heart introduces us into deep interior silence so that we learn to experience its power. For that reason the prayer of the heart has to be always very simple, confined to the simplest of acts and often making use of no words and no thoughts at all.

Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 19.



## Opening our Heart to the Indwelling Presence of Christ

In Australia, the Aboriginal peoples use the term *dadirri* meaning “deep inner spring” which refers to the “heart”. A person can call on it, and it calls to them – if they are receptive. The spirit of *dadirri* involves inner, deep listening *and* quiet, still, silent awareness, with no need for words. This contemplative way of *dadirri* spreads over a person’s whole life – it renews them and brings them peace. It makes them feel whole again.

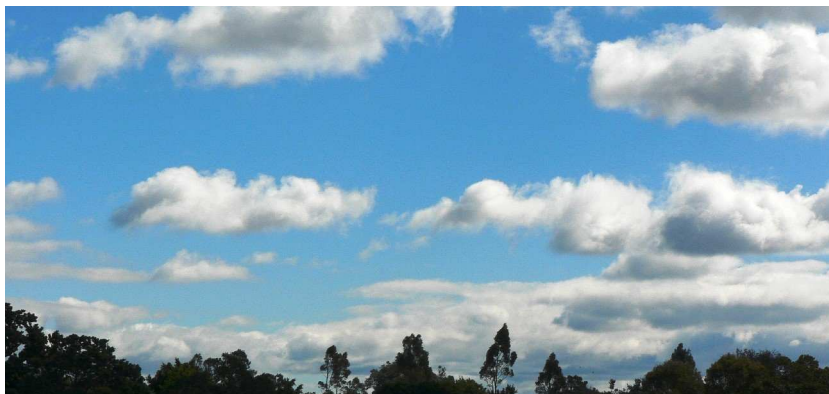
Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, *Dadirri – The Spring Within*, vii-ix.

Likewise, a deep spring exists within each one of us. This deep spring is the Spirit of God. It parallels Jesus’ words about “streams of living water” flowing from within a person, by which “he meant the Spirit” (John 7:38-39). Similarly, contemplative prayer involves stillness of the body and spirit. In that stillness and silence, by faith, we open our heart to the personal and powerful indwelling presence of Christ. In other words, we enter into the presence of the Spirit who dwells in our inner heart in love. We thereby glimpse the meaning behind the words of mystery: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) and how “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:17). Such a journey of contemplative prayer is a journey to the heart of God.

Alexander Peck



## ENCOUNTERING THE DIVINE



In Silence and Stillness We Hear the Voice of God Calling  
Meeting God in Solitude  
Union with the Divine Through Meditation  
Encountering God in the Depth of our Being  
Connecting with Divine Mystery in the Silence of the Night  
Listening to the Voice of Love in Prayer  
God Speaks in Diverse Situations  
Seeing Divinity in Daily Living  
Encountering God Through Grace



### **In Silence and Stillness We Hear the Voice of God Calling**

I shall speak of thoughts which come when alone, uncluttered by the immediate, free from pressure, reflecting in the cool of the evening after the heat of the day. How difficult it is to make space to be silent and to find solitude to be still, and yet it is in silence and stillness that we hear the voice of God calling us to look for him in the world he has created and to listen to his speaking deep within. God is not in the hurricane, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the sound of stillness (1 Kings 19).

To be silent and still is an art to be learned. It has its own discipline and difficulties, but the learning is essential, lest we be trapped in the purely secular and the material, escaping from the emptiness of the former by indulging in the attractions of the latter. True religion does not condemn what is material, nor does it fail to respect the laws of science, economics, medicine. It teaches that this world is good, that we are stewards of creation, and in cultivating its riches we work with the Creator, and ourselves grow – but a steward so easily becomes an exploiter and the perfection of the individual an end in itself.

Basil Hume, *Cardinal Hume: A Spiritual Companion*, 74.

## Meeting God in Solitude

We enter into solitude first of all to meet our Lord and to be with him and him alone. Our primary task in solitude, therefore, is not to pay undue attention to the many faces which assail us, but to keep the eyes of our mind and heart on him who is our divine savior. Only in the context of grace can we face our sin; only in the place of healing do we dare to show our wounds; only with a single-minded attention to Christ can we give up our clinging fears and face our own true nature. As we come to realize that it is not we who live, but Christ who lives in us, that he is our true self, we can slowly let our compulsions melt away and begin to experience the freedom of the children of God. . . . We have, indeed, to fashion our own desert where we can withdraw every day, shake off our compulsions, and dwell in the gentle healing presence of our Lord. Without such a desert we will lose our own soul while preaching the gospel to others. But with such a spiritual abode, we will become increasingly conformed to him in whose Name we minister.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 17.







### **Union with the Divine Through Meditation**

Silence is the essential human response to the mystery of God, to the infinity of God. It is as though the mystery of God is a wonderful multi-faceted diamond. When we talk about God or we think about God, it is as though we are responding to one or other of his facets. But when we are silent in his presence, we respond to the mystery which we call God as a whole, and that, omni-dimensionally. The wonder of it is that it is the whole of us that responds to the entirety of the mystery of God. It is not just our intellect, not just our emotions, not just the religious side of us or the secular side of us. Everything that we are responds to everything that he is, in absolute harmony, in absolute love. That is what the experience of Christian prayer is – our union with the one who is One.

Peter Ng, ed., *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, 159.



## Encountering God in the Depth of our Being

Contemplative prayer or meditation proceeds from the “center” of man’s being, his “heart” renewed in the Holy Spirit, totally submissive to the grace of Christ. It begins with a “return to the heart” – finding one’s deepest center, awakening the profound depths of our being in the presence of God, who is the source of our being and our life. Such “prayer of the heart” seeks its roots in the very ground of our being, not merely in our mind or our affections. By “prayer of the heart” we seek God himself present in the depths of our being and meet him there by invoking the name of Jesus in faith, wonder and love.

The concept of “the heart” refers to the deepest psychological ground of one’s personality, the inner sanctuary where self-awareness goes beyond analytical reflection and opens out into metaphysical and theological confrontation with the Abyss of the unknown yet present – one who is “more intimate to us than we are to ourselves” (to adopt the phrase from Augustine’s *Confessions*).

Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 5-9.





### **Connecting with Divine Mystery in the Silence of the Night**

The time just after sunset has a magical quality. Sometimes, after the sun has set, the clouds begin to glow with colours of water and colours of fire. Buildings and mountains also glow, and the sun is reflected like molten gold in the windows of far-away houses. It is a wonderful time to take a walk. At eventide, the daylight fades and the distinct silence of night descends.

Looking up to the night sky, we are reminded of the immense mystery in which we are immersed. The root meaning of the word “mystery” is to shut one’s eyes and ears. Mystery is silence, darkness. Darkness is symbol and image for the divine mystery, the nothingness (the no-thing-ness) of the divine realm. The night calls us to set aside time outside the practical demands of the day and to connect with that dark but grace-filled mystery in which we are immersed. Once the bright light of day dawns and the demands of the day begin, it is easy to forget the sacred, timeless dimension of our lives.

David Steindl-Rast, *Music of Silence*, 20-21, 27, 94-95.

## Listening to the Voice of Love in Prayer

We are God's beloved daughters and sons, not because we have proven ourselves worthy of God's love, but because God freely chose us. . . . Voices [the endless seductions of our society] keep pulling us away from that soft gentle voice that speaks in the centre of our being: "You are my beloved, on you my favour rests". Prayer is the discipline of listening to that voice of love. Jesus spent many nights in prayer listening to the voice that had spoken to him at the Jordan River. We too must pray. Without prayer, we become deaf to the voice of love and become confused by the many competing voices asking for our attention. How difficult this is! When we sit down for half an hour – without talking to someone, listening to music, watching television, or reading a book – and try to become very still, we often find ourselves so overwhelmed by our noisy inner voices that we can hardly wait to get busy and distracted again. Our inner life often looks like a banana tree full of jumping monkeys! But when we decide not to run away and stay focused, these monkeys may gradually go away because of lack of attention, and the soft gentle voice calling us the beloved may gradually make itself heard. Much of Jesus' prayer took place during the night. "Night" means more than the absence of the sun. It also means the absence of satisfying feelings or enlightening insights. That is why it is so hard to be faithful. But God is greater than our hearts and minds and keeps calling us the beloved . . . far beyond all feelings and thoughts.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Here and Now: Living in the Spirit*, 123-124.





### **God Speaks in Diverse Situations**

To pray means to open your hands before God. It means slowly relaxing the tension which squeezes your hands together and accepting your existence with an increasing readiness, not as a possession to defend, but as a gift to receive. Above all, therefore, prayer is a way of life which allows you to find a stillness in the midst of the world where you open your hands to God's promises, and find hope for yourself, your neighbor, and your world. In prayer, you encounter God not only in the small voice and the soft breeze, but also in the midst of the turmoil of the world, in the distress and joy of your neighbor, and in the loneliness of your own heart.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*.

## Seeing Divinity in Daily Living

Life can become a series of roller-coaster activities, bringing joys and struggles, blessing and brokenness. This is why a daily time of reflection – where we pause and notice what is happening in body, mind, and spirit; and even look for God’s hand in it all – nourishes us. In the stillness of our heart, we can come to recognize that the human heart is our privileged place of encounter with God.

Sometimes, at a deeper level, we may feel only sadness, see only absurdity, and experience only despair. “To despair,” writes Finlay, “is to die inside, to lose all hope of ever being the person whom we deep down know ourselves to be in the intimacies of our own moments of spontaneous contemplative experience.” The pain experienced in life can take many forms – a psychological disturbance, a troubled marriage, a crisis of faith, a series of illnesses – and result in a sense of homelessness, where we no longer feel at home with ourselves.

Daily returning to the stillness of our heart helps nurture within a quiet inner assurance and meaningful sense of direction in life. We learn to welcome “the divinity of what just is” – in other words, the “awareness of the divinity of the life we are living”. In glimpsing more and more the divinity in daily living, we see the “inherent holiness of the present moment” – and have a renewed confidence in returning home to ourselves.

Adapted from James Finlay, *The Contemplative Heart*, 19-20, 26, 39-41.





## Encountering God Through Grace

Contemplation is essentially a listening in silence, an expectancy. . . . The true contemplative is not the one who prepares his mind for a particular message that he wants or expects to hear, but who remains empty because he knows that he can never expect or anticipate the word that will transform his darkness into light. He does not even anticipate a special kind of transformation. He does not demand light instead of darkness. He waits on the Word of God in silence, and when he is “answered”, it is not so much by a word that bursts into his silence. It is by his silence itself suddenly, inexplicably revealing itself to him as a word of great power, full of the voice of God.

One who simply follows the ordinary ways of prayer, without any prejudice and without complications, will be able to dispose himself far better to receive his vocation to contemplative prayer in due time, assuming that he has one. True contemplation is not a psychological trick but a theological grace. It can come to us *only* as a gift, and not as a result of our own clever use of spiritual techniques.

Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, 68-70.



## HEARING AND RESPONDING TO THE DIVINE



Guarding the Life of the Spirit Within  
Abandonment to God  
Ministry of Divine Silence  
In Heartfelt Listening the Heart Is Reached  
Hearing Within; Reaching Without  
The Test of Meditation: Growing in Love



### **Guarding the Life of the Spirit Within**

Silence guards the inner heat of religious emotions. This inner heat is the life of the Holy Spirit within us. Thus, silence is the discipline by which the inner fire of God is tended and kept alive. Diadochus of Photiki offers us a very concrete image: “When the door of the steambath is continually left open, the heat inside rapidly escapes through it; likewise the soul, in its desire to say many things, dissipates its remembrance of God through the door of speech.”

What needs to be guarded is the life of the Spirit within us. Especially we who want to witness to the presence of God’s Spirit in the world need to tend the fire within with utmost care. . . . Sometimes it seems that our many words are more an expression of our doubt than of our faith. It is as if we are not sure that God’s Spirit can touch the hearts of people: we have to help him out and, with many words, convince others of his power. But it is precisely this wordy unbelief that quenches the fire. Our first and foremost task is faithfully to care for the inward fire so that when it is really needed it can offer warmth and light to lost travelers.

Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 48-49.



## **Abandonment to God**

We can lovingly and confidently “cast all [our] anxiety on him because he cares for [us]” (1 Peter 5:7), as this writer beautifully expresses in his prayer:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*, 81.





### **Ministry of Divine Silence**

The thought keeps coming to me that it is as important to be silent with friends as to speak with them. Seeing so many people and talking with them about all that has happened and is happening to them often leaves me with a sense of not really being together. The exchange of countless details about people's lives can often create more distance than closeness. Words are important in order to come close, but too many words create distance.

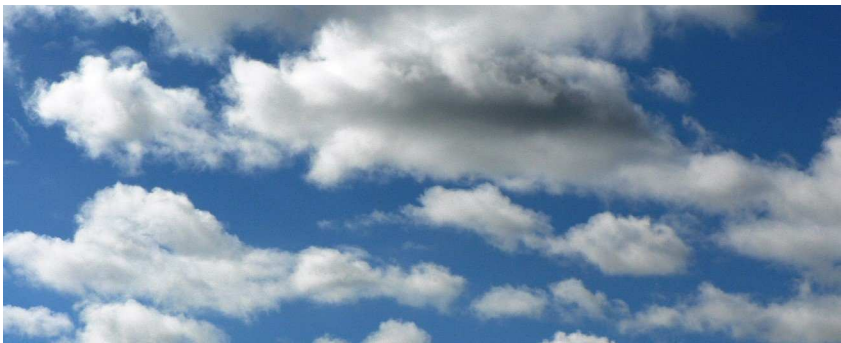
I feel an increasing desire to be silent with friends. Not every event has to be told, not every idea has to be exchanged. Once an atmosphere of mutual trust is present, we can be silent together and let the Lord be the one who speaks, gently and softly. Listening together to Jesus is a very powerful way to grow closer to each other and reach a level of intimacy that no interpersonal exchange of words can bring about. A silence lived together in the presence of Jesus will also continue to bear many fruits in the future. It seems as if a caring silence can enter deeper into our memory than many caring words. Maybe not always, but certainly often. But to create this silence requires much spiritual work. It is not the most obvious style for a reunion! And still, it may be the most blessed.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Road to Daybreak*, 188-189.

### **In Heartfelt Listening the Heart Is Reached**

In heartfelt listening to the stories of the underprivileged, vulnerable, wounded, and poor, I find that the realm of the heart is reached. Here's how. First, in listening, I begin to hear the voice of love and compassion within myself as I understand their plight; and, if I understand, then I cannot help but love; and when I love, I will naturally act in a way that relieves suffering. Second, I can journey with them back to their own heart and woundedness – my hope being that in our mutual experience we are not abandoned in our woundedness, but rather our wounds become the places of encounter with the compassionate heart of Jesus, and this becomes a place of transformation and new growth. Third, I may discern a deep, underlying meaninglessness and emptiness in their lives, the consequence of life blindly led by the dictates of the ego – and I may be able to gently nudge those so afflicted in the direction of the journey back home to God. Fourth, I come to understand what *respect* means – it is not aloof and detached; rather, it acknowledges the worth of others, relates to them as they are (not what I want them to be or think they should be), and accepts them as they are (even with their defects). Finally, in listening to the weak at a deeper level, I may also hear another reality within their self, their indwelling soul – a crying for God and yearning for the fellowship of the Spirit. With such receptive listening, I may be able to guide them to their heart's sacred Presence – God within, who is their hope of glory.

Alexander Peck





### **Hearing Within; Reaching Without**

In relation to the prayer of the heart, we can by faith:

*Affirm* that the risen Jesus is among us as the glorified Christ, living in each of us, and present everywhere at all times.

*Believe* in the action of God in our hearts, as well as everywhere and in everything.

*Consent* to the work of the divine Presence within, knowing that the unloading of the false self will, by God's grace, lead to new awareness and greater love. We do not have to fear this process when we trust in God's unconditional love.

*Detach* and rest in silence and solitude, remaining open by faith to the ultimate mystery, the ground of our being and the source of all life.

In reaching out to others, we can:

Be present and listen to those God has called us to be with. May our heart embrace their strengths and woundedness with love and grace.

See each person as important to us, realizing the presence of the true Self in them. May we see no one as insignificant or unworthy.

Console and encourage those who are suffering in their woundedness and in the unloading of their false self. May we speak kind and reassuring words to them.

Trust and rest in God without anxiousness regarding others. By faith, may we believe that God's grace is operating at all times.

Based on David Forbes Morgan, "Centering Prayer and Community" in *Centering Prayer in Daily Life and Ministry*, 104-105.

## The Test of Meditation: Growing in Love

The great test as to whether your meditation is working, or whether you are making progress (I don't advise you to rate yourselves) is: Are you growing in love; are you growing in patience; are you growing in understanding and compassion? That is the effect of our meditation. With some of us, it takes longer. With some of us, the end of egoism requires a big struggle. Sometimes, we are carried more or less kicking and screaming into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But the important thing is not to bother how long it takes. It doesn't matter how long it takes. The only thing that matters – and the thing that I wish I could communicate to everyone – the only thing that matters is that we are on the journey. The journey is a journey away from self, away from egoism, away from selfishness, away from isolation. It's a journey into the infinite love of God.

All of us would like to be more kind, more understanding, more selfless, more sympathetic, more compassionate, and so on. But, at the same time, we recognize ourselves as weak, mortal, fallible human beings. What we discover in meditation is the power source to enable us to live this way. We discover that this power source is established right at the centre of our own being, in our own hearts. "God is the centre of my soul."

Peter Ng, ed., *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning: Learning to Meditate with John Main*, 135-136, 184.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alexander and Eva Peck write from a Christian and international background. Through their Christian work and teaching English as a second language, they have experienced a range of cultures, having lived and worked in Australia, the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. As a result, they have interacted with believers from a variety of faith traditions. Their view is that different faith perspectives enrich whatever one's own spiritual path is. They value a non-denominational and ecumenical approach which recognizes that all faiths are in search of transcendent Reality, that a unity among faiths emerges in the lived experience of spirituality, and that oneness with the Divine is possible. Through their own life journey they have discovered the richness of the contemplative dimension of the Gospel and its path to the Life, Light, and Love within.

After receiving post-graduate qualifications in education, Alexander earned two Masters Degrees in Australia with an emphasis in Christian spirituality. Eva, who has an undergraduate degree in science and postgraduate diploma in education, also completed a Masters Degree in Theology in Australia. The Pecks live in Redland City, Queensland, Australia where they continue to write in the field of Christian spirituality and theology. Readers may also wish to visit their websites: [www.spirituality-for-life.org](http://www.spirituality-for-life.org) and [www.truth-and-beauty.org](http://www.truth-and-beauty.org), as well as perusing their book on Bible teachings, *Pathway to Life – Through the Holy Scripture*, available to preview and purchase through the website, [www.pathway-to-life](http://www.pathway-to-life).





*Journey to the Divine Within* shares how to enter the realm of one's heart through the reflections of a variety of spiritual writers. One way that this occurs is through silence, stillness, and simplicity. When pondered, the reflections will lead readers to the silence and stillness of their own hearts on the path to encountering the Life, Light, and Love within. The book has something to offer both beginners and seasoned pilgrims on their contemplative journey.

Photographic images from the beauty of natural settings in South-East Queensland, Australia complement many pages.

Alexander and Eva Peck both have Masters degrees in theology and live in Redland City, where they continue to write in the field of Christian spirituality. Readers may wish to visit their websites: [www.spirituality-for-life.org](http://www.spirituality-for-life.org) and [www.truth-and-beauty.org](http://www.truth-and-beauty.org).

