

CHAPTER II

THE PRACTICE

Silence, therefore, is seen primarily as an understanding of the indescribable Presence within and without which offers peace and joy to all who understand and come to drink. Silence and solitude, seen without such understanding, can become just another technique, tried for a while and soon dropped in favor of another attempt at happiness. Or perhaps even worse, silence can become a horrifying prison of loneliness and terror, seen as a further separation from reality and love. Perceived as a source of reconnecting, silence truly takes on the experience of being golden. Instead of being feared, it is welcomed as a place of renewal and joy. Although the life may be a busy one, awareness of the Holy Center within is carried wherever one moves. Moments of rest and times of vacation become holy times, sabbaths, and holy days in the truest sense of the original meaning of "holiday."

Caution: Desert Ahead!

A caution, however, and gentle warning is given. To receive this understanding after a period of desire and search will often place the inquirer into a temporary stage of confusion and dismay even though initially such a disappointment may seem impossible. That which was sought is found! Joy seems complete, unstoppable.

Yet years of living in "sleep-walk" and fantasy do not necessarily leave without a good fight. The ego is a tough foe and does not give up easily.

Giving up the body or physical objects as eternal or real may not come easily. John of the Cross, the Sixteenth Century Roman Catholic mystic from Spain, wrote of this in his classic, The Dark Night. The "Dark Night" is a way of picturing the transition from delusion to truth, from separation to atonement.

John points out that in the initial stages, one's senses seem very satisfied. They can become even titillated during spiritual exercises. Religious exercises can become very "sense-oriented," wherein they become a kind of spiritual lust. People fall victim to this, according to John of the Cross, by maintaining a judging attitude toward others. They become angry with the sins of others. They "set themselves up as lords of virtue."¹

¹Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodrigues, Translators, The Collected Works of St. John of The Cross (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 306.

This could be compared with frequent attempts to renew worship through the use of elaborate electronics and the sensational. If care is not exercised, such attempts could become substitutes for the Spirit within. Emotions could be accepted as the Presence. Unless an emotional high is experienced, God could be felt to be absent. Thus it can become a trap, a way to avoid quiet listening for the Inexpressible. Such is written with respect for those in modern day "charismatic movements" who are seen as reacting against the saturation of words and reason in many mainline churches. "Tongues," as an expression of the Inexpressible, is a beautiful concept. Eroticism during the Eucharist can be a beautiful alternative to discussions of afternoon golf games. Yet sensationalism could become a trap in the senses rather than a door to deeper forgiveness and oneness. It could become "wall to wall sound and fury" which never lead to the stillness of the Presence. This is the concern of John of the Cross. The "Dark Night," as he describes it, will cure this unbalance and help perfect one who cannot leave behind his or her anger and judgment of the sins of others.

The "Dark Night" is also a cure for what he calls the "spiritual gluttony" of beginners. Getting a vision and taste of Reality, they tend to become impatient and desire to go all out, practicing spiritual exercises with excessiveness, even obsession, expecting perhaps to "force God's blessings" upon themselves. Often the exercises they choose are the most sensual and erotic, seeking to substitute, in John's words, "sensory satisfaction for invisible grace."²

John describes these as children at the breasts of their mothers. They have enjoyed the sweet comfort for a few months or years, and now Mother pushes them off onto their own. This begins the "dark night." At first the child may

²Ibid., p. 308.

be puzzled, and then angry and revengeful. The child may then live life feeling unfairly treated, or resolutely clamoring for one sensual pleasure after another. But if the child is lucky, it will awaken to deeper resources within itself and be able to live life more deeply fulfilled and free.

Each one, however, seems destined for this dark night, a night of purgation, as John calls it. It is a time of cleansing from attachments to sense objects, learning to see them as they are, temporal sign posts pointing to the Invisible. John compares this experience to "desert solitude" such as when God led Israel through the wilderness forty years before entering the land of "milk and honey." It is a time, when after enjoying manna given by God, people want to return to the fleshpots of Egypt. One could find him or herself in fellowship with Christians for years, but suddenly wanting to return to the illusions of before. It is at this time, John wrote, that people can become further cleansed of attachments in the "desert of solitude." It is usually best that such an encounter be done alone in solitude. It is a time of being weaned from the breasts, forced to grow up a little more into the grace and power of God.

Teresa of Avila, another Sixteenth Century mystic of the Roman Catholic Church, also of Spain, wrote of this experience in her last book, The Interior Castle. It is a story of seven different rooms, an image of the human soul experience. The earlier rooms could be seen as the dark night that one enters when committed to finding God. They are rooms filled with tests and trials, with "snakes and ghosts," trying to force the seeking one back. Teresa's advice is to be gentle; ". . . you cannot begin to recollect yourselves by force but only by gentleness . . ." ³ However, through persistence one will finally reach the

³Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodrigues, Translators, The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila (Washington, D.C.: ICs Publications, 1980), p. 302.

seventh room where all is calm, quiet, and beyond words in inexpressible oneness with the Divine.

The "Temptation of Jesus," as recorded in the Gospels, could also be seen as his journey into the "dark night of purgation." For forty days he fasted, depriving the body of its voracious appetites, forcing himself deeper and deeper into his Center, to the place of communion with his Father. He was tempted by food, by doing the sensational, by power over people, but chose instead in favor of the deeper, lasting peace of eternal reality. This, then, represents the test of every child of God who seeks the havens of religious forgiveness, the milk of love from the Divine breasts and then must choose to leave attachments of temporality behind.

This has been the experience of the author. Several dark nights have been entered, the most difficult coming after he had seemingly made the biggest strides toward wholeness in his own spiritual development. In the spring of 1985 he made a commitment to pray the Christian "Office" as a duty for his own pilgrimage. In the first few months, great peace and relief seemed to be a regular experience. However, as the months and years went by, he could see it as a kind of "ego-trip," even a device of separation from others. The De Mello Conference in Syracuse, the summer of 1986, became a turning point. His understanding of non-attachment to sense objects was deepened and expanded. Yet for the next year, he still seemed much like a child just learning to walk. But he wanted truth; he wanted peace; he wanted non-attachment to anything but the mysterious presence of peace and eternal joy.

The solo trip to India, paid for mostly by a grant from San Francisco Theological Seminary, was another long step into the "dark night." Little did the author realize how confusing he would become, especially the first few days and weeks. His journey lasted thirty-eight days, a frequent reminder of a kind

of "desert," especially since he embarked upon his trip on Ash Wednesday. Never had such disorientation and confusion been experienced. He kept repeating to himself; "I am God's son; I am not my body; I am not my emotions; I am not my thinking. I am God's son, so please have mercy, and please help me!" Armed with his special "rules for grace," he was stripped and humbled many times in those few weeks there. Lost in a sea of "strange looking people," he was forced to search anew for the God within and for God's connectedness to these new brothers and sisters, all around! And just when he felt he could endure no more, another "angel" would be sent with a little more help!

The very first day, after some sixteen hours in confusion, riding a hot, crowded, interminable train, alone as the only "Westerner" in evidence, he felt near the end. He wondered how he would endure three days of travel to Southern India from Bombay. At the city of Puna, one hundred miles south of departure, he got off the train, looking for something to drink. As he stood there on a crowded platform, still unaccustomed to all the people, noise, and smells, a young man approached him and asked, "Are you a Christian minister from America? I am a Christian, and I think I can help you!" Uncertain of anything but hoping that God had sent him, the author went with him to the Christa Prema Ashram. The young man lived next door in a hostel where he was studying law. At the ashram, which was Christian, the author stayed four days, receiving needed sustenance and a basic orientation on Indian life! There he also met a man from England who was training to become a Buddhist priest. He was roving around India as a "Sadhu," a kind of hermit in spiritual training. This hermit stayed with the author nearly three weeks, advising, explaining, lecturing, and pointing. The author left India a little more subdued and humbled and less attached to the many things he had thought so essential in his living style and religious exercises.

A few weeks later in the summer of 1987, he departed for a ten day retreat in the mountains of Pennsylvania. He carried a backpack with tent, supplies, a Bible, prayer book and journal. By the fifth day, he became so distraught and disoriented that he packed up and hiked out. It was another experience where the "negativa" became too much. He remembered St. Teresa's words and Fr. Bede's advice, "Go gently, be easy, not forceful." And he was reminded again of how much of a novice he still was and that expectations were raised too high.

In the summer of 1988, he took two more weeks of "solitude," the first with his son. They stayed in a small trailer near a lake in the woods. The second week he stayed alone in silence but would take frequent walks and bicycle rides. He would also do some fishing. He returned home much more refreshed, relaxed, and renewed. This was a much more enjoyable, if not a safer journey, into the "dark night."

Caution: Easy On The Purgation!

Matthew Fox believes that the Western Church has overly exaggerated the purgation of the dark night. As a result it tends to fall again into the very dualisms which must be avoided. Rather than beginning with God, beauty, and the mystical oneness of all creation, people can become stuck in sin and the awfulness of its power and fury. Dwelling on such "innate badness" gives it a power that is unreal. Fox concludes from studies of writers as Meister Eckhart that such emphasis on fighting darkness and the body can be counterproductive. By starting with one's creation as part of God's love and beauty, one merely seeks, perhaps more radically at first, to "let go and become." One seeks to become part of the creative energy he or she was created as and therefore is. As Fox learned from Eckhart:

Things are not bad but the human propensity to cling to things is harmful and creates the dualisms that result in all sin. When we learn to let go and be we learn new levels of trust including trust in the dark and in our experiences of nothingness, both personal and political.⁴

⁴Matthew Fox, Meditations with Meister Eckhart (Sante Fe, New Mexico: Bear and Company, Inc., 1983), pp. 4,5.

Thus the temptation to become violent to oneself in order to attain "spiritual purity" is cautioned against. The silence needed to absorb a God of love becomes more of a gentle understanding rather than that of intense purgation. Such violence not only can lead to insanity, as Swami Prabhavanda warns⁵, but can in itself become a thing of pride, another ego trip. When aware of an opportunity to spend ten days in total solitude at a Buddhist Center near Madras, the author asked his Buddhist guide for a reaction.

"Well," he said, "if it doesn't drive you insane, it no doubt would become another ego trip for you!"

Fox quotes Eckhart as opposing such forced violence;
 Asceticism is of no great importance. There is a better way to treat one's passions than to pile on oneself ascetic practices which so often reveal a great ego and create more, instead of less, self-consciousness.⁶

Thus the dark night might actually be part of one's coming to his or her own illusions about retreats, fasts, and purgation methods. This is not to say that such times of "darkness" will not be experienced. The difference will be in how one sees them; as violence sent from God, or as opportunities for growth and further detachment from that which is sensory (which could be "religious") as well as the faulty thinking that keeps one in guilt and fear.

⁵Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, Translators, How to Know God, The Yoga Aphorisms of Pantanjali (Hollywood, California: Vedanta Press, 1953), p. 69.

⁶Fox, p. 58.

The Course in Miracles explains that the ego, or that "Satanic, unreal" part of us that grasps at illusions, actually attracts and draws us toward pain. The ego teaches that sacrifice and pain are actually good and redemptive. The ego also subtly teaches that to escape pain and guilt, one must see one's body as the real self and thus a source, along with other sense objects, of real pleasure. Both practices, then, of harsh asceticism and of hedonism come to the same conclusion; more guilt, pessimism, and fear. For no matter how much people honor and indulge the body, they always know it is mortal and faces eventual dissolution. Thus, "It is impossible to seek for pleasure through the body and not find pain."⁷

The solution is understanding that it is the same Spirit that creates which also gives life. It incarnates these human bodies but leaves them one day behind as discarded tents. So entering the dark night is actually a journey toward joy and reconnection with the True Self, happy, and eager to let go of temporary illusions and to be joined in creative force with the Spirit.

To conclude, "dark nights" ought therefore to be entered gently, not violently. Seek to know yourself, as Teresa advises, but take not yourself too seriously. Remember that there is no one way to enter or experience God and the True Self. There is the understanding that one is Spirit and as such blissful in one's innermost being. Learn to follow this and to honor It, and whether in trouble by the world's view or not, one will always be at peace, guiltless, and free. As Matthew's Gospel records the words of Jesus:

Come unto me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn of me, for I

⁷Helen Schucman and William Thetford, A Course in Miracles (Tiburon, California: Foundation for Inner Peace, 1975), p. 386 Text.

am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest for my yoke
is easy and my burden is light.⁸

⁸Matthew 11:28-30, NAB.

Follow The Thirst

So where does one start to experience such oneness and bliss in silence? Beginning with the thirst and desire, one simply stays with it. Understanding that God is beyond words or expressions and that God is peace, joy, love, gentleness and that this Presence is in all people, and everywhere, and remembering that the experience of this is in the Right Now, the Holy Instant, let the thirst be assuaged. It is following the desire to respond to Jesus' invitation to come, to open the door and be filled. It is the experience of seeking and finding in opposition to the ego's "seek and never find, never be satisfied."

For if it be true that the Presence is there in each one, then it is true that the thirst is there too. In Eckhart's reply to the question, "Where should be begin?" he writes, "Begin with the heart. For the spring of life arises from the heart and from there it runs in a circular manner."⁹ One begins with that thirst to become free, at peace, and in love with life. It is what the Course in Miracles refers to over and over again as the "little willingness" to be whole and free. This is where one starts and ends. It is reverence for the light within, the worship at the heart's "shrine" or "cave," and letting this force be the victor, for this is our True Self. The Course advises:

⁹Fox, p. 4.

Never approach the holy instant after you have tried to remove all fear and hatred from your mind. This is its function. Never attempt to overlook your guilt before you ask the Holy Spirit's help. That is His function. Your part is only to offer Him a little willingness to let Him remove all fear and hatred, and to be forgiven.¹⁰

For the author, it began with his awareness of the tremendous pressure felt in being a pastor, with all the demands placed upon him and of his tendency to allow criticism and conflict to slowly destroy his career. His "little desire" led him in 1979 to a book in "getting what you want" though the use of self-hypnotism. The first step, he discovered, was defining what it was that he wanted. He wanted peace, freedom, guiltlessness, maturity. Taking that little, but persistent willingness has led him to San Francisco Theological Seminary, to Fr. De Mello, to India, to the Course in Miracles, and most importantly, to a freedom and peace unknown before. And it increases every year. All from the "little willingness" to know a better way, willingness given by God to experience peace and healing.

This is where one starts, by recognizing this inner thirst for life. "If anyone thirst, let him come to me, let him drink who believes in me. Scripture has it: `from within him rivers of living water shall flow.'"¹¹ Jesus said on another occasion: "I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, no one who believes in me shall ever thirst."¹²

¹⁰Schucman and Thetford, p. 357 Text.

¹¹John 7:37, NAB.

¹²John 6:35, NAB.

Of course, it is not simply the "Jesus of Nazareth" that Jesus was talking about. It is not just a matter of trying to follow Jesus as depicted in Scriptures written centuries ago; it is awareness of the Christ within, the eternal Christ who was existing before the worlds were ever made. Fr. Bede was the first to remind the author of Christ as the only way, a Christ present as the True Self in every child of God. Call it whatever; Atman, True Self, Light, Holy Spirit. It is the same eternal Christ within each. Peace is peace, love is love, in any language. Or, a rose is a rose with whatever name it is called. Honor the rose, the Christ within, and it will lead and show one the waters of eternal life. And "if you live in me, and my words stay part of you, you may ask what you will -- it will be done for you."¹³

In India people often greet others with folded hands over their heart, with fingers raised and thumbs pointing inward. It is a beautiful, reverent gesture. It often is accompanied with the word namaste, an expression wishing God's blessing. It entails much more than a common handshake and "hello." The author was told that the gesture represents not only the God in the other but in oneself as well. As the head is bowed in greeting, fingers are pointed toward the greeted one while the thumbs point backward to the greeter's own heart. Another's "inner shrine" is thus revered as the shrine within oneself. It is beautiful in that it reminds people of the true desire that all share to know and experience God.

So silence is begun and entered with this desire and willingness, however small. And it will be blessed as guilt, fear, and anger are slowly removed by the One who is the True Self and who exists in us and in all things.

¹³John 15:7, NAB.

Suggested Techniques And Methods

A consideration is now given of some methods used to discover and live by this inner Spirit. Such consideration is done with the caution that silence, spiritual silence, is not a technique or method, but an understanding. When the author first began his study of silence, he was hoping for a technique or method to bring lasting cure to pain. He has found that there is no one way. There are different schools of thought, but it must always be remembered that they are just that, "schools of thought." The author began the present decade with daily exercises of self-hypnosis, and they were helpful. A few years later he switched, with modifications, to the "Prayer Office" breviary. Both were begun with a hope that in such practice peace and bliss would be experienced.

It was Fr. De Mello who first made it clear to the author that spirituality is not a technique or method, but an understanding. This was very difficult at first. It was hard to lay aside or modify what was being done. De Mello always emphasized that whatever "rule" one practices, one is not to take it too seriously, or to not impose it on others in the name of God. He told the story of how a searching soul decided one day to go into the desert and see if there he could find enlightenment and peace. When he finally returned, it was obvious that he had been greatly touched by some divine power. His face shone with radiance and his whole countenance manifested peace and self confidence. Immediately his friends wanted to know what he had done and what technique had he used!

"I can't tell you," he replied, "it is beyond description. You will have to experience it for yourselves."

But they pestered and bothered him so that after many days, in order to dispel their nagging, he relented and said, "Okay, if you promise not to bother me, I will give you a formula, but that's all." And so he did.

Well, some wrote it down and had it printed for sales and distribution. Others began to write and publish books on the meaning of the formula and the life of the one who had given it. Others founded schools where the formula was studied and given to serious and bright students. Others founded a mission movement to take it across the seas to other countries. They even began to set up armies in order to defend it. Years later, when the pilgrim was old and looked out upon all that had been done in his name, he said, "I knew that I should never have given them a formula!"¹⁴

¹⁴Anthony de Mello, The Song of the Bird (Garden City, New York: Image, 1982), p. 31.

Thus the author has a reluctance to describe techniques to be used during times of silence. He is reluctant to share his own favorite methods except with the understanding that they can never be actually repeated but only expanded and shared with others. Eckhart called his method and ideas the "wayless way" that is available to all.¹⁵ Such is a good reminder along with his other suggestion, one that Fr. De Mello repeated often; "The soul does not grow by addition but by subtraction."¹⁶ Silence, spirituality, are not something one adds on, but a process of helping to let go, of leaving behind. After being born with a sense of separation and the years of seeking identity and peace from the body and sense objects, silence becomes the "great soul cleanser," that which helps one to let go and enjoy communion will all that one needs, and has, and is, God Herself.

The second day in India, the author was given the book How to Know God, The Yoga Aphorisms of Pantanjali. He began to devour the book, eager to try anything to attain peace in his adventure in that strange land. Later at the Shantivanam Ashram in an interview with the Dom Bede Griffiths, the author asked if Fr. Bede had ever followed such steps and experienced the ultimate, blissful union with the Atman or Spirit within. To the author's surprise and disappointment, Fr. Bede replied, "No, not really!" Fr. Bede then went on to say that no doubt some have had authentic experiences of ecstasy and psychic power displays, but these are reserved for a unique few. However, this does not mean that the rest cannot live in happiness and peace because the very essence of light is understanding. It is understanding of the inexpressible "cave" within that brings peace in contrast to the ignorance or forgetfulness that it is there. Again, as

¹⁵Fox, p. 7.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 7.

Fr. Bede underscored, true silence is understanding and experience not a technique.¹⁷

¹⁷Interview with Fr. Bede Griffiths, Shantivanam, India, March 20, 1987.

Now this is somewhat disappointing to the Western mind which is usually obsessed with technique and a kind of "quick-fix." This need for instant solutions is often evident to visitors from the East or from more intuitive cultures. The Presbytery of Western New York, of which the author is a part, is connected with the Wynberg Presbytery in South Africa through a commitment of dollars and the exchange of views and visits between the two. The Reverend Russell Botman, a pastor from Wynberg, in visiting Western New York and the United States in the winter of 1988, noticed this "fix-it" trait. "People," he said in a small meeting which the author attended, "constantly ask me what they can do to stop apartheid. Some would like to give a million dollars if the 'problem' could be all nicely solved and fixed in a year or two. This is unreal," he said. "What we need and want is your long term struggle to be with us, a life-time, or life-times, if need be!"

So what is offered here are a few ideas and suggestions for connecting with the Spirit within. These could be added to one's life-time of wanting to be in communion with God, growing and developing by His grace into maturity and wholeness. The goal is to cultivate love, joy, peace, and happiness, along with the correlating aspect, according to Eckhart, of usually being in trouble!¹⁸

Having then a serious desire, what does one do? Well, one ought to keep it simple. Complexity only breeds complexity, and with it, a tendency toward pride and then confusion. Thomas Kelly advised, "There is no new technique for entrance upon this stage . . . The processes . . . do not grow more complex, but more simple."¹⁹ Complexity can become a diversion from listening and experiencing the True Self, the Spirit. For one soon can become attached to a complex prayer

¹⁸Fox, p. 7.

¹⁹Thomas Kelly, A Testament of Devotion, (New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1941), p. 43.

method or methodology which is then practiced rather than the experience of peace. Becoming like a child is also a fitting reminder here.

One day in India, the author showed his seventeen hundred page prayer book to his Buddhist companion. The hermit flipped through it in amazement and then handed it back shaking his head! All those pages, all those ribbons for marking! So complicated! And perhaps rightly so. The hermit continually counseled simplicity, and he modeled it; a morning walk, few possessions, always listening in every encounter, every hour.

It also could be said that complexity is not necessarily the rituals practiced by some. Protestant Christians, unfamiliar with Roman Catholic ritual or technique, may think of their own tradition as much simpler, as the ideal. Complexity is not to be seen in the outward manifestations. Without seeking to judge or indict either tradition, Thomas Kelly is again quoted as saying:

It is not the Roman Catholic alone who have overlaid the authority of the Light Within by a heavy weight of ecclesiastical authority, but the Protestant emphasis, beginning so nobly in the early Luther, has grown externally rationalistic, humanistic, and service-minded. Dogmas and creed and the closed revelation of a completed canon have replaced the emphasis upon keeping close to the fresh upspringings of the Inner Life.²⁰

Regardless of tradition, all people seem to have the same tendency to complicate things, covering over the Self or Spirit with tradition, words, intellectualism,

²⁰Ibid., p. 33.

or whatever else keeps them from experiencing innate peace and forgiveness to self and to others.

Bede Griffiths point out that it is not just coincidence that the decline of Hindu influence coincided with the great wave of elaborate temple buildings. These buildings began in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries in India.²¹ They are certainly beautiful but amazingly complicated compared to the simple, road-side ashram. And it may also be worth considering how the decline of silence and meditation arose in the West alongside the period of "Enlightenment" when the elaborate building of empires took place, including the building of great cathedrals.

²¹Interview with Fr. Bede Griffiths, March 20, 1987.

A Place For Silence

One major step, in aiding one to come to the place of simplicity and the "inner cave," is to find a place and time to go into silence and solitude. As noted, silence is primarily an understanding, not a method, but it can be useful to find a definite place and time to help open the doors of Inner Silence. Physical silence can at first be awkward and threatening as it is for many Christians in mainline, Western churches. Yet it can become illustrative of the many attachments and enslavements that one may have.

De Mello would advise a day in silence as a test of one's authentic peace and wholeness. If one can exist a few hours or a day alone, then that one may be on the right track. The physical silence can also then be a kind of "soul and attachment cleanser." It can aid in scrubbing away some of the enslavements people may have to sense objects. But as written above, go slowly, not forcefully.

When the author asked Fr. Bede for advice in taking a ten day retreat, he suggested taking a book or something to do with the hands. What Fr. Bede would not give was the way to exist there outside of the understanding that in being there one is seeking renewal and reconnection with that Inner Cave. Take the "little willingness" and go. When Fr. Bede was asked when he himself used set times for physical, silent withdrawal, he simply responded, "Whenever I need it." Not a certain day, week, or month? No, just when he felt the need. Such was a surprising answer to one who had just traveled 10,000 miles to find "the way."

Urban Holmes has written of the Western craze to go camping, to get back to the "great outdoors," as expressive of a national desire in America to get back into some physical silence and simplicity. However, since the simplicity

of the wilderness may be too overpowering, there is the tendency to take along "city life." Elaborate campers, radios, televisions, even air conditioning, are all lugged along so that the "soul scrub" is avoided.²² Yet many still find renewal and reconnection in ways they cannot explain. The power and place of physical silence may be measured by a consideration of how much silence pervades the universe as well as this small planet earth. Perhaps ninety-nine percent of the universe exists in absolute silence! This is hard to comprehend for those wrapped in electronics, the roar and drone of traffic, boats, airplanes. Even now, as the author sits in a small R.V. in the woods, away from the city, tractors and occasional airplanes can be heard. Yet our "natural habitat" has been and is in silence, and here one may be better able to understand that the Light is truly beyond words and expressions, even those of praise.

²²Urban Holmes III, Ministry and Imagination, (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), p. 131.

In a book recommended by the author's hermit companion, the author read how for the beginner solitude, physical solitude, is absolutely vital. James McCartney, in his book, Yoga - The Key to Life, suggests no more than fifteen minutes a day for the unaccustomed, busy Westerner. The physical silence is important, he points out, for one to learn concentration on the Atman or Spirit within. As one becomes more comfortable with such a habit, longer periods will naturally become more desirable and easier to undertake.²³ Yearly retreats, which could be a natural part of vacation time, could be experienced as a return to the more original idea of "holiday" as a "holy day."

Douglas Steere also suggests physical silence in order to embrace Inner Silence. He also suggests not more than fifteen minutes of devotional reading at one sitting lest one becomes just another "consumer" in another context. Steere believes that the West has great need for the India experience in order to break its slavery to time. In one of Steere's visits to India, he noticed almost immediately the absence of the Western obsession with time. To rephrase the words of Jesus in Mark 2:27 on the Sabbath: "Time was made for people not people for time."

The author himself had much difficulty at first with India's concept of and freedom in regard to time. Time schedules were truly guidelines not laws! Steere quoted the Hindu Swami, Vivekananda as a teacher for the West. Vivekananda died around the turn of the present century. ". . . as long as Western people are as overplanned as they insist on being, no authentic spiritual movement could ever come out of the West!"²⁴ And this was said ninety years ago!

²³James McCartney, Yoga - The Key to Life (Bombay, India: Jailo Publishing House, 1970), pp. 103-104.

²⁴Douglas Steere, Together in Solitude (New York: Crossroad, 1985), p. 35.

Thus a simple fifteen minute reflection on the great abyss of silence that one exists within could be helpful: the stars and planets, floating in billions of miles of silence; this earth, home to known humanity, floating along in a sea of silence, with mostly silent oceans, wildernesses, country-sides, mountains, and hills! One could reflect on his or her own birth, gestating in nine months of silent preparation; the silent growth, of organs existing in silence, beating, digesting, oxygenating, sensing. One could consider the world that Jesus existed within some two thousand years ago; the quiet countrysides, travel by walking, with radios, buses, trains unknown, and unheard. "To be alone with the Alone in silence and solitude is a virtual necessity for out physical, mental, and spiritual wholeness."²⁵

Jesus himself was born in the quiet cave for there was no room in the busy, noisy inn. Before he began his public ministry, he lived thirty years in quiet, obscure Nazareth. And then he existed forty more days in the silent desert as he was tested and cleansed of unnecessary thoughts, words, and desires.

Thus, go to silence. Seek to shut off the electronics leaving behind the busy, noisy neighborhood and finding the quiet place that Jesus so often found and went to. One need not worry about how often at this point or where or when but to just go and wait to be directed!

²⁵George A. Maloney, The Silence of Surrendering Love (New York: Alba House, 1986), p. 21.

A SPIRITUAL GUIDE OR DIRECTOR

Before proceeding further, a consideration is given of a teaching and discipline that may have nearly been lost in much of the mainline churches of the West, especially in the Protestant tradition. The concept is perhaps inherent in what has already been written, that of a spiritual guide, director or friend. The suggestion, then, is to seek someone who can be trusted, whose own life appears to be fairly stable, and with whom one could share his or her desire to grow deeper into the communion of Oneself. Many of the writings left by the "masters" suggest, if not insist, on a director at least for the beginner. One of the most helpful books for the author on this subject was Soul Friend, written by Kenneth Leech. Leech believes that such direction and encouragement are the primary task of the pastor or priest. Summarizing Martin Thornton, Leech believes this ideal for the pastor should be such that he or she is recognized as skillful in the practical aspects of prayer, and as one who can apply it to the needs of the people he or she leads. Thornton further believes that the vocation of pastor is for one essentially involved in acquiring expertise in the life of prayer and what he calls, "ascetic theology." Quoting Thornton directly, Leech offers this: "It is because a priest has time for prayer, study and reflection, that his guidance of those in the world's hurly burly is likely to be worth having."²⁶

²⁶Kenneth Leech, Soul Friend (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), p. 35.

Thornton, as Anglican Priest, was writing in the 1950's in reaction to the strong emphasis then emerging that the primary role of the pastor was to be counselor and leader in social activism. Spiritual direction was what he saw to be the clergy's chief role.

A spiritual director, in Leech's conclusion, is also one in concept and practice similar to that of the Hindu Guru. In the Hindu tradition "guru" is synonymous with "teacher" and primarily is seen as one who teaches by example. He or she is not a master in the sense of being final authority but as light from which others can ignite their own candles.²⁷

Leech traces the history of spiritual direction following it from Jewish history, the Desert Fathers, the Eastern Church, the Roman Catholic tradition on to the modern day renewal of interest and practice. He sees the Jesuits, of which William Johnston would be an example, as providing leadership in the renewal, especial since 1945. The recent trend has been to see the director on a more egalitarian level. The director is to provide assistance in clarification, operating in an adult to adult relationship rather than parent to child.²⁸ Much of the importance for spiritual direction was lost in Protestantism, Leech points out, due to its strong emphasis on individualism, of "going it alone," typified in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. The Quakers, of which Douglas Steere and Thomas Kelly are Twentieth Century models, stress the mutuality of sharing the Inner Light supported by other Friends. Spiritual direction in Methodism may have been buried in Wesley's stress on "full deliverance" in a true

²⁷Leech, p. 39.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 37, 38.

conversion experience. Such an intervention by Divine power would thus delete the need for further personal guides.²⁹

²⁹Ibid., p. 88.

Leech also gives his marks of a qualified spiritual director. He is in agreement with much of the Eastern teachings but without the Eastern emphasis upon silence, the minimal use of words, the poverty of outward possessions, and the inequality of guide and inquirer. A reflection on these marks may well be helpful to present day pastors and those in search for such a guide. Here, Leech's marks are merely listed:

1. One possessed by the Spirit.
2. One of experience, having struggled with the realities of prayer and living.
3. One who constantly is learning and growing in spiritual maturity. He or she ought to be steeped in Holy Scriptures and the "Desert Fathers."
4. One of discernment, who can read the signs of the time.
5. One who gives way to the Holy Spirit, the end always being God, not the director. The director is always seen as the means to the end.³⁰

An excellent description of the modern guru/teacher in the Christian context was written by a woman from India called Vandana. Vandana was one of the re-organizers of the Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Puna, India. She had gone to the Himalayan Mountains for silent retreat when this author was at the ashram, but he was given her book to study, Gurus Ashrams, and Christians. She includes a whole section on "the Guru" which is helpful to those desirous of offering spiritual direction and guidance. Such leaders are properly disciplined themselves and are potent forces for change in individual and corporate lives. She quotes a Vishal Mangalwade as to the impact of gurus upon the nation India:

³⁰Ibid., p. 88.

The philosophical, religious, and cultural impact of the gurus, which has already become a worldwide force to be reckoned with, is shaping the civilization of tomorrow's India.³¹

Although Mahatma Gandhi did not proclaim himself a guru, he certainly adopted a lifestyle with many similarities. His impact is still prevalent throughout India.

Guru as teacher is also inherent in the idea of ordained minister as an elder in the Presbyterian Church. He or she is to be a "teaching elder" in contrast to a "ruling elder." Ideally the ruling elders oversee the administrative matters of the congregation while the pastor teaches, especially matters pertaining to spirituality. However, one senses that much of the pastor's time is spent in other than teaching "matters of the soul." Pastors in the West are likely to be surrounded by electronics and a variety of gadgetry as they seek to pilot the modern corporate church "business," whose bottom line so often is, "How is it going financially?"

³¹Vandana, Gurus, Ashrams, and Christians (Madras, India: The Christian Literature Society, 1978), p. 24.

Vandana believes that Seminaries today are not preparing students for spiritual direction and teaching. Seminaries, she believes, are filling students primarily with concepts and theological knowledge bereft of experiential "heart and soul" knowledge. Ordinations follow examinations on academic achievement and pastoral administrative abilities not on prayer, silence, or on what the student has experienced in silence. Seminaries are pressure-packed laboratories preparing for pressure-packed, stress-filled parishes. Vandana believes that the Eastern Orthodox Church has traditionally recognized the place of spiritual development and leadership much better than in the West. She and a few others would love to see the Christian Church in today's India begin such efforts at spiritual training.³²

Even the Wall Street Journal recently recognized the plight of unpreparedness of the average, mainline Seminarian in the United States. In a column on the front page in the summer of 1989 writer Dennis Farney wrote of the stress and frustration experienced by many such pastors with a special note on Presbyterians. Trained and geared for social improvement and constant busyness, pastors find parishes especially in rural, quiet areas nearly devastating. As Farney writes: "We are preparing Seminarians today for disaster!"³³

After a few weeks in ashrams in South India, the author stayed a weekend at the Bangalore Christian College, a school comparable to a Western Seminary. He was shocked at the noisy contrast to the ashram. It was like being back in the United States with exception of the obvious economic poverty. In an interview with a senior student, the author asked what major affect the training there had had on him.

³²Ibid., p. 37, 38.

³³Dennis Farney, "To the Stresses Faced By a Rural Clergyman, Add His Own Isolation," The Wall Street Journal, 14 July 1989, p. A1,4.

"Well, when I began, he started, "I saw myself as a person of prayer. But now, I see myself as an `ethicist!'"

Later at a graduation party, a group of students shared a humorous song they composed in which they described themselves as the "new ethicists" about to descend upon India's societal problems. One older student told the author, "It really shouldn't be a time of celebration but of sadness, for in a few days, we will leave our fantasies for the real world." In the view of Vandana and the writer of the Wall Street Journal article, and from the experience of many, the student may have been fairly accurate.

Douglas Steere wrote a few years ago that the nearly total absence of a concern for spiritual direction in Protestant Seminaries is a "sign of the progressive inward poverishment of the Protestant tradition of our time, and points up how desperately we need help. . . ." ³⁴ Fortunately, this trend appears to be beginning to reverse itself with present leadership being offered in such schools as San Francisco Theological Seminary.

Vandana does give her own suggestions for basic qualities that a spiritual director or teacher should possess, qualities that she believes every authentic spiritual leader ought to seek and cultivate. One of the foremost is the quality of joyousness and compassion. If the teacher is usually sad, worried, and angry, he or she ought to be suspect. The teacher ought to radiate peace and acceptance to those in his or her audience. One ought to feel comfortable and accepted by him or her.

The guide should also be one who only claims to be a voice, not the voice. He or she is always pointing to the greater One. Thus he will not condemn other guides as being separated from God's oneness. At one ashram the author asked

³⁴Steere, p. 13.

the guru for his opinion on other ashrams and prayer centers. The guru would not make judgments saying that only God could judge and that he, the guru, was in no position to judge the effects of growth. He like others was only a voice pointing to the Voice.

The good teacher is also not wealthy in material possessions, Vandana claims, nor is she interested in amassing wealth and fortune. Further, she will not charge for her teachings. In this sense, the teacher illustrates his or her own non-attachment to anything but God, Spirit. This does not mean that the teacher cannot marry, own property, or own possessions. He just does not amass or crave such. This speaks to the tremendous pressure that modern Western pastors often feel in the midst of middle class material wealth. Many often feel disappointment and anger that after seven or eight years of schooling, they do not receive salaries and benefits comparable to lawyers and medical doctors. Such continual feelings would lead Vandana to question the understanding or validity of the teacher's call.³⁵

At Anjali Ashram in Mysore, India, the Roman Catholic guru, Dr. Amalorpavadass, told the author that one of the Christian church's problems in India is its credibility due to wealth. Entering a church vocation is seen by many there to be an escape from poverty. The most materialistic people in India, he claimed, himself a priest, were the priests of the Christian Church.

The guru/teacher will also require those asking for help to follow a discipline of prayer and meditation. Vandana says that this is in contrast to the current popular idea of spiritual director or friend. This is likely the present state of the Western church. Little would be required except a desire to share and support.

³⁵Vandana, p. 19.

This is more as Douglas Steere describes the Quaker ideal. People gather as Friends to "share the light" with others. However, the guru idea of the East is more as the patient coming to the doctor for treatment. The doctor gives a prescription to be followed. If not followed, the doctor may well drop her services.

To Vandana, the guru is the doctor who has recognizably achieved or been given peace and joy. She or he has outward evidence of wholeness. The author was told by his hermit friend that the age of fifty is the ideal in which to begin to offer guidance as a guru. Thus they have the authority to teach and "write out prescriptions" for spiritual blight.

Jesus himself could be interpreted in this light, teaching with an authority unlike other religious leaders in his simpleness, material poverty, and freedom from written laws. To the young man seeking wholeness and eternal life, Jesus said to "God, sell all you have, and come, follow me."³⁶ To his own twelve he simply called, saying, "Follow me."³⁷ He constantly gave instructions for them to follow until he finally left preparing them, as is said in the East, for the "guru within:" "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God."³⁸

Perhaps the most difficult quality for many to be a guide as Vandana teaches is that he or she must use few words, the teacher herself having spent several years in developing silence. It is the presence and spirit of the teacher which count not wordiness or vocabulary skills. Here again candidates encounter different ground rules in the normal Western preparation for ministry. Words,

³⁶Luke 18:18f.

³⁷Matthew 4:19, RSV.

³⁸John 14:16, TEV.

writings, and sermons become paramount. Sermons are a major part of even receiving a "call." One who spoke little would be quite suspect, certainly finding it difficult to secure a job-with-pay in most traditions. Yet it may simply be illustrative of how far such traditions have moved from the understanding of silence and of its place not only in theory but in practice.

In the summer of 1985, while studying the second summer in San Francisco, the author had the opportunity to interview a Korean pastor who had come for study. The Korean pastor was finding the transition quite difficult. As differences were being discussed, he said that when he was thinking of a possible call to the ministry, his pastor sent him away to a mountain where he was to stay six months. During this time, he would be either confirmed or redirected in his interest in ministry. His experience was certainly given a much greater appreciation of silence than in the author's. The good guru/teacher, Vandana teaches, is a person of few words because she also knows the place of silence and its great power of revelation and communion.

One can but wonder what change in authority pastors would be given had they been directed into silence as part of their training in "spiritual formation." It seems almost insane at first, yet from Moses to Jesus to Paul, long periods of silence and communion were natural paths in their formulation and preparation for leadership.

In this context, Vandana points out that the authentic guru/teacher is an expert in using the "intellect as a handmaid to intuition."³⁹ God being the Great Unknown comes to persons first in the intuitive, non-reasoning, non-rational mode. Thus quiet listening and non-rational techniques which encourage one's intuitive mind are encouraged and practiced. Rationality and logical thinking

³⁹Vandana, p. 26.

become its servant not its master. This again is in clear contrast to most Western seminarian training. Seminary in the majority of experiences was a "left-brained" exercise where candidates could be prepared and honored for their hard, left-brained thinking. Such intuitive exercises as dance, free-painting, quiet solitude, moon and star-gazing were not encouraged.

Yet, as Urban Holmes has written, this is essential for the one called to be a spiritual leader, "spiritual" itself being such a non-rational word. The "good priest is an earthly mystic," he wrote, and schools must work to move away from the emphasis upon the "professional image" of the pastor to the image of the "spiritual director." Holmes envisioned the parish priest as kind of a "wagon master," organizing spiritual pilgrimages for his people. As such, the priest must develop this most important "imagination" as a major vehicle for ministry.⁴⁰

Such guru/teachers are rare today, in Vandana's mind, because the emphasis is on the attachment to the seen or the normal "professional image." But re-training and revised training are not only possible, but happening. As more of the Eastern spirituality is being shared with the West, more of this conversion is taking place.

Another problem in regard to guides and directors will be the ability of the guide to let go. The teacher/guide quickly discovers that having students or disciples is a "trip" for his or her own ego. He or she may then not want to let go. De Mello told of the original Buddha, surrounded by his worried disciples as he neared death, who were wondering where they would now go for instruction. "Go now," the Buddha said, "to the Guru within."⁴¹

⁴⁰Holmes, pp. 237-244.

⁴¹Conference with De Mello.

Much of the training received by ministers today, in the author's opinion, is training for intellectual and emotional dependence. Pastors leave seminary surrounded by books, obsessed with buying the latest new one or idea. So if found working in some small rural church, which most are, many will become bored and experience separateness from God and colleagues. What better place to continue the journey of going within. The better place to have begun would have been during seminary training.

And finally, it is taught by Vandana that the spiritual teacher or guide can never be simply appointed but must be discovered. In India there is the saying that "when the disciple is ready, the guru will appear." This is in contrast to assigning someone arbitrarily to a director. It is also a way of saying again that there must be a certain level of eagerness and desire to grow on the part of the inquirer.

Once, the story goes, an inquirer went to the guru seeking enlightenment. After a few hours of silence, the guru took him to the river where he held the inquirer's head under water until he could take no more! The guru released him and asked, "Now, how do you feel?"

And the inquirer answered, "I must get some air, I must get air or I'll die!"

"Well," the guru replied, "when you want light and peace as much as you want air, then you are ready for the guru!"⁴²

⁴²Vivekananda, Bhakti or Devotion? (Hollywood, California: Vedanta Audio Tapes, 1988).

It may be that guides or directors will therefore appear at different stages of growth and readiness. The author was certainly blessed on his pilgrimage in India. Many wonderful people were met who had the right thing to offer at the right time. Perhaps the most memorable was the "Buddhist hermit" whom he found "waiting" for him the very first day. During his three week companionship, he became an important part of the author's encounter with India. However, at the end of the three weeks, the author knew it was time to separate. The most obvious, conclusive sign was when the "hermit" became ill and could no longer travel.

Caution, then is suggested. Directors, gurus, teachers, have a tendency to hang on and to create dependency. As the "hermit" would say to the author, "India is full of `gurus' who need disciples!" A good one will be able to release and allow to grow at one's own level or place of pilgrimage.

Books

Having written about guides, there are still many other places to find guidance which will help one grow in communion with the Inner Light. Witnessed to by this study, books can have invaluable resources from the ancient, holy scriptures to the latest publications. There are many good ones available of which a small sample is offered in the Bibliography. Steere's advice is again worthy of mentioning here, that of not trying to read too much. Take a little at a time, reflect and let it sink in.

Thus caution is advised against the attachment to books, a great temptation for many Westerners who become "book addicts." Spirituality is of the Spirit; the letter, as Jesus warned, can stifle and kill. Seek to "let books find you." Using the concept "when the disciple is ready the guru will appear," the author has all the books needed at his present stage of journey and desire for light. Seek not to project larger than life qualities upon authors. Seek to feel and experience the Unknowable One, and be not the fool who only sees the finger while it is actually pointing to the moon. Keep in mind Teresa of Avila's words, "I pity those who begin solely with books!"⁴³

⁴³Kavanaugh and Rodrigues, Works of St. Teresa, p. 93.

Retreat Houses

Another resource for help in technique and guidance is retreat houses. In recent years, Roman Catholic leadership has opened its resources to laypeople, including non-Catholics, with open arms. Even monasteries are open to inquirers seeking a more intense period of search and prayer. In most cases these offer guides and directors for the retreatant. The author has found many of these invaluable in his journey toward spiritual understanding. Many Protestants might be frightened of such "unfamiliar places." Yet God is One and there is no Presbyterian, Hindu, or Roman Catholic God or spirituality. Retreat houses can be merely used as part of the journey to Oneness. While the author was visiting the St. Joseph Abbey in Massachusetts receiving help from Fr. Basil Pennington in his plans for India, a group of parish clergy were there on retreat at the Trappist monastery.

In 1943, Douglas Steere published a book on spiritual growth called On Beginning Within. In it he suggested revision and updating of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola for this time. (Steere is a Quaker.) "Anyone concerned for religious practice should come to know them intimately," he wrote.⁴⁴ The "Exercises" were written in the Sixteenth Century after Ignatius was seriously wounded as a soldier. During the forced time of leisure, he went to a cave in Manresa, Spain, and wrote the lessons. Although they have been revised, and the author has used them on retreat, they are heavy in the teaching of sin and guilt and the role of the retreatant as one who "nailed Jesus to the tree." As the Course points out, such understanding can deepen one's guilt in "standing before the

⁴⁴Douglas Steere, On Beginning Within (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 102.

angry, wrathful God." (author's quotation.) Yet the exercises certainly would be recommended. The author simply suggests certain cautions in such use. William Johnston, himself a Jesuit priest of the order founded by Ignatius wrote that the Exercises were actually written for the beginner. Their thirty day, step by step, hour by hour directions, were intended to help the beginner break out of the old, destructive patterns of living and attachment. They never were intended to be life-long in their use.⁴⁵

Thus a thirty day retreat done in directed silence could make a tremendous impact upon most inquirers for a deeper experience of the Divine Center. Pastors could use part of vacation or study time for such an exercise. It also could be incorporated as part of Seminary training where students could have such experiences built into their curriculum. Such experiences could help lead students away from the deep "impoverishment" that Steere sensed to be in Protestant Seminaries. It could also help correct the obsession in so many current seminary programs with cognitive learning minus experiential development.

⁴⁵William Johnston, The Still Point (New York: Fordham University Press, 1970), p. 22.

A Presbyterian Monastery?

Douglas Steere's own ideal of a religious retreat would be similar to the current Iona Community in Scotland.⁴⁶ The author briefly visited this island enroute to India in 1987. Begun in the Sixth Century by Columba, an Irish priest, the community was destroyed about four hundred years later by a band of Scandinavian Nordics. Resettled in the Thirteenth Century by the Benedictines, they abandoned the island around 1500 due to lack of interest. In 1936, the Rev. George McCloud, a Church of Scotland pastor from Glasgow, moved to the island with a band of unemployed craftsmen and a grant from the government. They were to rebuild the ruins left by the Benedictines. The government's only stipulation was that the site, as rebuilt, be opened to all faiths as a center for study and renewal.

It is an impressive site today, the journey to get there being a pilgrimage in itself. Journeying through the hills of Scotland to the sea town of Oban, one must then board a ferry boat to the island of Mull. Upon reaching Mull, one travels the length of the island in a bus winding down a one lane road. At the end of the island, one then boards another smaller ferry to the tiny isle of Iona. The morning the author arrived, it was windy, cold, and foggy, a true mystical appearance! The first view of the old, restored buildings was breath-taking. Although the season had not officially opened in early March, the small group inhabiting the site graciously welcomed the author. Before he left, a larger group of cleaning volunteers arrived from other European countries and welcomed the brief assistance of the author.

⁴⁶Steere, On Beginning Within, p. 102.

The actual number who join the community is small, but various study and work opportunities are offered throughout the summer months. Although the author felt that the program did not offer much in the area of "spiritual formation," many of the ingredients are there as Steere observed several years ago. There is devotional reading, private and corporate worship, manual work, and spiritual direction. Further development still seems to be a need. Presently there appears to be a strong emphasis on social activism and ethical responsibility, which is commendable if the work is done out of a response to peace, love, and forgiveness and not out of anger or guilt. It was interesting that on the last night of the author's stay, he was asked to lead a discussion on silence and meditation. Neither of the resident directors attended. Later a member wrote the author saying that she had missed the inner dimension of spirituality and direction at Iona except for the unplanned talk and discussion the author offered.

Kenneth Leech gives more light on the present potential of the Iona setting by pointing out its roots in the "soul-friend-guide" idea. Columba, being an Irish priest, was of the tradition of Ireland that first used the word amchara, or "soul-friend." Until the Roman Catholic Council of Lyons in 1274, a soul-friend could be both lay women and men. Such a concept, Leech believes, grew out of centers such as Iona and the Celtic tradition. The Celts had greatly stressed the mutuality of the priest and the "penitent."⁴⁷

⁴⁷Leech, p. 50

Daily Disciplines

A basic and simple technique to commune with one's Center is to simply set certain times aside when one can stop and reflect. This may seem very obvious, but many, if not most, tend to ignore this in a busy, fast-moving culture. Buddhism teaches that the primary way to attain peace and enlightenment is to sit. Designate times and sit. "How (does one) discover this Real Self? The answer is simple: sit!"⁴⁸ "Be still and know that I am God." So appoint a time and place to sit and listen becoming quiet. While sitting, one could ask that the Inner Self, one's True Center, be revealed and experienced.

Such times to pray are not unknown in Protestant traditions. John Calvin taught that each one must individually set apart certain times to pray. Such times are separate from the corporate gatherings of the larger church. Calvin suggested five basic times to specifically pray each day:

1. Upon awakening in the morning
2. Before each meal
3. After each meal
4. Before daily work is begun
5. Before retirement at day's end⁴⁹

⁴⁸Johnston, p. 56.

⁴⁹John T. McNeill, Ed., Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 917-918.

It is interesting to the author that the ancient daily prayer offices ("office" here meaning "duty") of the Roman Catholic Church were originally intended for laypeople and those in what was and still is called a "third order." A "third order" is a community of laypeople committed to a discipline of prayer and service much in common with the Iona Community. However, the daily prayer office book has been primarily thought of as a tool for priests, nuns, and those in monasteries.

Although such a book or breviary can be quite difficult for laypeople, if not many in religious vocations, it is structured around certain times in which the participant stops to pray and express devotion in seeking guidance from God. The author first became aware of such a book while reading Thomas Merton's Seven Storey Mountain five years ago. This author later bought the post Vatican II revised version and used it for over four years before modifying his discipline to be less structured and wordy. Such a book, however, could be helpful to one looking for certain prayers and psalms with readings to be offered seven times daily. Besides the wordiness of the prayer book, the author's chief reason for modifying his use was its strong theological theme of "fall/redemption" thinking (to use Matthew Fox's terminology). Yet the rhythm of stopping to pray and meditate was rediscovered as a discipline by the author using the breviary and became an invaluable aid for him in a tradition without many such guides.

Set times are fairly common in the Scripture tradition. The Psalmist wrote: "Seven times a day I praise you for your just ordinances."⁵⁰ Jesus is seen constantly going away to quiet places to pray. In the early church apostles carried on the Jewish tradition of stopping to pray at certain hours. It was during the midday prayer near Joppa in Acts 10 that Peter received the vision which led

⁵⁰Psalm 119:164, NAB.

to the inclusion of Cornelius. Part of the pilgrimages and special feast days of Jewish traditions was to set times apart to be more intensely renewed in communion with God.

In India there is the ancient tradition of the Gandhian Maun, the custom of setting aside time each week to be in complete silence, prayer, and reflection.⁵¹ It tends to correspond to the Christian tradition of Sabbath Rest, except that in the West Sabbath seems to be jammed with so many words and exciting, noisy, competing activities.

The question may still be asked, though, "Well, what do I do in this set apart time? Where do I start to become silent, to listen? How do I learn to sit?" One of the major and simple techniques is to seek what Fr. De Mello taught as the "coming into oneself." One seeks to stop the mind from wandering like the usual "unharnessed horse" it is by reconnecting the mind with the body. The body, as an extension of the mind and ultimately the Spirit, can be used to help quiet one, bringing him or her "back home." One of the simplest techniques to do so is by controlling one's breath. Sit and breathe slowly. Notice the sense of relaxation and peace that begins to emerge.

When the great Buddha was pressed, as the story goes, to instruct his disciples in techniques of prayer, he refused to give any. "Spirituality is not to be seen as technique, but as understanding." But finally, after much pressure, he replied, "Okay, I give you one prayer technique: when you breathe in, be aware of it. And when you breathe out, be aware of it!"⁵²

⁵¹Kathleen Healy, Entering the Cave of the Heart (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 16.

⁵²Conference with Anthony de Mello.

Hatha Yoga

In the East, Hatha Yoga and Tai Chi body movements and positions are understood as simple, helpful ways to attain silence and to come back into "oneself." The Indians laugh, though, and shake their heads at the desecration of Hatha Yoga in the West. They call it a part of the Western "body worship cult." They call it America's fruitless attempt to have a "godless mysticism." Yet properly understood, such body concentration can serve to bring one back into the present and thus back into the Self.

Books and classes abound on Hatha Yoga. The important thing is to go slowly, concentrating on each movement, especially the breathing. Feel the muscles stretch; listen to and feel the movement of air in and out of the lungs and nostrils; notice the heart beating. Such concentration for twenty minutes or so can be helpful in bringing one back to Silence and Stillness. Several ashrams in India offer Hatha Yoga instruction. It was not the central focus in the ones the author visited but was offered as part of the style and way to attain silence. Other such body awareness exercises are also helpful and were suggested. A walk in quietness can be quite effective. Gandhi was known for his morning silent walks. Many Westerners also attest to the strength derived from easy walking.

When the author's hermit companion learned of the author's interest and experience in bicycling, he suggested that it be used as a way to reconnect and become centered. One merely needs to be cautioned, especially here in the West, of the ego's obsession with competition and the use of the body as a "machine," which merely then separates one further from the Source. As several sport and athletic events attest weekly, the body can easily be turned into a "separate

machine" which is pushed and abused in order to experience a brief moment of ego satisfaction and illusion of victory.

Temperament and Silence

Knowing one's own psychological temperament can also be helpful in selecting techniques to aid one's desire to experience his or her Center. Fr. Bede Griffiths explains that the aim of meditation and thus of living is to find and listen to one's intuitive temperament mode, one's intuitive resources. Reason, he points out, always must end in conclusion of its own limitations and thus lead one back into the intuitive mode. He writes:

Intuition is a knowledge which derives not from observation and experiment or from concepts and reason but from the mind's reflection on itself. What distinguishes the human mind above everything else is . . . its power of self-reflection.⁵³

Intuition, then is a kind of "passive intellect," exercised as one seeks to listen to the Voice.

⁵³Bede Griffiths, The Marriage of East and West (Springfield, Illinois: Templegate Publishers, 1982), p. 153.

It is to this intuitive center that one is aiming in whatever techniques or formulas used. It is with this understanding that Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey did their work in the publication of Prayer and Temperament. Silence has already been discussed as being this intuitive place. Michael and Norrisey simply suggest ways to get there using one's natural personality traits. These observations are not new. Hippocrates wrote of them twenty-five hundred years ago; of the Sanguine temperament, the Choleric, the Phlegmatic, and the Melancholic.⁵⁴ In this century, with the arrival of psychological studies, C. G. Jung popularized the understanding of such temperament types with his categories of Extrovert/Introvert, Sensory/Intuitive, Thinking/Feeling, and Judging/Perceiving. Thus people can be categorized as being in one of the four major temperament types corresponding to their natural gifts. By taking one of the popular temperament evaluation inventories, one can quickly discover his or her basic temperament. Michael and Norrisey also show from such an inventory one's dominant, auxiliary, tertiary, and inferior modes. They point out from a series of experiments in prayer/retreat settings which particular style or pattern would be recommended as the most favorable for the retreatant to use to experience the intuitive mode or the place of "self-reflection," the "Cave of the Heart."

⁵⁴Chester P. Michael and Marie C. Norrisey, Prayer and Temperament (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Open Door Inc., 1984), p. 11.

For purposes of this study, the four major types are summarized along with suggestions which a particular temperament might adapt for his or her own practice of meditation and prayer. For example, the Intuitive/Thinking type which make up about twelve percent of the United States population, naturally ask questions and thus tend to question their way toward Reality. They are usually highly intelligent and because of their gift of questioning, make up a large share of the research and scientific community. Their intuitions or hunches and dreams are always being "chased" by their thinking and questioning gifts. Because intuition and dream are qualities such as Divine Spirit and thus endless and Unknowable, NT's (Intuitive/Thinkers) tend to be workaholics. They become like wet hands chasing after slippery soap, never able to quite grasp it, but always trying. Although NT's offer valuable contributions and discoveries, they have a tendency to never quite come to a conclusion. Their danger is to "stay in the head," tempted to make a mental game out of each experience thus missing the experience. It is difficult for them to just be and to let go of "mental gymnastics." Michael and Norrisey state this has been the dominant thinking of the West since Rene' Descartes of the Seventeenth Century, the so-called "Father of modern rationalism." Such thinking took over, they point out, Jesuit and Protestant thinking. Experience became greatly de-emphasized in place of rational questioning.

One can observe the NT influence in modern day Presbyterianism with which the author is associated, where words and ideas dominate. Usually very little emphasis is placed upon silence or experience in "just being." Life must be analyzed and thought out. Presbyterianism, with its emphasis on rationalism and on being "decent and in order," with its denigration of mysticism, may well be classified as an NT denomination.

Intuitive/thinkers, however, can most naturally find themselves in the silence of the intuitive mode by use of their questioning. By trying to analyze and classify God the NT finally realizes the futility of such an attempt. He learns to become quiet and still by logical analysis so that God is finally seen as being beyond all thinking. Such was the conclusion of Thomas Aquinas, who is offered as a model for NT thinkers. Aquinas, one may recall, wrote the great rational arguments in an attempt to "prove" the existence of God.

In a book related to Michael and Norrisey's, From Image to Likeness by Grant, Thompson, and Clarke, the rich contribution of NT personalities is noted. They point out how such thinkers represent the basic call to bring order out of chaos and how discipline and order are important aspects of a life seeking growth in communion with the Inner Light. As God created order from chaos so can humanity's thinking mode do so in the midst of world confusion.⁵⁵

For those who are dominated by this personality it is suggested that they spend time in silence asking questions. They could take a passage of Scripture, and let their inquisitive mind work. Through such exercises, they may move more quickly toward the point of thankfulness and thus communion with their intuitive mode. Or they could simply sit and ask, "Why am I here? Who am I? What is my purpose?" Such question were the chief instruction given by the late Sri Ramana at his Mount Aranachula ashram in South India. He felt that if one questioned deeply such ultimate questions of existence, he or she could not help but be brought to the Inner Self. The NT temperament is more natural at this exercise and would thus be encouraged to use it freely.

One of the major types of temperament in Western society is that of the Sensory/Judging type. This type likes order and repetition. They are drawn

⁵⁵Harold Grant, Magdala Thompson, and Thomas I. Clarke, From Image to Likeness (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 89.

to things, sense objects that they can adore and place into ordered places. They like neatness. They are the practicalists of society who tend to help maintain order. Whereas the NT questions the order and helps create a new one, the SJ accepts and preserves it. In their prayers repetition is important. SJ types make up a very large percentage of those who work loyally within one denomination or structure. As such they are great preservers who are skilled at holding the organization together. They ought to be appreciated people by worried pastors or those concerned with keeping a group together.

When it comes to prayer and meditation and reaching the intuitive mode, the SJ temperament may respond best to repetitive forms; the saying of the Lord's Prayer, the repeating of a favorite Psalm, or the using of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. In these exercises one is led into a ordered recollection of the life of Jesus by focusing on a passage, seeking to be there amid all the sensual noises, sights, and smells of the setting. It can help give one the security of having been there with the familiar stories remembered from earlier years. It is thus using the traditions in a recollecting but sensual manner.

For a few years, as noted above, the author used the Prayer Offices as a structure for his desire to move more deeply into the Spirit. The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., recently published its own version of the Daily Office of prayer. Like the Roman Catholic version, it offers suggested forms with Psalms, readings, prayers, and responses. Whereas all the readings, Psalms, and prayers are contained in the Roman Catholic version, one would need to carry at least a hymnbook and Bible with the Presbyterian version. Such prayer books can be very helpful, though, for the SJ types who desire order, routine, and long-held traditions.

SJ's also may respond to repetition of phrases or words. Rosary or prayer beads can help in bringing mind and hand together as a prayer phrase or simple word is repeated with each bead. In Hinduism, such a technique is called

"Japam," as when a "mantram" or "mantra" is repeated over and over as a way to quiet, focus, and thus clear the mind. When the mind is quiet, the silence of the intuitive mode can be more readily experienced.

SJ's may also respond to reflection on "sense objects." Simplicity is important so preferably one is selected and concentrated upon to help bring stillness. A stone, a candle, a lake, a seed, a cross, or any object can be used for concentration. Although such techniques are helpful for all temperaments, the Sensory/Judging types may find them more helpful.

The other large group in Western society is the Sensory/Perceiving type. These comprise about the same percentage as Sensory/Judging types and respond well to sense objects but are not drawn toward neatness or routine. They are likely to be quite open-ended, always ready for a new experience and idea. These are often "pack-rats," collecting, storing and creating with their hands out of what they have gathered. As a temperament leader, St. Francis of Assisi is suggested. These people can pray anyway, anywhere, anytime, as long as it is not the same routine. Their favorite form of prayer is through helping another in giving tangible service, or as in Hinduism, practicing Karma Yoga. So they pray through fixing a meal, repairing a roof or by doing something for someone else. In this way their "ego" or false self is forgotten, a sense of oneness with others is nurtured, and they will more likely come to quietness and stillness. Their tendency may be to never settle down, however, at least long enough to experience quietness because they are always being drawn toward celebrating a new way. Because of the nature of the church structure in most places, very few of these are found in the traditional places of worship.

Last there is a smaller group in this country about the size of the Intuitive/Thinking group, who are called the Intuitive/Feelers. These temperaments find mystical union with God the most accessible because like intuition

and feeling, God is Spirit and intangible. These people need the least convincing that Spirit is real, and they come the most readily to retreats, vigils, and the like. They make up the largest percentage of religious professionals. They most easily see God in everything for everything tends to be seen as symbolic of this Unknown, Inexpressible God. A leaf, the wind, some water, a tree, can more readily become pointers to the Presence for these types. These temperaments are the easiest to satisfy and make happy. They tend to make others at peace with their usual optimism and good natures. They dominate the country of India. However, because of their innate gifts of intuition and feeling, they may feel somewhat awkward in an overwhelming, sensory, materialistic culture. Their appreciation of silence and joy may tend to make them look somewhat "flaky" and unstable in an ordered, materialist, practical society. They may need the most time in silence and devotion to nurture their intuitive/feeling dispositions. They seem to be able to function best with an hour each day spent in listening and in quiet. They can use a variety of techniques, but it is more helpful to them if they take this time to become quiet.

Such self understanding can therefore be helpful in approaching communion with the Center, but it must be constantly remembered that prayer is never just a technique but an understanding that God is within, and as such God is beyond all words, ideas, and methodologies. The most important point is to be aware of the tension, guilt, and pain that one may be experiencing. If these are present and peace is thus absent, one simply need but remember that he or she has chosen wrongly again. God is peace, love, joy. To live in God is to live in these attributes. This becomes one's "self-realization." The difficult part is the acceptance that the conflict and anger are the result of faulty belief systems. But if these systems are seen as faulty, then peace and confidence will soon return. As the Course summarizes:

I must have decided wrongly, because I am not at peace. I made the decision myself, but I can decide otherwise. I want to decide otherwise, because I want to be at peace. I do not feel guilty, because the Holy Spirit will undo all the consequences of my wrong decision if I will let Him. I choose to let Him, by allowing Him to decide for God for me.⁵⁶

In the West, it may appear somewhat odd to even think of technique or method to deepen one's spirituality and to seek union with the One. On the one hand people seem quite prone to "quick-fixes" and short-term easy answers; on the other, they are skeptical of methods that challenge their religious practices, especially those that seem to be of Eastern, non-Christian origin. For many in the Protestant tradition, including the author, movement of body in prayer can seem quite new and awkward. Many are accustomed to moving into a pew or seat and outside of standing, sitting, reading or saying words, little else is done except listen to more words and ideas. Further an understanding that aims to bring people into silence can seem even more foreign. Methods to aid are quite suspect. Most of the Christian mystical tradition is short on proscribed methods. What people tend to do is to become locked into ideas of explanation. The analysis is continually analyzed. Thus in seeking to understand the experiences, the experience itself is missed.

Kathleen Healy, of the Religious Order of the Sisters of Mercy, went on a two year journey of the East a few years ago to help her rediscover the roots

⁵⁶Schucman and Thetford, p. 83, Text.

of her own Christian faith. In her book, Entering the Cave of the Heart, she states that:

Hindu religious experience cannot teach the Christian the revelation given to us only by Jesus. But the Hindu can teach a way of interiority in prayer given to the East by God through cosmic revelation long ago as a gift to all women and men.⁵⁷

Healy further writes that Christ was long a part of God's people in India before Jesus of Nazareth arrived on earth. This is often a great stumbling block to Christians in thinking and thus for practice. But when one sees that Christ is eternal and present in all peoples, one can begin to move beyond words to the experience of oneness with everything and everybody. Thus Sister Healy can help seekers understand how to adapt some of the Eastern practices and understandings to the Western quest for Oneness with the Christ. Whereas in the West specialization is made in books and talks explaining the faith, including prayer, in the East the emphasis is on depicting the experience of inner communion with the Divine.

Healy's book is therefore a helpful one, giving a short summary of how Yoga is understood and practiced in the East. Yoga is the word for bringing people into One, ending the separation of minds and experience from Christ. The study of such practices can be invaluable for the aspirant in the search for Inner Silence. It is beyond the present scope of this study to further elaborate. Such elaboration would no doubt become tempting for some to simply adopt another technique, perhaps "from the East," and then soon sink back into the normal misery of separation from God.

⁵⁷Healy, p. 10

Therefore the chief point is to have the desire, that "little willingness" to want the experience of the True Self. If that be present, perhaps the best advice is to simply then learn to sit still and listen each day. "Sit, be still, and know that I am God." Whether it is the seven sittings of the day recommended by the Catholic breviary, the five of John Calvin, or the long "sit" for thirty days in an Ignatian Retreat, or even a personal "retreat" into the woods for a few days, the important point is to begin following the thirst and making the quest. One seeks to live each moment and to continually seek to see beyond the world of the seen into the world of the unseen, the deep eternal light of peace and of unspeakable joy. So there is no one way or technique. There can be no one sect or denomination. God is too infinite for such imprisonment. Simply seek to be, to do, and trust that the eyes may be opened to the overflowing, abundant life one already has!