



Free Listening Hearts Program Materials

A Primer on Spiritual Discernment: Topic 3

Centering Silence

Centering silence is fundamental to the contemplative life in every major spiritual tradition. It involves being anchored to the center of your being and at the same time fully open to the invisible Spirit of Love and Truth. It is an immersion in the Divine Presence.

To get started, schedule a regular time for intentional silence each day, or at least several days a week. If you are unaccustomed to such silence, perhaps begin with two minutes, then gradually increase the amount of time to ten minutes, then possibly work your way up to twenty minutes. During this period of stillness, try to ignore all thoughts and feelings. Do not fight them; simply pay them no heed. Let them come and let them go so that they sort of float by at the periphery. To help draw you back when you find yourself slipping into a thinking mode, choose a word to serve as your sacred word that you can silently utter to ease you back into stillness. A short word, no more than two syllables, is best. Examples of possible words are “peace,” “rest,” “come,” “love,” “God,” “Source,” “be.” Any time that you start to get distracted, let that word take you out of your head and back to your center.

No one way is the right way to go about this. Different things work for different people. And what works best for a one person at a given time may not be the same at another stage of his or her journey. If one thing is not working for you, try something else.

Some people find it most effective to sit upright in a firm chair; others prefer to sit in a lotus position on the ground or floor; some even stay centered best when soaking in a bathtub full of warm water. Others find it easier to be prayerful if moving: walking, gently running or swimming, or on a treadmill or exercise bike—some kind of activity that does not have distractions and does not require concentration in a way that riding a bike in traffic does. Still others can easily sit still, but have trouble centering down unless they can move something in their hands, for instance by holding a ball of clay in their hands.

If feasible, designate a spot as your special place for this time of centering. Quiet pleasant surroundings are most conducive to becoming still within. Let people who might intrude

know that you are reserving this space at whatever the time so that they do not interrupt you during this.

As you build centered silence into your life, you are cultivating a centeredness that eventually will stay with you through the activity of daily life and that you can readily access in the midst of turmoil. Regardless of the specifics of how you arrive at centered silence, you are merging with the Source of life and goodness, which slowly leads to peace, integration, and fullness of life.

*While practicing inner prayer
do not permit yourself
any concepts, images, or visions.*

– St. Nil Sorski, a Russian ascetic writer in the 15th century