

SAINT BENEDICT'S MONASTERY

November 11, 1987

Dear Charles,

To your question about the centering prayer that we teach, it is important to recognize this distinction. There are two ways of quieting the mind in meditation; one is to use a concentrative method such as Dom John Main proposes. This is to repeat the mantra uninterruptedly as a kind of forced feeding to squish out all other thoughts by constantly repeating a sacred word or mantra. This is a method used a lot in the Hindu spiritual practice and is called the japa. The other approach to quiet the mind is the receptive method that we propose in centering prayer. This is to take a completely receptive attitude towards one's thoughts, allowing them to come^{and} allowing them all to go by by not becoming emotionally involved in them, either by attraction, repulsion or by curiosity. These two methods are reconciled eventually by the concentrative one becoming receptive anyway. It is not a good idea to try to reconcile them beforehand, that is, before the concentrative one evolves into a receptive one. The two have distinctly different psychological effects in the beginning. Since one is still in control of one's prayer when using the concentrative method, the purification of the unconscious is delayed, or at least greatly reduced. In the receptive method, the unloading of the unconscious begins almost at once. Hence, it is important to know how to deal or react to what is coming from the unconscious.

The receptive method seems to be more in tune with the Ap^ost^olic tradition coming down to us from psuedo-Dionysius and which^{you} rightly recognized in the writings of Dom John Chapman. THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING is in this tradition along with St. Francis de Salles, St. Jane de Chantal, St. John of the Cross, de Caussade and many others.

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For someone who has prayed a great deal already, the receptive method is probably better suited. For those just beginning, this could be a matter of temperament, personal history or simply which method one learned first. It would be important to persevere in whatever method it was as long as it seemed to be having good results. If one has great difficulty in one method, one could certainly experiment with the other for a reasonable time, such as a month or two.

As regards the true self and God being the same thing, I meant that the true self is our participation in the Divine being. This is meant to emphasize the transcendent potential within us. ^{We are} to take possession or assimilate ^{the} union that is already present within us but hidden and covered over by layers of the false self system which prevent us from recognizing our true self and our actual union with the Ultimate Reality. The true self might be compared to the risen life of Christ within us. ^{When the life is} released, it means that the motivation of the false self system has died and the motivation of Divine love, the Spirit of Christ, has become the source of one's activity and attitudes.

I am happy to have this chance to be in contact with you. I remember when the Foundation in Vancouver began.

With all best wishes and in union of prayer,

Your friend in Christ,

Thomas Keating

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