

Listening Spirituality Forum (11-23-08)

Chapter 2: Active Meditative Personal Practices in Support of Listening for God (from Vol. I of Listening Spirituality by Patricia Loring)

A. Discursive Meditation

“Discursive meditation is active meditation...In western traditions, ‘meditation’ refers mostly to deepening, discursive reflections on passages from devotional reading, on images, words or ideas...This doesn’t mean to analyze or critique it. Rather, meditation on a text or word or image is allowing it to open within you and show you its deeper meaning” (p. 31)

B. Forms of Discursive Meditation

In this section P. Loring discusses “some other systematic ways of active meditation, other than simply following where you are led” in your devotional reading (p. 31).

1. Meditation on reading using repetition, memorization, comparison, simple reflection
“Some experienced meditators suggest stopping the reading when a word thought or phrase arrests you or ‘shimmers’ or seems to ‘speak to your condition’” (p. 32). It can also be helpful to read the passage aloud.
 - a) Repetition – Some people focus their attention and allow “the reading to open out into meditation...(by reading) the passage over and over until it is engraved in the mind, until each word or phrase is fully present and realized” (p. 32).
 - b) Memorization – A second practice is “memorizing a passage and carrying it in your heart, allowing it to rest in the corners of your consciousness, to open out in unexpected moments and situations between the times you are actively attending to it” (p. 32).
 - c) Comparison – Reading multiple translations of a passage can enhance “the sense of the nuances and possibilities” (p. 32).
 - d) Simple Reflection – Another strategy is to “just take some time after completing a reading, in quiet, meditation – or even ruminative – reflection about whatever surfaces from your life in relation to your readings’ (pp. 32-33)
2. Transposition
This practice involves asking “yourself how your passage applies to you here and now, in your present situation” (p. 33)
3. Projection
“In this exercise, you project yourself into the scene of the story as one of the participants, or as each of the participants in turn” (p. 33). Projection “works best with parables, stories or other narrative” (p. 33)
4. Examination of consciousness: *The Examen*
“It is easier to examine our consciousness in a structured way, called in the Roman Catholic tradition by the Latin name, *Examen* (p. 34). On pages 34-36, Loring offers two examples of this structured approach to “examining or querying your consciousness for the presence of God” (p. 34).
5. Examination of thoughts in the present moment
This form of (discursive) meditation involves “watching our thoughts in an effort to cultivate awareness of the Spirit in the present” (p. 36). This is a God-centered practice which “requires enormous dedication and long practice “(p. 37).

- C. 1. Journaling in support of daily meditation
“Journaling may be regarded both as a way of recording the fruits of your meditations and as a way of discursive meditation itself” (p. 38). Although Patricia references several methods for journaling (see p. 39), she recognizes that “it is not essential that the practice of journaling be done according to any method at all” (p. 38). It can arise from a variety of sources or starting points, such as “the disciplines of devotional reading and study,...the events of your day, your life, your meditation (the above *examen*, for example), your prayer, or events in the wider world” (p. 38).
“For some this writing will be...a useful tool in discerning the promptings and movements of the Spirit in your prayer and action...For other people, journaling is the meditation” (pp. 38-39).
2. Programs for journaling
Once you are launched, you will find your own way into journaling as it is most supportive of your spiritual life” (p. 38). If you are drawn to searching for specific suggestions or a plan, take “care that you use one that is compatible with the way you are moving toward God” since some books “have a particular psychological or spiritual perspective” (p. 39)
3. Modes of journaling
The first step in journaling is to “get a notebook...Get what will travel easily and well with you and has the ‘right’ feel to you...(It’s) important to find the medium and the mode which are natural and appropriate for the unique walk you are having with God” (p. 40).
4. Quaker journals
In contrast to journals which focus on one’s current life, the “Quaker journal...is an extended, retrospective undertaking by someone who has reached maturity. Basically it is an account of the presence and work of God through the vicissitudes of a lifetime’ (pp. 40-41). George Fox describes the content and purpose of his journal in terms of “the dealings of the Lord with me, and the various exercises, trials and troubles through which he led me in order to prepare and fit me for the work unto which he had appointed me” (quoted on p. 41). A useful reference is Howard Brinton’s Quaker Journals.
On page 42, Loring offers three questions that can be used to structure a retrospective journal and points out that “John Woolman’s Journal is regarded by many non-Quakers as well as many Friends as one of the most luminous examples of a journal ever written” (pp. 42-43).
5. A prayer journal
“Set aside a part of your journal to reflect on where you have been in relation to prayer and meditation over your lifetime, from childhood onward and how you have come to this point” (p. 43). This recommendation is followed by a “Journal exercise” which consists of a guide to answering four broad queries (see pp. 44-46).