

The Law of Three Thursday, May 16, 2019

*Cynthia Bourgeault, one of our core faculty members and an Episcopal priest, has helped Christianity rediscover the powerful model of the “Law of Three.” This was originally developed by the Armenian-born spiritual teacher G. I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949) who saw it comprising what he called the “Laws of World Creation and World Maintenance.” Based on Trinity as flow and movement, this “law” describes the ways in which different elements work to create change and ongoing evolution. Today I’ll share a brief introduction from Cynthia’s work, but I invite you to read her full book *The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three*.*

From a metaphysical standpoint, the Trinity is primarily about process. It encapsulates a paradigm of change and transformation based on an ancient metaphysical principle known as the Law of Three.

[The basic foundational principles are:]

- In every new arising there are three forces involved: **affirming, denying, and reconciling**.
- The interweaving of the three produces a fourth in a new dimension.
- Affirming, denying, and reconciling are not fixed points or permanent essence attributes, but can and do shift and must be discerned situationally.

Solutions to impasses or sticking points generally come by learning how to spot and mediate third force, which is present in every situation but generally hidden.

Let’s consider a simple example. A seed, as Jesus said, “unless it falls into the ground and dies, remains a single seed.” [John 12:24] If this seed does fall into the ground, it enters a sacred transformative process. Seed, the first or “affirming” force, meets ground, the second or “denying” force (and at that, it has to be moist ground, water being its most critical first component). But even in this encounter, nothing will happen until sunlight, the third or “reconciling” force, enters the equation. Then among the three they generate a sprout, which is the actualization of the possibility latent in the seed—and a whole new “field” of possibility.

Actually, the entire Paschal Mystery can be seen to play itself out as a fairly straightforward configuration of the Law of Three. If you assign affirming as Jesus, the human teacher of the path of love; denying as the crucifixion and the forces of hatred driving it; and reconciling as the principle of self-emptying, or kenotic love willingly engaged, then the fourth or new arising, which is inescapably revealed through this weaving, is the Kingdom of Heaven, visibly manifest in the very midst of all the human cruelty and brokenness.

Reference:

Cynthia Bourgeault, [The Holy Trinity and the Law of Three: Discovering the Radical Truth at the Heart of Christianity](https://cac.org/the-law-of-three-2019-05-16/) (Shambhala Publications, Inc.: 2013), 15, 16, 24-25, 74.
<https://cac.org/the-law-of-three-2019-05-16/>
3/2/2020

Ways of Knowing Sunday, February 9–Friday, February 14, 2020

God calls us to “not conform to the pattern of the world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds” through relationship with those who see differently than we do (see Romans 12:2).
([Sunday](#))

The vast majority of people throughout history have been poor, disabled, or oppressed in some way (i.e., “on the bottom”) and would have read history in terms of a need for change.
([Monday](#))

As a pastor I refuse to separate the reality of this world from the reality of the Bible by preaching a “cheap gospel” that neither challenges the present reality nor is challenged by it. —
Mitri Raheb ([Tuesday](#))

She takes my face gently in her hands and holds me in Her gaze as She tells me what She thinks I need to know, forming the words slowly so I can remember them and let them sink in. —
Steven Charleston ([Wednesday](#))

Black Theology is the story of black people’s struggle for liberation in an extreme situation of oppression. Consequently there is no sharp distinction between thought and practice, worship and theology, because black theological reflections about God occurred in the black struggle of freedom. —James Cone ([Thursday](#))

What a gift to be on earth during an era when the universe is making itself known to and through the human race. —Barbara Holmes ([Friday](#))

Practice: Meditation and Prayer

Contemplation is meeting as much reality as we can handle in its most simple and immediate form—without filters, judgments, or commentaries. The ego doesn’t trust this way of seeing, which is why it is so rare, “a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:14, New Jerusalem Bible). The only way we can contemplate is by recognizing and relativizing our own compulsive mental grids—our practiced ways of judging, critiquing, blocking, and computing everything.

Depth psychologist David G. Benner offers the following framing of Christian contemplative practices in a way that can help deepen our experience of them:

The Christian forms of meditation bring us to the question of the relationship between meditation and prayer. This is an important question because I think there are limits to what meditation can, in itself, accomplish that are overcome when meditation is placed within a context of prayer.

Although contemplative prayer and meditation may share many features, contemplative prayer is wordless openness to God. Hence it involves a relationship. It is this intentional openness to God while setting aside thoughts that makes contemplative prayer so deeply transformational.

Contemplative prayer always requires hospitality to your deep self, to the deep parts of your self. It demands the openness to receive whatever might arise in you and then gently release it into God's hands. But in prayer you are not alone as you open yourself to whatever might emerge. You do so in a relationship that provides a safety and support in holding whatever emerges. That which arises might come with a flood of emotional intensity. Sometimes, being still before self and God releases a torrent of emotions. Tears may be intermixed with joy. . . . But whatever emerges in silence and stillness before God emerges in the place within you in which you are held within God. It emerges, therefore, within the context of prayer, whether or not you are thinking of God or talking to God. Your openness to God makes it prayer.

Thomas Keating describes what happens in stillness and silence before God in unworded presence as divine therapy. It may involve an unloading of the unconscious, but this is only the visible face of the invisible process of reworking your unconscious, a process that is going on as you sit in stillness before God and yourself. . . . This isn't the time to try to understand the things that float to the surface of your consciousness. Instead, it's the time to simply note them and then release them to God. But as you recognize their presence, you become aware of what exists within you, and you have an opportunity to peek at the deep hidden work of healing and transformation that God is doing in your soul. This is the transformational way in which contemplative prayer works.

Reference:

David G. Benner, *Spirituality and the Awakening Self* (Brazos Press: 2012), 226-227.

For Further Study:

Steven Charleston, *The Four Vision Quests of Jesus* (Morehouse Publishing: 2015)

James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Orbis Books: 1997)

Barbara A. Holmes, [Race and the Cosmos](#), rev. ed. (CAC Publishing: 2020)

Mitri Raheb, *Faith in the Face of Empire: The Bible Through Palestinian Eyes* (Orbis Books: 2014)

Richard Rohr, [Yes, And: Daily Meditations](#) (Franciscan Media: 2019)

Richard Rohr, *Scripture as Liberation* (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2002), [MP3 download](#)

<https://cac.org/ways-of-knowing-weekly-summary-2020-02-15/>
3/4/2020

Mind, Body, Heart
A Way of Being
Sunday, February 16, 2020

Wisdom is not the result of mental effort. It cannot be gained through intellectual study. Even life experiences do not make us wise if we don't process them humbly and consciously. Sadly, most of us were never taught how to do that, which is why so few older people are true elders, with any wisdom to pass on to the next generations.

Wisdom is a way of being—a way of being whole and fully open to a knowing beyond rational thought alone. Do not confuse this kind of knowing as lightweight, saccharine, or ephemeral. The exact opposite is true. To see in such a way requires the hard work of keeping all our inner spaces open—mind, heart, and body—all at once. This is at the center of any authentic

spirituality, and it does not happen easily or without paying respectful and non-egoic attention to the moment in front of me and within me—which I could call prayer.

My fellow CAC faculty member and respected wisdom teacher Cynthia Bourgeault writes of the deep interior commitment that must be made by those who embark on this path:

A Wisdom way of knowing . . . requires the whole of one's being and is ultimately attained only through the yielding of one's whole being into the intimacy of knowing and being known. . . . It doesn't happen apart from complete vulnerability and self-giving. But the divine Lover is absolutely real, and for those willing to bear the wounds of intimacy, the knowledge of that underlying coherence—"in which all things hold together"—is both possible and inevitable. [1]

Since the Enlightenment, Westerners have become overly reliant on the intelligence of the mind, neglecting that of the heart and body. But by heart, I don't mean just feeling and emotion. Cynthia Bourgeault calls the heart "an organ for the perception of divine purpose and beauty." [2] Tilden Edwards, founder of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, describes the spiritual faculty of heart as "a quality of intuitive awareness . . . a sense of inclusive, compassionate, undefended, direct in-touchness with what is really there." [3] This "undefended knowing" allows us to drop beneath the thinking mind, to touch upon real experience, unhindered by the ego's sense of self, without fear or agenda.

The Wisdom lineage offers us a healthy middle place, trapped in neither of the two alternating mediocrities of knowing: all heart and little head (lacking rational, historical, or scientific grounding) or all head and little heart (lacking deep personal experience, subtlety, or authentic love). For a holistic and mature faith, we need both head and heart grounded in our physical and sensory body.

References:

[1] Cynthia Bourgeault, [The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart](#) (Jossey-Bass: 2003), 10.

[2] *Ibid.*, 34.

[3] Tilden Edwards, "Undefended Knowing: A Conversation with Richard Rohr and Tilden Edwards" (HuffPost: 2013), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/undefended-knowing-a-conv_b_3744513.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, [Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self](#) (Jossey-Bass: 2013), 70-71; and [Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality](#) (Franciscan Media: 2007), 13-14.

<https://cac.org/a-way-of-being-2020-02-16/>
3/4/2020

Mind, Body, Heart
Our Three Intelligences
Monday, February 17, 2020

After her theological training and ordination in the Episcopal tradition, my friend Cynthia Bourgeault has spent much of the last two decades teaching the Wisdom tradition in a Christian context. You are about to read something that it took me most of my life to begin to comprehend! I admire Cynthia's unique

insights and ability to bring together the ancient wisdom of Christian monasticism and the transformational teachings and practices of spiritual seeker G. I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949). Today she offers a brief explanation of Gurdjieff’s teachings on Three-centered Awareness.

Wisdom is a way of knowing that goes beyond one’s mind, one’s rational understanding, and embraces the whole of a person: mind, heart, and body. The intellectual faculty is one way of knowing, to be sure, but it is joined by two additional faculties: the intelligence of the “moving center” and the intelligence of the “emotional center.” These three centers must all be working, and working in harmony, as the first prerequisite to the Wisdom way of knowing.

I’m going to start with the moving center because it’s the one least known in the West, least valued, and least worked with. The moving center basically is about intelligence through movement. It’s the way that our body is able to put its tentacles out and explore and gain information from the world. It’s that whole realm of things that we don’t do directly with our intellectual rational brain but that deeply engage us. We drive a car, ski down a hill, sail a boat. It gets in our bodies. That kind of intelligence, which we mostly underuse, is a huge reservoir of connectivity and information with the world.

The intellectual center is a profoundly useful tool for exploring and navigating the world, and it allows us to do things that separate us from the rest of the animals. But the program it runs is perception through separation. It’s a grand separating, evaluating, and measuring tool. But it can’t “do” because of the limitations built into its operating system. It can’t ask two questions: “Who am I, and who is God?” because these questions can’t be measured by an operating system that depends on separation. I have sometimes said that doing the journey toward mystical union with the mind is like trying to play the violin with a chainsaw. It’s not that the chainsaw is bad, but its nature is to cut and separate, not make music.

Finally, the heart and the emotional center are not identical. The emotional center is the capacity to explore and receive information from the world through empathetic entrainment by what we might call vibrational resonance. Of all the centers, the emotional center moves the fastest. It’s the part of us that gets the impression instantly. We don’t have to parse it out. It is our antenna, so to speak, given to us to orient us toward the divine radiance. The heart is not for personal expression but for divine perception.

References:

Adapted from Cynthia Bourgeault, [The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart](#) (Jossey-Bass: 2003), 27, 28, 34; and An Introductory Wisdom School with Cynthia Bourgeault: Course Transcript & Companion Guide (Wisdom Way of Knowing: 2017), 5, 9, 10. Now available through the online course, [Introductory Wisdom School](#) (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2019). <https://cac.org/our-three-intelligences-2020-02-17/>
3/4/2020

Mind, Body, Heart Developing a Wise Presence Tuesday, February 18, 2020

CAC Faculty member Cynthia Bourgeault shares how Three-Centered Awareness—heart, mind, and body—allows us to be fully present to ourselves, our lives, and God.

When a person is poised in all three centers, balanced and alertly there, a shift happens in consciousness. Rather than being trapped in our usual mind, with its well-formed rut tracks of issues and agendas and ways of thinking, we seem to come from a deeper, steadier, and quieter place. We are present, in the words of Wisdom tradition, fully occupying the now in which we find ourselves. Presence is the straight and narrow gate through which one passes to Wisdom.

This state of presence is extraordinarily important to know and taste in oneself. For sacred tradition is emphatic in its insistence that real Wisdom can be given and received only in a state of presence, with all three centers of our being engaged and awake. Anything less is known in the tradition as “sleep.” It is like the disciple Peter suddenly sinking beneath the surface of the waters [Matthew 14:30].

Everybody has all three centers (head, heart, moving) in them. Most people are born into the world favoring one center or another. We learn to make one our dominant center for our own orientation to the world. And in the Western culture, I would say that’s overwhelmingly, shockingly, the intellectual center. In traditional schools, that’s the capacity we train, with maybe a little bit of space left for the kinesthetic moving center through sports programs, and virtually nothing for the emotional center. Any budget cutback and what leaves? Arts and music, the primary channels through which the emotional center is still trained. So in the West we’re formed as heavily lopsided intellectual-center-oriented beings. That’s how most of us get our start.

In pop culture, we say, “Well, find your center, acknowledge it, and live in it.” But the inner tradition work calls us to develop our under-utilized centers. If we over-use the intellectual center, then our work lies in bringing the emotional and moving centers fully online and integrating them.

The “work” is to discover our starting position and reach out to incorporate the other two so that they are fully—and in a balanced way—part of our perceptual center. Whatever center you may find yourself to be, don’t detain yourself on it, because it immediately sets out your job of discovering where the other two are hiding inside yourself and bringing them forward. It’s only when you have balanced the three centers—kinesthetic moving center, emotional center, and intellectual center—and integrated them that you become conscious. We’ve got to have all three as the basis of a good, strong tripod before we’re really awake.

References:

Adapted from Cynthia Bourgeault, [The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart](#) (Jossey-Bass: 2003), 36, 37; and

An Introductory Wisdom School with Cynthia Bourgeault: Course Transcript & Companion Guide (Wisdom Way of Knowing: 2017), 11. Now available through the online course, [Introductory Wisdom School](#) (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2019). Inspiration for this week's banner image: A Wisdom way of knowing . . . requires the whole of one's being and is ultimately attained only through the yielding of one's whole being into the intimacy of knowing and being known. . . . It doesn't happen apart from complete vulnerability and self-giving. But the divine Lover is absolutely real, and for those willing to bear the wounds of intimacy, the knowledge of that underlying coherence—"in which all things hold together"—is both possible and inevitable. —Cynthia Bourgeault <https://cac.org/developing-a-wise-presence-2020-02-18/> 3/2/2020

Mind, Body, Heart The Wisdom of Contemplation Wednesday, February 19, 2020

We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. . . . Prayer is the opening of mind and heart—our whole being—to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing—closer than consciousness itself. —Thomas Keating [1]

Although Wisdom “work” and contemplative practice are not synonymous, I hope you can sense the resonance between the two paths. Each has the potential to open us up to greater love, compassion, and action through a conscious surrendering to greater knowing and the Great Knower. Whenever heart, mind, and body are all present and accounted for at the same time, when they are all “online” in the language of Wisdom, we can experience pure presence, a moment of deep inner connection with the pure, gratuitous Being of anything and everything. It may be experienced as a quiet leap of joy in the heart, absolute clarity in the mind, or a deep centeredness in the body.

Contemplation, like the Wisdom path, is an exercise in openness, in keeping all three spaces open long enough for us to notice other hidden material. When we can do that, we are content with the present moment and can then wait upon futures we know will be given by grace. This is “full-access knowing”—not irrational, but intuitive, both rational and trans-rational at the same time. The supreme work of spirituality, which makes presence possible, is keeping the heart space open (the result of conscious love), keeping a “right mind” (the work of contemplation or meditation), and keeping the body alive with contentment or, as Cynthia would say, sensation, without attachment to its past woundings (often the work of healing). In that state, we are neither resisting nor clinging, and we can experience something genuinely new.

Those who can keep all three spaces open at the same time will know The Presence that connects everything to everything. Surely this is what Jesus is talking about in his several parables that warn us to stay awake! (See Mark 13:34-37; Matthew 24:40-44 and 25:1-13) Being awake is a prerequisite for true prayer. This way of knowing has little to do with belonging to any particular denomination or religion; it is found at the headwaters of all the world's major religions. Each has its own piece of

Wisdom, its own techniques and teachings that urge us to bring our whole selves to the job of growing and “wising” up.

References:

[1] Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20th anniversary ed. (Bloomsbury: 2006), 175.
Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Just This* (CAC Publishing: 2017), 32-33. <https://cac.org/the-wisdom-of-contemplation-2020-02-19/> 3/4/2020

Mind, Body, Heart Stuck in the Body Thursday, February 20, 2020

In the West, we rely predominately on “head” knowledge, but our hearts offer us plenty of information as well through powerful experience of awe and empathy, joy and heartbreak (even if we choose to dismiss it most of the time). But it seems to me that we have lost or ignored the wisdom of the body almost completely. I have often taught that if we are not transformed by our pain, we will almost certainly transmit it to those around us, and I am learning that we pass it on to future generations as well. Author and therapist Resmaa Menakem speaks directly about “bodily knowing” and the transmission of trauma from a historical and corporate perspective.

Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains. This knowledge is typically experienced as a felt sense of constriction or expansion, pain or ease, energy or numbness. Often this knowledge is stored in our bodies as wordless stories about what is safe and what is dangerous. . . . The body is where we live. It's where we fear, hope, and react. It's where we constrict and relax. And what the body most cares about are safety and survival. When something happens to the body that is too much, too fast, or too soon, it overwhelms the body and can create trauma. . . .

Trauma is not primarily an emotional response. [It] always happens in the body. . . . Trauma is the body's protective response to an event—or a series of events—that [the body] perceives as potentially dangerous. This perception may be accurate, inaccurate, or entirely imaginary. . . .

An embedded trauma response can manifest as fight, flee, or freeze—or as some combination of constriction, pain, fear, . . . reactive behaviors, or other sensations and experiences. This trauma then gets stuck in the body—and stays stuck there until it is addressed.

Menakem explains how layers of trauma have built up in the United States:

America is tearing itself apart. On the surface, this war looks like the natural outcome of many recent social and political clashes. But it's not. These conflicts are anything but recent. One hundred and fifty-six years ago, they spawned the American Civil War. But even in the 1860s, these conflicts were already centuries old. They began in Europe during the Middle Ages, where they tore apart close to two million white bodies. The resulting tension came to America embedded in the bodies of Europeans, and it has remained in the bodies of many of their descendants. Over the past three centuries, that tension has been both soothed and

deepened by the invention of whiteness and the resulting racialization of American culture.

At first glance, today's manifestation of this conflict appears to be a struggle for political and social power. . . . While we see anger and violence in the streets of our country, the real battlefield is inside our bodies. If we are to survive as a country it is inside our bodies where this conflict will need to be resolved. . . . If we are to upend the status quo of white-body supremacy, we must begin with our bodies.

Reference:

Adapted from Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Central Recovery Press, 2017), xvii, 5, 7.

<https://cac.org/stuck-in-the-body-2020-02-20/>
3/4/2020

Mind, Body, Heart Wisdom Is Loving Friday, February 21, 2020

The first principle of great spiritual teachers is rather constant: only Love can be entrusted with Wisdom or Big Truth. All other attitudes will murder, mangle, and manipulate truth for their own ego purposes. Humans must first find the unified field of love and then start their thinking and perceiving from that point. This is the challenging insight of mature religion.

All prayer disciplines are somehow trying to get mind, heart, and body to work as one, which entirely changes one's consciousness. "The concentration of attention in the heart—this is the starting point of all true prayer," wrote St. Theophan the Recluse (1815–1894), a Russian monk, bishop, and mystic. [1] Apart from Love, any other "handler" of your experience, including the rational mind or merely intellectual theology, eventually distorts and destroys the beauty and healing power of Wisdom.

The second principle is that truth is on some level always beautiful—and healing—to those who honestly want it. Big Truth cannot be angry, antagonistic, or forced on anyone, or it will inherently distort the message (as the common belief in a punitive God has done for centuries). The good, the true, and the beautiful are their own best argument for themselves, by themselves, and in themselves. Such deep inner knowing evokes the soul and pulls the soul into All Oneness. Incarnation is beauty, and beauty needs to be incarnate—that is specific, concrete, particular. We need to experience very particular, soul-evoking goodness in order to be shaken into what many call "realization." It is often a momentary shock where we know we have been moved to a different plane of awareness.

This is precisely how transformation differs from simply acquiring facts and information. Whereas information will often inflate the ego, transformation utterly humbles us. In that moment, we know how much we have not known up to now, and still surely do not know! Such humility is a good and probably necessary starting place and, I would say, the very seat of Wisdom.

Love is luring us forward, because love is what we already are at our core, and we are naturally drawn to the fullness of our own

being. Like knows like; to paraphrase Meister Eckhart, "God's own whole being is poured out into identity. It is God's pleasure and rapture to place God's whole nature in this true place—because it is God's own identity too." [2] Like an electromagnetic force, Infinite Love is drawing the world into the one fullness of love. When we are comfortable in our true identity, we will finally be unable to resist such overwhelming love. (Some saints said even the devil would be unable to resist it in the end.) So don't fight it, resist it, or deny it now. Love will always win.

References:

[1] Theophan the Recluse, as quoted in *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo, ed. Timothy Ware (Faber and Faber: 1997, ©1966), 183.

[2] Meister Eckhart, *Qui Audit Me, Non Confundetur*, Sermon on Sirach 24:30. See *Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, Raymond Bernard Blakney (Harper and Row: 1941), 205. Note: The verse number here is from the Latin Vulgate Bible known to Eckhart; the source text is Sirach 24:22 in later translations.

Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* (Jossey-Bass: 2013), 90-91, 92-93.

<https://cac.org/wisdom-is-loving-2020-02-21/>
3/4/2020

Mind, Body, Heart Sunday, February 16–Friday, February 22, 2020

Wisdom is not the result of mental effort. It cannot be gained through intellectual study. Even life experiences do not make us wise if we don't process them humbly and consciously. ([Sunday](#))

Wisdom is a way of knowing that goes beyond one's mind, one's rational understanding, and embraces the whole of a person: mind, heart, and body. These three centers must all be working, and working in harmony, as the first prerequisite to the Wisdom way of knowing. —Cynthia Bourgeault ([Monday](#))

If we over-use the intellectual center, then our work lies in bringing the emotional and moving centers fully online and integrating them. —Cynthia Bourgeault ([Tuesday](#))

Those who can keep all three spaces open at the same time will know The Presence that connects everything to everything. ([Wednesday](#))

While we see anger and violence in the streets of our country, the real battlefield is inside our bodies. If we are to survive as a country it is inside our bodies where this conflict will need to be resolved. —Resmaa Menakem ([Thursday](#))

Love is luring us forward, because love is what we already are at our core, and we are naturally drawn to the fullness of our own being. ([Friday](#))

Practice: Prayer of the Heart

For those of us who were taught that prayer is primarily saying the "right" words in the "right" way, it can be difficult to open up our whole selves to God, but author and spiritual director Teresa A. Blythe offers a wonderful practice that integrates mind, body, and heart.

Deep within each of us is a prayer phrase longing to be expressed, what some have named the Prayer of the Heart. It consists of two simple phrases—one said on inhalation and one said on exhalation. Early Christians used to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” in this fashion. That was their deep longing, for Jesus to return and be among them in physical reality. We will spend time in this exercise finding those prayers that are as close to us as our very breath. The beauty of this prayer is the way it stays with us all day, all week, or even for a lifetime if we allow it.

The Exercise

Begin seated in a comfortable position. Make sure your body weight is distributed in such a way that you feel stable. Take about five deep, slow breaths and allow the tension of the day to flow out with each exhalation. After five deliberate breaths, turn your attention away from counting and allow your breath to find its natural pace.

What is your deepest and truest longing for life with God at this moment? If you find that your longing feels “tacky” or too worldly, try suspending judgment and instead looking at what’s at the base of that desire. When you check in with your deepest and truest self, what is it that you seek from God?

Give that longing a short phrase. For example, if your deep desire is inner freedom, then your phrase would be “freedom” or “inner freedom.” Make sure that your phrase is not too long.

What is your favorite name for God? How do you image the Creator? Choose whatever name seems to fit best for you. Some examples include: Jesus, Wisdom, Father, Mother, or Mystery. Be as creative as you want to be. But again, keep the name rather short.

Combine your name for God with your longing. For example, if my phrase is “freedom” and the name I choose for God is Christ, my prayer of the heart might be “Freedom, in Christ.” Spend a few moments coming up with your two-part prayer. Begin to say—either aloud or silently—your phrase. You may inhale on the name of God and exhale on the desire or vice versa. Spend several minutes breathing this prayer. Make it your own. Allow God to inhabit this prayer.

After several minutes of repeating this prayer, sink into contemplative silence. Allow the love of God to fill you and surround you.

If you want to be sure to remember this phrase to pray it throughout the day, write it down. You might want to place it on the back of a business card and put it in your wallet or pocket. Place it on a sticky note next to your computer, or on the door of your refrigerator.

Reference:

Teresa A. Blythe, *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times* (Abingdon Press: 2006), 36-38.

For Further Study:

The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology, compiled by Igumen Chariton of Valamo, ed. Timothy Ware (Faber and Faber: 1997, ©1966)

Cynthia Bourgeault, [The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart](#) (Jossey-Bass: 2003)

[Introductory Wisdom School with Cynthia Bourgeault](#) (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2019), online course

James Finley, [Turning](#) to the Mystics (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2020), podcast

Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20th anniversary ed. (Bloomsbury: 2006)

Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother’s Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Central Recovery Press: 2017)

Richard Rohr, [Another Name for Every Thing](#), season 3 (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2020), podcast

Richard Rohr, [Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self](#) (Jossey-Bass: 2013)

Richard Rohr, [Just This](#) (CAC Publishing: 2017)

<https://cac.org/mind-body-heart-weekly-summary-2020-02-22/>
3/4/2020