



**Living in Relational Wholeness**

## **Coalesce Podcast**

### **Episode 030 – Understanding Contemplatively**

#### **Note, terms, scripture, practice**



Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) - *Revelations of Divine Love*

- “First the fall, and then the recovery from the fall, and both are the mercy of God.”
- “The place which God takes in our soul he will never vacate, for in us is his home of homes, and it is the greatest delight for him to dwell there. . . . The soul who contemplates this is made like the one who is contemplated.”
- “The soul is precious knitted to Him in its making by a knot so subtle and so mighty that it is oned into God. In this oneing, it is made endlessly holy. Furthermore, He wants us to know that all the souls which are one day to be saved in heaven without end are knit in this same knot and united in this same union, and made holy in this one identical holiness.”
- “By myself I am nothing at all, but in general, I AM the oneing of love. For it is in this oneing that the life of all people exists”
- “The love of God creates in us such a oneing that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another person”
- “In the sight of God all humans are oned, and one person is all people and all people are in one person.”
- “God makes no distinction in love between the blessed soul of Christ and the least soul on this earth.”
- “I saw no difference between God and our substance, but, as it were, all God; and still my understanding accepted that our substance is *in* God, that is to say that God is God, and our substance is a creature *in* God. For the almighty truth of the Trinity is our Father, for he made us and keeps us in him. And the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we are enclosed. And the high goodness of the Trinity is our Lord, and in him we are enclosed and he in us. We are enclosed in the Father, and we are enclosed in the Son, and we are enclosed in the Holy Spirit. And the Father is enclosed in us, the Son is enclosed in us, and the Holy Spirit is enclosed in us, almighty, all wisdom and all goodness, one God, one Lord”
- “Our highest Father, God Almighty, who is ‘Being,’ has always known us and loved us: because of this knowledge, through his marvelous and deep charity and with the unanimous consent of the Blessed Trinity, He wanted the Second Person to become our Mother, our Brother, our Saviour. It is thus logical that God, being our Father, be also our Mother. Our Father desires, our Mother operates, and our good Lord the Holy Ghost confirms; we are thus well

advised to love our God through whom we have our very being. I then saw with complete certainty that God, before creating us, loved us, and His love never lessened and never will. In this love he accomplished all his works, and in this love he oriented all things to our good and in this love our life is eternal.”

[John 14:20](#)

[Genesis 28:16](#)

[1 John 2:21](#)

[John 17](#)

[Ephesians 3:18-19](#)

*The Cloud of Unknowing* - 14<sup>th</sup> century spiritual classic written by an anonymous English monk

→ “However, there are some presently engaged in the active life who are being prepared by grace to grasp the message of this book. I am thinking of those who feel the mysterious action of the Spirit in their inmost being stirring them to love. I do not say that they continually feel this stirring, as experienced contemplatives do, but now and again they taste something of contemplative love in the very core of their being. Should such folk read this book, I believe they will be greatly encouraged and reassured.”

→ “anyone who wants to become a real contemplative” to “let the wonderful transcendence and goodness of God teach you humility rather than the thought of your own sinfulness, for then your humility will be perfect. Attend more to the wholly otherness of God rather than to your own misery. And remember that those who are perfectly humble will lack nothing they really need, either spiritually or materially. God is theirs and [God] is all. Whoever possesses God, as the book attests, needs nothing else in this life”

→ “Thought cannot comprehend God. And so, I prefer to abandon all I can know, choosing rather to love him whom I cannot know. Though we cannot fully know him we can love him”

→ “the higher part of the contemplative life, as it may be had here, takes place altogether in this darkness and in this cloud of unknowing with a loving stirring blindly beholding the naked being only of God[self].”

Ira Progoff writes: “The ultimate goal of the work of *The Cloud of Unknowing* is union with God, not as God is thought of or imagined to be, but as God *is* in [God’s] nature. . . . [This] refers to an experience in which man seems to be transcending himself, but is in fact discovering himself *as he is*. He is coming into contact with his own ‘naked being,’ and, by means of this, it becomes possible for him to come into contact with God *as He is*.”

## Practice: Centering Prayer

*This is what you are to do. Lift your heart up to the Lord with a gentle stirring of love, desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts. —The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 3*

In the 1970s, drawing from *The Cloud of Unknowing* and other Christian mystical writings, three Trappist monks—William Meninger, Basil Pennington, and Thomas Keating—developed a simple method of silent prayer. This method came to be known as Centering Prayer, referencing Thomas Merton’s definition of contemplation as prayer “centered entirely on the presence of God.” (You can [learn more about Centering Prayer through Contemplative Outreach.](#))

Centering Prayer is simply sitting in silence, open to God’s love and your love for God. This prayer is beyond thoughts, emotions, or sensations. Like being with a very close friend or lover, where words are not required, Centering Prayer brings your relationship with God to a level deeper than conversation, to pure communion.

Because our minds are so attached to thinking, Father Thomas Keating sometimes suggests choosing a sacred word, with one or two syllables, “as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within. [Then,] sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce your sacred word. . . . When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to your sacred word. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.” [1]

Two sessions of 20-30 minutes of Centering prayer is recommended each day, but if that is too much for you, begin with five or ten minutes. Let go of all expectations or goals during this time. It is not about achieving anything, whether emptying your mind or finding peace or achieving a spiritual experience. There is no way to succeed at Centering Prayer, except to return again and again to love. Allow thoughts to come and go without latching onto them, without judgment. “Ever-so-gently” bring your sacred word, the symbol of your intention, back to mind and return to resting in Presence.

[1] Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (Amity House: 1986), 109-115.