

Meditating With Presence **David Frenette**

The guided meditation we shared on the Meditation Summit introduces Meditating With Presence, a form of meditation inspired by Christ and the Christian contemplative tradition. You can practice Meditating With Presence whether or not you are Christian or have a connection with Christ. Simply bring your own sense of God into the relational component of the meditation, for example, as Spirit, Mystery of Life or the Divine. If you are in a 12-step program of recovery, you can Meditate With Presence in relationship with your own Higher Power.

Mindfulness meditation and hatha yoga are practiced by many without the religious containers of Buddhism or Hinduism from which they come. In a similar way, Meditating With Presence can be practiced without the religious and spiritual container of Christian contemplation. The benefits of this meditation flow from the basic movements of its practice: greater groundedness in life amidst feelings, stress and distraction; greater authentic experience of who you are; manifesting attitudes such as gratitude, compassion and authenticity in your relationships with others, including your spouse and family.

Or, you can practice Meditating With Presence as a way of consciously relating to Christ, opening to the transformation of consciousness that this practice invites when practiced over time as a Christian contemplative path.

Classical Christian contemplative teachings in books such as *Practicing the Presence of God* (written by Brother Laurence of the Resurrection), *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (written by Jean-Pierre de Caussade), and the many teachings on attention, meditating with the breath and the Jesus Prayer (in the Orthodox Christian Hesychast tradition) inspire Meditating With Presence. In another Christian contemplative practice --“divine” reading (*lectio divina*) -- the body, mind, heart and spirit are accessed as one engages with sacred text, as a way of deepening ones relationship with God. Rather than going beyond body, mind and heart in order to access spirit, in divine reading and in Meditating With Presence the sacred is discovered in our bodies, minds and hearts, as well as spirit – that is, *within our human nature* – embodied and expressed in this present moment. In Christian contemplation, practicing a contemplative approach to sacred text opens up an appreciation for the sacredness of all of life.

The most important dynamic of Meditating With Presence happens as we consciously turn our attention – the direction of our awareness – towards our body, mind, heart or spirit. Rather than remaining caught by the many distracting technologies and events of life, our breath, our body and our humanity can ground us in this moment. Rather than stimulating the mind, the simple noticing of what we are experiencing in our bodies, now, in this moment, opens us to the gift of our life. Rather than drawing us away from the Divine, opening our heart in a sacred attitude like gratitude deepens our presence to the Source of life. Rather than trying to transcend our human nature, resting our attention on the sensations within our body, mind and heart makes awakening to spirit more inclusive, brighter, and more alive. The divine and the human are intertwined, inseparably, in us, in our lives, and in our presence to the suffering world.

The four basic movements of Meditating With Presence – grounding, experiencing, relating and resting – help us be more *present and awake to the Divine Presence*. Let's renew these four movements, as a way of extending your experience from the guided meditation of the Meditation Summit into your life.

Meditating With Presence's Four Basic Movements

- *Ground* attention in your breath
- Notice what you are *experiencing* (physical sensations, emotions, thoughts)
- *Relate* to your own sense of the Divine as you bring sacred attitudes (such as gratitude, mercy, praise, consent) to what you are experiencing
- *Rest* in the Divine Nature in pure awareness

1) Ground your attention in your breath

Being more present is one gift of Meditating With Presence. The simplest way of practicing being present is by returning your attention to your breathing. Rather than following the thinking mind with its unending narrative of judgment and despair, return to the simple moment, *this moment*. Embody your prayer in God's embodied Presence. Breathe. Ground attention in your breath. Attending to the breath is a way of attending to the Presence of the Divine, the Spirit.

Whatever is going on, it is going on here and now, in the Divine. We become more present to what is going on when we ground our attention in an embodied way, in our breath and in our own sense of Ultimate Reality. Rather than perseverating in thought commentaries about what your experience was or will be, bring your attention to your breathing, now. Sense your breath in your body as you exhale and as you inhale. Remember the Divine – your own sense of who God is for you. Let your remembrance of Ultimate Reality be joined with your breath.

Our thinking mind, the way we obsess about the past and fear the future, keeps us ungrounded, distracted and distant from what is really happening in front of us, now. The Divine nature invites us back into life. All we need do is renew our foundation in this nature, the ground of Being. Attention – the embodied direction of our awareness – frees us from the trap of our mind when it is wild and out-of-control. Grounding attention is not about thinking. It is about sensing, feeling, awakening to the gift of the moment, this moment, through remembering God and our breath. The Divine is always present, your breath is always here, the present moment is always now, life is always present. Why not be more present to the Presence?

2) Notice what you are experiencing

Our human experience, here and now, is the channel through which we can encounter the Divine. Once you have grounded your attention, you have a way of being more present to *who you really are*. Tense or peaceful, restless or bored, sick or well, it is only by being more present to what you are experiencing that you are present to the giftedness of life. Compared to the rich textures of your human existence in this moment of time, everything else is merely expectation or judgment, future imagining or past regret. As Jesus said, the realm of God, the kingdom of heaven, is among us.

Recall that, in *Meditating With Presence*, you open to your humanity through embodied experiencing, by simply noticing what you are experiencing. Noticing means that you perceive, with your attention, what is already happening. You might notice that you are thinking a thought, or feeling an emotion, or experiencing a bodily sensation. You were already doing all this before, but *noticing* what you are experiencing awakens you out of habituated unconsciousness. You direct your attention, simply noticing that you are thinking, feeling, or sensing. With awareness you are

able to be more free and alive. With awareness, especially with God's presence in pure awareness, you are freer to choose what to do, how to respond to other people.

Right now, pause in reading and notice where your attention is. If you don't understand what this means or sense that your attention is somewhere "in your head," wrapped up in thinking, get more concrete by noticing how you are seated. Feel the chair beneath you, or, if you are standing or lying down, feel what else supports you. Rather than thinking about how your body is being supported right now, focus your attention into feeling your body's contact with the world around you. The content of this moment is your activity of "sitting." You may also become aware that you are feeling an emotion. Or, there may be physical sensations, painful or pleasurable. You can direct your inner attention, focusing on an emotion or sensation. What happens? Does the emotion or sensation change, or shift?

Normally our attention unconsciously follows our thoughts, conditioned by events. We feel distracted; we lack a sense of presence. We are out of control of our minds, and our lives. Directing our attention *into* what we are experiencing through simple noticing reclaims our life for us. Do this, now. Thinking, feeling, sensing. Feel what thinking, feeling and sensing are. In order to give you a little help in the shift from thinking about what to do, into simply noticing what you are experiencing, you can always return to the first movement of Meditating With Presence: renew your attention in your ground – your breath, the present moment and God.

3) Relate to your own sense of the Divine as you bring sacred attitudes (such as gratitude, mercy, praise, consent) to what you are experiencing

Oftentimes, the first two movements of Meditating With Presence are enough. Grounding and experiencing renew your presence to God, to yourself and to the present moment. However, as you are more awake in your own experience, be willing to open further to the Divine. For example, as you are more present to how you experience happiness in your body – perhaps giddiness in your chest, an upturning of the corners of your eyes or your mouth, racing thoughts – you can allow a sense of gratitude to God come to you. Breathing into the sensations helps you become one with the gratitude. What is it like to do this, now? Gratitude....

If you are feeling fear or anxiety, you can call in the sacred attitude of asking for help. Grounding your attention in your breath and remembering God will help you open more to the feelings and sensations associated with fear. Perhaps these feelings and sensations include churning in the belly or tightness in the chest. You might open to God, quietly calling out inside, “help.” How blessed it is to ask for help, for you have the support of God with you.

Whatever *sacred attitude* you adopt – such as gratitude or mercy, praise or consent – let your heart open to your own experience of who or what the Divine is. Allow yourself to become fully human before God. Allow yourself to open to God from your genuine human experience in this moment of time. Realize what “contemplative prayer” is, as an opening of body, mind, heart and spirit to the Divine beyond and within you, as a prayerful expression arising out of your humanity.

4) Rest in the Divine Nature in pure awareness

Mediating With Presence ripens as we rest in pure awareness, the Divine Nature imaged in the deepest part of our human nature. Attention, the directing of awareness, is no longer towards an object like the breath or body sensations or the embodied sense of our heart opening. Attention lets go of its focus, releasing itself into its source, awareness itself. Awareness is not one of many things but is the expanse in which everything arises and falls. As we discover more of what this movement of Meditating With Presence is like in our own experience, we learn that we can experience awareness without attaching to any of the thoughts, feelings, sensations or perceptions that arise and fall away in awareness. “Pure” awareness means just this: consciously apprehending awareness without identifying with any objects of awareness. Awareness in its natural state is our own deepest nature, created in the image and likeness of the Divine nature in us.

Be willing to let the directed movements of attention go and just be. Be open to all that is, without trying to do anything with what is. Presence just is. Be present, be still, and know that God is.