

## Article for Contemplative Outreach of Hawaii

### Quiet Time Is Good for Something

By

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In Centering Prayer, one is taught that it is neither prayer nor meditation. Prayer is generally understood as speaking to God or with God or asking God for something. In meditation, we seek insight, reflection, resolution, problem solving, a state of mind. In Centering Prayer, there is no steady state of the use of a mantra. One simply returns to your sacred word when you are engaged in a thought. It is a process of letting go thought by thought by thought and to release, release, and release. How easy it is for a newcomer to Centering Prayer to say that after a 30 minute session of quietly sitting that one comes away with nothing to show for all the effort that one puts into it. There is nothing to write about in one's journal, nothing that was resolved and nothing that was moving. It appears that one has done nothing and achieved nothing.

How is it possible to sit down comfortably with eyes closed, motionless, with a blank mind that is constantly entertaining five or six or fifty or sixty thoughts? During a normal 30 minute quiet sit, one hears in the background a cacophony of noisy leaf blowers, blaring music from passing cars, barking animal sounds, the wind rushing through trees, birds chirping at sunset. Our mind is engaged in personal memories, problem solving, complex issues, lists of things to do, annoying people. What happened to the quiet sitting that seemed so promising?

While centering, most will agree that distractions are sometimes difficult to handle. I wondered if it is worth my time and effort. Is this exercise ever going to reveal any benefits if I continue this path? Is peace the ultimate expression of Centering Prayer? What changes? How do I handle problems and issues? What kind of higher power am I dealing with through Centering Prayer?

Over time I have noticed a change in myself. Quiet time is good for something. Busy thoughts, distractions, noise, multitasking is beginning to take a back seat to simplicity, kindness, peace and patience.

It also appears to me that group prayer brings benefits like an increase in love or closeness among members of the group. Total silence in a group feels comforting and supportive. Are we communicating with one another when in group contemplation, in deep silence close to one another? It is easier in a group to achieve concentration and easy to be lazy on my own.

Here's how I refer to Centering Prayer when asked by someone curious about the subject. I call it the "non clinging school of quiet sitting." The intention is to be deeply and completely open to God, deeper than thinking, deeper than reflection, deeper than emotions. If you catch yourself thinking, you let the thought go. Empty yourself and let go. Let go of whatever you are hanging on to. The practice of letting go and releasing thoughts seems to be affecting thousands, indeed millions of Christians worldwide who are practicing Centering Prayer. It is changing the way Christians engage with God. Sitting comfortably with eyes closed is simply a way to experience God.