



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"The Method of Centering Prayer, Part 2"

Excerpted from

The Spiritual Journey Prologue

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It's a good idea not to do the prayer right after a meal, because then the body will be busy digesting and will draw energy whereas the nature of the prayer is to let go of all activity including physiological in order to be completely open and quiet in the presence of God. Also, some people will not do well if they do it too late in the evening, because as the prayer settles down, it releases some of the energies in the body. We have to respect the unconscious and the unconscious has a number of energies that will arise when we are very quiet and thinking, oddly enough, is like a manhole. It covers the unconscious. But when you stop thinking, then you become vulnerable to the unconscious and both its positive and negative energies may begin to arise. One of these is just plain energy so that you may find, if you do it just before sleeping, you might sleep for a couple of hours, then you wake up raring to go.

Everybody has to be creative in finding the right time for themselves and the right space. I might add here, you have to take your family and other obligations into account. I think the Spirit expects us to respect whoever we're living with and that peace in the home comes before the time of prayer and it's just up to us to find a suitable time.

You may also notice a few physical symptoms that are surprising the first few times you do this, like a little pain somewhere in the body, or an itch, or a twitch, or a tick. This is simply some little emotional knot stored in the body from earlier times that is close to the surface of your awareness and that uses this rest just enough to unwind the knot, so it appears as a little discomfort.

The body is the storehouse of emotional undigested material or emotions that were not processed, so it's the place where unprocessed grief is lurking. You can pick this up in deep massage. It sometimes can even recover the event that happened. But most of the time in this prayer, it's just a very light unloading, a light untying of knots that are near the surface of the body. So, it's better to pay no attention to them and they'll quickly dissipate in a few minutes.

Another occasion when it's helpful to remember your flexibility and freedom to adjust the circumstances is when the unloading of the unconscious involves memories that are

very painful or emotions that are quite primitive. The point I'm trying to make here is that sometimes the emotional rush into awareness that bears no relationship to the immediate path is what we call "unloading the unconscious." It means that the body has received so much rest that it can begin to assert its native capacity for help and evacuate what is harmful just as the physical body evacuates material or toxins or waste products. This is a psychological-evacuation process. This is prevented by defense mechanisms, repression, and thinking. Thinking is a marvelous way of not facing the real issues of life. It doesn't mean we think at certain points, but that constant interior dialogue, it's like a wall of protection against the unconscious.

When this is broken down regularly by two periods a day, you gradually develop the habit of listening to the body a little more and, sure enough, the body begins to tell you what's there and it's unbelievable what's there waiting to be processed.