

THE PATHWAY OF SPIRITUALITY

Wholeness, or total well being, is available to each of us. Nevertheless, in several situations there seems to be impossible obstacles to whole person healing. What appear to be obstacles can include: severe physical suffering, the psychological bondage of addictions, personality problems, the emotional pain of anxiety, depression and psychosis. Oppression in the socio-economic sphere leads to poverty, discrimination, racism, social disorganisation, war, crime, violence and abuse in families.

The obstacles of spiritual evil occur in the form of secularisation, loss of spiritual values. Then there are destructive occult practices such as witchcraft and satanism. False propaganda from the media through advertising, entertainment or in popular thinking can be used by evil forces or spirits for the purpose of destroying others, and for mind controlling. There is activity of the Evil One to tempt, oppress and control the human spirit. Existential despair and loss of meaning and purpose of life are other forms of spiritual evil.

Management hurdles also exist. Those seeking to help others through organisations, groups or individually can also experience lack of management resources for ministry – manpower, money, materials, motivation, training and political will – and indeed the obstacle constituted by the fact that we are all wounded healers.

All these obstacles should not be seen merely as barriers but as challenges that can be overcome!

What about the spiritual pathway to wellness? This is the central aspect of the answer to obstacles. Spirituality involves seeking *a relationship of loving and receiving from God. This God is a person, our Creator, Father and giver of wholeness. His greatest concern for us is to love us unconditionally.*

Loving and Receiving in Contemplative Spirituality

Loving and receiving from God, is the essence of what we have chosen to call Contemplative Spirituality. It is the only way to overcome the obstacles faced in BECOMING WHOLE and helping others to reach wholeness. Loving and receiving from God involve the *first steps of conversion or making a full commitment to follow Him.* These include:

1. Acknowledging the ways in which we have failed to follow God and have also offended others.
2. Recognising that by His death, to pay for God's just punishment, for our wrongdoing, Christ has "bought us back" or redeemed us from an eternal alienation or distancing from Him. This distancing, that is referred to as a "state of sin" eventually leads to suffering in every aspect of life. It leads to broken relationships, a broken world and eventually to a devastating life after physical death called "hell." Christ gave himself for us because of God's love and desire for our salvation (deliverance) and healing.

3. Repenting or deciding, with God's help, not to repeat our negative actions, followed by asking and receiving Christ's forgiveness.
4. Pledging to follow Christ and to enjoy his company in everyday choices, and to be a part of His Church community as well as being involved in witnessing, or sharing, about Him and serving others in every aspect of one's life.

What is the next step?

In Acts 2, the apostle Peter shares with us that after turning our backs on - or repenting from - a self-destructive and self-centred lifestyle and rejection of God, we need to *become initiated into the membership of the church which is a joyful and health giving community of believers* This initiation or new beginning is through the symbolic act of baptism.

Yet all these are only the first steps in the Christian life. On the day of Pentecost many people asked Peter, "What shall we do?" He answered, "Repent and be baptised," but He went on to say, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2: 37-38). The fullness of spiritual experience comes only with *being filled with God's presence in the person of the Holy Spirit*.

There are two (2) aspects of relating to God's Holy Spirit as we seek to be whole or to be involved in a service team. The first is obvious: *receiving the Spirit*. That is, asking the Spirit to come and live within us. Receiving the Spirit occurs as we make our commitment to Christ, as we ask Christ to be our Lord and Saviour.

Yet this is not necessarily enough; we could say, "Lord come into my life," and still not be significantly transformed or empowered for wholeness and service.

An Evil Intruder

The fable is told of a man, who, when Christ came knocking at his door, said to him, "Come into my house, Lord, and I will give you a room where you can stay. Just stay in that room." Then some days later, the Evil One came to his door and knocked loudly. And when he opened the door, the Evil One came in and wrought havoc in his house.

Then the householder said to Christ, "Lord, how is it that you are in my house, and yet all this has happened?" And Christ said to him, "You did not give me the keys to every room in your house."

The man then said, "Lord, I will give you all the keys. Here is the key to my living room - take charge of my entertainment. I give you the key to my bedroom - take charge of my sexuality. I give you the key to my dining room - take charge of my eating habits. I give you the key to every room in my house - you take charge of my whole house."

And then, a few days later, again came a loud knocking at the door, and one could hear the babble and chatter of all the demons of Satan. He had come with all his reinforcements. But it

was Jesus who stood and opened the door. Immediately, the devil and his demons retreated in disarray, shouting, “Lord of hosts, Lord of hosts!”

Shall we then appreciate the difference between just asking the Spirit to come in and *asking the Spirit to fill us completely*, in order that we be completely governed by him? This is the second aspect of relating to God’s spirit. To walk in the Spirit is to be completely governed by the Spirit. It says in that wonderful chapter eight of Romans, where the teaching about the Spirit of God is expounded, “For they that are of the flesh are governed by the things of the flesh, but they that follow the Spirit are governed by the Spirit.”

Thus, being completely governed by the Spirit (Romans, 8:5) in one’s mind – thoughts and actions – or being filled and walking in the Spirit, means that the Spirit is not merely received and present, but is given total access to every room and corner of the “house” in our lives in order to do his work of transforming our personalities, of empowering (Galatians 5:4, 16-25; I Corinthians 12: 4-11), teaching (John 14: 26) and leading (Romans 8: 14, Acts 13: 2).

Goals of Loving and Receiving

We are told that as we long for the Spirit – as we seek to receive him – *we shall receive his power and spiritual gifts* for actual service to others. According to Luke 9, when Christ sent out his disciples, the first thing that he did was not to give them a plan or strategy, but rather he gave them “power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases” (v. 1) in ministering to others. And then he sent them out.

Again, when Christ was leaving them after his resurrection, as he gave them the “Great Commission” he said to his disciples, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses... to the end of the earth” (Acts 1: 8). As part of his power, God gives to his Church supernatural gifts for ministry (I Corinthians 12: 4-11, 28)

Receiving God’s power and also loving God involves receiving God’s love and grace. God’s love is unconditional and forgiving (Ephesians 2: 4, 5). God’s love is for all: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3: 16). God’s love is totally sacrificial (Romans 5: 8). God loved us and gave his son to die for us.

God’s love is what leads to his grace, his undeserved favour that meets all our needs, whether spiritual, psychological, social or economic. It is of that grace that the writer to the Philippians can say, “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 19). God’s love and grace are made effective by the power of his Spirit (I Corinthians 12: 9). To him is given all power in heaven and in earth (I Chronicles 29: 12).

Disciplines of Loving and Receiving

Like anything else, the loving and receiving aspect of spirituality involves specific steps, and these steps can be seen as disciplines, inasmuch as they require persistent and constant application – daily, if possible.

We are free to develop our own steps in the life of contemplative spirituality. The steps I will share are identified by the initials, or acronym, **LBSL** – **L**eaving **B**ehind **S**elf and **L**oving. The steps are as follows:

- L - *Loving* God with our whole person
- B - *Believing* in God and in His power, love and grace through the Holy Spirit
- S - *Surrendering* to Him
- L - *Listening* to Him

LOVING God *with our whole person* means, “and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might.” (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is a daily act of adoration, of thanksgiving and indeed, of self-giving in absolute loyalty. It is saying to God, “All I am is yours.”

This is similar to the total devotion of one human being to another. It is a loss of self-centredness to become God-centred. It is the giving of our possessions as well as of ourselves (Luke 14: 33). The rich young ruler was told that if he wished to have eternal life, he should “sell all that you have and distribute to the poor... and come, follow me” (Luke 18: 22). We are talking here about total giving.

BELIEVING in God is next. As we love, as we adore God, we come to believe in His power, love and grace, operating through Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is the main part of effective living – not depending only on our own efforts (Ephesians 2: 8-10). It leads to the miraculous power of the Spirit in us (Galatians 3: 15).

We are told that whoever comes to God must believe that God is a real person, one who rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11: 1-6). We need to believe “for we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6: 12). Wholeness and becoming healers are in the realm of spiritual warfare.

Believing can indeed lead to the miraculous power of the Spirit working within us. As Christ said,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever” (John 14: 12-16).

Matthew 21: 22 tells us that whatever we ask in prayer, if we have faith, we will receive. When the disciples were powerless to cast out a demon, Christ said to them that if they would only believe, “all things are possible” (Mark 9: 23).

Then there is *SURRENDERING to God* – surrendering our efforts and frustrations with the recognition that while we are limited, God is limitless (Mark 10: 27). Surrendering is a confession of our having failed God, others and ourselves. Surrendering is “letting go and letting God.”

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4: 6-7).

Let go and let God. It is like exhaling and inhaling. Think of that when you think of surrendering. In letting go, the burdens will become light (Matthew 11: 28). It is to let go so that we cease to live, so that Christ can live in us (Galatians 2: 20). And as we let go, and as we “inhale” and “let God,” it is a surrendering and opening of self in order to be filled by God’s presence through his Holy Spirit. Christ says:

“And I tell you, ask and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you... If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”
(Luke 11: 9-13)

Don’t be surprised if you start finding yourselves having some unusual-seeming spiritual capacities or gifts that you may not be used to. The human mind and spirit now develop a greater potential and work through these gifts of service – healing of the sick, sharing prophetic revelations, or special messages, from God to build up others, speaking and interpreting messages from God through strange tongues or “languages of the Spirit.” The gifts of knowledge of others’ ‘ailments,’ of discerning evil spirits, of faith, of helping others and administration – all these give new dynamic to our lives of service (I Corinthians 12: 7-11). These gifts need to be accepted in joy and used with emotional maturity and humility.

We ought to *LISTEN* to God, having loved him and celebrated his presence; having believed that his love, his power and his grace can operate in our lives; having “let go” to “let God.” In our contemplation we now listen, while asking, “Lord, what do you have to say to me?” This is the most vital aspect.

Most of my life I have thought of prayer as just talking, talking, talking. It is only recently that I have come to learn that prayer also involves listening and more listening. “Lord, what do you have to say to me?” It is only then, as the Spirit fills us, as we surrender, as we listen, that the Spirit will guide us when to minister, even in the middle of a disaster, how to minister, how to manage our projects, how to deal with our self.

The Spirit of God speaks to us through the *words of Scripture* (II Timothy 3: 15-17), speaks to us directly through our *meditating in silence* – not the earthquake, not the wind and not the fire, but through that “still, small voice” (I Kings 19: 11, 12). As the Lord used Ananias and sent him to

Paul, who had just had his conversion experience (Acts 9: 17), so God speaks to us through the words of others.

He spoke to Peter through a vision to go to the Gentiles (Acts 10: 19). God may speak to us also through *dreams and visions*. Hebrews 2: 4 mentions that God spoke through Jesus, with words confirmed by the words of disciples and demonstrated by “*signs and wonders*.” And the miraculous unfolding of circumstances, the miraculous action of God in our lives, is yet another way in which he speaks to us. God also speaks to us through *angels*. Let us not limit the ways in which we can experience listening to God. Let us be open to the many channels God can use to reveal his will and purposes to us.

Practical Aids

What are some aids to help us love God, believe in him, surrender to him and listen to his voice?

Prayer

Prayer is the most important activity in the discipline of contemplative spirituality. Christ said to his disciples that faith and the power they needed to overcome evil come only by prayer and fasting. Prayer should involve adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession and supplication – waiting on God and listening, if we are to hear him.

Divine Healing, Prayer and laying on of Hands is another form of prayer. We can lay hands on ourselves, our spouses, children, friends, fellow workers or church members, as well as others in more structured situations. The hands have their own energy and symbolise love and caring. *The power of the touch is powerful*, yet when all of this is taken over by God’s power, imagine what the results can be! Several scientific experiments have established clear links between faith, prayer, personal church involvement with faster rates of recovery and less prevalence or negative effects of various chronic diseases.

Bible Study

Alongside prayer, comes *Bible Study*, involving a daily listening to God through his Word. Also, there is silent *meditation* – finding a quiet place, as Christ himself went “apart” to be alone.

Journalling

Another form of support is *writing a journal*, putting down on paper our burdens, what God says to us, and what we say to God in our prayers. We can come back from week to week and month to month and review the journal and be inspired and reminded to God’s power and grace. See chapters on SELF-MONITORING and JOURNALLING.

Sharing

Community is the greatest human agent of healing and spiritual growth. Therefore we need a *prayer partner* and / or a *small group* of brethren with whom we can share. In a small group, the gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy and healing, can be used. In inspirational *retreats* our teams can come apart for a while to listen to God.

Fasting

Fasting is a valuable discipline to accompany all the others, because “this kind [of demon] goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Matthew 17: 21, KJV). Fasting has a physical benefit of allowing the body to detoxify itself in the relative absence of ingestive loading. It leads to feelings of refreshment and longer life. It also clears the mind and spirit. Drinking water or juices should be maintained, plus medical advice given for persons with acute or chronic ailments.

Obedience

Obedying God as we listen to him is the *pathway to effective ministry* because it offers us the challenge of *following through by means of action on what we hear* from him when we listen.

Obedience is an expression of love that leads to a greater presence of God within us. Where there is obedience, we find our new selves, a new direction, a new transformation, into wholeness and a new effectiveness in service to others.

Out of loving, believing, surrendering and listening, there comes transformation, commitment, renewed motivation and empowerment. Indeed, although with human beings becoming whole and the task of effective service may seem impossible, with God all things will now be possible. But “this kind” of power comes only by prayer and fasting.

It is only in this way that health and salvation – which are the same – shall be revealed to us and to the world. How willing are we to love God, to believe in Him, to surrender and listen to him? How willing are we to seek the path of contemplative spirituality as we face obstacles in becoming whole and in our service to others?

A CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITATION ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us meditate. And as we seek in this act of meditation to love God, to believe in him, to surrender to him and to listen to him, let us reflect on the words of the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus taught his disciples.

Loving

Lord, we love you because you are *Our Father*, Papa, Daddy. You first loved us. You are our Father whom we adore because you are lifted up, you are transcendent, *you are in heaven*, holding the whole world in your hands. As we love you, we acknowledge your might. We say that your name is special. *Your name is holy*, as we love and adore you.

Believing

Lord, we believe in you, because *your kingdom has come on earth*. We are now in your kingdom. You are our king. As king, you have total authority in the land. Thus, whenever we seek anything and we proclaim anything in your name, it will be done. Yours is the name above all names – the name to which every knee shall bow above the earth, on and under the earth. Your kingdom is come.

Surrendering

And Lord, we surrender to you as we say, *let your will be done on earth*, in our homes, in our neighbourhood, as we sit by ourselves, in our thought-life, in our work, in our play, in every aspect of our life, as in our morality. In every aspect we surrender, that your will may be done here *as it is in heaven*.

Lord, as we “let go” we want to “let God,” so we say to you, give us what we need to live. Supply what is necessary to meet the personal and practical needs of ourselves, of the people whom we serve, and of the whole world. Lord, *give us this day our daily bread*.

And as we seek your presence in our lives when we “let go” to “let God,” we also have to seek your forgiveness for the many ways in which we have failed you. We lay bare before you the sins of pride, lust, doubt, hatred for others, greed and jealousy. We confess the more private sins, such as lack of temperance and the sins that for each one of us only we, among human beings, may know about. As we confess to you now, each one of us, we say *forgive us our trespasses*.

And as we “let go,” help us, Lord, to let go the wrong that others have done us. We find it hard to forget the pain of the heart, but Lord, we ask you to heal the heart, to help us let go and forgive, to enjoy that freedom in our spirits. So as we let go, Lord, *help us to forgive*.

And as we let go, we pray that you will protect us from the testing that will overwhelm us. Lord, we will experience sickness, yes. We will experience loss, yes. We will experience persecution, yes. We will experience inner doubt and affliction from the evil one, yes. But Lord, like Job, we can say, “After my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19: 26). Lord, we know that you will not give us more than we can bear. And even though we fear no evil, *you will not lead us into overwhelming temptation* and testing because you are our Lord, and you will comfort and *deliver us from evil*.

Listening

Lord, as we “let go” in these moments, now help us to listen to you, to hear what you have to say to us.

Let us now open our minds and hearts to hear the Lord.

(Silence)

Let us love the Lord absolutely. He loves us absolutely. We celebrate the words he has said to us. And we celebrate these words because we say, “Lord as we have loved you, as we have believed you, as we have surrendered to you, as we have listened to you, we now seek to obey, because *yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*”