

Wisdom Circle – Contemplation
January 2019



Chalice Lighting - Today by Mary Oliver

Today I'm flying low and I'm
not saying a word.
I'm letting all the voodooos of ambition sleep.
The world goes on as it must,
the bees in the garden rumbling a little,
the fish leaping, the gnats getting eaten.
And so forth.
But I'm taking the day off.
Quiet as a feather.
I hardly move though really I'm traveling
a terrific distance.
Stillness. One of the doors
into the temple.

Silence- Take three minutes to settle into this space, to fully arrive. You may also use this time to reflect about the chalice lighting words above.

Check-In

As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share whatever you need to share with this group in order to be fully present. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.

Business (approx. 10 min)

Use this time for any new business: welcoming new members, scheduling future meetings, revisiting/reciting the covenant, answering questions about wisdom circle processes, etc...

Spiritual Exercise

Share any insight, learning, lesson gained from doing or resisting this month's spiritual exercise. (Focus on your heart/emotions/spirit/personal experience). Because this is a section for personal sharing, attentive listening and no-crosstalk is recommended.

Choose one of the following spiritual exercises and, if possible, commit to do the exercise for the entire month of January:

- a) **Poem or Song-** Choose a song or poem that speaks to you. Read it or listen to it (you can recite it or sing it, too) over and over again for at least 5 min each time.
- b) **Walk the Labyrinth** – Take some time to walk the labyrinth located in the canyon behind the meeting house. Do so in silence, mindfully, paying attention to each step you take.
- c) **Pray, meditate or contemplate-** Choose the practice that feels better to you. Say a daily prayer, take some time to sit in silence and mediate, go out in nature and spend sometime contemplating it.

How was this experience for you? What insight did you gain?

Discussion of Reading and Words of Wisdom

Take turns reading the words of wisdom. Share about the one(s) that caught your attention. Discuss the reading and the questions below. Crosstalk can enrich your conversation here (avoid judging or wanting to “fix” things, and speak from your own experience, avoiding generalizations, and identifying who you mean when/if you use the word “we”).

Words of Wisdom

“Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life...It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that source” -**Thomas Merton**

“Muddy water, let stand, becomes clear.” — **Lao Tzu**

“When we contemplate the whole globe as one great dewdrop, striped and dotted with continents and islands, flying through space with other stars all singing and shining together as one, the whole universe appears as an infinite storm of beauty.”-**John Muir**

“If we stay faithful to the practice, our false self begins to be dismantled and we live more and more from our center, from that Divine Ground of Being, from our true self.” —**Susan Rush**

How good it is to center down! To sit quietly and see one’s self pass by! —**Howard Thurman**

Contemplation

A reading from the Center for Action and Contemplation

<https://cac.org/contemplation-week-1-summary-2018-12-15/>

Contemplation does not always happen in physical silence, stillness, or solitude. And wordless prayer does not necessarily imply contemplation. Thomas Merton noted that his brothers in the monastery may have been more introverts than contemplatives! The “silence” we’ve referred to this week is not so much a lack of sound as it is a deep, interior openness to Presence. That openness—of heart, mind, and body—can take many forms.

Barbara Holmes, one of CAC’s guest authors and teachers this year, writes about contemplative silence from an African American perspective.

Although silence is not necessarily the focus of contemplation in Africana contexts, it is always a part of the human experience. We tend to presume that one must create silent spaces for contemplation. It is as if we have drawn the spiritual veil around contemplative activity, seeking to distance prayerful and reflective practices from the noise of the world. . . . European domination in Africa and in other nations elicited the silence of those captive cultures. . . . In Africana contexts, this may mean that ineffability is translated into dance or song. Accordingly, an ontological silence can occupy the heart of cacophony, the interiority of celebratory worship. . . .

Silence [is] the source of all being. . . . Silence is the sea that we swim in. Some of us allow it to fully envelop and nurture our seeking; others who have been silenced by oppression seek to voice the joy of spiritual reunion in an evocative counterpoint. As frightening as it may be to “center down,” we must find the stillness at the core of the shout, the pause in the middle of the “amen,” as first steps toward restoration. Contemplation in Africana contexts is an act of communal reflection and reflexive engagement. . . .

[Recalling experiences from her own life, Barbara writes:] . . . contemplation was an everyday practice that included nurture of the body and spirit. The lesson was that life was not to be lived as a truncated interlude without meaning. In the midst of a noisy secular life space, we were to know without question that the sacred far exceeded ordered Sunday worship services. . . .

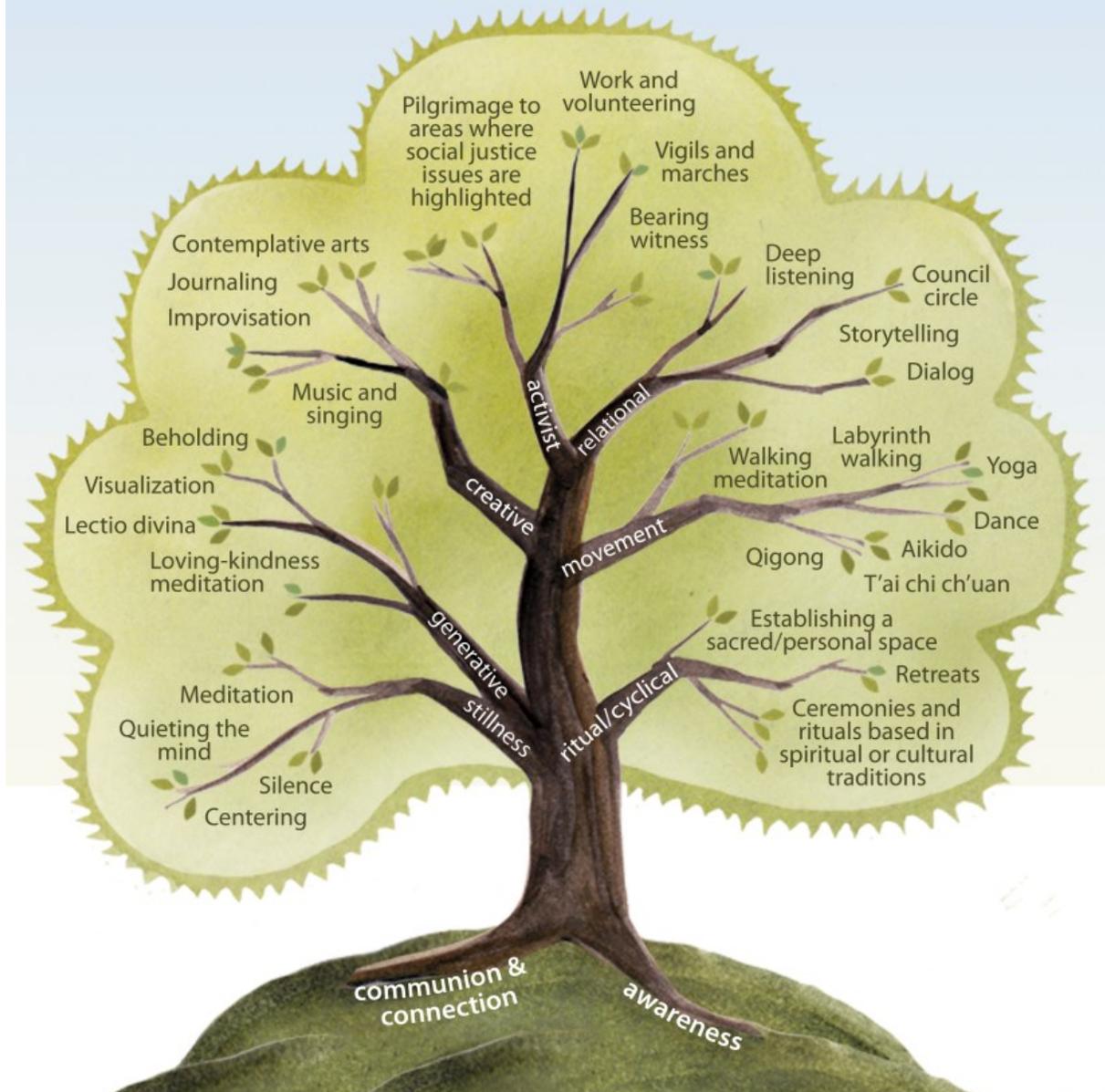
Although our lives were grounded in the context of social and political realities, we knew that God was also present. Sometimes the indwelling was ritually invoked through liturgy and worship, and at other times the mystery arose in the midst of ordinary activities. We learned to embrace a spectrum of contemplative experiences in the most unexpected places. . . .

Discussion

Look at the Tree of Contemplative Practices below. What’s your initial reaction? What’s coming up for you?

Think about your own spiritual practices, what grounds you? What connects you to the transcendent mystery of life?

The Tree of Contemplative Practices



Gratitude: Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session.

Extinguishing of the Chalice:

Poem For Belonging, John O'Donohue

May you listen to your longing to be free.

May the frames of your belonging be generous enough
for your dreams.

My you arise each day with a voice of blessing
whispering in your heart.

May you find a harmony between your soul and
your life.

May the sanctuary of your soul never become haunted.

May you know the eternal longing that lives at the heart of time.
May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within.

May you never place walls between the light and yourself.

May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world
to gather you, mind you, and embrace you in belonging.