

UNLOADING THE CONSCIOUSNESS FROM OPEN MIND, OPEN HEART

Emotionally charged thoughts are the chief way that the unconscious has of expelling chunks of emotional junk. In this way, without your perceiving it, a great many emotional conflicts that are hidden in your unconscious and affecting your decisions more than you realize are being resolved. As a consequence, over a period of time you will feel a greater sense of well-being and inner freedom. The very thoughts that you lament while in prayer are freeing the psyche from the damage that has accumulated in your nervous system over a lifetime. In this prayer both thoughts and silence have important roles to play.

To use a clumsy simile, in tenement houses where the garbage collection is unreliable, some tenants use the bathroom to store the garbage. If you want to take a bath, the first thing you have to do is empty out the junk. A similar procedure holds in this prayer. When we commit ourselves to the spiritual journey, the first thing the Spirit does is start removing the emotional junk of a lifetime that is inside of us. He wishes to fill us completely and to transform our entire body-mind organism, into a flexible instrument of divine love. But as long as we have obstacles in us, some of which we are not even aware of, He cannot fill us to full capacity. In His love and zeal He begins to clean out the tub. One means by which He does this is by passive purification initiated by the dynamic of centering prayer.

Centering prayer, insofar as it puts us at God's disposal, is a kind of request that God take our purification in hand. Courage is needed to face up to the process of self-knowledge, but it is the only way of getting in touch with our true identity and ultimately with our true Self, which is the image of God within us. When you feel bored, restless, and that anything would be better than just sitting still and being battered by disturbing thoughts, stay there anyhow. It's like being out in the rain without an umbrella and getting drenched to the skin. There is no use groaning because you didn't bring an umbrella. The best approach is simply to be willing to be doused by the torrent of your thoughts. Say, "I am going to get wet," and enjoy the mental rain.

Before you reflect on whether a particular period of prayer is going well, you are having a good period of prayer. After you reflect, it is not so good. If you are drenched with thoughts and can't do anything about them, acquiesce to the fact that that's the way it is for today. The less you wiggle and scream, the sooner the

work can be done. Tomorrow or a few days from now will be better. The capacity to accept what comes down the stream of consciousness is an essential part of the discipline. Cultivate a neutral attitude toward the psychological content of your prayer. Then it won't bother you whether you have thoughts or not. Offer your powerlessness to God and wait peacefully in His presence. All thoughts pass if you wait long enough.

Another point worth remembering in this. During the unloading process sometimes you may want to figure out where a particular smile, itch, pain, or strong feeling is coming from in your psyche and to identify it with some earlier period in your life. That's useless. The nature of the unloading process is that it does not focus on any particular event. It loosens up all the rubbish, so to speak, and the psychological refuse comes up as a kind of compost. It's like throwing out the garbage. You don't separate the egg shells from the orange peels. You just throw the whole thing out. Nobody is asking you to look through it or try to evaluate it. You just throw everything out in one big garbage bag.

It can also happen that external difficulties may arise in your life that have a direct connection with your spiritual growth. They are another way God uses to bring you to a deeper knowledge of yourself and to a greater compassion for your family, friends, and other people.