



“Nothing is Lost”

Excerpted from an oral history interview*
with Isabel Castellanos, January 6, 2025.

ISABEL CASTELLANOS: It's important to know Thomas [Keating] the person, the human being, because most of us know him only through his books and, if you're lucky and persevere, through his videos, which I think still transmit a great deal of his being. It's amazing how much they still transmit his charisma 40 years after the fact. But it's important, also, in order not to make a guru out of Thomas. It's important to know him as he was, without turning him into an idol, which is very common in the case of founders. He was very, very much aware of that peril. When he came to Miami in 2007, one of his concerns was precisely what was going to happen with Contemplative Outreach and with the practice of Centering Prayer once he was gone. One of his main concerns was that people could become so devoted to the figure of the founder, to his own image, that it would stifle their growth, as has happened on many occasions in the past. At the same time, he wanted to preserve the integrity of the [Centering Prayer] practice. This is a paradox. Both are going on at the same time. He was very much aware of that, and he thought and prayed a great deal about that.

PAMELA BEGEMAN: *When I interviewed Fr. Carl Arico, he said, “If you don't know someone, you'll canonize them. But if you've met them and you know them, you know they're a human being.”*

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*An oral history project is currently underway to interview close personal friends, colleagues, companions and family members of Thomas Keating to add to the breadth and depth of the Thomas Keating archives located at Pitts Theological Library at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

ISABEL: Exactly. And if they're human beings we can identify with them, since we are human beings as well. There's the possibility of establishing rapport, a communion with that person as a fellow human being, not as someone set apart and that I think has attained unreachable heights. Thomas shows us that the path is possible for everyone. Not only that it is possible, but that we are being called to it; and he has given us a method to help us consent to it ...

PAMELA: *So, you got to see a side of Thomas on the [Contemplative Outreach] board during your board [tenure] — the administrative concerns, the community concerns, what to do with the evolution of the community. You got to see his human side there. ... How did you find him in administrative decision making? How did he teach you in that respect? ...*

ISABEL: It's difficult to isolate this aspect from the rest, but as an administrator sometimes Thomas could be challenging. On his very first talk in 2007 to the then board of directors of Extensión Contemplativa Internacional (ECI) (and this we find in the transcript of his presentation but did not make it to the book

Consenting to God as God Is) he told us, "I know that one of my problems is that I want everybody to be happy. And that is not possible. And that really causes problems." He acknowledged this tendency in himself and humbly brought it out into the open. And it's true. But something very strange happened on those occasions, because usually when we witness people deliberately wanting to please others, it is possible to perceive a whiff of the false self in action. Not so with Thomas. I never sensed that he was looking for approval. Of course, I wasn't at the bottom of his soul, but what I always sensed was that he was only thinking of the other person. He just didn't want to make the other person sad or angry or uncomfortable. He really didn't want that.

PAMELA: *Yes, David Frenette saw this same thing. The way David Frenette said it [when I interviewed him] is, "It's because Thomas loved everyone." He just loved everyone. So he wanted everyone to be okay. He wanted everyone to be taken care of.*

ISABEL: And that created problems, administrative problems since there were times when we had to decide between this or that, between incompatible situations. There are issues that sometimes must be decided one way or the other. On certain occasions, if Thomas came in and tried to make this person happy or that other person happy, we would go, "Oh, my God. {laughing} Oh, my God!" But, like David said, it really wasn't because he was looking for something for himself, but because he was trying to be kind to others, to those he loved. He really, truly, and honestly loved everybody. So, some of those meetings could become somewhat difficult, depending on the situation. Nevertheless, in the end, his presence and his outlook had a way of putting things in the right perspective, of moving the discussion in the direction of the Spirit, without imposing his point of view or saying anything as if came from above. I learned a lot from that. He had a gentleness. ...

PAMELA: *You mentioned at the beginning that he was a man of paradoxes. How else would you describe the paradoxes you saw in him?*





ISABEL: Well, he was a man of paradoxes until the very end. I mean, he was the most apophatic teacher that you could expect to find in this day and age. And at the same time, at the end, he was hanging on to the prayer of Charles de Foucauld, a totally cataphatic [prayer]. In her book, *[Thomas Keating: The Making of a Modern Christian Mystic]* Cynthia Bourgeault brilliantly states, “Thomas was bilingual.” He could move between the worlds, and that is so true. He was given the grace of perfectly integrating his relationship with both the Unmanifest (transcendent) God and the Manifest (immanent) God of particularity. No contradiction whatsoever existed in him at the end. Thomas could at one moment be talking about unity consciousness and immediately afterwards deal with Contemplative Outreach practical concerns ... He was dying and would still be calling me on the phone to ask about the online meditation chapels that were just beginning in 2018. Thomas was always like that. If we want to understand him, we really have to be open to paradox. We have to be open to contradictions. We have to be open to a big picture of him, just like he invites us to have a big picture of God. Otherwise, we will not understand him. We would simply be constructing a nice little niche in which to idolize him.

PAMELA: *One of the paradoxes that I think is interesting about him is how traditional Father Thomas was ... a man*

rooted in his tradition, and yet at the same time a pioneer in interspiritual dialogue.

ISABEL: Exactly. Exactly.

PAMELA: *Somebody who really wanted to go beyond the boundaries and explore the commonalities, “The Common Heart,” as the book is called, which is just so beautiful.*

ISABEL: And that teaches me a great deal because it shows me how important it is to be open to other things. One important insight that Thomas taught me, especially at the end, is that **nothing is lost**. Everything that he let go of throughout his journey, he recovered at the end, in a transformed and integrated way. We don’t really have to leave anything behind at the end. We are called to live! Yes, we must let go of all our attachments in the course of the journey. But at the end, like Richard Rohr would say, “everything belongs.” Everything belongs. Nothing is lost. Thomas was profoundly rooted in his tradition. He was Catholic to the core, without that becoming an identity label, since he lost all identity eventually, right? This was not about mental constructs, doctrine or abstract truths of faith, but about his encounter, his relationship with Jesus Christ, his becoming one with Christ. That was the basis of his openness and, at the same time, of his discovery of Christ in others,



PHOTO BY RON BARNETT

and his acceptance and delight in discovering the presence of God in others, in other traditions. That is very important in understanding and responding with tolerance and universal love.

PAMELA: *What were some of his most important teachings that were meaningful to you and transformative for you?*

ISABEL: Well, the whole thing! {laughing} I mean, as we were talking before you started recording [this interview], one of the teachings that I think is incredible, and very important for me, especially right now, is the Four Consents. At the moment, as I told you before, I'm in the midst of the Third Consent [aging and diminishment], and it makes a huge, huge difference when I face my limitations from that perspective. This is a consent that I am being called to right at this moment, it's a 'yes' that I am being called to give. Limitations are more and more obvious, and I have no control over them. Everything has a meaning when it's lived from that perspective. ... The Four Consents is about accepting reality as it is. It's about really consenting to reality, whatever that is, consenting to the reality of God's goodness, to the gifts that we have received, as well as consenting to diminishment and non-being. It is really consenting to what is. ...

I am a different person. I can distinguish a BT, "Before Thomas" and an AT, "After Thomas" stage in my life. I was turned inside out by his transmission really! Then, to be given the privilege of witnessing what I witnessed in him at the end of his life, precisely at this point in my own life, has been very, very, very, very transformative, very, very important. To hear him say, "I believe I am being called to explore that my vocation might be to join the passion of Christ for whatever purpose God may have." That really impacted me, because he was so detached that it didn't occur to him to attach any personal intention to his surrender. He could have said, "I consent to this for the peace of the world, or for the transformation of the world..." But no, he offered his sufferings "for whatever purpose God might have." That is huge!

And then, of course, at the end, the very end, when he said on my very last conversation with him that he was living the passion of Christ, *including the loss of the Father's presence!* One of the things that moved me the most was his voice. I can still hear it. The tone in which he said it. It was one of complete surrender. You could hear it his voice. It was very weak at that point, but you could hear a complete surrender. *Consummatum est!* All is fulfilled! I could hear that. I could sense it. Being exposed to that, being a witness to that, is really an immense grace for which I am so very grateful! ...

PAMELA: *Some others that I've talked to spoke a lot about witnessing Thomas listen for the promptings of the Spirit and being in that state of discernment and listening and waiting, which is not always convenient or expedient. He was willing to wait for that prompting until he felt rooted in it and it was clear. Did you see that as well?*

ISABEL: Oh, yes, definitely. I saw it in his administrative duties in Contemplative Outreach, in which he was always listening to the promptings of the Spirit. Sometimes he just was in the dark. I think that was a constant in his life: when things are not clear, to have the patience to wait and not to rush into action, while at the same time being conscious of the need to make decisions. ... It's difficult to describe it, but I always sensed that there was this other channel in him, if you want to speak holistically, that there was always this other channel that was constantly connected to his listening to God's will.

I already mentioned his final journey. During that time, the awareness of his calling to join in the passion of Christ unfolded very gradually. He began by stating things like, "I think ... I believe ... it may be ..." Little by little the verbs became increasingly assertive. You can almost detect in his words the unfolding of this process. He did not start by rushing in and saying something like, "Oh, okay, here I am now Lord." No, it was a process. A real process of discernment. When the response from God was clear, he moved into accepting it, welcoming it, and recognizing, *really* recognizing, all that was being



returned to him from his past. This included a childlike delight in the joy and comfort that he was receiving from the Blessed Mother ...

PAMELA: *I wanted to bring that up because that other channel, as you said, is different from his indecisiveness. That's a different state of being in discerning and listening than the other one that had difficulty with decisions ... of vacillation between being rooted in the Spirit and indecisiveness or uncertainty but then going back into the waiting and the praying. So I just wanted to tease that out a little bit.*

ISABEL: For sure. I think that's one of his lessons to us. He teaches us to wait. {laughing} He teaches us to wait, since there are situations in which there is nothing else that we can do ... {laughing}. ☸



Isabel Castellanos resides in Miami, Florida, USA and has been practicing Centering Prayer for over 30 years.

Becoming a Lover of God

DANIEL R.
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What kind of relationship do you have with God? Over the last year or so I have been playing with a series of grounding intentions and more recently I am using these as a vestibule for my Centering Prayer practice. One of these statements is: I am becoming a lover of God.

It occurs to me that I am not a great lover. What I mean by this is that Ultimate Reality, who has many names, loves me more than I love myself. I often take this for granted. Today the ground where I stand is tattooed with an understanding that when “... we are faithless, God remains faithful, for God cannot deny Godself” (2 Timothy 2:13).

I grew up as a young adult in a Christian container where I was groomed to become a big fish of sorts. I was inspired by and followed those who proclaimed their “*passion for Jesus*.” Some have suggested I was infected by a religiously transmitted disease. I was a sincere seeker and my seeking led me along the path I found myself journeying. But I was not okay in my inner being; the hurts and deep disappointments of my childhood marked me, and my own efforts to grow up encountered regular moments of failure. Like you I was a person whose starting point in life was defined by my unique experience of what Thomas Keating calls the *human condition*.

My relationship to God and my belonging and status in the community in which I was a leader was defined by behaviour, believing and the badges of Spirit-possession: self-control, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, etc. I was loved *conditionally* by the god of my understanding and those in my circle. Prayer was part of my performance and not the basis of being in relationship with God.

One Friday night I watched a movie in our local cinema and the relationship onscreen between a young indigenous woman and her grandfather devastated me. I wept violently and uncontrollably, making a scene as I watched that movie; I had no capacity to process or integrate the event. I did not understand the experience myself and those around me had no sense of how to explore, go deeper or support what was being invited in that moment. I talked the talk and limped the walk, usually in secret.

Today I understand that what is required, and can be *either* realised now or taken as we pass through the veil of human death, is a medicine that causes the false self to die. My walking wounded self was patched up and had learned to perform but I could not have been further from being human in the ways that the Gospel invites.

My programs for happiness (security/survival; affection/esteem; power/control) were all I “knew” but their very existence and influence was a thing I was non-conscious of. My life events conspired to remove myself and my young family from the community where I had poured out my life. The walls of the city of my life began to crumble. My identity as a lead performer in a religious community was undone. The success and accomplishments I thought I had realised turned to sand. I was left alone in a desert of my homemade attempts at becoming human – a follower of Jesus. I was angry, sad and confused. Was I a seeker anymore?

I found in friendships and in books all kinds of invitations to pursue relationship with the god of my understanding. I cannot exactly remember how but I encountered the method of Centering Prayer and it has become part of my way of life. This practice is rewiring me, the space and awareness that I am receiving as I keep on practicing, one day or one sit at a time, is changing me. Centering Prayer is today

an integrated part of what it means for me to live my *one wild precious life* repenting. I know intuitively that I am – and you are – loved by the Being our very existence depends upon, moment to moment. I am becoming a lover of God.

I do not seek or expect that I will become a Master of how the false self dies. But my daily intention is to live a life that is surrendered to the *Abba* of Jesus. Not my will or my way be done but theirs, in whose image all humans are made.

Having practiced Centering Prayer for a number of years I increasingly find myself drawn to noticing the energy and patterns that repeat in the rhythm of daily life. The gentle letting go of thoughts that defined my initiation into the method of Centering Prayer is now evolving into a heartfelt practice of letting go of difficult feelings or commentaries as they show-up in daily life.

Thomas was clear that there were other practices, e.g. the Welcoming Prayer, that would support our habitual *return* to and acuity concerning the contemplative dimension of the Gospel – how to’s for living daily life with a growing conscious awareness of and consent to the presence and action of the Divine One. Do you have a complimentary practice that supports your experience of consent in daily life?

May we all grow into the fullness of what it means for us to be lovers of God. ☩

If you have a story that you would like to share about your experience of the practice of Centering Prayer or your contemplative journey, please email pamela@coutreach.org.



My Journey of Homecoming and Consent

For fifteen years, my spiritual seat was one of disciplined pursuit. As a practitioner—and eventually a teacher—within a particular Tibetan Buddhist tradition, I was trained to view the mind with the precision of a surgeon. My “end-game” was clear: the cultivation of a wisdom and compassion that could lead to liberation and enlightenment. I spent those years learning to sit with the arising and passing of all things, and finding a stable clarity in the vastness of both my mind and the Mahayana path. I am deeply grateful for that time; it was a prerequisite. It gave me the mental muscles and the internal silence necessary to eventually respond to an undeniable call.

The call came not through a text or a teacher, but in the vulnerable space between sleep and waking. One morning, I sat up in bed and found myself speaking four words that my training hadn’t prepared me for: “I have a soul.”

My Buddhist training specifically focused on the lack of a permanent self, and the “soul” was eschewed in service of a transcendent emptiness. But this wasn’t a philosophical or theological debate; it was a visceral reclamation. It felt as though a guest had finally arrived in a room I had spent fifteen years cleaning. Re-encountering the works of Thomas Moore (e.g., *Care of the Soul*) during this time acted as a vital anchor; his focus on “soul-making” reminded me that the spiritual journey isn’t just an ascent into rainbow light, but a descent into the sacred depths of my humanity. There was a sudden weight to my interior life—a sense that I wasn’t just a student of wisdom, but a participant in a profound, individual mystery.

Shortly thereafter, a second morning brought a culminating turn. I woke up and said, “Intimacy. Intimacy with God.”

In an instant, the journey shifted from an ascent toward enlightenment to a relational descent into love. The “Divine Spark” I had been seeking through rigor was revealed to be a steady light that had been there all along, waiting for me to stop fighting with myself. I realized then that my Buddhist years had built an open and receptive vessel, but the vessel was now being filled with a Presence I could finally name. I certainly wasn’t to leave the wisdom of the East behind; I was to bring it home to meet the Creator.

When I finally turned toward the Christian contemplative path, I found that I wasn’t walking into a strange land, but into a homecoming already prepared for me. My first guide was Fr. Richard Rohr. Discovering *Falling Upward* felt like receiving a map of a territory I had been wandering for years. Fr. Richard’s insight—that the first half of life is about building the container—sanctified my past. My fifteen years of Buddhist training weren’t misguided; they were the fire that baked the clay of my container, rendering it strong enough to hold a deeper mystery.

My sense of homecoming—so eloquently described by Brené Brown in the Foreword to *Falling Upward*—was the emotional atmosphere of my transition. The practical anchor arrived through CAC’s online course for the book, which opened with an introduction to Centering Prayer. The instruction was deceptively simple: “Be still and know that I am God.”

While Fr. Richard provided the map of the “two halves of life,” it was Fr. Thomas Keating who provided the method for the journey. Watching him speak of the spiritual life as a “divine therapy” was a revelation. He showed me that the rigorous dismantling of the ego I had practiced in Buddhism was not an end in

itself, but a way of clearing the debris of the “false self” to make room for the “True Self” that lives in God. Through Fr. Thomas, I realized that my years of “letting go” were actually the perfect preparation for the ultimate “consent” of Centering Prayer.

Centering Prayer became the bridge where my two lives met, using the stability I had cultivated via the East as a vessel for the intimacy I now craved in the West. It taught me that the Divine Spark didn't require me to transcend my humanity, but to simply consent to God's presence and action within it.

As this new path began to take root, several key ingredients began to blend and simmer, drawing me fully into the heart of the Contemplative Outreach community. The first was encountering *The Spiritual Journey: Formation in Christian Contemplative Life* series. I jumped into this profound body of work with a deep sense of hunger, accompanied by an immense appreciation for the rigor, depth, and wisdom that had been so carefully developed and made available. It provided a rich, structural foundation that satisfied both my intellect and my longing heart.

The second ingredient was finding the Meditation Chapel. Its explicit invitation to “join in a global community of prayer... and pray in silence with practitioners from all over the world in this ecumenical, interfaith community” resonated deeply with my newly emerging life. It felt like an invitation to a vast, spiritual university unlike any I had encountered before. Sitting in virtual chapels alongside a global community of seekers who were all explicitly committed to a journey of transformation allowed me to realize that while my practice was silent and interior, I was never walking alone.

Beyond daily practice and study, the ultimate deepening of this path arrived through the Intensive and Post-Intensive Centering Prayer retreats provided under the auspices of Contemplative Outreach. It was in these six-to-eight-day retreats that I met “real” practitioners and shared an unyielding space of silence with them. There is something truly profound in a shared intention to consent to the presence and action of God within—a communion born of a sacred, shared solitude in hallowed environments.

A peak of this retreat life was a powerful week spent at the Garrison Institute with Cynthia

Bourgeault and David Frenette. Together, we sat in deep silence while holding the late Fr. Thomas Keating's *The Secret Embrace* poems in our hearts. In that space, the rigorous, silent discipline I had cultivated for fifteen years via the East was completely transfigured. It was no longer just about witnessing the nature of mind; it was about resting in a poetic, relational field of divine love.

Today, this gift of interior stillness has naturally flowed outward into my church community at Trinity NYC. I recently helped launch and now co-lead a weekly Centering Prayer group there, which enjoys deeply engaged participation. It has been a joy to visit various established community groups throughout the church, introducing different members of the congregation to the gentle mechanics of this silent practice. In doing so, we are witnessing a natural, organic, yet blessed growth of a dedicated contemplative community right within our parish walls.

From within the messiness of life, I am glimpsing a quiet, steady light that reveals itself in the moments I stop resisting. I am gradually releasing the need to protect my peace as if it were a fragile water bubble; instead, those moments of peace I find in the silence are what support me from the inside out. The container I built allows me to hold “what is,” while the intimacy I find in the present allows me to trust that I am held in the hands of God.

I no longer feel like a traveler caught between traditions. Instead, I feel like a man who has finally unpacked his bags in the home he was always meant to inhabit. The fifteen years of seeking were the long, necessary walk toward the front door. I am leaving the preparatory seasons of my life not with a new achievement, but with a deeper sense of presence—trusting that the Providence which guided me through the prior 15 years is the same Love that meets me in the morning silence. ☸



Neil Toyota resides in Glen Spey (Catskills), New York, USA, and has been practicing Centering Prayer since February 2024.

To Say Yes



I started a regular fitness routine in 2003. My father had just had part of his feet amputated because of complications from diabetes, one of my sisters had been recently diagnosed with the disease, one of my uncles was in a coma and I was carrying significantly more weight than was healthy. Somehow, given all of these circumstances, beginning to get active was an easy choice.

Over the last 23 years, it has been a far-from-steady journey – even though the commitment and motivation are always with me. And over time, I’ve come to realize that attending to my physical health is not something that I can do for a short period of time. It can only unfold over time and has to be a daily habit. And the chances are good that all kinds of resistance is going to come up. Not only that, to see steady progress, a steady and progressive effort is needed.

Not a heroic effort, mind you. Steady and progressive.

When I pause and reflect, I can see that something similar can be said of my spiritual journey as it has unfolded over the last many years.

I was introduced to the practice of Centering Prayer just about the same time as I began to exercise. And even though there have been detours from the path of Centering Prayer – engaging in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola, studying the Thai Forest lineage of Theravada Buddhism, these detours have always brought me back to the practice of Centering Prayer and sitting with “the naked intention to consent to God’s action and presence.”

Recently, I had the opportunity to present on Thomas Keating’s notion of Divine Therapy for Contemplative Outreach’s Living Flame series. One of the real gifts of presenting this material was the opportunity to immerse myself in this teaching again – to spend time with many of the components. I was particularly drawn to the relationship between Divine Therapy – the gradual unloading of the unconscious – and the spiritual journey itself.

Both take time.

And there’s more to it than that.

A few days ago, the Irish poet and author John O'Donohue's book *Anam Cara: Spiritual Wisdom from the Celtic World* made its way off of my bookshelf back into my hands. In one of the early sections of the book, O'Donohue addresses "spiritual programmes," noting that they tend to be very linear. He goes on to reference Meister Eckhart, crediting him in saying that there is no such thing as a spiritual journey. O'Donohue continues: "If there were a spiritual journey it would only be a quarter-inch long though many miles deep. It would be a swerve into rhythm with your deeper nature and presence."

While I was preparing for my presentation on Divine Therapy, something curious happened. An article was emailed to me from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective entitled, "Not for Happiness." The author, Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse, makes the point that we do not take on the practice of the dharma – the Buddhist spiritual path of practice – for the sake of happiness. He tells us that studying and practicing the dharma will bring anything but happiness. It will bring great disturbance, as it turns out, as the practitioner comes face to face with the realities of the ego over time.

Call it synchronicity or coherence in a higher level of causality, but this assertion felt deeply connected to the motivation for following in the path of Jesus. We don't take this practice up to have a comfortable life any more than we take up this practice to sleep better at night, be relieved from stress, or even to feel good all of the time as we are held in the arms of God. True enough, all of these things may happen. But the deeper reason why we take up this path – the real reason why Jesus invites us to follow – is nothing short of transformation; and transformation is not easy.

A few years ago, I was working with one of my teachers in an embodiment practice that can be seen as a context for working with the Welcoming Prayer. The practice involves taking gestures, one after another, to music that is rooted in the ancient near east. The practice is difficult by design – and among other things, it sets us up to experience the "afflictive emotions" that the Welcoming Prayer works with in real time.

In this particular time, working with this practice, the core issue of my own spiritual journey was

revealed in a large and startling way. I began to feel the grimace on my face from the inside – and to see how I was beating myself up for every mistake – over and over. This self-flagellation, this poor image of myself that came as a result, has been the core wound of my lifetime. The depth of my spiritual journey was suddenly placed in front of me.

This is the "many miles deep" that John O'Donohue talks about – or "the Spiral Staircase" as Thomas Keating talks about – going deeper and deeper into the shadow, while, paradoxically, ascending higher and higher toward the Divine.

I have come to see that this is not only the way that my own spiritual journey has unfolded – it's the way that the spiritual journey unfolds – at least the unfolding of the spiritual journey that is transformation in Christ. In this journey, time shifts from being simply linear to being something that, while it has a linearity to it, also has depth and dimension. The path of healing, of transforming, is itself a transformative path that takes us into the deep.

As I reflect on the way that this path has unfolded over time, it brings me back to a core teaching from *The Cloud of Unknowing* – that we are drawn to this work only by the love of God. And this is crucial, because only love can allow us to face the deep in a way that allows healing. Only through love can we face the shadow and allow the Light of the Holy One to reach into us, shaping us as vessels of love and presence.

This spiritual journey – this journey of allowing – might well be far from steady. We are bound to have many detours. Yet, once we are on this path – once the love of God has drawn us to follow in this way – all we can do is say yes. ☸



Henry Schoenfield resides in Lynn, Massachusetts, USA, and has been practicing Centering Prayer since about 2003.

Our Common Silence

God's silence is our meeting place, our commons. By entering, we consent to God's grace peeling away the rind of our small selves, transforming our wrongdoings, virtues, moralities, and fears into boundless Love. In the commons, we intimately meet all others who answer that same call, whether they enter from a neighbor's home, a hospital, or a prison.

We meet in spirit in God's commons. Our given names, riches, and physical scars all disappear. God's darkness dissolves us into God. There we meet Mary Magdalene, Judas Iscariot, and the innumerable unnamed. After touching God's silence, many of us crave someone else to share the experience with. This is especially true for those locked behind prison walls.

John of the Cross overcame many obstacles to write about God while in prison. Little has changed in the five hundred years since his time. People in prisons today encounter God in profound ways. Like him, they want to share their encounters, ask crucial questions, and crave connection with others who seek God's commons. Their souls slip out unseen to relish in God's tender caress. They overcome mighty odds to write down their thoughts. Concrete floors help them sharpen nubby pencils. In solitary confinement they're stripped of anything to write with or on. Yet like John of the Cross, they still find ways to write, to share, to reach out.

Those in prison who write Contemplative Outreach reach out blindly from God's commons. They

never know who reads their letters. And we who read and reply don't know if they are surrounded by seventy people in a dormitory or are battling hallucinations in solitary confinement. It doesn't matter. They reach out from a desire for love and need to be seen and heard. Some share how shame haunts their hearts. Some confide how inhuman isolation can bring profound spiritual connection. Discovering Centering Prayer in prison, many write, is the difference between living with hope rather than despair. On the whole, they fill pages with gratitude for Centering Prayer, for meeting God in silence.

Reading letters from contemplatives in prisons is to meet them in the Silence. It is a *Lectio*, a prayerful reading, with real-life consequences. We read their letters precisely as they offer themselves, without our judgements, biases, or false hopes clouding our replies. When they share tragedy, we hold their heaviness in our hearts. When they share how Centering Prayer brings them a sense of peace and belonging, we say, "Yes, we understand you."

In our replies, we understand we are guests they invite into their souls. Our replies must reach out with love and intimacy, like a tender and light dance in God's silence. We avoid taking on or offering flattery while offering encouragement and care. We are invited guests in prisons and the souls of those who are living in

prisons. Our obligation to take care has consequences from the organizational level down to the soul level.

When Centering Prayer ends, God's Silence continues to reverberate as our eyes open and our scars become visible. Some get in cars and drive home. Others return to overcrowded rooms, solitary loneliness, and hunger that must wait until the next meal arrives.

In Silence we heal together because we are spiritually bound, but our daily lives provide vastly different grounds for carrying out our contemplative practice. Meeting there is one gift of Centering Prayer, but it comes with the responsibility to meet each other in bodies with scars, faces with stories, and lives that are complex and human. For those in prison to take time and speak from their contemplative silence is an act of faith that they will be heard. To hear them and respond to their call is to meet them in God's love.

The last word belongs to Rumi, who so loved God's Silence that his invitation to us still resounds to this very day:

"Out beyond ideas of
wrongdoing and rightdoing,
There is a field. I'll meet you
there."

Yours in God's love,
a member of the COPOST team ☸

To learn more or find out how to volunteer with us, contact:
centering@cpprisonoutreach.org.



Lucky Tonight

Closed the meeting with one last reading

and the people in the squares, thanked each other for the shares
and I watched each one disappear from the screen.....

most I will never meet in this lifetime

but we have shared, experienced precious moments together

some unforgettable

and some of these encounters, I wish could go on forever

Maybe because it starts with 20 minutes of silence

a sweet listening to God's first language

that prepares our ears to hear what we need to hear

what we have come for in our curiosity

and yearning

for a "togetherness" we long for,

a spiritual, human connection

helping us in every evening

to realize how "same" we all are

and blessed!

Shawn Dehne resides in Littleton, Colorado, USA,
and has been practicing Centering Prayer since 2012.

RESOURCES IN OUR ONLINE STORE



Thomas Keating's Later Teachings

These five books have been re-published with new forwards and designs. Immerse yourself in what Cynthia Bourgeault calls “later Thomas” teachings and understanding, as he went deeper into his own experiences of All That Is.

- [Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ](#) \$20 USD
- [That We May Be One: Christian NonDuality](#) \$20 USD
- [God is Love: The Heart of All Creation](#) \$25 USD
- [God is All in All: The Evolution of the Christian Contemplative Spiritual Journey](#) \$30 USD
- [The Gift of Life: Death & Dying, Life & Living](#) \$30 USD

PHOTO BY RON BARNETT

OTHER RESOURCES



Season Four of Opening Minds, Opening Hearts Podcast Focuses on Divine Therapy

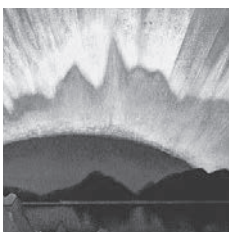
In season 4, we're engaging in conversations about the practice of Centering Prayer, specifically the aspect which Thomas Keating calls “the divine therapy” that “heals the emotional wounds of a lifetime.” In Centering Prayer, we are invited into “the office of the Divine Therapist,” and offered the gift of healing, “the divine remedy.”

Our conversations this season are with a diverse group of Centering Prayer practitioners and friends of Contemplative Outreach – psychotherapists, spiritual directors, members of the 12-step community, and Enneagram practitioners, each with their own healing journey experiences and insights they've gained while companioning others on the journey of healing and awakening.

Episodes from season 4 and all previous seasons are available on your favorite podcast platforms or on our [YouTube channel here](#). More information is also on our website here: <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/podcast>.



Our YouTube channel is now 15 years old, with over 900 free resources. New videos are posted each month. [Search under the Playlists tab for more video series.](#)



Self-guided, on-demand, e-courses are available anytime, anywhere you have internet access.

You may choose from a variety of options including e-courses to learn practices such as Centering Prayer, Welcoming Prayer, Lectio Divina, The Prayer of Forgiveness, Utmost Charity and the Process of Discernment. Or choose e-courses for spiritual enrichment and practice support including *Practicing the Presence of God*, *The Transformation of Suffering*, *Wisdom for Living: The Parables of Jesus* and more. Read more on the website at [Program>Online Courses](#). Scholarships are available.

DIRECTORY

For a complete listing of the Contemplative Outreach
worldwide contacts, please visit
www.contemplativeoutreach.org > Contact Us>
Choose US or International Contacts.

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extensioncontemplativainternacional.org



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Supporting international 12-step persons



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We are perpetually in awe and thanksgiving for
your abundant prayer and financial support. Your
gifts have opened the door for so many around
the world to experience the peace, joy, strength
and unconditional love of God through Centering
Prayer. We would be honored to have you consider
extending this legacy by including Contemplative
Outreach, Ltd., in your Will or Estate Plan.

Your bequest, regardless of size,
will have a powerful and lasting impact.

Another opportunity for giving is in gifting
appreciated stock to COL. This is a beautiful
donation which eliminates capital gains for you
and can also satisfy your Required Minimum
Distribution requirements.

If you have an interest in either
of the above-mentioned possibilities,
please contact Kathleen@coutreach.org
for guidance on how to participate.



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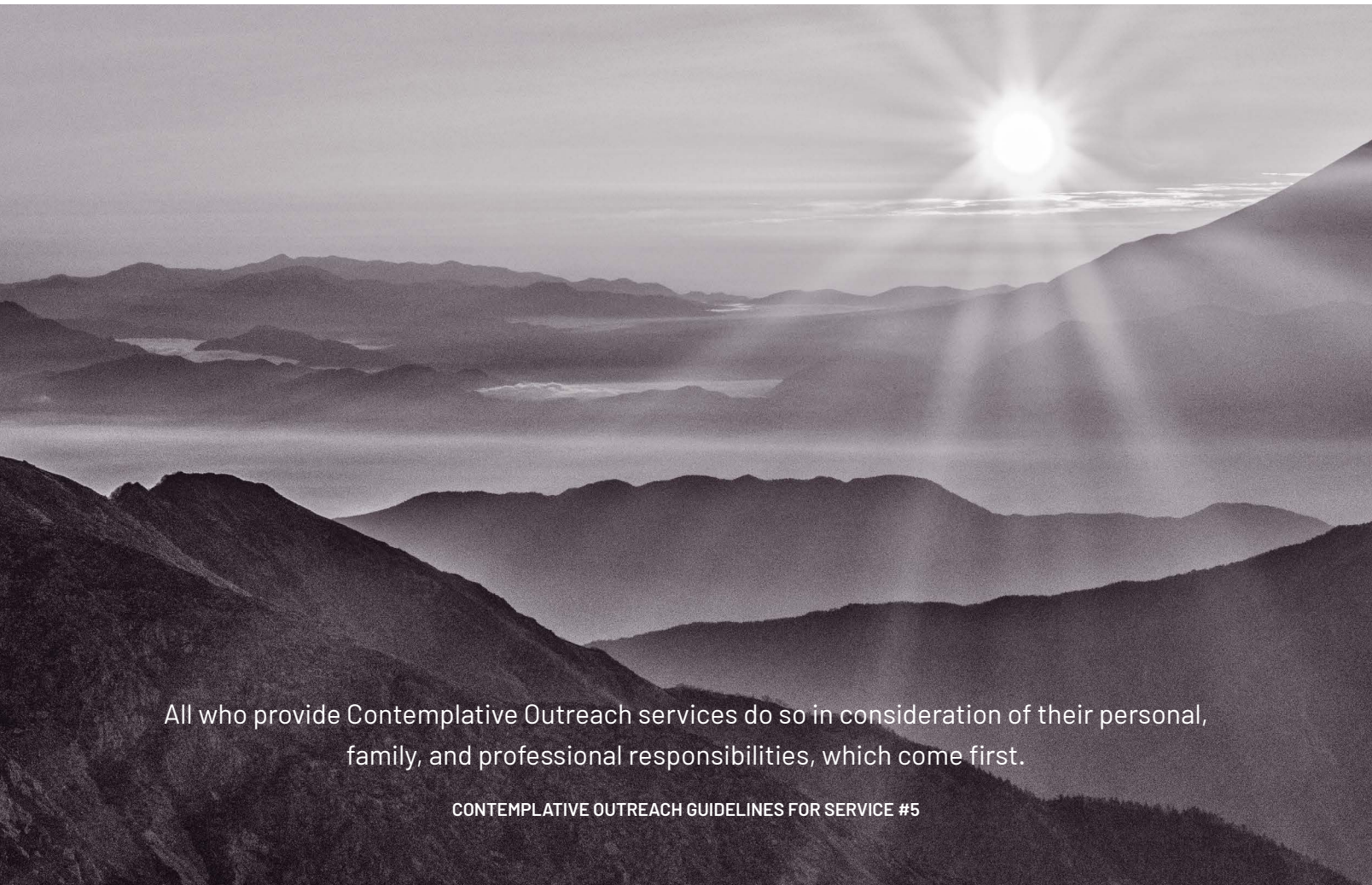


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