



Free Listening Hearts Program Materials

A Primer on Spiritual Discernment: Topic 7

Contemplative Sharing

At the heart of spiritual discernment is contemplative sharing, which combines reverent listening with articulating thoughts and feelings that percolate up from within. This presupposes that some serious inquiry has taken place beforehand.

Discernment begins with a real life concern. Next comes rational consideration of the stated issue: assemble information and ideas; engage in study, discussion, and possibly debate; then identify options and weigh them. After that it is time to transition from the head into the heart. Meditation exercises that tap into the imagination provide a good bridge for this. A wide range of creative meditation options can be found in sections three, four, and eight of this Open Hearts document. Such meditation will quiet the soul and bring forth rich material for reflective sharing. The time has come to move to a deeper place and stay there. The time is ripe to alternate between profound silence and sharing the thoughts of ones heart with others.

The ideal number of people for contemplative sharing probably is four. Yet if only one other person is available, it can be fruitful between two people. At the other end of the spectrum, sometimes there are reasons for a large group to want to share reflections as a group of the whole. This can work well if the participants are sufficiently experienced or if small group sharing immediately precedes the large group sharing.

For optimum contemplative sharing, everyone arrives in silence at an appointed time, gathering in a pre-designated spot that is quiet and free of interruptions, with the appropriate number of chairs set up in an intimate circle. Once everyone has arrived, the silence continues for a couple of minutes. Then, in no particular sequence, each person takes one turn to share reflections around whatever issue he or she is addressing. No one is obligated to share, but in most cases, doing so leads to additional insight for the person sharing as well as those who are listening.

During this period of shared reflections, everyone listens with reverent attention to the person speaking—making no comments, asking no questions, expressing neither approval nor disapproval—trying to be fully present to God at the center of the person

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speaking, allowing silence to envelop each person's words. The intent of this is to serve as a non-threatening prayerful presence in which a person can freely explore his or her inmost thoughts and feelings without being interrupted. Listen with your eyes as well as your ears. Listen with your entire self—body, mind, and spirit. Let the divine presence penetrate the group. Pause between speakers so that everyone can absorb what has been said.

Once everyone has had sufficient opportunity to speak, additional reflections may be offered in the same contemplative manner to the extent that time permits.

No single person is facilitator for this sharing. It is everyone's privilege and responsibility to help the group stay on course. When the time to conclude approaches, one person or more concludes by offering an appropriate Scripture text, a short prayer, or a closing thought to pull the reflections together.

The heart is the hub of all sacred spaces; go there and roam.

– Source unknown

