

**Optional Study and Practice Suggestions for Chapter 2,
“From Practicing the Presence to the Prayer of Listening,”
in *I Stand on Holy Ground***

This chapter gives us an opportunity to look at how we are doing with respect to practicing the Presence and meditation. If you see room for improvement, some of the suggestions here might be helpful.

How Are You Doing with Practicing the Presence?

In this class, Joel speaks about practicing the Presence, saying that “from the moment we awaken in the morning until we go to sleep at night, we [should] have some conscious realization and acknowledgment of God.”

If you would like to improve your practice, it can be helpful to ask, “What gets in the way of my practice?” For example, some students say that they simply forget to practice the Presence. They are conditioned to undertake and respond to the events of daily living in routine human ways, and they simply forget to take moments to acknowledge the Presence or to turn within for guidance and direction.

If we really want to practice the Presence at the level that Joel suggests, it must become a habit, something that we do automatically. Those who have studied how we build habits say that it can be helpful to choose a cue, something that you do frequently throughout the day, and then “pair” what you want to do with that activity. Then, every time you do that thing, you take a moment to engage the habit you want, which in this case is practicing the Presence.

For example, walking through a doorway can be a cue. We walk through doorways in our homes and offices, when we enter or leave a store or other place of business, and when we get into or out of a car. If your daily routine does not involve many doors, you can choose some other activity that you do frequently, such as making or answering a telephone call, or checking your computer, tablet, or smartphone for news or messages. If you think about your daily routine, you will probably see a repeated behavior pattern that could be a cue for you. The more you practice the Presence, the more you *will* practice the Presence. Eventually, you will not need the cues because you will have developed the habit.

If the obstacle to your practice is something other than simply forgetting, see if you can devise a way to eliminate that obstacle. You can always turn within, ask what you could do about it, and then listen. The Christ of your being can give you the answer.

If you are new to practicing the Presence as taught in *The Infinite Way* and want to learn more about it, the book *Practicing the Presence* gives a full treatment of the subject.

How Are You Doing with Meditation?

Because Joel talks about prayer, or meditation, in this class as well, it gives us the opportunity to look at how we are doing with meditation. Many students, both new and old, have difficulty with meditation from time to time. They report issues such as:

- Being unable to stop the chatter in their mind
- Continually being distracted by worries or other thoughts
- Falling asleep
- Feeling restless
- Feeling that nothing ever happens in the meditation
- Feeling that somehow, they are not doing it “right”

Over the years, we have gathered some suggestions from Joel, from other Infinite Way teachers, and from our own experience that have been helpful to us. They are summarized below. You might find that one or more of these resonates with you.

Prepare for Meditation

Sometimes when we sit down to meditate, we expect to get into meditation right away. But if we have been engaged in something else before we sit down, it can be difficult to change gears quickly. By taking a few minutes to prepare for meditation, we can get into a quiet, receptive state more easily.

- **Prepare the environment.** Minimize distractions. Turn off your cell phone or if you have a standard phone, take it off the hook. If there is a ritual you like that helps you to set a spiritual tone, such as lighting a candle, using incense, or ringing a bell or bowl, use it.
- **Focus your attention and attitude.** Often, we forget to remind ourselves why we are having the period of meditation. Take a moment to ask, “What is my purpose in this meditation?” By asking and answering this question, we adopt the appropriate attitude. In The Infinite Way, the purpose of meditation is to experience the presence of God and receive impartations from within. Reminding ourselves of this helps to foster an attitude of reverence and attentiveness.

In our study chapter, Joel gives us several examples of what we might “say” within ourselves to set our intention. For example, *“I am not coming to You for anything. I am not asking for anything, nor am I trying to tell You what things I have need of. I am coming here only to rest in the assurance of Your presence and grace. Reveal Yourself to me. Let me feel Your presence.”* Your own words will come to you as you think about your intention.

- **Prepare the body.** One reason that people have trouble with meditation is that the body is restless or uncomfortable. Take a moment to calm and quiet the body by taking several deep breaths. With every out breath, release physical tension. If you like to do yoga, a few simple yoga asanas can also help quiet and balance the body before meditation. When you are ready to meditate, be sure you are seated comfortably.
- **Prepare the mind.** To quiet and still the mind, Joel recommends that we begin with a contemplation to give the mind something to do that has a spiritual focus. A passage from the writings, a Bible verse, or even just a word such as “God” can be the subject of the contemplation. That passage, Bible verse, or word becomes an anchor, and if the mind begins to wander, we gently bring it back to the focus of the contemplation.

Joel describes this practice of contemplative meditation in Chapter 2, “Attaining the God-Experience,” in *Living The Infinite Way*, and he says that contemplation will lead you into

meditation, that state in which you go beyond thinking and settle into a state of stillness, peace, and receptivity. If you have difficulty even settling your mind into a contemplation, it can be helpful to read the Bible verse or the text selection aloud to yourself.

- **Prepare the heart.** We cannot expect to experience God—absolute purity Itself—if we are holding any negativity in our hearts. Take a moment to release anyone you may be holding in bondage for any reason. To the best of your ability, forgive them and acknowledge the truth of their being. In doing this, you are following the Master's instruction from the Sermon on the Mount, *"If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."*¹

Be Consistent with Your Practice

- It can be helpful to meditate in the same place and at the same times each day. Eventually, you will automatically stop to meditate at those times. If you meditate in the same place, that place will become imbued with the energy of meditation, just as some cathedrals and other sacred spaces acquire a beautiful spiritual energy because of the devotion and spiritual practice that occurs there.

Consider Using a Meditation Shawl

- Meditation shawls have been used for centuries in many spiritual traditions by both men and women. Metaphorically, a meditation shawl covers the mundane garments of our everyday life with a spiritual intention and creates an intimate space within which to connect with one's spiritual center. A shawl can give a sense of turning within, helping us focus inwardly more deeply. It can keep the body warm and provide a sense of relaxation and comfort conducive to spiritual practice. Used regularly, a meditation shawl will also be imbued with the spiritual energy of meditation. If you use a meditation shawl, it is good practice to use it only for meditation so that it remains pure.

If You Still Have Difficulty

If you have tried the suggestions above, or perhaps other recommendations, and still have difficulties with mind chattering, the intrusion of worrisome or distracting thought, falling asleep, feeling restless, feeling that nothing happens in meditation, or feeling that you aren't doing it "right," these ideas might be helpful.

- **Be sure you understand meditation as taught in *The Infinite Way*.** If you are new to *The Infinite Way*, you can review the Joel's instructions for meditation, which are given in *Living The Infinite Way*, Chapter 2, "Attaining the God-Experience." Joel describes one method there, but he has also acknowledged that there are many ways to meditate, and that any of them are fine, as long as the goal of the meditation is to experience God and receive impartations from within.

If you feel that you need to learn more, Joel has a whole book on meditation: *The Art of*

¹ Matthew 5:23-24.

Meditation. In addition, these recordings provide a good foundation in meditation as practiced in The Infinite Way:

- 424A: “Meditation – Its Function and Purpose”
- 475A: “Ten Second Meditations”

If you are an experienced Infinite Way student and are struggling with meditation, you may want to review Joel’s teaching about meditation in The Infinite Way. The resources mentioned above can provide a good refresher and help you to re-set your foundation in this important practice.

- **Go back to practicing the Presence.** Practicing the Presence cultivates the quietness and stillness of mind required for meditation. You might try putting aside the longer meditation periods for a few weeks and focus only on practicing the Presence. Then go back to meditation and see what happens.
- **Try shorter meditations.** Sometimes we try to meditate for too long. Joel says that doing short meditations—just a few minutes each—but doing them frequently throughout the day develops the ability to have longer meditations.
- **Meditate with Joel.** If you are having real difficulty getting into meditation, it can be helpful to “meditate with Joel.” Many of the recordings have beautiful contemplative meditations that can help you attain the quiet and receptive state required for meditation.
- **Meditate with another student or with a group.** In the age of Zoom, WebEx, WhatsApp, and Skype, you can meditate with anyone, anywhere, and you might find someone who is also looking for a partner with whom to meditate. Also, there are Infinite Way groups that meditate together each day by telephone, and there may be some who meditate together via Zoom or some other meeting application.
- **Try a new venue.** Indoors, you might try meditating in a different space, perhaps one that could be more conducive to meditation. Or try meditating outdoors in some place that you find beautiful, such as in a garden or park, by the ocean, in the woods, or near a river, pond, or stream.
- **Be sure you are not trying to stop thoughts or blank your mind.** If distracting thoughts come in meditation, let them come and let them go. Do not try to stop the thoughts, or get angry, or condemn yourself because you can’t concentrate. Refrain from engaging them. One Infinite Way teacher has said that these thoughts are like cars passing by. Some of them are appealing, and we would like to ride in them. But, she says, do not get into any of the cars! Let them just pass on by and gently return the mind to your anchor contemplation.

Likewise, do not try to blank your mind. Instead, use a contemplation to give the mind a spiritual focus. Joel says that we cannot blank our minds, but that the mind will eventually get still of itself if we give it something spiritual to contemplate.

- **Nothing Happening?** In the class for this chapter of our study book, Joel says that we should pay no attention at all to the fact that we may not hear anything or feel anything during meditation. He says, “That makes no difference. After a minute or two or three,

you get up, and you go about your work. If there is any need for you to hear anything, or be instructed in anything, or be led, it will take place at the time when it is necessary. There is no such thing even as telling God when you want Him to talk to you. You merely tune in and then rest assured that when the time comes for receiving guidance, it will be there.”

- **Falling asleep?** Choose a time of day for meditation when you are most alert and awake. Meditating after eating usually not a good idea. Joel points out that meditation is a conscious experience, a conscious activity of your mind and soul. It is not sitting back and saying, “All right, God, go ahead.” If you fall asleep in meditation, it may be that you do not realize that you must be alert constantly for some inner guidance, alert to hear the voice of God: “Here I am, Father, alert and awake for Thy guidance.”

If you have used a contemplative meditation to begin, you will probably remain alert, minimizing the chance that you will fall asleep when you go into meditation. Joel says¹ that if you are going into meditation to receive guidance for something, you can take that question into your meditation, and then you will be consciously aware of the fact that you are listening for guidance and direction. It is unlikely that you will fall asleep with a mind open and waiting for instruction.

- **Try to practice consistently.** If we feel that we are failing in meditation, we might want to avoid that feeling of failure, so we do not meditate. Instead, we might read or listen to a recording. This gives us the feeling that we are doing something of spiritual value—and we are. But while reading, listening, and studying are important parts of the spiritual life, they are not meditation. Consistent practice is key. Remember that it took Joel eight months of meditating several times a day before he experienced something. If you can give up any attachment to having a specific experience or getting a “result,” and meditate consistently just for the joy of meditating, you will make progress.
- **Be patient with yourself and with your progress.** Be patient. Refrain from letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. Every time you make the effort to contemplate or meditate—regardless of whether you feel that anything happened—you are coming a little bit closer to attaining spiritual enlightenment and freedom. In any case, refrain from self-criticism. If you miss a few meditation periods, just get back on track and feel good that you got back on track. This is not an easy path, and the very fact that you are on it is a testimony to your spiritual development.
- **Turn within for help.** Above all, remember that you can always turn within. Acknowledge your frustrations and difficulties, ask for help and direction, and then just listen quietly for the guidance from the Christ of your being.

¹ *God, the Substance of All Form*, Chapter 2, “Building the New Consciousness.”