

What Does "Contemplative" Mean?

The word **contemplative** has many meanings today. It comes from the Latin roots **cum (with)** and **templum (temple)**, connoting a sense of the sacred.

Stated simply, the classical tradition understands contemplation as **a loving quality of presence in which one is open to things just as they are in the present moment.**

In Christianity and other traditions that understand God to be present everywhere, contemplation includes a reverence for the Divine Mystery, "finding God in all things," or "being open to God's presence, however it may appear." When referring to prayer or other spiritual practices, contemplation is classically distinguished from **meditation**.

Generally this means that meditation seems like something we "do" by means of our own effort and intention, while contemplation always seems to come as a gift. Further, the reverence for mystery implies an openness to unknowing, a willingness to be led and guided by God without having to comprehend what is happening.

In this understanding, **contemplation is in no way opposed to action.** In fact, our sense is that truly effective, responsive action in the world needs to be undergirded and informed by contemplative awareness.

Also, although silence and solitude play a role in the contemplative life, **contemplation does not mean withdrawing from the world.** On the contrary, it is a responsive, participative presence *in* and *with* God, oneself, one's neighbours, and all creation.

Practising Contemplative Spirituality

The Object in Contemplative Spirituality is to quiet the mind so that it might be open to hear the voice of God in the midst of silence.

Find a comfortable spot indoors or outdoors where you may be quiet.

Sit straight with your feet on the floor or ground. Your hands should rest palm upwards in a spirit of waiting.

There are numerous methods to quieting the mind. I like to follow my breath in through my nostrils, down through my oesophagus into my lungs, stomach, through my hands, down my legs and into my feet. The object is to relax the body.

Don't become upset if your mind wanders or stray thoughts come in, this is natural. Just let the thoughts go without focusing on them. Focus on your breathing to re-centre yourself. It becomes easier with practise. Stay in your contemplation as long as comfortable and then slowly return to consciousness.

Further Information may be found at shalem.org.

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