

What is Centering/Contemplative Prayer?

The terms Centering Prayer and Contemplative Prayer are becoming well known in Christian circles. For the most part, these terms have been used interchangeably. However, Centering Prayer appears to be the methodology which creates the “spiritual” environment for Contemplative Prayer which is defined as contemplating God with the soul, NOT with your mind or rational thought.

Centering Prayer/Contemplative Prayer was brought into the Roman Catholic Church in 1977 by three trappist monks: (Abbot) Thomas Keating, William Meninger, Basil Pennington. This was in response to Vatican Council II’s call for “the revitalization of the path of contemplative prayer”

These three joined with ecumenically oriented Catholic theologians, an Eastern Zen master who offered retreats on Buddhist meditation and a former trappist monk who taught transcendental meditation. Together they created “centering prayer.”

In the forward to the book Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality by Philip S. Romain, Thomas Keating (the most famous of the three trappist monks) wrote:

“Reading the Christian mystics from the perspective of his [Philip St. Romain] own experience of kundalini energy, the author sees many examples of its working in the lives of Christian saints and mystics. Since this energy is also at work today in numerous persons who are devoting themselves to contemplative prayer, this book is an important contribution to the renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition. It will be of great consolation to those who have experienced

physical symptoms arising from the awakening of kundalini in the course of their spiritual journey, even if they have not experienced it to the fullest extent described by the author. His [Philip St. Romain] compelling testimony is a powerful affirmation of the potential of every human being for higher states of consciousness.”³

See Full Text of Forward

Although its proponents will argue against it, Centering/Contemplative Prayer IS most definitely a form of Eastern Meditation, i.e. Mystical Meditation. Below is a comparison between what is taught by the New (Age) Spirituality and the method of meditation that is taught for Centering/Contemplative Prayer:

Mystical Meditation	Centering / Contemplative Prayer
Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight	Sit comfortably with your eyes closed
Choose a mantra and repeat it silently	Choose a sacred word or phrase and introduce it silently
If and when you notice that your attention has drifted completely off the mantra, gently begin repeating it again, and continue with minimal effort	Whenever you become aware of anything (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, associations, etc.) simply and gently return to your sacred word (This obviously results in repetition of the word)

The intended Goal: become enlightened, knowing truth by experience and ultimately “ascension” – which is self-realization, knowing that “I am divine”

The intended Goal: To reach “The Silence” when all distracting thoughts are gone, a thin place where the spiritual barrier is the thinnest, where you can contemplate God with your soul NOT with your intellect.

As you probably noticed, the steps taken are identical. Both use the same method to induce an altered state of consciousness – void of thought, just contemplating *spiritual truth* in an experiential fashion and accepting it as *truth* without discernment. This is a spiritually dangerous condition. The door to the spiritual realm of intense experience becomes the basis for truth instead of the Word of God.

Works Cited

³Philip St. Romain, *Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality: A Path to Growth and Healing*, pp.7, New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1994.

The Origins of Centering/Contemplative Prayer–Kundalini

The following is a forward written by Thomas Keating, one of three Trappist Monks who created the modern centering/contemplative prayer. He asserts that kundalini can be awakened by contemplative prayer practiced by Christians

and indicates this is a positive thing.

Kundalini is an occultic energy or power which is the basis of all occultic belief systems, most notably Yoga. Kundalini or the "serpent power" is believed to be coiled at the base of the spine in the first Chakra and through meditative techniques can be released and rise through each Chakra until it reaches the last where the practitioner attains psychic powers and self realization that he/she is god.

Along the way he/she also experiences numerous physical manifestations such as spontaneous singing, reciting mantras, animal sounds, uncontrollable trembling and shaking, spontaneous uncontrollable movement from yoga posture to yoga posture, waves of bliss, elation, altered states of consciousness, aches, anxiety, and feeling of heat flashes.

It can also be awakened instantly by the touch to the forehead by a guru which is a method called Shaktipat.

All occultic practices are forbidden by God throughout the Bible, most notably in the passage of [Deuteronomy 18:10-12](#) which is a virtual encyclopedia of occultic practices which God states are "an abomination unto the LORD."

The origins, eastern meditative methods, and occultic supernatural results of Centering/Contemplative Prayer should be enough to convince any true believer that this something to steer clear of and isn't a legitimate method of true prayer, but a camouflaged occultic practice intended to deceive.

The following is the Forward written by Thomas Keating (one of

**the founders of Centering/Contemplative prayer) to the Book
"Kundalini Energy and Christian Spirituality" by Philip St.
Romain:**

"This book is the first description that I know of in Christian literature about the awakening of kundalini energy in a purely Christian context. Kundalini has long been known in Taoist, Hindu, and Buddhist spirituality. The fact that this complete awakening occurred in the context of a classical development of Christian prayer makes it an important contribution to East/West dialogue. Given the newness of the kundalini experience in Christian circles, however, any theological interpretation is bound to be tentative.

Reading the Christian mystics from the perspective of his own experience of kundalini energy, the author sees many examples of its working in the lives of Christian saints and mystics. Since this energy is also at work today in numerous persons who are devoting themselves to contemplative prayer, this book is an important contribution to the renewal of the Christian contemplative tradition. It will be a great consolation to those who have experienced physical symptoms arising from the awakening of kundalini in the course of their spiritual journey, even if they have not experienced it to the full extent described by the author. His compelling testimony is a powerful affirmation of the potential of every human being for higher states of consciousness.

The awakening of kundalini energy and its various stages clearly enhances our understanding of how the body takes part in the spiritual journey. Spiritual writers of our tradition have long known that the body must be carefully prepared if it is to receive the higher communications of divine grace. For example, St. John of the Cross considered bodily ecstasy a weakness that gradually subsides in the process of transformation.

With keen insight, the author raises several crucial questions that arise from his experience of the full unfolding of kundalini. Prior to the awakening of kundalini he received the Baptism in the Spirit and enjoyed the gift of tongues. While appreciating the immense value of kundalini, he sharply distinguishes it from the action of the Holy Spirit. He considers kundalini a natural evolutionary energy inherent in every human being. There is a tendency in Hindu spirituality to identify kundalini and the Holy Spirit, perhaps because the Baptism in the Spirit is not a part of the experience of the East.

Kundalini is an enormous energy for good, but like all human potentials, it could also be used for selfish motives and thus become a source of serious harm. This is probably the energy that is so attractive in cult leaders; they may well impart a spiritual experience through the transmission of kundalini in a way that we do not yet understand. Energy, however great, is only energy,. It is how one uses it that counts. Thus the importance of the moral context in which kundalini is awakened. Most spiritual disciplines worldwide insist on some kind of serious discipline before techniques of awakening kundalini are communicated. In Christian tradition, the exercise of the moral virtues that quiet emotional turmoil, the service of others, and the regular practice of the stages of Christian prayer from discursive meditation to contemplation are the essential disciplines. Without such positive preparation and the passive purifications described by St. John of the Cross, kundalini could serve the purposes of the false self and be used for spiritual power plays, to the great emotional and spiritual damage of other people. Thus, for a Christian at least, it is essential that the Holy Spirit direct their energy. In Christian spirituality, the unfolding of the stages of prayer described by St. Teresa of Avila in the Interior Castle may be the fruit of the kundalini energy arising under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Kundalini may also be an active

ingredient in the Dark Nights of St. John of the Cross.

Kundalini has influenced ancient Eastern methods of medicine such as acupuncture and ayurvedic medicine. As these forms of healing become better known in the West, the question as to the exact nature of kundalini will certainly arise. All the Eastern traditions concur that this energy should not be awakened except under the guidance of a qualified teacher. Since this energy can arise through the practiced of ordinary Christian prayer forms, the need of spiritual directors who are at least knowledgeable in this area is evident. The personal predicament that the author describes could be happening to other Christians in our time. Moreover, as Christian contemplation becomes better known, a number of persons who have experience the awakening of the kundalini through Eastern techniques may wish to return to their Christian roots, where their spiritual condition needs to be understood.

In order to guide persons having this experience, Christian spiritual directors may need to dialogue with Eastern teachers in order to get a fuller understanding. The importance of the "Document on the Non-Christian Religions" comes into focus here. The document states, "the Church therefore has this exhortation for her sons[and daughters]; Prudently and lovingly through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men and women] as well as the values in their society and culture."
(no.2)

This book will initiate Christians on the spiritual journey into this important but long neglected dimension of the transforming power of grace."

END OF FORWARD

Is Contemplative Prayer Biblical Prayer?

In [2 Corinthians 2:11](#), Paul takes it for granted that the Corinthians are *“not ignorant of his (Satan’s) devices.”* Sadly, a large portion of the church today appears to be vastly ignorant of Satan’s devices.

[Deuteronomy 18:10-11](#) gives a list of occult or pagan practices which are an abomination to God. Many of these have been disguised by being given positive-sounding names or simply adding the word “Christian” to them such as “Christian Yoga” in effect producing “Christianized Abominations.” One such practice is called centering or contemplative prayer, which isn’t prayer at all, but mystical meditation

What is the Biblical definition of prayer?

There are a number of different words translated “pray” “praying” or “prayer” in the New Testament Greek. Many of which simply mean to make a request of either man or God. Two of these are “Eratao” and “Deomae.”

“Eratao” ἐρωτάω is a verb that simply means to ask, request, beg. It is used in passages such as [Luke 5:3](#) *“And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon’s, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.”* ([John 17:15](#); [Acts 10:48](#); [1 John 5:16](#) and many others)

“Deomae” δέομαι is a verbal/gerund which means—wanting, desiring, asking, begging, beseech, make requests.” [2 Corinthians 8:4](#) *“Praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”* ([Galatians 4:12](#); [Acts 8:22](#); [1](#)

Thessalonians 3:10 and many others)

However, the next word, “Proseuche” προσευχή is a noun which actually means “a prayer addressed to God.” **Romans 12:12** *“Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer”* (**Luke 19:46; Acts 12:5; Philippians 4:6;** and many others)

“Proseuchomai,” προσεύχομαι is a verb that means to offer up prayers (to God). **Mark 11:24** *“Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”* (**James 5:13; Hebrews 13:18; 1 Timothy 2:8** and many others)

Characteristics of Biblical Prayer

The characteristics of scriptural prayer are as follows:

- Making requests directed to God. **Philippians 4:6** *“Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”*
- Using language and words. **Matthew 6:9-13** (The Lord’s Prayer)
- Your desires, your mind, your thoughts, etc. **1 John 5:14, 15** *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”*
- Prayer is our communication to God. This is in contrast to reading, studying and meditating on God’s word, which is God speaking to us.
- Comparison of Biblical Prayer with Contemplative Prayer

Biblical Prayer	Centering / Contemplative Prayer
Makes Requests to God	Makes no Requests

Uses the Mind, Desires and Conscious Thought	Conscious thoughts are considered undesirable
Uses words to communicate our requests	A word or phrase is only used to eliminate thought
GOAL: To communicate with God, to express our needs and desires; and to receive an answer from God.	GOAL: To reach "The Silence" when all distracting thoughts are gone, a thin place where the spiritual barrier is the thinnest, where you can contemplate God with your soul NOT with your intellect.