

PAUL COUTINHO

Awaken
TO THE
Divine

52

CONTEMPLATIVE
REFLECTIONS
TO TRANSFORM
YOUR SPIRIT



TWENTY-THIRD
PUBLICATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

*The only graces and gifts we possess
are those we have allowed ourselves
to receive and share with others.*

*I cast pebbles of inspiration, and as the ripples begin,
I consciously detach myself from the fruits of my ministry.*

The gifts we have given away become the platform for receiving better and deeper graces. This has been my motivation for all my ministries: teaching, retreats, spiritual direction—and yes, in writing all my books.

In all my ministries I realize that I am just a channel. My constant prayer is this: “Cleanse my heart and my lips that I may worthily proclaim You.” I spend time trying to get my ego out of the way, so that the Spirit might work effectively in the minds and hearts of people.

Every now and then I receive confirmation that I am on the right path:

- A woman who attended one of my retreats more than twenty-five years ago told me that that experience continues to sustain her in her daily life. She has made a mantra that I shared her very own: I am Important, Precious, Beautiful!

- Couples on their silver wedding anniversary remind me of the message I shared on their wedding day.
- In my course evaluations, students state how my course was life-changing. I hear how my books have changed people's lives.
- And sometimes, I hear people tell me that they finally get what I have been trying to say for ten years.

This is the Spirit confirming that I am on the right track, and it is encouragement to continue. For my part, while taking in this affirmation, I look for ways to be a better channel, to get my ego out of the way. In accepting the Spirit's confirmation, I take comfort in Mary's Magnificat prayer:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness
of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations
will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name. + LUKE 1:46-49

I would like to propose a methodology for the spiritual life and reading of this book. I invite you, dear reader, to open your mind and soul to these three stages:

UNDERSTAND — BELIEVE — KNOW

Many of the inspirational quotes I've chosen for reflection are easy to *understand*. We can grow to *believe* some of these

quotes. But there are very few that we *know*. The Eastern understanding of “knowing” or knowledge is that which touches the heart and transforms life. The biblical definition of knowledge goes even deeper. It is *intimacy at the core of our being*.

We will undertake this method through the insights of Sts. Benedict and Ignatius and through perspectives drawn from the Eastern tradition.

St. Benedict’s gift for us

Lectio Divina, a form of prayer encouraged by St. Benedict, has four steps. We begin with *Lectio*, Latin for **reading**. The reading could be a passage from the Scriptures or any inspirational literature. The second step is *Meditatio*, **reflection**. This is a reflection on the passage (the *Lectio*). We spend time thinking about a word, a phrase, or an idea that draws our minds and hearts. This is followed by *Oratio*, **response**. This takes the form of a prayer. The final stage is *Contemplatio*, **repose**. In this resting contemplative state, we allow the Divine Presence to take deeper root at the core of our being.

St. Ignatius’ gift for us

In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius introduces us to three major levels of prayer. Meditation, which is the prayer of the mind; Contemplation, which is the prayer of the heart; and the Application of the Senses, which is the prayer of consciousness. In Meditation, one gets revelations and ends the prayer by making resolutions. In Contemplation, one opens oneself to the mystery that is the subject of one’s prayer. This allows one to be filled by, transformed by, and drawn into that mystery. The Application of Senses is the prayer

where neither the head nor the heart gets in the way of pure consciousness. It is a prayer of spiritual repose.

Spiritual repose is a state of being, when pure consciousness becomes a way of life. We now learn to live as the I-Now-Here. The I is the image and likeness of God, or the Divine Breath. This present moment, NOW, is part of every moment from the beginning to the end of time. Therefore, this NOW is part of eternal time. This place, HERE, where I am now present, is a part of everywhere. It is part of the whole of Creation. In this I-NOW-HERE state, we experience spiritual repose. Spiritual repose gives us the energy and the inspiration to live every moment as if it were our first, our last, and the only moment. We live life as fully human and fully alive! We live the life that Jesus came to give us: Life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

We become contemplative in action. That is, *we open ourselves to the mystery of the Divine Presence at every moment in the here and now* and allow ourselves to be filled and transformed into the mystery of the Divine Essence. We are fully involved in life, with our hearts rooted and grounded in the Divine Essence.

Eastern spirituality's gift for us

The goal of Eastern spirituality is the realization that every part of Creation is Divine. We attain liberation and freedom in this lifetime. I would like to reflect on an ancient Hindu Scripture, the *Upanishad*. One of the meanings of the word *Upanishad* is to sit at the feet of an enlightened teacher. These teachers offer their wisdom to any sincere seeker, through a threefold process: *Sravana, Manana, Nididhyasana*.

Sravana literally means **listening**. In this stage, we begin by listening to the teachings of the sages.

Manana is a stage where we **reflect deeply** on the teachings we have listened to. We spend time trying to understand the teaching through study and reflection.

Nididhyasana is the culmination of *Sravana* and *Manana*. This is the stage when **knowledge becomes wisdom**. This wisdom emanates from us spontaneously, from the core of our being, and its effects are felt by everyone and everything that comes into our presence. *Nididhyasana* becomes as natural as our breathing.

Try this warm-up exercise as you approach the book's reflections:

1. Notice a sentence or even a word that draws your attention. This is the first step of listening.
2. Now read the rest of the chapter, meditating on that word or sentence or do all you can to understand that word or sentence.
3. Then keep repeating it until it sinks to the core of your being or your unconscious and becomes an integral part of your being.

Let's take an example from the Scriptures that tells me who I am. The Bible tells me that I am the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1) or the Divine Breath (Genesis 2) or a child of God. The Hindu Scriptures define us as *Aham Brahmasmi*: I am Brahman or *Tat Tvam Asi*, you are *THAT*—and *THAT* is the Divine Essence. The Qur'an tells us that God is closer to us than our jugular vein! Pick one of these dictums, repeat it continuously, and listen to how it sounds.

Now try to understand the depth of that truth. Then keep repeating it until it becomes part of every fabric of your being. Once we realize this stage, we may not be aware of how we have changed, but everyone else will. *We emote peace and inner freedom wherever we are.*

The three-stage integration, *understand—believe—know*, is reflected in the parable of the Sower and the Seed (Luke 8:4-15). The seeds that fall by the wayside are like those who **understand** that they are made in the image and likeness of God or the Divine Breath but do not want to go deeper. Some may move on to the next stage and want to **believe** this truth. But these are like seeds that fall on rocky ground, the rational type, who do not allow the truth to take root, or seeds that fall among the thorns, the emotional type, who choke the seed and stunt its growth. And then there are those who are open and prepared to receive the truth. When this truth begins to take root and bear fruit, then they truly **know** the truth. And this truth will make them free.

And now, dear reader, I get out of the way.

In Divine Providence, may the pebbles cast in these pages ripple to the Spirit's beckoning and to your receptivity to understand, believe, and know.

PART I

Rediscovering Your Divine Identity

I. If You Meet the Buddha on the Road

You have to grow from the inside out.

None can teach you; none can make you spiritual.

There is no other teacher but your own soul.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The spiritual path is an ongoing journey that culminates in self-knowledge and God-realization. Spiritual growth is a process that goes beyond the physical body and mind, realizing our identity as the soul or Spirit. This Spirit is present in every part of creation. The mystics believe that the soul is part of God; it is the Divine Essence.

In the gospels, we find that Jesus is constantly inviting his followers to “the other shore” and then asking them to launch into the deep. This invitation is to find ourselves deeper and deeper in the Ocean of Divine Love and Infinite Life. The Ocean is not something “out there”; it exists at our core. As we journey deeper, we realize that we are the Ocean.

The “other shore” in Buddhism is known as *paramita* or

the pinnacle of the spiritual life. It is a state of enlightenment that every spiritual person yearns for. It is an invitation to cross the river of life and get to the other shore. Here we experience oneness with the whole of creation.

Karl Rahner, a great Catholic theologian, once said that the Christian of the future would either be a mystic or cease to exist. What Rahner said about Christians is true of every person and culture in today's world. Consciously or unconsciously, we are all striving to be mystics. We know that a mystic cannot belong to or be contained by any religion. Religion is a raft that takes us to the Ocean of Divine Love and Infinite Life. The question is, once we realize that *we* are this Ocean, do we still need the raft?

It is said that the famous ninth-century Chinese Buddhist monk Lin Chi exhorted his disciples, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him." The road is a metaphor for our spiritual journey, and the Buddha represents all teachers and teachings. Truth is the awareness that the Divine Essence is in every part of creation. The Buddha is like the finger pointing to the moon. Once we have become aware of the moon, we do not depend on teachers, and we do not need any teaching. Enlightenment is realized within us.

The prophet Elijah did not find God in the great wind or the earthquake or the fire but in the sound of sheer silence (1 Kings 19:11-12). For Mahatma Gandhi, Truth was God. He explained Truth as realizing our identity in the Divine Essence and experiencing the interconnectedness of all of life. The source of Truth was his inner voice. "I shall lose my usefulness the moment I stifle the still small voice within," he said (December 3, 1925).

Personal experience was paramount for Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits. He was convinced that “when the eyes of his understanding were opened,” that is, when he experienced awareness and consciousness of the Essence of life, he did not need the holy Scriptures anymore, nor would he need any external authority.

The prophet Jeremiah invites us to live by a Divine inner and personal covenant:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord. + JEREMIAH 31:33-34

Religion, the saints, spiritual teachers, and even the Scriptures are all fingers pointing beyond themselves. They all reveal to us the “other shore.”