I arrived in Berkeley, California, USA, mid-morning, exhausted. After fifteen hours of travel, every step and breath brought me closer to a bed, and blissful sleep, or so I thought. Standing in the historic Bancroft Hotel, I learned my room would not be ready for several hours. I was early. Looking into my bleary eyes, the manager said, “I’ll change your room assignment.” We exchanged a smile. Ten minutes later, I contemplated a shower and hours of sleep before walking across the street later that night to the University of California at Berkeley School of Law. Yet actually, I had another decision to make: in two hours, conveniently located in the room beneath mine, an optional “meditation mini-retreat” led by poet and Zen Buddhist priest Zoketsu Norman Fischer would begin. Thus my choice: sleep or meditate. A hot shower was non-negotiable.

A bell rang. Sit in a dignified position. That was safe enough—I was nervous in a room with more than one hundred people, some students, others dressed professionally, many who greeted one another with familiarity. For several hours that afternoon, breathing meditation, mindfulness practice, very few words, and walking meditation restored me. Silent connections formed between those of us who would participate in The Mindful Lawyer—a conference exploring the integration of meditation and contemplative practices with legal education and the practice of law. The words justice, just this, just is, rippled in my mind.

Throughout the weekend I became more convinced that cultivating an inner life takes courage and appears counter-cultural. This was a new arena for me: 185 lawyers, law professors, students, judges, mediators, and other dispute resolution professionals gathered in a law school lecture hall. Time and again people told how difficult it is to admit to a colleague or client, “I have a meditation practice.” The value of being present in the moment is inestimable for an attorney or during conflict mediation. Lawyering takes place in a stressful, competitive environment with high stakes for everyone involved. Justice, activism, and social transformation require intention, presence, and wise action.

Be still, breathe. We were born knowing this fundamental spiritual practice. It is core to our vital life force. Somehow, in the hustle and bustle of achievement, success, productivity, life commitments, failures, and demands, we dismiss and replace the value of cultivating an inner life with sleep, addictions, stress, apathy, or restlessness. It need not be so—or continue.

You have a choice. I have a choice. We each have the power to make a decision to commit to a contemplative practice. It is essential to cultivate our inner aliveness. This is not an esoteric concept. It is being fully human, and begins with breath, pulse, and a dignified position. A spiritual director or spiritual guide can be an excellent companion during our first steps or when we are well on the journey.

—Pegge Erkeneff Bernecker
something extraordinary happens when the deep heart speaks. It has its own prayers and to practice them is based on an ancient tradition called Prayer of the Heart. To combine your prayer of the heart with the visceral touch of beads creates a powerful reminder of intention.

Beads or grooved stones, as a representation of intangible thoughts or feelings, have been used as early as 3,200 BCE as a way to express the ineffable. The early Christian desert mothers and fathers would often use pebbles as a reminder of their prayers. I tried that method and found my pockets becoming increasingly heavy with stones until a Coptic monk shared another component of this prayer with me. I was to drop the pebbles in the sand when my prayers were finished.

Aha! This is contemplative prayer in its purity; to let go of my prayers, until all that remains is the desire to love the Holy One whole heartedly.

Creating prayer of the heart necklaces began ten years ago when I first led pilgrims into the Sinai Desert of Egypt. We would dedicate a day of silence to apply what the fifth century CE Christian desert mothers and fathers prayed in the desert: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me. Because the pilgrims were from various faith traditions, I invited them to let the prayer emerge from their deep soul. Following this ancient theology, the prayer begins with a call of guidance to a Divine Presence with the desire to live into the highest self for the good of all. It is often a short prayer of about ten words to be repeated with frequency.

You do not need to be in the desert to practice this tradition.

Find a peaceful place. Be still and try not to hold onto any particular thoughts, just accept each without judgment. Let the prayer come from within the depths of your heart and pray itself within you. Write it down as it is. Do not worry if it does not come immediately. Try again another time. Once you have written your prayer of the heart, practice it in your thoughts and actions throughout the day for several weeks. Notice the shift in your awareness and presence.

Many beautiful prayers have come from this practice including the one I use: Eternal Wisdom, guide me to be present here and now. The ten beads on my prayer necklace help me to remember when I forget, which is often.

Similar to the desert mothers and fathers who would weave mats from palm leaves as a contemplative practice, I now string beads from around the world. Each prayer necklace is a reminder of our sacred life journey and its connection with a universal movement towards balance and harmony. Symbolic of this ancient wisdom are the two hearts I add to each necklace. They signify the individual journey in relationship with creation, other human beings, and the Great Spirit.

—Regina Roman is a spiritual guide, retreat leader, and leads pilgrimages through Sapira—Journey with Purpose. Author of Journey with Purpose—A Guided Journal to Discover Your Way, she lives in Alexandria, Virginia, USA, and her e-mail is rgroman@comcast.net.

Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the Spiritual Directors International website at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of spiritual traditions, and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.
Cultivating compassion and loving kindness is the highest form of spiritual and contemplative practice. Compassion is esteemed by all world religions and healthy spiritual traditions. Neuroscientists have tested the brain to explore our response to social as well as emotional pain and discovered that compassion activates different parts of the brain than other emotions. Compassionate awareness is experienced through the practice of empathy. Empathy and understanding are engaged by the capacity to imagine yourself encountering another’s experience as your own. Compassion is awakened through the encounter with our own suffering and the suffering of others.

Contemplative Remembrance of Compassion

Begin by sitting quietly. Notice your heart and what is on your heart. Listen and be present to what is. Gradually your heart is emptied. Move into a place of stillness.

- Remember a time when you were suffering or struggling in life. Remember how you felt. Who offered you a compassionate listening heart or presence? What was it like to experience compassion?

- Take a moment to be aware of the gifts and the challenges; notice the prayer on your heart.

- Remember a time when you saw or experienced the suffering of another and felt compassion. What was this experience of compassion like for you? How did the encounter with suffering affect or change you?

- Take a moment to be aware of the gifts and the challenges of your experience, notice the prayer on your heart.

Authentic compassion gives rise to the desire to alleviate suffering, providing a foundation for social justice and action. Compassion shelters and embraces the other while opening our heart to new possibilities for healing and growth.

Our personal and global dialog about faith and belief will be successful to the extent that we are willing and able to encounter and understand the beliefs of others while being compassionate with our differences and similarities.

Contemplation is essential to the cultivation of a compassionate heart. A person with a compassionate heart walks with incongruities, acknowledges the reality of suffering, and chooses to consciously act with kindness and love anyway.

—Carol A. Fournier, LCMHC, NCC, is director and founder of the Silver Dove Institute in Vermont, USA, where she offers training in spiritual direction, counseling, and contemplative living. Her e-mail address is info@silverdoveinstitute.org.

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An Octave Stanza: Daoist Lectio Divina

Walk in the forest as serenely as a deep river.
Breathe as smoothly as a soft cloud.
Now, sit and read the bible or sacred readings from Lao Tzu.
Meditate on your reading and seek God, Dao.
Pray and knock on God, Dao, the hidden meaning of the scripture.
Contemplate silently and enter into naked God, Dao.
Participate in the self-emptying ensemble of infinite God, Dao.
Sing and dance the life of chunjiin aulim, the way and fruit of spiritual direction.

NOTES

Dao translates to English as Way.

Lectio divina is a Latin word representing a traditional Christian spiritual discipline meaning divine reading or spiritual reading. Lectio divina is composed of four parts: lectio (reading); meditatio (meditation); oratio (prayer); and contemplatio (contemplation).

“Chunjiin (heaven, earth, human) aulim (harmony)” is a Korean phrase, and is the spirit of Korean and East Asian traditional culture including Daoism and Confucianism. Heaven may be on a par with God, Dao.

—Youngman Park, PhD, is an author, educator, and the director of the Spirituality Meditation Center, Goyang Si, Gyunggi Do, Korea. His e-mail is youngmanpeace@hanmail.net.

Oseh Shalom

Oseh Shalom, bi-me-ro-mav hoo ya-aseh shalom aleynu...
May the One who grants peace in the Heavens, grant peace to all of us.
This refrain, found many times, in the Hebrew liturgy of my people, has been echoing, in that still, small place within, almost incessantly in these troubled days.
I learn in my study of mysticism, how God sometimes prays the prayers in us.
My God, we pray for peace. We weep.
Are You praying and weeping too?
—Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann, Ontario, Canada
Fragments of Your Ancient Name: 365 Glimpses of the Divine for Daily Meditation
by Joyce Rupp, OSM
Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2011
406 pages, CAD$22.62, GBP£16.99, USD$22.95

Fragments of Your Ancient Name is a gift to everyone who treasures an expansive, personal relationship with the Divine. Drawing from Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and other traditions, Joyce Rupp offers 365 fresh, daily meditations to draw us into deeper relationship with ourselves, each other, and God who is beyond all names.

Rupp, an excellent spiritual guide, writes, “I encourage you to contemplate the names. Be full of curiosity. Engage each one with the wonder of an open mind and heart. Let the reflections deepen an appreciation in you for the divine. Let them stretch you into a fuller, more extensive view of this mysterious one. Hold dear the name of the One you cherish, but also lend your heart to the ones that are uncomfortable or unusual. Call on the divine as you go about your life using the name given for that particular day” (15-16).

Providing insight into the human desire to give titles to the divine in order to “communicate with this veiled presence” (1), Rupp quotes Thomas Merton who says, “…our idea of divinity tells us more about ourselves than it does about the divine. The names we use are personal projections of our own humanness and our perceptions about life. Because of our inability to adequately perceive who this Nameless One is, we tend to project or place on “God” our beliefs, inclinations, and hopes about divinity” (7).

Every day, for 365 days, you can treat yourself to a one line mantra, short reflection, and thought to accompany you for the day. Perhaps this sampling of names will evoke your interest: The Pure One; Silent Potency; Ruler; Surprise; Laughing One; Namer of the Stars; Shakti; Lord; Balm to the Weary; My Most Treasured Happiness; Bridegroom; Dweller in the Rainbow; Silent Sentinel; You Who Question Souls; The Witness; Trusted Guide; Quencher of Thirst; Divine Magnet; Hearer of All.

The daily reflections are simple and stick easily. For example, “Soul Liberator” is offered on May 14. Rupp writes:

Come with your freeing love
And unburden my barnacled soul,
That precious, pure essence,
The enduring core of my self.
Come, release the false clutches,
Those stifling cultural fallacies
And adhering, personal deceptions
That prevent me from being true.
Liberate all that hampers me
From living authentically.
Today: I get in touch with my falseness. (156)

If you desire to expand your notion of God and create an opportunity for contemplative practice, Fragments of Your Ancient Name will be a significant companion for your daily journey.
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Question: Could you please help me? I am a new spiritual director and am starting to see a number of people who question well-liked images of God. For example, many of these people cannot accept the concept of God as Father. Some have backgrounds of childhood abuse or absent earthly fathers. Could you offer me some assistance?

Hoot Hoot: Thank you! Your question is complex and multi-layered, particularly when issues of abuse or abandonment interweave in an individual’s spiritual, psychological, and embodied experience of being human. Many people reject religion, and thus God, when images of God become limiting, nonsensical, or even harmful to one’s inner aliveness of being human. Spiritual direction is an excellent place to explore images of God—both with old or painful images, and through exploration of images that could potentially be healing and transformative.

Men and women can experience concepts that limit their image and thus experience of God, or the Divine, the Holy, or the Sacred. This is not a gender specific topic. The image of God as a punitive Father figure can exasperate patriarchal patterns of being silenced, shamed, and being treated with a lack of respect. For someone else, the image of God as a Father may provide comfort and consolation. When a spiritual guide offers compassionate listening and an opportunity to explore questions such as these in a safe, non-threatening manner a person’s concept and image of God can heal and expand. Simply through the decision to seek spiritual direction, a person indicates that their inner journey and inner aliveness is valuable. Therefore, the groundwork for exploration, forgiveness, healing, and transformation is already beginning.

You asked for resources—there are numerous books and articles that specifically address your question. This issue of Listen includes a book review of *Fragments of Your Ancient Name: 365 Glimpses of the Divine for Daily Meditations* by Joyce Rupp, OSM. Resources like these are an excellent starting place for reflection and conversation. Images of God—and how they shift and grow throughout a lifetime—is a healthy topic for spiritual guidance. In addition, as a person grows in contemplative practice it is natural and normal for the human constructs of names and images for God to change. This is good!

—if you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdworld.org.

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