

Chapter 19

Religion as Practice

Religion is too often misunderstood as a collection of thoughts. Religion is a practice; it is something we do. It is something we do in order that our awareness of the Deep Self and the Awesome Wholeness of Reality may be more vivid. Our awareness of Reality is not caused by our religious practices. Rather, religious practices make the dawning of this awareness more likely.

Religion is also too often misunderstood as a set of ideas brought into our minds from some long-established heritage. But a religious heritage is not furnishings for the mind only. A religious heritage is about doing – doing a daily, weekly, yearly practice of specific activities. We use our minds of course, but it is the doing of the practice, not the thinking about it, that makes it effective religion. For some philosophers of religion the following statement would be a big paradigm shift: *religion is a practice before it is a set of accompanying thoughts*. We might say, “Worship precedes theology.” Or, “Ritual, icon, and myth precede religious theoretics.” Our theology can purify our worship. Our religious theoretics can enrich our religious practices, but the action of doing religion precedes enriching our practice with thinking about it. We might put it this way: doing theology is a religious practice. Once we see the primacy of practice, then we can also see that the practice of thinking about our religious practice is part of the practice. Religious thinking need not be scorned. Indeed, it takes a practice of thoughtfulness to practice a religion well. But practicing, not thinking, is the essence of being religious.

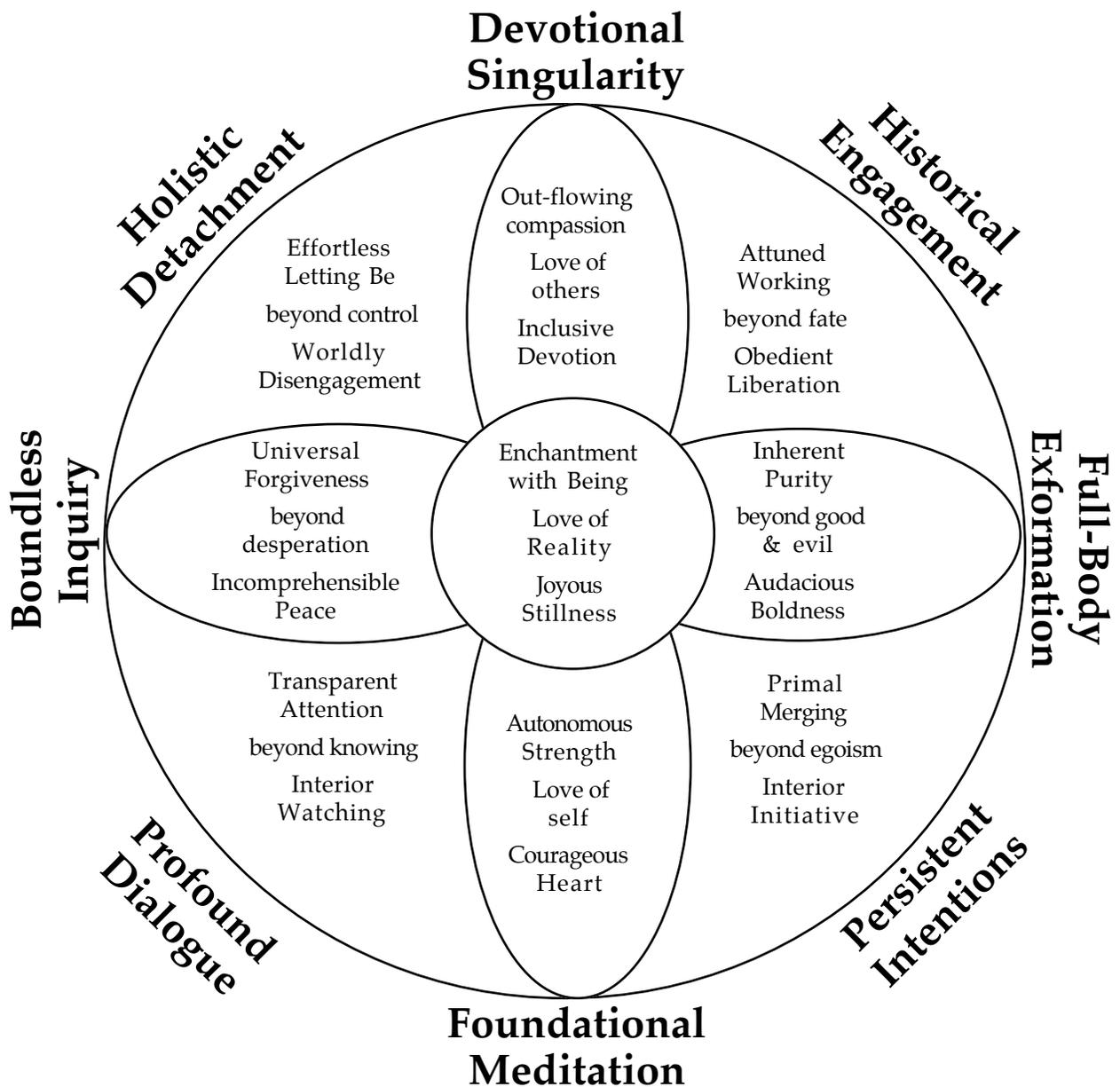
So what do we mean by “religious practice.” We mean things like sitting in silence for twenty minutes or an hour. We mean things like reading a good book that provokes Spirit awareness. (I will use the word “Spirit” with a capital “S” to mean the profound humanness explored in earlier chapters, the Awe, the numinous, the qualities of the “I Am.”) By “religious practice” I mean things like praying passionate requests or passionate intentions in the face of onrushing challenges. Religious practice can also mean dancing, singing, or performing some ritual observance or pageant. Religious practice can mean sitting in a circle of peers and sharing the glories, tragedies, remorse, guilt, and fears of our daily lives. Religious practice can mean listening to good words about our welcome home to Reality, a welcome that Reality is always ready to offer. Religious practice can mean listening to prepared talks from those who have in some way accredited themselves to us as persons of Spirit awareness. As we will discuss later, our engagements in history, our washing dishes, our building community life may also be viewed as religious practices. Religious practice can mean many things, including reading these words about religious practice.

And here is an important sub-point about seeing religion as practice: religion is not something you wait around to have happen to you. Religion is something you do. Religion is something that human beings organize, pay for, and spend time doing. Religion is a part of the practice of being social beings, including the coming apart from other people for solitary practices.

Thinking about religion is important; it may even play a big role in giving ourselves permission to do religion. But religion as religion begins with doing, action, performing, engaging in the seeming silliness of standing, sitting, kneeling, dancing, chanting, drumming, meditating, reading, dialoging, journaling, vowing, singing, ritualizing, socializing, engaging and more. Theological study and reflection are part of our religious action. Ethical thinking and practical love of neighbor, society, and planet Earth are also part of religious practice. Nevertheless, when we retreat into our minds from “religion as practice,” we retreat from the very essence of religion.

So what are the basic practices of religion? How do these basic practices of religion

relate to the nine aspects of the “I Am” described in Chapter 14. The following chart associates nine basic types of religious practice with the nine aspects of the “I Am.”



With each of the large bolded words add the modifiers:

The Practice of _____

Corresponding with the center Circle associate:

The Practice of Visionary Trance

I will begin my descriptions of these types of religious practices with the bottom three, which I will call the “solitary practices.” These are the religious practices that we do alone. Every long-standing religious heritage has developed solitary religious practices.

Solitary Practices

There are three distinguishable types of solitary religious practice. I am calling them “Profound Dialogue,” “Foundational Meditation,” and “Persistent Intentions.” Some Christian groups have called these “Meditation, Contemplation, and Prayer.” The first, *Profound Dialogue*, has to do with developing an *inner council* of persons with whom to dialogue. The second, *Foundation Meditation*, is about what we might also call *contemplative consciousness*, the practice of “viewing” the dynamics of consciousness with a concentrated focus on consciousness itself. And the third, *Persistent Intentions*, has to do with *petitioning Reality*, initiating our interior programming with respect to Reality and the many realities that we confront.

Profound Dialogue

The practice of “*Profound Dialogue*” includes what we have called devotional reading, meditation on Scriptures and other “sacred” texts, and interactions with “saintly” persons both personally known and known through their writings and/or art. Dialogue is a helpful name for this arena of religious practice, because the key to this practice is hearing deeply the voices of other persons and speaking back to them. We all tend to have an interior council of “great people” with whom we dialogue: a parent, a teacher, an author, an artist, an activist, a personal friend, a person in the distant past, a contemporary, and many others. As a solitary religious practice, *Profound Dialogue* means bringing those “great people” to mind through reading or remembering their words – hearing their voices, their music, their poetry – seeing their paintings, their sculpture, their architecture. These people are “great” because we have found them inspiring, evoking Awe within us, assisting us to access our “I Am” greatness.

While all the voices that have spoken to us have taken up a place in our memory and tend to talk to us more or less all the time, *Profound Dialogue* begins when we take charge of this interior council of “great voices.” We can seat these speakers as we want them seated. Some of them are on the front row of our circle of council members. We consult them first or most often. Others we have seated further back. We consult them with reservations or infrequently. We can order our interior council in accord with various subjects or topics or ways of aiding us. This is our council, our creation, our interpretations of our personal history of being inspired. It is also our future resources for further inspiration. We have the power to listen or not, accept what they say or not, correct them, enrich them, or shut them up. This religious practice is dialogue! We are not passive pawns of our inspiring voices, nor are we closed to what these voices have to share with us. In a practice of dialogue, we go to these “great people” willingly and actively for the enrichment of our lives. We may disagree with them, fight with them, and even unseat them from our interior council.

Profound Dialogue makes us “accident prone” to experience that aspect of the “I Am” described in Chapter 14 as *Transparent Attention* – an interior watching that unites mind with Being in a form of knowing that is more profound than our customary forms of information gathering and knowledge mastering.

Foundational Meditation

The second of these three overarching arenas of solitary religious practice, I am calling “*Foundational Meditation*.” In Christian heritage this arena is often called “contemplation.” But I am honoring the Buddhists who call this practice “meditation.” As a collection of religious practitioners, the Buddhists stand out as our planet’s chief experts on meditation practice. Whatever name we call it, meditation distinguishes

itself as a pre-rational, post-rational, or transrational practice. In this practice we are not thinking or dialoguing, we are simply noticing. And this noticing is not a mental sort of noticing, but a concentration of our consciousness upon the activities of aliveness as we experience them in our inner being. For example, in the elemental teachings of most Buddhist practitioners, we are advised to begin by noticing our breathing. This is not a mental game, it is a discipline of concentration on an aspect of our aliveness that is always taking place. In-breath and out-breath, air moving across our upper lip, the rise and fall of the abdomen, these are the sort of noticing that Buddhist meditation practices emphasize. If thoughts arise, we are advised not to resist those thoughts, but simply notice them, and allow them to come and go rather than engage in them or let them carry us away from our concentration on the immediate aliveness of breathing. Faithfully maintained over periods of time, this practice creates an awareness of how we are aware of our living in the actual here and now. It teaches us that this aware consciousness can be present no matter what programs of thought or projects of action may also be there. It teaches us that we have intentional power over our thoughts and actions rather than being the victim of whatever stories we have habituated or whatever reactionary behaviors we are obsessing. And *Foundational Meditation* is a practice that prepares us for noticing our "I Am" essence. We are not in control of the enlightenment journey that accompanies meditation practice; the enlightenment journey unfolds in its own way, unique to our own psyche.

The practice of meditation can be most associated with that aspect of the "I Am" that I describe as *Autonomous Strength*, as the *courageous heart* of true love of self. Buddhist meditation or Christian contemplative practices do not exhaust what I mean by *Foundational Meditation*. Many of the yoga practices of Hinduism qualify as *Foundational Meditation*. The Orient has given us Qi Gong, Tai Chi, and other forms of bodily movement that can be viewed as contemplative activity. Islamic Sufi chanting and dance traditions can likewise be viewed as practices of *Foundational Meditation*. Any practice that focuses consciousness upon our conscious experience can be called *Foundational Meditation*. All types of *Foundational Meditation* make us "accident prone" to experience an "accident" of that aspect of the "I Am" described in Chapter 14 as *Autonomous Strength*, the courageous heart of love for our own "true self."

Persistent Intentions

The third of these three arenas of solitary religious practice, I am calling "*Persistent Intentions*." In Christian heritage this arena is often called "prayer." The term "prayer," however, needs to be cleansed of its perverse usages. We need a wider and more secular category to be sure that the general quality of this practice is understood. *Persistent Intentions* means taking an active relationship with the Awesome Wholeness that Awes us. Yes, this interior action changes things, but it does not radiate out as a spooky influence that finds its way to some Majestic Controller or to some other person's psyche. *Persistent Intentions* means our initiative, our freedom operating in our own being. Awakening and employing this capacity in our solitary time does make a difference in the way we live our lives, and thereby it makes a difference in the course of history. Such historical effects can be understood without any spooky or magical explanations. The Christian community has come up with at least four types or aspects of prayer: confession, gratitude, petition, and intercession. Describing these four aspects of prayer is a useful means for illuminating the universality of this basic dynamic of solitary practice, a dynamic that is recognized in virtually all religions.

Confession as an aspect of solitary practice means owning up to some reality in our behavior, our attitude toward life, our feelings, our thoughts, whatever. It means admitting the ways these bits of living are escapes from the "I Am." Confession is an

important initiative on the part of our consciousness because it is a beginning toward being where we are in our living, rather than pretending to be where we are not.

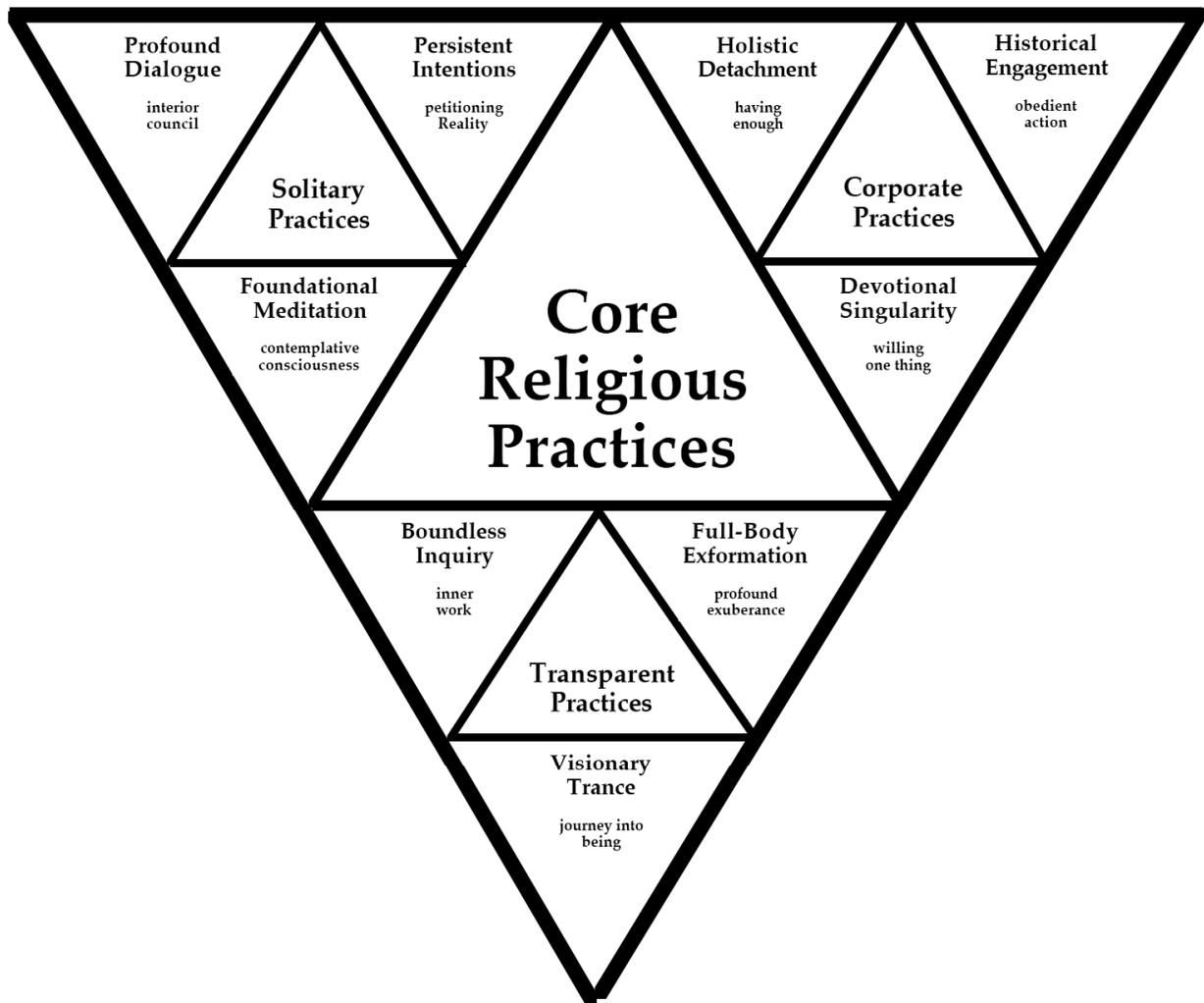
Gratitude as an aspect of solitary practice means choosing the Reality we are being given instead of the unreality we might desire to substitute for the given Reality. In so far as the given Reality always includes forgiveness and the option of a fresh start in our living, we may experience grateful feelings for this welcome release from self-incrimination, self-underestimation, or self-victimization. But whether we have grateful feelings or not, the practice of gratitude is restorative to our solid here-and-now openness toward life. Life, openly lived, does provide its joys and exuberance, but the practice of gratitude does not mean forcing such states of feeling. Gratitude is an intention that allows our real lives to produce whatever feelings and potentials life naturally produces.

Petition as an aspect of solitary practice means choosing what to intend relative to augmentations for our own existence. Where do we want to go in our life journey? What do we want to have as states of being or worldly opportunities? Petitionary prayer is a courageous thing because we do not always receive exactly what we ask for, or what we thought we were asking for, or what we thought having our request would actually mean. A petition puts our life out there to be disappointed or surprised or amazed beyond all expectations. Petition is a powerful practice, it readies us to receive a future which contains that for which we are asking. Petitionary prayer programs our psyche to pursue opportunities as they present themselves. Petition is a powerful thing: it changes history. But petitionary prayer is not a magical means of controlling the future. Our petitions seldom work out exactly as we expect. History is a surprise, a surprise that can be intensely disappointing as well as overwhelmingly gracious.

Intercession as an aspect of solitary practice means choosing what to intend with regard to other people, social systems, ecosystems, and the planet as whole. To intercede means to stand between a value and the threat to that value. To intercede means to put our body, our wealth, our reputation, our very being in the breach of creating solutions that handle the threats to what we value. Intercessory prayer is a solitary practice that is intending our being. Intercession is not asking some divine being to do something for someone. Intercession means requesting with our whole body that the trends of Reality change on behalf of some specific value that concerns us. In making a solitary intercession we do not need to have a clear plan about how this change in history can happen or what our role is in making this change. We can intercede for something that may be impossible. An intercessory prayer is simply the programming of our psyche in a specific direction. We set up our own being to be on the lookout for insights and opportunities that pertain to the value that is the topic of our intercession.

All four of these types of prayer are *Persistent Intentions*. And all four types of *Persistent Intentions* make us "accident prone" to experience an "accident" of that aspect of the "I Am" described in Chapter 14 as *Primal Merging* with our own essential freedom.

Following is a triangular chart of what I will call *Core Religious Practices*. These are the same religious practices listed on the previous chart, but now in a triangular array that shows something more about the relationships between these nine arenas of religious practice. In particular, the chart groups together three groups of practices: *Solitary Practices*, *Corporate Practices*, and *Transparent Practices*.



In addition to the *solitary practices* already described, the above chart pictures three *corporate practices* and three *transparent practices*. Can we be confident that these nine practices encompass all religious practices? No, we can't. I am simply drawing my model of what I have observed about religious practices. Such a model is little more than a teaching tool, hopefully a thoughtful one. In any case, the model is just a model, and any model can be improved. We may want to include more practices or to see these relationships differently. So bear with me as I describe what I am calling "Corporate Practices."

Corporate Practices

By "corporate" I mean practices that are done together with other people rather than done alone. This includes practices that would go on in the life of a religious order as well as practices that characterize a worship service, an intimate circle, a study group, and so on. I am not going to examine the details of the wide variety of corporate religious practices. I am suggesting a typology of three major arenas of corporate practices. Our "life together" can be a practice that calls forth profound humanness. The monastic orders of Christianity came up with these three categories: Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. Properly interpreted, I find these to be useful categories, but

for this chapter I want to use categories that have a wider reference – categories that can include non-Christian and non-monastic communal applications. My three categories will be *Holistic Detachment*, *Devotional Singularity*, and *Historical Engagement*.

These categories can also point to inner states of being. But I will emphasize how these three categories can point to religious practices? I will use these categories to point to three types of vows (or promises) made to a group of religious practitioners. Members of such groups make vows to live lives of *Holistic Detachment*, *Devotional Singularity*, and *Historical Engagement*. In order to do this, the group may write a covenant and create rules that spell out how these practices are to be done by their particular group. For example, the rules might be as simple as: come to a weekly meeting on time and be prepared. In a more extensive practice, the rules might include selling all your possessions, living together in the same buildings, wearing a monastic garb, doing a share of the daily work of the group, and relying on the group for your lifelong subsistence. In the next three sections I will be describing group practices as well as indicating the inner states of being that these practices can help us access.

Holistic Detachment

Holistic Detachment is rooted in a vow made to live simply and carry out a life of simplicity in order to access detachment from the general culture of neediness for more, and more, and still more. (Are we all more-ticians? e. e. cummings) *Holistic Detachment* need not mean a strict asceticism, but it does include a commitment to a style of “enough already.” Food, shelter, health can all be affirmed while still manifesting a style of living that renounces the obsessive consumerism and frantic climbing of economic and status ladders into the stratospheres of self-indulgent delusion. This vow or promise to live a simple style of life typically includes a commitment to live beyond the common obsessions: sex, emotional love, acceptance by others, status, celebrity, family ties, partners, friends, social expectations, philosophical systems, states of peacefulness, and more. All these ties are valuable in limited ways, but they are not infinitely valuable. A vow of *Holistic Detachment* is a promise to live in a loose relation to all these “limited” values and thereby remain open to the change of and the inevitable negations of such values. Indeed, *Holistic Detachment* means being open to death itself. Life is wonderful, a factor of indescribable value, but *Holistic Detachment* includes a willingness to lay down our lives (time, treasure and bodies) for the causes and persons that call upon us for our service. This style of living opposes the common style of thoughtlessly backing into the grave. We can intend our deaths. *Holistic Detachment* includes living our deaths, expending our deaths along with all other aspects of our living.

The practice of *Holistic Detachment* implies communities to whom we vow our vows of simplicity and who assist us to fulfill those vows, rescue us from our failures, pronounce our forgiveness, and challenge us to continue in the life style of *Holistic Detachment*. Maintaining the religious communities in which such vows are made and practiced is part of the religious practice of *Holistic Detachment*. Humans are communal beings. We seldom manifest our profound humanness entirely alone. Solitude is a sacred practice, but communal practice is no less sacred. *Holistic Detachment* is a communal practice of belonging to a community of people who practice detachment and thereby conduct a fresh relationship with the entire community of humankind. Indeed, this practice can lead us into as a fresh and open relationship with the entire community of Earth beings and with the Earth itself.

The practice of *Holistic Detachment* can make us more “accident prone” to experience an “accident” of that aspect of the “I Am” described in Chapter 14 as *Effortless Letting Be* – letting our finitude and our aliveness and our possibilities be what they are.

Devotional Singularity

This communal practice has to do with the disciplined use of the images and symbols, stories and pictures with which we nurture our lives. Every religious community has a religious culture in which its members are educated and with which they are cared for in the depths of their beings. If *Holistic Detachment* is the “economics” of corporate religious practice, then *Devotional Singularity* is the “culture” of corporate religious practice. *Historical Engagement* will be described as the “politics” of corporate religious practice.

The essence of *Devotional Singularity* is not easy to state, for it is more than being familiar with a tradition; it is finding a heartfelt devotion to the states of being alive that a specific religious tradition is capable of accessing and nurturing. The very idea of committing to a specific religious tradition is threatening to many people, for they have been burned by so many experiences of perverse religious community. Nevertheless, it is necessary to select or create some sort of religious community in order to have a religious culture whose images, symbols, stories, and icons can form a disciplined nurture. In order to wholeheartedly commit ourselves to such a discipline, it is crucial for us to understand the state of being that *Devotional Singularity* is aiming for.

Søren Kierkegaard wrote a book which he called *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*. His core insight was this: we do not will one thing when our core devotion is less than the Whole of Reality. Our devotion to finite causes always ends up duplicitous: we are willing two or more things instead of one. Our only purity of devotion is to will the Whole of Reality. Then all the smaller realities take their relative places within that wholeness of devotion. I will not attempt to summarize Kierkegaard’s intricate development of this topic. I merely want to indicate that the state of being we aim for with *Devotional Singularity* is happening when we are willing one thing, when we are willing devotion to all the actualities and possibilities that confront us.

Here is a story from the New Testament that helps us to get a feel of the state of being that the practice of Devotional Singularity aims for.

Jesus came to a village and a woman called Martha welcomed him to her house. She had a sister by the name of Mary who settled down at the Lord’s feet and was listening to what he said. But Martha was very worried about her elaborate preparations and she burst in saying, “Lord, don’t you *mind* that my sister has left me to do everything myself? Tell her to get up and help me!”

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, my dear, you are worried and bothered about providing so many things. Only a few things are really needed, perhaps only one. Mary has chosen the best part and you must not tear it away from her.”¹

There is nothing wrong with the thousand and one finite causes with which life is filled, and Martha was just doing some of them. We need to be thankful for the many Marthas that are doing the many things that make our lives possible including our times of religious practice. But for Martha or Mary or you or I to be scattered in our devotion among the many things of temporal life is to miss what Mary has chosen – namely, the purity of heart that wills one thing. Martha is anxious and troubled about many things. One thing is needed. The Martha in each of us may cry out, “Oh for the glorious tranquility of willing one thing with all my heart and all my mind and all my strength.” Mary is focusing upon a Devotional Singularity that must not be interrupted. Rather, such a practice needs to be enabled for both Mary and Martha. Mary is just one more Martha who has chosen to practice what needs to be practiced to become a tranquil person in the midst of her own busy round of living.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the practice of *Devotional Singularity* can assist us to

¹ Luke 10:38-42 J. B. Phillips translation

access the profound humanness aspect of *Out-flowing Compassion*. When we sit at the feet of profound humanness long enough, we learn to act from an inward authenticity that includes *Out-flowing Compassion* toward others.

Historical Engagement

Typically, we do not think of historical engagement as a religious practice. But many of us have had experiences that witness to why and how social engagement can be religious. Walking down the main streets of Jackson, Mississippi with a crowd of white and black citizens in the 1960s was for me a religious experience. It was not the walking that made it a religious experience, though walking can certainly be good for us. It was not the revolutionary thoughts in my head that made it a religious experience. It was the engagement with people on their porches watching us go by. It was the engagement with the conservative establishment of Jackson, Mississippi, dramatized in their police forces. It was the “we” feeling within that specific group of people walking and thereby tangling with the actual forces of history in that time and place. This engagement was the source of our Awe. This engagement was an encounter with the Awesome Upagainstness that one might, with a specific brand of theology, call “God.” This engagement was a request to the power that posits us to give us a better world.

There are many ways to be historically engaged. Sitting at my computer writing this book can be experienced as historical engagement, in so far as I genuinely feel that I am engaging the religious communities of the planet with insights that can matter in the broad course of events for my generation. Much of our historical engagement takes place in quite simple ways: stuffing envelopes for a mailing that matters, staffing a booth at a county fair, facilitating a meeting of an ecological planning council, attending a hearing about not licensing a coal-fired power plant. What makes any of these activities *Historical Engagement* is that history is being actually engaged. History is being understood as a pliable flowing that human effort can redirect. And such engagement directly involves or indirectly implies a group of people with whom we are engaged in solidarity and communion. Surely, all this can be viewed as religious practice.

Not all religions emphasize *Historical Engagement* as a religious practice. The best of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam do emphasize *Historical Engagement*. And we can view the life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as an example of engaged Hinduism. And we find many folk today who explain their religious practice as an engaged Buddhism. It is becoming meaningful for many people to view *Historical Engagement* as a religious practice right alongside solitary meditation, devotional ritual, and so forth. *Historical engagement* takes its place alongside *Holistic Detachment* and *Devotional Singularity* as a *corporate practice* of religion.

The practice of *Historical Engagement* can assist us to be accident prone to the “I Am” aspect of *Attuned Working*. Rather than being forever preoccupied with trying not to miss out on something, we can be wholehearted focusing on real historical imperatives and thereby experience the satisfying adventure of relevant action.

Transparent Practices

The solitary practices and the corporate practices are the most obvious of the religious practices. They seem to have “substance” to them. The *Solitaries* have the substance of our psychological life, and the *Corporates* have the substance of group participation and historical relations. The practices that I am calling “*Transparent Practices*” are not so directly grounded in obvious “substance.” The *Transparent Practices*, though being practices that involve our minds and bodies, are practices that focus exclusively upon the “I Am” enigma of profound consciousness. The transparent

practice on the left side or knowing side of the chart, I am calling *Boundless Inquiry*. The transparent practice on the right side or doing side of the chart, I am calling *Full-Body Exformation*. And the transparent practice in the center of the first chart and at the bottom of the second, I am calling *Visionary Trance*.

Boundless Inquiry

“Inquiry” is a word that has been carried into new levels of meaning by A. H. Almaas, by many Buddhist teachers, by many forms of depth therapy, and popularized by innovative celebrities such as Byron Katie, Gangaj and Eli Jaxon-Bear. All these innovators encourage us to use our minds to work beyond our thoughts into conscious inquiry about consciousness itself.

Perhaps many of us have discovered something about *Boundless Inquiry* through doing a practice we have called “journaling.” As a religious practice, journaling is a step beyond diary keeping, but like diary keeping, journaling is reflecting upon and recording insights about our own lives. If diary keeping means recording memorable events, journaling goes a step further into inquiring into our real experiences of lasting truth about our lives. Such inquiry can be called “Boundless” because it is not bounded by the philosophical or religious teachings that have influenced us so far in our lives. *Boundless Inquiry* is a process of self discovery in which the self itself is both the discoverer and the discovered. We inquire into our own being with the disciplined openness that we expect of a good physicist inquiring into the structure of the atom or the patterns of gravity.

Boundless Inquiry is, however, different from empirical science. It is operating within the contemplative approach to truth. It is even a purification of the contemplative approach by the invention of methods for making the contemplative approach more effective in dodging our illusions and limited ideas and thereby opening ourselves to the convincing truth that arises from within our own inner lives.

Boundless Inquiry can be a solitary method, but it is actually more effective when conducted with the aid of teachers who can assist us to track our own experience more accurately. This brief description of the wide spectrum of practices is, of course, sketchy, for without direct experiences of doing “inquiry” into our own life and coming up with revelations that matter to us, this entire category can seem opaque. To make this category of religious practice “transparent,” we will have to do the inquiry.

The practice of *Boundless Inquiry* can assist us to be accident prone to the “I Am” aspect of *Universal Forgiveness*. Rather than being preoccupied with promoting our last best ideas and defending them from Reality, we can journey deeper through inquiry into the surprising details within our own consciousness and thereby have a fresh taste of the abiding treasure of being welcomed home to Reality.

Full-Body Exformation

The “doing” aspect of *Transparent Practice* I am calling “*Full-Body Exformation*.” I have had three teachers who have contributed most to my grasp of this religious practice and its effectiveness. The first was a meditation dance teacher named Dunya. She is a retired professional dancer who has combined her dance experience with a Sufi mystical sensibility and a selection of fabulous Arabic-oriented music. What I learned from her was that I could move my body from the feelings evoked by the music in my body rather than moving my body from the ideas or habits that I had in my mind. The experience was one of consciousness and body movement without the “control of what we might call “mental will.” We spend so much of our time driving our bodies around with our mental will that we do not often slow down to realize the direct connections

between consciousness and body. Such improvised dance movement can lead to aspects of our being that we do not often access through other practices.

Two other helpful teachers of *Full-Body Exformation* are Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter. These two innovators created the term “Exformation” which I am using in my title for this category of religious practice. By “exformation” they mean experiencing the opposite of what we normally mean by “information.” We take *in* so much information we can become choked full. We need to “*exform*” – put the inner into outward expression. Specifically, this practice includes both bodily movements and innovative talking. Phil and Cynthia are founders of a movement they call “Interplay.” They have created scores of exercises that enable people to “exform” effectively and imaginatively. One of my favorite exercises they call “Dance,Talk,Three.” In groups of three or more, each person performs for the others a brief improvised dance and then talks about something going on in their lives (No advanced thought about this is necessary, just exform whatever comes to mind.). Then do a second short dance movement, after which another brief talk session is shared. Dance a third time; then talk a third time. This exercise moves the participants beyond needless secretiveness and comfort zones and gives them an experience of sharing their lives instead of holding them in. I call this a religious practice even though it is done in a secular context. Some of the Awe of living is accessed no other way than through some form of full-body exforming.

The practice of *Full Body Exformation* can assist us to be accident prone to the “I Am” aspect of *Inherent Purity*. Rather than being preoccupied with doing the right thing and knowing for sure what the right thing is, we can find our truly good life by honestly sharing in active ways what is actually happening to us.

Visionary Trance

Of all the nine types of religious practice, *Visionary Trance* can seem the most kooky to many people. Actually, all religious practices tend to manifest what some think of as kooky elements, but with visionary trance we are observing practices that move us into a full departure from our mental sensibilities. *Visionary Trance* is a practice that is very old. It was perhaps the favorite religious practice led by the shaman in very early tribal life. In more recent times we also see instances of Visionary Trance in the practices of Pentecostals, Holy Rollers, Shakers, early Quakers as well as Sufi twirling, Hindu chanting, and much else. When encountering both recent and ancient forms of this practice, many people have typically dismissed such practices as ignorant superstition. We need, however, to find a plausible explanation for the continuation of such practices for thousands of years. What is the validity so many have experienced in these practices. Perhaps we skeptics have opened ourselves to a number of practices that can be included in this category. For example, practices that promote ecstatic, mind-blowing laughter might seem OK to us. To “lose oneself in laughter” is a sort of trance. A certain kind of songfest can also be trancelike. Some songs are written to promote trance. Ecstatic drumming and dancing is another trancelike practice. Those who have experimented with dream interpretation and waking dreaming are touching into this arena. Yes, even the use of certain drugs has been an exploration into trance. However uncomfortable we highly-mental members of society may feel about exploring *Visionary Trance*, we can perhaps begin to appreciate this tradition of practice by simply noticing that all direct consciousness of the enigma of consciousness is a sort of trance in which the mind is somewhat set aside even though the mind may help express and interpret these trancelike experiences of our raw consciousness.

Ancient shamans typically understood themselves as enabling their youth or adult “clients” to take a “trip” away from their familiar thoughts and patterns of living into

an “other world” of conscious experiences from which the “client” was then enabled to return and report, and then with help from the shaman learn something of value for the pursuit of their ordinary lives.

Many of us have been on religious retreats of such length that a similar departure-and-return experience was had. We found a new context in basic consciousness about our lives during such a “trip.” Afterward, we returned to our ordinary lives with a challenge to integrate the trancelike trip into the quality of our ordinary living. This is the essence of the practice of *Visionary Trance*: to go away for a time from our ordinary thoughts, patterns, anxieties, distresses, despairs, apathies, etc., and then return to our ordinary lives with a fresh ability to be our being in a more transparent, victorious, and effective fashion. Perhaps we can see why this religious practice can be associated with accessing that central aspect of the “I Am” that I have named “*Enchantment with Being*.”

The practice of *Visionary Trance* can assist us to be accident prone to the “I Am” aspect of *Enchantment with Being*. Rather than being preoccupied with avoiding conflict and making everybody happy, we can rediscover our profound intensity through making trips into the unusual frontiers of Reality.

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My aim in writing this chapter has not been to wrap up the immense topic of religious practice, but to spread out and intensify our imagination about what “religious practice” includes. Obviously, religious practice includes more than what has been mentioned here. Each of these arenas of practice is a deep well of possibility. And it is likewise plausible that there may be still unmentioned arenas of religious practice. But to this insight I cling: religion is practice, practice, practice, practice, before is it anything else.