

TRANSFORMATIVE MEDITATIONS **FOR SPIRITUAL HEALERS**

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1. Transformative Meditations

For many years I have been leading workshops and seeing clients, sometimes offering meditations and spiritual counselling, sometimes offering psychotherapy, and sometimes both. In 2000 I felt called to a new emphasis, exploring more deeply the processes of spiritual healing, especially in people with life-threatening illness

As part of my own movement into this form of service, preparing me for it, meditative processes that I had practiced for their own sakes turned out to be very important in spiritual healing. After experiencing their transformative power in various healing contexts, I felt moved to share them in half a dozen workshops with spiritual healers, both novice and veteran

Some people who had been in the workshops asked me to provide a written account of the transformative meditations, and so in 2001 I drafted an original version of this essay, outlining the use of three of them: (i) surrender into mystical discernment (ii) being the cosmic tree and (iii) self-healing through touch. The workshops were designed mainly for people from a wide variety of approaches, so during them I did not present any distinctively Christian meditations, though all three can be used by Christians. At the end of this considerably-revised version for 2004, however, I will do so, especially since the new version is designed specifically for participants in a Toronto School of Theology course on “Christian Spiritual Healing” where both universal and distinctively Christian meditations will be explored experientially.

In spiritual matters, reading an essay is rarely as transformative as having a direct experience within a group. My hope, nevertheless, is that readers of this essay will find some parts of it useful, selecting whatever seems relevant to their own process of becoming a better healer, and setting aside whatever seems irrelevant. Some readers may find that their horizons of possibility are being expanded. On the other hand, some may find the

proposals familiar, for it is unlikely that anything I present has not already been practiced by some individual or tradition. Whatever your response, I warmly welcome your comments at: donald.evans@utoronto.ca I find that I learn a great deal through dialogue with others whose perspective and life-experience differs from mine. This is an essay-in-process, not a final, definitive draft!

2. “Better” Spiritual Healers?

In this essay I presuppose that various changes within oneself can make one a “better” spiritual healer. This is a controversial claim. For one thing, people differ concerning what counts as “better”. Some see healing as an emotional-spiritual transformation that may, or may not, affect the body so as to eliminate disease or delay death. Others emphasize frequency of cures (or remissions) of physical disease.

Another issue is whether or not it is misleading to refer to oneself as a “spiritual healer”, for one is not the agent of healing, merely the instrument. A point well taken, I agree, but it seems to me possible to use the expression “spiritual healer” as merely a short-hand for “instrument of spiritual healing”. People involved in spiritual healing generally agree that, while one is being an instrument, one needs to set aside one’s narcissistic preoccupation with comparative status and power and, specifically, one needs to be very clear to oneself and others that the agent in healing is not oneself but cosmic energies or a particular spiritual presence or God (depending on one’s world-view)

Purity of motivation is not merely a matter of saying the “spiritually correct” things (“Don’t praise me, praise God, etc.), for self-deception concerning our hidden self-centredness is a common human tendency. Nevertheless we can consciously aspire to such purity while being ever alert to detect unconscious distortions that shape our motivations and our self-images. For example, at one point I reluctantly realized that my intensely strong desire to bring a particular kind of healing to others was arising mainly because I refused to acknowledge to myself that I secretly needed such healing myself. Another subtle self-deception that I uncovered involved my repressing a hidden motive for healing work: the hope that somehow I will receive affection from someone as a reward.

Nor is “success” as a healer a guarantee of pure motivation, for God sometimes uses even a self-inflating ego-maniac as an instrument for bringing healing to many people, in spite of serious motivational distortions within the healer. Or, in another setting, a healer who is greedy rather than caring may be “successful” because he or she has special skills in manipulating cosmic energies and in manipulating the trust and hope of desperate people.

It has been my good fortune, however, to meet many exemplary spiritual healers from a variety of traditions and modalities. . Especially during their times of concentrated focus on others, they succeed in getting themselves largely out of the way, so that cosmic energies or a spiritual presence or God can pass through them relatively unimpeded and undistorted.

Indeed, since I began to teach varieties of meditation over twenty years ago and included an introduction to spiritual healing I have found that most beginners can distinguish experientially between two phases of a learning exercise. First, one is exploring the experience of energy-vibrations in one’s hands and around the other person. In this phase it is okay to be thinking, “Gee whiz, I can do this!” or “I’m not as good at this as I’d hoped”. In the second, one consciously tries to get oneself out of the way, being respectfully in service to the other person, letting the energies flow through one’s fingers to him/her, and being intuitively guided concerning where one’s hands are to move

Later on, some people may supplement this temporary letting go of self-preoccupation by following the rubrics of some particular method such as Reiki or Therapeutic Touch. But whether or not they do this, the key to becoming a better instrument of healing is a decreased focusing on one’s ego while in healing mode

3.Letting Go: Temporarily as a Healer or Continuously as a Person?

What eventually matters most profoundly, however, is whether one lets go of one’s ego-attachments not only temporarily as a momentary instrument of healing for others, but constantly in one’s life as a whole. Such a transformation radically reduces any tendency, especially when not in healing mode, to inflate oneself as a healer.

If my daily practice includes the uncovering of attachments then I am likely to be open to realizing – if it is true – that I have an attachment to being, and being seen as, a healer. If I am attached to this, I can recognize it is as merely one of many ongoing requirements that I impose on life or on God: “Such-and-such must be the case or I’ll not be able to go on”. The demand that I be a successful healer is something that I must recognize and shed – along with other conscious or unconscious requirements such as being loved in a particular way, or achieving this or that ambition, or having my contributions recognized, or not being restricted by disease in my activities, or not having to cope with so-and-so’s obnoxious behaviour.

Such attachments are in the way of gradual surrender of one’s whole self into the Divine Mystery, the Divine Love. And they distort our motivations in our dealings with fellow human beings. The discernment of attachments is a gradual process that deepens day by day, week by week and year by year, for our most powerful attachments are unconscious, and are only gradually uncovered. In this process I have found very helpful a meditation, which I call “Surrender into Mystical Discernment”. In it I ask, “What within me, at this moment, is an obstacle to a more intimate union with the Divine Mystery, the Divine Love?” Such a meditation, if practiced daily while surrendering into the Divine as much as possible, gradually facilitates the uncovering of specific attachments that have secretly motivated us in our daily lives.

Once I discern an attachment during meditation, I need to let go of it. For example, if I am attached to a person “umbilically” I need to ritually “cut the cord”. This by itself, however, is not enough, for ways in which the attachment continues to play itself out in daily life need to be recognized and changed. Eventually, if such “working through” in my dealings with others is thorough, another attachment that is more deeply repressed rises to the threshold of consciousness and becomes accessible for (i) discernment, (ii) discarding and (iii) working through. And so the purging process continues through days and months and years.

Until a few years ago the only way that I associated this “Surrender into Mystical Discernment” meditation with healing other people was as a specially thorough way of preparing myself, getting myself out of the way, before beginning a distinctively healing process such a bringing healing energies to someone through my hands. Recently, however, I have realized that “doing” this meditation alongside a person who needs healing can be

itself a healing process, an alternative to laying on of hands or other recognized healing activities. In the fourth section of this essay I will be giving some examples of this alternative use of the “Surrender” meditation, but first I will outline the four phases of the meditation itself.¹

When I teach this meditation to an individual or a group, it includes going through three phases before the “discernment” phase begins. With years of daily practice, these three phases become unnecessary, for one can move into surrender almost immediately. What I am about to present now, however, is the four-phase approach that I teach to beginners.

(1) Asking for the Discernment:

“What within me, at this time, is an obstacle to a more intimate union with the Divine Mystery, the Divine Love?” Note that the question presupposes that an intimate, mystical union is possible and desirable. Indeed, this meditation can be viewed as a revised version of a meditation directly into such union. I will clarify this later. I should note here, however, that if a person’s theology precludes movement towards mystical union the wording of the request for discernment could change accordingly, e.g. “What within me, at this time, is an obstacle to a closer alignment of my will with the Divine Will?”.

(2) Relaxing the Body and thereby the Mind.

This phase is optional, but it is needed if a person’s unconscious bodily tensions are causing such severe mental stress that relaxation and letting go seem impossible. Here is one version of this phase: “On a deep inhalation, tense your feet, hold the tension as you hold your breath, then release the tension as you release your breath. Repeat this throughout the bodily parts (calves, knees, thighs, etc.), and then with the whole body”. (Other versions can be drawn from bodily meditations such as yoga.)

(3) Emptying Consciousness and Sinking Down.

This phase is central, and is also part of a meditation towards mystical union, or directly into mystical union.

Initially you focus on exhalations. With each exhalation you let go of distractions in the consciousness and/or tensions in the body. Letting go of distractions involves withdrawing the energy of your attention from everything except the exhalations. Letting go of bodily tensions involves

literally sinking down into the mat, letting go of subtle attempts to hold yourself together.

As the meditation continues, the focus on exhalations gradually decreases in intensity and becomes minimal. Gradually all the contents of consciousness lose much of their attention-grabbing power, a process assisted sometimes if you consciously let go, consciously refuse to cling, whenever your attention is “grabbed”. And gradually you sink down metaphorically into an enveloping darkness, stillness, silence and Mystery. If one’s meditation were directly towards mystical union, this emptying out and sinking down would continue indefinitely. In the Discernment meditation, however, you stop emptying and sinking and you begin to “wait”.

(4) Waiting for Discernment.

This phase involves a subtle combination of eager openness to receive and patient acceptance of whatever ensues or does not ensue. If there is an “answer” to the question it may come in words, but it may also come in images, or a dream-like sequence, or a memory, or even a bodily sensation. If there is no “answer” this may be because hidden blocks in you are preventing me from receiving one. Alternatively, perhaps there is, in the moment, no obstacle close enough to the threshold of consciousness for it to be discerned, though many obstacles remain deeply unconscious. Whatever the reason for no discernment, we need to realize that what matters most is the movement towards letting go of one’s self-centredness and thereby “falling” into Divine Love. Since what matters most is the movement, even people trying this meditation for the first time may find its transformative power amazing.

In contrast with this, however, some skilled meditators who have learned how to empty all the current contents of their consciousness find that this acquired skill, though an ingredient of a mystical path, does not by itself bring true self-surrender into mystical union. By itself, it lacks three crucial ingredients: (i) openness to discernment of attachments, (ii) conscious, decisive severing of attachments and (iii) transformative working through in daily life. Indeed, the acquiring of a meditative skill may even reinforce egocentricity and thereby become an obstacle to transformation

More generally, a person’s ability to set aside self-preoccupation temporarily, while meditating or being an instrument of healing, does not by itself bring transformation out of narcissism and may even be an obstacle to

this. Other examples of this can be seen in many artists and athletes and intellectuals, who can become deeply absorbed into their activities, whether this be creating a painting, performing a “quad” on skates, or solving a mathematical problem. All of these, like spiritual healing, involve setting aside one’s self-preoccupation during a period of disciplined focusing – a period that may further resemble spiritual healing in that it includes a receptivity to inspiration. As with spiritual healing, an ability to focus on a task while being open to inspiration can develop in people who remain very self-centred in their overall relations with God and with other human beings.

Some people become so egocentrically attached to their skill as an “essential” part of their personal identity that their relations with God and with associates are totally subordinated. This is not inevitable, however. Some very gifted artists, athletes and intellectuals learn how to offer in love their whole selves, including their skills, to the Divine Mystery, to humankind and even to nature.

4. Using the “Surrender into Mystical Discernment” Meditation in Healing

Several years ago a friend who was in a state of anguished confusion and agitation concerning the direction of her life asked me to drop by. I asked Spirit whether it was appropriate to try to help, and if so how. Spirit ruled out three approaches: sending her spiritual energy or spiritual presence, facilitating a life-crisis meditation whereby she might receive insights, or asking on her behalf for insights. Instead, I was firmly instructed to surrender into the Divine Mystery as deeply as possible in the moment. Indeed, although she was to be initially included in my consciousness, I was to concentrate on asking, “What, in this moment, is impeding fuller surrender by me?” Meanwhile she was simply to focus on her breathing so as to become as calm and receptive as possible. After about ten minutes she spoke: an amazing flood of visions and insights and decisions had come, giving new shape to her life.

The next time I was instructed to offer my own attempts at surrender was in a situation of life-threatening illness where on previous occasions there had been an intensive outpouring of spiritual energies and presences through me as a relatively ego-less instrument. On this occasion, however, nothing like that was to happen. Sitting beside her bed, I was told to hold her at the periphery of my consciousness or not at all, while focusing inwardly on identifying obstacles in the moment to my surrendering more

deeply. Afterwards the sick person, a very experienced Buddhist practitioner, said that never before had she received so many healing insights concerning her current physical, emotional and spiritual challenges.

A third occasion arose when the son of a friend was in a coma resulting from a car accident hundreds of miles away. His mother, at the bedside, reported that the doctors were trying with medication to calm the commotion in his brain. Psychically it also seemed clear to me that sending him a barrage of healing energies would be inappropriate. Instead, we both went into emptying-surrendering mode, she literally alongside him, and me at a distance. I have no doubt that her continuous vigil contributed greatly to his eventual emergence from coma and his eventual recovery.

Later, during one of the workshops that I offered for spiritual healers, it seemed appropriate to have one person sit in the middle of the group while everyone in the circle practiced the “Surrender into Mystical Discernment” meditation as best they could. Both the person in the centre and those in the circle reported subtle but profound changes.

How does one person’s surrender facilitate healing in another person? One clue from my own experience comes from what has happened for me when I am in the presence (physically and/or spiritually) of a holy person who has profoundly surrendered into the divine Mystery. My own comparatively shallow surrender is thereby deepened. Perhaps this is part of what happens when someone’s sickness is healed solely by being in the presence of a holy person. The sick person’s surrender-access to the Mystery is opened, whether consciously or unconsciously, and this inner deepening brings healing. In a much less powerful way, my own imperfect but sincere attempts towards self-emptying surrender may facilitate healing in another human being. In a group, we support each other in our openness towards surrender by attempting this together. This in turn makes surrender more accessible to any sick person for whom we move “alongside”

My personal discovery concerning surrender and healing was important on my own path, but soon I came to realize that my “discovery” was not at all new to humankind! I had, as it were, reinvented the wheel! Millions of people in countless cultures have known the appropriateness of sitting in silence with an ailing loved one. Moved by a relatively selfless impulse of compassion, they temporarily let go of anxious self-preoccupation and share with the loved one some of the peace that then

ensues. Indeed, some clients have told me when they had a temporary breakthrough into self-emptying surrender they felt inspired to try to become more steadily selfless, and soon recognized their need for a rigorous daily discipline of self-surrender.

Commitment to some such daily discipline is central in many paths within the great spiritual traditions. Usually the main emphasis is not on healing the sick but on personal transformation, though healing may be a by-product. Even if one's special calling is to serve others as a spiritual healer, taking up such a discipline means that becoming a spiritual healer is rightly seen as merely a particular version of becoming a transformed, surrendered human being in the whole of one's life. One simply stresses healing rather than, for example, service of others through social action or artistic creativity or scientific research. Where healers lack any such commitment they may become successful and even famous, but will display a split between healing and the way they live their life. At best the ego only recedes temporarily during the times of healing.

To summarize: A meditation of self-emptying Surrender into Mystical Discernment is not only occasionally a preparation for healing and occasionally itself a mode of healing. It is also, and mainly, a daily regime for living in increasing alignment with the Divine Mystery. One is thereby likely to bring this alignment not only to situations of healing as they arise, but also to all situations.

5. Surrender into Mystical Discernment rather than Mystical Union

I have also alluded to a meditation of self-emptying Surrender into Mystical Union, where one continues indefinitely the process of letting go and sinking down into the Divine Mystery, without any pause of waiting for discernment. Eventually one lets go not only of egocentricity but also the whole self. Some version of such a meditation occurs within many spiritual traditions and the subsequent "pure consciousness" is sometimes regarded as ultimate. Consciousness becomes "pure" in that not only the ego but also all awareness of oneself as a human being disappears. One verbal expression of this, afterwards, is "There is only God". On some paths pure-consciousness states of total world-transcendence occur periodically and one returns to everyday consciousness with the memory of pure consciousness perpetually in the background, so that one is simultaneously in this world and transcending it.

Being in the presence of someone who lives in this way can bring healing, for it can facilitate deeper surrender within oneself. Nevertheless I am recommending in healing contexts the surrender into mystical discernment, rather than into mystical union. I have three reasons for this. First, it can “work” as an approach for me and for many others even if our surrender is relatively limited, for what matters is the honest “attempt” in that direction. Second, it keeps us honest in relation to the shadow dimension of our human nature, for we are regularly inviting an uncovering of self-deceptions rather than mistakenly assuming that we have transcended these. Third, it keeps us open to a very different kind of mysticism, where the whole self, including the body, is filled rather than emptied. On such a mystical path, the movement is not towards disappearing into God but rather towards embodying God.

Becoming filled spiritually rather than emptied is important. On the path that has emerged for me, a state of pure consciousness, of being completely emptied, is important but it is incomplete. It is not ultimate. It needs to be balanced by a state of being completely filled as a human being, resonating spiritually with the energies of all creatures in the cosmos. On such a path, the ego gradually loses its power through repeated surrenders – both surrenders into emptiness and surrender-offerings of one’s fullness – but many of one’s positive gifts and passionate engagements as a human being are retained and transformed.

Later in this essay I will outline two meditations that involve being filled: the meditation on being a cosmic tree and the meditation on self-healing. Before I do so, however, I want to suggest two analogies² that illuminate the difference between emptiness and fullness as vehicles for healing. Where emptiness is stressed, a healer gets him/herself out of the way so as to become, at least temporarily, like a transparent window. Through this very clean window the sunlight (spiritual energies and/or presences) can pass unimpeded and undistorted. The temporary cleaning symbolizes the removal, for a while, of self-inflating concerns as well as other shadow-traits such as self-deflation, fear, rivalry or resentment. Ideally one exists, as it were, solely as a window-shape; like clear glass. One becomes invisible both to oneself and to whoever is receiving the healing sunlight.

Where fullness is stressed, the transparent window is replaced by a translucent window, say, a stained glass window in Chartres Cathedral.

From inside the Cathedral we appreciate not only the sunlight but also the distinctive patterns of colour in each of the many windows. Each one manifests the light in a different way, conveying a different, distinctive beauty to us. Where the healer as medium for spiritual energies is translucent rather than transparent, the human “medium” is part of the “message”, for distinctive human qualities of the healer are part of what is conveyed. The healer him/herself is in process of being healed, and this particular instance of humanity-in-transformation is part of what is being brought to the other person.

6. Introducing the Meditation on Being the Cosmic Tree

This meditation is in my experience the best one for beginners to learn how to resonate spiritually within one’s own body with the energies of all creatures in the cosmos or with a specific presence such as the resurrected Jesus Christ or the Hindu saint Ramana Maharshi or the Buddhist saint Kwan Yin or an aboriginal “power-animal”. From the ensuing state of humanity-in-transformation healing can radiate out to others.

The capacity to resonate within one’s own body with other creatures can be learned because every creature has its own distinctive vibrations. An analogy for this is freeing the strings on a piano by depressing the damper pedal, singing a note, and noting how the corresponding string resonates and sounds. We can learn how to release the “dampers” in our bodies so as to free ourselves to resonate selectively with other creatures, whether these be alligators or angels, volcanoes or deceased saints. (Knowing spiritually through resonating is emphasized in aboriginal spirituality, especially shamanic work, and also in Sufi spirituality.³)

7. Outlining the Meditation on Being the Cosmic Tree

This meditation probably originated within aboriginal oral traditions. My own version of it has changed in subtle ways over the last twenty years. It is best done standing, though sitting is permissible if twenty minutes of standing is too much. You begin by focusing on your breathing as a physical process, that is, noting any movements in your rib-cage and your abdomen. Also, you use your exhalation to release tensions and distractions downwards into the earth. Then you synchronize the exhalation with bending one knee, exhaling through that foot, which receives the body

weight; then you inhale to a very upright stance and immediately exhale through the other foot, bending that knee.

After a while the body movement changes somewhat, becoming purely vertical, for you exhale through both feet, bending both knees. All this is preparation for the tree meditation itself, which has five phases.

(1) Resonating with the earth

Imagine roots going down from your feet deep into the earth, and with each exhalation descend further down the roots with your consciousness, which rises on each inhalation up the roots, against gravity. Soon it becomes clear that this is no ordinary tree, for its roots go down towards the centre of the earth. After a while you imagine (or become aware of) very primitive volcanic energies, powerful and primal, which somehow do not consume the roots with their flames. Indeed, you can begin to suck these ancient energies up with each inhalation, for the roots becomes like straws. At first the drawing upward is difficult, against gravity, but then the energies rise spontaneously toward one's feet. For some people that are as far as it comes the first time, and this brings a new sense of grounding-connection with the earth. For others, however, the energy-vibrations are sensed in the feet, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, and so on. A few may, the first time, resonate up to the heart and even to the crown at the top of the head.

As the volcanic energies enter our human bodies we resonate with them in our human way, so we feel not only grounded but also intensely enlivened as we recover an ancient connection with our primitive origins. There actually are such energies. Of course our imagination shapes our awareness of them in varying ways, but the meditation soon convinces most people that we directly experience the energies. (Similarly if we rub our hands together, we can directly experience static electricity rather than inferring it from its observed effects; in meditation, however, there is no friction.)

(2) Resonating with Heaven

The meditation changes direction abruptly, shifting from earth to heaven: both the literal, material heaven (sun, moon, stars) and the realm of unembodied angels and disembodied human saints and teachers whom we usually think of as "up there". Focus your attention on the heart energy-centre in the middle of your chest and with your inhalation let your consciousness rise through your crown and then soar up the imagined tree-

trunk – no ordinary tree, for it soars endlessly. But immediately with your exhalation you draw down, through your crown into your body, whatever you have contacted in the heavenly realm, whether this be the moon or St. Francis. This immediate embodiment of the heavenly energies or presences enables you to soar safely, without any danger of an involuntary out-of-body experience. It keeps your process world-affirming rather than world-transcending. If the heavenly energies or presences are welcomed into your whole body rather than only into your consciousness “in the head”, the heavenly realm is being brought down into your body to pervade every cell.

Some spiritual healers whom I have met are very much at home in the non-material heavenly realm. When I invite them to soar there on an inhalation, their access is easy and immediate. Drawing spiritual energies and presences down into the body is much more difficult. Often they then realize that their transmission from the heavenly realm to others in healing is not through their whole body, which would have to adjust to the energies and presences and also would amplify them with lower frequencies. Often they also have difficulty with the first phase of the meditation, bringing up earth energies.

(3) Resonating from the Heart-Centre in Six Directions

The next phase in the meditation is to focus attention mainly at the heart centre, while maintaining some awareness of the heavens through one’s crown and renewing awareness of the earth through one’s feet. If possible, you resonate whole-bodily with energies from both heaven and earth, united in the heart-centre. Now extend your arms horizontally with fingers extended, and imagine two other horizontal “branches” extending frontward and backward from the heart centre. This can facilitate a sense of connecting with all creatures on, or near, the earth’s surface.

The awareness that you are vibrating in all six directions is awesomely expansive. Each of us is a microcosm. By resonating we can, in principle, contain the whole universe. Eventually, a regular practice of the tree meditation can enable you to move into microcosm-awareness in a few breaths. In one inhalation you move up through the cosmic tree-trunk to the heavens. In the next exhalation you move down through your body into the earth-centre via the cosmic tree-roots. With the next inhalation you move from the earth-centre through the body into the heavens. Then you exhale down through the crown to the heart centre, moving outwards from there horizontally in four directions.

(4) Receptive Spontaneity: Openness to Personal Transformation

At this point in the meditation, when we are connecting six ways and are focusing on the heart centre, I often invite people to become as receptive and spontaneous as possible, open to whatever “needs” to happen: stillness or movement, silence or sound, vibrations or images or insights, cosmic awareness or cleansing. Often this is the phase during which people experience surprising transformations, especially through awareness of new spiritual presences, or deepened awareness of familiar ones. Sometimes Christians experience for the first time Jesus Christ as a real presence within their own bodies and within the physical world. In one way or another participants usually feel blessed, so this phase can be, in a broad sense of the word, “healing” for each of them.

(5) From Fullness Offering Oneself to God and Blessing to Others

From the expanded sense of one’s whole, filled self you can offer yourself up to the Divine Mystery in thanksgiving for the gift of abundant life. This is not an emptying out of the whole self, but a rejoicing in its fullness. Nevertheless it does involve a kind of surrender, for you acknowledge that your whole, microcosmic self is a gift, not something you own. Gratefully you receive and celebrate this gift, which in its expansiveness spontaneously becomes a giving outward to others, a blessing to all creatures. The prayer, “May the Lord bless you and make you a blessing” is fulfilled.

(6) Healing from Fullness

The Cosmic-Tree meditation may end with phase 5, where blessing is radiating outwards towards everyone and everything in the cosmos. Insofar as the blessing includes healing, phase 5 is, in a general way, healing. But a new, more explicit and focused phase may arise where the individual meditator or the group actually names people to receive the blessing in a healing way. Indeed, where one’s primary intention is to bring healing to others, the five phases of the Cosmic-Tree meditation can be regarded as a profound preparation for phase 6, the healing from fullness. The spiritual richness experienced within your own body is passed along to others for them to receive, each recipient resonating with it in their own distinctive ways. Here, as with a translucent window, the transformation occurring within you, the healer, is part of the gift to the recipient. The “medium” is part of the “message”.

As taught initially, the five phases of the Cosmic-Tree meditation take at least twenty minutes. The five phases are very significant by themselves, and it might seem strange to subordinate them to a sixth, specifically healing, phase. Indeed, the five phases could seem to be rather lengthy as a preparation for healing work. Eventually, however, one can move very quickly through the five phases and have plenty of time to focus on healing others.

Before we leave the Cosmic-Tree meditation I want to end with a note of caution concerning it. Without the fifth phase of thanksgiving and self-offering in service of the Mystery and of others, the microcosmic state can become, at worst, a narcissistic ego-trip, a grandiose self-inflation. More generally, the path of learning through resonating - like all spiritual practices - can be corrupted by our tendency towards self-centred preoccupation with comparative power and status. Indeed, some charismatic teachers who become adepts in the realm of spiritual energies and spiritual presences misuse their gifts, for example in employing black magic to abuse students who try to leave the teacher's group.⁴

Because a few adepts have corrupted the way of resonating, some healers cautiously avoid all healing-from-fullness work and confine themselves to trying to be "transparent windows" of pure heavenly light rather than being "translucent windows. But, as we have seen, such a restriction does not by itself rule out ego-tripping, and it does rule out the positive benefits of expansive healing from fullness. My own impression is that both approaches can be appropriate and helpful, depending on the context and the guidance from intuition or Spirit. Also, both approaches are less likely to be corrupted by egocentricity if there is a daily practice of something like the Surrender into Mystical Discernment

The Cosmic-Tree meditation facilitates the creation of an appropriate translucent window, an appropriate human medium for healing. Another meditation that works similarly is the Self-Healing meditation.

8. Outlining the Self-Healing Meditation

When I gradually developed this meditation for myself a few years ago I drew from Buddhist teachers and from a Reiki master, combining elements from these contrasting sources into a meditation for my own healing. Initially I viewed the self-healing as simply a good in itself, but

after only a few weeks I was using it also as a preparation for sending healing to others at a distance. Now whenever I practice this sequence I first bring healing to myself and then send it to others. What happens in me is part of what I transmit to others, to be received by them in whatever distinctive ways are needed by them at the time. The process on myself involves hands-on-skin touching of my whole body, except for surfaces that I can not reach, where a “touch of my consciousness” has to suffice. When I teach the meditation in a group, respecting the privacy of participants, participants remain clothed, and I tell them to use the touch of consciousness as much as they wish.

Another difference between my private practice and what I teach is that in group I divide the meditation into two successive phases: the healing of ailing parts and the sensual celebration of all parts. For beginners it is usually better to learn the phases separately, for each phase involves distinctive obstacles. What both phases have in common is that one is treating each part with acceptance and affection, whether or not it is ailing. So by myself I do not distinguish between phases. Indeed, parts that are not “ailing” are not necessarily thriving, and usually need affectionate touch to become vibrantly alive.

(1) Healing of Ailing Parts

Bodily Awareness

To begin this phase I invite participants to focus initially on their breathing as a very physical process, being aware of changes in the rib-cage and perhaps in the abdomen. Then it is easier to shift to a bodily awareness of tensions or pains or dis-ease as these emerge in consciousness. Focusing on one ailing bodily part and perhaps bringing a hand there, participants are asked how they feel towards this part. Sometimes the private answer is “I don’t feel anything in particular. Usually I can ignore it, but you’ve asked me to attend to it so I’m not ignoring it; but even now it’s tolerable”. Sometimes, however, if a participant is suffering, they find within the suffering a strongly distancing feeling-stance: fear or rejection or hardening or judgment or hatred or resentment.

Befriending one’s Body.

After a while I ask them to see whether they can shift their attitude: from fear to friendliness, from rejection to welcome, from hardening to softening, from judgment to mercy, from hatred to affection, from resentment to forgiveness. There is then a period in which participants explore and try to

shift their responses to ailing parts. Perhaps all that is possible at this stage is to distance oneself less strongly, like the stance one has towards a person whom one finds obnoxious, whom one either ignores or tolerates. What is still lacking is compassion.

Imaginative Reflections to Facilitate Befriending one's Body

Compassion may arise spontaneously, even if one's distancing has been very strong, when one imagines treating the ailing part as if it were one's child, or one's family pet. Or one might reflect on Jesus' parable concerning the man who was mugged on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Jesus said ⁵ that the Good Samaritan, who did not know the victim but intervened compassionately, was a "good neighbour" to him. Similarly one can be a good neighbour to one's ailing bodily part. In the same way that one may be actively moved to help a fellow human being in distress, one may be moved to care for one's bodily part.

Asking for Help in Befriending one's Body.

Imaginative reflections, however, may not suffice in stirring compassion for one's own body. Another route is to ask a spiritual presence to help one befriend one's own body. Depending on one's spiritual tradition one may ask Christ or Kwan Yin or Mother Shakti or an angel sent by Allah or a power-animal. Often this does help in shifting one's attitude. Note that in such prayer one is not asking the spiritual presence to heal the ailing part directly, but rather indirectly, through changing one's attitude towards it.

Inner Obstacles to Befriending one's Body.

Substantial help is often needed in befriending one's own body, for there are serious inner obstacles in the way. For one thing, we tend to take our bodies for granted and then feel betrayed when they let us down and get in the way of our projects. And another obstacle is that we frequently confuse compassion with pity. We abhor self-pity, but this is because, unlike self-compassion, it involves a whining appeal to others. Sometimes the complaining call is voiced directly, but often it is kept hidden, or surreptitiously hinted. If the attention demanded is not forthcoming, there is resentment. If attention does come, there is a self-absorbed clinging to the one who pities.

Self-compassion, however, involves no appeal to another, except perhaps for help in becoming more compassionate. And like compassion for someone else, it is direct, respectful, active, discerning, and heart-present.

(2) Sensual Celebration of All Bodily Parts

Affectionate-erotic touch.

An invitation to celebrate sensually every pore on the surface of one's body is for some people very shocking, but doing this brings one's body to life in a powerfully healing way. What one can bring to oneself is the touch involved when one spontaneously expresses affection to a child or a pet or a lover when greeting them. Such touch brings pleasure, yet it need not be sexually arousing for giver or receiver.

Often when one is greeting one's sexual partner, the pleasure includes more of an erotic element even though the touch is clearly not in that moment intended as foreplay to stimulate "coming". When one is both giver and receiver, a similar kind of affectionate-erotic touch is possible – as distinct from masturbation.

Self-pleasuring.

Masturbation is the only self-pleasuring that many people have experienced, and often it feels either shameful or at best a second-best to loving intercourse. Because of this frequent association I sometimes avoid calling the meditation "self-pleasuring", though what one is actually doing is evoking pleasure in ways similar to what sensitive lovers do

Learning how to love oneself.

What we need to acknowledge is that all of us crave the pleasure of receiving affectionate touch. Beginning in infancy this is a vital need. Much fear of it is often present, however, because of the longings and the painful memories that it can evoke. For many, affectionate, pleasurable touch was experienced in infancy, but then suddenly stopped; for some, it never started; for others the only touch was abusive. So the meditation of sensual celebration is often an essential part of the process of re-parenting one's inner child. And, more broadly, it is part of learning how to love oneself and to receive that love: in the mature, responsible ways that one loves someone else: with trust, commitment, respect, open-heartedness and, especially, affection⁶.

Respecting our defenses.

If I feel affection for someone, I enjoy being close to him or her, both emotionally and physically. Even if minimal physical touch such as a warm hand-clasp is involved, much can be expressed. When touching oneself a

similar feeling of warm delight and cherishing is important even if I touch only one part of my body. The more parts the better, of course; but we need to respect our own defenses. For some, even in private, only the touch of consciousness may be initially possible. Or, alternatively, the focus can at first be less on experiencing pleasure than on consciously giving thanks for each bodily part in turn.

Asking a spiritual presence to help.

As one tries to shift from shy reserve to affectionate delight one can call for help from a spiritual presence. The idea of requesting spirit-help for sensual celebration of my body can seem bizarre if you have been taught to associate spirituality with asceticism and the flesh with sin. But I know quite a few people whom Christ has surprised by helping in pleasuring not only a belly or a nose that seems repugnantly big but even an erogenous zone. If Christ loves all of me, he can help me to love all of me!

(3) Combining the Two Phases and Sending Healing to Others

Eventually it is possible to mingle the two meditative phases, for the same loving touch comes to ailing parts and to flourishing parts, and whatever is appropriate can be conveyed. Essentially the overall meditation is a training in how to love, starting with oneself. What one has learned in the transforming process of loving oneself is included in what is passed on to someone else, whether by touch or at a distance. The meditation is a process of combining subtle shifts in attitudes with receptivity to spiritual energies and spiritual presences. Then we express to others an affectionate compassion, an inspired and inspiring bodily-emotional-spiritual state. The “medium” is part of the healing “message”.

A self-loving transformation within me, like a new design created in a stained-glass window, can matter greatly in the healing process for another person. This is not, however, an occasion for self-inflation, for the transformation itself presupposes a deep erosion of the ego. Indeed, our egoistic self-preoccupations are a bogus form of “self-love”, a form that arises out of an absence of real self-love. In so far as my body has been spiritually filled I do not need to be anxiously concerned about my comparative status, for as Alexander Lowen has said, I am already a “somebody”.⁷ Moreover, real self-love not only is fostered by letting in love from God and from human beings; it enables me to receive even more of

such love. So at times my heart overflows with gratitude, like a spring of living water, and this pours out to others in an enlivening and healing way.

Such an expansive state, healing from fullness, is wonderful. But although I wish it could be more frequent, I do not aspire to its being constant. Sometimes a movement into emptiness is inflicted on us, and like Jesus on the cross we feel utterly alone, abandoned by friends and by God. Or it becomes clear that a meditation on discerning and discarding ego-attachments is moving into an offering up of the whole self so as to become nothing. Both kinds of emptiness are in stark contrast with being filled, but they differing radically from each other. A “Dark Night of the Soul” is very different from the emptiness of “Pure Consciousness”. A later report of the former is typically, “I felt there was only me”; of the latter, “There was only God”.

Each empty state can be healing for others. The silent witness of a person persisting in reaching out for God through a Dark Night can inspire even a hardened soul.⁸ And as I stressed earlier, a meditation of self-emptying surrender alongside another person, whether it be towards mystical discernment or towards mystical union, can bring healing. Nevertheless I have emphasized the healing that goes out from shared fullness. Each of us as a spiritual healer is called into one or other mode of healing, depending on where we are on our own path and what is most appropriate for the other person at a particular time. Much intuition and guidance by Spirit in the moment is required as one makes such choices.

9. Christian Use of Universal Meditations

What I mean by a “universal meditation” is one that can be used by people from various religious traditions or meditative paths. Sometimes some revision of it may be required if it is to be compatible for a particular tradition or path, but substantial similarities remain in common. A version of each of the three meditations for healing that I have outlined (mystical discernment, cosmic tree, self-healing) can be used by some Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Aboriginals and New Agers; also by those secular humanists who are open to a spiritual dimension in people and nature. If, however, someone from any of these backgrounds is committed to a world-transcending rather than a world-transforming spirituality they may find the meditations inappropriate for them.

There are two different ways in which the three healing meditations (and others that are universal) can be seen as usable by those Christians who affirm a world-transforming spirituality.

The first way requires no explicit reference to Christ within a healing meditation, whether it be one of the three or a modality such as Reiki or Therapeutic Touch. Indeed, just as any approach in intensive psychotherapy that works and that respects persons can be used by Christians in helping people in distress, so can any helpful approach in spiritual healing. Christian love can use it to bring relief, whether or not its origin is non-Christian and whether or not it is used by non-Christians. . Indeed, if it requires no explicit reference to Christ, it can be offered to anyone regardless of their tradition. Also, it can be presented as drawing on universal cosmic energies rather than anything sectarian. For such reasons some contemporary healing modalities are provided both in medical institutions and in United Churches as a service in our multi-cultural society. Analogous services in some settings might be food, shelter, protection, medications, herbs, trauma counselling, palliative care etc. A Christian might privately understand the particular service as being motivated by his/her faith in Christ, but the help offered can be offered by anyone who knows how.

The second way involves explicit reference to Christ, and often it is a more appropriate approach in spiritual healing where the context is understood by everyone to be distinctively Christian, for example, Christian worship. Or within a group where people diverge in spiritual paths, Christians can devise their own distinctively Christian versions. As I presented the three transformative meditations for spiritual healing I provided some hints concerning such versions, calling on Christ as the specific spiritual presence from whom one seeks self-transformative help. Similarly, some Christians draw on distinctively Christian language as they bring healing to others through Reiki or Therapeutic Touch (or as they bring healing to themselves through focusing on the breath and/or a mantra, or as they take up yoga postures).

When leading Christians in transformative meditations for spiritual healers I have usually encouraged them to follow their own intuitions concerning how and when they explicitly call on Christ, in contrast with simply being open to whatever spiritual, emotional or bodily experiences arise. Sometimes a Christian becomes aware, not of Christ, but of a spiritual presence associated mainly with an aboriginal or Hindu or Buddhist tradition

with which they are not familiar. If this happens, there is some spiritual reason for it. (Similarly people from non-Christian traditions may meet Christ during a universal-type meditation. If this happens, there is some spiritual reason for it, and it need not imply that they are to join the institutional Church.)

When Christ does come to Christians, he accommodates his approach to the diverse openings and obstacles in various individuals. For example, some people are more accessible through sound and others through images and others through reading scripture. For one person at a particular time in his/her life there is may be a need and an opening for Christ to come as an awesome transcendent figure, whereas to others Christ comes as a friendly travel-companion or as a lover or as a confirming parent or as a power-animal (e.g. C.S.Lewis's lion, "Aslan"). In my own experience what was predominant for several decades was Christ transfigured, replaced more recently by Christ resurrected.

Obstacles to receiving Christ bodily often arise because of traumatic experiences in childhood, sometimes in the context of the Church. . One problem for quite a few women is that although they welcome the presence of the Divine Mystery or the Holy Spirit, they feel cautious concerning inviting any male figure to enter themselves. They prefer to limit such intimacy to Mother Earth or Sophia-Wisdom or a female saint. Such bodily apprehensions need to be respected, especially if they arise from destructive experiences with men. Eventually some healing can occur, such that not only the teachings of Jesus but also Jesus himself can be welcomed.

Similar difficulties may also arise where distinctively-Christian approaches in healing are practiced, especially if the call is to receive Christ not only into one's consciousness but also into one's body.

10. Distinctively-Christian Approaches in Healing

What do I mean by "distinctively-Christian" approaches in healing? Others may understand this differently, but what I am referring to is healing where Jesus Christ is the only, or the dominant, spiritual presence at work. Such a healing intrinsically involves a transformation of the healer by Christ so that the healer may become the vehicle through whom the healing power of Christ's presence is conveyed to the person being healed.

My own impression is that sometimes a kind of Christian healing can occur when the transformation is only for a while and does not involve the whole self. Indeed, it seems that sometimes the “healer” may not even have more than a minimal awareness of the real presence of Christ. In contrast with this, however, sometimes the Christian healer is profoundly aware of Christ’s loving, awesome presence stirring and transforming his own compassion as healing takes place. And the more this is happening throughout the body and is not restricted to symbolic images or words within the mind, the more transformative it can be for both the human instrument and the human recipient. Over the years I have observed this happening during workshops for many Christians as they learn to resonate in a bodily way with the distinctive energies of Christ.

In my own experience, calling on the crucified and resurrected Christ to be the only, or the dominant, presence in a healing is different from being an instrument for some other spiritual presence, which typically happens when I am working with a Muslim or a Buddhist or a Hindu or a Jew or an aboriginal. Where Christ is central in what is conveyed through the healing process what happens is also different from healing work involving cosmic energy. Many Christians and others offer this in loving service to others. I greatly appreciate their work, having benefited much from receiving it myself through them. Nevertheless it seems to me desirable that more Christian healers might become vehicles of distinctively Christian healing. This would involve experiencing the Real Presence of Christ within their own bodies, thereby deepening their own transformation and their healing service to others. I do not know which Christian healers are called to this, but my hunch is that some are. If others continue with cosmic-energy healing, that’s fine too.

In my own history such an experience has required prior experience with universal bodily-meditative practices, and I’ve witnessed it happening during some workshops that are focused on such practices, for example in ten four-day retreats for clergy that I’ve led or co-led. It is not something that anyone can bring about by an act of will, but an openness to the possibility can facilitate it. Sometimes, of course, the Spirit breaks through our conscious or unconscious resistance in an unlikely context. This was true of my own first encounter with the transfigured Christ. It happened when as a tourist I was visiting a monastery in Florence and found myself looking at Fra Angelico’s depiction of that event in a monk’s cell. Only later did I realize that I had been contemplating the fresco as an icon. . During

twenty minutes that seemed timeless I met the Real Presence of Christ transfigured. For me what happened was a total surprise, but a somewhat similar encounter, sometimes is granted to a devout Christian who, unlike me, consciously contemplates an image of Christ as an icon through which he/she hopes to meet Christ. Or another Christian may become open to an encounter with Christ through contemplative reading of scripture, which itself becomes a vehicle for the Presence.

An encounter with Christ, however, is different from an experience of his resurrected spiritual-bodily presence vibrating within one's own body. For me that gift of grace required prior learning concerning how to resonate in my body with cosmic energies and various presences. This may not be true for others, but I offer help in such learning both because it is valuable in itself but also because for some people it may be helpful in connecting with Christ in a special way – if that is their calling.

Through Christ's resurrected bodily presence in our own bodies we begin to embody the Divine Mystery.

11. Embodying the Divine Mystery through Jesus' Incarnation and Resurrection

For some Christians, “embodying the Divine Mystery” happened only in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God. Speaking about it as a possibility for anyone else seems very strange. For Christians in the Methodist⁹ and Franciscan¹⁰ spiritual traditions, however, we as Christians are called to continue the divine incarnation that began in Jesus. How? By welcoming his transformative indwelling, which eventually can enable us to become “partakers of the divine nature”¹¹ paradoxically both divine and human.

For me as a Christian, Jesus differed from all human beings, even the greatest such as Moses, Mohammed or Buddha, in incarnating the Divine Mystery and also in continuing after death not merely as a purely spiritual, disembodied presence, but in a uniquely resurrected mode – much more “touchable” or “palpable” than other spiritual presences. Such has been my own experience. So for me as a Christian the central way through which to learn how to embody the Divine Mystery is by letting Christ bring about whatever changes within us are needed for this to occur. For others, of course, the process may be very different.

I have presented my own Christian approach. The Sufi poet, Rumi, however, challenges my assumption that it is only through Christ that we can come to embody Divine Mystery. Rumi the Muslim mystic seems to me to understand such embodiment more deeply and sensitively than any Christian writer that I have read! Consider this poem: ¹²

In the early morning hour,
just before dawn, lover and beloved wake
and take a drink of water.
She asks, “Do you love me or yourself more?
Really, tell the absolute truth.”
He says, “There’s nothing left of me.
I’m like a ruby held up to the sunrise,
Is it still a stone, or a world
made of redness? It has no resistance
to sunlight.”
This is how Hallaj said, I am God
and told the truth!
The ruby and the sunrise are one.

Although my own way of access to incarnation is through Christ, I have to acknowledge that something similar was realized by Rumi. And although Rumi expresses much reverence for Jesus, he does not refer to Jesus as his way into realization of incarnation. Indeed, Rumi cites a Muslim heretic, the mystic Hallaj, and his poem involves defending and explaining Hallaj’s divine-human claim by referring poetically to Rumi’s similar experience.

12. Embodying the Divine Mystery through Jesus and Healing “In the Name of Jesus”

Before I conclude this essay I feel a need to reflect briefly concerning similarities and differences between the kind of “distinctively-Christian” healing that I propose and that which is derived from Christian scripture as understood by Ian Cowie, a Scottish Presbyterian leader of a healing centre in Glasgow. ¹³ I choose him for consideration because he is not involved in the controversial kind of large-scale, healer-centred TV healing-evangelism that is remote from the context of the TST course that I am offering. And also, positively, what he points out to as central in Christian spiritual healing within the scriptures is very plausibly presented.

Cowie notes that, like Jesus in his healing ministry, Christians are called to speak a “Word of Authority”. It is clear that both Jesus and his disciples/apostles frequently spoke words that were central in the healing that occurred. What was the relation between the words emphasized by Cowie and the universal spiritual energies or the energies of spiritual presences that I have been emphasizing? Cowie’s account involves some unclarities and contradictions that we will consider in the TST seminar, but some of his affirmations indicate an affinity, though not an identity, between his approach and mine. Consider these examples:

“There is no magic formula, no equivalent to ‘a spell’ in which it is important to get the words right, and which can be passed on to initiates..... The Beatitudes point the way.”¹⁴ Cowie goes on to exhort his fellow Christians to apply the Beatitudes deeply in their own lives. Such a transformation is required if they are to be the ones who bring “shalom” (total well-being) to those around them. “We must be very careful not to begin to speak in Jesus’ Name if we do not in fact have the inward assurance that what we say is from him.”¹⁵ “In Christian healing the energy transfer is from Christ-in-us to Christ-in-you.”¹⁶

Cowie and I agree that although distortions within us as Christians do not prevent God from bringing some healing through us, the more we shed our ego-tripping and the more God transforms us into Christ-like Beatitude-living, the more shalom can come. We differ, nevertheless, in that he emphasizes the spoken word much more than I do. And as is evident in his phrase “Christ-in-US”, he emphasizes Christian community more than I have done in this essay: the “two or three (or more) gathered together”. I, too, greatly value spiritual community”, whether in personal transformation or in healing others, but my experience of this has not been exclusively “in the Name of Jesus”.

13 Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning, this essay is a work-in-progress. It would surprise me if everyone agreed with everything I said. It is merely one person’s reflections on experience.

I welcome any comments, suggestions or reflections at:
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END-NOTES

1 The meditation of Surrender into Mystical Discernment” has important similarities to a meditation that I call “Threshold Relaxation”, where the initial question is not about current obstacles to mystical union but rather is drawn from a wide range of other personal issues, e.g. “What am I here for?” or “Should I remain in this job (or marriage, or spiritual path):” or “Can I become aware of the presence of Jesus (or of my deceased spouse, or of a spirit-guide) “Is there pattern from my past that I am repeating in my dealings with him/her?) Or, more generally, “What is at the threshold from my emotional unconscious or my spiritual unconscious that is accessible now and would be helpful to access?” Whether or not a person feels drawn toward mystical union, a comparatively shallow version of emptying consciousness and sinking down can facilitate access to one’s own inner wisdom for discernment concerning a vast array of personal issues. I outline “Threshold Relaxation” in an essay on shamanic psychotherapy in Seymour Boorstein, ed. *Transpersonal Psychotherapy* 2nd ed. (Albany: N.Y.: State university of New York Press, 1996) chapter 15, pages 467-70, 481-83.

2 For an extensive exploration of the transparent/translucent contrast in a context, not of healing, but of appreciating varieties of revelatory spiritual paths, see Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1993) pp. 242-5.

3 For a further exploration of knowing by resonating, see my essay “Life After Death: Reflections on Experiences” on my web-page: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/devans>.

4 For a further discussion of such practices and how to disarm the practitioners see my essay on shamanic psychotherapy in *Transpersonal Psychotherapy* pp.479-81. (Details are in note #1.)

5 Luke 10.29-37

6 For a more thorough comparison of love for self and love for others see Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature*, (see note#1) pages 57-67.

7 Alexander Lowen founded bio-energetics, a bodily-focused psychotherapy which works with what he calls “life-energies”. See his *Depression and the Body* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1973) p.30.

8 For an unusually profound example in fiction, see George Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, translated from the French by Pamela Morris (New York: Carrol and Graff, 1983, 1st edition, 1937), pages 137-56. I should note, however, that in Bernanos’ poignant portrayal of human nature and divine grace, original sin has radically obscured the image of God in us, so there is little place for my “way of fullness”.

9 Concerning Methodist tradition see Frank Whaling, ed. *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist, 1981). The promise that we Christians can become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1.4) was central in the life and teaching of Methodism’s founder, John Wesley. On May 25, 1730 he records in his journal that at 5 a.m. he opened the Testament to these words (op. cit p.106). At 8.45 p.m., attending a service at Aldersgate Street and listening to someone read Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, his crucial conversion happened. “While (the reader) was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed” (op. cit. p.107).

For John Wesley, becoming a partaker of the divine nature meant becoming perfect in love. Wesley held that “Christian Perfection” is possible: “the conscious conviction, in a present experience, of the reality of one’s utter love for God and man in response to God’s own love... a luminous experiential self-awareness of the fact of perfect love in one’s own life”(op.cit. p.53). This state did not for him imply faultlessness or inability to fall into temptation or even to fall from grace (see op.cit.p.54). Like St. Paul in 2.Corinthians 4.7 he knew that we have the treasure of God’s loving presence in “earthen vessels” to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. Nevertheless, God’s loving presence is in these earthen vessels, our bodies.

According to Wesley we can feel this presence through an “inward sensation” analogous to the sense of touch (op. cit.p.44). Faith as an experience can involve a bodily assurance. According to the great Methodist hymn-writer, Charles Wesley “Love divine, all loves excelling” can fix in us “its humble dwelling” (op. cit. p.227-28).

10 The theme of continuing the incarnation is presented by a contemporary Franciscan writer, Sister Frances Teresa, in her book *Living the Incarnation: Praying with Francis and Clare of Assisi* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1993). Consider these quotations:

“Every Christian is invited to be an incarnation of the incarnation, every Christian effects a physical presence of Christ in the world.”(op. cit. p.101).

“Just as Christ was the Word made flesh, so we are invited to become the same: the love of the Godhead in bodily form... Christ is the firstborn, the eldest, but only the first of many. We are the many. Like Francis, we gradually become incarnations of the incarnation. This is our calling” (op. cit. p.98)

(In the background of her thought in page 98 is Colossians 2.6-10: “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him...for in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ”.)

“Only those who are still immersed in the material, physical world can sweep that world with them on their journey to God. Only those whose own material being has become infused with the spirituality of love can lift creation to the fulfillment of its destiny as an unspotted mirror of the working of God.” (op. cit.p.115).

“Even though we are invited into a sharing of the divine, we are never summoned out of our original humanity... God, Instead, issues this call to become Christ with all our weaknesses, aware that those weakness and our struggles with them do not go away, but remain to the end, no matter how Christlike we might become”(op. cit. p.101).

“Francis is an outstanding demonstration of something which we tend to doubt, namely that God loves the person we already are and has no desire to turn us into stereotyped saints to adorn his heavenly niches. The saint God likes and seeks are robust human beings in all our original quiriness. To become holy is really to become our dearest selves.” (op. cit. p.110).

11 2 Peter 1.4

12 Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, translated and edited by Coleman Barks, (Edison, NJ: Castle Books for Harper Collins, 1995), page 119. For further exploration of Rumi, consult my notes on him in the Course Outline for the course “Spirituality in Literature” pages 31-44 on my webpage: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/devans>.

13 Ian Cowie, *Jesus’ Healing Works and Ours* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2000).

14 Op. cit. pages 239-40.

15 Op. cit. page 242.

16 Op. cit. page 85.