

IMAGES OF GOD – WE BECOME LIKE THE GOD WE ADORE

The purpose of this spiritual practice is to raise to explicit consciousness the images of God that influence one's life and behaviours.

Here's what to do:

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| <p>1. Express with a drawing, symbols, or words as God has been presented or taught to you by parents, teachers and friends.</p> | <p>2. Express through a drawing, symbols or words the image of God you have formed from your own experiences or personal search. Here you might describe moments when you experienced God in prayer, whether in happy or difficult times.</p> |
| <p>3. Express the image of God that actually influences your decisions and choices.</p> <p>After finishing the first three boxes, study your page and note what the juxtaposition of the three images stirs up in you in terms of insights, questions and feelings.</p> | <p>4. Express how your images of God have influenced your way of being during lockdown.</p> |

Stay with your windows and reflect on the following questions:

- What is your operative (as opposed to your professed image of God?) In other words what image/s actually influences the way you think, feel, and act as a Christian?
- In your operative image, is God near or far?
- Does your operative image help or hinder your spiritual growth, your sense of self and personal maturity and your sense of freedom?
- Is your current experience of lockdown giving birth to a new image of God?

This exercise is adapted from *The Discerning Heart* by Wilkie Au and Noreen Cannon Au.

Fresh Spiritual Practices

Sadhana-A Way to God, Christian Exercises in Eastern Form

Anthony de Mello 1978, Image Books, USA

<https://www.demellospirituality.com/>

I have included some examples of exercises from Sadhana aimed at learning thought control and quelling distractions before Christian meditation or bible reflection. Such exercises need to be practiced regularly for anyone to see real improvements. The book contains 47 well described and cumulative exercises which are reasonably realistic for those who struggle to sit still or let go.

Exercise 1 Breathing Sensations

Begin this exercise by spending some five minutes in becoming aware of sensations in various parts of your body . . . Now move on to the awareness of your breathing. Become aware of the air as it comes in and goes out through your nostrils ... Do not concentrate on the air as it enters your lungs. Limit your awareness to the air as it passes through your nostrils ... Do not control your breathing. Do not attempt to deepen it. This is not an exercise in breathing but in awareness. So if your breathing is shallow, leave it that way. Do not interfere with it. Observe it. Each time you are distracted, return with vigour to your task. In fact, before you get started it will help if you resolve firmly not to miss awareness of a single breath. Continue this exercise for some ten or fifteen minutes.

Most people find this exercise difficult and yet, from the point of view of sharpening awareness, it is rewarding. It also has the effect of bringing calmness and relaxation with it. In attempting to be aware of your breathing, do not tense your muscles. Determination must not be confounded with nervous tension. You must expect to be considerably distracted at the beginning. No matter how distracted you are, the mere fact that you keep returning again and again to the awareness of your breathing-the mere effort involved in

doing this-will bring beneficial effects that you will gradually notice.

Exercise 2 Body Sensations

Close your eyes. Get in touch with sensations in various parts of your body. The ideal would be not to even think of the various parts of your body as "hands" or "legs" or "back" but just to move from one sensation to another and give no labels or names to your limbs and organs as you sense them. If you notice an urge to move or to shift your position, do not give in to it. Just become aware of the urge and the bodily discomfort, if any, that gives rise to the urge. Stay with this exercise for a few minutes. You will gradually feel a certain stillness in your body. Do not explicitly rest in the stillness. Go on with your awareness exercise and leave the stillness to take care of itself. If you become distracted, get back to the awareness of body sensations, moving from one to another, until your body becomes still once again and your mind quietens with your body and you are able to sense once again this stillness that brings peace and a foretaste of contemplation and of God. If your mind wanders, bring it patiently back to the exercise as soon as you become aware of the wandering.

Variation- Walking Meditation

When you walk, become aware, for a while, of the motion of your legs. You can do this anywhere, even on a crowded street. It is not a question of knowing that your legs are moving but of getting the feel of the movement. This will have a soothing, tranquilizing effect on you. You might even make a concentration exercise out of this, but then you must do this in a quiet place where you are not likely to be seen by others who may, quite understandably, conclude from watching you that there is something seriously the matter with you!

While pacing up and down a room or corridor slow down your movement to the extent that you are fully aware of each of the movements of your legs. Become aware of the following: the lifting of your left foot . . . the movement forward of the left foot . . . the left foot touching the ground . . . the weight of your body shifting onto your left leg . . . Now the lifting of your right foot . . . its movement forward ... it's coming to rest on the ground in front of you ... and so on. As an aid to concentration you might say to yourself mentally as you lift your foot, "Lifting . . . lifting . . . lifting . . ." As you move it forward, "Moving . . . moving . . . moving . . ." And as you place it down on terra firma, ". . . placing . . . placing."

Growth

The master used to assert the great idea
that in this matter of growth
all should go at their own pace.
He used to illustrate this theory
by telling his students this:
Someone saw a butterfly
struggling to get out of its cocoon...
The process of emergence was painful
and slow for someone watching.

So the man began
to blow his friendly warm breath
on the little bug
to help it emerge.
Indeed, he hastened things
and the butterfly was born,
but its tiny wings
ended up atrophied!
The master then finished by saying:
'In growth, my friends, things
cannot be hastened – to do so is disastrous.
Hastened growth will end up aborted!'

PRAYER OF EXAMEN DURING COVID-19

The purpose of this spiritual practice is to help you reflect on your day and note moments of consolation (where I felt touched by God) and desolation (where it was difficult to sense God's presence).

Here's what to do:

Each night before you go to bed spend a little time thinking over the day. Remember all the things that have happened this day and bring the experiences to God in prayer.

- What am I grateful for today?
- Who did I connect with today?
- What expectations of "normal" did I let go today?
- How did I get outside today?
- How have I moved in my body today?
- What beauty did I create, cultivate, or invite today?

Give thanks to God for all these experiences and end by saying the Lord's Prayer.