



DAY 06 - SILENCE

LIVE THE FLOURISHING LIFE: FLOURISHING FAITH

All the major religions of the world today practise some form of meditation—a private devotion or mental exercise to heighten one's awareness of self, of God or of spiritual things. This has been a characteristic of faith in all times and places. The aims and methods of meditation vary greatly, but there is a common application of the mind to facilitate increased awareness, revelation and spiritual growth. In some faiths, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, meditation is introspective, being used as a means of self-realisation and internal peace. Other religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, also use meditation for self-reflection, but this is more focused on understanding yourself in relation to God. There is a greater emphasis on looking outside of yourself in an attempt to better understand your faith or deepen your relationship with God.

A popular practice today is mindfulness meditation. This is an internal exploration that aims to increase self-awareness and bring focus to the present moment —'the goal of mindfulness is to wake up to the inner workings of our mental, emotional, and physical processes.' It is usually a silent meditation that focuses on awareness of your own body. Mindfulness has some benefits in common with other forms of meditation, spiritual or not. Meditation can reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, and is linked with the prevention of stress-related diseases. It might even help to prevent psychological disorders including Alzheimer's and ADD by rebuilding brain tissue.

'The goal of mindfulness is to wake up the inner workings of our mental, emotional, and physical processes.'

Faith-based forms of meditation have significant spiritual benefits as well as these psychological ones. Meditation can help you to connect with God, increase your awareness and strengthen your faith. Thomas Merton stated that contemplation, which he described as 'the transcendent experience of reality and truth in the act of supreme and liberated spiritual love—was the 'highest and most essential spiritual activity.' Like mindfulness, religious meditation also often uses some

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point of focus, be it a thought or a physical sensation, to concentrate the mind and facilitate reflection. Some practices use the repetition of words or mantras out loud, but many are silent. These kinds of meditation are often practised alongside prayer or the reading of scripture. You might reflect on a portion of scripture to understand its meaning or pause after prayer to sense a response from God. Meditation can also be a form of worship—you might reflect on God's creation, on something God has done for you or on something you believe to be true about God. Any of these practices can help your spiritual life to flourish.

'Contemplation is man's highest and most essential spiritual activity.'

Thomas Merton

Today, challenge yourself to sit in silence for three minutes. You might like to do this after prayer or reflect on a section of scripture, or you could use the time to notice your thoughts and feelings. Find a time and place free from distractions and interruptions, sit comfortably, and become aware of yourself and of God.