

# THE PRAYER OF SILENCE

At the outset, it is important to distinguish the difference between silent or 'quiet' prayer and the technique of induced passivity.

When inducing a state of passivity, the mental faculties are stilled until the mind is cleared of all thought. This state may be induced by repeating a mantra—even a religious phrase like 'Jesus is Lord,' until normal thought processes are negated, and the mind becomes completely passive. This induced state of passivity provides fertile ground for the intrusion of deception by satanic spirits.

By comparison, the practice of silent prayer involves quietening our souls and settling our attention on the Lord who dwells in our hearts. It is to be 'still' and 'wait' on Him, being attentive to hear His voice, and to be led by the Spirit in an attitude of silent praise and worship.

## *A Legitimate Spiritual Practice - or - A Copied Spiritual Technique?*

*"A spiritual 'technique' or method is an attempt to recreate someone else's path to God (or gods)."*

*"If you practice a particular technique, you are in effect copying someone else, in an attempt to reproduce their spiritual experience."*

## **QUESTION: Is Quiet Prayer a Spiritual Technique ?**

The leading proponents of 'Quiet Prayer' were Miguel Molinos (b.1627 d. 1697), Jeanne Guyon (b.1650 d.1717), and Francois Fenelon (b.1652 d.1715). Preceding advocates of quiet prayer can be traced back at least a century before to people like John of the Cross (b.1542 d.1591), and Teresa of Avila (d.1582), so their teaching was not new to Christianity.

Their subsequent influence, through their books and letters, has been quite significant over the past 300 years. Leaders of important Christian movements, like Count Zinzendorf (the Moravians), John Wesley (the Methodists), George Fox (the Quakers), Hudson Taylor (China Inland Mission), Watchman Nee (the Little Flock), have all acknowledged their debt to these teachers.

The essence of their teaching is that there is nothing in a Christian's fleshly endeavours that can be considered worthy enough to offer to God ["**Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist,' says the LORD.**" (Is 66:1-2).

This being the case, we should divest ourselves of fleshly effort, and approach Him to worship in silence in His presence ["**'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?'** says the LORD. **'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle...When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand...? Bring no more futile sacrifices...'**" (Is 1:11,12,13).

Rather than struggling to sustain a rigid and complicated program of outward religious observance, Guyon etc taught the simplicity of an open and stilled heart approaching His throne

room within. That approach, they said, can only be made through the virtue of Christ's blood (i.e. His righteousness), and the most we can ever hope to offer Him is our submission to His refining work in us.

This was radical teaching for the Catholic countries of Spain, France, and Italy, during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Roman Church tradition was steeped in spiritual technique and religious method. For nearly one thousand years, monastic and clerical communities had obeyed the Benedictine Rule, which split up their day into 'hours' or regulated periods of liturgy, prayer, and physical work. And in more recent times, the 'Spiritual Exercises' of the extremist founder of the Jesuits (Ignatius Loyola b.1491 d.1556), which were based on ascetic self-denial and almost super-human willpower, had swept through Catholic Europe with increasing popularity.

These historical traditions were obviously 'techniques' and 'methods.' The real question is whether Guyon, Fenelon, and Molinos, had simply invented another technique, even if it seemed to be in a more subtle form.

### *Is there New Testament Evidence for the Practice of Quiet Prayer?*

A good starting point in distinguishing what is a genuine move of God from what is a religious counterfeit, is to establish whether there is a New Testament pattern or precedent.

- Jesus often prayed alone. **"So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed."** (Lu 5:16). **"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."** (Mk 1:35). **"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."** (Lu 6:12). **"And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray."** (Mk 6:46).
- Jesus taught an intensely private and unassertive view of prayer. (Please read Matthew 6:5-8 in plain text before going on to read the following 'amplified' version). **"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites [or 'actors' who perform their faith]. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward [ie the fleeting recognition of their audience]. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place [or '*hidden chamber within*' from Gk '*kruptos*' and Eng '*crypt*' or '*cellar*'] and your Father who sees in [the] secret [place - ie '*kruptos*' again] will reward you openly. But when you pray, do not use vain repetitions [JFB Comm. "'Babble not' would be a better rendering...not so much the repetition of the same words as a senseless multiplication of them."] as the heathen [or '*non-believers*'] do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him [ie without our speaking]." (Matt 6:5-8).**
- Jesus experienced the indwelling presence of the Father in this way. **"Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."** (Jn 14:10). **"Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does..."** (Jn 5:19-20).

- Jesus proposed the same experience of God's indwelling presence to each one of us. "**A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."** (Jn 14:19-21,24).

Christians are often compared to a spiritual building in the New Testament. In terms of a building, such as a temple or a house, the crypt or cellar is the deepest most hidden room. It is here in the quiet dark stillness that we meet God, to listen to Him and to 'sit' privately in His presence. We all have an inner room like this, because we are all built with the same need to communicate with our Father.

It is clear from these readings that if such a dependant and responsive relationship is to work effectively, then our observance of the "Babble not" rule is of major importance. If we are serious about hearing Him, our silence is required. And not just our physical voice, but all the inner 'voices' competing for attention in our minds. We have to 'quiet' our selves and 'settle' our attention on Him who occupies our innermost space. We have to be 'still' and 'wait' on Him as obedient attendants in His Court.

Guyon, Fenelon, and Molinos, are all aware of how difficult this can be in practice. We are used to having 'busy' minds and do not feel very comfortable without some sort of mental stimulus. But they are also aware that this is the point where it is spiritually fatal if we allow ourselves to butt in and help.

For example, while Madame Guyon tentatively suggests certain prompts, like beginning with reading the Bible and then 'swallowing the Word,' or recalling your wandering mind by uttering an occasional phrase of 'worship and adoration' to the Lord, she is most anxious that we relinquish these 'helps' as soon as possible. This type of prayer can only be undertaken when the supplicant is free of all supports, whether they be physical, mental, or pseudo-spiritual.

Our difficulties in this area stem from our own fundamental roots of pride and rebellion. We cannot bear the thought of being unable to 'master' what seems to be such a simple spiritual exercise. So we abandon our attempts to pray in this way, or we invent little 'tricks' to aid us in our concentration. In effect Satan has the victory here, because he has succeeded in deflecting us from our original aim of intimate communion with our heavenly Father and His Son, *Who dwell within us*.

Each of the three teachers agree that it is only in gentleness and humility of spirit that we will ever attain the Lord's rest in this. Even when we find our minds wandering off, their advice is not to be angry with ourselves and harshly yank our thoughts back towards God, for this too has its seat in our pride. Any force applied in our own strength will only grieve the Holy Spirit, who is our Comforter and Guide in this. Only gentle and obedient perseverance on this path can bear good fruit.

*A spiritual trick is contained in one key act, which once mastered, enables that experience to be repeated over and over again at will.*

*A spiritual path is where we can never claim to have mastered anything, but simply follow on through a number of experiences, sustained by trust and faith.*

## **Conclusion - Quiet Prayer is a Spiritual Path!**

### *Does Quiet Prayer Replace Ordinary Prayer?*

It is still necessary to pray to God using our mental and verbal faculties. For instance, Jesus said, "**When you pray, say...**" (Luke 11:2), and, "**Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.**" (Matt 7:7-8). James says, "**Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss...**" (James 4:2-3).

### *Spiritual Prayer*

Paul places a condition on asking and receiving. "**Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.**" (I Jn 5:14-15).

Prayers that are readily accepted and answered by God are those that are "**according to His will.**" The Holy Spirit knows the will of the Father, and so we may be sure that prayer initiated and directed by the Holy Spirit will be accepted and blessed by God.

The reason why so much of our prayer is not answered is that it is initiated by our flesh. An obvious example is of the use of "**many words,**" and "**vain repetitions,**" spoken of by Jesus. But we must realise that all that does not proceed from the Spirit is flesh. Even the most zealous and well articulated words that proceed from the soul rather than the spirit, are flesh.

### *Quiet Prayer is a Preparation of the Heart*

Quiet prayer, or a time of stillness before the throne of God, prepares our heart to receive the input of the Spirit, and subsequently pray on a spiritual level. Too often our minds and emotions overwhelm our spirits, and we are unreceptive to the Spirit. The voluntary act of being still before God, is in fact subjecting our souls to the power of the cross.

God says, "**Be still, and know that I am God...**" (Ps 46:10). The Hebrew word, '*raphah*,' which has been translated 'be still,' has these alternative meanings:

'to be quiet,' 'to withdraw,' 'to let drop,' 'to forsake,' 'to abandon,' 'to let go,' 'to refrain.'

The most profound way we can acknowledge that God is '**I AM**,' '**The Almighty**,' and that we choose that He should have sovereignty over our whole being, is to be still—to withdraw from the demands of the flesh, and abandon all things into His hands.

Quiet prayer, or the prayer of silence, is an act of worship and submission. It acknowledges that we, in our flesh, have nothing to offer, and that in all things we are totally dependent on Him. It opens the door for Him to respond by the enlightenment and direction of His Holy Spirit.