

## **An Exercise in Support of Contemplative Prayer: Noticing the Location of your Attention<sup>1</sup>**

Prior to our weekly sits at the Episcopal House of Prayer, we will introduce short, practical exercises in lieu of the short teachings that began in 2020. While these exercises intend to support prayer practice, they are not designed to serve as prayer per se—that is, their content and form will focus on building up the prayer muscles that support contemplative prayer, such as focused-attention, heart-awakening, mind-stilling, intentional-breathing, and sensations-perception. Each exercise will be repeated for three to four weeks at a time. The short exercise itself will take 7-10 minutes, and we will allow for a few minutes of contemplative dialogue after the exercise is complete. During that time, those present will be invited to offer contemplative responses such as insights, observations, considerations, and questions. Our intention is to provide communal space for learning as we engage the contemplative path.

At this time, I would like to invite you to engage in an exercise, with the intention of developing the muscles that we use in order to strengthen our contemplative prayer. In this case, we will focus on the muscle of attention. In particular, this exercise encourages you to learn how to locate the particular place where your attention is drawn.

I invite you to find a comfortable, seated position. Take a few breaths and settle into the moment. Begin by offering an intention to tune into your senses, the felt, concrete experience of the world. After offering this general intention, I invite you to focus your attention on specific parts of your body. I'll invite you to focus your attention on one part of the body and then move your attention to another place. Let us begin by focusing our attention on the left foot.

As you focus your attention on your left foot, allow your senses to actually perceive the foot in and of itself. Do not rely on a memory or an image of your foot, constructed in your mind. Rather, allow your senses to inform your attention and focus on your actual left foot. Where is it in space? What else is it touching? How does it feel? Is any part of it moving, twitching, vibrating? What is its temperature? It may take a while for your attention to land on the actual location of your left foot. That is normal. Simply repeat your intention to tune into to the sensations of your foot.

After a while, once you have rested with your attention on your left foot, I invite you to shift your attention to your right foot. Again, it might take a while for you to move your attention to the actual sensations and location of your right foot.

Once your attention is located there, simply keep it there, expanding the nuances of what you can perceive concretely, through the senses. Allow yourself to notice whatever might emerge when your attention is focused.

Next, we will move our attention to the left knee. After you are able to rest your attention on your left knee, shift your attention to your right knee, and so on.

For the next few minutes, I invite you to continue alternating your attention on different parts of your body at your own pace, especially alternating between left and right. You might draw your attention to your hips, to your rib cages, to your shoulders, to your elbows, to your hands, to your head, and so on. If you really get the hang of the exercise, you might even shift between your left ear and your right ear, your left eye and your right eye, all in due time.

Continue to explore the sensation of alternating the location of your attention. When a few more minutes are complete, I will strike the gong to indicate the end of the exercise.

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<sup>1</sup> Created by Christine Luna Munger. Based loosely on Anthony De Mello's Exercise 2: Body Sensations, in his text, *Sadhana: A Way to God, Christian Exercises in Eastern Form*. (1/27/21)