

## Exercising Contemplative Power

December 2014

When I began the [Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue](#) (ICCD) I consciously chose to focus on contemplation as a communal experience. Having been influenced by Constance Fitzgerald's article, "Impasse and the Dark Night," I instinctively knew that our time in the evolutionary journey required of us ways to share our experience of contemplation and the wisdom and insights that emerge. I felt our historical time invites us to socialize our learnings so as to discover together the next steps on the journey.

As the processes for the program, Engaging Impasse: Circles of Contemplation and Dialogue®, developed, it became clearer that communal contemplation was much more than experiencing together contemplative sitting. It embraced every aspect of our time together: the prayer/rituals, personal reflection, communal silence, intellectual sharing, play, body movement, art, symbol and contemplative dialogue. It reflected the entire process of the experience which fostered within the participants mutual attunement.

When we begin with contemplative sitting there is a significant shift in how the group gathered engages in the conversations, the dialogue that follows. The atmosphere is charged with energy that invites trust and vulnerability in ways that surprise. Recently a participant was sharing about an exchange with his father and filled up. He quickly acknowledged that this doesn't happen to him. But his honesty invited others to risk as well. Over and over I hear participants say things like, "We've never had such deep conversations;" "I really felt listened to;" "People who are usually the naysayers were so different;" "We have really changed;" "I can see the other's point of view."

Such comments testify to the power of communal contemplation to transform who you are and how you want to be in the world. It invites you into new ways of being and acting. When you set the intention to access the Divine dwelling within you and acknowledge that desire in every person it readies you to listen and speak to each other in new ways. It opens up a space where you begin to imagine new responses to people, issues and problems. Over time you begin to see the Godself in the other. You realize that we have all come from the same star dust as cosmologists are telling us. You begin to understand that we all breathe the same air and receive nourishment from the same water. You know deep in your bones that we are all connected. And when you do, you can't demonize the other anymore.

What happens when you try to look at acting on behalf of justice from a contemplative stance?

In 2012 as ICCD entered its second decade we began to explore exactly that – what does acting on behalf of justice rooted in communal contemplative practice look like? We (a planning committee working with me) believed that it would be different but still very real. As we talked and explored this phrase caught our imagination and we focused it as: *Exercising Contemplative Power*.

We began by entering into our own contemplative dialogue around what we meant by the words, Exercising Contemplative Power. Over a period of time we came to a felt sense of what we are talking about.

We understand it as a power within us – the divine indwelling to which we all have access. It is that divine consciousness which is with us always but needing to be retrieved in a conscious way. It is our capacity to be, to act, out of a space that invites us to see anew. It invites us to observe and interpret with new eyes, with new ears, to take that long loving look at the real so as to see where the Godself is trying to emerge.

It is also communal. We liken it to a jazz ensemble where each player needs to be open to the others; attentive to what is being sung and played; willing to shape the next response attuned to what went before and moving it forward.

We believe communal contemplative power can heal the world. It is letting go of thinking that we are going to come to something that no one has thought of; rather it is believing that as we let ourselves be in this deep space things will realign in us and in the world. It happens even without our knowing it. We make the change by holding the high consciousness.

How that might happen and what it might look like in relation to specific issues will continue to be explored in the following months.

(The planning committee consisted of: Arlene Ashack, IBVM, Margaret Galiardi, OP, Mary Ellen Gondeck, CSJ, Mary Jo Klick, Margaret Mayce, OP, Susan Schorsten, HM, Nancy Sylvester, IHM, and Dorothy Thum, RSM)

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