

The Julian Meetings

Meeting in silence with God

Going Into
Silence

... and

Coming Out

The Julian Meetings

*F*oster the teaching and practice of contemplative prayer and in the Christian tradition

*E*ncourage people to practise contemplative prayer in their daily lives, and to explore ways of doing this which are appropriate for them

*S*upport the individual ecumenical Julian Meetings - groups whose members meet regularly to practise Christian contemplative prayer together



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The Julian Meetings

There can be no set patterns for going into and coming out of the silence at a Julian Meeting. There may be as many ways of leading small groups of people into silence as there are members of the groups - or indeed more, for we each have within us a variety of resources. These resources are the raw material of our silence.

Each Julian Meeting is a unique experience, for it depends not so much on the method, or even on the leader, as upon the members. Little depends even on them, for all they can do is wait. The initiative is with God.

It is perfectly possible for members of a group to come to their chosen place of contemplation in silence, to maintain their silence for the agreed time and to leave as they came, without a word; this may be the chosen way for those who are well practised in contemplative prayer and who often meet together at other times.

Most Julian Meetings, however, benefit from some type of lead-in, as well as a gentling out of the silence. This pamphlet tries to suggest tools which may be used in any way appropriate to a particular group. There are more ideas in the JM pamphlet *Your Turn To Lead*.

The setting

Because we are physical beings the physical setting is important. The chosen place should be quiet, without distractions and conducive to prayer. It should be warm and comfortable, though not soporific. This is a counsel of perfection and many Julian Meetings have to make do - often a church is the best place even if it is cold - but we need to be aware of the ambience and to be prepared to search for the right place.

Ideally the group should be in a circle, or as near as possible, gathered round a focal point.

Atmosphere can be created. Symbols have the power to reach deeper than words. Traditional Christianity has recognised this as much as any religion. Lights may be dimmed at the beginning of the silence.

A candle may be used, symbolising fire; light in the darkness; the spirit; or simply as a focus of attention.

The candle may be scented, or a stick of incense may be burned, or scented oils vaporised (*best avoided if any members are asthmatics or sensitive*).

Many people find music helps to set the scene if it is well done [we are so used to high quality sound reproduction that the second rate - noisy switches included - can irritate and distract]. Some who use music to



lead in and lead out 'record' thirty minutes of silence in the middle of them.

Going in relaxation

Relaxed, yet receptive. This attitude of prayer comes with practice. But just as we try to create the atmosphere for silent contemplation, so we can set the mood for our bodily state. Many Meetings use a centring exercise to bring their bodies into stillness. Relaxation exercises are most helpful to some, or simply standing for a while, stretching and relaxing with deep breathing. Taking notice of each other, by saying the name of one's neighbour round the circle, is one way of getting started.

Going in focus

Stillness of mind and body can be hard work. Most people need a focus. Individuals may have a mantra - a word or phrase which is repeated silently; they are free to use it as they wish in the silence. But there are other ways of focusing the attention while leaving the spirit free.

Looking is helpful and many simple objects may be evocative, especially when coupled with a suitable phrase or sentence: a candle, water, earth, fruit, leaf, a flower, a stone, bread, wine, a wedding ring, any beautiful object or picture, a crucifix, an icon.

The sense of touch is important too. An object can be passed around or shared; each person in the group might hold and feel something throughout the silence - a hazelnut, a stone, a shell, a cross.



Going in ... lead in

The aim is to still the mind as well as the body, so the lead in should help people to relax and to focus mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. A short passage from the Bible, or from a modern or classical writer on prayer or recollection, or a suitable poem, can enable members to let go of the busyness of the day and to settle down together. Or a short talk may be appropriate, if it is a simple story, or something personal, about prayer and contemplation, that the leader wishes to share with everyone. This is not the occasion for a lesson or a sermon: the reading or talk should be devotional, leading to God. It should concentrate not on ideas about God but upon how God is revealed in words, in the world, and in me. It should be simple and brief. Some Meetings like to hold hands during the talk or reading.

The Silence - the heart of every Julian Meeting

In the Julian Meetings we have no set length for the silence. Many have about thirty minutes of uninterrupted silent prayer. Some have longer, up to one hour. A silence of less than twenty minutes may not be enough.

One Meeting has members scattered over a wide geographical area. They make the most of their meetings, after their long journey to the venue, by having three silences of twenty minutes, separated by short readings. Nor do we have any set way to use the silence. While this is a matter for each individual, we wrote our pamphlet *Some Basics of Contemplative Prayer* to offer guidance on using the silence.

The only thing Julian Meetings always have in common is commitment to silent prayer in the Christian tradition. The silence in the Meetings is enriched and deepened if the individual members regularly use silence in their own prayer life. And, in turn, each member will be strengthened by the corporate silence and be encouraged by the assurance that others are travelling the same road.

Coming out

Coming out of the stillness is as important as the lead in. Some people go very deep during the silence and need to come out gradually. They can experience too swift a surfacing almost as a physical blow.

The lead-out should be as carefully prepared as the lead-in and should include some element of taking notice of others in the room. Very quiet music, slowly increasing in volume, can gentle people out of the silence. Words should generally guide people back to the original focus and, through that, to each other. Having ended the silence, people can begin a gentle opening of the eyes and moving of fingers, with a growing awareness of the body and of each other. It may be helpful at some point to say something aloud together - perhaps the grace. One Julian Meeting passes the peace at this point, as in some Communion services.

The whole experience

Ideally the going into silence, the coming out and the re-adjustment to the tangible world should be integral parts of the whole experience. After all, God is not more present in the silence than at other times. We choose silence in order to become more aware of his presence, to try to know his will. Each time we come out of the silence we bring into the world a little more stillness, a little more awareness, a little more of the love of Christ.

Suggested readings for Going Into Silence ... and Coming Out



Biblical Passages

Genesis	28.13-15	Matthew	6.33
Exodus	15.26		12.28-29
	3.1-6		18.20
Deuteronomy	1.29-32		28.19-20
1 Kings	19.11-13	Mark	4.35-41
Job	33.33b	Luke	24.28-32
Psalms	27.1	John	4.7-14
	46.10		6.35 or 6.51
	51.6		8.12
	63.1		9.5
Any of the Praising Psalms			10.14-15
Isaiah	12.2		12.28-29
	43.1-4		12.32
	49.15		14.6
	54.10		15.5
Ezekiel	37.4-7		18.20
Hosea	11.3-4	Galatians	2.20
	11.9	Hebrews	11.1
	14.8	Revelation	21.6

Non-Biblical - Going In

A certain brother went to Abbot Moses and asked him for a good word. And the elder said to him, "Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything."

The Desert Fathers

Contemplation is nothing else but a secret, peaceful and loving infusion of God, which will set the soul on fire with the spirit of love.

St John of the Cross

I said to my soul, "Be still and let the dark come upon you"

T.S.Eliot (East Coker)

Abandon yourself for a little to God and rest in him. Enter into the inner chamber of your soul and shut out everything save God and what can be of help in your quest for him. Having locked the door, seek him out. He yearns to see you ... and is eager to seek you out

St Anselm

In this endless love we are led and looked after by God and never shall be lost. For he wills that we should know our souls to be alive and that this life - through his goodness and grace - shall continue in heaven without end; loving him, thanking him and praising him.

Julian of Norwich

One act is required - and that is all. For this one act pulls everything together - and keeps everything in order ... This one act is to stand with attention in your heart.

Theophan the Recluse

Step out then and resolutely apply this sovereign remedy. Just as you are, lift up your sick self to God as he is - our God is good and gracious.

The Cloud of Unknowing

Non Biblical - Coming Out

Our soul rests in God its true peace; our soul stands in God its true strength and is deep rooted to God for endless love.

He wants us to know that he will come suddenly and joyfully to all who love him.

He wants us to see and enjoy everything in love.

Julian of Norwich

I looked at him,
not with the eye only,
but with the whole of my being,
overflowing with him as a
chalice would with the sea.

R.S.Thomas

Forth in thy name, O Lord I go
My daily labour to pursue:
Thee, only thee, resolved to know,
In all I think, or speak, or do.

The task thy wisdom hath assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil:
In all thy works thy presence find,
and prove thy good and perfect will.

Charles Wesley

Drop thy still dews of quietness
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier

Many people think that living and dying for God is one thing, living and dying for each other another; but the Christian truth is that our love of God is contained in our love of men.

Mother Mary Clare (Encountering the Depths)

Also recommended

Love is my meaning - An Anthology of Assurance

edited by Elizabeth Bassett

The Fire of Silence and Stillness

An anthology edited by Paul Harris

Music for times of meditation

Choosing music for a group meditation needs consideration, for not all music is suitable. It is best to choose something which flows gently, with gradual, rather than sudden, changes of volume. Some percussive music may hinder contemplation; so piano music may be regarded with caution since the piano is a percussive instrument.

However carefully chosen, a piece may turn out to be totally unhelpful to someone. It may be a matter of trial and error, and a Meeting could find it useful to keep a list of pet hates. It is, of course, important that the music be presented without the distraction of noisy switches etc.. but the programming facilities and controls of modern audio equipment are ideal.

We do not claim that the list below is comprehensive or even well balanced. Julian Meetings which have a favourite piece which they think others might like to try are welcome to suggest it for inclusion in the monthly newsletter. .

J S Bach	Double Violin Concerto in D minor, 2nd movement. Violin Concerto in E major, 2nd movement. Adagio in E.
Beethoven	Romance in F.
Brahms	Piano Concerto No 2, 3rd movement.
Debussy	La Mer.
Gluck	Dance of the Blessed Spirits (from Orfeo).
Grieg	Holberg Suite, Air.
Hildegard von Bingen	A Feather on the Breath of God - a selection of Hildegard's songs and sequences sung by Gothic Voices.
Holst	Neptune the Mystic, from The Planets.
Mahler	Symphony No 4, 3rd movement.

Mozart	Sonatas for violin and piano: B flat major, C major and E flat major. Symphony in E major, 2nd movement. Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola, K364, 2nd movement.
Pachebel	Canon.
Palestrina	Missa Brevis, second Agnus Dei.
Schubert	String Quintet in C major, D956, 2nd movement, Adagio: 3rd movement, Trio. Piano Quintet in A major, D667, The Trout, 2nd movement.
Taizé Community	Chants. [Thomas More Centre recordings recommended.]
Tallis	Motet in 40 parts, 'Spem in Alium.' Motet, 'O Lord Give Thy Holy Spirit'
Vaughan Williams	The Lark Ascending. Fantasia on a Theme by Tallis. Fantasia on Greensleeves.
Vivaldi	The Four Seasons: Concerto No 4 in F minor, Winter, RV297, 2nd movement.

There are many compilations of music suitable for meditation, and the internet offers a wide choice of material.

There are also recordings of natural sounds - water, wind, birdsong etc. - which may be appropriate to lead in or out of some silences.

Some meetings use a singing bowl.

If you wish to know
more about the Julian Meetings,
and / or details of your nearest Meeting(s)
go to our website:
www.thejulianmeetings.net

Julian Meetings Publications

- * The Julian Meetings (*free introductory leaflet*)
- * A5 leaflet on contemplative prayer (*a brief introduction*)
- * Try Stillness (*a small book of visuals and brief suggestions for simple ways to find stillness in everyday life*)
- * Some Basics of Contemplative Prayer
- * Going Into Silence ... and Coming Out
- * Approaching Silence
- * It's Your Turn To Lead (*helpful suggestions for your turn*)
- * The Ideal Julian Meeting
- * A bookmark (*with helpful suggestions for using silence*)
- * A pew / handbag / wallet card (*with meditation suggestion*)
- * Promotional A4 posters (*two*) and A5 poster
- * An A6 noticeboard card

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