

LESSON 183 • JULY 2

“I call upon God’s Name and on my own.”

Practice instructions

Purpose: To go past the defense of valuing other gods, of valuing the idols of the world, and so experience the true God. This will intensify your motivation and strengthen your commitment.

Morning/evening quiet time: At least five minutes; ideally, thirty or more.

This lesson is the introduction of what I call Name of God Meditation. This meditation can be summarized in the following way:

- Choose a name for God that you will use. You may want to ask within for this.
- Close your eyes and repeat the idea for today just once.
- After that, simply “repeat God’s Name slowly again and still again” (6:1). Do not, however, repeat it as a mere word. Repeat it as a heartfelt invitation to God. Fully expect Him to hear. “And God will come, and answer it Himself” (7:2). You are asking, then, for the experience of God, and of your true Self, which is part of Him. Repeat the Name, then, with all the desire you have to know God and yourself. Repeat it as “the only wish [you] have” (6:6).
- Whenever your mind wanders and starts thinking about the idols of the world, repeat the Name to dispel those thoughts. It will help if you repeat it with the awareness that the Name is everything and the things you were thinking about are nothing.

Hourly remembrance: One or two minutes as the hour strikes (reduce if circumstances do not permit).

Do a short version of the morning/evening exercise. Close by asking for God’s guidance for the coming hour and thanking Him for His gifts in the past hour.

Response to temptation: When tempted to cherish an idol, a valueless thing of this world.

Repeat God’s Name, realizing that this Name signifies everything you want, while the idol is nothing.

Commentary

God’s Name, as the term is used in this lesson and the next, symbolizes His Identity and our identity with Him. God’s name is not Jehovah, or Krishna, or Allah. Yet any of those symbols could be used to represent Him. When this lesson urges us to “repeat God’s Name,” what, then, do we say? The actual word we use does not matter; it is the concept of His Identity that is to be foremost in our minds. We might say the word “God” over and over, or “Father,” or “Divine Mother,” or whatever word best symbolizes for us the Identity of God.

The general practice outlined in this lesson is very similar to practices in Eastern religions of repeating the Name of God over and over, and the intent is very much the same. In the Eastern spiritual practices, this often takes the form of chanting. The Hare Krishna religion, for instance, gains its name from the practice of repeatedly and seemingly endlessly chanting, “Hare Krishna, Hare Rama,” which (I think) basically means “Praise Krishna. Praise Rama,” with Krishna and Rama being names of God. A Christian group I once belonged to had a major emphasis on the practice of repeating the words “O Lord Jesus” for extended periods of time, with exactly the same kind of intent, and with often remarkable results. Although this kind of practice is not a major emphasis of the Course, clearly it is one means offered by the Course for helping us find the holy instant. The one difference I see here is that (in 5:4) the repetitions are meant to be *silent* and done “within your quiet mind,” rather than aloud.

By focusing on God's Identity, we loosen the hold that all lesser names have on our minds. We counter the illusion of separation in recognizing the one Name that represents everything there is: "There is one Name for all there is, and all that there will be" (8:5).

Many results are attributed in this lesson to repeating the Name of God: it reminds us of our identity with Him (1:5); it invites the angels to surround us and keep us safe, recognizing the holiness we share with God (2:2); it prompts the world to lay down all illusions (3:1); it causes all idols to fall (4:1, 3-4); it calls upon our Self, the extension of God that we are (5:1); it acknowledges God as sole Creator of reality (8:1).

We are encouraged, almost as an aside, to do this practice with someone else, sitting together in silence and repeating God's Name in our minds; this seems to have particular merit, for by it we establish "an altar which reaches to God Himself and to His Son" (5:4). This is the only place I am aware of in the Course in which meditation with another person is even mentioned, but it is a very favorable mention, and indicates there is some added value in joining with others in meditation.

The primary idea of the practice seems to be that the thought of God replaces every other idea in our minds, and if other ideas enter, we can respond to them with God's Name (8:3-5). Instead of praying for any specific thing, or any specific persons (all of which have names that distinguish them from everything else), we repeat the Name of God which includes them all. "No prayer but this is necessary, for it holds them all within it" (10:2). As we repeat God's Name we can alter our mental state to experience the gift of grace (9:1); eventually we come to a place where "the universe consists of nothing but the Son of God, who calls upon His Father" (11:4).

• • •

NAME OF GOD MEDITATION

We in the West, primarily through the influx of Eastern spiritualities, are slowly discovering that meditation is an extremely powerful tool. If one wants to scale the heights of the Divine, attempting this without meditation might be the mountain-climbing equivalent of forgetting your gear, and your hiking boots as well. If this practice is so central to our journey home, what does *A Course in Miracles* have to say about it?

I have argued for many years that one of the major goals of the Course's Workbook is to train us in meditation. This training begins early on, in Lessons 41 and 44, after which meditation instruction becomes a staple of Workbook practice. The technique taught in the 40s is something I have written about several times. However, there is another method of meditation which is distinctly different from that one. This one is not introduced until Lesson 183. This technique is not only accorded great importance in that lesson (and in Lesson 184), but is a practice we are apparently expected to continue in Part II of the Workbook (see W-pII.In.10:4 and W-pII.222.2:1). It is a practice of entering into God's Presence by repeating His Name over and over, to the exclusion of all else.

This is a method I have tried to use over the years, and have received some benefit from. Yet it never quite clicked into place for me until a few months ago when I took a personal retreat. One of the goals I had for this retreat was to really "get" this method—both in theory and in practice—in part because our group here in Sedona would soon be practicing Workbook Lesson 183. Oddly enough, I just happened to take my retreat at a Catholic retreat center which, I discovered upon arrival, is very focused on Centering Prayer, a contemporary form of Christian meditation which is rooted in the medieval mystical text, *The Cloud of Unknowing*—and which is very similar (though not identical) to the method taught in Lesson 183. The focus at the retreat center on Centering Prayer gave me a feeling of support and a renewed motivation. Then, while there, I did a close study of Lesson 183, which really clarified its method in my mind, so that when I went to practice it, it began to work much better than it had before. As a result, I enjoyed many wonderful

meditations with this method during my retreat, and since then it has become my preferred technique.

The purpose of this essay is to clarify this technique to Course students so that they can make use of it, or make better use of it if they are practicing it already. The rest of the essay is divided into three parts: theory, technique, and instructions.

Theory

This method of meditation is grounded in a teaching which makes this meditation seem like the most logical and natural thing one can do with one's mind.

Our attention is naturally drawn to those things we think can bring us happiness, or at least protect us from pain. When our eyes look at a particular scene, don't they automatically gravitate to perceived sources of pleasure? To put this differently, we give our attention to what we think can answer our prayers. Attention, then, is an expression of desire, and desire is prayer. When we place our attention on the things of this world—which is where we usually place it—we are in essence praying to those things, hoping that they can fill our needs and make us safe. Yet can they really answer our prayers? Can they bring us true happiness? According to the Course, the answer is an emphatic “no.” Only God can bring us true joy. He is the only true Object of our desires. By giving our attention to things of this world, we are making them into false gods, substitutes for the only One Who can truly reward our attention. We are behaving like the ancient worshipper who prayed to a lifeless piece of stone that could neither hear nor answer his prayers.

We also give our attention to what we think is real. We don't spend a lot of our time, for instance, thinking about pink elephants—they're not real. Instead, we spend it thinking about the events and situations that face us in our day, precisely *because* we regard these as real. The Course, however, teaches that the world is a dream; only God is real. Certainly you and I are also real (Workbook Lesson 132 has us say, “For I am real because the world is not”), but our reality is *part* of God's. His reality encompasses ours, as well as the reality of all things.

This means that the characters we see walking around in the world have two aspects to them, a real aspect and an unreal one. They have the outer face they show us—their body and personality—which, the Course tells us, is unreal. And then behind this outer face lies their eternal spirit, the only thing truly real. And that spirit is part of God. Therefore, by placing our attention on God, we are simultaneously placing it on the truth within others, even while we are *withdrawing* our attention from the face they present the world.

In summary, we place our attention on what we think is real and will make us happy. The things of the world (in their outer aspect, the aspect we are generally focused on) are unreal and cannot make us happy. Only God is real (“only” because He encompasses all things real) and only He can make us happy.

This has obvious implications for where to put our attention. It implies that the most honest and appropriate thing we can do with our attention is to remove it from the outer realm and place it on God. And that is the essence of this meditation technique. We can see this as having several aspects. We transfer our attention from the outer to the inner, removing it from the sensory realm and placing it on God's Presence deep within. We transfer our attention from the many to the One, withdrawing it from the numberless external bodies and placing it on the One Spirit. We transfer our attention from the thousand nameless things of the world (nameless, because only real things deserve names) to the one Name, which stands for all of reality. We remove our desire from the little gods of the world, since they cannot answer our prayers, and we give it to the One God, Who yearns to answer all our prayers with the priceless gift of Himself.

An important element of this technique is that it uses only one word. This is part of the Workbook's focus in the latter half of its year, where it sets the goal of gradually going beyond words. Ultimately, we will not need words at all for our practice. With a single motion of our will, we will be instantly ushered into God's Presence. Reducing our practice from many words

to just one is an important step towards this goal. Given that using only one word is central to this technique, I would not recommend using multiple names for God within a single meditation.

Technique

1. Selecting a name

Select a name of God to use (since the Workbook does not dictate which name you use for God). It can be any word that signifies God to you, but it should be a single word—preferably a short word of one or two syllables. It should have maximum personal meaning to you, maximum ability to evoke your desire and love for God. You may want to ask within for guidance on what word to choose.

2. Beginning the meditation

Sit comfortably. Close your eyes. The meditation consists in repeating the Name, slowly and intentionally, over and over. You can repeat it constantly, or regularly every several seconds (synchronized with your breath, if you like), or irregularly, whenever you feel moved to. The Workbook is silent on these issues and generally considers such matters unimportant.

3. Focusing only on repeating the Name

Draw your attention in from everything else and put all your attention and desire on the Name:

Practice but this today; repeat God's Name slowly again and still again. Become oblivious to every name but His. Hear nothing else. Let all your thoughts become anchored on This. No other word we use except at the beginning, when we say today's idea but once. And then God's Name becomes our only thought, our only word, the only thing that occupies our minds, the only wish we have, the only sound with any meaning, and the only Name of everything that we desire to see; of everything that we would call our own. (W-pI.183.6:1–8).

4. Repeating the Name as a call for everything real and desirable

The meaning, the feeling, you place in this Name is important (as you can see in the above quote). Some suggestions about that:

4a. Don't say God's Name just as a word

Speak it directly to God, as a communication from you to Him. Expect Him to hear and respond. "Thus do we give an invitation which can never be refused. And God will come, and answer it Himself" (W-pI.183.7:1).

4b. Repeat the Name as a call, which calls out for a response from God

- You are calling to God to come and reveal Himself to you in direct experience. Let this call contain all your desire to experience Him.
- You are calling to your true Identity, Which is part of God. You are asking to know Who you really are.
- You are calling to all things real—including the reality of your brothers—since everything real is a part of God.
- You are calling for everything you truly want, since God is the only One you really want. As the Course asks us to pray, "Yet is Your Love the only thing I seek, or ever sought. For there is nothing else that I could ever really want to find" (W-pII.231.1:3).

In other words, with this one single word, you are calling for *everything*. You are calling for everything that is real and everything you truly want. Don't try to consciously include all of the above meanings in your mind. It is important to repeat the Name gently, without strain. However, while you do, also say it with meaning. Make it the appeal of your heart. As *The Cloud of Unknowing* (a medieval mystical text) put it, make this repetition into "a dart of longing love."

5. *Drawing your mind back from wandering*

Whenever your thought wanders to something of the world, or to anything besides God's Name, respond by repeating the Name. This wandering will be a regular occurrence, so don't be distressed by it. Expect it. Simply be ready to respond by repeating the Name and so dispelling the extraneous thought. Do this as often as you need to. *If you spend the whole time doing this and nothing else, the time will have been well spent.*

Sit silently, and let His Name become the all-encompassing idea that holds your mind completely. Let all thoughts be still except this one. And to all other thoughts respond with this, and see God's Name replace the thousand little names you gave your thoughts, not realizing that there is one Name for all there is, and all that there will be. (W-pI.183.8:3-5)

In repeating the Name to dispel wandering thoughts, it helps if you remember that what you were thinking about is essentially nothing—it is unreal and unsatisfying, and that God's Name represents everything—all that is real and all that you really want. So, when you notice a wandering thought, repeat God's Name in the awareness that it represents everything and what you were thinking about is nothing.

Induction Process

I have found the following instructions useful for beginning the meditation. They are a way of turning the Name into a full and heartfelt call. Since they only take a few minutes, they are just there to get you started on the right foot.

At the beginning of the meditation, repeat God's Name two or three times, as a way of addressing Him directly. Treat Him as a real Person. Expect Him to hear.

And now repeat God's Name as an act of calling on Him, calling Him to come to you and reveal Himself to you in direct experience.

And now repeat the Name as a way of calling on the awareness of your true Identity. By calling on God you also call on your true Self, for They are one.

Now repeat the Name as a way of calling on all of reality, including the reality of your brothers, for everything real is part of God.

And now repeat God's Name as a prayer that asks for everything you truly want, a prayer that contains all possible prayers. Say it as the prayer of your heart.

And now repeat His Name in love; as "a dart of longing love."

Now let all of these meanings blend together into one, so that by speaking this one word you are calling on everything—everything real and everything you truly want. As you continue the meditation, continue repeating His Name in this spirit.

And whenever your mind wanders to something besides His Name, repeat the Name gently as a way of drawing your mind back to focus. Repeat it as an affirmation that God's Name represents everything, while the thing you were thinking about is really nothing.