

THE MONK
WITHIN

*Embracing a
Sacred Way
of Life*

STUDY & REFLECTION
QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

- Have you experienced what Dr. Lanzetta calls “the monastic call”?
- What central beliefs or aspects of personality have kept you from being the guardian of your own divinity?
- List the phrases, sentences, and words in this chapter that pierce through your intellect and into your heart.

CHAPTER 2

- Do any traditional forms of monasticism speak to you?
- How have you consciously cultivated an interior monkhood?
- How do you differentiate between “the monk as archetype” and “the archetype of the monk”?
- How do you understand your “right” and “obligation” to be a “co-partner” with the cosmos?
- What are your favorite words and phrases from this chapter, and why?

CHAPTER 3

- What does the term “spirituality” mean to you?
- What is meant by “spiritual maturity”?
- What is contemplation and how does it differ from meditation?
- How might you cultivate the mystic within?
- How can we avoid the pitfalls of temptation and false motives?
- Describe an instance when you have received the gift of divinity, however briefly.
- Have you ever experienced the “dark luminosity of being”?

CHAPTER 4

- How do you understand the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*? Have you experienced them in your own life?
- What does “unknowing” mean to you?
- What is meant by “the soul’s emptiness”?
- Is there evidence of the “birthing of the new” in your own life?
- Dr. Lanzetta speaks of negation as the fuel of self-emptying. Has negation disrupted your spiritual life?
- What are you dismantling in your own understanding of self and what are you discovering?

CHAPTER 5

- What theology or philosophy grounds your life as a seeker?
- How do you understand the *via feminina*?
- How do you understand “intimate wholeness”?
- When you consider your own religious affiliations - past, present, or both - are the qualities of the *via feminina* discernible? Can you identify places where *via feminina* can intersect successfully with your tradition?
- What does Dr. Lanzetta mean when she says that the *via feminina* “disturbs and transgresses” the wisdom teachings of patriarchal religions?
- What does Dr. Lanzetta mean by “unsaying”?
- How does the term “unsaying” show up in your life?
- Which of the various personifications of the Divine Feminine appeal most to you?
- Take each of the four attributes of the *via feminina* - radical gentleness, unifying spirituality, suffering and mercy, and the mother seed - and apply them to yourself. How are you already expressing your divine nature?

CHAPTER 6

- Dr. Lanzetta writes that the Divine Feminine is a profound and elusive “reconfiguration of the human soul” - so profound and elusive that She can only be glimpsed by Her traces. What do you think she means? What have you glimpsed?
- What is the “revelatory mind”?
- What prophetic voice are you hearing?
- Reflect on your “break through” and your “breakdown.”
- What makes it possible for you to function in the world of pluralism while also experiencing the world as non-dual?
- Describe or reflect on a “purifying experience that took apart your beliefs.”
- What steps are you taking to reclaim your original nature?
- What are the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that are most meaningful to you in this chapter?

CHAPTER 7

- What are some of the soul-damaging structural beliefs that you recognize?
- Look into your past and identify periods of your “soul’s anguish” wherein you felt incapable of resolving inner conflict and were at an impasse. How did you handle it? How did it resolve? How were you changed by the experience?
- Why can the pain of spiritual wounding not be “simply transcended”?
- Reflect on your own dark night of injustice. What impact did it have on your community and soul?
- What does the phrase “illumination leads to transfiguration” mean to you?
- How are you incarnating the Divine Feminine?

CHAPTER 8

- How is the idea of an embodied spirituality disruptive to our collective belief systems?
- How is the physical body symbiotic with spiritual growth?
- In what ways have you accepted the rupture between spirit and body? How does that affect your life?
- How do you treat your body as holy?
- How do you see the body as a microcosm of the universe?
- How can we participate in the awakening of the heart of the world?
- What is your vow and how are you living it?

CHAPTER 9

- How are you opening the spiritual imaginary and crossing a threshold into an uncharted world?
- Do you have a “Theology of Intimacy”?
- How might you practice the “renunciation of separateness”?
- How does emphasis on intimacy as the primordial force of life change the story of our origins?
- What is your favorite part of this chapter? How has it touched you to your core?

CHAPTER 10

- How would you describe your “love of the Divine Mystery”?
- What is “the one thing necessary”?
- How do you self-empty? How do you know you are empty?

CHAPTER 11

- Do you “adore the unnameable”?
- How do you differentiate between wise and unwise love?
- How do you discern the wisdom that you have regarding love?
- How much of your freedom have you given away to be loved?
- What has been your experience with “darkness, dryness, and turmoil” and how have you experienced seeds of love?
- How can you imagine using your heart’s intention to change the world?
- In what ways do you or have you experienced the “homelessness of the heart”?
- How is your heart becoming your home?
- How do you refuse despair?

CHAPTER 12

- Fashion at least two vows that you would be willing to take that express your gratitude, your wisdom, and the illumination of your heart.
- What is “the monastic heart”?
- What is solitude? How has the deepening of solitude brought into stark relief what you have not resolved?
- What is the “order of your heart”?
- How strong is your spiritual heart?
- What are you still able to give when you are in pain, feel diminished, or suffering?
- What is your antidote to a closed heart?

CHAPTER 13

- How do you practice the virtue of inner authenticity?
- How do you define wholeness?
- What causes division in your soul?

CHAPTER 14

- How do the virtues of monastic spirituality contribute to the transformation of self that you are experiencing in your present circumstances?

CHAPTER 15

- How does “holy inaction” relate to one’s progress as a monk in the world?
- How do the qualities of the monastic personality emerge in you?

CHAPTER 16

- Have you surrendered the self in an act of unknowing? How has that shattered you?
- How does the divine secret speak in your soul?
- What have you unlearned?
- How have you feared change and denied the transcendent?
- How are you unlearning dualism?
- How do you understand your acceptance of the status quo?
How do you protest nonviolently?
- How are you the guardian of your own divinity?

CHAPTER 17

- How do you understand the Divine longing within you?
- Why might deep spiritual experiences become less frequent with spiritual maturity?
- What is the prophetic voice?

CHAPTER 18

- What is the relationship of the inner and outer soul?
- What is passive or infused contemplation?
- What is the difference between active and passive contemplation?
- In what way is the Divine calling you?

CHAPTER 19

- Can you relate to Augustine's tension between personal willfulness and spiritual awakening? How might that have played out in your life?
- How is Augustine's struggle an example for us all?
- Name the stages of spiritual growth and explore how you relate to each in your own life.

CHAPTER 20

- What was Gandhi's three-fold practice?
- Why did Gandhi see human life as full of struggle, conflict, and uncertainty?
- Why would we be afraid of the truth?
- How can we live in the world and not be co-opted by it?
- What did Gandhi mean by "Truth is born out of the work of prayer."?
- What is Gandhi's concept of obedience?
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CHAPTER 21

- What is social mysticism?
- What is the mystical imperative expressed by Thurman that the ultimate commitment is to remove all that stands in the way of being fully united with the Divine? Have you made this kind of commitment to yourself ?
- How do you understand that civil oppression has its roots in soul oppression?
- What did Martin Luther King Jr. want?
- What are the four principles of nonviolent action?
- What do you make of Merton's realization that it is not possible to leave the world in any real sense?
- What does "the synthesis of opposites mean"? How might it apply to your life?
- What is self-sacrifice?
- What do you make of Merton's fight against the complacency and dishonesty with which we tend to shield ourselves with from the suffering of others?
- What is a "contemplative ethic"?

CHAPTER 22

- What is the definition of a monastic heart?
- What does it mean to focus one's life on God alone?
- How does monasticism approach reality in ways that differ from the common world view?
- How does your life perspective differ from that of monasticism?
- How is gratitude a foundational principle behind monastic vows?
- What is the mystical definition of obedience?
- How does discipline refer to the order of one's heart?
- If you were to write one vow for yourself, what would it be?

CHAPTER 23

- Why is Gandhi a valuable guide for pioneering a new monastic expression?
- What are two essential principles that underly Gandhi's vows? Do you relate to them in your own life?
- How, according to Gandhi, is God the epitome of a vow?
- What is the "law of God"?
- What is the relationship between solitude and action?
- How does self-sacrifice heal humanity's divisions?

CHAPTER 24

- Define mystical celibacy. What is the difference between the common usage of the term celibacy and mystical celibacy?
- How is mystical celibacy the relationship of divine/human intimacy?
- How is it possible for a traditional monk to be celibate for many years and still not understand what mystical celibacy is about?
- How might the traditional practice of celibacy deny the sanctity of the body and denigrate women and the female principle of the Divine?
- Have you ever been faithful to anything or anyone?
- What is the definition of holy passion?
- How can intimacy happen whether or not we are in a relationship or alone?
- What is purity?

CHAPTER 25

- How are celibacy and asexuality complimentary realities on an energy level?
- What does it mean to approach sexuality through the lens of solitude?
- How do you understand/experience passion in your own life?
- How can our desire and capacity to participate in physical joy lead the way towards wholeness?
- How do physical bodies express “oneness”?
- How can celibacy contribute to the conservation of creativity?
- How is the world “the body of God”?
- What do people lose sight of when they concentrate on orgasm as the goal of sexuality?
- How can the practice of solitude heal trauma?

CHAPTER 26

- What rule of life have you consciously been following, and how has it changed over the course of your life?
- When you view your own actions and attitudes that you feel are negative toward yourself or others, can you perceive a rule of life that you may be denying or unconsciously carrying in yourself ?
- What common themes can you discern among all the “rules” from different religious formations described in the chapter?
- When you read about rules of life, why do you think this matters for a spiritual life and how do you believe it matters for you?
- Which of Benedict’s 12 Steps of Humility speak most resonantly to you and why?
- How do you understand the term “poverty” or the idea of relinquishment of attachment mentioned in all the rules and in what way do you imagine you incorporating that into your own spiritual practice?

CHAPTER 27

- How might the notion that “all life is prayer” change the way we see both our spiritual practices and our everyday lives?
- Dr. Lanzetta notes that “prayer is not merely linguistic or intellectual, but is a living river of devotion bringing divine energies into the world.” Are there ways in which you think this view could change how you experience the natural world and your own body?
- Has this chapter changed your notion or experience of prayer?
- In what ways is your prayer life with the Divine similar to “an intimate sharing between friends?”
- Have you had moments, or even longer periods, of being absorbed into the Divine Presence? What practices or conditions have encouraged or triggered those experiences?
- Thomas Merton noted that “The darkness is enough.” What do you think he meant by this?
- What do you think Dr. Lanzetta means when she states, “Even when we do not know we are praying, the universe is praying in us.”?