

THE MONASTIC PERSONALITY

by Dr. Beverly Lanzetta

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Session 2: The Place Within

MY THEORY on the spiritual life is to stop resisting and accept. It's easier and faster in the long run. Your resistance doesn't help you at all, because resistance is a reaction. When you let in this experience and feeling, if it resonates with you, you will be shown what to do. When you make that commitment or vow to yourself, you will be shown how to make it happen in your life. But as long as you're resisting, or asking –what does this mean? Do I have to get divorced? Send my children to an orphanage?—you're never going to get through it. You have to trust that spirit is working in you. That your search for truth is working in you and is going to show you a way.

In this interior betrothal, everything is included. Nothing is excluded. Every relationship has the potential to mirror and reflect the place within. In fact, when you finally accept your primary commitment, you will love and honor life and your relations more. It's just that you have to say to the world, in one form or another, in active protest: "Don't invade my mystical betrothal. You can be here with me in this relationship, but don't try to possess it, take it over, think it belongs to you, enter it, because it is my solitude with God." You don't have to necessarily sit someone down and recite this verbatim, but there are ways to explain it: "This is an important part of my life, and if you want to be in relationship with me, we will figure out a way to make that happen. I will figure out a way to make that happen." This is the way to thrive in your inner monastery in the world. And you have to be fierce about it in your own inner being, because this is your vow.

If you are a contemplative or monastic personality, you have to be able to establish silence as the center of your being or you will never survive in the world of relationships because you will always feel fractured. You will always feel pulled in two different directions. Therefore, we need to become fierce advocates for and protectors of the Divine in ourselves.

What compounds this and makes it difficult for everyone, I believe, in this room, and for everyone with a contemplative personality is that people with a contemplative personality usually display an unusual depth of sensitivity to others and to the world. This insight has come from my work as a spiritual director over the last 40 years. Knowing that people drawn to the spiritual life are personally sensitive, I also noticed that this personality type tends to be very sensitive to others even from a young age, and they are often in touch with the mystical dimension of life.

Most of us either don't understand our sensitivity, have had it oppressed or suppressed, or have tried to "get over it" and toughen up. But the mystical personality is not completely capable of doing that, and I'll talk about why in a minute. Denial of our deep sensitivity has ramifications for those who are contemplative because it can affect your health, your spiritual well-being, your understanding of life and your search for truth. Just think about it. If you are a very sensitive person, you could use the image of a sea anemone, kind of soft and mushy. If you touch one, it shrinks and withdraws. If you are born as a sensitive soul, growing up you will bio-spiritually react to things that are harsh or that invade your space.

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The way most people react is to retreat and to put up barriers and develop resistances. So a lot of what you consider to be your 'personality' is a reaction to this primary inability to negotiate as a child how to be sensitive in the world and not be invaded, or how to be sensitive in the world and be open. A lot of what we go through is really based on these energies. We tend to think of it as our personality – "I am this kind of person" – but it actually has a lot more to do with energy. In Eastern religions we talk about energetic systems of the body, and how we have learned bio-spiritually to retract those energies as a way to protect and preserve ourselves. But then when we resist, we close our heart, and our sight, and all the chakras start to shut down so we're not processing information correctly. We're not really being as open and loving as we want to be.

We don't have time to go into it in any depth at this retreat, but the reason meditative and prayer practices are so essential and have been found in religions since time immemorial is that harnessing and organizing your energies and learning what your own space is, is essential to practicing any spiritual path and to keeping your heart open. If you don't know your own energy, what your energy feels like, and you don't know what it feels like when you're overwhelmed with fingerprints and footprints all over you from other people, you can't maintain the center place. You might not even know when you're thinking other peoples' thoughts. When I was a child, I was like that. I was very open, and I would think things that I would later find out were events my parents were talking about that they didn't want us to know. Because the energetic system is picking up everything. And this can certainly affect your health, your memory, your understanding, and your intellectual ability. It has an effect on the whole system.



REFLECTION

- Can you identify times when you have been reactive or resistant in your spiritual life?
- What does the phrase “the place within” evoke in you?
- Can you identify moments with people in your life, where you were subtly taking in their thoughts or energies, without your awareness?
- How does it feel to think of your being as bio-spiritual?



PRACTICE

Sit in a chair with your feet on the floor and take some deep breaths from your abdomen, just letting the energy flow in and out, making a sound as you exhale. Imagine that you are a young child and see if you can find the place that you used to go to, to be alone. Maybe it was in nature, maybe it was playing in your room, maybe it was by a river. When you find that place, put a great white light around the child that you see yourself to be. Observe your child self, and fill it with love, holding that light closely, so that you create around your child a living enclosure of light. Then take the light of enclosure and bring it into your adult heart. Feel it come into your heart—the child and the enclosure of love-filled light. Allow it into your heart. And rest in there.


Now, feel the earth pulsing up through your feet and filling your body with strong earth energy. Feel the spirit coming down through your head and filling you with light. Pose this question to yourself, “When did I lose my love-filled secret space around my heart? When did I give it up? To whom did I give it up?” If you hear an answer, write about it in your journal. If you don’t know, simply write what you are feeling after the meditation.



PRAYER

May the divine mystery fill me with light, with love, with humility, with compassion for all sentient creatures. May my heart be lifted up with the courage and the joy of sharing the spark of holiness in every part of my life. May I have the strength to release you, Divine One, from every breath and in every aspect of my life. You are hidden in the most intimate part of my being and it is to You that my heart is drawn. Amen

—Beverly Lanzetta



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