

THE MONASTIC PERSONALITY

by Dr. Beverly Lanzetta

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Session 3: The Permeable Soul

ANOTHER THING about the contemplative personality is that they have what I like to call a very pliable or permeable soul, or what I call a mystical soul. Everybody, of course, has a mystical soul in the absolute sense, meaning that it's a soul open to the Divine. But a person who is born with a natural tendency toward monasticism is very pliable in the sense that the boundaries between the inner and the outer soul are not completely closed. For those of you who haven't seen this diagram before, I'll explain it now. *(see page four)*

This diagram is important so you can understand what I'm trying to talk about. Buddhism and some other traditions they might not talk about the permanent soul, but when I'm talking about the soul, I'm talking about the deep self, that immaterial spiritual part of you that belongs to the Divine alone. In mystical texts it is considered to be precious and holy and is your higher self. In western mystical traditions, the entire soul is considered to have an outer and an inner dimension. You can think of this as states of consciousness. The diagram I am using was drawn from Teresa of Avila where she talks about the seven levels of the soul, or the interior castle. But you also see this division in Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, even Taoism. They talk about the levels of consciousness of the deep self. We're going to use Teresa's model and a graphic diagram from my book *Radical Wisdom*.

What Teresa says is that the soul has outer and inner layers. The three outer levels turn toward the world and are susceptible to the world. The four inner layers turn toward God, which is always in the center. These are supernatural or mystical states. This distinction is really important so people can conceptualize what I'm talking about. Your deep self, not your outer personality, but your deep self—your soul—has a part of it that turns toward the world, of necessity as it is connected the body. This part of the soul experiences the pains and wounds and sufferings of the body. Someone like Julian of Norwich, a 14th century Christian mystic, will talk about wounds or fractures that will happen in the outer soul, between the inner and the outer soul.

Let's say in your life as a young person you have experienced a trauma of some sort; you've been unloved, mistreated, told you're worthless. You've been segregated or judged in some very harsh way. You've been physically violated, you've been raped, or you've been in a war—any of the harmful acts that we can think about. What we're saying is that the actual soul, the deep self, the part of you that is spiritual is affected by this, is fractured by this violation. The inner soul, however, remains pure and untouched. It can never be overcome by the world.

If the fracture is very deep, the person will forget or be unable to make the connection between the outer soul and the inner, or the lower soul and the higher soul. They will be unable to break that barrier or wound and feel that connection from the deep self.

The other thing that Teresa talks about is how we enter this castle and grow deeper into these inner layers of the soul and heal the fracture. She says it is prayer; prayer is everything. Prayer and meditation. You enter the castle and you deepen your spiritual life by praying and by understanding. The outer levels of the soul, she says, are susceptible to what she calls 'lizards,' and 'demons,' using the language of the 16th century. They can kind of distract you. But the inner soul is always precious in the Divine eye, and God is always present in the soul healing it from the inside out.

Someone might say they have been working on an issue for twenty years and it is still coming back. They want to know why. Primarily it is because normally when we work on a psychological level, we're working on the personality and the outer levels of the soul. We're not recognizing that the healing has to come from that passive contemplation, from the deepest levels of the soul. I'll be talking about this later, but basically it is allowing yourself to be healed from the inside out.

A person who has a contemplative personality has a mystical soul in this sense: the boundary between the outer and inner soul is very permeable. So this is a conceptualization, but the boundary between the two levels is very permeable in these people. Maybe this also true in musicians and artists. These personality types have even more trouble sustaining blows because it is so permeable between outer and inner, between this part of the soul and the world, that while they feel this inner center, the supernatural place, and are grounded or overcome by that, they are also taking more of the pain because the boundary is so permeable.

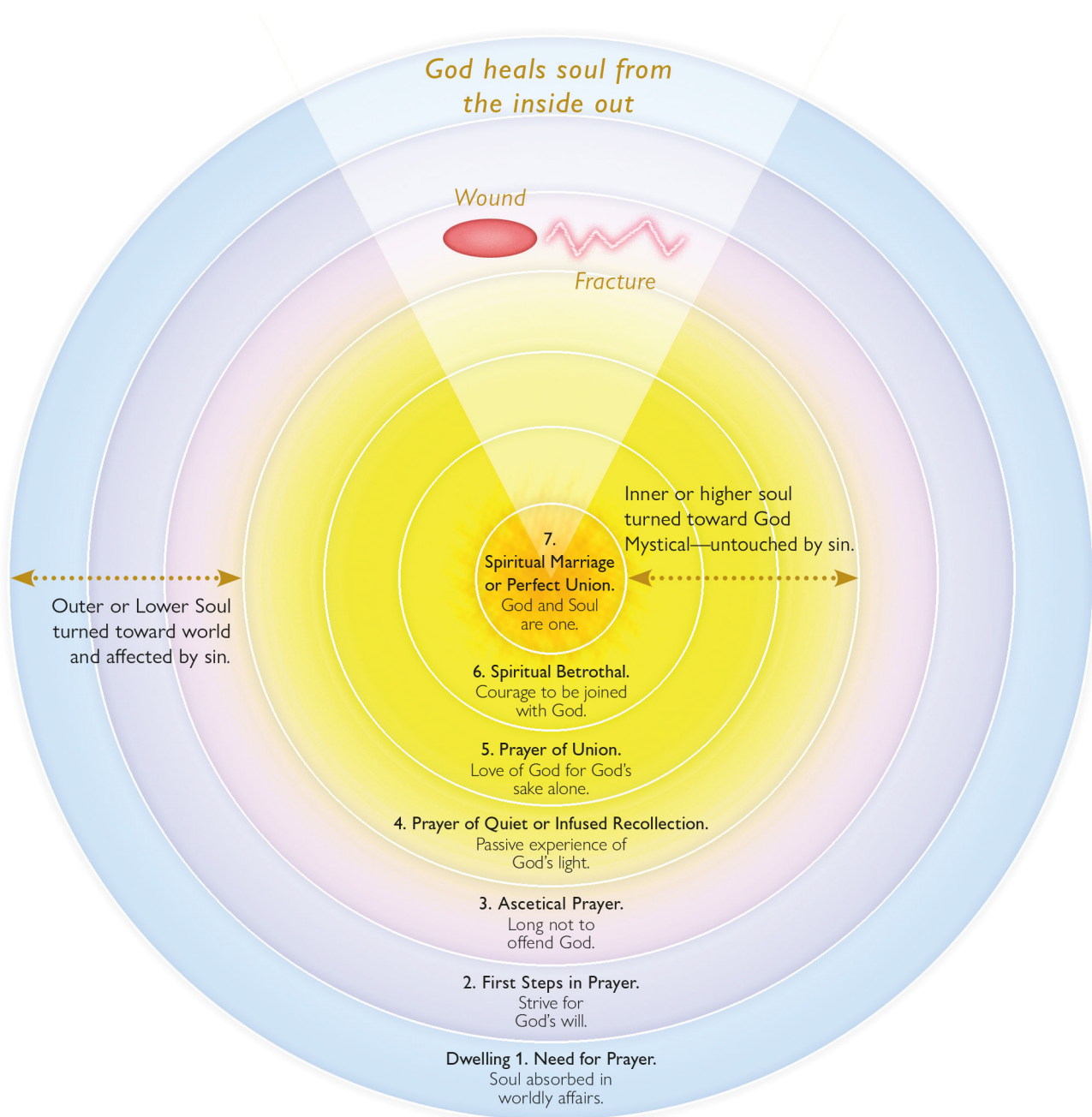
With the Divine, boundaries are not necessary. When you're in your silence, your place of love with God, you don't need boundaries or resistances. You can just be there in your full self. The contemplative personality has a hard time understanding that because they are so open to the inner life. They have trouble establishing boundaries and staying in their own space. While it's a blessing, it also has its curse, because it is hard to remain open, remain sensitive to all you know and feel, and at the same time not be a sieve open to all that's around you. That's where prayer and meditation come in. Practice, practice, practice. This is why it often takes many years in order to sustain a spiritual understanding at the level that you want to sustain it.

When I first started teaching forty years ago, and we'd be in a room like this and someone would be going through something because of what we were talking about, or someone was feeling negative or not telling the truth, my whole body would go crazy. I'd get stomach trembles and other symptoms, and I had to work really hard to remain grounded and in my own energy. It's not to say that if you are

very sensitive or susceptible you can't go higher in this realm, higher into the Divine nature, but you need to ground yourself in this world as well.

You have to have a balance, and part of that balance is practice, prayer, meditation, learning your energies, and recognizing what I'm talking about here. Because this is not metaphorical. It really is, in my mind, the way things work. And the way I've seen souls suffer and be healed.

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IMAGES OF THE SOUL

(Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*)

Entrance into the castle is through prayer, and the soul's progress moves parallel to the maturing of prayer, from the lower to higher soul. Medieval theologians held that human sin caused effects in soul consciousness, dividing the lower soul from the higher and turning it away from divine goodness. Although sin was said to be responsible for the split between the higher and lower soul, it can never penetrate or fundamentally harm the soul's perfection, which always remains pure and untouched in its center.



REFLECTION

- What does the concept of permeability mean to you, in terms of energies or thoughts?
- Do you have trouble establishing boundaries and staying in your own space?
- Can you relate to the stages of the soul chart (*see chart diagram*) as being levels of consciousness?
- What is the state of your connection to your precious untouched inner soul?



PRACTICE

- Chose an issue that you have been working on for a while. Take it to meditation or prayer and ask to be healed “from the inside out.” Within this time, let this issue move beyond any thoughts and emotions about it, but simply seek a deep healing that has no words. Let the issue empty into silence.
- Take some time in your daily interactions to identify when energy and thought patterns are coming your way. Simply notice how you react to this. Are you simply allowing it all in? Or are you becoming very defensive, closing all doors within yourself? After such an encounter, imagine what it might be like to maintain your own centered energies, welcoming the other, but being aware of your own energies, and theirs.



PRAYER

O Mother of Compassion

Blessed is your heart of pure love,
source of all life.

O Mother of Passion

Graced are we, enflamed by the fire
of your own desire.

O Mother of Wisdom

Radiant is your secret teaching,
known by the pure of heart.

O Mother of Sorrows

Who shares in every wound,
healing every suffering and sin.

O Mother of Light

Who illuminates all realms
with inexhaustible sweetness.

Formless, Dark Mercy

Hidden is your power
of wordless bliss
You are the fountain of joy
and the breath of benevolence.

Holy Sophia, Godhead of Intimacy,

Within creation You dwell
longing for You alone.

—Beverly Lanzetta



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