

Practice: The Three Faces of Spirit Seeking the Face of God in All Perspectives

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In this practice, we contemplate, think, and know about Spirit in the 3rd-person; we relate, dwell, and commune with Spirit in a 2nd-person relationship, and we meditate, feel and know ourselves as Spirit in a 1st-person apprehension of our source and substance.

To Practice the Three Faces of Spirit:

1. Choose a name for Spirit that you find meaningful, in each of the perspectives. For 1st-person, you might use "I AM," "Myself," "Pure Awareness," "Pure Presence," or "Mirror Mind." For 2nd-person, use any name that deeply resonates with you for Spirit as a Great Other, such as "Jesus" or "Beloved." For 3rd-person, use a phrase such as "The Great Perfection," "The Web of Life," etc.

2. As your meditation begins, attend to your breath as much as awareness allows. Then, anchor your 3rd-, 2nd- and 1st-person relationship with the Ultimate, using the words or phrases you have chosen.

3. Begin by anchoring yourself in your 3rd-person awareness of the Ultimate. Become aware of Spirit as it manifests in the universe as "It." Introduce into your awareness the word or phrase you have chosen to invoke and express Spirit in 3rd-person.

4. Then, come into the intimate presence of the Ultimate as a Great Other. Experience the depth of your relationship with Spirit, and utter the word or phrase you have chosen for Spirit in 2nd-person.

5. Next, realize that there is no separation at all. Experience the Ultimate as your very Self. Let your breath, body, mind and feeling register your true Identity as Spirit in 1st-person, and speak the word or phrase you have chosen for this aspect of Spirit.

6. For the duration of your meditation (from 20 minutes to an hour or longer), simply sit and attend to the breath. At random, and anytime your mind wanders, introduce into your awareness, with full feeling, one of the names that resonates with you for one of the Faces of Spirit.

Practice Genealogy

"Thich Nhat Hanh is more my brother than many who are nearer to me in race and nationality, because he and I see things exactly the same way."

Thomas Merton, the great Christian contemplative, famously made this statement in 1966, after meeting Zen

Master Thich Nhat Hanh on exactly one occasion. How is it that a Catholic Christian monk and a Zen Buddhist monk could see things in "exactly the same way," even though they theoretically disagreed on the very existence of God? The answer lies in perspectives. Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh had each come to know Spirit through a particular perspective; Merton had realized Spirit as his Beloved, and Thich Nhat Hanh, as his True Self. Each, by means of their contemplative practice, had come into contact with the Absolute; each had seen one of "The Three Faces of Spirit." Perspectives are a cornerstone of Integral theory. Taking perspectives on Spirit can be an exquisite Integral spiritual practice.

First, a quick explanation of perspectives. A 1st-person perspective refers to one's own interior, subjective experience. A 2nd-person perspective refers to a shared, intersubjective experience. And a 3rd-person perspective refers to an exterior, objective experience. The primordial natures of these perspectives is evidenced by the fact that all human languages, even the earliest we have researched, have some form of the pronouns "I" (1st-person), "you" or "we" (2nd-person) and "it" (3rd-person).

In the beginning, according to Buddhist cosmology, there is only Emptiness. And from the Emptiness, luminosity arises. From an integral perspective, we might add that as luminosity arises, it does so in perspectives. It arises in precisely those perspectives - 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-person- with which we relate to one another. Perspectives go all the way up and all the way down, and if you look all the way up through any of the perspectives, there you will find Spirit. Says the Koran, "God is the East, and God is the West; therefore, look to the East, or look to the West, and there you shall see the Face of God."

Since, at the very instant of manifestation, perspectives are already arising, every religious practice is seated in 1st-, 2nd-, or 3rd-person. In fact, religious traditions implicitly tend to favor one perspective over the others. Some emphasize a mystical realization of Spirit within oneself as the Supreme Identity (1st-person); some cultivate a devotion to Spirit as a Great Other, a being with Whom we can enter into communion (2nd-person); others point out the Web of Life or the Great Perfection of this moment (3rd-person).

Thus, the 3 Faces of Spirit can also be used as a sort of inventory, to bring awareness to one's spiritual practice and to make explicit what was implicit for centuries, or even millennia. From an integral altitude, we can begin to appreciate how steeped and embedded we are within our traditions, and can develop an objective view of what had been subject in our experience. Perhaps we, too, favor one perspective over the others; perhaps we could benefit from

approaching Spirit in its other aspects. Though the religious traditions tend to emphasize one perspective over the others, most contain examples of practices in all three perspectives. For example, in Buddhism, one might practice:

- Shikantaza (a 1st-person practice by which one remains aware of all phenomena that arise in the present moment, realizing that they are not that)
- **Tonglen** (a 2nd-person practice by which one breathes in the suffering of the world, and breathes out compassion upon the world)
- Meditate on the Great Perfection (a 3rd-person practice which helps one to realize the absolute perfection of this moment, exactly as it is)

In Christianity, one might:

- Pray a Psalm that describes Nature as a reflection of God (3rd-person)
- Experience one's soul as Beloved of God, through writings such as the Song of Songs, or St. John of the Cross's Dark Night of the Soul (2nd-person)
- Pray about what it means to be the "Temple of the Holy Spirit," or to "put on the Mind of Christ," realizing with Saint Paul that it is no longer I who act, but Christ in me (1st-person).

So, take up the ancient injunction to seek the Face of God, but indeed, seek Spirit in each of its three Faces, for a fuller understanding and realization of Spirit itself.

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