**The Seven Stages *of* Centering Prayer**

**Thomas Keating**

The essence of Centering Prayer is consenting to God’s presence and action within. The logo of Contemplative Outreach as depicted on our newsletter suggests how this consent normally develops. The seven stages of Centering Prayer outlined below continue these steps beyond the present logo and dispose us toward ever-deepening self-surrender. These seven stages might be called the process of Centering Prayer. I summarize them as follows:

**1. Silence** is consenting to God’s presence – what Jesus calls the Kingdom of God – within and among us. External silence supports this movement.

**2. Solitude** flows from interior silence. Disregarding our interior dialogue leads to “resting in God” (Saint Gregory the Great), and to consciousness without particular content.

**3. Solidarity** is the awareness of increasing oneness with God, with the whole human family, and with all creation.

**4. Service** is following the ever-present inspirations of the Spirit not only during the time of formal prayer, but in the details of everyday life. It is a spontaneous expression of solidarity: God in us serving God in others.

**5. Stillness** is what Jesus called “prayer in secret” (Matthew 6:6). This is the experience of God’s presence beyond rational concepts, beyond preoccupation with one’s personal thoughts and desires.

**6. Simplicity** is the integration of contemplation and action, a growing capacity to live in the midst of duality – the ups and downs of daily life – without losing the non-dual perspective. Contemplation is not the same as action. They are distinct but they are not separate.

**7. Surrender** is the total gift of self to God, a movement from union to unity. It marks the beginning of what Jesus calls “eternal life” as an abiding state.

As we are moved through the stages of grace, our perspective changes in regard to Centering Prayer, the contemplative life, and God. In between the steps there may be delightful plateaus as well as dark nights, all of which have physical, mental, and spiritual consequences. The most transforming dark nights seem to be primarily psychological states, and the darkest of all is the purely spiritual suffering that arises from just being a creature, apparently unequipped for the hazards and trials of this life, but going through them with invincible confidence in God’s love.

(*Contemplative Outreach – News*, vol. 28, number 2, June 2012)

 2, June 2012)