

# Soul Spark



## Approaches to Stilling

### Ways of leading into bodily relaxation and attentiveness

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of leading people into stilling and bodily relaxation is to enable a greater level of personal relaxation – body mind and soul together all help each other in this. So to enable physical relaxation can help mental and spiritual relaxation and vice versa. To enable the quietening of the mind and the letting go of concerns to God's holding can help physical relaxation. These all have been found to help prayer, to enable greater openness and attentiveness to God.

Stilling is thus a way of getting to a state of relaxed attentiveness that is a great aid to prayer and drawing closer to God.

#### **Methods**

There are various ways of approaching this – and generally I would 'play the range' varying from session to session which approach I used.

I briefly describe some here:

#### **Breathing:**

Begin with encouraging people to adopt a comfortable posture – most find it best to be settled in an upright position, letting the chair take ones weight, letting the back of the chair support the back, so that no effort is needed to hold the posture.

Invite an attentiveness to the rhythm of breathing – without changing it – just be aware of your breathing.

After giving about 30 seconds to notice breathing – invite taking in a deeper breath, filling the lungs and holding them full for a few seconds, before letting go and breathing out. Suggest this is done three or four times to stretch and relax the lungs, chest and body.

Then let breathing return to its normal and gentle rhythm.

The words 'Breathe on me breath of God' can be prayed with each in-breath and 'I let go to you Lord' with each out-breath

After three or four minutes of this you can move on to the prayer exercise.

#### **Listening:**

Begin with encouraging people to adopt a comfortable posture – most find it best to be settled in an upright position, letting the chair take ones weight, letting the back of the chair support the back, so that no effort is needed to hold the posture.

Invite attentiveness to sounds that can be heard from outside. If there are particular noises it can be helpful to gently name them as you invite people to notice them.

Leave for a minute or two and then invite moving attention to sounds coming from within the room. Again there may be particular sounds (eg a ticking clock) that can be named.

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Again leave a couple of minutes before moving on to listening to ones own breathing, and feeling the heartbeat.

After a couple more minutes, the listening can move to a quiet prayer seeking to hear the still small voice of God speaking.

### **Bodily Relaxation**

Begin with encouraging people to adopt a comfortable posture – most find it best to be settled in an upright position, letting the chair take ones weight, letting the back of the chair support the back, so that no effort is needed to hold the posture.

Then invite awareness of the head – stretching and relaxing various parts – eg the forehead, the jaw. Invite people to stretch and relax each part a couple of times.

Then move on to the neck – it can be good to roll ones head, forwards and then round to the side, back, side and front, before returning to a comfortable central position.

Then the shoulders – invite lifting high, dropping low, shrugging, rotating (any one or other of these actions or combination will suffice)

To relax the arms and hands, invite people to put their hands together – fingertip to fingertip and gently press so that a tension is felt down the arms and through the hands.

Then relax, and press again. Then relax and let the hands lie easily in the lap.

The back often holds tension, so inviting a ‘wriggling’ just to ease tensions can be helpful.

Moving down to the legs and feet – invite lifting heels and pressing on the floor with the toes, then relaxing, lifting the toes and pressing down with the heels, then relaxing and letting the feet rest flat on the floor.

### **Leading**

Some points about leading people into relaxation and stillness. Firstly, it helps if you have given yourself a chance to find your own relaxed stillness (just for a few seconds) before starting, otherwise you are likely to reveal your own tension in the way you lead which is counter productive!

### **Introducing**

In introducing this, particularly to people who may not be used to it, it is worth clarifying the purpose of this – to enable our closer connection with God, and to briefly outline the process – so people are less anxious about ‘what is this and where is it going?’

It is good to affirm that relaxation is in itself a prayer – an opening, trusting and seeking God – letting go to God

Use a gentle but clear voice (not always an easy balance to achieve) but try to be relaxing in the way you do it.

Be spacious in the pacing of the leading through the stages. Few people are too slow in leading, many are too fast – so pace it a bit slower than you think is appropriate and you are probably doing it right!