

Are Carmelite (Interior) prayer and Mindfulness Meditation compatible?

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Introduction

It is not easy to distinguish between Carmelite prayer and mindfulness meditation. To help us do so, let's examine **seven false similarities** between these two practices.

The application "**Meditate with Little Bamboo**" is extremely popular. In one click, you can participate in a mindfulness meditation session for a small fee.

According to "**Little Bamboo**", the benefit of meditation is unanimously recognized. But, is it compatible with **Christian prayer**? And more precisely with prayer as taught by Saint Teresa of Avila, doctor of the Church? The answer is a resounding **No!** The techniques of mindfulness meditation are inspired by spiritual traditions that seek the destruction of desire and the dissolution of the person. Without saying so, and sometimes even pretending to be Christians, they take a contrary path to the Gospels

1 DO WE PRAY TO TAKE CARE OF OUR SOULS?

The term "meditation" means "to take care of". So, it seems that **Carmelite prayer** and **mindfulness** coincide since these two practices are aimed at **taking care of our soul**.

Do we not say that **interior prayer** provides certain fruits of healing, happiness, peace, joy, liberation?

Don't we see in all bookstores book titles that ensure us happiness by means of "**meditation**"?

In reality, Carmelite prayer, according to Teresa of Avila's definition, is an **exchange of friendship with Jesus**. If, in fact, along with the idea of exchange, there is the idea "**taking care of someone**".

However, interior prayer does not invite us to take care of our own soul but of Jesus, himself, and the suffering members of his Mystical Body.

If we do experience what we legitimately call inner fruits of peace, joy, etc., they are only the consequence of this primary purpose that we seek.

"O my God, the Trinity whom I adore," writes Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity, "help me to forget myself completely."

Teresa of the Little Flower says that we pray because we have understood that "Jesus desires to be loved".

In reality, to take care of one's soul, in prayer, is to walk contrary to the Gospels. Jesus told us: "He who loses his soul, will find it" and he said to St. Teresa of Avila: "Take care of my business and I will take care of yours."

This is the key to **happiness!** The key to **holiness!** The eternal and blessed God, in his merciful goodness, wants me to participate in his intimate life, He wants, as a purely free gift of love, to make himself a slave of my love by allowing me to participate with Him in the redemption of the world. So, I enter into prayer to take care of Jesus, that is, to love him and make him loved.

2 DO WE PRAY TO FIND PEACE?

The goal of mindfulness meditation is **inner peace** brought about by a liberation from the **tyranny of desires** that fragment the soul.

This peace results by detaching oneself from feelings and thoughts; by just letting them go to avoid being enslaved by them.

And, indeed, in the short term and at least superficially, this technique seems to have some effectiveness.

But, is this **peace genuine**? Teresa of Avila certainly wouldn't say so. In the *Book of her Life, the Way of Perfection, the Interior Castle*, she explains very clearly that to **begin to practice interior prayer is to go to war**!.

We find ourselves at war with demons, at war with the flesh, and at war with the world. A firm determination is necessary therefore to **carry one's cross with Christ**. Teresa even tells us that the beginnings will be the most difficult and she states that she worries about those who find themselves too easily in a state of peace.

"The only ambition of one who begins to devote himself to prayer must be to work to strengthen himself in good resolutions, and to neglect no means to make his will conform to that of God's. [...] This is the highest perfection that can be attained on the spiritual path. »

3DO WE PRAY TO LISTEN TO OUR BODY?

The practice of mindfulness meditation invites us to **welcome** our feelings, our emotions, our thoughts, without judging them. It consists of a **deep listening** to the body through breathing exercises along with a concentration on the **present moment**. There is, even in interior prayer, a legitimacy to anchor our prayer in the flesh. Christianity is, in fact, a religion of the **Incarnation** and our bodies are the **temples of the Holy Spirit**. We have no right to

despise them. However, the flesh, wounded by sin, can be deceptive.

Teresa reminds us that according to St. Paul and the tradition of the Church: **"Prayer and a soft, cozy life, do not go well together"**:

"The bad thing about our body is that the better we treat it, the more demanding it becomes. It's a strange thing that it likes to be treated well. At the slightest need, it deceives the poor soul who ceases to make progress [...] If we do not resolve to shun death and sickness once and for all, we will never do anything. Seek to no longer fear death and surrender yourself completely to God, come what may. [...] Believe me, this determination matters more than we can comprehend. » Teresa of Avila

It is therefore perfectly legitimate to recall the Eastern monastic traditions of **hesychasm**, based on breathing, but it is also necessary, to recall the **ascetic tradition** of the Christian East. To pray with one's body is to make sacrifices, reminding our flesh that it must not become **Master** of our prayer, that is the **role of the Holy Spirit**.

4IS MINDFULNESS SIMILAR TO GUARDING THE HEART OF THE DESERT FATHERS?

For some, mindfulness would be the simple rediscovery, on a natural and therapeutic level, of the practice of **guarding one's heart** from the desert fathers, a practice that they themselves allegedly inherited from the East.

In reality, there is a **fundamental difference between mindfulness and guarding the heart**. The **first** is being attentive to thoughts and welcoming them without judging them. The **second** is being attentive to thoughts but with discernment driving out those thoughts inspired by the devil.

He who practices mindfulness indiscriminately makes himself **available to spiritual influences whose origins he does not know...** This represents a considerable **danger to the faith.**

5 SHOULD WE SUSPEND OUR JUDGMENT?

One of the leitmotifs of **mindfulness** is the **suspension of judgment.** We must neither judge ourselves nor our thoughts, nor our feelings...and of course, what is going on around us.

One might think that this non-judgment is in line with Jesus' call not to judge: "**Do not judge, and you will not be judged.**"

In reality, Jesus calls us not to judge people.

On the other hand, he invites us to be especially vigilance in discerning false prophets, as one judges a **tree by its fruits.**

But the **non-judgment of mindfulness** is even more **radical.** It consists in abstaining in all situations from the intellectual operation that declares a proposition true or false.

The danger of getting used to non-judgment is really riding the **relativistic wave.** And the even more serious danger for Christian life is refraining from making acts of faith. The **leap of faith**, as such, is a judgment. If I say, "**Jesus is Lord,**" I am making a judgment of truth, inspired by the Spirit.

If I replace this judgment with an attitude of non-judgment, I cut off my relationship with Christ and my acceptance of grace.

There is a **contradiction** between mindfulness and prayer. Someone who says that he practices mindfulness while practicing interior prayer, in reality does neither one nor the other. He cannot **judge** and **not judge** at the same time.

6 SHOULD WE DETACH OURSELVES FROM OUR THOUGHTS AND IMAGINATION DURING PRAYER?

Interior prayer is not just a silent and imageless prayer. If it were only that, it would bear a striking resemblance to mindfulness, which is practiced in inner silence, and does not use images or words. But, Teresa of Avila tells us that interior prayer must consist in **consideration** of the one to whom we are speaking. We are not inactive during prayer. We do not peel away from images and words. On the contrary, we use them to support our act of faith directed to Christ. If we talk to Jesus, we must think of Him and look at Him.

Perhaps He will give us the **gift of supernatural contemplation** that would prevent us from having any mental activity. But this gift cannot be provoked by a technique, it can only be received **humility of heart.**

7 SHOULD PRAYER BE ACCOMPANIED BY A RELEASE FROM DISTRACTIONS?

Some Christians say that it is perhaps good to start the practice of interior prayer by practicing mindfulness to learn to free oneself from distractions.

However, the progress of prayer does not coincide with the decrease in distractions and it is important to note that distractions can be considered blessings, in the sense that they compel us to make many acts of faith during our times of prayer.

Thinking of the meal that awaits us during prayer, could be seen either as an obstacle, or as a springboard to return to Christ in trust and surrender. " We need to return as frequently as possible to the Master through jactatory prayers or acts of theological virtues."

It is because we have distractions that we surrender ourselves to our Lord. Practicing

mindfulness to prevent distractions... may simply prevent us from practicing interior prayer.

However, the end of the story may not be all negative. For if Teresian prayer could benefit from mindfulness, it is very likely that the face of the world would be changed. The Holy Spirit would take possession of hearts. He would infuse them with charity, thus allowing every man of good will to have the necessary and sufficient means to build and serve the "**civilization of love.**"

St. John Paul II spoke to us, following in the steps of St. Paul VI, of such a civilization.

Let us keep in mind the popularity of mindfulness as a real possibility for the spread of the spirit of prayer.

In a way, it would simply be necessary for men to understand individually and collectively, in companies, schools and hospitals and on the benches of the national assembly that they are called to interior prayer, in other words to a heart to heart with Jesus. They would thus have the resources of grace necessary to accomplish their temporal mission here on earth and make this world a more human place to be.