

Love Breathing



**Experience Divine Joy with
Every Breath You Breathe**

Eric Munro

A wellspring of God's joy resides in everyone. Loving God with an open heart releases this wondrous joy into one's life. Doesn't it make sense then to practice loving God, so His joy becomes a natural part of the day?

How, though, does one practice loving God?

Love Breathing is one method that helps habitualize loving God to every breath. With a sincere, regular, loving God practice, enjoying divine communion becomes a natural and common experience; as natural and common as breathing.

'Love Breathing' is a sweet and practical guide to practicing the presence of God, yet taking it a step further, to the practice of 'loving' God, in every moment of daily life. Finding God is actually simple. It is we who make it so complicated. In this little pamphlet you'll find a guide to the spiritual simplicity of 'suffer the little children to come unto me, for such is the kingdom of God.'

— **Nayaswami Kriyananda**, author and founder
of the Ananda Self-Realization Communities

This book springs from the heart of actual experience and for that reason has unique power both to inspire and guide. It is simple, creative, and effective.

— **Nayaswami Asha Praver**, author and Spiritual Director

I love this book – it is so easy to keep God in your mind when you practice love breathing – during a hectic day there is always time to breathe and focus. Thank you, this added another blessing to my life. — DH



Additional comments for *Love Breathing*

Love Breathing is very inspiring ... a beautiful and practical guide toward loving God moment to moment. If joyful living is your goal, then keep this little volume handy. Both practical and wise, it offers an inspiring array of techniques to bridge the divide between the mundane and the divine, techniques that help whisk away distractions of daily life with every breath. The daily practice of "love breathing" will transform your life for the better.

—**Helen Purcell**, director of Living Wisdom School

This little pamphlet on "love breathing" is full of very practical suggestions on how one might bring an awareness of God into every moment of the day. The simple line drawings tell the whole story in a few words with illustrations that go right to the point. From this booklet, you will learn how to quiet your mind, how to expand your love for God, and how to see God in everything around you. This is great, simple, and deep reading that will bring you closer to God, one breath at a time.

—**BL**, Fremont, CA

The partially blossomed, partially budded yellow rose on the cover symbolizes a heart starting to open to God. The inner budded portion is still closed and hasn't completely given itself over to God. The outer petals have opened to both receive and radiate God's love.

The child-friendly computerized drawings are meant to communicate the sincere simplicity needed by both adults and children to strengthen their communion with God.

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Eric Munro

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Any and all profits the author derives from this book will
go toward promoting the practice of loving God.

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Dedication

To seekers and sharers of divine love everywhere. To my wife and sons. To my parents and entire family. To my Ananda church family, whose members' sincere commitment to serve and let God's love touch others through them has inspired and encouraged me.

Helping others, letting God's love flow out to others provides a great, divine service which isn't always outwardly noticeable. However it can profoundly help people in their search for divinity. I remember vividly such an example from my childhood, when I was going through a period of teenage angst. My mother brought me to see a spiritual practitioner (counselor and healer) from our church. Everyone called her Auntie Kim. She was great divine soul who emanated a strong aura of love. She talked to me for awhile asking questions. I could only answer "yes" or "no" and remained closed off to her conversationally. Inwardly though, I desperately wanted what she had, this wondrous divine connection. Sadly I knew I couldn't open up to her. Her motherly energy was too overwhelming; as a teenage boy it was time for me to "push away" and separate from this. Auntie Kim told my mother there was nothing she could do for me. Well she did so much in just those few minutes. They left an indelible mark on me and helped to further propel a lifelong longing for God.

For anyone who has shared God's love—Thank You.

Introduction

This book outlines spiritual techniques this author has been experimenting with for the last three years, techniques modified from many great spiritual traditions to help achieve a feeling of loving communion with God at will during the day. Hopefully, others will find them useful in their own spiritual quest.

From my early 20s, I had been actively seeking spiritual upliftment, some regular tangible connection with the divine. At age 47, finally, I was put on a path of regular, consistent communions, feelings of God's love and joy in the heart. After working more than two decades in the high-tech industry, I felt it was time to leave and find something else to do that would better further my spiritual aspirations. I wasn't sure what; only it was time. It was a major decision, leaving a lucrative position while needing to support my family. When contemplating the move once, I heard in my mind a very strong divine voice say "*You'd be absolutely insane to stay where you are.*" With this confirmation, I quit and started to volunteer part-time at Living Wisdom School, where my then middle school-aged children attended.

Despondency and anguish filled most of my next year. Leaving behind my career identity, doing less intellectually, and not being as engaged outwardly proved very trying for me. I had resolved to use this opportunity to develop more spiritually, but this too was failing me. My daily schedule consisted of getting children to school, waiting an hour, helping out with math class, waiting two hours, then helping out with lunch duty, waiting again, then chauffeuring the children to some after-school activity or home.

During these waiting periods, I had been trying spiritual activities. I tried meditating in my car, but I didn't feel enough inspiration and couldn't will myself to continue this. I practiced

japa, the Indian technique of constantly repeating God's name. I became very good at silently saying "God" while also feeling upset that I didn't feel joy! Having been inspired by Frank Laubach's and Brother Lawrence's *Practicing the Presence of God* methods, I tried thinking about God and talking with God while sitting at parks and taking walks. Some fleeting inspirations came; they weren't enough, and I quit trying.

I finally gave up that first school year and just sank into reading the newspaper, Internet surfing, and random household chores. At the start of the next school year, I had dropped my children off and was waiting for math class to start. Feeling quite despondent, I thought about getting coffee and reading the newspaper; instead, though, I felt, "No, I can't repeat this anymore." Instead, I got out of my car and told God, "Well, I don't know what to do, so I'll just take walks with you. They seemed to be the best activity I tried last year. It's all I know how to do." As soon as my feet touched the sidewalk, I felt this loving golden presence descend and heard very clearly a divine voice in my mind say:

*Love God! God wants your love,
God needs your love, Love God!*

Instantly, I realized I had been saying "God," thinking about God, talking to God, but I hadn't been loving God with feeling in my heart.

While exhilarated, I also felt somewhat foolish. How could I have missed the first commandment! Raised in Christianity, I certainly knew it. And my own spiritual family, the Ananda Communities for Self-Realization, reiterated it every Sunday.

Right then, I resolved to *practice loving God every day*. And since this revelation came while walking, I'd find the best way to

love God in a half-hour walk every morning right before math class! So for the next year, I experimented with different meditation, breathing, chanting, prayer, and energy techniques to love God while walking—all to optimize loving God during a 30-minute walk.

Several weeks after starting this exploration, I could feel a communion with God during every single walk. Like clockwork, after 10 to 20 minutes of walking, I could feel God’s joy well up inside and all around me. I refined for myself a specific set of techniques for these walks and called them *love breathing*, as they attempt to link loving God with every breath.

For a full year, I only practiced love breathing while walking. It hadn’t worked for me while sitting or standing. After a year, though, new inspirations that worked while sitting and standing came. So now a feeling of warm, loving communion with God is just a few breaths away whenever wanted. My spiritual focus today is to work on wanting God’s communion with every breath!

Paramhansa Yogananda states, “Everyone must find their own way to make love to God.” Hopefully, others will find the techniques described here useful in their spiritual search. Mostly, though, it’s hoped others will be inspired to practice loving God daily and to experiment and find the best method for them.

In God’s Joy,
Eric Munro



... open yourself to
His Love completely,
inviting it into all the
dusty corners of your heart,
and sweeping them clean.

—Nayaswami Kriyananda



First Things First

Many times, people seeking personal or spiritual growth will focus too much effort on improving themselves. The idea takes hold that they must fix a laundry list of their faults before they can experience any divine communion.

It's as if they are inside the "house" of their own being and trying to clean it up before they invite God inside. But God is "outside" their house banging on the doors and windows, asking to be let in. He doesn't care how dirty it is inside. He just wants to come in. If we let Him, He will help clean up the mess with us. This is *grace*—letting God into your heart, and He then changes you.

How do we open the door to our house and heart to God? It's actually quite simple. Practice the greatest commandment: "*Love God with all your heart ...*"

God is wildly in love with you. He can't resist any love you give Him, and He cries when you ignore Him. If you want God by your side, send Him a little love. He can't resist it. He's like a child with no self-control being offered a candy. One love offering from you and God will immediately come to your side.



*God weeps when we close Him
out of our hearts and homes.*



*Loving God lets Him in to help
clean the house of our Soul.*

God is infinite consciousness, infinite bliss. Love is the great connecting force. Anything you love will be drawn closer to you. The answer to: “why practice loving God?” is very simple. Practice so you will be drawn closer to infinite bliss. Spend more time practicing loving infinity, less time loving finiteness.

Practice loving God every day. Make it a routine part of your life. Daily dedicate some fixed amount of time where you only practice loving God with feeling in your heart. Spend 80% of your spiritual efforts on loving God and 20% on fixing yourself. If you do this, communion with the divine will become a daily joy, and grace will start cleaning your “inner house.”



The love of God is the solution to life.

—Paramhansa Yogananda





By feeling the love of God
and following the love of God
you will come to love everything
and everyone.

—Paramhansa Yogananda

Through selfless work,
love of God grows in the heart.

—Ramakrishna



Loving and Serving Others

One early reader of this book mentioned that the techniques described seemed selfish, as they only address inner activities to achieve divine blessings. This book's limited scope only suggests techniques to help one love God, certainly not to preclude the necessity of loving and serving others, as all the great scriptures implore. Having God's love in your heart makes it easier to love others. In fact, with divine love in your heart, it is impossible not to love others!

When my own heart has been troubled and I've tried to practice loving others, I know my attempts, while valiant, were correctly perceived as only being a facade, not genuine. Now before interacting with others, I feel it is my duty first to practice loving God so divine love can be more freely shared.



When we return God's love
our capacity to receive
His love expands.

—Nayaswami Kriyananda



Establishing a Practice

Loving God is the fastest, and only, path to God. Shouldn't we then practice loving God? Shouldn't it be a daily practice—rain or shine, depression or joy?

Many religions recommend spending devotional time with God each day, time where you just love God. Many techniques are recommended to help in this: prayer, meditation, contemplation, chanting, singing ... Love breathing is another technique that can be added or adapted to one's existing devotional practice. Or it can be used to establish a new "loving God" practice.

As God is infinite, there are an infinite number of unique ways to express our love to God. Learning how to love God in our own individual way can be a wondrous path of spiritual discovery. The more we sincerely love God, the closer we come to the heart of God's ecstasy.

When developing your own loving God practice, pray or tell God:

"God, help me find the best, most effective ways

to practice loving You in my daily life.”

Start off each morning by saying:

“Good morning, Lord, how can I love You today?”

Every day, experiment and try different methods. God loves it when you try. The very act of trying shows your love.

If you decide to use the love breathing techniques, make a commitment to practice sincerely every day. It doesn't take a long commitment. Spending just 10 minutes a day will put one firmly on a path of wondrous unfoldment. The techniques are designed to habitualize loving God to the rhythm of your breath. So as you practice, you will start automatically loving God throughout the day whenever you breathe!

It would be impossible to practice sincerely loving God for just 10 minutes a day for, say, an entire year. One's heart would start to open up, and the joy shining through would become so enticing that one would increase their practice time. One would also be inspired to take on other activities in addition to love breathing to help deepen the communion. Activities like loving others, serving others, meditation, etc.

However, instead of unfoldment, one could give up entirely and simply stop practicing. So a simple sincere 10-minute-a-day commitment can lead to a wondrous unfoldment, or it can be forgotten. Commit yourself to the practice of loving God, you will end up in joyful communion.



A spark of this divine love exists in
most hearts in the beginning
of life, but is usually lost,
because man does not
know how to cultivate it.

—Paramhansa Yogananda





Your breath is a sacred clock, my dear
—why not use it to keep time with God's
Name?

And if your feet are ever mobile
upon this ancient drum, the earth,
O do not let your precious movements come
to naught.

Let your steps dance silently to the rhythm
of the Beloved's Name!

—Hafiz



Basic Love Breathing Technique

Sit or stand straight with the chest slightly pushed out. With eyes open, breathe deeply without strain. On the in breath, inhale love and energy into your heart center. On the out breath, feel deep love for God going out from your spiritual eye center and silently chant “God.” The spiritual eye center is the point between your eyebrows (“thine eye be single”). Feel like you are sharing love directly with God on the out breath. You are loving God, God is loving you, you both are loving each other at the same moment, during exhalation.

Focus the greatest intensity of feeling love and devotion to the point where the exhalation is complete and you’ve just completed chanting “God.” This sets up a rhythm of intense “love moments” at the end of each breath. With practice, this can become a more natural part of everyday breathing. Many times during the day, when I’ve forgotten about loving God, I’ll find myself unconsciously love breathing and chanting “God.” Then I remember again. With this practice at a nor-

mal breathing rate, God and you can love each other about 12 times a minute!

Being able to generate a feeling of love in your heart at will is crucial for this practice. For some, when starting out, this is unfamiliar. It becomes quite natural, though, with a little practice. To start off, one can think of a loved one, feel love in your heart for this person, and intensify this feeling of love for them. Then stop thinking about the person but keep the feeling of love and redirect it to God.

A more physical method to energize the heart center is to put both hands over the chest. Then right at full inhalation, with a quick jolt, firmly press your hands into the chest for just a brief moment, then exhale. Do this several times, synchronized to the breath's full inhalation.



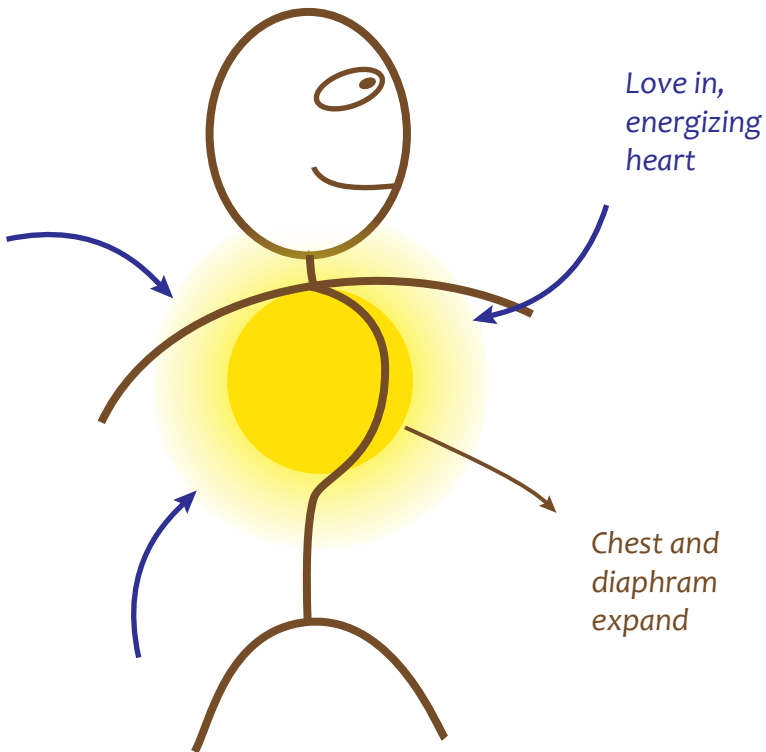
Always bear in mind
God's Name is
He Himself.

—Anandamayi Ma



LOVE BREATH

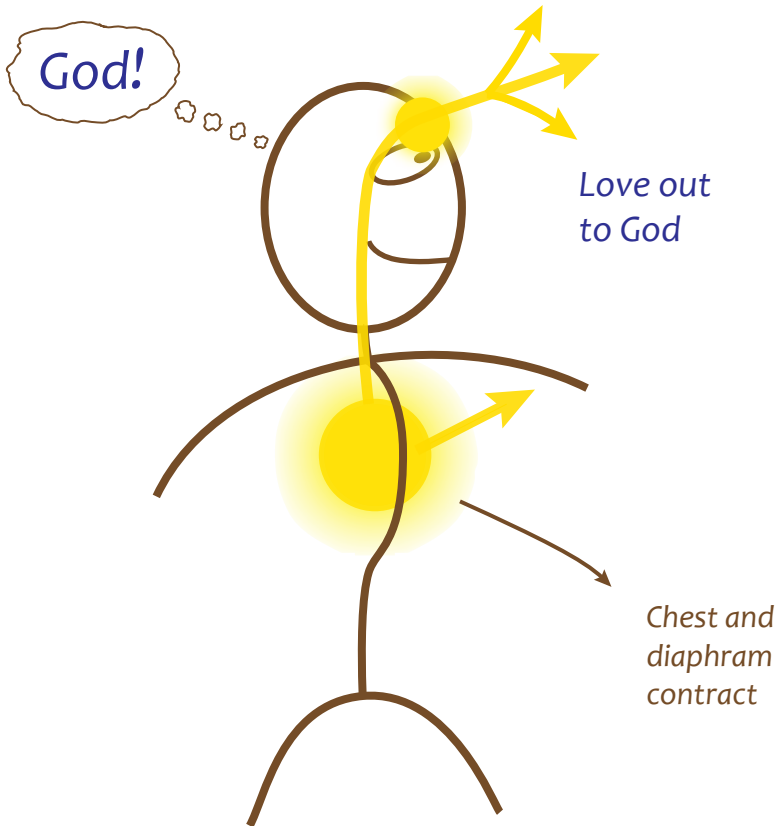
Inhale



Mind focuses on energizing heart

LOVE BREATH

Exhale



Mind focuses on loving God



...

Christ be with me.

Christ before me.

Christ after me.

Christ in me.

Christ under me.

Christ over me.

Christ on my right hand.

Christ on my left hand.

Christ on this side.

Christ on that side.

Christ at my back.

Christ in the head of everyone to whom I speak.
Christ in the mouth of every person who speaks to me.

Christ in the eye of every person who looks at me.
Christ in the ear of every person who hears me today.

—Saint Patrick



Focus Space for God

Have a focus space for where you feel God is and where you direct your love. Since God is infinite, He has localized Himself everywhere. Usually, I feel God inside me slightly offset to my right side and as a bubble around me.

It is very helpful to have a focal space for God rather than just trying to feel Him everywhere. When I've tried to feel God everywhere, it takes my complete focus, and I can only hold the feeling for a moment, whereas "confining" God to a fixed space is easier and allows me to more easily practice loving God throughout an entire day. It also creates a sense of personal intimacy between you and God.



No one can keep us from carrying God
wherever we go.

No one can rob His Name from our hearts
as we try to relinquish our fears and at last
stand victorious.

We do not have to leave Him in the mosque or
church alone at night.

We do not have to be jealous of tales of
saints, those intoxicated souls who can
make outrageous love with the Friend.

Our yearning eyes, our warm-needing bodies,
can all be drenched in contentment and
Light.

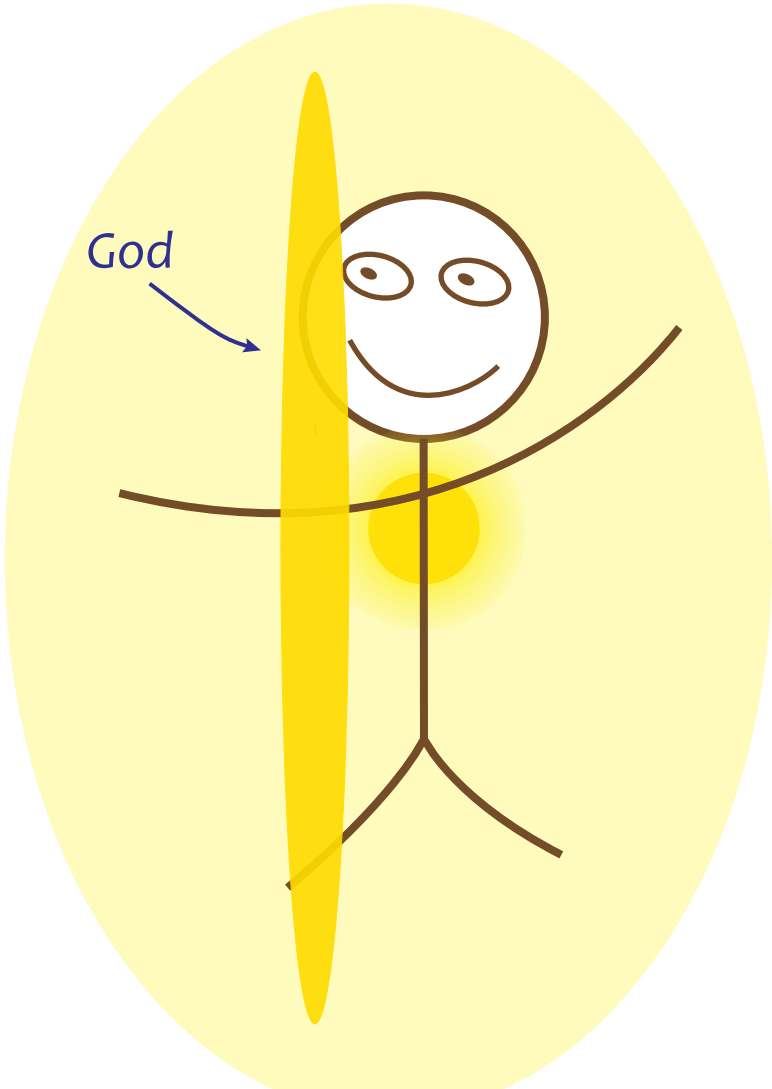
No one anywhere can keep us from carrying
the Beloved wherever we go.

No one can rob His precious Name from the
rhythm of my heart, steps and breath.

—Hafiz



God's Local Presence



Focus on God in His localized presence next to you. It develops intimacy. How do you carry God around with you, throughout the day?



God! God! God!

From the depths of slumber,
As I ascend the spiral stairways of wakefulness,
I will whisper:
God! God! God!

Thou art the food, and when I break my fast
Of nightly separation from Thee,
I will taste Thee, and mentally say:
God! God! God!

No matter where I go, the spotlight of my mind
Will every keep turning on Thee;
And in the battle din of activity, my silent war-cry will be:
God! God! God!

When boisterous storms of trials shriek,
And when worries howl at me,
I will drown their clamor, loudly chanting:
God! God! God!

When my mind weaves dreams
With threads of memories,
Then on the magic cloth will I emboss:
God! God! God!

Every night, in time of deepest sleep,
My peace dreams and calls, Joy! Joy! Joy!
And my joy comes singing evermore:
God! God! God!

In waking, eating, working, dreaming, sleeping,
Serving, meditating, chanting, divinely loving,
My soul will constantly hum, unheard by any:
God! God! God!

—Paramhansa Yogananda



Chanting God

Silently chanting “God” just on the out breath helps make love breathing a habit. When I tried chanting “God” on both the in and out breaths, it was too distracting. My mind had to focus so much on saying “God” that I didn’t have enough focus left to love God as well.

Also, the word “God” has worked best for me. It’s a simple one-syllable, three-letter word. It doesn’t take too much focus to inwardly chant it; this leaves more focus for just loving. Sometimes though, for variety, I use other words, such as “Master,” “Christ,” etc.

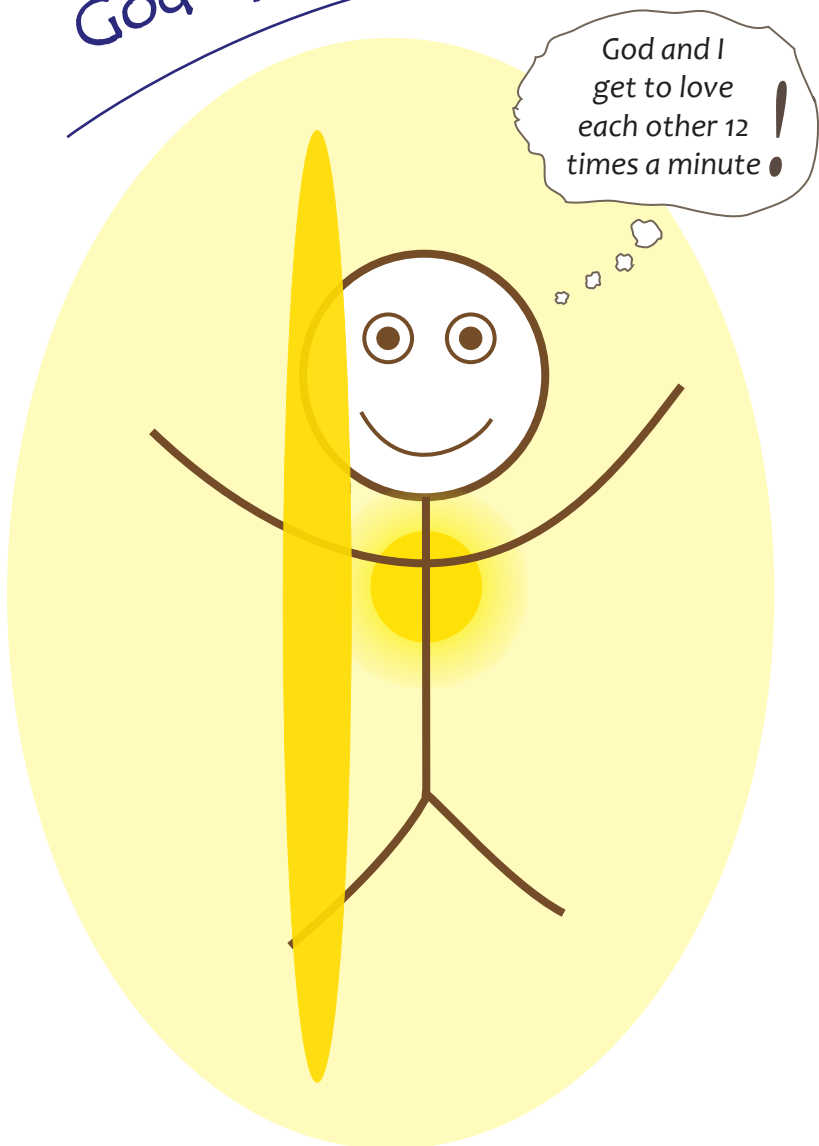


Silent japa (mantra repetition)
should be engaged in at all times.
One must not waste breath uselessly;
whenever one has nothing special to do,
one should silently practice japa
in rhythm with one's breathing.
In fact, this exercise should go on
continually until doing japa has become
as natural as breathing.

—Anandamayi Ma



Love Breathing with God by Your Side



People breathe about 12 times a minute.



This whole world
is a song God sings
just to be close to us.

Sitting Exercise

While sitting, practice love breathing for five minutes or more. Pick a location to sit where you can look around: porch, patio, deck, backyard, park, inside a mall, parked car, living room, etc. Keep your mind focused on loving God with each breath; try not to think about anything else. Your mind and ego will resist with random thoughts distracting you. Let your eyes roam around and look at things. This helps calm your mind so it doesn't go off on random thought trains and allows you to concentrate your thoughts on just loving God. As you get more deeply into loving God, start looking around less and less. Once you can go deeply, it is best to just look at one point. Looking up about 30 degrees with your eyes, while keeping your head level.



Before I fell asleep last night
I laid awake and wondered:
What did I achieve this day
Just roaming around calling His name?
So I brought before my mind's eye all
 who I had been kind to,
 And it turned out to be
 All things that I had seen.
I'd call that a productive day!

—Mirabai



Coaxing the Mind toward God

It is difficult to take your mind from a state of daily activity and force it to immediately become still and just love God.

Try these experiments for five minutes each:

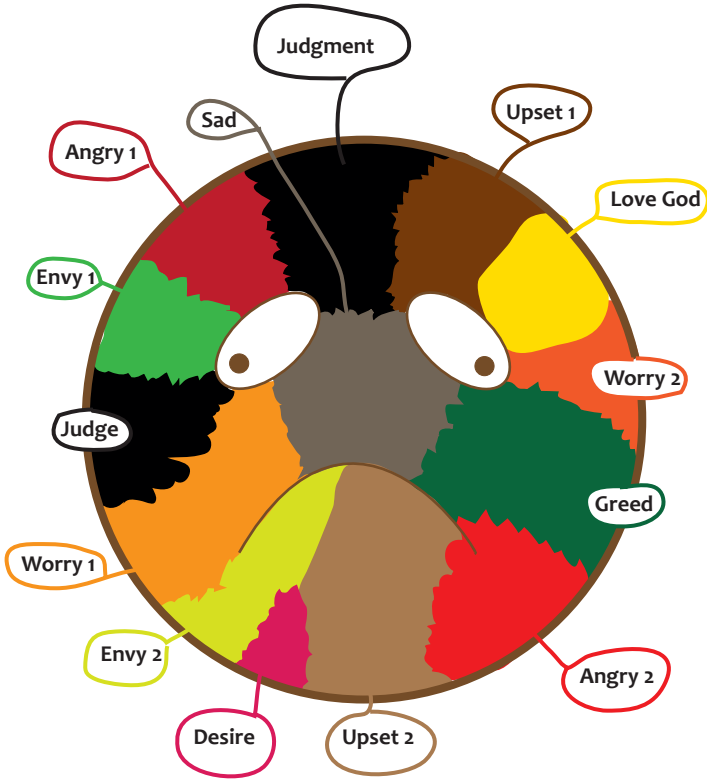
1. When in daily active mind-set, sit down straight, completely still, head level, look up at a fixed point, and practice love breathing. Keep completely still, looking at the same point the entire five minutes.
2. Sit down, back straight, let your gaze roam, let your body rock slightly, and practice love breathing. Keep your gaze roaming the entire five minutes.
3. Sit down, back straight, initially let your eyes roam while practicing love breathing. Rock slightly at the beginning if desired. Then as you go more deeply into loving God, reduce the amount of your gaze roaming so that by the end of the

five minutes, you are completely still, looking up at a fixed point.

My experience in doing these three experiments include the following:

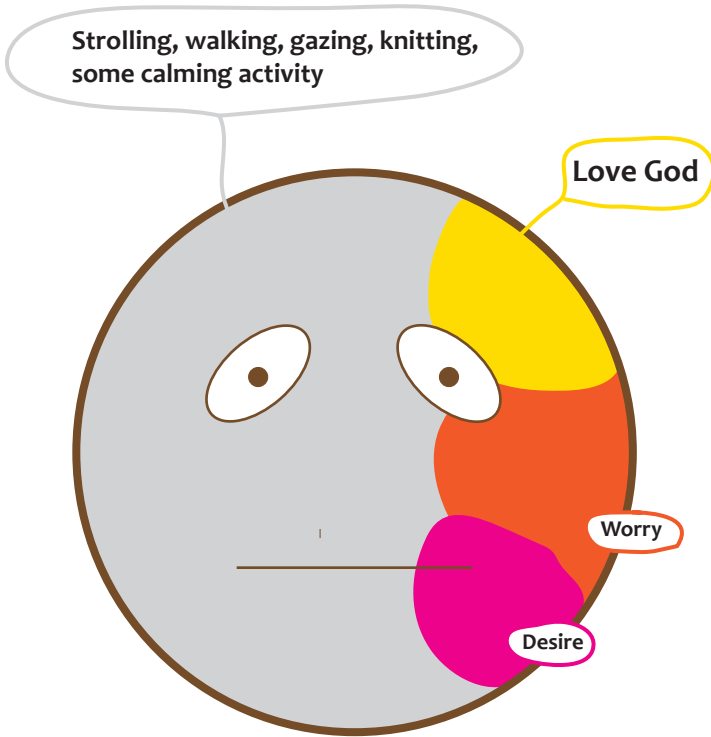
1. My mind and body ferociously resist this. It takes a huge amount of willpower to do this. When I first started my daily loving God practice, I tried doing it this way. But it was too hard, so I gave up, concluding that love breathing doesn't work while sitting. It wasn't until a year later that I tried again while sitting and found it does work if done slightly differently.
2. Here, the initial gazing activity occupies or placates the mind, making it easier to resist random thoughts. So initially I feel the communion with God growing. However, after a while, the random gazing proves to be a distraction from loving God. So if I keep gazing around, I find my mind being taken away on "random thought trains," and I forget about loving God.
3. As in number 2, I feel the communion with God grow. As the communion grows it is easier to be more still and focus on loving God more and more deeply. As long as I keep up the focus on loving God and I slowly reduce the amount of gazing activity to slightly lead my inner stillness level, I find, in a short few minutes, I'm in a wonderful, loving communion with God.

It still amazes me that I initially concluded that practicing loving God was too difficult when sitting. All it took to make it work was to gently coax the mind and body to greater stillness, rather than trying to force it all at once into instant stillness.



*Good luck quieting this mind down
instantaneously!*

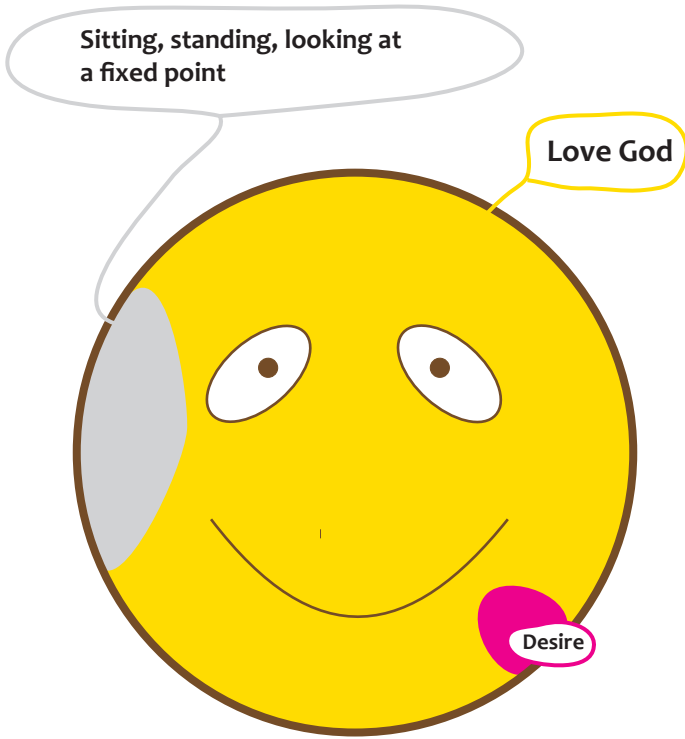
*It's extremely difficult to force a
restless mind to start loving God.*



Rather than force your mind to stillness, keep it busy in an outward activity that occupies your mind but doesn't take too much conscious thought. This helps prevent it from going off on random thought trains.



As the heart and mind still, reduce the amount of outward activity. This frees extra mind capacity to focus more on loving God.



When still enough, ceasing outward activity can help lead into a deep loving communion/ meditation.



Love is a skill, a precious skill that can be learned. There are many other skills that are useful, even necessary, but in the end, nothing less than learning to love will satisfy us. ... Love grows by practice; there is no other way.

—Eknath Easwaran



The Sweet Spot

There is a sweet spot between total stillness and total activity that allows your mind to best focus on loving God. You want your conscious thoughts, right from the beginning of a dedicated loving God exercise, to be entirely on loving God. But the mind will rebel. So some activity at first helps keep the mind busy subconsciously so your conscious mind can more easily focus on loving God.

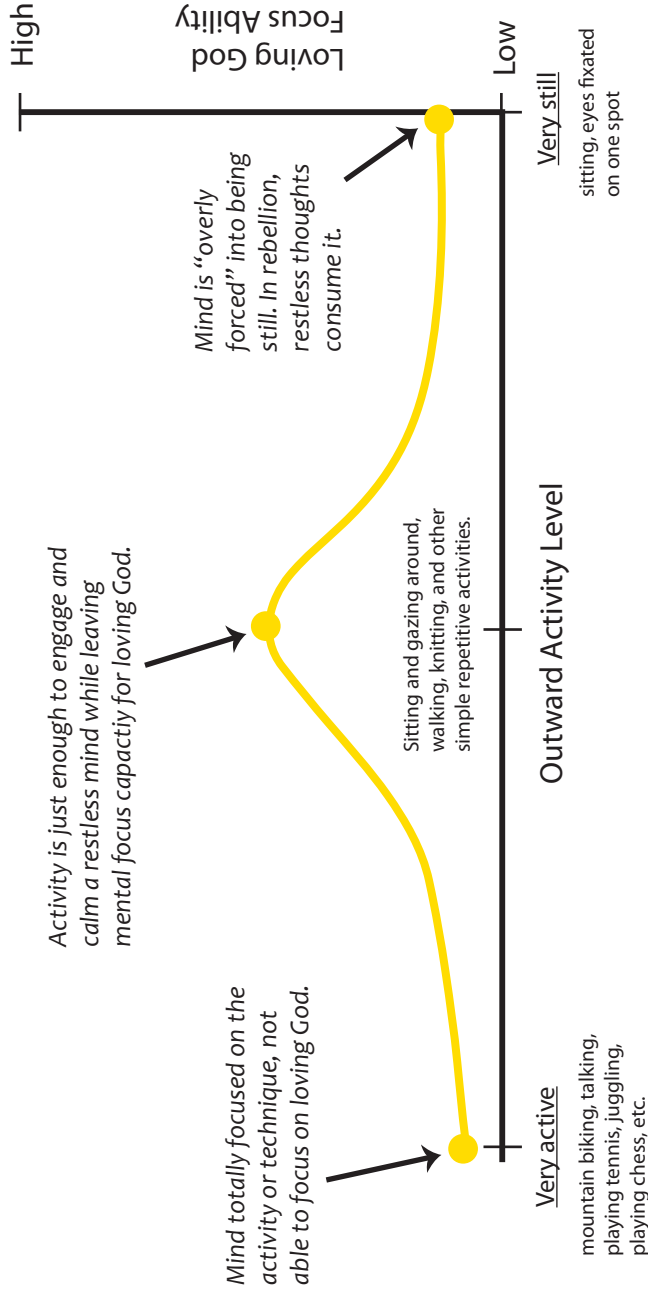
A restless mind wants to dart about and think about many things; it is easily caught up in “random thought trains” that constantly crisscross your consciousness. Activities that require unconscious mental processing use up some of one’s mental capacity. This makes it less likely that your mind will jump on a random thought train. It helps keep one’s conscious focus on just loving God.

Some good activities for calming the mind are gazing around, walking, knitting, doodling, people watching, etc. These activities take a lot of mental processing power but don’t require much conscious thought. So your conscious focus can be on loving God.

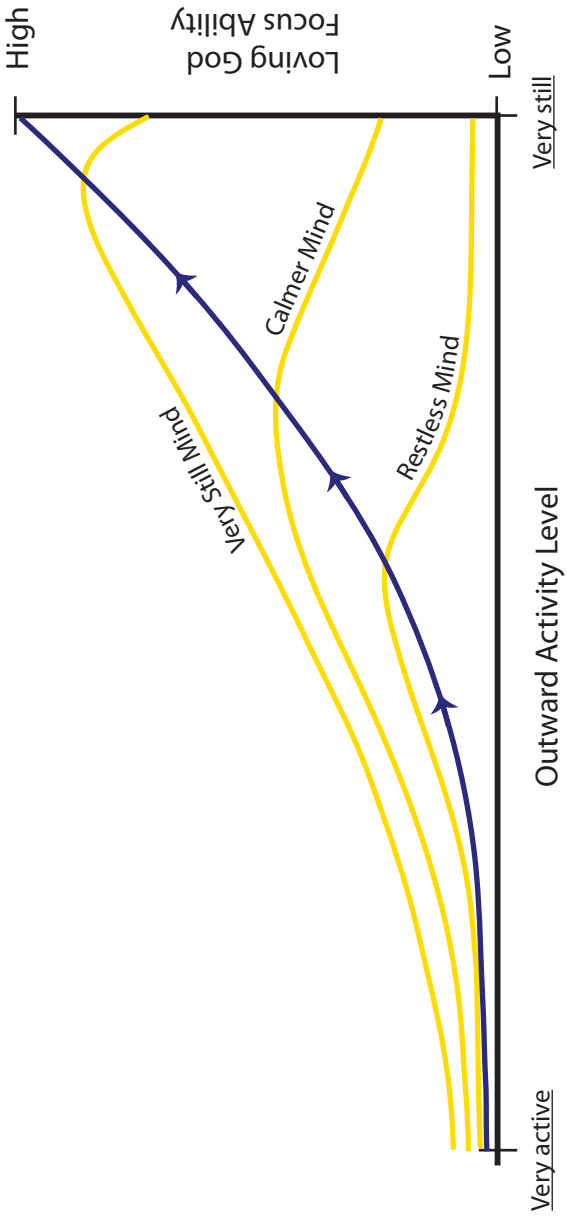
As you become calmer, the sweet spot will move toward less outward activity and more stillness. You become more in communion with God, so it is less likely you will “hop on a random thought train” that would break the communion.

For a dedicated loving God exercise, you want to keep yourself in a sweet spot as you go deeper; this coaxes your mind into greater communion. You reduce the amount of external activity as you go deeper. How fast you reduce your activity is somewhat of an art. One can develop a good intuition for it by experimenting in different situations: how much to push one’s mind to greater focus and stillness without pushing so hard that your ego rebels, thwarting your efforts.

For a given state of restlessness, there is an optimal outward activity level that helps one practice loving God.



As the mind stills, the optimal activity level also stills.



With sincere, unconditional practice, going from restless activity to joyful stillness can take just a few minutes.



God expects but one thing of you,
that you should come out of yourself ...
and let God be God in you.

—Meister Eckhart





God yearns for our love ... what is God longing for? Our love. Our attention. He has made it very difficult for Himself, because He gave man free will to seek Him or reject Him. He says, "I am pursuing every heart, waiting for My children to spurn My creation and turn toward Me." ... unless we choose to go to Him willingly He cannot free us or Himself from suffering.

—Paramhansa Yogananda



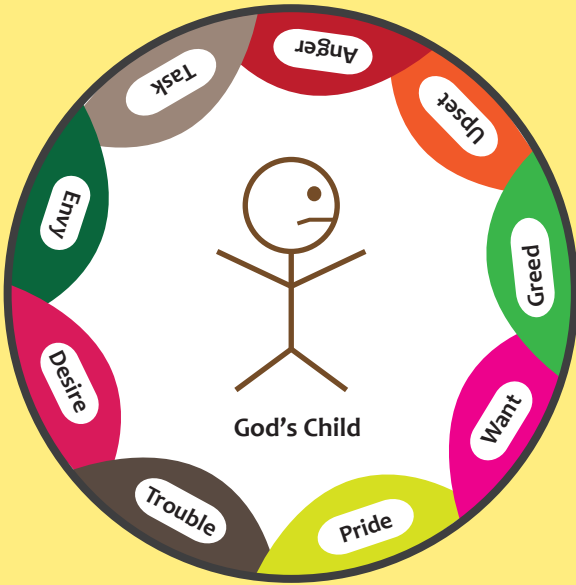
Dedicating Time

Dedicate times each day to only loving God. With sincere practice, these dedicated times can lead to intense, thrilling feelings of loving communion with God. It is good to insert several short dedicated practice times into your daily routine. Five minutes each time is enough.

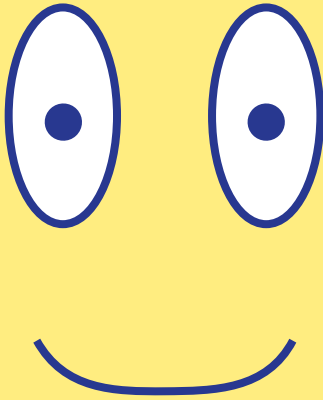
For myself, I take a daily 30-minute devotional walk while practicing a variation of love breathing. Also, when I drive somewhere, before getting out of the car, I'll sit for five minutes and practice love breathing.

The longer devotional walk offers a more intense communion, while the short interspersed practices help keep a communion alive throughout the day.

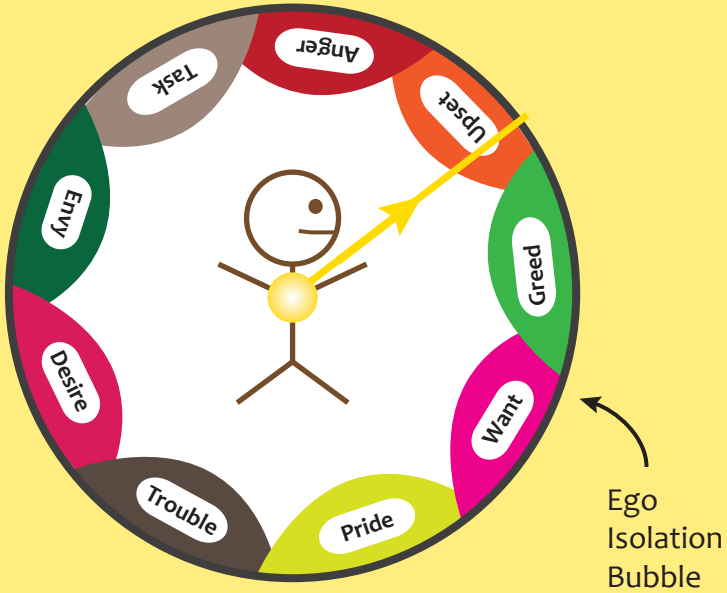
Indeed, these loving God practices, even the five-minute ones, are much more important than any errand or task being done. Loving God is our most important task in life—make time for it.



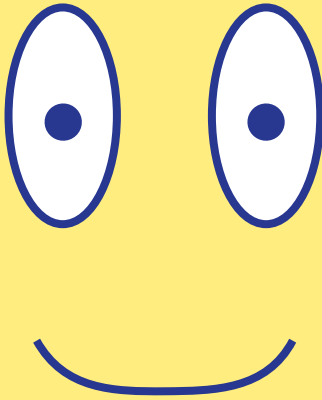
God weeps for our love.



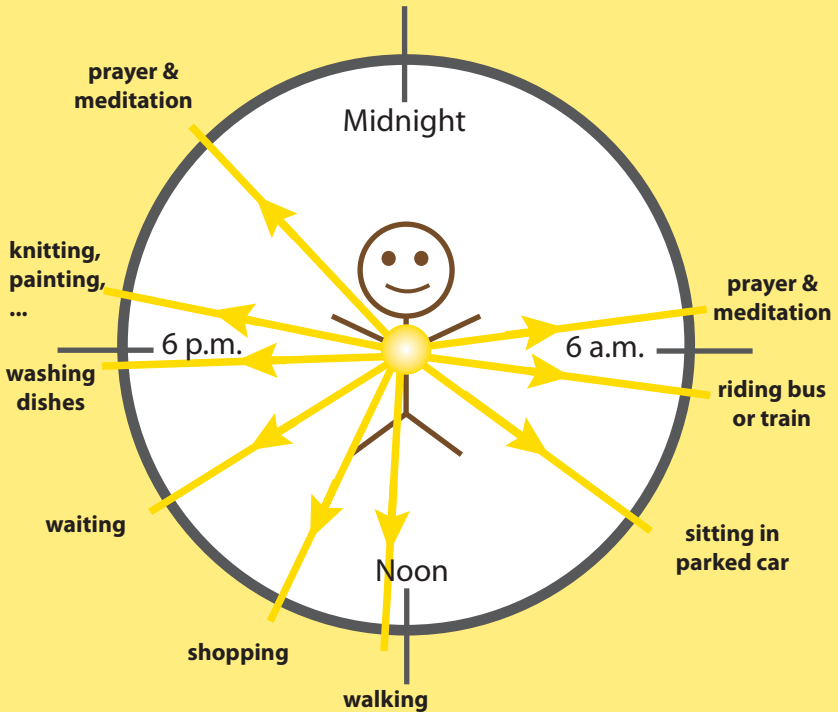
My child sent me one love breath today. She's on her way back!



For any love we send Him,
God rejoices ecstatically.



She visits Me a few times every day!



Many opportunities exist for 5-minute or longer love breathing exercises. Interspersing a few throughout the day becomes heart melting.

Good Activities for Love Breathing

Activities that lend themselves well to love breathing are activities that require unconscious thought and whose activity level can be modulated down as needed.

Shopping:

I've found by walking slowly through shopping aisles while love breathing, I can keep a communion going. It doesn't slow down the shopping either, since when in this communion, I usually find what's needed more readily and calmly.

Standing waiting in line:

This is a great time to practice love breathing. I usually gaze at the people around me and feel love for them and God on every out breath.

Sitting in a park:

Here, again, it is nice to gaze at people while love breathing, also feeling love for them. If no people are around, gaze at the scenery first and then end up looking up (with head level) into the blue sky.

Driving:

Love breathing while driving works. But I find that the depth of the communion is limited as I need to keep focusing on the driving and not go too deep and lose the ability to drive safely.

At church:

Sitting and listening to a sermon is a great time for love breathing. The mind can easily listen attentively while love breathing at the same time. This greatly increases the inspiration felt and understanding of the sermon's message.

Strolling:

Slowly pace outside, at a mall, in an airport, etc. Your body movement and gazing around provide the mental calming needed. I find as I go deeper while pacing, I'll pace slower and gaze around less. Sometimes I'll end up just standing still, looking slightly up at a fixed space.

In a parked car:

As mentioned, adding a short five-minute loving God practice every time you get in or before you get out of the car is a great way to integrate this into your life. Driving around vibrates your body, releasing energy. After stopping the car, if you spend a few minutes love breathing, this energy will be directed upward. So love breathing after driving can be especially effective. Love is like helium, activating your heart and causing the energies in your body to naturally rise.

As a variation, I've practiced love breathing in the car

while listening to one spiritual song. When doing this, I don't gaze around, as the song is enough to calm the mind. I find one song played either once or twice is ideal. When I've tried two different songs in succession, it proved more distracting than helpful.

Many times, I need to wait for children for up to an hour or more while they are at some practice or event. This is a great time to practice love breathing, followed by meditation. I've had some of my best meditations in my car while waiting for children.

In a train or airplane:

Many people have commented or experienced that on long train or airplane rides, their lower chakras get activated due to the vibration in the seat. If you practice love breathing during these times, the extra energy in these lower chakras naturally flows up through the heart to the head. This makes it easier to achieve a higher spiritual communion. So riding a train or airplane can actually be a great time for spiritual practice!

Sewing:

Personally, I don't sew but can now understand why Paramhansa Yogananda mentioned that sewing was a good activity to do while loving God.

Doing dishes:

This can take a little more focus since dish washing requires varied activity. The varied activity makes it harder to go as



deep. But one can stop and stand motionless for a moment, love God, and then continue washing. Standing motionless every now and then during an activity can help keep a communion going.

Extended park exercise:

A wonderful way to spend several hours at a park is to alternate between love breathing and meditation. Go to a park where you can find a bench suitable for meditation. Practice love breathing while walking around a little, then practice sitting. After you go deep, start meditating. Then if you lose focus in meditation, just open your eyes again, gaze around, and practice love breathing. If desired, stroll around again. By alternating this way between strolling, love breathing, sitting, and meditation, you can keep a deep inner connection going for a long time.

In morning or evening meditations, I usually need to exert a fair amount of willpower to stay focused. However when practicing in a park, I don't exert as much. Instead, I just allow myself to stop meditating and then start gazing around while love breathing. I find this alternation allows me to go much deeper than when I just try to will myself through a long meditation.



Devotional Walking

Walking while love breathing has a special effect. Walking naturally activates the energy of the spine and helps one's energy rise. Walking is the main activity where I practice loving God. For the first year of my exploration, it was the only method used. I had decided to optimize loving God in a 30-minute walk. So the technique I use is quite specific and thus not necessarily the best practice for others, as each person has their own unique "disposition," as His Holiness the Dalai Lama refers to it.

Here's a simple summary of devotional walking. It does show that one can get quite detailed if one wants to in developing a personal practice.

- * Stand straight with chest puffed out.
- * Head is level, and eyes look up at 30 degrees.
- * Smile a little—force one if necessary.
- * Walk in a straight line back and forth at least 200 yards long.
- * Practice love breathing, chanting "God" on the exhale.
- * For approximately the first 10 minutes, I carry God

around beside me.

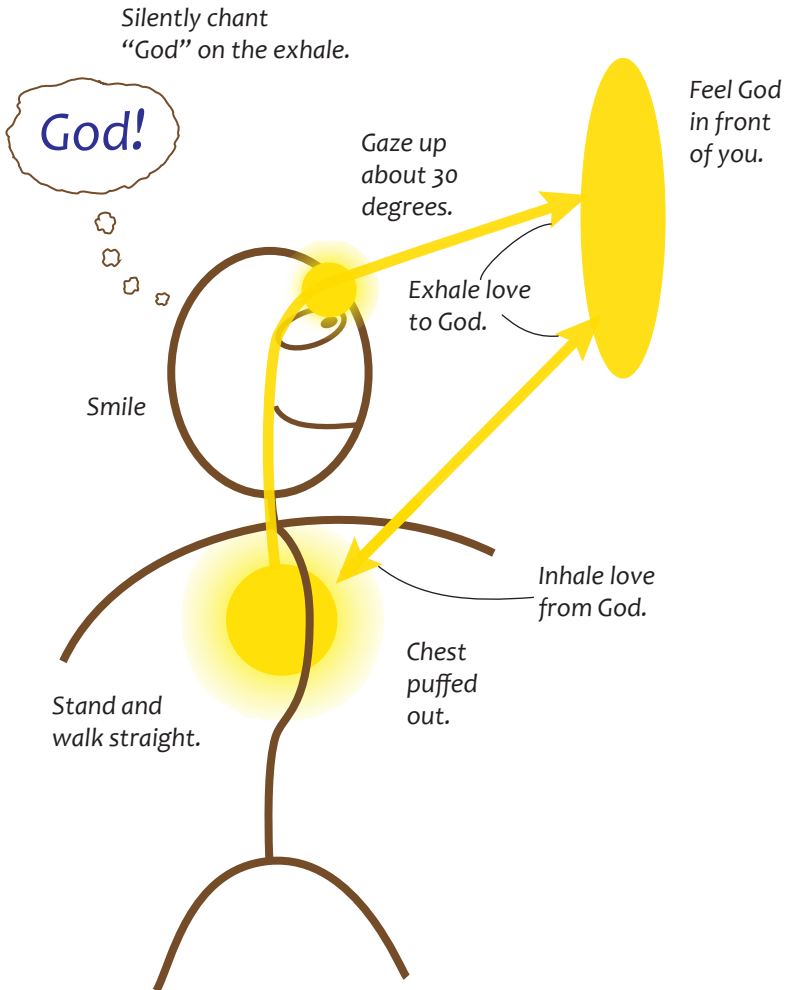
- * For the rest of the time, I put God in front of me, a few feet up where I'm gazing. And I modify the love breathing. On the inhale, I feel God sending/pushing love into my heart. On the exhale, I send the love from my spiritual eye center and heart center to God. So God and I are breathing love back and forth to each other.
- * In addition to love, I also practice breathing delight back and forth. On the exhale, I delight in God. On the inhale, God delights in me. Also do this with a feeling of longing.

This walking technique is different from strolling. When strolling, I keep God beside me the whole time, and we love each other on the exhale. During walking, God is in front of me, my gaze is fixed, and we are breathing love back and forth to each other. The devotional walking takes more focus. I estimate that for only one in five breaths do I keep a total focus on loving God. But this is enough to enter a deep communion.

Others:

There are countless activities that lend themselves to a loving God practice. Usually, the more repetitive and boring, the better!

Devotional Walking



In this variation of love breathing, one breathes out love from the spiritual eye and heart. Then God breathes love into your heart. Feel Him filling and expanding your heart with love, not you pulling it in.



When you realize
How perfect everything is
You will tilt your head back
And laugh at the sky!

—the Buddha



Start-up Exercises

Here's a quick fun exercise that's helpful to do when starting. With your arms down and palms facing forward, tilt your head back and chest up as far as you can. You'll then be looking straight up. Breathe deeply into your chest, expanding it. Say, "God! God! God! Drown me in your love!" Then straighten your head and start love breathing. Use any phrase that speaks to your own heart.

Another start-up exercise is to put your right hand over your heart center (not the physical heart, but in the middle of the lung region). Have your hand lightly touch your body. Keep your right elbow touching your side for stability. Start love breathing. On the out breath, move your hand out by only moving the wrist. Feel love going out to God. On the inhale, bring your hand back to your heart. Feel your hand putting God's love into your heart. Sometimes I'll do this for a minute right before a meditation to "activate" the heart.



Daily Bookends

*A sweet way to start and end the day
is to lie face-up in bed with your hand
over your heart and practice
love breathing to God.*



When Bliss comes,
all else goes.

—Paramhansa Yogananda





People do not know what the
Name of God can do.

Those who repeat it constantly
alone know its power.

It can purify our mind completely ...

The Name can take us to
the summit of spiritual experience.

—Swami Ramdas



Warm-up Time

The Indian saint Sri Anandamayi Ma commented that repeating God's name is like pouring hot water down a snake pit. All the snakes come writhing to the surface when you do this.

This happens when starting a love breathing exercise. At first, the ego puts up a lot of resistance, and it can take awhile for the ego "snakes" to clear out and leave you calm enough to enjoy the exercise. This initial warm-up time will vary. I've found that for a devotional walk, it takes 10 to 15 minutes to work through it. For just sitting on a bench or in a car, it takes less than five minutes.

Getting over this warm-up "snake pit" hurdle is probably one of the biggest obstacles to a successful loving God practice. Once you realize and experience getting over the hurdle a few times, one understands it is just part of the process.

***Which brand would
you want to inhale?***



***Instead of taking a cigarette break,
take a love breathing break.***

Slowing the Breath

When love breathing, the breath will naturally slow down. This is OK and helpful. When sitting or standing and love breathing, I'll breathe through the nose and purposely slow the exhale while silently chanting "God." This helps go quicker and deeper into communion. Don't leave yourself short of breath, though. When walking, I don't purposely slow down the breath since extra air is physically required, and I'll usually breathe through the mouth.

Having been an occasional smoker of regular cigarettes, I've been fascinated by the similarity and contrast between smoking and love breathing! Both are motivated by a desire to feel better. Both slow down the breath and focus attention on the breath entering and leaving the lung/heart area. Both affect and calm the mind. However, cigarettes sap your vitality and increase depression, whereas love breathing increases your vitality and joy.



If the heart wanders or is distracted, bring it back to the point quite gently and replace it tenderly in its Master's presence. And even if you did nothing during the whole of your hour but bring your heart back and place it again in Our Lord's presence, though it went away every time you brought it back, your hour would be very well employed.

—Saint Francis de Sales



Compartmentalization

It is good to tell your mind when starting a loving God exercise how long it will be for, whether it's a 30-minute walk or a 5-minute sit. This allows your ego to relax somewhat. A 5- to 30-minute exercise is something your ego might not get too upset with. However, if you tell yourself, "I'm going to love God intensely all day," your ego might rebel and make it quite difficult for you.

Also, at the beginning of an exercise, I tell myself that for the next X minutes, my only purpose in life is to love God. Then I try to pretend that only God and I exist for that time period. Many times, after the 5 or 30 minutes is up, you'll find you want to continue going longer.

Another aspect of compartmentalization is that during the exercise time, forget everything else in your life. Leave all your worries in a separate compartment that you'll pick up again after you're done. Tell your mind, "OK, for the next 30 minutes, it's just loving God. I'll start worrying again after this 30 minutes about the kids, job, etc."

This can also be very helpful if you are in a state of upset

when starting. Once during an upsetting situation with my spouse, I was in a downtown city area and left her at an event and needed to pick her up after 90 minutes. While waiting, I walked the city streets, practicing love breathing. To my great surprise and joy, it still worked, even though I was in a noisy city and upset. It did, though, take a full half hour to get into the joyful space. Unfortunately, the upset didn't magically evaporate; instead, it was an interesting feeling of being joyful while, at the same time, having an upset "compartment" inside me.

Of course, we want to love God all the time or "live in the presence of God," as Nayaswami Kriyananda states it. It is helpful, though, to have several short "compartmentalized" practice sessions interspersed throughout the day. It greatly helps in keeping a connection with God during other times.



Endurance is one of the most difficult disciplines, but it is the one who endures that the final victory comes.

—the Buddha





*When you focus on loving God,
He sends a helping hand.*

30-Second Interval Training

When love breathing, it can be easy to get into a joyful space and then just stay there and not go higher or deeper. To help shake oneself off one of these “joy plateaus,” one can make a short intense effort to love God with complete focus. Tell yourself, “For the next 30 seconds, I am going to love God with all the intensity I can muster.” By limiting it to 30 seconds, your ego won’t rebel too much against this extra effort. Usually, however, after the 30-second interval, you will be in a more joyful state and will want to continue the extra effort. Extra effort doesn’t mean straining. Your muscles remain relaxed while your heart, mind, and breath focus entirely on God.



Just these two words He spoke
Changed my life

“Enjoy Me.”

What a burden I thought I was to carry—
A crucifix, as did He.

Love once said to me “I know a song,
Would you like to hear it?”

And laughter came from every brick in the
street
And from every pore in the sky.

After a night of prayer, He
Changed my life when
He sang
“Enjoy Me.”

—Saint Teresa of Avila



Mindful Delight

Many activities require so much outward focus that love breathing becomes difficult or impossible. Examples include skiing, mountain biking, any competitive sports, talking, etc.

For these intense concentration activities, it is fun to practice God working through you in a spirit of mindful delight. For example, when mountain biking, I'll feel God inside me the same as when love breathing, but I'll feel that God and I are sharing this body and enjoying the ride with complete outward focus and delight. This is similar to the Buddhist practice of mindfulness, but adding God as a partner in the activity.

Just for fun, you can modulate how much God versus how much you are in the body. One commonly recommended practice is to feel that God is controlling your body 100 percent. He is doing everything. You can play with this percentage: what does it feel like for God to be doing only 10 percent, 50 percent, 80 percent? Personally, I find the easiest and most sustainable practice is to feel that God and I are 50-50 partners sharing this body. It is easier for me to “carry

God around with me” all day with this shared partnership feeling.

When doing a normally unpleasant task, it can be fun to go into 100 percent mindful delight mode, letting God take over 100 percent of your body. I tell God, “Well, since You enjoy experiencing life through me, this bathroom washing chore is for You!”

Interestingly, the most boring and repetitive activities can generate the most inner joy and bliss. The most outward-attention-needing activities can be enjoyable and delightful, but they’re usually not intensely blissful.

For activities that fall in the middle, you can oscillate between practicing love breathing and practicing mindful delight with God. With enough focus, one can do both at the same time. I enjoy this but usually can’t hold it for very long.



... there is a gold mine in you,
when you find it
the wonderment of the earth's gifts
you will lay aside as naturally
as does a child a doll.

—Rumi





How long can the moth flirt
Near the mouth of the flame before their lips
touch
And the moth's soul
Becomes like a sun.

...

How long do you think
You can just flirt with Him before you
Dissolve in ecstasy?

...

—Meister Eckhart



Pretend Fantasy?

When practicing love breathing, mindful delight, or any other form of practicing the presence of God, the following thoughts can arise:

Is this just a fantasy? Am I deluding myself in thinking this is real? Am I going insane? Is this just like the mentally challenged people you see talking to themselves on the streets?

My own personal answer is that since this practice regularly results in a joy more blissful than anything else I've experienced, with no bad side effects, it must be real—more real than anything else. It provides joyful moments more thrilling than any career success, money acquisition, or sexual encounter.



Birds initially had no desire to fly,
what really happened was this:
God once sat close to them playing music.
When He left they missed Him so much
their great longing sprouted wings,
needing to search the sky.
... nothing evolves us like love.

—Hafiz



Overcoming Spiritual Frustration

God can be a big tease in His efforts to motivate us onward. He will give us divine experiences beyond our current state of awareness to show us what joy awaits if we keep moving closer to Him.

While these divine experiences inspire, they can also be the source of much frustration. Many times, while on a devotional walk, I'd be frustrated that I wasn't feeling as blissful as on some previous walk. For a long time, my technique to combat this frustration was just to redouble my efforts to focus only on loving God unconditionally. This worked OK. But a much better method, now employed, is to love God with gratitude for whatever love and joy I have felt in life.

Loving God with gratitude brings extra sweetness into the practice. It also makes it much easier and faster to transition from a state of distraction or frustration into a state of sweet, loving communion.

God is ecstatic and deeply grateful for any love we give Him, no matter how little or short. Likewise, we should be

deeply grateful to God for any love and joy we have felt.

Try a comparison:

Practice love breathing with your mind also focused on how much joy you want and expect to receive from God. Then practice love breathing with gratitude for any love or joy you've ever felt.

Which works better?



Even
After
All this time
The sun never says to the earth,
“You owe me.”
Look
What happens
With a love like that—

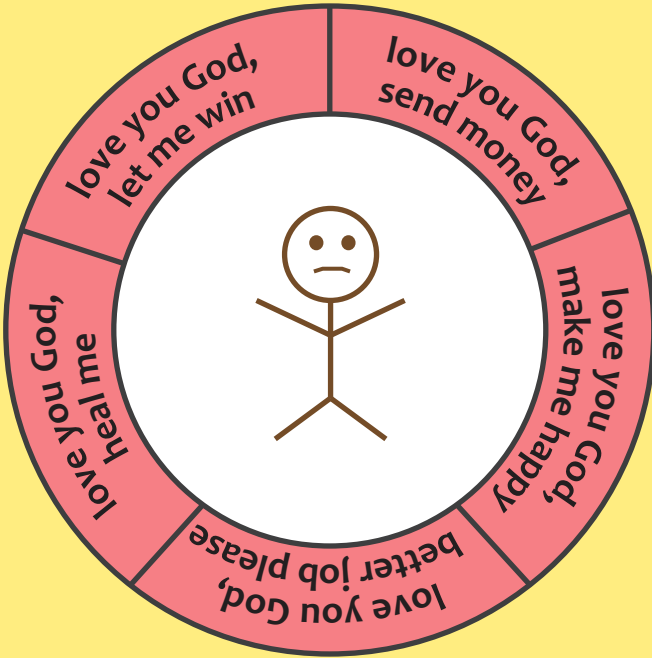
It lights the whole
World.

—Hafiz





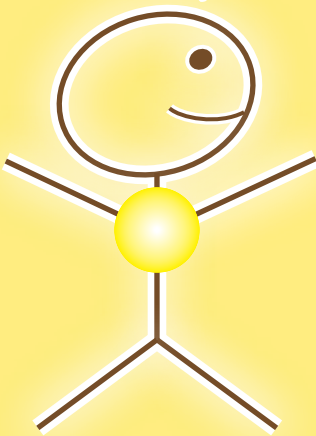
She only loves Me for My gifts.



Loving God Conditionally



My
child's
come
home



God, thank You
for Your love.
Anything You
want, this life is
Yours.

Loving God Unconditionally



Be still, and know that I am God
The Lord of hosts is with us.
—Psalm 46

Meditation

For 16 years, I'd practiced meditation before starting a daily loving God practice. As soon as I started love breathing, my meditations became easier and much deeper. I thought, "How could I have missed this 'loving God' thing for the past 16 years. How incredibly dense! It's so simple, and it works so well!"

And as an experiment once, for a few days, I stopped meditating and only practiced love breathing. While I could still feel joy while love breathing, it was noticeably diminished.

You could practice love breathing sitting still with your eyes closed as a type of meditation. However, there are much better meditation practices. A simple one practiced at my church is called Hong-Sau which translates roughly to "I am one with the Spirit." While it is better to learn in person, here is a simplified description.

Sit up straight, chest puffed out a little, eyes closed. Picture golden energy that is God's love at the base of your spine.

When inhaling, bring this golden energy in a wave of love up your spine to your forehead. On the exhale, let the energy wave fall back down to the base of your spine. Silently chant “Hong” on the inhale and “Sau” (pronounced “saw”) on the exhale. You could also try chanting “God” or “Christ” or another saint’s name. Feel that God is scrubbing and cleaning out your insides with this wave of love. You can use beads to count the times you do this. Beads, I found, help calm the mind, as holding them requires unconscious mental effort. When in deep stillness, though, focusing on the energy flow or beads can become distracting and prevent you from going deeper. So it takes experience to know when to use these techniques to help calm oneself and then when to stop using them in order to go deeper into stillness.

Before I learned this one, I had tried many different meditation methods. All of them used similar elements, but the Hong-Sau put the elements together in a way that, for me, proved very practical and most effective. Contemplating why from a “spiritual engineering” perspective captivated me. Some of the common elements between different meditations are as follows:

Breath, or deep breathing.

Energy, feeling and moving energy in the chakras.

Sound, saying a mantra, prayer, or sound.

Mental focus, on what and how much does the mind need to focus.

One meditation I previously tried had you energize every major and minor chakra individually, starting at the heart and then going out in a spiral pattern to the crown chakra and then back in. This one, for me, required too much mental focus. You had to remember the spiral order of chakras. Whenever I entered into a slightly meditative state, I'd forget the order or which one I was on, get frustrated, and then lose the inspiration. Also, it did not incorporate sound, so my mind was too easily distracted.

Another one had you immediately focus your energy at the forehead chakra and try to see spiritual realms. Sometimes I'll do this today, but only after entering into stillness. The problem of doing this at the start was it proved too simple. There was not enough activity to prevent my mind from being distracted, so I could never regularly get to a state of stillness.

I also tried a beginning mindfulness technique where I just watched my thoughts. Without the extra elements of breath, sound, and energy, though, I found I just got lost in my thoughts and forgot about watching them.

It still amazes me how the simple combination of elements in the Hong-Sau technique and more advanced techniques I've learned at my church have benefited and inspired my practice for decades. While previous meditations tried, all had similar elements, yet I couldn't keep practicing them for more than a few months before giving up.

Love breathing is meant to be a devotional technique practiced with open eyes. Early in my exploration to find a way to love God, I tried practicing Hong-Sau while walking. This proved ineffective. It was too complicated. Walking takes a fair amount of brain capacity. Adding Hong-Sau with walking, meant my mind needed to almost totally focus on the technique. I couldn't focus on loving God. However, Hong-Sau while sitting still with eyes closed had just the right amount of mental activity without overdoing it, to make it an effective meditation technique.

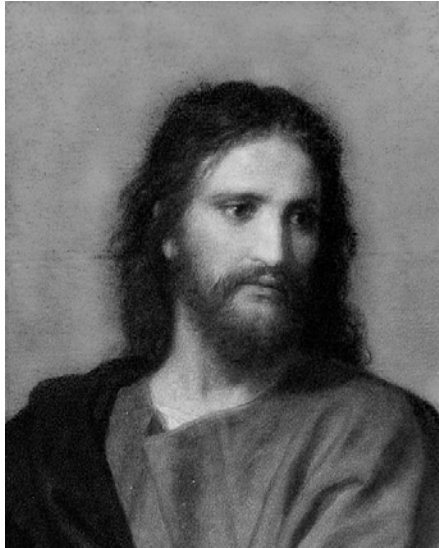
Another devotional technique I tried was feeling love go back and forth from just my heart, no forehead chakra involved. This also was ineffective as it amounted to trying to love God with only the energy of the heart. If you leave the energy just in your heart chakra, it becomes easier for egoic passions to pull the energy down into lower regions. However, by energizing the forehead and thus also "loving God with your mind," the energy becomes uplifted. This topic deserves a better detailed discussion. Unfortunately, this author does not have more intellectual insight into the "spiritual physiology" involved. However, by trying various combinations of loving God techniques, one can experience the differences themselves.

When teaching love breathing to meditators, I've noticed they instinctually close their eyes and practice it like a meditation. The problem with this is that it is not a very

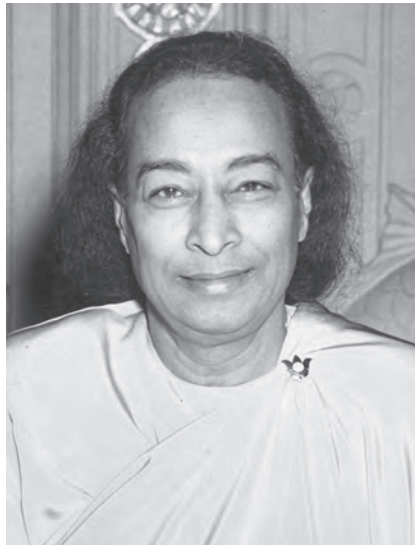
good meditation technique, so these people then conclude the technique is not effective. My deepest spiritual experiences have come from when I practiced love breathing for enough time to feel inspiration (with open eyes) and then closed my eyes and gone into a normal meditation. Roughly, the routine consists of practicing devotion, then practicing stillness, then practicing devotion in stillness.

Meditation needs devotion
and devotion needs meditation.

—Paramhansa Yogananda



Christ Jesus



Paramhansa Yogananda

Images of Saints

Images of saints are used by many to help invoke spiritual devotion. Looking at a picture or statue of a spiritual master who was deeply devoted to God can help one vibrationally awaken devotion in their own hearts for the divine.

Personally, I have found this very helpful while practicing love breathing while sitting in my living room. Some practices instruct one to look for long periods of time at a spiritual image. When I have experimented on what works best for myself, I find just glancing momentarily every now and then at the image works better. I will look at the image, feel devotion to the Master, and then look randomly around the room, all while love breathing. As I go deep, I will end up just looking up at a blank space on the wall or ceiling. Then I will alternate shutting my eyes in a loving meditation and opening them again if I start to lose focus.



There is no need for temples,
No need for complicated philosophies.
My brain and my heart are temples;
My philosophy is kindness.

—His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama



Heart Chakra, Mind Chakra

Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind ...

—Jesus Christ (Mark 12)

Previously, I had practiced the presence of God by taking walks and chanting “God,” while focusing energy on the point between the eyebrows. While this practice did raise my energy and spirits, I found that after a few minutes, my mind would get caught by random thoughts (or a random thought train), and I’d forget about God. My energy would then crash way down. After a while, I noticed I’d forgotten. Then using willpower, I’d raise my energy up again to the point between the eyebrows and start chanting “God” again. This cycle would frequently repeat. I found this practice too frustrating and couldn’t will myself to continue it.

Love breathing while walking, however, provided a very interesting contrast. Here, while focusing on the heart chakra and chanting “God,” the “mind” chakra would automatically become energized—even more energized than when I had only focused on the mind chakra.

Also, when my mind became distracted, my heart would start to feel pained. It would signal me figuratively, saying,

“Hey, this hurts. Please go back to loving God.” This would happen before my energy had crashed. Then, by focusing on the heart again, the energy would easily rise back up.

The heart notices much sooner than the mind if you are off course—which is another way of saying, “Listen to your heart, not just your head.”

Talking with God

God is infinite, so He's interested in every infinitesimal event in your life. Conversations with God are more inspiring if you love God and cultivate a warm feeling in your heart first. Switching back and forth between love breathing and talking with God works especially well when involved with daily chores.

One of the hardest tasks I find during a day is to stop thinking about God and to instead talk directly to God or just love Him without words. Thinking about God is calming, talking to Him is uplifting, but loving Him directly is thrilling.

Sometimes when I catch myself thinking about God or just thinking some random daily thoughts, I'll stop, rewind the thoughts, and just change them into a direct conversation with God. Here's a simple example: if you're thinking, "I need to go buy milk before going home," rewind and rethink this as "God, we need to go buy milk before going home."



In the market, in the cloister—only God | saw.
In the valley and on the mountain—only God | saw.

Him | have seen beside me oft in tribulation;
In favor and in fortune—only God | saw.

In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,
In the religion of the Prophet—only God | saw.

Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance,
Qualities nor causes—only God | saw.

I oped mine eyes and by the light of his face
 around me
In all the eye discovered—only God | saw.

Like a candle | was melting in his fire:
Amidst the flames outflashing—only God | saw.

Myself with mine own eyes | saw most clearly,
But when | looked with God's eyes
 —only God | saw.

I passed away into nothingness, | vanished,
And lo, | was the All-living—only God | saw.

—Baba Kuhi of Shiraz



Loving God in Everyday Items

This can be a fun method to help awaken a loving communion with God throughout the day.

Since God is everything and in everything, picture God as some ordinary item, like your favorite cup. Feel God's infinity and love in your cup. Also, feel God as just having a wonderful, delightful time being your cup. Then share a few love breaths with God as your cup. Breathe in energy, and on the out breath, feel you and God as the cup are playfully loving each other with intensity.

This is also a good exercise to do for a few minutes at the start of a devotional walk, when the mind is restless. See an object in front of you—a tree, a flower, a person, a mountain, a piece of trash, a piece of gum squashed on the sidewalk, a leaf—anything. Then share a love breath or two with God as that object. Then move on to another object. You can also imagine objects not in front of you, but objects that are in your everyday life. Examples include your socks, shoes, car,

fork, spoon, toothbrush, doorknob, etc. Feel God as all these objects supporting you.

Practice loving God as every object you touch. Let the feeling lead to a deep gratitude for God.

The simple chores of washing dishes and folding laundry have, for me, been totally transformed through this practice. They used to be dull chores; now they are joyful, playful times with God. It is very inspiring to practice loving God quickly in every dish or piece of clothing you pick up and put down.

While practicing this, you might find that at unexpected times, you'll be looking at an object, and all of a sudden, God is smiling back at you from that object!

You can do this with other people also. See God as the consciousness of someone you know or someone passing you on the street. Share a few love breaths. You can also see God as your own consciousness and share some love breaths.

Someone beside me stood unseen—
And whispered to me, cool and clear:
“Hello, playmate! I am here!”

—Paramhansa Yogananda



Feel God in everything. Treat everything with reverence and you will experience divinity everywhere.



God came to my house
and asked for charity,

And I fell on my knees and
Cried, "Beloved.

What may I give?"

"Just love," He said,

"Just love."

—Saint Francis of Assisi



Sending Love, Sharing Love

When starting a loving God practice, for some, it might be useful just to send love to God. Then over time, shift the focus to sharing love with God. Before I first started a daily loving God practice, my search for divine joy had been generally selfish. I wanted to feel joy, to feel peace, to be healthy, to be prosperous—all reasonable desires. But the focus was on “me” and what “I wanted.” So at first, just focusing on sending God love helped me break out of this “spiritual selfishness.” After a few months of just sending love to God, intuitively, it then felt right to switch my practice to both giving and receiving, or sharing, love with God.

When sending love to God, it can be useful to pretend He is sad or not as blissful without your love. Then feel God getting happier when you give Him your unconditional love. See, your foremost duty is to make God happier by giving Him your love.



I remember how my mother would hold me.
I would look up at her sometimes and see her
weep.

I understand now what was happening.

Love so strong a force

It broke the cage,

And she disappeared from everything

For a blessed moment.

Unable to live on earth,

Mira ventured out alone in the sky,

I write of that journey of becoming as

Free as God.

Don't forget Love;

It will bring all the madness you need

To unfurl yourself across

The universe.

—Mirabai



Loving God through Trials

When practicing loving God, set up your practice situations to make it as easy as possible on yourself. You want to get to the point where you can feel God's joy inside on a regular basis, even if it is only in ideal situations: taking a walk, sitting in a park, quietly parked in your car, in church, at a temple, etc.

Practice when it is easy so that you can then love God and feel His supportive communion during times of frustration, hardships, and even tragedies.

Our Soul desperately wants to be reunited with God. So if we only turn to God during hardships, our own Soul may create hardships for us! Anything to help us reunite. Don't let the pain of trials be the only motivating force turning you to God. Let Divine Joy be the sweetness that pulls you toward God; let it be the sweetness that motivates you to practice daily loving communion.

When life does give us frustrations, use these times to help strengthen your love for God. A simple example happened once when I misplaced an object needed for work. In previous years, I would have become quite irritated while

looking for it. Instead, though, while feeling frustrated, I knew this was just God being my “spiritual trainer.” He’s giving me a challenge to love Him in the face of frustration. So for over half a day, I systematically searched the entire house while practicing love breathing. It was poignant, feeling love and an underlying joy while, at the same time, being frustrated. I was glad that I didn’t find the object right away, or I would have missed this “extended” loving breathing session with God. And I was also glad, when I later found the object in my car.

Loving God in the midst of tragedy is uniquely spiritually transforming. When I was young, my father passed on. During this time, I closed down emotionally. But my mother, despite being in deep grief, kept her heart open to God. I vividly remember visiting her once in her room during this time. She had been crying, but her eyes and whole aura shone with a transcendent divinity. Years later, during a discussion, she remarked that it was a “very unusual time. I changed many times from feeling deep grief to feeling divinely joyful. It was as if I could see this all wasn’t real and feel God.”

Don’t let grief harden your heart; keep loving God. Let grief burn a hole in your heart where God’s love can flow through to all.



If you let your mind dwell on ghosts,
you'll become a ghost yourself.
If you fix your mind on God,
your life will be filled with God.

—Sri Ramakrishna

Everyone can learn to love
and urgently needs to learn to love.

...

If you do not learn how to love
everywhere you go you are going to suffer.

—Eknath Easwaran





Why
Are there
So few in the court
Of a perfect
Saint?

Because
Every time you are near Him
You have to leave pieces
Of your
Ego

With
The hatcheck
Girl

Who won't give them
Back--

OOOUCH

-Hafiz



Lover, Beware

When practicing loving God, do take caution. It has unintended consequences! Opening your heart to God allows God into your “inner house,” and He will insist on helping you clean up any mess there, even ones you want to keep.

It would be extremely difficult, probably impossible, to keep a sincere loving God practice going while also rejecting the need to make positive changes in your life. Either your loving God practice will fade away, or you’ll start trying to make positive changes in your life. For example, how could one keep sincerely loving God while, at the same time, continue cheating people? Over time, one or the other will fade away.

Making positive changes while God “has your back” is much easier than trying to do it alone with just your own willpower. But it does take willpower. And when you do make positive changes, it reinforces your loving God practice. So loving God while “cleaning up your inner house” becomes self-reinforcing, a virtuous cycle.

One last caveat: Sometimes people experience sudden upliftments when first embarking on a sincere, dedicated

spiritual path. In the ecstasy felt, they might make hasty life decisions: change careers, move, change relationships, etc. It might be better to ground oneself for a while in one's spiritual practice before making drastic changes. You want to make sure you are being guided by true intuition, not an egoic desire to avoid a difficult situation.

When I first dedicated myself to a spiritual path, I had an intense desire to quit my high-stress, high-tech career and prayed for release. Luckily, though, common sense prevailed. But 15 years later, it did feel right to move on, which I did. This led to a much deeper relationship with God.

Egoic Separation

All ego-related impulses and desires arise from the pain of separation from God. In order to mask over this pain and make ourselves feel better, we engage in an endless variety of ego-pumping thoughts and satisfying ego-driven desires. Unfortunately, while these activities provide some temporary relief, they reinforce our sense of separation from the divine. When we pump up our ego by judging others or thinking ourselves better, it reinforces the thought that we are different, separate from others. Indulging in physical desires reinforces the thought “Joy comes from this separate body.” A downward cycle of separation ensues.

Most people have a lot of experience in criticizing themselves harshly for egoic impulses. Unfortunately, this self-judgment also reinforces our sense of separation from God.

Rather than getting unproductively upset with egoic faults, we can use them as markers on the path to spiritual re-unification. When I catch myself in a train of egoic thoughts or desires, I’ll stop and try to feel the underlying pain of

separation that is causing this egoic response. Then I'll say to God, "Lord, I am sick and tired of this separation. Satisfy me with your love right *now!* Please." Then I'll focus very intently on God loving me while love breathing.

Sometimes now when an egoic tendency arises, instead of despairing, I find it cause to rejoice. The thought comes, "God, just think how much more joyful we'll both be when this little piece of ego is transmuted!" It's a harbinger of more joy to come!

Loneliness and Depression

When feeling lonely or depressed, when God's joy is out of reach, love God with a sense of longing.

Loneliness is the pain felt when we are aware of our delusional separation from God. Separation caused the accumulation of egoic thoughts, actions, and feelings. Loneliness and depression sap the willpower, making it hard to take positive action. Instead, many times, people turn to eating, watching TV, drinking, smoking or some other activity to escape the pain. These types of activity will dull the pain for a while, but unfortunately, they increase the sense of separation, so the pain increases later.

Loneliness and depression provide an opening of the heart, an opening to love and reconnect with God. When in this state, it's not usually possible to love God with a sense of delight, joy, or even gratitude. But usually, we can always love God with a sense of longing, a longing for God to come and relieve our pain.

When I've been caught in the abyss of feeling sorrowful, I'll usually just sit on the living room couch and practice love breathing while longing for God. Finding a comfortable, comforting chair or couch is most helpful. I've tried sitting totally upright in my meditation chair before when in a state of sorrow, but while it was useful, it seems a more gentle approach with oneself might be better. Taking a slow devotional walk while longing for God is very comforting. Indeed, when I first started taking daily devotional walks, many of them focused only on longing for God.

None of this is meant to indicate that simply sitting on a couch and practicing love breathing will cure one of depression! But when we can sit with our loneliness and open our hearts to God, it is uniquely transformative. It can provide the springboard needed to rise. Obviously, overcoming our sense of isolation from God is a lifelong path. Active service to others is also crucial. We need to help and serve others in order to reach beyond our own isolating self-centeredness.



Why complain about life if you are looking for
good fish and have followed some idiot
into the middle of the copper market?

Why go crazy if you are looking for fine silk
and you keep rubbing your hands against
burlap and hemp sacks?

Why complain if you are looking to quench
your spirit's longing and have followed a
rat into a desert?

—Hafiz





All you who labor,
All you who sorrow,
Know that the Savior
Awaits but your love.

—“Sing Out with Joy”

It's in your heart
the songs of joy resound
You'll hear but echoes
in the world around.

—“Come Gather Round”

Songs by Nayaswami Kriyananda



Let God Guide You

Divine joy sparkles behind the scene of daily life everywhere, in every situation. It can become easily accessible with sincere effort. Spend time each day practicing loving God. God will guide you in your practice. Try some of the techniques discussed but stay open to God's intuitive guidance. He will direct you in what is best for you. When first starting, find the easiest way for yourself. When alone, pick a time and a location that easily integrate into your normal day. Once you learn to commune with God when it is easy, then expand your practice to more challenging times and situations.

If your practice becomes stale, let it change and evolve. Don't become fixated with a static technique. If a thought, an outside suggestion, or an intuition presents itself to try something different, do it! With a daily practice, you have plenty of time and opportunity to try different methods. When trying something new, give it time to work—don't just try something once and conclude "that didn't work." It

takes sincere effort.

God will also guide you in finding the best outside support for your spiritual aspirations: maybe deepening your commitment with your current church, a spiritual book to read, a new spiritual group to join, new ways you can serve others, etc.

Most of the variations of loving God I tried didn't work out for me. But after repeated daily experimenting, a wonderful, consistently joyful, thrilling practice evolved and continues to evolve.

Find and practice "your own way to make love to God."



I know the voice of depression still calls to you.

I know those habits that can ruin your life still
send their invitations.

But you are with the Friend now and look so
much stronger.

You can stay that way and even bloom!

Learn to recognize the counterfeit coins that
may buy you just a moment of pleasure, but
then drag you for days behind a farting
camel!

—Hafiz





When you commune with Him, you will know what you should do about any problems, and you can truly say: “I understand the will of my Father,” or “I can see the love of my Father behind all that happens to me.”

—Paramhansa Yogananda

Ultimately, the only important thing you can do in life is love God.

...

When your love for Him
is effortless and complete,
you will have Him.

—Nayaswami Kriyananda



Joy Everywhere

Feel God's joyful, loving presence everywhere, in everything and in everybody.

This wonderful advice is given in many forms and in many spiritual traditions. For myself, though, I have had to practice first by focusing on God as a localized presence. Feeling God as everywhere was too difficult for me to sustain. However, now, two years after first starting a daily love breathing practice, this has changed. Now much of the time when I practice love breathing while walking or sitting, I focus on and feel God as bliss everywhere.

Anyone drawn to this type of practice can see what is easier for them: God as a local presence or infinite. Go with whichever brings the most sustainable joy. Let the practice evolve, if in the future changing it brings more joy.

Bearing Witness

Here is another variation to love breathing that came when attending a weeklong spiritual renewal retreat, roughly two years after first starting this practice.

Focusing on loving God helps diminish the ego; however, even when feeling a joyful communion with God, the egoic thought can still arise: “Isn’t this wonderful, I (egoic I) can feel such joy with God.” This very thought reinforces separation and cuts down on one’s joy. If the practice only involves you and God, a sense of isolation can creep in.

Turning love breathing into a form of prayer for others can counteract this and helps diminish the ego further.

When love breathing, instead of sharing love between God and you, feel God loving someone else. As before, breathe in love and energy into your heart and mentally chant “God” on the exhale. But on the exhale, instead of feeling you and God loving each other, feel that God and this other person’s soul are loving each other. Sense God’s incredible joy in His love for this person’s soul.

You can pick one person and then, throughout the day, just focus your practice on that one person. Or you can shift

your focus to the different people you interact with throughout the day. Also, when in a group of people, you can love breathe while sensing God loving the entire group.

This practice isn't projecting your love out to others or even trying to project God's love out to others. Rather, it is more like being an observer or "bearing witness" to God's infinite love for another.

When I first realized this "love breathing for others" should become my main practice, I felt sad and somewhat remorseful. After two years of just practicing God and me loving each other directly, I was to give this up and mostly be an observer! Well, the remorse lasted about half a day until I first practiced this in earnest. What joy! What an incredible sense of unity comes when sensing God loving others, loving us all.



Feel the love of God;
then in every person you will see
the face of the Father,
the light of Love which is in all.
You will find a magic, living relationship
uniting the trees, the sky, the stars,
all people, and all living things;
and you will feel a oneness with them.
This is the code of divine love.

—Paramhansa Yogananda



Master Inside

Many spiritual writings refer to God in you, Christ, or the Master in you. Saint Teresa writes:

I used to labour with all my might to imagine Jesus Christ, our Good and our Lord, present within me. And this was the way I prayed.

Many practices from my own church recommended feeling the Master inside of you. working through you. The practice described in the chapter “Mindful Delight” was my attempt to practice the Master within. However, my attempts at this always had a superficial feeling to them. They were more of a mind imagination than an inward experience. While attempting these “mind imaginations” was useful, as any spiritual effort is, they did leave me feeling like I was missing the point, missing the true experience.

Recently, a little over a year after writing the chapter “Bearing Witness,” feeling the Master within has become more real.

For the previous three years, my main focus was on sharing love with God directly and feeling God loving others. While this has been absolutely wonderful and uplifting, an

increasing sense came that I should focus more on developing a closer relationship, a closer communion with the Master also. I started reading His writings at night before bed, and singing/chanting silently to Him.

Then once, while practicing feeling God loving others, an intuition came to feel the Master loving others through me. So I felt the Master inside me, loving people through my eyes, through my heart. A deep communion ensued.

Feeling the Master loving through me triggered a much deeper communion than whenever I had tried feeling the Master acting through me.

Interestingly, now though, even when not feeling the Master loving others through me, I can still feel the Master strongly inside me when I focus on it. Usually, when alone, I'll focus on the Master and I looking out through my eyes, enjoying and loving everything together. And on devotional walks, I'll spend time feeling the Master loving God with and through me.

Many religions speak about the necessity of having a Master or Guru to find enlightenment. In my church before I took discipleship vows, I questioned: "Why not just make God your Guru?"

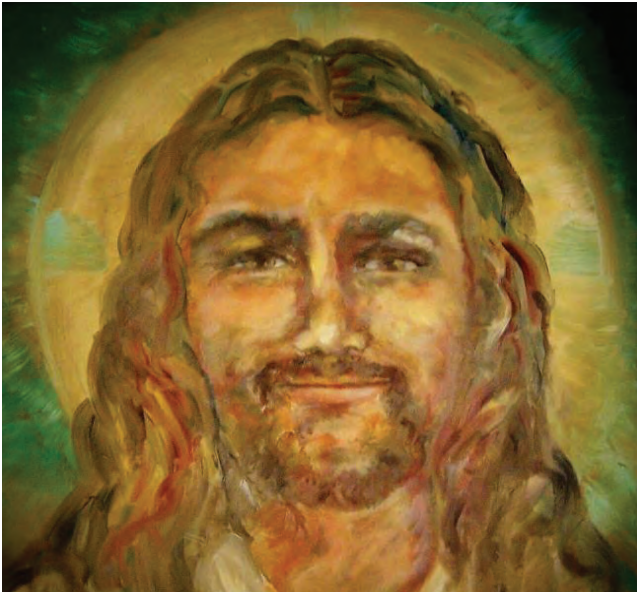
Now this seeker can state through experience that focusing on God *and* the Master leads to much deeper communion.

Buddhist Loving-Kindness

Since my wife is a Buddhist, I've searched to see if there are similar practices in Buddhism to love breathing. The practices of Metta Sutta and Tonglen seem to have many parallels. From a cursory reading, Metta Sutta practices giving loving-kindness to the world and Tonglen practices breathing in the world's suffering and breathing out loving-kindness.

After reading about them, I practiced them while adding specific focus on the heart and forehead chakras. With Tonglen, as a method for praying for another, I visualizing breathing in their particular suffering to my heart and breathing out love to them through the forehead. With Metta Sutta, just breathed in loving-kindness from all the world into my heart. On exhale, breathed out loving-kindness from my forehead to all the world, while silently chanting "Buddha." Did this with eyes open and felt very uplifted.

Personally, I'd be very interested to know if adding the energy flow focus on the heart and forehead chakras and chanting "Buddha" on the out breath would enhance these practices for a Buddhist doing them.



Jesus Christ



Blessed Virgin Mary

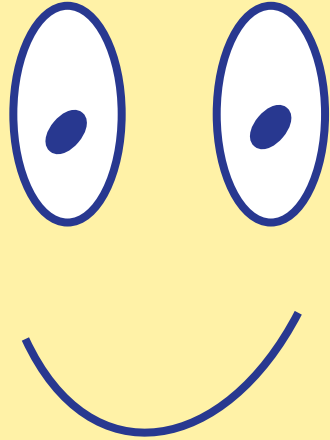
Adoration

After experiencing the wonderful upliftment from practicing loving God through love breathing, I looked into other devotional practices. Eucharist Adoration resonated strongly with me after reading about it. So even though I'm not a Catholic, but definitely a lover of Christ, I went to several Eucharist Adorations at local Catholic churches.

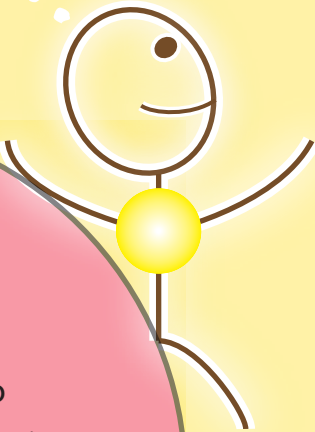
It was wonderful. During a Perpetual Eucharist Adoration at a monastery with cloistered nuns, I sat upright for over two hours, feeling Christ's love come into my heart on every in breath; on every out breath, I felt love going out from my eyes and forehead to Christ, and I silently chanted "Christ" on every out breath. There was such a strong spiritual presence at this monastery.

Some people might find that adding the love breathing elements to their adoration practice helps deepen the experience.

Every time is Wonderful!



God!
I'm back!



Ego
Isolation
Bubble

*Celebrate
with God each
breath you
remember to
turn back and
love Him.*

Handling Failure

If one attempts to love God with every breath, ongoing, repetitive failure will be a constant companion!

Even the great Saint Teresa of Avila, who discusses raising a person from the dead in her autobiography, writes:

Our Lord said to me once, consoling me, that I was not to distress myself, —this He said most lovingly, —because in this life we could not continue in the same state. At one time I should be fervent, at another not; now disquieted, and again at peace, and tempted ...”

While effort and focus are necessary, one needs to avoid self-condemnation, when one’s efforts don’t live up to expectations. Self-condemnation only increases our delusion of separation from God.

Dealing constructively with self-criticism is vital on the spiritual path. Self-criticism hampered me for decades and still requires ongoing vigilance to prevent debilitating relapses.

One method I find useful whenever I catch myself in random thoughts, when I want to be loving God, is to “step outside” my ego on the next breath and just love God again.

I'll tell myself, "This ego doesn't need to be fixed or corrected. I am just a lover of God, who got sidetracked. Back to loving God."

In our true essence, we all are lovers of God who just need to start doing it again. Nothing else matters, especially not our past failings.

If we truly love God in every moment, whatever we do will be right and will be directed by God.

Another method to deal with egoic distractions is to recognize that they do energize and engage us. So they can be useful. When we catch ourselves, we can simply take that egoic-inspired energy and redirect it toward loving God. We can even thank the ego for getting us going.

The best method I've used to help overcome debilitating self-negativity was inspired from a practice at Living Wisdom School, the elementary school where I volunteer, called Rocks in the Basket. Whenever a child shows genuine kindness, puts out positive energy, or makes a good effort in their schoolwork, the teacher asks them to put a rock in a basket. When the basket is full, the class has a celebration day. Skilled and positive teachers are needed to implement this correctly. It's designed not to promote competition to "be good." Rather, it helps all the children in the class learn that they genuinely feel better themselves when they are kind and make good efforts.

God celebrates and rejoices whenever we love Him. He enjoys it even more when we share in His celebration! The prodigal son story in the Bible expresses the Father's overwhelming joy when His son turns his love back to Him.

So rather than get upset whenever I catch myself distracted away from God, I'll focus instead on rejoicing with God that, with a new breath, I've started loving Him again.

Given the distractful nature of this human mind, I get to celebrate with God many, many times a day my "return" to Him!

When disappointed in yourself,
which path do you take?

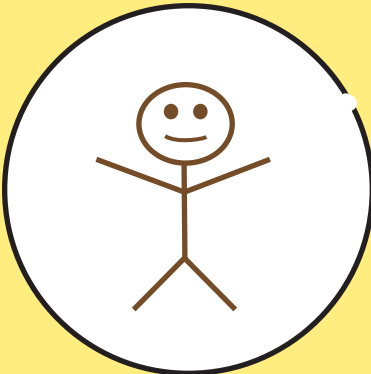
God
watching



Why did I do that?
Why didn't I do that?
I should have ...
I shouldn't have ...
I failed again.

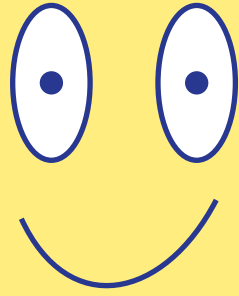
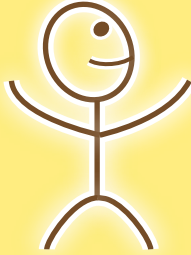
Middle Path

Well ... it is an
upward path.



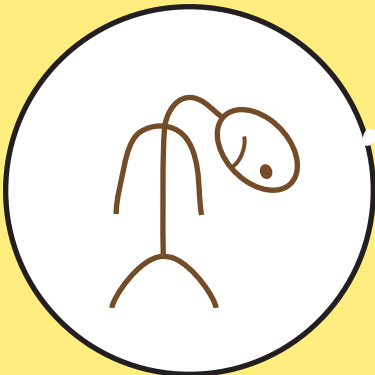
I will do better!
I visualize myself
doing right! I am
strong! I am good!

High Path



God!
I just love
You. Help me
walk where
You inspire.

Low Path



Please
come
out!



I am so stupid!
I am so weak!
Others are so much
better and stronger!



... ultimately the motivation behind
wishing to follow a spiritual path is to
attain supreme happiness ...

—His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama



Willpower and Habit

It has been fascinating to relate the literature and research on willpower, habits, and behavior modification to the development of my own love breathing practice over the last three years. The “want” or motivation is simple: to know God, to experience unconditional joy, a joy that needs no reason for existing. Once this want overrides all other desires, the willpower and path to follow emerge.

In the first year of my practice, I could only really do it during a 30-minute walk on a quiet residential street. Even walking in beautiful open space parks proved too distracting—I would just start enjoying nature and forget about loving God!

After a year, I started practicing it in my car: first while sitting parked, then also while driving. This provided a strong trigger for the practice. As time went on, the practice became much easier. I’m sure the neural “habit” pathways have continued to develop and strengthen.

The triggers for my practice include, in order of “effectiveness,” sitting in a car, walking, and breathing. Now if I ever find myself in a distracted or distressed state, I can take

a walk and reestablish a calm, joyful communion. Or even more simply, I can go sit in my car in the driveway for a few minutes.

The focus on the forehead probably has scientific basis as it activates the frontal cortex/lobe. Hopefully, researchers will also start to focus on the heart center as much as they have focused on the brain.

When starting out, it is critical to make it as easy as possible for yourself. Pick a quieter place nearby where you usually spend part of your day. You don't want to have to travel extra in order to practice. As time goes on and you feel the joyous "reward," you'll be able to practice it in more distracting surroundings.

Research has show, it takes a few weeks to establish a new habit, that the brain will resist any change at first, but in two to four weeks of practicing, the brain will adapt and start to help out. So when starting a new devotional practice that you feel resonates with you, stick with it at least a few weeks before deciding to try something else.

Repeating a most crucial element; celebrate with God any effort you make and forget about any self-perceived shortcomings in your practice. We are all trying to move from finiteness to infinity; give it time.

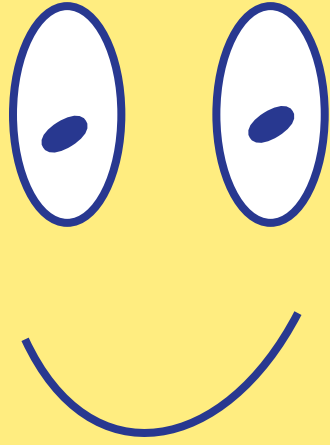


I once had a thousand desires,
but in my one desire to know You
all else melted away.

—Rumi



Finally, a stool
I can stand on
and reach for
God!



Spiritual Stability

This book has discussed one aspect of spiritual practice, inward devotion or loving God. But a stable spiritual practice needs more. I've often pictured my own spiritual life as a three-legged stool, with the legs as the key spiritual practices of the following:

1. Devotion or loving God
2. Selfless service to others
3. Prayer and meditation

The seat of the stool is spiritual community or church.

All of these are necessary to have a stable spiritual life. In my own quest, I started out in my early 20s focusing only on meditation. While trying many different methods, I was able to catch glimpses of divinity. Mostly, though, I floundered. In my 30s, I realized the need to be part of a strong spiritual group to make the kind of progress I desperately desired. So I went looking and chose a church where the people had the kind of light in their eyes and love in their hearts that I wanted.

Quickly, I added the practice of selfless service, giving time and donations as resources allowed. Then for the next 15

years, I focused only on the two “legs” of meditation and service. Devotion was just a concept I agreed with and thought I had. During this time, I caught more fleeting glimpses of divinity. My practice was unstable, feeling the divine flow for periods of time and still floundering the rest of the time.

It wasn't until I started actively practicing loving God every day with the energy of the heart that my spiritual life stabilized and feeling joyful communion became a daily occurrence.

Opening Heart

When practicing Tonglen as a prayer for another person, an inspiration came to instead of “breathing in their suffering,” to feel that God is opening up inside of their heart and soul filling them with His joyous perfection, when I breathe in. Then, when breathing out, I feel God irradiate them from the outside with His infinite love and compassion while I still silently chant “God,” and energize my spiritual eye chakra. This method seems well suited to practice while driving or in meditation.

My regular love breathing practice has continued to evolve, especially from some of the Metta Sutta influences. Now one way I practice love breathing is: on the in breath, I feel my heart being energized with love from all the world. On the out breath, I silently chant “God” while feeling God, Master, and myself loving everything from the spiritual eye.

God, God, God!

Integrate into your life a daily practice of loving God. Try lots of different methods: singing, chanting, journaling, adoration, love breathing, devotional walks, etc. Let your practice evolve—let God inspire you. Devote yourself to God, the Infinite One. Let go of devotions to temporary finiteness.

Each heart has a unique love affair with God. Find a way to romance God: a way to ignite the fires of Bliss with the One who only wants your love.



If you knew how much
God loves you,
you would die for joy!

—Saint Jean Vianney





Love is Here



Where do you want to live,
during your next breath?





About the Author

ERIC MUNRO worked in the electronics industry for over 20 years in Silicon Valley. He received a BS from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and an MBA from the Anderson School of Management at UCLA. Currently, he spends his time volunteering at Living Wisdom School Palo Alto, helping raise his two teenage sons, and starting a nonprofit business, WisdomScenes, which commissions inspirational posters for children. He can be contacted at: eric@wisdomscenes.com.

Credits

Watercolor paintings by Mantradevi LoCicero, <http://expandingarts.com>.

Painting of Jesus Christ at 33 by Heinrich Hofmann.

Photo of Paramhansa Yogananda, "Last Smile," taken at the Biltmore Hotel, 1952.

Paintings of Smiling Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary by Suzanne Reynolds, <http://www.saintsbysuzanne.com>.

Cover design, book layout, and computerized illustrations by Eric Munro.

