

Material covered this week

This week we focused on two aspects of silent prayer. First we finished up what we had been doing last week – getting the physical, material aspects of silent prayer right. First, how we sit and breathe, and then where we sit, when we do our silent prayer and whether we have our eyes open or shut.

These are all things you can control and decide about and do.

But then we got into the heart of the mystery of silent prayer that is not something you *do*. If you *doing* silent prayer it is not silent prayer. It is a letting go, a going beyond. You have to push yourself off from the edge of the swimming pool without touching the edge of the swimming pool. Thus there is a paradox at its heart. If you can “not think of a polar bear” you are there – but the moment you start not thinking of a polar bear, you are thinking of a polar bear!

The starting point to going deeper into this is simply to be here, now. Easy to say. For most of us it takes a long time to start becoming a reality. But that really is all there is to it.

Questions for reflection

- What do you see when you close your eyes?
- How much or how little regularity is there in your day, how do you feel about that, and how much control do you have over this in practical terms?
- Where do you feel most at peace?
- Can you not think of a polar bear?
- When your attention wanders from the immediate present, does it tend to wander to past or to future?
- Think back to day 1 – what has changed in your outlook on silent prayer?

Further prompts for discussion

- Who would like to share something about their set up for silent prayer – how, where and when are you sitting and breathing – what are you finding helpful at this early stage?
- What do we think of this fundamental paradox in silent prayer – that if we are doing it, we are not doing it? Does this make sense? Does it seem like a profound mystery? Or is it not a big deal?
- If it doesn't seem mysterious, should we perhaps reflect on it a little and see if the mystery becomes more present to us?

Before silence: “pre-flight checks”

- All the things we did last week
- Sit well, relaxed but not lolling, using core strength to maintain an alert posture, weight well distributed
- Breathe into the bottom of the lungs, conscious of the muscles working, open the chest and the ribs, breathe out from the bottom
- Be here now
- Don't try, don't be anxious
- Don't try not to try, don't be anxious about not being anxious
- Be here now

Time	Activity / Notes
7.45	Arrivals
8.00	Opening prayer
8.05	Check in
8.15	Reading
8.45	Reflecting on silence
9.00	Anything else?
9.10	Silence and concluding prayer