

LESSON 10: A Setwork for Spiritual Reading



REFERENCE

Page | 47 – 148 [A SPIRITUAL SETWORK]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (2) LSM: 'Spiritual Reading'
- (3) Learner-selected texts

AIM

- To encourage learners to include writings of a spiritual nature in their reading, or at least to reflect on spiritual aspects that may be included in whatever reading they do engage in.

OUTCOMES

- SKL Learners are able to recognise and identify aspects of spiritual writing – both as a genre, and as a dimension in other kinds of writing.
- DAP Learners include spiritual writings in the selection of reading.

TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson expresses something of an ideal: it depends on the assumption that you, the teacher, include works exploring spirituality in your own reading for personal development; that your learners also read widely for similar reasons; and that you both have access to a school library that has a shelf of writings in this category. If you do, well and good. However, this vision is far from a present reality in many schools, so the question then becomes: 'How can I make this lesson work?'

The Lesson Materials page, 'Spiritual Reading', sets out to introduce learners to the idea of spiritual reading. Section A provides some short sample texts, together with some questions for discussion. It may help to remind learners that, even if they weren't aware of it, they may have encountered writing of this kind during the course of their Religious Education – the guided meditations, biblical parables, an exploration of story forms such as the fable, and so on. Indeed, even when a text is not primarily a spiritual text, a reader can consider the extent to which it contains or presents spiritual wisdom. Thus, although this lesson seeks to encourage learners to try spiritual reading, it may be that you will have to work with whatever is at hand – including language networks, science fiction, romance, fantasy, self-help literature, and so on. So, the questions in Section B are designed to accommodate this.

Whatever the genre (type of text) that the learners are working with, it's important to consider how it addresses spirituality. It could be devotional, offer inspiration, encourage self-awareness and spiritual insight, or be quietly affirming of the reader. Readers may also be drawn to the text because it links with 'human interest' or can be said to be 'true-to-life', or because it tells a story of courage and endurance in the face of adversity. Fiction can also be read with an eye alert to its spiritual content – think about theme, character, and the kind of world constructed in the text.

Fantasy or science fiction may both deal with the struggle between good and evil, and the question of social order – the 'distance' created between that world and ours can invite thoughtful reflection on the issues of our time and place. In Romance, there's always the question of 'true love' and the 'path' to it, together with the extent of self-knowledge, awareness, and integrity of the characters.

– that one character may not be trustworthy, that things (especially with regard to the most beautiful or handsome) may not be what they seem, and that some learning or growing has to take place before the story can be brought to a satisfactory end.

You need to decide whether you are going to link Lessons 2 and 3 – if so, there needs to be a gap of two weeks to a month between them. You also need to decide on whether you will focus most of the lesson time on Section A or Section B on the Lesson Materials page, ‘Spiritual Reading’. This largely depends on two things. How many of your learners are willing to read a spiritual text? And, do you want to use Activity B largely in connection with this lesson, or do you want to set it as a task that learners can do in preparation largely between this lesson and Lesson 3? If you want to do more than Section A, you will need to ask your learners to bring a book – preferably a spiritual text, and not a setwork – to this lesson. But remember, the questions in Section B can be applied to any text they might bring.

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Introduction

Point out to the learners that they will explore aspects of spirituality in texts in this lesson. This includes both spiritual writings and other writings with a spiritual dimension to them.

2 Responding to a Spiritual Text

Hand out the Lesson Materials page, ‘Spiritual Reading’. Ask the learners to do the task given in Section A. After a suitable time, either take a few comments from the class on the exercise, or invite the learners to quickly share their experience with their chosen text with one other learner. If the main focus of your lesson falls here, then at this point either set Section B as a task for the learners to prepare for, or move directly to the Conclusion.

3 Identifying the Spiritual Dimension

If you have asked the learners to bring a text with them to class, and if you have decided to begin this activity during this lesson, then ask the learners to do Section B. They need to answer the given question with regard to the text they have brought. At a suitable moment, take enough feedback to see that everyone is on the right path. Then move on to the Conclusion.

4 Conclusion

In the closing minutes of the lesson, quickly see whether you can elicit some defining aspects of ‘spirituality’ or ‘spiritual literature’ from the learners. Affirm responses that touch on: insight, new awareness, enlightenment; our relationship with God, others, the world we live in; writing that affirms us and gives us hope; writing that encourages an awareness of interconnectedness and interdependence. Some responses may point to features of this kind of text such as reflective stories, poetry, meditations, or art (e.g. the mandala), or even the presence of activities for the reader to work through.

OTHER IDEAS

5 A Collection of Spiritual Writings

Bring to the class a selection of spiritual writings from your friends, family, or colleagues. Or see what you can find in the school library. Authors you might want to look for could include: Henri Nouwen, Michel Quoist, Carlo Carretto, Anna Fynn, Anthony De Mello, Ernesto Cardinal, John Powell, Joan Chittester, Megan McKenna, Dennis and Matthew Linn, Margaret

GRADE 12 Spirituality

Silf, Thomas Merton, Joyce Rupp, M Scott Peck , Harold S Kushner, Richard Rohr, Thich Nhat Hahn, Helder Camara, Desmond Tutu, Dorothy Soëlle – there are many, but it might be tricky to find a suitable selection for your class. Ask the learners to see what they might be able to bring. Try to get a collection of at least 20 titles together, take the precaution of lightly writing owners' names into the books in pencil, and display your collection for the class to look at. Invite learners - individually or in pairs – to choose a book and to preview it (i.e. look at it enough to form an impression of it – it's style, it's content, an idea or two, and whether they would find it's language accessible for easy reading, etc.). Halfway through the time available, ask each person or pair to pass their text on to the next person or pair. This will allow them to at least look at two books during the course of the lesson.

MATERIALS

LEARNER

CIE. 2006. 'Spiritual Reading'



Lesson Materials



Spiritual Reading

Section A: Reading for insight and awareness

Read each of these texts. Choose one. See if you can briefly answer these questions in relation to it.

- What is your chosen text about?
- Have you any experience of this?
- Is there a new understanding available to you? Can you put this into your own words?
- Do you need to do anything about this? If so, what will you keep in mind? And, what is your next step?

When The Day Came

When the Day came –
The Day I had lived and died for –
The Day that is not in any calendar –
Clouds heavy with love
Showered me with wild abundance.
Inside me, my soul was drenched.
Around me, even the desert grew green.

Kabir (English version by Andrew Harvey. Found at: www.poetseers.org
Accessed 16 October, 2006.)

Temper

A Zen student came to Bankei and complained: 'Master, I have an ungovernable temper. How can I cure it?'
'You have something very strange,' replied Bankei. 'Let me see what you have.'
'Just now I cannot show it to you,' replied the other.
'When can you show it to me?' asked Bankei.
'It arises unexpectedly,' replied the student.
'Then,' concluded Bankei, 'it must not be your own true nature. If it were, you could show it to me at any time. When you were born you did not have it, and your parents did not give it to you. Think that over.'

(From *Zen, Flesh Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1976, p 70)

There is more Light here/...

Lesson Materials

READING SPIRITUALITY (cont)

There is more Light here

Someone saw Nasruddin searching for something on the ground.
'What have you lost, Mulla?' he asked. 'My key,' said the Mulla. So they both went down on their knees and looked for it.
After a time the other man asked: 'Where exactly did you drop it?'
'In my own house.'
'Then why are you looking here?'
'There is more light here than inside my own house.'

(From Idries Shah, *The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasruddin*. London: Pan Books Limited, 1973, p. 26)

You Are Me

You are me and I am you.
It is obvious that we are inter-are.
You cultivate the flower in yourself
so that I will be beautiful.
I transform the garbage in myself
so that you do not have to suffer.
I support you; you support me.
I am here to bring you peace;
you are here to bring me joy.

Thich Nhat Hahn (Found at: www.poetseers.org Accessed 16 October, 2006)

Section B: Identifying spirituality in texts

1. What kind of text or book do you have? [Non-fiction / Devotional / Spirituality / Self-help ... / Fiction / Novel / Romance / Fantasy / Drama ...]
2. Why did you select that text or book? Just because? On the recommendation of friends?
3. Why read such a text?
4. Would you describe it as a spiritual book? Why? Why not?
5. If it is not a spiritual book, can you still discern something of value in it? About values? About character? About the importance of self-knowledge? A recommendation about how life might or should be lived? A vision for society?
6. Choose a moment / short passage / quote that speaks to you. Write this out.
7. If you went into a bookshop, where would you expect to find other texts like the one you have?
8. Have you enjoyed it? Have you learnt anything from it? Would you recommend it to others?

LESSON 11: The Ocean



REFERENCE

Page 148 – 149 [CONTEMPLATIVE BREATHING & USE OF A MANTRA]



WHAT YOU NEED

- (2) TSM: 'Awareness of Breathing'
- (2) TSM: 'The Ocean'

AIM

- To use a process of meditation with a focus on breath awareness

OUTCOMES

- EXP Learners experience a meditation with a focus on breath awareness.
- DAP Learners commit themselves to a practice of meditation.

TEACHER'S NOTE

This lesson offers a meditation with a focus on awareness of one's breathing. If your learners have been introduced to forms of meditation at some point during their time at school, they are likely to have practiced some breath awareness since it is often used as a way of entering a meditative state. However, it's useful to bear a few things in mind. From a 'technical' perspective, you will need to remind learners of the need for a straight spine and a relaxed posture. You may also need to remind them to breathe in and out easily and naturally, to neither force nor hold onto their breath. It also usually takes several breaths before an easy rhythm of deeper breathing is found – i.e. when breathing out can be 'felt' in the base of the spine. However, breath awareness may be used in meditation to bring about a state of relaxation, calmness, or inner peace. Learners can also be invited to be mindful of breath as life, a mindfulness of natural-life rhythms, and even of the breath of God, or of the Third Person in the Holy Trinity.

LESSON OUTLINE

1 Introduction

Invite the learners to participate in a meditation with a focus on breathing. Some might recall that they have started other meditations with breath-awareness. You may wish to elicit a few points on breath and its symbolism from the learners before you begin. Tell them you will guide the meditation, and that it will begin with a short 'settling-in' period. The meditation will continue into a period of silence, and it will come to an end with your invitation to them to return to an awareness of the classroom.

2 The Breathing Meditation

- Ask the learners to settle-down, to seat themselves comfortably, to keep their spines straight, to find an easy rhythm with their breathing. The Lesson Materials page 'Awareness of Breathing' may provide you with some further hints. Some might like to close their eyes; but remind those who prefer to keep their eyes open to allow their gaze to become soft (aware, yet unfocused – perhaps directed at the ground a little way in front of them if the seating arrangements permit). Ask them to be aware of any tensions

and aches in their bodies, to quietly acknowledge this to themselves, and to ease out the tension, and to let it go. Don't rush this – allow time for the group to quieten and to establish their collective silence.

- ii Once the group has settled, begin the guided meditation, 'The Ocean', provided on the Lesson Materials page. Again, take your time in leading the group through this.
- iii Allow the group to sit in silence for some time after you have finished reading the text of the meditation. Then, quietly invite the learners to leave their meditative state, and to return to the class. (Some facilitators use a soft bell or gong to signal the end of the period of meditation.)

3 Concluding Reflection

Once all the learners have come out of their meditative state, take a couple of comments on their experience with this method. You could also invite some sharing of thoughts or insights that might have arisen. Finally, ask the learners for some examples of why they might like to use this method of meditation and how they might go about this. Some people like to practice meditation on a regular basis – perhaps first thing in the morning. But an exercise like this can be done at any time and in many places. For instance, as a way of managing stress or for creating inner peace before settling down to study or to write an exam.

OTHER IDEAS

4 More Ideas for Breathing Meditations

Here are some further suggestions for breathing-awareness:

OUT: exhale all cares, like exhaust-fumes

IN: inhale the ever-fresh gift of God's concern and love and peace.

OUT: exhale yesterday, the baggage of the past

IN: inhale the 'now' that God is giving.

IN: accept a moment from God

OUT: relinquish a moment

IN: live to a moment

OUT: die to a moment.

OUT: 1. Let go. 2. Sink down.

IN: 3. Become one. 4. Become new.

OUT: only to the extent that we become emptied (of our self-importance and pride) . . .

IN: . . . is there room for God to fill our lives (with His Power).

(Michael Burke. 1991. 'Breathing-prayer – samples' 139 in *Connections* Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 134-135)

5 Breathing-prayer – Using a *mantra*

Here are some suggestions for combining breathing with a *mantra*. A *mantra* is word a word, phrase, or sentence that is prayerfully repeated, one part (a syllable or phrase) being said with breathing in, another part (a second syllable or phrase) being said with breathing out. It may take the form of a personal address to God, for instance, 'Je...sus' or 'Krish...na'. Or it may take the form of a short prayer – the 'Jesus prayer' for example: 'Lord Jesus Christ ... have mercy on me, a sinner.' Here are some examples:

OUT: "Whoever loses his life for my sake . . ."
IN: ". . . will gain it." (Mt 10:39)

IN: "In his will . . ."
OUT: ". . . is our peace." (Dante)

IN: "Our Father . . ."
OUT: ". . . your will be done."

(Michael Burke. 1991. 'Breathing-prayer – Using a *mantra*' 139 in *Connections* Pietermaritzburg: Centaur Publications, p 135)

6 Religious Chanting

Chanting and recitation is used prayerfully and meditatively in all religions. Invite your learners to find out something about this in a religion other than their own. Hindus call to mind Brahman and the nature of the universe by sounding 'AUM'; Hindus who practice devotion to Hare Krishna use specific mantras. Catholics may recite the 'Hail Mary' together. Muslims may gather to chant the ninety-nine 'beautiful names' of Allah. Ask them to consider the form of meditation and why it is practised (i.e. its intention from the point of view of those engaged in it), together with some aspects of its performance – the use of voice, the role repetition, the use of rhythmic clapping or the playing of drums. Perhaps one or more learners will be able to bring recordings of these practices in their own faith traditions for the class to listen to.

MATERIALS

TEACHER

- Merwede Van der Merwe. 1997. *Meditation: A path to consciousness*. Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, p 40 – 41
- Anthony De Mello. 1986. 'The Ocean' in *Wellsprings*. New York: Doubleday, p 188



Lesson Materials



Awareness of Breathing

Using breathing as an object for focusing the mind is a common practice in most meditation traditions. Breath awareness anchors the mind in the present moment. It is an effective way to prepare the body and the mind for meditation.

1. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Your spine must be straight, your chest open, your body relaxed.
2. Close your eyes gently. Take a few moments to centre your awareness in your body. Feel your body. Relax and let go of any tightness. Notice your breathing.
3. Take a few deep, slow breaths. Notice the movement of your diaphragm and chest.
4. Allow your breathing to come back to a natural rhythm. Pay attention to your breathing. Notice the inhalations and the exhalations. Discover the difference between them.
5. Sit for a few minutes and attentively watch your breathing. Keep your awareness focused in one place, either at the tip of your nose, or on the rising and falling of your chest or diaphragm.
6. Do not control or manipulate your breathing. Remain an objective observer. Notice how the rhythm gradually changes. Pay attention to the quality of your breathing: smoothness, depth, duration of in and out breaths.
7. Notice if there is a pause between the exhalation and the next inhalation. Remain aware of the duration of the pauses.
8. After a few minutes of observing, take a few slow, deep breaths again. Fill your lungs to capacity. Exhale completely after each in-breath. Feel your chest expanding and contracting. Pay attention to the flow of your breathing.
9. Return to natural breathing. Again simply be aware of your breathing taking place by itself. Notice the inhalations, the exhalations, the pause in between. Just watch. Continue for a few minutes.
10. Open your eyes, feel your body, reflect for a while and continue your activities

This exercise can also be done at any time during the day. It focuses you in the present moment. It is a technique for centreing and calming

Lesson Materials



The Ocean

Focus on your breathing.
Be aware of the fact that you are breathing in
and breathing out.

Now focus on the flow of the air
through your nostrils
the way you would if you were watching
the ebb and flow of the sea.

Where do you feel the touch of the air
in your nostrils
as you breathe in?

Where as you breathe out?

Is the volume of air passing through one nostril
greater than that passing through the other?

Observe the difference of temperature in the air
as it goes in and comes out.

Now use imagery that will affect you
at deeper, more subconscious, levels.
Now use imagery that will affect you at deeper, more subconscious, levels.

Imagine the outgoing air to be a polluted stream,
carrying with it your impurities.
Do not focus on any sins in particular
– just your selfishness
and your fearfulness in general.

Fill your lungs with air,
the better to eject these impurities from your heart
when you breathe out.

Now switch your attention to your inhalation:
imagine the atmosphere to be charged
with God's presence.
Fill your lungs with the life-giving, energising presence of God.

And as you do this imagine that the whole of you
becomes energised and radiant.