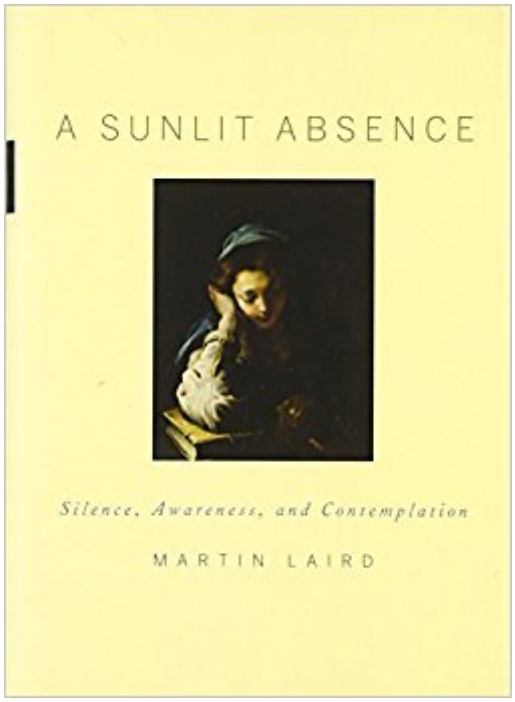
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A Sunlit Absence: Silence, Awareness, And Contemplation



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Synopsis

"The practice of contemplation is one of the great spiritual arts," writes Martin Laird in A Sunlit Absence. "Not a technique but a skill, it harnesses the winds of grace that lead us out into the liberating sea of silence." In this companion volume to his bestselling Into the Silent Land, Laird focuses on a quality often overlooked by books on Christian meditation: a vast and flowing spaciousness that embraces both silence and sound, and transcends all subject/object dualisms. Drawing on the wisdom of great contemplatives from St. Augustine and St. Teresa of Avila to St. Hesychios, Simone Weil, and many others, Laird shows how we can uncover the deeper levels of awareness that rest within us like buried treasure waiting to be found. The key insight of the book is that as our practice matures, so will our experience of life’s ordeals, sorrows, and joys expand into generous, receptive maturity. We learn to see whatever difficulties we experience in meditation--boredom, lethargy, arrogance, depression, grief, anxiety--not as obstacles to be overcome but as opportunities to practice surrender to what is. With clarity and grace Laird shows how we can move away from identifying with our turbulent, ever-changing thoughts and emotions to the cultivation of a "sunlit absence"--the luminous awareness in which God’s presence can most profoundly be felt. Addressed to both beginners and intermediates on the pathless path of still prayer, A Sunlit Absence offers wise guidance on the specifics of contemplative practice as well as an inspiring vision of the purpose of such practice and the central role it can play in our spiritual lives.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"...useful to anyone on the contemplative path, this book deals profoundly yet simply with matters treated only superficially, if at all, in many other guides to contemplation." --Library Journal"A Sunlit Absence, by Martin Laird, a professor of theology at Villanova University and a priest in the Order of St. Augustine, is filled with sympathy, grace and encouragement... Laird's writing is refreshingly concise, occasionally amusing and vividly memorable. Both beginning and longtime contemplatives will discover treasures in this little gem of a book." --Todd Friesen, Christian Century"Books that talk about 'contemplation' often seem to have been written on Jupiter. This one is a sterling exception." --John Wilson, Christianity TodayPRAISE FOR INTO THE SILENT LAND:"This book is different. There are plenty of books on contemplation that feel rather tired--either wordy and labored or unhelpfully smooth and idealistic. But this is sharp, deep, with no cliches, no psychobabble and no short cuts. Its honesty is bracing, its vision utterly clear; it is a rare treasure."--Rowan Williams, The Archbishop of Canterbury "Often they say 'you learn how to swim by swimming' but a good coach or swimming manual is essential. Equally, we could say 'you learn how to be contemplative by contemplating' and a good guide or mentor is necessary. Into the Silent Land is just that. I tried it and it works. Try it."--Archbishop Desmond Tutu, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize "Into the Silent Land is a beautiful and deeply consoling book, a reminder that prayer is both real and fundamentally simple. Not since Thomas Merton's Contemplative Prayer have I encountered a guide to contemplation this wise and compelling."--Douglas Burton-Christie, author of The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism "Laird's book defines how to sink back in God's ground physically with breathing, mentally with 'prayer words,' and spiritually with interior surrender. Through anecdote, Scripture, and classic wisdom, Laird illuminates a Christian path into the silent land. An able guide, he makes the trip more than worth the journey." --Christianity Today

Martin Laird, O.S.A is Associate Professor of Theology at Villanova University. He has extensive training in contemplative disciplines and gives retreats throughout the United States and Great Britain. The author of Gregory of Nyssa and the Grasp of Faith and Into the Silent Land (both by OUP), he lives in Villanova, PA.

I found this book to be an excellent follow-up to his first book on the subject of contemplation. Even though I lived as a cloistered contemplative monk for many years & have read a great deal on this topic & have given many contemplative retreats, I still found this book to be very insightful, with many quotes from teachers in this tradition as well as a very unique & beautiful way of presenting. A

very clear, concise & poetic presentation. I highly recommend this book along with its companion book.Rev. Robert J. Powell

The subtitle - "silence, awareness, and contemplation" - summarizes the focus of this magnificent book perfectly. I've been practicing centering prayer daily for the past six months (after a long hiatus), and Laird's insights have helped me immensely to see beneath (beyond? through?) the basic practice of "when thoughts arise, simply return to your sacred word." No New Age-y book, this work contains dozens and dozens of footnoted quotes from traditional contemplative masters such as St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, St. Augustine, and the author of The Cloud of Unknowing. You'll also likely be introduced to lesser-known fathers such as Evagrius the Solitary (4th Century).

Gently insightful, quiet in tone, thoroughly researched, this book takes readers still further into silence, awareness and contemplation than the preceding book, "Into the Silent Land". Anecdotes from modern day experience, the wisdom of desert and church fathers, saints, poetry, art and novels are all gathered in support and illustration of the book's themes. They are used in such a way that the reader wants to go back to the original texts, so I refreshed myself with Seamus Heaney's poetry, picked up the writings of Evagrius for the first time and resolved to return to St. Teresa of Avila. Contemplation informs every part of life, so it is fitting that every part of life should meet with contemplation in this book.I was grateful that the difficulties of contemplation were investigated at some depth. Some points of practice about which I was unsure after reading "Into the Silent Land" became much clearer for me, producing shifts and growth that were palpable in my own life. "A Sunlit Absence" is best read after "Into the Silent Land" because there is a clear development and deepening from one text to the next. I shall read this book much more than once.

This is a richly and wisely informed exploration of the value and place that "awareness" has in the practice of Contemplative Prayer. Awareness is shown to have an honored place in wisdom tradition of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the early Early Christian Movement. Yet, this seems to be a neglected aspect of the modern enthusiasm for Centering Prayer. Martin Laird, a historical theological, redresses this neglect in a work that has significant relevance for those of us moderns who struggle to break free from the tyranny of thoughts and feelings..

Another gem by Martin Laird, "A Sunlit Absence" presents further encouragement in the practice of

contemplation, "one of the great spiritual arts." Many sources all the way from John of the Cross to Mark Twain to Holy Scripture enrich the reader's experience. Laird gives specific ways to quiet constant mind-tripping and the videos that run on and on. Describing how we are held prisoner to inner chatter, he quotes St. Hesychios. "A donkey going round and round in a mill cannot step out of the circle."Through physical silence in prayer, as our awareness is deepened, compassion for others grows. One meets noise with stillness. Again Laird quotes St. Hesychios, "Awareness is a spiritual method which, sedulously practiced over a long period, completely frees us with God's help from compulsive thoughts."After long practice and many failures, silent prayer allows us to receive "with awareness all that is, just as it is, as a large screened-in porch receives whatever breeze that blows."Finally "We learn to see whatever difficulties we experience in meditation - boredom, lethargy, arrogance, depression, grief, anxiety - not as obstacles to be overcome but as opportunities to practice surrender."If you practice Contemplative Prayer, "A Sunlit Absence" will be a welcome addition to your library.

Martin Laird discusses the finer points of contemplation using many examples drawn from educating students and directing silent retreats. With the resurgence and increase interest in contemplative practice from the Christian viewpoints many of his terms are modern and richer such as collection of videos which run in the head. Laird draws from poets, part contemplatives, and psychology. He gives examples of some of the difficulties encountered in this practice, boredom,depression, which will lead to the self surrender and maturity. This book and 'Into the Silent Land' are worth the price of admission.

Martin Laird rocks! Whether you have been a practitioner of contemplative prayer for along time or are a neophyte it is obvious that Fr. Laird knows the land. His insights are well grounded, reassuring, and oft enlightening in their own right. The "A Sunlit Absence" arrived in a most timely fashion and was as spiffy as the merchant promised. Shopping doesn't get much better than this ! Except maybe if you have Prime!

I loved this book by Fr. Martin. In it, he describes the 2 dynamics of contemplative practice as both deepening concentration and expanding awareness. The title of the book really does say it all as he probes our experience of the Silence and it's relationship to true awareness in everyday life experiences. I'd always wondered about my own internal commentary and he speaks much about the difference between thoughts which ebb and flow through the mind and the incessant

commentary that has a tendency to become attached and which then leads us into all kinds of "reactionary" ways of being.I appreciate his wonderful insight and find myself returning to the book for meditation on particularly meaningful passages.

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