

# Encore

**“To make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.”  
T. S. Eliot**

*This final piece in the series on Contemplative Engagement comes as we are all in the throes of responding and adapting to the coronavirus pandemic. While this was clearly not planned, the theme of this offering—ENCORE—seems especially timely.*

*Why? In part, because when we are in disruptive times such as these, we find ourselves drawn to return to familiar, comforting and strengthening resources—favored prayers, reflections, poems, scripture passages, that nourish and uplift our spirits, that help to ground us and help illumine the darkness in which we find ourselves. This particular piece is an invitation to do just that—to return to those sources that have sustained us in the past and to return to and re-engage the previous offerings in this series on Contemplative Engagement.*

*It is also an invitation to do more than simply return. It is an invitation to open ourselves to experience these treasured passages in new ways, to allow them to open up inner space and capacity in us in ways we may not have experienced before. So let’s explore the idea of ENCORE.*

It is likely that each of us has had the experience of attending a concert, dance or play where the performance was so exceptional that we leapt to our feet crying “Encore! Encore! Encore!” We were swept away by the beauty or energy or dazzling skill displayed, and we wanted more. We wanted the moment never to end.

And it is likely that we have had experiences of the astonishing, intimate and encompassing presence of the Holy One in, through, around and holding us together with all things in oneness. These moments may have come while we were consciously “at prayer” or when we were walking in the woods, sitting quietly watching a sunrise over the water, or immersed in service to and with others in need.



These also are moments and experiences where we want to cry “Encore!” “Don’t stop!” “Do it again!” We do not want the moment to end. And when we find ourselves struggling or in the midst of challenges and darkness that we do not comprehend, we long for those moments of light and peace and knowing to repeat themselves in our lives and our consciousness.

*And what you thought you came for  
Is only a shell, a husk of meaning  
From which the purpose breaks only when it is fulfilled  
If at all. Either you had no purpose  
Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured  
And is altered in fulfilment.*

*T. S. Eliot—Little Gidding*

As we come to this last offering in this series there is a sense of not wanting it to end, a desire for the richness and the inspiration to continue. And so we offer an invitation to you to keep it going—go back and re-experience each of the offerings in this series, not by way of repetition, but as a new moment of discovery.

*What we call the beginning is often the end  
And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
The end is where we start from.*

*T. S. Eliot—Little Gidding*

**ENCORE!** What is it?

By definition an encore is a demand for repetition or reappearance made by an audience, or an additional performance demanded by an audience. It can also be a second achievement that surpasses the first.



In our Christian tradition we have practices of repetition, practices designed to deepen and expand our understanding and open us to fuller experience. We return to and repeat certain prayers, psalms and scripture passages. We engage in the practice of *lectio divina* in order to enter more deeply into the wisdom of a passage and to open ourselves more fully allowing the passage to transform us.

At the same time, there is a hidden danger in this invitation to repetition or return—the desire for things to be as they were, to cling to the ways in which the Holy One has come to us in the past. We can be like small children crying out, “Do it again! Do it again! Do it again!” However, John of the Cross reminds us:

*“To come to the knowledge you have not,  
You must go by a way in which you know not.”*

*John of the Cross*

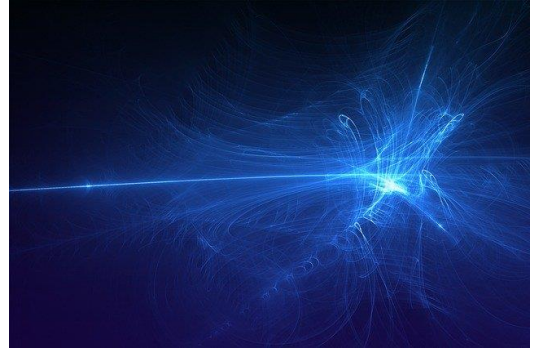
The invitation offered here is to a different kind of “encore,” one in which we return to the familiar and at the same time set aside our expectations of how things will be. This is an invitation to lay aside any expectation of how the Holy One may come to us and to simply open ourselves to what is and allow the Holy to take us where we have never been.

***With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling***

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time . .*

*Quick now, here, now, always—  
A condition of complete simplicity  
(Costing not less than everything)  
And all shall be well and  
All manner of thing shall be well  
When the tongues of flame are in-folded  
Into the crowned knot of fire  
And the fire and the rose are one.*

*Little Gidding, T. S. Eliot*



**Some simple practices of *Encore***

- ❖ Recall some favored passage that has sustained and nourished you over the years. Simply remember it and let yourself feel again the comfort and strength that it provides.
  - When you have a chance, sit quietly and re-read the favored passage, recalling the wisdom and strength you have garnered from it.
  - Then read the passage again and simply sit with it opening yourself to any new ways in which it may speak to you.
  - Carry some word or phrase from this passage with you and repeat it to yourself as a mantra throughout the day.
- ❖ Select one of the offerings on Contemplative Engagement from the LCWR website and take some time each day to quietly pray with a section of it. Invite others to reflect and pray this with you.

Set aside a half hour or so where you can sit quietly and read *Little Gidding*, the last of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. You can find it by going to Google and entering *Little Gidding*.

Return and read the poem two or three times over the course of the next month noticing what stays with you.

### **Communal contemplative dialogue**

Begin by sharing some moments of quiet presence with each other. Invite whoever would like to share some word, passage, or poem that they have found sustaining over these days and to speak briefly about how it sustains them and how they may be hearing this passage in a new way at this time.

Engage in reflective conversation around how these insights may be speaking to who we are to be and how we are to be in this moment.

