



MEDITATION ON AN ORANGE

This meditation uses an orange as a focal point for the practice.

OVERVIEW

Meditating on the simple beauty in an object of God's Creation with the inquisitive, curious outlook of wonder that George Washington Carver embodied.

MATERIALS

Fragrant, unblemished oranges

Scripture

ROMANS 1:19-20

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.

GENESIS 1:9-12

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.

Quotations

When I was young, I said to God, 'God, tell me the mystery of the universe.' But God answered, 'That knowledge is for me alone.' So I said, 'God, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, 'Well George, that's more nearly your size.' And he told me.

— *George Washington Carver*

My prayers seem to be more of an attitude than anything else. I indulge in very little lip service, but ask the Great Creator silently, daily, and often many times a day, to permit me to speak to Him through the three great Kingdoms of the world which He has created - the animal, mineral, and vegetable Kingdoms - to understand their relations to each other, and our relations to them and to the Great God who made all of us. I ask Him daily and often momentarily to give me wisdom, understanding, and bodily strength to do His will; hence I am asking and receiving all the time.

— *George Washington Carver*

Introducing the Practice

Ingrained in the very nature of humanity is a deep sense of wonder at the world and a desire to better understand it. The marvels of our world are truly incredible, and we do not have to go very far to appreciate them. Christians understand the world as created by God, and this gives us a very special way of understanding everything we see around us.

George Washington Carver (1864-1943) was an American botanist and man of deep faith whose scientific studies were always an attempt to better understand God's Creation. Carver is widely recognized for his outstanding scientific achievements in botany and agriculture – all of which are even more impressive considering the challenges that faced him as an African American born into slavery. In 1896, Carver became a professor at the Tuskegee Institute where he conducted research and taught new ways to develop the agricultural economy of the South. At the time, many southern farmers were struggling to grow cotton in soil that had been exhausted from single-crop agriculture and could no longer sustain active growth. Carver proposed that farmers grow peanut plants in order to regenerate the soil, and he developed over 300 products from peanuts in order to increase their commercial value. He became famous as the "Peanut-Man," and he was widely celebrated for his scientific expertise. Carver saw his scientific studies and his belief in God to be two expressions of the same wonder that he felt at the world, and he often claimed that his faith was the exact motivation behind his scientific studies.

As we prepare for our meditation on an orange today, let us enter with an attitude similar to that of George Washington Carver, whose faith produced in him a wonder and awe at the mysteries inherent in a simple object of God's Creation.

Preparing for the Practice

Have everyone spread out, then give each student an orange. Instruct them not to peel it or eat it yet.

The Spiritual Practice

Begin by centering yourself. Slow your breathing and bring your attention to this moment of prayer.

Now direct your attention to the object of God's creation sitting before you – an orange. Though there are many mysteries of this universe that God alone knows, ask God to share with you the mysteries of this one simple orange. (pause for silent reflection)

We normally tear through the skin and eat an orange quickly with our minds busily going through thoughts about many far away things. Try simply holding the orange and contemplating it passively. Notice its inherent beauty. Notice God's master touch. (pause for silent reflection)

Roll it in your hand. Feel its coolness...

Hold it next to your cheek. Smell the rind. (pause for silent reflection)

After a time, peel the orange slowly, attending to how perfectly the rind does its job of encasing, protecting, and sealing the fruit. (pause for silent reflection)

Hold the peeled orange in your hand and regard its fullness – its utter perfection. (pause for silent reflection)

Hold it next to your ear. Listen to the sound of the peel coming off the orange. (pause for silent reflection)

Smell the orange. (pause for silent reflection)

Pull the orange slowly apart into pieces, noticing its cohesion – its incredibly beautiful design, geometry and symmetry.

Take just one wedge and regard it, attend to it. Hold it up to the light or a candle. (pause for silent reflection)

After a time slowly eat it, eyes closed, attending to all the sensations. This orange is God's gift to you. "Taste and see that the Lord is good!" (Psalm 34:8)

Amen.

Duration: 15-20 minutes

Discussion Questions

1. How was your experience of the orange different than your normal experience of an orange?
2. How did you experience God while doing this meditation?
3. What do you think of George Washington Carver's attitude toward faith and scientific discovery?