



Howard Thurman: Moral Anchor to the Civil Rights Movement

Class Three Activity: Thurman's Laboratory

Howard Thurman's lectures were often preceded by extended periods of silence: guided meditations, times for contemplation, spontaneous responses to particular icons, symbols, ideas, poems, or religious figures. One of Thurman's favorite exercises was to go to the blackboard and have the students contemplate and respond to "a single, charged word."

Instructions:

1. "Open [your] mind to the music of the words, to the general atmosphere which listening to the psalm generated in the mind without paying attention to its meaning or ideas."
2. Listen to the musical selection: Kol Nidrei, Op. 47.
3. Select "a sentence, a phrase, a word, or an idea to which individual attention could be given for purposes of reflection, thought, meditation, or prayer" and contemplate this silently for forty minutes.

Psalm 139

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise;

you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down;

you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue

you, Lord, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before,

and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit?

Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn,

if I settle on the far side of the sea,

Even there your hand will guide me,

your right hand will hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me

and the light become night around me,"

Even the darkness will not be dark to you;

the night will shine like the day,

for darkness is as light to you.