



### What is Lectio Divina?

Lectio Divina (Latin for "Divine Reading") is an ancient contemplative practice of engaging with sacred texts in a deep, meditative way. Dating back to the 6th century, this practice invites us to move beyond merely analyzing or studying texts to experiencing them as a living dialogue with the divine. Though rooted in Christian monastic tradition, this approach can be adapted for spiritual texts from any tradition.

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### The Four Movements of Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina traditionally unfolds in four movements, creating a natural rhythm that moves from mind to heart:

1. Lectio (Reading)
2. Meditatio (Meditation)
3. Oratio (Prayer/Response)
4. Contemplatio (Contemplation)

These movements are not rigid steps but rather a flowing process that allows for a progressively deeper engagement with the text.

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### Preparing for Sacred Reading

#### Environment:

- Choose a quiet, comfortable space where you won't be disturbed
- Silence or silence electronic devices
- Consider lighting a candle or creating a small ritual to mark this as sacred time
- Have your chosen text readily available
- Allow 20-30 minutes for the full practice

#### Inner Preparation:

- Take a few deep breaths to center yourself
  - Gently release distractions and preoccupations
  - Set an intention to be fully present to the text and what may arise
  - Begin with a simple invocation or moment of silence to mark the transition
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## Detailed Instructions

### First Movement: Lectio (Reading) "What does the text say?"

- Choose a short passage (a paragraph or less is often sufficient)
- Read the passage slowly, aloud if possible
- Pay attention to the words themselves, their meaning and context
- Notice if a particular word, phrase, or image catches your attention
- Read the passage a second time, listening for what stands out to you
- Allow your first impressions to arise naturally

The purpose of this first movement is simply to become familiar with the text, letting it speak on its own terms before we bring our interpretations to it.

### Second Movement: Meditatio (Meditation) "What does the text say to me?"

- Focus on the word, phrase, or image that resonated with you
- Reflect on why this particular element stood out
- Consider what meaning it might hold for your life right now
- Allow associations, memories, or insights to surface
- Stay with whatever arises, exploring it with curiosity rather than analysis
- If your mind wanders, gently return to the word or phrase

This movement bridges the gap between the historical context of the text and your present situation, allowing the wisdom to become personally relevant.

### Third Movement: Oratio (Prayer/Response) "What do I say to the text?"

- Allow a natural response to arise from your heart
- This might be gratitude, questioning, struggle, or longing
- Express this response honestly, as in a conversation with a trusted friend
- If using traditional prayer, speak from your authentic experience
- For secular practice, frame this as your honest response to the wisdom encountered
- Stay with the feelings that arise, allowing them to deepen

This movement cultivates the dialogical nature of sacred reading—not just receiving wisdom but actively engaging with it from your lived experience.

### Fourth Movement: Contemplatio (Contemplation) "Resting in presence"

- Release all effort and specific focus
- Rest in the silence and spaciousness that remains
- Let go of words, images, and thoughts
- Simply be present to whatever arises
- Allow yourself to rest in the mystery beyond words
- If using devotional language: rest in God's presence
- If using secular language: rest in open awareness

This final movement transcends discursive thought, allowing for direct experience of the reality to which the text points, beyond concepts and language.

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## Closing the Practice

- Gradually return to ordinary awareness
  - Take a few deep breaths
  - Consider writing in a journal about your experience
  - Thank yourself for taking this time for deeper connection
  - If desired, seal the practice with a brief blessing or gesture of gratitude
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## Variations of Lectio Divina

### Group Practice:

- One person reads the selected passage aloud three times, with silence between readings
- After the first reading, each person shares a word or phrase that stood out (without elaboration)
- After the second reading, each person shares what this word or phrase evokes for them
- After the third reading, each person shares their response or what they feel called toward
- The session concludes with silent contemplation and perhaps a closing ritual

### Using Nature as Text:

- Substitute a natural setting for written text
- "Read" a landscape, plant, or natural object with the same attentiveness
- Follow the same four movements, allowing nature to speak to you
- This practice honors creation itself as a sacred text

### Using Art as Text:

- Select a piece of visual art, music, or poetry
  - Engage with it through the four movements
  - Allow the artistic expression to speak to you on multiple levels
  - This approach is sometimes called visio divina (divine seeing) when using visual art
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## Common Questions About Lectio Divina

Q: What texts are appropriate for Lectio Divina? A: While traditionally used with biblical passages, particularly the Psalms and Gospels, Lectio Divina can be practiced with any text considered spiritually meaningful—whether from religious traditions, poetry, wisdom literature, or contemporary spiritual writing.

Q: How long should the selected passage be? A: Shorter is generally better—a few verses or a short paragraph allows for deeper engagement. Quality of attention matters more than quantity of text.

Q: What if my mind keeps wandering? A: Mind-wandering is normal. When you notice it, gently return to the text or the word/phrase you've selected, without self-criticism. Each return is itself a valuable practice.

Q: How frequently should I practice Lectio Divina? A: The practice can be done daily, weekly, or whenever you seek a deeper connection with spiritual texts. Consistency helps develop the contemplative capacity to engage texts more deeply.

Q: What if nothing stands out to me in the text? A: This is perfectly normal, especially when beginning. Simply notice what you're experiencing—perhaps dryness, distraction, or neutrality—and let that be your starting point for reflection.

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## Tips for Deepening Your Practice

- Approach the same text multiple times, noticing how different elements may speak to you on different days
- Keep a journal of your experiences with Sacred Reading
- Try both familiar and unfamiliar texts to experience different types of engagement
- Remember there is no "right way" to experience the text—your authentic response is what matters
- Consider working with a spiritual director or joining a group to share the practice
- Be patient with yourself as you develop this contemplative skill

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## Historical Context

Lectio Divina was formalized by the Benedictine monk Guigo II in the 12th century, though the practice dates back to early desert monasticism. Originally a monastic practice, it has experienced renewed interest in recent decades among people from many traditions seeking contemplative approaches to sacred texts.

The practice reflects a transition from reading as information-gathering to reading as transformation—from reading to be informed to reading to be formed by wisdom that speaks to the heart and spirit.

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"Words are not merely words. In the desert of preparation, words become water, Refreshment, nourishment, and the sheer grace Of being addressed and responding."

- Kathleen Norris

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