

HAZELDEN MEDITATION SERIES

MELODY  
BEATTIE

52 Weeks of  
Conscious Contact



*Meditations  
for Connecting with God,  
Self & Others*

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Conscious Contact



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**MELODY BEATTIE**

 HAZELDEN®

Hazelden  
Center City, Minnesota 55012-0176

1-800-328-0094  
1-651-213-4590 (Fax)  
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*Editor's note*

The stories in this book are based on actual experiences. In some cases, the names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

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*For drama addicts*



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## INTRODUCTION

“What’s the name of that place?” I asked my friend. “I can’t think of the name of it, but I know you know what I’m talking about.”

“What place?”

“It’s that place you get to when you’re taking care of yourself and trusting God—when everything is all right, even the hard, painful stuff. But it’s more than taking care of yourself. That’s cold. The place I’m talking about is warmer than that. A place where you’re not childish, but where you’re innocent—like a child. The world comes alive for you. It’s a magical place,” I said.

“Maybe that’s the name of it,” she said. “A magical place.”

“Nope, that’s too hokey,” I said. “It’s more than that. Maybe it’s what some people call the Kingdom of Heaven?”

“Don’t some people call it Nirvana?” she asked. “No. Too many people think you don’t go there until after you die.”

“I didn’t even know about it when I first started taking care of myself,” I said. “I found it later, years later, but I know other people know about it too.”

Although we never agreed on the name of that place, this is a book about finding it. This book is less a meditation book, and more a book about acquiring and practicing simple life values that will help us get there.

The impetus for this book came from Alcoholic Anonymous’s Step Eleven: “Sought through prayer and

meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

*Conscious contact* is that place many of us have known, but it can be elusive. Sustaining conscious contact seems to require a curious balance between working hard and letting go.


Each week we'll look at one idea, or value, drawn from the well of religions and recovery programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon. Then we'll explore ways of consciously putting that value into practice throughout the week.

You could read the entire weekly section on one day, apply the ideas throughout the week, and review your progress at week's end. Or, if you prefer daily readings, you could read one of each week's seven sections: a value, an application, a challenge, an inventory focus, an action, a gratitude focus, and, finally, a prayer.

You could progress through the year following the course of the book. Or you could find the weekly topic that applies to a current situation and work on that.

This book is for people who want to do more than let life happen to them.

It's for recovering drug addicts; alcoholics; codependents; people not addicted to anything; people in grief; people just a little on the obsessive side; people who attend church, temple, or synagogue; and people who don't.

This book is for all of us who thought we could skim lightly over the surface of life—who then discovered that's not what we wanted after all. The gifts are below the surface. Have fun uncovering them. 

WEEK 1

## *The Quest*

### ❧ Day 1 ❧

Have you ever gone on a scavenger hunt or a treasure hunt? You have a list of things you're looking for, and it's up to you to get creative and find them. Let's pretend that you're on a treasure hunt. Only it's not pretend, it's real.

In the introduction, we talked about that nameless place that many of us are trying to get to, whether we know it or not. The treasures we're seeking are the values we acquire, and through practice, we create this magical place.

I didn't start a formal spiritual quest for values because I wanted to. I started looking for and practicing many of my values because I had to. It was a do-or-die situation.

I started praying because I was killing myself with alcohol and drugs and I couldn't stop drinking on my own. I needed help.

I started learning about the value of living one day at a time because I found myself in such painful, overwhelming circumstances that there was no other way to survive.

Most of my values resulted from painful or uncomfortable situations that demanded that I do something different. Sometimes in my quest for another treasure—improving myself, getting a better job, or improving a

relationship—I discovered other treasures such as patience, faith, discipline, guidance, surrender, and service. Over time, I learned that these values were more than emergency-care procedures. Living with these values was a good way to live.

On one of my expeditions, I found myself on top of a famous holy mountain in China. I looked around at the people like myself who had forged their way to the top. Some of them were tourists. They had cameras around their necks. They looked like they were there to see the sights. Any difficulties they encountered on the way to the top were just irritating inconveniences.

Others were more spiritually inclined. They considered each hardship a chance to prove their devotion to spiritual principles. They had humbled themselves by prostrating each step of the way. The trip was a pilgrimage.

Each step was holy and valuable. Whether you call it a quest, a process, a scavenger hunt, a treasure hunt, or a pilgrimage, like Ken Blanchard says, “The only thing that will keep you going is a huge amount of faith and trust in the journey.”

*Value: This week we will focus on valuing the pilgrimage and the lessons put before us.*

## ❧ Day 2 ❧

“It was the hardest two years of my life,” a woman said. “So many painful, unexpected events happened. I felt so abandoned, so lost. I didn’t understand what was happening, and I felt tortured by God and life. I didn’t think it would ever end. But it did. Now I can look back on that time and say, ‘Wow. Look at all I learned. There’s nothing that life can bring my way that I can’t handle and get through.’”

She learned self-confidence. But whether she's conscious of it or not, this woman is beginning to learn the value of trusting the process.

**Application:** *Sometimes we don't know what we're learning, or whether we're learning anything at all. It's easy to look back on a situation—once it has worked itself out—and be in awe of the process and all that we learned. The time we most need to trust the journey is when it looks like we can't.*

### ❧ Day 3 ❧

Life brings us to our knees. We can't take *it* anymore, whatever *it* is. In desperation, we begin learning new values and living them in new ways, such as prayer, meditation, or service.

Or we're desperate to reach a goal in our lives: more money, a better job, a change in ourselves. So we begin living new values in order to move closer to desirable changes.

For whatever reasons, we begin living by values that work. These values shift our lives. We begin to experience peace and joy. And some of the things we want begin to take place. The pain subsides. The relationship problem improves. We get the new job. The situation becomes better.

Then we relax our practice or attach our happiness to the outcome—the external things—forgetting that it was by living these values that we produced our joy.

**Challenge:** *The hardest thing about values is remembering that they are the real treasures.*

❧ Day 4 ❧

Some problems are slow-burners. We live with them for a long time and get used to mucking about in them.

Other problems strike hard and fast, coming down on us like a hailstorm.

It can be difficult, when the storm hits, to remember that the journey is a benevolent and holy one, a process that is working with us to help us learn something new.

***Inventory Focus:** Are you going through a situation right now that feels torturous, like it's happening for no reason other than to irritate or punish you? Can you believe, just a little, that what you're going through right now is a valuable part of your life and that an overall benevolent process is taking place? Can you at least believe that this situation has the possibility of shaping you in valuable ways and bringing gifts to your life?*

❧ Day 5 ❧

A recent article suggested that the biggest cause of stress is the frustration of not getting what we want. We can reduce our stress by turning frustration into fascination.

***Action:** Instead of asking, "Why is this happening to me?" ask, "What am I learning now?"*

❧ Day 6 ❧

I was walking through my house stomping my feet and whining about a seemingly impossible problem I was facing. That's when I remembered that stomping my feet, whining, and resisting will not solve the problem. It will not make it go away. Practicing my values will.

**Gratitude Focus:** *This week, we can practice gratitude for the lesson we're learning right now, whether or not we understand it yet. Sometimes the best teachers are tough circumstances. We can be grateful for those teachers too.*

❧ Day 7 ❧

The fog lifts. The way becomes clear. It is with sheer joy that we realize we're not alone. Something valuable and important was being worked out. However difficult that process, it changed us, transformed us, took us to a new place.

"Next time," we think, "I won't ride that extra roller coaster of emotion caused by not trusting the process. I'll trust it all along."

**Prayer:** *Higher Power, help me remember that you're not torturing me, you're teaching me. Please show me—in a way I can understand—what you want me to learn. Help me remember that practicing the values I'm learning is the true source of joy. Guide and bless me in my pilgrimage through the year.*



 **Day 1** 

I heard the water pipes gushing under the house. I was so busy. A busted pipe was the last thing I needed. Whether it was what I needed or not, it was what I had. The high tide frequently banged against the exposed plumbing. Calling the plumber for a quick repair job was part of my duties as condominium president and manager.

I called directory assistance for the number for the local plumber, then I called the plumber. An hour later, two men in plumbing uniforms showed up at the door. I explained the problem. They said they'd get right to it. I went back to work.

An hour later, they pounded on the door again. This time they were scowling.

"You'd better come look," one of the men said.

I had dealt with these plumbers time and time again. I trusted them.

"Just fix it, please," I said. "I'm busy."

Another hour passed. They knocked on the door again. This time, they insisted I come with them.

"What is the problem?" I asked.

They shook their heads, looking concerned. "We can't repair the pipe that broke," they said. "The fittings are



corroded. It's bad," they said. "You're going to have to replace all the plumbing under the house."

"Just tell me the bottom line," I said. "How much is it going to cost?"

"Somewhere between five and seven thousand dollars."

Now they had my attention. "Show me," I said.

I went under the house with them. What had previously been a dripping pipe was now a rain shower under the house.

Then, a light went on. There were two plumbing companies by the same name that serviced the area. One was a highly reputable plumber, the one I called all the time. The other by the same name wasn't.

"Which plumbing company are you with?" I asked. They explained they were *the other one*. Directory assistance had connected me with the wrong one.

I said they needed to leave immediately. They said they needed to be paid for the time they had worked. I said they hadn't finished the job. They said it would cost me thousands of dollars for them to complete the work. We were at a standoff. For just a moment, I considered going ahead. After all, I was already into these guys for some money. "Maybe I'll let them finish the job," I thought.

Then I remembered, "Don't dance with the devil."

"Let's negotiate," I said. "I'm going to give you something, but you're not going to get what you want because I didn't get what I want." After some haggling, I paid them a small amount of money and they left.

I called the other plumber. In two hours, the job was properly done. The bill was \$87.50.

Encountering integrity can be like a breath of fresh air.

A person of integrity has honorable intentions, is trustworthy, and is honest. An air of high drama or manipulation does not surround acts of integrity. Acts of integrity stand on their own.

*Value: This week we'll explore the value of integrity—other people's and our own.*

### ❧ Day 2 ❧

Some people just can't help themselves; they simply lack integrity. We, too, can lapse into less than honorable behavior at times. The burden, then, is on us to take steps to protect ourselves from other people's lack of integrity, and from our own.

*Application: Whenever our guts go off because we don't trust someone, or whenever we're in a state of high anxiety because we're not living up to our own standards for ourselves, it's time to get back to basics. That's when it's time to quickly assess which of our own values are needed to get us back on track.*

### ❧ Day 3 ❧

A friend had gone to work for an employer with a reputation for dishonesty. Then he wondered, in the end, why that employer lied, conned, and screwed over him. Story's not over. He ran into the employer years later and got mixed up with him again.

“I was trying to make him be honest with me. I was insisting that he treat me fairly this time.” We all know the ending. He got screwed over again.

Dancing with the devil is seductive—in work and in

love. It's an enticing challenge; we want to make somebody change, treat us right, and give us what we know we deserve. Not living up to our own values can be seductive too. "This situation is an exception," we think. "This time, the values I believe in don't really apply."

It's easy to look around at the world and think that the only ones who really make it are the people who lie, cheat, and steal. Or we see something we really want, and we believe we can't get it honestly, so we set our values aside for a time.

Acknowledging other people's lack of integrity usually hurts. At least it stings. By the time we see it, we may be in over our head. "I'll just keep dealing with this person," we think. "Try and recoup my losses so I don't lose any more."

I'm as prone to dancing with the devil as anyone else. We pay a price each time we do.

**Challenge:** *The hardest part about living with values can be simple pride. It's hard to admit that we got conned. It can be humiliating to admit that we can't have what we want, or that we've not lived up to our values, or that we have a lesson to learn because we made a mistake. Here's a hint: Learn to take your losses and run.*

#### 🌀 Day 4 🌀

Do you value integrity in others?

**Inventory Focus:** *Are the people you're involved with in business, play, and love living by values that are harmonious with yours? Are you dancing with the devil somewhere in your life, either by associating with people who don't have integrity, or by not living up to your personal values?*

❧ Day 5 ❧

Play a little game with yourself. Find the value in each situation you find yourself in today.

**Action:** *You don't live in utopia yet. Forgo naïveté. Protect yourself when others display a lack of integrity. Work on living by your values.*

❧ Day 6 ❧

I'm not sure whether experience is the best teacher, but it's a consistent one.

**Gratitude Focus:** *We can be grateful for all the situations that teach us the value of integrity. We can be grateful for all the opportunities we have to practice our values each day.*

❧ Day 7 ❧

When we can't control anything or anyone around us, we can gain a sense of control by living with integrity. Figure out what you need to do to take care of yourself. Don't judge others too harshly for not living up to your values, and give yourself a break for being imperfect. Then let God handle the rest.

**Prayer:** *Grant me the courage to change the things I can, and the presence of mind to know when someone is acting without integrity toward me. Help us acquire a treasure chest of the real gems in life—the values we acquire and live by each day.*



## ❧ Day 1 ❧

When I began studying martial arts, I felt awkward about the moves I was learning. “Can’t you give me a book?” I asked my instructor. “I need a set of rules to tell me exactly how to do this, so I know when I’m getting it right.”

“You don’t need to read a book,” he said. “Keep practicing. You may not always know when you’re doing it wrong, but you’ll know when you get it right.”

Applying the appropriate value to a given situation requires practice. Sometimes we need to practice patience in a particular relationship. On the other hand, there is a point when we need to practice setting a boundary and saying, “That’s enough and that’s it.” When do we need to let go a little more, and when have we let go too much?

Some situations require us to express our feelings, like anger or sadness. At what point, however, have we mucked about in our upset feelings too long, refusing to forgive someone? When is tolerance the life-giving value of the day, and when have we tolerated enough?

What about prayer and faith? How much time do we spend on our knees or with hands folded, talking to God? On the other hand, when do we get up and go do something ourselves—take an appropriate action to help change our own lives?

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What gets in the way of serenity? For most people, the answer is life—those everyday distractions, obligations, and frustrations that cause chaos and clutter. Best-selling self-help author Melody Beattie knows all too well the challenge of creating a more serene life for oneself. Her week-by-week guidebook will get you thinking about—and acting on—ways to bring more balance into your life by

- nurturing inner peace
- reaching out to others
- carrying through on good intentions
- making time for fun
- cultivating a deeper prayer life

Each week invites new opportunities for reflection, affirmation, and change.



**Melody Beattie** is the author of numerous best-selling books, such as *Codependent No More* and *The Language of Letting Go*, which draw on the wisdom of Twelve Step healing, Christianity, and Eastern religions.

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