

Simmering as a Spiritual Practice

by Chris Koellhoffer, IHM June 20, 2026

Recently I was reading about the Slow Food movement, a philosophy that invites us to move from cooking as a rushed chore to cooking as a meditative process. Advocating for meals that are good, clean, and fair, slow cooking encourages using whole, regional ingredients and respecting and preserving culinary traditions. Beyond using a Crock-Pot or Dutch oven, the process of slow cooking views food preparation as an act of patience, mindfulness, and respect for ingredients. It moves away from instant gratification and microwave convenience and encourages intentional living.



"Is that for real?" a friend of mine, a mother of four, wondered aloud about this philosophy. I understand that the optimal time for slow cooking is not the moment when you have several hungry mouths crying for supper on the table, right now. But could the philosophy behind slow cooking be integrated into our full and busy lives, at least occasionally? Perhaps on a leisurely Sunday (if there is one) or a day when we might be prepping meals for the week ahead. We can also prepare for a gathering of friends or others we cherish and hold those dear ones in awareness as we prep and combine the ingredients. We can cook with mindfulness of the farmers who raised the vegetables or livestock, for the laborers who harvested them, for the truckers who drove the basics to a supermarket, for the workers who arranged and replenished them. We can cook with gratitude that we have any food at all and advocate for those who have nothing to satisfy their hunger.

Another way we can embrace the intent of slow cooking is in the way we pray and discern. We can cultivate the practice of pausing before replying to an email or text message. We can inhale and exhale to center ourselves as we begin a time of prayer. We can also breathe calmly for a moment before reacting to a comment or conversation that puts us on the defensive.



I find that times of discernment provide the optimal setting for the slow cooking philosophy to be put into practice, specifically, through the practice of simmering. For discernment, I've adapted the Ignatian way of noting the pros and cons of a choice into the practice of two areas surrounding a possible choice: noticing what attracts and draws us towards a possible decision, and also noticing what we might resist about that same choice. This is not a positive or negative ranking, but instead a simple and conscious noticing of what is. Then we place all that information into an imagined pot, put it all on a back burner, and let it simmer for a while, low and slow. We give it an occasional stir and notice any changes in the whole. If we receive new information that might affect the outcome, we simply add that to the pot that's been simmering, taste the difference, and give it another stir. Over time and with thoughtful prayer,

we ask to receive enlightenment from the Holy One as to the direction which would best serve our own place in life and in the life of the world.

I invite you to pause as we come to the close of this reflection to remember any practices you have that integrate some element of slow cooking into your spiritual life or everyday living. With the grace of the Holy One, how might “low and slow” make a difference in your life at this time?

Takeaway

Sit in stillness with the Holy One.

Notice your breathing, especially the pace of how you inhale and exhale.
Continue praying with your breathing in and out for 5 minutes or more.
Notice how your breath slows over time and becomes more peaceful.
Finish by breathing a slow breath as blessing on yourself and out into the world.

Featured Images: Vitor Monthay, [Unsplash](#); Fabian Møller, [Unsplash](#)

[Simmering as a Spiritual Practice – Mining the Now](#)