

THE JOURNEY OF MEDITATION

STELLA KON

Christian Meditation is a form of prayer. It is a discipline, a commitment, a promise to the Lord – to sit down to meditate regularly twice every day, and to keep returning to the mantra in spite of countless distractions. As disciples, we trust that through this discipline, we will be brought ever closer to Him.

The ancient symbol of the labyrinth reminds us not to expect simple linear progress. Many times we may seem to be just wandering round and round. However there are no mistakes or wrong turnings on this journey of meditation because we trust the Lord, who is at the centre, to lead us and to guide us. And from the very beginning, wherever the path takes us, we are never too far from the centre.

WHAT MATTERS IS TO BE FAITHFUL

A person who has just started meditating is as close to the Lord as another who has been meditating for twenty years. The beginner may have a serene and beautiful meditation experience while the experienced one may struggle through a dry period of difficulties and distractions. What matters is that both of them remain faithful through it all. As the poet T.S. Eliot said “For us there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.” Just like the poor widow whom Jesus praised for giving all that she had – if we are greatly distracted yet we persevere in sitting through the meditation period - we have given it all we’ve got.

DO NOT TRY TO MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS

Meditation is not a technique; there are no performance goals to be achieved. There is no “success” to be measured. We don’t give ourselves a rating depending on whether we were totally free from distractions or whether we had a beautiful experience, or any other matters. In fact we should not evaluate or judge our meditation because it is through the distractions and difficulties that we grow. Each time that we are distracted – and each time we then humbly return to the mantra – we grow in faithfulness and in discipline.

THE MANTRA BEGINS TO SOUND IN OUR HEART

As we start our meditation, our mind is full of daily fears, worries, distractions and it is an effort to keep coming back to the mantra. Then it seems to sink deeper inside us. We are not so much saying the mantra, as sounding it in our heart. And then increasingly we begin to listen to it. And as we listen, it brings us to a place of silence. (The process usually takes at least fifteen minutes – which is why we recommend at least twenty minutes for the period of

meditation.) But the silence is not a goal to be achieved! As soon as you say to yourself “Ah, I am in silence!” you have been distracted by your thoughts – and the only thing to do is to faithfully return to sounding the mantra.

A GRADUAL HEALING PROCESS

As we continue meditating over a period of time, we may come to a deeper level of consciousness where old memories, hurts, emotional wounds begin to

surface. We need not worry or be unduly concerned. If they arise during our meditation period, we gently let go of them and return to our mantra. Jesus, the Divine Healer, is reaching out to heal these wounds. And as time goes by, we will find the burden has been lifted from our hearts.



The ancient labyrinth in the Cathedral of Chartres is a symbol of the journey of faith.

In meditation, there are no instant results. The changes take place gradually, like the seed that grows unseen in the dark. All that we have to do is try our best to be faithful to the discipline, and He will make all things beautiful, in His time. ■

This article was compiled from many sources, especially the talks of Peter Ng and the writings of Laurence Freeman. Books and other resources on Christian Meditation can be obtained from the bookstore outside the Meditation Room (contact Daulet at 64697671 or email her at daulet@pacific.net.sg). The book and CDs referred alongside can also be obtained from Katong Catholic Bookstore, next to Holy Family Church.

The next article in this continuing series on Christian Meditation will be “John Main and the WCCM community, world wide and in Singapore.”



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ) ON CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Q What makes our meditation Christian?

It is our faith which makes our meditation Christian. We are joined to the Spirit of Jesus who prays within us. "God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of His son, crying 'Abba, Father!'" (*Gal 4:6*). The Spirit prays without words: "We do not know how to pray, but the spirit prays within us in groans that cannot be put into words, and he who can see into all hearts knows what the Spirit means." (*Rom 8:26*)

Q Are breathing and posture important?

Fr John Main did not give much emphasis to breathing and posture because he wanted to keep the discipline simple and not turn it into a technique. When you get too interested in technique, you forget the purpose of meditation, which is prayer.

Meditation involves the whole person, body, psyche and spirit – so what we do with our body in meditation, is of great importance. Our position expresses an attitude of reverence. We need to sit upright, relaxed and alert, without being in pain or discomfort. Learning to breathe well using the abdomen, and to sit upright with a straight spine, helps us enter into a state of stillness, simplicity and silence.

Q Is it necessary to meditate twice a day? I find it difficult to fit in two slots.

For newcomers, it will be a challenge to find the time to meditate twice daily. Start to meditate faithfully once a day for 20 minutes, either in the morning or evening. This will require an adjustment to the daily routine, and may require some sacrifice such as giving up some of your favourite television shows. After one or two years, try to fit in the second meditation period. The rhythm of meditating twice daily brings serenity to our lives, as morning meditation opens the day while the evening meditation closes it.

The experience of many meditators is that in making time for meditation, we actually gain time. This is because the quality of our life is considerably enhanced by meditation.

Please send all your queries on meditation to: meditatorQA@gmail.com

HOW TO MEDITATE

SIT

Sit down. Sit still and upright.
Close your eyes lightly.
Sit relaxed but alert.

SAY

Silently, interiorly,
begin to say a single word.
We recommend the
prayer-phrase "maranatha".
Recite it as four syllables of
equal length: Ma-ra-na-tha.

LISTEN

Listen to it as you say it,
gently but continuously.
Do not think or imagine anything,
spiritual or otherwise.

RETURN

If thoughts or images come,
these are distractions at the time
of meditation, so keep returning
to simply saying the word.

PERSEVERE

Meditate each morning and
evening for 20 to 30 minutes.

Meditation Groups

GROUPS & TIME

Tuesday, 8pm (*Beginners group*)

Wednesday, 7.30pm

Thursday, 8pm

Friday, 8pm (*Young Adults group*)

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WHAT KNOCKS US OFF-CENTRE OFTEN RE-CENTRES US

What uncentres us is a crisis of some kind. Nobody wants to be in crisis. However, it is often the means by which renewal takes place. In these talks, Laurence Freeman explores the rich metaphors that are generated by different aspects of the symbol of the Centre. Giving balance, it is the symbol of wholeness, a place of convergence, a place of peace. A centre is relational; it cannot exist outside of what it is the centre of. It is a moving point within a dynamic system. A sailor will tell you that navigation involves the daily discipline of checking a number of points in order to safely reach the destination. Our practice of twice-daily meditation is a discipline that acts as a 'beacon' that directs us, and keeps us centred within ourselves – within the universe – within God.

CD2

- 1 Being centred
- 2 The day's work in navigation
- 3 Checking your course
- 4 Reaching the centre
- 5 Advaita - non-duality

CD3

- 1 The journey of solitude
- 2 The uniqueness of solitude
- 3 Keeping the gates of the city open
- 4 Coming to a place of rest

CD4

- 1 Being re-centred in times of crisis
- 2 Affliction leading to the centre
- 3 Obedience - listening to the silence
- 4 Benedictine spirituality

Silence & Stillness in Every Season

EDITED BY PAUL T HARRIS

NEW EDITION
with new Foreword

DAILY READINGS
with
JOHN MAIN

Silence &
Stillness in
Every Season

Every morning and evening these daily readings offer gentle encouragement and wise inspiration.

Laurence Freeman OSB

This collection of readings from John Main's many talks and books draws the essence of his teachings into one volume. Paul Harris has devotedly selected the essential extracts from each of John Main's works and arranged them into an attractive and practical daily-readings format. The selection is arranged so that each year can be a renewal of the journey for us, reminding us that we are all beginners always. Paul Harris has also selected and positioned these readings with a sense of the liturgical year. As a monk, John Main lived each day with this rich sense of sacred time, and to read this book daily is to have a companion for our own pilgrimage whose wisdom inspires, keeps us mindful, and keeps us going.

Edited by PAUL T HARRIS
with JOHN MAIN