The World Community for Christian Meditation

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April 17 Readings

An excerpt from John Main, ?Kissing the Joy as it Flies,? in THE HEART OF CREATION (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007), pp. 74-75.

Meditation is concerned with detachment. And as in our Western religious vocabulary there is no word more misunderstood than detachment, meditation can often present unnecessary problems or complications for people. It seems to us, generally, that detachment means a frosty sort of platonic indifference and it was this that put most of us off the idea when we came across the word in many spiritual books of the past which talked of Christian life from a largely negative or repressive view of detachment.

Yet I feel that detachment is the most important lesson that mediation has to teach us today as men and women of the West, affected by this often badly-emphasized religious culture. Detachment is not dissociation from yourself or an evasion of your problems or your responsibilities. It is not a denial of friendship or affection, or even of passion. Detachment is, in essence, detachment from self-preoccupation, from that often unconscious mind-set that puts myself at the centre of all creation. Detachment is equally concerned with a commitment to friendship, to enduring brotherhood and sisterhood, to a self-transcending and outreaching love. Detachment makes love possible because love is only possible if we are detached from self-preoccupation, if we have moved out of self-isolation, if we are freed from self-indulgence. The disengagement that detachment involves is from using other people for one?s own ends. But above all, and this is the important lesson we have to learn in meditation, detachment is liberation from the anxiety we have about my own survival as a self. Life teaches us all that loving is in essence losing oneself in the larger reality of the other, of others, and of God. Detachment from self-centredness liberates us for love so that we are no longer dominated by the animal quest for survival. Detachment requires fully human trust: trust of the other, both in other people and in God. It requires the willingness to let go, to give up controlling, and to be.

Meditate for Thirty Minutes. Remember: Sit down. Sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly, begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer phrase "Maranatha." Recite it as four syllables of equal length. Listen to it as you say it, gently, but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything spiritual or otherwise. Thoughts and images will likely come, but let them pass. Just keep returning your attention ? with humility

and simplicity to saying your word in faith, from the beginning to the end of your meditation.

After Meditation, ?In Blackwater Woods,? Mary Oliver in NEW AND SELECTED POEMS (Boston: Beacon. 1992) pp. 177-78.

In Blackwater Woods

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars

of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,

the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders

of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its name, is

nameless now.
Every year
everything
I have ever learned

in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side

is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.
To live in this world

you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it

against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.

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