The World Community for Christian Meditation

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January 30 Readings

Laurence Freeman OSB,

"The Fear of Death," THE SELFLESS SELF
(London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1989), pp. 129-131.

By meditating. . .we are facing death every day. And if we face death every day, if we allow ourselves to die a little more each day, then the experience of death will allow us to live each day more fully. Death faced with faith takes us beyond the fear of death and has us live each day with the certain hope of eternal life. That hope is why meditation is a way of life.

Because it is a way to die. Death cancels out our sense of the future and so forces us to concentrate wholly in the present moment. Where else is there to go? When we really face death we are totally in the present moment. We enter eternity before we die, if we can face death with this unevasive attentiveness. But we always try to escape the present moment.

We usually evade the present, either by living in the past, or by creating a world of fantasy. But when we are meditating, the saying of the mantra closes off those two options or escape routes. There is nowhere to go except to be *here*. The mantra points in one direction, towards the center. It is a narrow path, but it is the path of truth. As we follow the way of the mantra, as we learn to say it with courage and humility, it leads us along a way in which everything in us dies that would hold us back from fullness of life.

We die each day in faith and that is the supreme preparation for the hour of our death. But as a way of dying in faith it inevitably brings us to confront two very powerful forces that we must also be prepared to face. They are the forces of fear and anger. [. . . .]

[But] anger, and the fear that it springs from, is everything that meditation is not. The deepest anger comes from our deepest fear—of death. But it comes from all sorts of secondary causes too, from everything that makes up our psychological history. We need to be aware when we meditate, and as we cleanse ourselves of that anger, that it is not our immediate concern to trace where it comes from.

All that is really important is that we are shedding it. . . What is important is that the love active

in the faith of the mantra casts out anger from the heart. We begin to meditate with a great advantage if we start with a developed faith because we begin by being able to understand that anger is cast out by the power of Christ. . .Christ in the power of the Spirit can cast out anger because he is the one who has overcome the primal fear of death and who is now empowered to free us from that fear. . . .[In the words of 1 John 4:16-18], ”God is love; he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him.

This is for us the perfection of love, to have confidence on the day of judgement, and this we can have, because even in this world we are as he is. There is no room for fear in love; perfect love banishes fear.”

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 from St Augustine, *Sermons*, noted in THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM, Olivier Clement (London: New City, 1995), p. 249.

Fear is a suffering that oppresses us. But look at the immensity of love.

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