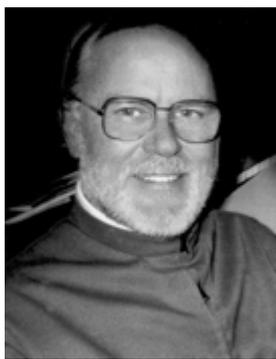


## January 9 Readings



John Main OSB, "Second Conference," THE GETHSEMANI TALKS

(Tucson, AZ: Medio Media, 1999), pp. 35-37.

We must take extreme care about using terms like "self-renunciation." In prayer we do truly seek to turn our whole being to a contemplation of God's goodness, of his infinite love. But we can only do this with any degree of effectiveness when we have first truly come close to ourselves. Prayer itself is the way to experience the truth of the words of Jesus: "The man who would find his life, must first lose it." But we have to take a preliminary step. And this first step is to gain the necessary confidence to lay down our life in the poverty of the single verse in meditation. This is the tremendous importance of Christian community---when we live with [others] and experience ourselves as revered and loved we build up the confidence that is necessary to enter into prayer where we practice this total poverty, this total renunciation. And Christian self-renunciation is always self-affirmation in Christ.

Meditation and the poverty of it is no form of self-rejection. We are not running away from ourselves, nor do we hate ourselves. On the contrary, our search is a search for ourselves and the experience of our own personal and infinite capacity to be loved. The harmony of the real Self that lies beyond all selfishness, beyond all ego-based activity, is so well attested to in the Christian tradition. St Catherine of Genoa put it succinctly: "My *meis* God. Nor do I know my selfhood save in him." But to *arrive* at our selfhood---and it is to that invitation we respond when we meditate---or, putting it in the more felicitous and perhaps more accurate language of the East, to *realize* ourselves---we must pass into the radical experience of personal poverty with an unflinching self-surrender.

And what we surrender, what we die to is, in the thought of Zen, not the self or the mind but rather that *image* of the self or the mind which we have mistakenly come to identify with who we really are. Now this is not a proposition that we need, in the language of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, "to expound with imaginative cleverness." But it does indicate that what we are renouncing in prayer is, essentially, *unreality*. And the pain of the renunciation will be in

proportion to the extent that we have committed ourselves to unreality, the extent to which we have taken our illusions to be real. In prayer we divest ourselves of the illusion of the isolating ego. We do so in a sustained act of Faith by concentrating our entire self away from the idea of ourselves, by concentrating on the real Self, created by God, redeemed by Jesus, a temple of the Holy Spirit.

**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***, Sri Ramana Maharshi, in RAMANA MAHARSHI and the PATH OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE, by Arthur Osborne (York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, 1997), pp. 20-21.

When a person knows his true Self for the first time something else arises from the depths of his being and takes possession of him. That something is behind the mind; it is infinite, divine, eternal. Some people call it The Kingdom of Heaven, others call it the soul, others again Nirvana, and Hindus call it Liberation. You may give it what name you wish. When this happens, a person has not really lost himself; rather he has found himself.

Unless and until a person embarks on this quest of the true Self, doubt and uncertainty will follow his footsteps through life. The greatest kings and statesmen try to rule others when in their heart of hearts they know that they cannot rule themselves. Yet the greatest power is at the command of a person who has penetrated to his inmost depth. . .What is the use of knowing about everything else when you do not yet know who you are?

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