



# The World Community for Christian Meditation

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## March 6 Readings



Laurence Freeman OSB, "Letter Nine," **COMMON GROUND** (New York:

**Continuum, 1999), pp. 104-105.**

The great risk we take in meditation is first of all to be ourselves. This is the first step. If we did not take the corresponding next step, we would never move from where we are; we would be hopping on one leg all our life. The next step is to take the risk of letting others be themselves. Perceiving their reality as distinct from our own is the way to do this. And to see them as real is to love them. Iris Murdoch once wrote that "love is the perception of the individual." She went on, "Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than ourselves is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality. What stuns us into a realization of our supersensible destiny is unutterable particularly."

Turning attention away from ourselves toward the greater reality "outside us" that contains us is the great act of contemplation. It is the same act of contemplation however we manage to do it: in relationships, in art, in service and duty, and in prayer. Certainly, learning to meditate--a lifelong art to learn--is a fundamental way to do it. But it is not limited to the actual work of meditation. To meditate is to learn how to live contemplatively in everything we do. St Antony of the Desert once called his disciples to him and told them to "always breathe Christ."

Small things hold great mysteries. William Blake spoke of the holiness of the "minute particular." Meditation as a daily spiritual practice soon becomes a way of life in which our attention to small things expands the horizon of our perception and the richness of our existence. Discretion--the great virtue of the desert tradition--grows in our judgment and dealing with others. With discretion comes the wisdom of balance and moderation. A strong compensatory force is needed to correct a life that has swung out of balance and is veering from one extreme, one crisis, to another.

Discretion, as a spiritual fruit of meditation, is an extremely powerful force capable of doing this. It keeps us centered in the midst of storms and tragedies. We learn eventually not to give up meditation when life's problems get too difficult. We learn that you can meditate even in prison when it seems your life has stopped. We come to feel the effect of meditation in all the experiences with which life confronts us: how to deal with the troubles of the heart (falling in love, falling out of love), how to cope with jealousy or greed (in yourself or others), how to live with the thorn in the flesh.

The contemplative mentality, which meditation cultivates gradually, becomes our habitual style of life. This will not diminish our energy or love of life. In fact, it will energize us and make life seem more wonderful. The

vast amount of energy we can expend in coming to simple decisions, for example, is reduced. The problems which occupy us do so for less time. The anguish of choosing dissolves in the act of attention. [And] when we look clearly, we really see. . . .

**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 Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," *WAITING ON GOD* (London: Fount (HarperCollins), 1977), pp. 60-61.

Not only does the love the God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbor, which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. Those who are unhappy have no need for anything in this world but people capable of giving them their attention. The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle. Nearly all those who think they have this capacity do not possess it. Warmth of heart, impulsiveness, pity are not enough.

In the first legend of the Grail, it is said that the Grail (the miraculous stone vessel which satisfies all hunger by virtue of the consecrated host) belongs to the first comer who asks the guardian of the vessel, a king three-quarters paralyzed by the most painful wound: "What are you going through?"

The love of our neighbor in all its fullness simply means being able to say to him: "What are you going through?" It is a recognition that the sufferer exists, not only as a unit in a collection, or a specimen from the social category labeled "unfortunate," but as a person, exactly like us, who was one day stamped with a special mark by affliction. For this reason it is enough, but it is indispensable, to know how to look at him in a certain

way.

This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth.

Only the person who is capable of attention can do this.

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