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What is Meditation?

Meditation is the faithful repetition of a prayer phrase or 'mantra' as John Main called it. John Main rediscovered this way of prayer in the writings of the early Christians, the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who in the fourth century of our Common Era retired mainly to the desert of Egypt to live an authentic Christian life based on the teaching of Jesus.

The phrase John Main recommended is 'Maranatha'. He chose that one, because it is the oldest Christian prayer in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. Moreover, the word has no associations for us, so it won't give fuel to our mind eager to go on thinking.

The faithful and loving repetition of this prayer leads us to stillness of body and mind and helps us to enter the silence that dwells in the centre of our being. The famous 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart said: 'Nothing describes God as well as silence.' There in the true centre of our being dwells Christ, and there we enter the prayer of Jesus. John Main said in 'Moment of Christ':

"It is our conviction that the central message of the New Testament is that there is really only one prayer and that this prayer is the prayer of Christ. It is a prayer that continues in our hearts day and night. I can describe it only as the stream of love that flows constantly between Jesus and his Father. This stream of love is the Holy Spirit."

Our first aim is to be able to keep our mind on the mantra during the meditation period. This is quite difficult in itself, as thoughts keep coming in. Our mind just loves going off on flights of fancies, down memory lane, or listing all the tasks we have to do after meditation. We just need to be patient and gentle with ourselves. When you realize you have got lost in your thoughts, don't judge or criticize yourself, but gently steer your mind back to your prayer word. Just accept that this is natural and to be expected. Your mind is like a playful puppy, always willing to run off rather than stay near you. You would not get cross with a puppy, would you? You would gently and lovingly encourage it to come back.

As long as you therefore do this without any sense of forcing yourself - don't use the mantra as a club to hit your thoughts with - slowly you will be able to stay the mantra without being aware of any distractions. Your thoughts may still be there in the background, but more like

music in the supermarket - you don't really notice them much.

The more you practice the easier it gets and soon instead of saying the word, you seem to be listening to it and finally it will sound by itself in your heart. Then your body and your mind become like the centre of your being in harmony and at peace.

In 'Word into Silence' John Main describes this as follows:

"The surface areas of the mind are now in tune with the deep peacefulness at the core of our being. The same harmonic sounds throughout our being. In this state we have passed beyond thought, beyond imagination, and beyond all images. We simply rest with the Reality, the realized presence of God Himself dwelling within our hearts."

School of Meditation Weekly Teachings

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