
Meditatio Talks

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Laurence Freeman

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*The music between tracks of the Meditatio Talks Series 2005-C CD is extracted
from
Margaret Rizza's "Lord of my Life" in Fountain of Life, Track 2.
The full track is included after the last talk on the CD.*

1. “Better than Winning the Lottery”

I was talking to a young meditator, about 21 years old, the other day. I was quite surprised that at his age he had responded quite deeply to meditation and understood it and had begun to practise it in a serious way. He wasn't – as you know many of us do when we are beginning – saying “I'm not doing it very well” with the sort of slight Christian guilt about it. He was saying that it was helpful to him, that it was helping him with his very healthy questions of faith that he was going through, his doubts, his questioning of his traditional religious training which he had gone through and he appreciated and that he was questioning it in a healthy way and his meditation was helping him with that but it was also helping him to concentrate, helping him deal with the anxieties of adolescence.

So I asked him how he came to meditation. Did he hear a talk on meditation that had started him on the path? He said he liked the basic idea of being in the present moment. So then I asked him what helped him to persevere. And he said that he had joined a group of older people and he was talking one day to one of the women in the group. He asked her why she meditated or how she came to it or something like that. Her answer was, “Well, I was going through various difficulties in my life and I was introduced to meditation and I began to practise it. And then I realised what a great gift it was. I realised I felt that it was better than winning the lottery.” And that expression that she used – “better than winning the lottery” – just hit him and it struck him with the full force of a faith communication. And that had deepened and energised his own commitment to this practice that he had begun. I think if we look at that remark and that little exchange between this young person and this older meditator, it may tell us something about the fruits of meditation and also about how we can share those fruits. They are not meant to rot on the tree and they are not meant to be just stored in your own larder. They are meant to be marketed and shared with others. That's what fruits are for, isn't it?

First of all, there was the sincere question that this young person asked of an older person – looking for experience, looking for some wisdom that would help him. And, secondly, there was the response – that very simple, uncomplicated, unpretentious response as she told a little bit about her own experience and how she had come to it, and what it meant to her. And then that wonderful metaphor that St Paul would have used, probably, if there were lotteries in his day – that wonderful metaphor drawn from ordinary life, not God-talk, not pious language but which struck him with the full force of experience and faith and authenticity. So certainly that is one of the fruits of meditation, I think, the ability to share the fruits, the ability to speak honestly and simply and to be authentic, to be truthful. Basically, she was just being truthful and simple; sincere, without acting a role of any kind and using simple language to do it.

2. The Gospel Connection

When we think about the fruits of meditation through that question – what are the fruits – we are taken back to the Gospel. What do you win by losing yourself? Jesus said that if we want to follow him, we must lose our life. After the question “Who do you say I am” which he addresses to the disciples, he then turns to everybody and says “Anyone who wants to be a follower of mine must renounce self. Day after day he must take up his cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What does anyone gain by winning the whole world at the cost of destroying himself?”

So take our question: “Why do you meditate?” People might ask you, like that young person asked that woman in the group – why do you meditate? What does it mean for you. It’s a question that takes us into the heart of the Gospel teaching. What do you win by losing yourself? What do you gain by giving up all your possessions? “No one can follow me unless they leave all their possessions behind”, Jesus said.

And we know from our familiarity with Fr John’s teaching – our friendship with Fr John’s teaching, with his introduction and description about meditation drawn from the language and the theology of the scriptures – we know that this is what we are doing when we meditate, when we say the mantra. We are losing self; leaving self behind. We are leaving all our possessions behind. What we are working at is poverty of spirit.

We should, as Christian meditators, make that connection between the teachings of the Gospel, the words of Jesus, those phrases in the Gospel, and connect them to our experience of daily meditation. That’s one of the fruits of meditation: being able to read the scriptures as if we had written them. That’s what John Cassian said in the 4th century. He said, “I started to meditate. I realised it wasn’t as easy as I thought it was going to be”, but, he said, “I pretty soon found out that something was changing in me because of the way I was reading scripture. It was as if I was the very author of the words and I had now an insight”, he said, “as if I could see into the very bones and marrow of the Word of God”. What that means is that your experience of your pilgrimage of meditation – day by day and week by week – is being enriched, articulated, made conscious and made fruitful directly by your reading of scripture.

3. The Work of Attention

In order to meditate, you have to practise attention and that's why a lot of people give it up, because it is very difficult to pay attention. At this very moment you may be thinking of being in a bar and maybe thinking: "I shouldn't be thinking of the bar now; I should be thinking of these holy thoughts that Father is talking about". But if we do pay attention to what somebody else is saying or to the mantra, then we immediately discover that attention is work. It is not easy to sustain your attention. Any kind of paying attention involves a loss of self and leaving yourself behind because you are giving your attention to another person. And in doing that you are actually giving yourself to that person.

And what happens if that other person doesn't acknowledge it, if they don't respond with attention to you? You love them, but are they loving you? They are stuck in their own problems and their own agenda, their own selfishness. Why should I continue to pay attention to them, why should I continue to love them?

Paying attention is a selfless act which is loving the Lord your God with your whole soul, your whole self, your whole strength and loving your neighbour as yourself. So as soon as we begin to do any kind of work of attention – saying the mantra or loving another person or doing work that requires fidelity – we very quickly discover, I think, that it is hard work and we can't sustain it very easily for very long. We can only do it maybe in short bursts. And we gradually try to build up the attention span. But that is a work that is going to take years, a lifetime, rather than just, you know, a six-week course. And we don't get any diploma at the end of it; we may not get the immediate rewards or paybacks or gratification that we think we deserve for all this good work that we are doing. 'I deserve something for being such a nice person, such a generous person, for having given so much of myself. What do I get back in return? Ingratitude'. And we feel that as much from God as we do from other people in our lives, or people we work with. So learning to pay attention and to sustain that attention is, I think, certainly one of the fruits of meditation. And it is the very work of meditation itself.

4. Two Waves of Attention

Let me suggest to you that there are two degrees or two kinds of attention.

The first stage of attention is when you try to do it, you try to pay attention and you do it for a very short space of time. With the mantra it might be for 3 seconds. With another person it might be for 3 weeks. With a job it might be for 3 months. And then it wears off and you find that you have failed, that you have become distracted. That means your attention can no longer be directed where it was. It slips. You just can't keep it going. You get discouraged. You get disappointed. You feel it is not worth it. You feel you are not getting anything back and you don't see how or why you should continue doing it. And, therefore, you will fail and you will give up. All of us, I think, have experienced that on the path of meditation. We start, we fail, we get distracted, we get discouraged, and we give up. Who likes to live with failure? You can apply all of this to the level of human relationships as well.

But then what happens? At a certain point you become aware that you have become distracted, that you've failed and that you've given up. You become aware that you've stopped paying attention. And that awareness is the second degree of attention. It's not success, but it's the awareness that you one day will do it the first time and this is like your second wind. This is your opportunity to start again, to pick it up and start paying attention again. It's like Shakespeare said: "as waves make towards the pebbled shore". It's just the waves coming in one after the other. The second wave of attention comes in after the first one has petered out, died on the shore. And the second one comes behind it. Where is it coming from? Where's that second wave of attention coming from? It's the great ocean of consciousness. It's the great mind of Christ which we are gradually becoming aware of, conscious of, through our sharing in his consciousness.

So we start again. And this is the process in every meditation when we've stopped saying the mantra and we come back it again. You suddenly realise you've stopped saying it and you are thinking about the bar and you say to yourself, "I'm thinking about the bar. Do I want to think about the bar or do I want to continue saying the mantra?" There's a choice there and it's not a very difficult choice probably if you will choose, at least for the next 20 minutes, to try to return to the mantra because that's your time of meditation.

The same is true in the larger perspective of your pilgrimage of meditation. You start to meditate, you meditate faithfully for a few weeks, a few months, for a year, a couple of years and then something happens. You go through a period of acedia. You have a crisis in your life, or great loss, or move house, or you've got a new job, or something happens of a major kind, and it throws you off your normal routine and you find that you don't have time to meditate anymore. There seems to be so much going on, emotionally, mentally, busyness, that, you know, this isn't the time to meditate now. 'I'm too busy. Later when things have calmed down then I'll pick it up again'. There's that little bit of self-deception that we all play from time to time.

But then at some point you say to yourself one day, ‘This is the time I should be meditating. I’m not meditating now in the evenings anymore. Why?’ So the second level of attention turns on; light comes on. You become aware and that’s your opportunity. It is grace. Out of the failure comes grace. Where sin is, grace abounds all the more.

That’s why the one thing one should never do in teaching meditation, especially to children, the one thing you must never do is in anyway link it to a sense of guilt. That they didn’t meditate – ‘Oh, you didn’t meditate today!’ If anyone of you is teaching meditation to children, I think you should be very careful of even the tone of voice that you use. The teaching should never be associated with any kind of guilt because the guilt would deceive you into thinking that there was some kind of punishment and there isn’t. When you come back in that second wave of attention to your meditation or to your mantra, you will just be received like the prodigal son with an overwhelming welcome, an overwhelming unconditional love. You will have come home and nobody is going to say anything about where you’ve been. You will just be embraced by the love of the self, love of the Spirit, love of Christ. So it’s out of that experience of coming back home that you will then be able to say one day to a younger person, “It’s better than winning the lottery, not just that it’s like better than winning the lottery” and what a profound genuine communication of spiritual values is contained in that authentic spontaneous remark, “It’s better than winning the lottery.”



5. From Failure to Fruits

When this second level of awareness awakens – and it is continually awakening – it enables us to see the real fruits of meditation. See, the fruits of meditation are really the burgeoning fruits of consciousness. You simply become more conscious, more alive, more awake, more aware and therefore more compassionate and less ready to take offence or to hold grudges. And this is perfectly natural.

The wonderful thing about meditation for Christians is that you don't have to try to be good anymore. If you see yourself holding grudges or being mean-spirited then I think maybe you do have to try to control yourself, but that's one of the fruits of meditation. You don't have to try to be good. You simply grow in the consciousness that you are good because God is good and everything around you is good. Anything that is not good is the result of unconsciousness, and those results can be terrible, but they are the results of unconsciousness.

The second level of attention then is a fruit of meditation that grows. The very first second you sit down to meditate you get this first fruit because the very first thing you are going to be aware of is that I am distracted; I stopped saying the mantra again. In your first meditation you were aware of that, so your first meditation was that the fruit began to appear. And this tree of the knowledge of good and evil, this tree of life that you are sitting under when you meditate is bearing fruit continually like the trees in the heavenly city of Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation. These fruits are not just seasonal fruits, they are continually being born.

At the first level of attention where you are trying to pay attention and you fail and maybe you feel bad about failing, at that level of attention, you do not see the fruits. You don't see the fruits at all. You will just see your failure or you will see your effort to be good, your effort to be holy, your effort to be a good meditator, your effort to be a good Christian. But with the second wave, the second degree of attention, you will be aware of your fruits in humility because you'll have the experience of failure and you will have gotten over it. You won't be lingering and hanging around in this feeling of failure because the second degree of attention will already have begun to take you to the next step, the next saying of the mantra. So you become aware of the fruits of meditation in an experience of humility, of self-knowledge.

Certainly, one of the real fruits of meditation is self-knowledge which is a contemporary term for the traditional term humility. You won't be like the pseudo-meditator as described in the Cloud of Unknowing who goes around trying to look holy, trying to look mystical, trying to hint to other people that you've had these great mystical experiences and bearing such wonderful fruit in you. You won't have to be that kind of person, thank God – the pseudo-contemplative as the Cloud calls it – because you'll have self-knowledge. That's why the Desert Fathers used to say self-knowledge is a greater gift than the ability to work miracles. It's self-knowledge which is actually, of course, our basis for the knowledge of God. We cannot know God without knowing ourselves and this grows immediately out of the failure of the first attempt to meditate, to say the mantra, to pay attention.

That fails when we realise we've failed. The second degree of attention awakens and it's in that second degree of attention that we learn to live. We learn to live on that wave. We surf that wave more and more continuously, without the effort that failed in the first attempt because we are not trying anymore. We don't have to try because we know that if we fail, the second wave will come to pick us up. And so as we learn to live, as we do live more and more continuously in that second wave of attention, that is contemplative living. That's why your life changes when you meditate. You begin to see the fruits as described by St Paul in the letter to the Galatians: The harvest of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control – manifest themselves in your life, and you see them without the slightest trace of self-importance, without the slightest trace of pride as it wouldn't occur to you to be proud about bearing these fruits. Because you know that they are coming out of failure and you are aware of how many faults you still have, but you now are able to see those fruits in your life without embarrassment. That's the witness you make to other people. And you realise that the emergence of these fruits of meditation in your life is nothing less than the manifestation of the life of Christ in you – "I live no longer but Christ lives in me". And then you realise this is the divine life growing in you; that what is happening to you is something bigger than you can imagine.

What is actually happening to you is that you are being divinised. You are being gradually introduced into the life of God in whom we live and move and have our being. You know, it's the seduction of God. It's the divine seduction that's taking place. It is at this second level of attention or in this second level of attention that we see the fruits of meditation with our spiritual senses. With our spiritual senses, we see, we feel, we taste and we enjoy the flavour of these fruits of the Spirit. They are reflected back to us on the screen of our lives' activities and relationships. We see it in our daily life that some of the things that really bothered me so much 15 years ago now I can, I take them better. When I'm going through a very difficult period I can still feel calm even though it's very turbulent and worrying and uncertain at the time I'm going through. What we are actually experiencing then is the vision of God. We are seeing God. We are seeing God at work. We see the footprints of God in our lives. So seeing the fruits is part of the process and it is indeed perhaps the major fruit that we are able to see the fruit

6. Love and Joy

Father John taught that if after you've been meditating for thirty years, you don't feel you've become a more loving person then try something else. That may not be consciously what you are actually wanting or thinking is going to happen – that you are going to be more loving. That is probably not what we are actually looking for, to be more loving. We are probably looking to have more love, to have something that will be emotionally satisfying, to have some kind of emotional security. But what we actually get is not that, primarily. What we get is the ability to be more loving – and, of course, the only chance we have of getting what we want is to be more loving.

What we see in this list of the fruits of the spirit that St Paul gives us – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control – what we see in these fruits, are priorities. These are the spiritual priorities. This is simply prioritising our lives, in terms of true values.

Love is the first. It is the new law of Christ. All the other laws and regulations have been superseded or relativised by this top priority of love. All you've got to do is love God, yourself and your neighbour.

Meditation, we soon come to realise, is a way of love because it is a way of attention. The first person who benefits from this love is me, because I am experiencing in my limited and constantly-failing attempt to love God with my whole being that God is loving me. My attempt to pay attention to God makes me aware that God is paying attention to me, and God is succeeding. God does not get distracted, otherwise we wouldn't be here.

That experience gradually builds up like a suntan if you sit in the sun for long enough. If you have regular practice, if you expose yourself to this attention of God, then it will do its work. There's medical research being done at the moment on the effects of meditation on the brain. They have discovered that permanent changes are made to the brain, the way the brain works, through regular meditation. Irregular meditation will show the same results in brain patterns and wave patterns and so forth, but the brain itself doesn't change. But with regular meditation it does, like good habits, like exercise, like with yoga. So the first person who benefits from this love is ourselves. As we experience ourselves as loved, we learn to love ourselves, and then whether we like it or not, we are going to become more loving. We may not be the first person to realise that we have become more loving, but it will be the people who benefit from it – if you are lucky, they will let you know.

The second gift of meditation, the fruit of meditation, is joy. Joy – how often Jesus uses that word in the Gospel of John. He tells us that he is giving us his own joy, so that our joy may be complete. Joy is an immediate offshoot of love. When you experience love, you feel joy. When you feel the withdrawal of love, you lose your joy. So it changes your life. And joy is the energy that enables us to start and to complete any meaningful project. If you don't have joy in your work your work will exhaust you and even if you complete it it will be not much fun. But a good work, a meaningful work, is work that is followed through to the end – if there is no joy in the

work there will be no fruit in the work. Joy is the direct experience of the presence of God. It is joy that we find through the practice of meditation, even though we experience dry periods, even though we may give up for a while, even though we feel that we are not getting anything out of it. We think we are not very good at meditation; we are not much good at teaching it. We may say, 'I don't have the confidence yet to speak about it to other people, because I am not very good at it' – even though we feel that, what is growing all the time, if we are doing it, is this energy of joy which is an energy which transforms our life and which energises us. People often say that as a result of meditation they feel energised, more interested in life, more able to enjoy simple gifts of life.

I hope this weekend will be a time for us to reflect on the fruits of meditation in our own lives – and talking about that, you know, I think people may be a little bit shy or embarrassed to talk about it. But a gathering like this, a community of meditators, should provide an opportunity to share some of these thoughts and feelings and experiences in confidence with one another, in conversations, in private meetings, because that helps to make it more conscious.

As we become more conscious of it, the fruit itself then begins to grow more, and you'll find that you can share it with others more, and that will be itself a delight: passing it on to others. "Better than winning the lottery." So take the opportunity while we are together to share with each other what meditation has meant to us. You will find that the Spirit is the Teacher. Whenever you genuinely open yourself to another person in this way, the Spirit is released between you. The Spirit will be teaching both of you and all of you. The Spirit will be among you, teaching you through what you are sharing with each other. We pray that we will not only be able to become more aware of the fruits of meditation in our own lives but also better able to share those fruits with others.

7. Freely Received, Freely Given

Understanding the fruits of meditation is very important for knowing how to teach meditation, to be able to teach it with integrity. As was said before, “It’s better than winning the lottery.” What a great way of teaching it. What a great way of expressing what it means to you. To be able to teach it with integrity, with simplicity, from the heart, without reducing it to a materialistic commodity that you have to kind of justify. Or that you have to push on to somebody, as though you’ve got to say, “You’ve got to meditate!” I don’t think any real meditator is going to say that to any one: “You’ve got to do it or you will be condemned”, or “You will not be saved,” – because that wasn’t how we experienced it when we found it, or as we learnt over a number of years to practise it. That’s not how we experienced it when it was presented to us; or how we read it or understood it. We realised that it was gift, didn’t we? A gift – something gracious, something gratuitous. We didn’t have to buy it.

No meditation group charges for what it teaches – what we freely received, we freely give. And that is going to be a very counter-cultural approach in our society, where everything is being commodified, quantified and valued in terms of money. But the very nature of meditation as we know is that it is pure grace, freely given. It comes from the free gift of self of God to us. And this is an experience that has an influence on our world, if we live this experience. “It is better than winning the lottery!” If we live that experience and share that experience, we are saying something, living something, which by implication is undermining these demonic values of our society, which put a price on everything. This huge problem about the value of human life or human health – “Decide the cost it is going to have to maintain it or to improve it!” What a terrible question that we find ourselves asking, as what we are doing with our environment, an extraordinary denial of the ecological disaster we are bringing on ourselves, with our commitment to unlimited growth economically.

It is really by witness, by living out the consciousness that meditation leads us to, that we make a difference, that we share the fruits. And we may find that that will lead us into some kind of political work or social work or working for a particular cause, as it often does, because when you see something like this you say “well I’ve got to do something about it, and I will make an effort to do it”. Or maybe you will say: “How important it is to be able to raise people’s consciousness, and therefore I will start a meditation group. I will make that gift of my time one evening a week. I will overcome my natural timidity and the fear of being rejected or being laughed at, and I will start this group with two or three people, whoever comes, in my church, or wherever it may be, in my home.” That may be how you will see it.

Teaching meditation then in this way, as a spiritual path not as a commercial commodity that will enhance your lifestyle – sort of “add meditation onto your life because it is the cool thing to do” or “it will save you on your medical bills” – but to meditate from the perspective of a spiritual path, has many consequences.

One of them is, there will be no worldly success in this. And that’s why we need the experience of the fruits of meditation to be able to teach it, because it isn’t based upon success. If you start a meditation group – there is no better thing you could do for this

disastrous world we are living in, there is no better thing to do than to start a meditation group – and if you do, you want to start it without worrying about “is it going to succeed or not”. You just do it for the same reason that you do your meditation every day – because it is a good thing to do. Not a successful or productive sort of thing to do in that sense, but it is a good thing to do.

And secondly, in doing this, in teaching meditation as a spiritual path, inspired by the fruits of meditation, you will find a model of how to preach the Gospel today – something that is caught not taught, something that is a gift, not a compulsion, not a threat as the fundamentalist approach to preaching the Gospel often suggests – “if you don’t believe, you are condemned”. There is no condemnation. In other words, teach with the spirit of the Gospel. This is exactly how we find Jesus preaching the Kingdom – living the Kingdom, manifesting it.



8. Contemplative Community

There is a story of David Boehm, the great spiritual physicist, who died some years ago, who was struggling with how the observer of a phenomenon affects the nature of the experiment. “If you’re there, it is different from when you’re not there.” He was interested in this and he realised that this has to do with consciousness, and he wanted to speak to Krishnamurthi about it. He wrote to Krishnamurthi and Krishnamurthi said to come see him. And so he was led into the room, and Krishnamurthi came into the room, and they sat down. Krishnamurthi didn’t say anything, and David Boehm didn’t say anything, for a few moments, and then a few more moments, then a few more moments of silence, and eventually twenty minutes of complete silence had passed. Then somebody came into the room and asked them if they would like a cup of tea. And they started talking. And David Boehm said that what this experience taught him was that this 15 or 20 minutes of silence was the answer to his question. It was the experience of oneness in silence; a oneness, a unity of the observer and the observed, the questioner and the questioned; the two becoming one. I think it is this experience of silence that we enter into daily, either on our own or with others, that produces community; that creates community. One of John Main’s most powerful prophetic insights was that meditation creates community. He expressed this and lived it in his own commitment to the growth of a community, as he taught meditation.

That was quite challenging to the prevailing understanding of meditation at that time, in the late 60’s and early 70’s. Meditation was very much of the Me-generation type of thing, an I-generation type of thing – something I do in order to lower my blood pressure or to improve my concentration, or to make me sleep better at night or maybe to give me a deeper I-experience of God. And that, I think, is still very largely the image of meditation produced in the popular culture, as part of our increasing individualism and isolation.

But John Main understood – because of his rootedness in the Christian tradition, his own experience of Christ and his own experience of meditation – that it wasn’t quite like that. That when you enter into the silence, you experience a oneness with others.

When he first began thirty years ago at his community in London, John Main’s first instinct was not to actually start meditation groups. His first instinct was to start a small community. And he got four problematical, mixed-up guys (of whom I was one) to form this little community that he guided and nourished and trained. And it was out of that little experience of non-institutional community, that the meditation groups arose. It was when people heard about that little group, and it wasn’t a monastic foundation, it wasn’t a big institution he was setting up or even a small institution that he was setting up, it was a temporary six-month experience of living together in community, very seriously based on meditation – getting up early enough to meditate together, being there at set times to meditate together, and living in a house that was conducive to very focused life, a contemplative life, without distraction, external distractions anyway. It was that contemplative living that inspired people to knock on the door and say, “I hear you are teaching these crazy mixed-up people to meditate. What about more normal people? Why is it only the crazy mixed-up people who get to learn, who get the benefit from this?” So that’s when we started the first meditation groups, thirty years ago. And very quickly he discovered, and I think he was surprised

by discovering it, that it brought in people of every type – your regular church-goer, your non-church-goer, your Christian and your marginal Christian, and your non-Christian; the old, and the young, and the middle-aged. John Main knew that meditation in some mysterious way creates community out of the experience of silence.

9. The Antidote to Fundamentalism

This contemplative practice, which meditation is, also bears fruit, I think, in our modern world as an antidote, as a way of dealing with, the rising problem of fundamentalism. This is a very serious and dangerous development in the modern world. Fundamentalism is not, as the fundamentalists often say, a retreat back to the good old days. Fundamentalism is a new kind of religious phenomenon. It's a very contemporary modern kind of phenomenon, and it's a very dangerous one because as we're already seeing, it very easily begins to influence governments, foreign policies. It's being used to justify war, again, on the one hand. And on the other hand, in the circumstances of the modern world, any fundamentalist group that is not necessarily a nation state is also able to get its hands on weapons of mass destruction. So we live in a world in which the dangers of fundamentalism are increasing. And if you've ever tried to speak with a fundamentalist you'll know how extremely difficult it is to speak with them on the issues with which they are most passionately engaged or committed. It's very difficult to speak rationally with them, especially when you meet a fundamentalist who says that dialogue itself is a sinful thing; that we should not even dialogue with people who have different beliefs. How do we deal with that? It's a very difficult problem.

Karen Armstrong, who has some very good insights into the nature of fundamentalism, says that, in her opinion, fundamentalism nearly always grows out of fear. It is related to fear. Fear that you or your group are going to be made extinct, or is being threatened with absorption. It's the fear of the loss of identity. Fundamentalism is often related to local ethnic or political identities. It is also often a reaction to globalisation, which we all rather fear as well. We like the benefits of globalisation, but we fear the implications of it.

So what is the solution to fear? What casts out fear? The work of love. This is the great Christian insight into the nature of the work of meditation. It is the work of love. As the Cloud of Unknowing says, "By thought we shall never know God, but only by love." By thought we will never know God; only by love will we know God. This is the heart of the Gospel. This knowledge, this higher consciousness, this awareness, this light that I was speaking about earlier, which enables us to see the fruits of meditation, is the fruit of meditation itself, and it is love. It is simply love.

Those of you who are professional lovers: you are married or have families or you have friendships or communities, you know that love is work. Once you get past the first flowering, once you take the wrapping off, after that it's work, isn't it?

10. Contemplative Church

Meditation creates communities out of this community that we keep. And this is, in a sense, a model of the church. But it is also the church itself, as Christ is wholly present in every one of us and in every group of two or three that gathers in his name – wholly present, not partly present. The whole Christ is present in the local church not just in the universal church. The contemplative community is not an alternative church – although it may well provide a shelter, a home, a community for people who have been hurt by the institutional church, or bored by it, or have never even thought of it. It is not in itself an alternative church, but it is a way of living in the Spirit of Christ even within an institution that, by its very nature as an institution, would be, to say the least, ambiguous. The contemplative community is a way of living within the institution of the Church, even though that institution is going to be ambiguous. This is a big problem for the church today as we see declining numbers, a loss of moral and spiritual authority, and even a loss of basic relevance. People just don't listen; they don't take it seriously any more.

But is that the case? Is that really the problem? Maybe this is the best thing that has ever happened to us in the last fifteen hundred years, ever since the Emperor Constantine made the Christian Church the Church of the Empire. Maybe this big problem that we are facing – declining numbers, what to do with all these buildings, all the ructions that we have within the institution, the fact that nobody takes us seriously as a church – maybe this is only a problem from the point of view of the institution. The problem might be that the authority of the church should derive from its faith, not from its power-base, not from its institutional strength. Institutions want to substitute power for faith. Power is easier to deal with than faith. Institutions want to set up a system which will institutionalise that power and preserve it and pass it on to the appropriate figures in the hierarchy or in the career structure. Institutions want to set up a system of ritual and observance that will substitute for the personal response of faith, and such as it has ever been and as it always will be.

Two of the most inspiring Christian voices, I think, of the last century were Simone Weil and Ivan Illich. Simone Weil said that she loved the Church, but inasmuch as the Church was an institution, it belonged to the prince of this world. Ivan Illich has a disturbing, but, I think, very worthwhile theory that deserves our attention: that the Incarnation casts a shadow. After all the Incarnation is a body and a body casts a shadow. To him the Incarnation makes possible a surprising and entirely new flowering of love. The Incarnation makes possible a surprising and entirely new flowering of love and knowledge. For Christians, the Biblical God can now be loved in the flesh and a new dimension of love has been opened. That's Christianity. But accompanying this new possibility is a terrible danger of trying to institutionalise this. The temptation to try to manage, he says, and eventually to legislate this new love, to create an institution that will guarantee and protect it by criminalising the opposite – that is the danger of the churches, all the churches, as institutions. And it is why the Church needs wave after wave of contemplative renewal, the waves that will relentlessly smooth down and erode the hard-heartedness and the rock-likeness of the institution. It works from the second degree of attention, whereas institutions work from the first degree of attention because they are always trying, they are always making an effort to control, to manage, to succeed.

The great danger of Christianity as a religion, as an institution, is that it has lost its self-critical awareness (which it had in the Scriptural days, in its early life) of the shadow that it casts. And because it has lost awareness of its own shadow – imagine what it would be like when we lose the awareness of our own shadow. Well, imagine an institution that loses that awareness. That is why one of the great fruits of meditation, I think, is to raise the awareness and make us conscious again as people living in the Church. It makes us aware of the shadow-side, and therefore it also makes us aware of the miraculous gift of the Church, of this enormous potential we have to manifest a new way of loving and a new way of knowledge. I think, this perhaps is the most important gift of the fruits of meditation that we can think of, beyond just the strictly personal or individual. It creates the Community within the Church that is free of the institutional power-play of the Church.

There is a frustration in that because we, as meditators, would like to do more. But maybe the grace is that it does prevent our little Community from becoming an institution, and therefore we can remain within the institutions of the Churches, ecumenically, as a contemplative community. Without force, without preaching too much, we can live out the consciousness which is the fruit of meditation, that enables us to see the shadow-side, and therefore to see also the real wonder and the real miracle of the Incarnation.

11. Silence in Worship

It's not such a difficult thing for us, I suppose, to spend a few moments in silence together, as we've just done, even though this is not a meditation period as such, and we take for granted that we can do that quite comfortably. But I think in many of our churches it would be a very problematical experience to take even 30 seconds in silence, let alone 3 or 4 minutes, and you don't really get much into silence under 3 or 4 minutes. One of the big problems with our church services, our liturgy, our celebration of the Eucharist, I think, is that we don't have this. We've lost, as a church, in all denominations, the ease, this capacity, to sit in silence and acknowledge that what we're doing is beyond words. So our services are noisy and endlessly rattling on from one prayer to another, and lacking that contemplative dimension which is essential, I think, for any true worship.

A friend of mine is the Dean of an Episcopalian church in Philadelphia. He's an Anglican dean, an Englishman, actually, by the name of Richard Giles. He has written a wonderful book which he has just sent me called *Uncommon Worship*. He wrote it as a sequel to another great book he wrote called *Re-pitching the Tent* which is about redesigning our sacred space. It's worth taking a trip to Philadelphia just to see the Cathedral there in which he has really re-pitched the Tent of Worship in a wonderful, beautiful way – and a way which is really conducive to a truly communal and also truly contemplative, form of Christian worship. In his new book, *Uncommon Worship*, he speaks about the importance of silence, and he gives some quite practical liturgical guidelines for communities and for celebrants about how to do this. I think this is one of the fruits of meditation in the Church and in the world that we are able to share with others an experience and an understanding of this dimension of life, and of worship, which is expressed and deepened in silence.
