



Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

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Young Meditators Retreat

I decided to follow the Young Meditators silent retreat in London in August after the Easter retreat on Bere Island during which I became more aware of the worldwide community. As I walked under the gate of the monastery at Cockfosters into a friendly green oasis I received a warm welcome from the resident Oblate community, our excellent hosts of the week Pierre, Stefan and Tony.

In his first talk Fr Laurence spoke, with clear, funny, heart-warming examples, about the anxiety which we cover up with different strategies to avoid the inherent uncertainty of life. I felt my breath relaxing. Recognising the common human condition made me feel one with the others around me, seeking God. The first meditation was integrated into the Eucharist. In people's prayers I was touched and surprised by the frankness with which people shared the pains of their daily life. Their honesty also struck me as they questioned what prayer is really about and what it means to celebrate the Eucharist. We formed a diverse group of about 20 people confident enough to show vulnerability and ask real questions.

Fr Laurence, Stefan and Giovanni led us well. The five meditations during the day, working in the garden and kitchen in silence, enjoying the peaceful trust of eating the tasty and lovingly cooked food in silence, the quiet walks in the beautiful Trent Park, walking the Labyrinth beside the retreat house – all these elements helped us to understand the words “be silent and know that I am God”. Through Giovanni's yoga each morning we learned to ‘read’ our body and be more alive in it while we prayed and worked. Fr Laurence and Stefan helped us listen to the words of scripture.

In the train going home I smiled as I saw the city centre of London pass by. For now it had lost its attraction. Despite the extra days I had booked to visit London after the retreat I hadn't gone. I discovered another pleasure – living in community with

other, very different meditators and growing in self-knowledge through my own little joys, loves, limits and discomforts. I felt more at home. Something deep down in me whispers that, in all circumstances I can listen to what I perhaps, carefully, dare to call ‘God’. (*Henriette The Hague, Netherlands*)

The Cockfosters retreat for young meditators was my first experience of living in a community whose focus is the practise of meditation. During the week we looked at paradox, and particularly how oppositions seem to form the heart of many of Christ's parable teachings. We have the prodigal and the obedient sons, for instance, and the unexpected contradiction of the inactive church members and the Samaritan whose care extends well beyond duty. As he later showed more bluntly in the temple, Christ was not opposed to turning things upside down.

After a week of living in a meditation community, it seemed to me that the Cockfosters retreat created one such paradox. On the one hand our group was united: we were ‘young meditators’, each sharing in the community of regular meditation, meals, talks, walks, manual labor, cooking and silence. On the other hand, beyond the outer sign of our common choice to share in all the different aspects of retreat, was the way in which we each actually got down and did meditation. At the heart of our unity was a very personal, very distinctive silence. In meditation we each entered into our own identity; in our own stillness we became remarkably different from one another. Perhaps our meditation was a time of pain, perhaps of feeling redirected, perhaps of perfect mundanity, or perhaps of uncertainty. Each person's experience, of course, was intricately different from the person sitting beside them in the chapel.

(continue on page 6)





A letter from Laurence Freeman

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Dearest friends,

I have been thinking about silence recently – which, of course, means I have not really been silent. Concepts ruffle the waters of silence even when thought is done in quiet. Not everything that looks silent – the quiet mood, the person who does not speak, the tranquil cloister – *is* silent in the sense that the contemplative tradition gives to the word:

If you love truth you will love silence for silence will even unite you with God

Isaac of Nineveh in the seventh century, like Meister Eckhart in the fourteenth:

There is nothing so much like God as silence
or John Main in our own day:

As we enter the silence within us we are entering a void in which we are unmade. We cannot remain the person we were or thought we were. But we are in fact not being destroyed but awakened to the eternally fresh source of our being,

– all understand silence as a depth of being. It is an expansion of consciousness beyond the limits of the ordinary mind-space we habitually run around in. It is liberation from the self-negating, self-entrapping qualities of the ego that the Desert monks called the ‘principal faults’ and which became somewhat legalized subsequently as the ‘seven deadly sins’. If indeed silence is Godlike and if it awakens us to the source of being, then it would benefit us in a period of history where we have become so un-silent to return to the ‘work of silence’ – as the Upanishads long ago described the practice of meditation. In an age where we so value and commodify ‘communication’ it behoves us to remember that communication is not restricted to words or melodies or images. Silence is the language of language, a medium of communication that, if it is true silence, cannot distort the message it carries.

FALSE SILENCE

My recent reflection on the meaning of silence was sparked by a couple of hours I spent talking with R., a woman who is passing through a Grecian tragedy of loss. Three years ago she lost her husband in a fishing accident during a sudden storm. A year ago her teenage son was drowned with two friends in an as yet unexplained car accident involving a group of other young men. The double blow and inconsolable loss is enough for anyone in one lifetime, and too much for many, to bear.

But R. is a woman of depth and real faith, too wisely rooted in the tradition of her ancestors to demand an explanation for everything, or to blame God when things go wrong. She has been led directly into the cloud of the mystery. She endures it bravely and at the heart of her grief is a silence that feels as if it is becoming Godlike. But in the case of her most recent loss the pain is especially cruel. A cruel and unjustified aspect of her anguish, one that does demand a shaking fist and angry voice, is the silence of suppression that has kept the full story of the events of that last tragic night of her son from being told. As the numbness of the trauma wore off she found herself compulsively asking the questions that everyone has the right to ask about the exact way their loved ones left them. A conspiracy of silence and avoidance has denied her this right.

I was reminded of the women in the squares of Buenos Aires or Santiago slowly walking in a circle of grief and courage carrying photos of their children who went missing during the dictatorships. Even decades later their hunger and thirst for justice – as Jesus calls the fourth Beatitude – is unabated and unsatisfied. One can imagine the politicians and civil servants wishing them away. What good does their questioning do? Let the dead bury their dead. Move on. It won't bring them back. Let bygones... But the passion ‘to see right prevail’ is, as the Sermon on the Mount says, simply a hunger and a thirst – as primal and unavoidable and as unpolitical as that.

R. has experienced how great loss plunges us into the silence of God where we have to learn a different kind of knowledge. She has realized that the answers to our questions do not come in the terms of the questions themselves. But she has also experienced the counter-image of that silence. It is the falsifying silence of denying the truth. Denial is deathly – often through a crucifixion perpetrated when those with whom we are bound in a contract of truth bluntly refuse to acknowledge what is true. Governments do it – how much of journalism is about trying to get the elected officials to tell the whole truth? Partners and spouses do it – keeping essential information away from each other. Families do it – as skeletons tumble out of old cupboards after many years of denial. Religious people do it – to keep the superego of the institution bathed in the false light of its pretended perfection. Our own psyches do it – whenever we repress what we cannot face.

LABORATORIES OF SILENCE

If we cannot appreciate silence, if we do not have the courage to be silent, it is hard to be truthful and so even to be fully human. Our life-potential is blocked from fulfillment by the

fear of the truth or by the anger or violence with which we defend the denial. As usual it is fear, the actual inversion of love, which creates the mess and muddle of so much human existence. We are frightened of the truth because we fear being punished, rejected or shamed. It seems so difficult, as it was for the prodigal son in the parable, to believe that we could be forgiven or that the wheels of justice turn ultimately in favour both of the perpetrator and of the victim.

Or, we simply feel we cannot find the right words to express the truth and that we will be misunderstood and condemned if we try. The person who has the taste of silence in their recent memory will be less likely to be controlled by these fears and doubts that are intrinsic to the psyche. They will know – too recently to have totally forgotten – that silence gives a taste of the unadulterated truth. Although the journey into that silence may at times be hard – we have a lot of cover-up to undo – we discover at each step that it is an embrace not a condemnation or a pushing away that we find at the journey's end. Acceptance, both of self and of the sacred otherness of others, is the nature of any journey into truth.

So we need to be familiar with silence if we are live in the truth and be just. This formative, familiar awareness is generated by passing through cycles and spheres of silence. It is not merely about the absence of words – there is a time to speak and a time to refrain from speech. Silence embraces both. Discretion tells us when which one is right and natural. Those who have a regular practice of meditation discover the secret of how to live truthfully. If discretion is an unteachable virtue – you either have it or you don't, some say – it can be acquired through the work of silence. It is practice not deprivation that drives the spiritual journey and pushes us to grow beyond our limits.

In a noisy and overactive lifestyle, drenched in media buzz and bombarded by visual intrusions, the times of morning and evening meditation purify and recharge our silence. Attention is the muscle of silence. It is built up strongly through regular and moderate exercise. It needs daily practice, but also to be part of a varied program. We cannot expect to maintain our focus of attention on one object indefinitely. The Desert masters said that the mind is like a bow. To be kept taut but flexible it needs to be stretched and relaxed in turns. Silence introduces us gently to the absolute.

But, anyway, the true nature of silence is that its way of *seeing* penetrates beyond the apparent surface of the object being attended to. Instead we become one with it. As we stop thinking about it we start to be with it. Silence, as Ramana says in a way very challenging to the modern mind, is the absence of thought.

Where and how do we learn this perennial human wisdom? In laboratories of silence. The word *laboratory* brings together the two ideas of work and prayer. Chapels too often lack the work necessary for real change and instead induce a dreamlike state rather than the sharp wakefulness of prayer. Places of scientific research often encourage intense, competitive work but lack the deeper kind of selfless attention that makes the work prayerful. At home and school, in the desert or on the

windy mountain side we should learn, from early on our human journey, what silence really means, how precious and immediate it is, how many spheres of wonder it contains and how necessary for our health and happiness.

EVOLVING AND CONDITIONING

Evidently, our contemporary lifestyle and the institutions that monitor us do not set much store by silence. The very nature of silence makes it easy to lose, without even realising it. The more distracted you become the less you notice that you are not paying attention. The more that external stimulus occupies the mind, the less we know that we have lost inner spaciousness. When we do eventually sense that something is wrong, or missing, we struggle to find a name for it.

We are all creatures of our conditioning. We can't be anything else at first without going feral. Family, genes, social culture – whether our parents watch game shows or period dramas for entertainment – religion (traditional, liberal, magical, intellectual or oppressive) or the complete lack of it, all these varied circumstances condition us before we can think for ourselves or ask who we are. Most of us at some point become conscious of the deficiencies or failings in our conditioning. Some try to deny or rectify them. But as silence is so absent,

so elusive and unspoken a quality of nearly all modern conditioning, it is rare that we go to that silent depth of our identity which is necessary to find in order to transcend all external conditioning – to find the truth that

sets us free.

Recently I was on retreat with a wonderful group of younger meditators. There were times of meditation and worship together and also illuminated times of sharing and dialogue. As the shared work of silence helped us lay aside the usual suspicion and caution that at first meeting affects any group of people, the level of truth and openness grew. Some spoke about the experiences of their early years that had kept them restricted by a conditioned sense of fear, anger, hurt or confusion. All were attracted to silence, and its work, because it opened a way beyond all these conditioned limitations of the past.

Like everyone, they struggled with the demand that the work of silence makes on us before it reveals its rewards. As most young people, they were reluctant to compromise their freedom of choice. Discipline was felt to be in tension with its opposite – the attitude that sees doing what you feel like doing as the royal road to self-fulfillment. Their religious and moral conditioning had not explained what discipline really means – the way to liberty – and how it needs first to be chosen freely and then supported by fellowship with others. But the innate wisdom that accompanies any deeply felt need, the spirit moving subtly and compassionately within our weaknesses, was guiding them to discover and practise what they had not heard in church or school.

Today all forms of the spiritual life are evolving, though it may seem at times like breakdown or chaos rather than evolution. More flexible and varied expressions of community and commitment are emerging. They are being bravely tested and patiently explored, usually on those margins of the

"LEARNING TO BE SILENT
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OFF OURSELVES."

institutions whence change comes rather than from the centres of institutions which are more fearful of change. From house churches to desert to monastery to oppressive institutions of uniformity, the principal forms of spiritual support have changed over time. Not all institutions, of course, oppress. Many, if they are well-constructed support growth and responsible freedom.

Forms and structures of community are of course necessary – and can even be enjoyable. They carry the teachings that help us to grow from being isolated members of a closed group into connected members of a mature community seeing itself as part of the wider community of humanity. The common experience of silence plays a powerful role in the evolution of the structures of community in any spiritual tradition. When silence is lost the institution ossifies. When silence is known forms of fellowship evolve that no longer use violence or fear to maintain order. They evolve from a fixation with uniformity, driven by the insecurity of difference, to a love of unity, nourished by the acceptance of the common ground.

In the maelstrom of the religious revolution we are experiencing silence is again being heard. If significant evolution is to progress spiritual leaders of all faiths, operating from participatory not hierarchical instincts, need actively to teach silence from the wisdom banks of their contemplative traditions. Every religious hierarchy faces this challenge today if the artificial opposition of spirituality and religion is to be resolved. Silence permits us to detach from our conditioning, including our religious formation, without the angry feelings of rejection that often cut off the nose to spite the face – throwing away what should have been treasured but remaining stuck with the negativities of history and the narrow mind they produce. Those who have been wounded by religion desperately need the emergency relief of silence brought to them out of the depth of the same traditions from which they feel so alienated.

FROM SELF-IMAGE TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Learning to be silent involves taking the attention off ourselves, at least in the way we are usually and compulsively thinking about ourselves, looking over our shoulder or peering at the horizon. *What should I do? How can I be happier? Am I a failure or a success? What do people think of me? Am I in control?*

Such questions normally determine our decisions and our patterns of growth or decline. Each question arises from a

self-objectifying sense of self, which has, of course, a necessary pragmatic role to play in life. Should I wear jeans or a suit? Should I ask for a raise? What's the best way to handle this awkward situation? But very easily these questions can become the dominant cast of mind from which we live all the time. We become their slaves. How we see ourselves (the ego like a continuously running security camera catching every word and gesture) and how others see us (the sense of being evaluated and found wanting) has, with the help of the media, generated a cultural obsession with self-image. Unchecked and unmodified it destroys the confidence of the true self that enables us to risk and to give ourselves – in other words, to live. A certain kind of naiveté, childlikeness and unselfconsciousness is necessary for normal living. The extreme ever-calculating self-consciousness, shyness, sense of inadequacy or false humility – or the excessive and aggressive ego-assertion that compensates for these in some psyches – can cripple us.

As I write this I am aware that some of the translators in our community will be spotting a familiar problem with these terms – self-knowledge, self-consciousness, awareness. In some more traditional cultures the degree of self-preoccupied individualism that has developed in complex consumer societies has not taken such deep root and so have not produced the language to describe it. Across the gulf between the affluent and the poor, the very self-inflicted wounds and handicaps of western culture may even look desirable and cool to developing parts of the world. In the same way, the naturalness and self-assurance of an embedded sense of self or the, to many, envious condition of being a local taken for granted in poorer societies seems idyllic to a frazzled New Yorker or insomniac Londoner.

Silence speaks imagelessly to both sides of the modern divide, to all of us. It connects the functional ego with the inner health and true strength of the soul. But, just as there is a certain speed necessary to break the sound barrier, so a certain degree of stillness is needed to cross over into silence. It is in the zone of silence that self-knowledge awaits us, patiently, effortlessly, and welcomingly. We trek through the desert of noise and complaint but then we reach the green valleys of the Promised Land. We move from just *imagining* ourselves to actually *being* ourselves. We come home to that experience of self that ultimately, inevitably, leads into the experience of God.



Self-consciousness fades and returns according to circumstances – such as if you have a lens or a microphone pointing at you. At these times we can be made intensely and uncomfortably aware of our self-image and often feel false. Penetrate it with an act of sustained attention, however and self-consciousness will diminish, to return again later perhaps but a little less intensely. Self-knowledge, however, is a different state of consciousness. Once the process has started it grows steadily in the timeless soil of silence. It is and always has been the same. It is the repository of faith. To enter it is to find the peace of mind we all seek and that passes understanding.

THE SILENCE OF CHRIST

The conduit from self-knowledge to the knowledge of God is the mind of Christ. We understand this – although as St Paul says ‘it is beyond knowledge’ – not just by asking ‘I wonder what does Christ think of this or that?’ – ‘what would Jesus say or do in this situation’ – but, more really, by understanding the silence of Christ. His mind is silent everywhere and always, in us and among us, pervading the created world like the primal radiation of the cosmos.

St Irenaeus thought that we cannot understand the words of Jesus unless we also understand his silence. His comment is like the saying of St Isaac the Syrian, that half the meaning of any passage in scripture is found in the words; the other half in the spaces between the words. Silence reassures us that there is no need to try to ‘understand’ everything – as St John of the Cross reminds us. Julian of Norwich similarly felt that we are given to know just what we need to know. Speculation on what cannot be verified in experience – the fascination with the ‘next life’, for example – may be harmless or may become the hubris of building a Tower of Babel. The World Wide Web, for example, is a veritable wonder of the modern world; but like any information tool, if it is not understood with some reference to silence it can become merely a babble of noise and distraction, compulsion and trivia. The mind of Christ is not a database. It is an all-inclusive consciousness, the comprehensive inside-out knowing which is love.

Silence is the fullness of communication flowering in a communion in which the love being transmitted from the true self is freely reciprocal and expands beyond all boundaries. When we sit on our meditation chair or cushion, making a pure sacrifice of the time we spend there, slipping through the whirling patterns of the mind that insist that *they* are the real until they recede and evaporate; when we hold fast to the work of the mantra as it gently homes in through all the chaos, self-doubt and disordered passions to the energized stillness of the soul’s bulls-eye; as we learn that we can only learn the truth by letting the truth know us; as we discover that the silence of God is already awake within us, awaiting us, and that it rises from our growing stillness as naturally as the morning sun raises mist from the warming earth; as all this unfolds in our meditation, moment by moment, year by year, what is happening?

We are learning the silence of Christ. We are plunging into and joining with his mind.

During my visit to Norway this summer I swam, one glorious day, in an Oslo fjord. As I don’t like cold water I tested it with my toe and found it too cold for my liking. But shamed by the

bravery of my Viking companion who had already jumped in I steeled myself and followed. The cold burst my mind open, a momentary agony but then, as I swam around and my body temperature regulated, it eventually became delicious. We are all frightened to jump in; we find excuses to avoid the sitting stillness and run from the dawning silence. But when we do become silent, life bursts open with a freshness and poignancy that is the energy of the life of Christ. In an instant the fears, prejudices and the self-constructed prisons of the human condition begin to crumble. Going into the inner room as Jesus tells us is a way of putting it. But as we enter this room we discover that we are moving through space boundlessly.

As true silence removes our fear of the truth and makes us truthful, so true stillness is the vehicle of the spiritual journey. As Theophan the Recluse wrote in the 19th century, we have only to learn to ‘stand with the mind in the heart before God, and to go on standing, unceasingly day and night, until the end of life. Behave as you will so long as you learn to stand still before God with the mind in the heart.’ In that silence we find the meaning of goodness and justice.

Through her ordeal R. discovered the dense silence of the divine mystery that somehow contains both love and suffering, joy and grief. She also is being wounded by the false silence of those who have chosen to stand outside that mystery because their ego’s fear and self-preservation are so overwhelming. The young meditators on the retreat shared their memories of a Christian faith that often collapses into moralism and ritualism and that becomes noisier and more distracted as it does so. Meditation had allowed them to see another side of the Christian tradition. In deep silence we know that we are not alone and also that we are, what is the right word? – guided. The silence of the mind of Christ, bathing all, receptive or rejecting, in a radiance of love is gracious. It is unceasingly benevolent. And probably, in the end, it is irresistible.

With much love,



Laurence Freeman OSB

(continuing from page 1) Using Christ's metaphor, Fr. Laurence said during the retreat that meditation is a 'pearl of great price'. This teaching has really stuck in my heart. We have much to be thankful for as meditators, young or old. The idea of pearls can also give colour to the paradox of community and meditation. Our community was made up of individuals, each of whom had been gifted a pearl. You might say that during our week together we made a necklace out of our priceless pearls. Each of us was separate – the pearls ranged in colour, size, shape, and so on – but we made up the same emblem of beauty through our shared practise. *(Philip)*

In meditation I can start to experience what it might mean to be in relationship with God and to start to experience some peace regardless of circumstances. The mantra is the still point to return to every day. What drew me to meditation initially was that my experience of the stillness and silence was the only thing that calmed my troubled and distracted mind and heart. It seems to me that there are certainly different kinds of knowledge. I have certainly exercised my intellect but there is that other knowledge perhaps more important that is gained and shaped through experience. The intellect can in fact remain blind or even put up barriers to what is most important.

This was my experience on the young meditators retreat. All

my life I have been taught the Bible and the parables of Jesus although now, as I think a lot of my time in church, not many sermons were actually preached on the stories Jesus told. On retreat we looked at some very well known parables – the Good Samaritan, the Lost Sheep, the Prodigal Son but I felt that I was reading them for the first time. Through the discussion we had I felt I began to understand that their true meaning is that the message of Jesus may be about love not judgment. Being a Christian might be about something very different than what I often experienced it to be. The talks were very helpful but returning to the meditation is a reminder to me that the way is not to tie myself in knots trying to work out all the answers in my mind. I have tried that way and it did not lead me to a peaceful place or give me the answers! What is important is simply to exercise faith and to follow the way of meditation every day. In this experience I move beyond words into the silence where I can begin to know what is real and true from my own experience. *(Debbie)*

*TO JOIN THE YOUNG MEDITATORS MAILING LIST
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NEWS FROM THE WORLD COMMUNITY

The following is a small representation of the life of the Community. For weekly news and more information visit the Community web page: www.wccm.org

MEDITATION IN BERE ISLAND



Opportunities appear in our lives every day, sometimes they are subtle, but sometimes they are unmistakable. Here on Bere Island, we are privileged to have the recurrent opportunity to have Father Laurence Freeman as a frequent visitor to our meditation group. Since reconnecting with the Island 2 years

ago, Father Laurence has inspired us to form a meditation group here on Bere Island. For years I had been attempting meditation without much success, I had bought books, tapes, candles, incense, I even bought a special meditation chair! I never quite got there until I heard Father Laurence unravel the mystery for me. Like the Nike ad, "Just do it" Don't analyze it, don't complicate it, keep it simple, just repeat the mantra. So it is just that simple, the challenge is finding the opportunity in a busy day to make time for it.

I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to be inspired by Father Laurence so I wanted to give others that same chance. During the Holy Week retreat on Bere Island we held an "Open Day", an introductory day of meditation in order to give others the opportunity to learn about meditation. It proved to

be a great success and we doubled our numbers, from 2, (my mother-in-law and myself, and occasional 3 if I brought one of my children) to 4 or 5 every week. Considering the population of the island is only 200, a meditation group of 5, (sometimes 10 in the peak of summer) is noteworthy.

Encouraged by the success of our first "Open Day", Father Laurence and I planned another day this past August. We included an introduction to meditation in relation to early Christian tradition as well as the health benefits - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. We meditated in a beautiful room in our island's recently renovated Old School House, now known as the Heritage Centre.

As I have also been introducing meditation to my children we incorporated a session dedicated to children during the day's retreat. For those new to meditation, it was amazing to see how meditation seemed so natural for the children. Everyone in the group had seen the children come in from playing wildly outside, to sitting still and meditating quite effortlessly for 10 minutes. When the session was over, the children went back to wrestling each other and running around. Seeing them so boisterous, it would have been hard to imagine them meditating a few minutes earlier unless you had seen it firsthand. The children were oblivious to the powerful example they had illustrated. No matter how hectic life may seem, it is possible to switch off to the outside world for a few moments and go to our "inner room".

Anne Sullivan: anniesullivanrgn@yahoo.co.uk

JOHN MAIN'S FIRST BOOK IN LATVIAN



On June 29 Fr. Laurence participated in the launch of the Latvian translation of John Main's *Word Into Silence*, published by the leading publishing house in Latvia Zvaigzne ABC. Lutheran pastor Dr. Juris Rubenis wrote a foreword to this translation. He said on the presentation: "There are quite a lot of different kinds of books about spirituality published in Latvia, but very little number of good books,

unfortunately. And this book by John Main can practically help us in our spiritual life."

On December 2008 Juris Rubenis, who is the best-known spiritual writer in Latvia (more than 20 books published), published his own book "Introduction to Christian Meditation", which became a national bestseller, increased people's interest in meditation and boosted the growth of Christian Meditation community in the country. Therefore the third visit of Fr. Laurence in Latvia was very productive with a four-minute

interview on Latvian State TV Evening News, an interview in the leading daily newspaper "Diena", an article in a weekly magazine "Lublu", articles in church media, and meetings with youth, experienced and first time meditators in a number of events.

Fr. Laurence began his visit by meeting with Latvian clergy and guiding a Day of Contemplation for them. There were 14 priests, pastors and ministers, from Catholic, Lutheran and Baptist churches united in silent prayer and rediscovering the forgotten contemplative dimension of the Gospel. Fr. Maximilian Podvik OCD shared his impressions: "I have discovered that Christian meditation is very good and serious approach to spiritual life. It teaches to give time to prayer and to be faithful. Practising meditation, we find ourselves more confident and peaceful, strange thoughts and opinions are not pulling us in different directions, fears have no more power upon us. After prayer the attitude toward things around us is more peaceful and less emotional."

George Indulen, National Coordinator, Latvia.
(george@animalibra.lv). Visit: www.jesus.lv

IN FOCUS

Amazing Grace in Hong

My journey of meditation, a relatively short one since going to a retreat with Fr Laurence in Hong Kong in 2004, has transformed the whole of my spiritual life. In the first few months, the daily struggle of meditation brought much pain to my vulnerable being. I never guessed that the opening up of my darkened and turbulent past through meditation could be so painful. But day in and day out, the amazing healing of the Lord took effect.

The journey was never a lonely one. Elizabeth King, coordinator for China and the pioneer of the meditation community here in Hong Kong has been a great mentor and friend and over the years, we have developed a deep friendship. As the community here grows, Liz is like a loving mother nurturing us all.

Surprisingly, perhaps, it was my mother, a devout Buddhist who first noticed the changes meditation brought to me. How could her 'wild, and nervous daughter' have become her close companion and caregiver? I never imagined that meditation could become the 'common ground' between us, even though Mum used always to say, 'there is never any spiritual plane higher than sitting still in meditation'. Last March she was diagnosed with lung cancer as I was organizing a pilgrimage to Israel. To my amazement, she made me stick to my plan because she knew how I yearned to see the land of Jesus and even bought me a camera. Fr Sean Burke, our much missed spiritual guide in HK comforted me by offering a Mass for my mother and said: 'Mothers know best to meditate. They let go of their children and let them fly free.' She passed away in June with a peaceful smile!

Fr Sean's own sudden and unexpected death in May filled

us all with pain but we remembered his words about meditation and detachment. What was special in him was not only his wisdom and serenity, but his total 'surrender' in the Lord that evidently, and as he said, came through meditation. The fellowship

of meditators here was mysteriously strengthened and highlighted by our losing him – a paradox that is all the more sharp because of the loss of my mother. The love and friendship of a meditating community is proven and expanded at such times. The personal and sincere support of our friend Bishop Tong, bishop of Hong Kong, has also been a blessing and encouragement at every stage of our development.

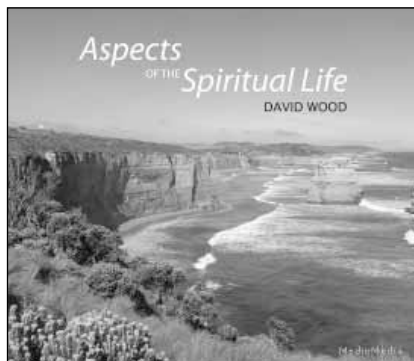
With him and the members of our nine groups here, we had a wonderful liturgical celebration of Fr Sean's life. We have also produced a DVD of his teaching meditation in Chinese which Fr Laurence will take with him to use and distribute on his visit to Chinese seminaries with Liz King in September. When he then comes to Hong Kong for talks and a retreat we will have another opportunity to realise how this seed of meditation being planted and nourished by many dedicated meditators continues to grow – through gains and losses alike.

Lina Lee, Hong Kong Coordinator: linakylee@gmail.com





Christian Meditation Bookstore - NEW ITEMS!



ASPECTS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

David Wood

David Wood is a retired Anglican priest. Most of his life, he lived and worked amongst declining industrial communities in Northern England

organizing and leading prayer workshops, retreats, and vigils of prayer, always exploring silence and solitude. When he found John Main's teaching in 1988, after searching wilderness years, he just knew he was "home". With his wife Sheila he then started and developed the Christian Meditation Community in Cumbria.

"These introductions to meditation", he writes, "are like aspects of the spiritual life and mystery I want to reveal more for myself, knowing that it is the same for many people I meet. We need to bring all things into our silence and let the silence work."

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MARRIAGE, PRIESTHOOD, MEDITATION

Frans de Ridder CICM

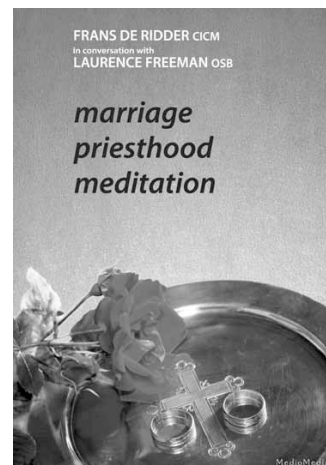
In conversation with

Laurence Freeman OSB

Fr Frans shares how he sensed a need for the experiential dimension in his prayer life, and how he found this in meditation. Meditation, he says, offered a way to "shift from thinking about God to awareness of the presence of God". His twice-daily practice of meditation, he says, enriched every aspect of his priestly life with increased faith, clarity, balance, and meaning. In the same way, he says, meditation can add the contemplative, mystical dimension to marriage spirituality. It can help couples to experience their relationship as a divine encounter when they go beyond words to simply "dwell" together in God's love.

Frans De Ridder CICM is a missionary of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Since 1981 he has been involved with the Marriage Encounter, Engaged Encounter, and Choice (young adults) programmes.

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Words by John Main....

*The first step in personhood is to allow ourselves to be loved.
(Word into Silence)*

PLEASE MAKE A CONTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO YOUR MEANS TO THE COST OF THIS NEWSLETTER AND IF YOU CAN TO THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY WORLDWIDE.



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NEWS FROM THE WORLD COMMUNITY

MALAYSIA:
CELEBRATING SWAMI SATYANANDA'S CENTENARY

Fr. Laurence's visit to Kuala Lumpur for Swami Satyananda's centenary seminar in July coincided with another auspicious event – his own birthday which we were privileged to celebrate! It was apt that on the day, he was able to spend some quiet time to meditate in the Temple of the Universal Spirit at the Pure Life Society where Fr. John was first taught how to meditate by the Swami.

In remembrance of the life and work of Swami Satyananda, the theme for the Centenary Seminar was 'Creating A World That Works For All', highlighting the importance of Interfaith dialogue and religious freedom. The speakers presented perspectives from the major religions of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Swami Satyananda was born on July 15, 1909, in Sri Lanka. As a child, he came with his family to Ipoh, Malaysia where his father worked as a planter. His father died when he was 10, and his mother died a year later. He was adopted by an uncle and went to St Michael's Institution, a Catholic school run by La Salle brothers. At home he was exposed to Hindu and Buddhist teachings, and also to the Muslims in the community. Thus the seeds of universal spirituality were planted early in his life and he finally decided to become a monk.

He continued his service to the poor, orphans and displaced children in Singapore and Malaya, and was assisted by his disciple Sister Mangalam (now "Mother" Mangalam). He was active in many spheres of life, as teacher, educator, writer, speaker, preacher, spiritual master, political activist, social

worker, interfaith champion and more. The Pure Life Society was registered in 1950, on Swamiji's 41st birthday. Its mission was to spread the message of 'One God, One World, One Race'. The society established a home for orphans and underprivileged children. The home was not only a refuge and place of learning but also a spiritual sanctuary. A Temple of the Universal Spirit was built as a symbol of the universality of creation, the universal values of life and the universality of the love of children and fellow mankind. Swamiji gave spiritual teaching and taught meditation to people from varied backgrounds, amongst whom was Fr. John Main.

In his talk, Father Laurence highlighted the importance of the contemplative dimension of prayer in all the major religions and spoke of the 'meaning of spirit'. He also spoke about the work of WCCM. The day ended with a play on the life of the Swami which included his meeting with Fr. John. Fr. Laurence's visit coincided with an Introductory workshop to Christian meditation in one of the KL parishes. He spoke on 'Meditation as a way of life' and celebrated mass for the 56 participants before leaving for Mumbai to meet with the Christian meditators there.

*Patricia Por,
National Coordinator Malaysia
wccm.malaysia@gmail.com*



The World
Community for
Christian
Meditation

THE JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2010: JAMES ALISON

The John Main Seminar of 2010 will be led by James Alison, one of the leading and most insightful theologians of our time. His theme: 'Basic Christianity: Exploring the Shape of God's Affection' will address many of the challenges and breakthroughs we are experiencing today. The Seminar will be hosted by the UK Christian Meditation community in Canterbury, England, Thursday August 5th to Sunday 8th. A retreat led by Fr Laurence Freeman will precede the Seminar.

For Further details and registration: www.jms10.org

NEWS FROM THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Pauline Peters: The Experience of Meditation and Illness

Dear friends,

Thank you for your emails, cards, words of wisdom and sharing your own experiences before my recent operation which encouraged and, at times, challenged me. I was conscious of being held in prayer by so many around the world which helped me to remain peaceful and positive.

Before I was taken into the theatre I told the surgeon that many people around the world held them in prayer that day and he asked what I meant, so I explained about the community and meditation. I'd also read in the Office it was the feast of St Camillus de Lellis, the Patron Saint of Drs and Nurses, so I told him it was a special day for them too. When I was wheeled into the operating theatre he told the assembled team that many were praying for them and they all clapped! As they began to prepare me I closed my eyes and my mantra took me into the silence. The operation was very successful and the pathology is all clear.

I had some setbacks after the operation and as fears started to surface, living in the present moment became a reality. I held onto my mantra like a lifeline and I realized later how the practice of meditation had prepared me for letting go of my fears and living in the now. My meditation practice before and after the operation helped me to accept whatever came, to welcome it as a friend and I hoped I would learn from the experience. Reading the Office also sustained me and lines in the psalms which I'd read many times jumped out at me as if reading them for the first time, sometimes consoling, sometimes challenging, and at times I was caught up in the experience of being loved. I held the community in my heart as I meditated in the hospital and thanked God for the gift we share. The nurses knew I meditated and were interested and some asked how to meditate. It made me realize how important it is to introduce meditation to the sick and dying as is already happening in some countries. I learnt many lessons in the hospital and as Fr John said it was as if "for the first time I saw the wonder of my being, the beauty of life and the centrality of love."

I've had my first check up with the surgeon and he was very



pleased and said I must have had some powerful pray-ers. My strength is returning and Graeme is an excellent nurse and cook. I now walk twice a day for 15 minutes – something I've always avoided! I see the world around me with new eyes and enjoy the beauty and freedom as I walk. Peter Ng gently reminded me once how much Patricia would have loved to have been able to walk – so she walks with me each day and I feel her presence and see her smile.

Now I'm home recovering. I rejoice in "being" not "doing" – it's been a time to sit in the winter sun in the morning listening to the birds in the bush, reading, enjoying music and spending time just being with Graeme. So my convalescence, too, is a graced time and I give thanks for the many blessings over these weeks and for your prayers, love and support with those of my family, Fr Laurence and friends. I have been richly blessed.

Pauline.

Pauline Peters, International Coordinator.
paulinepeters2@gmail.com

MEDITATION IN FINLAND

The Christian Meditation group in Helsinki began meeting last September. The first meetings were attended by 2 to 4 people. Paul Harris generously donated 20 copies of his "FAQs about Christian Meditation", which have been very well received. Thank you once more, Paul. The CDs sent by Daulet Manecksha in Singapore have been listened to during group meetings, and are being borrowed by new meditators. Recently, we moved to a lovely new setting with plenty of space: the Mikael Agrikola Church chapel. Last Tuesday we were 11 people listening to John Main's message and meditating together.

On a personal level, it is now a year since I moved to Helsinki,

and the experience has been a blessing. The opportunity to continue Christian meditation in a new setting with new friends is so very gratifying. By spring 2009 we had outgrown the space, and the church allowed us to move to the Chapel. Today, we meet every Tuesday at 18:00 in the Chapel of the Mikael Agrikola Church. One of our group members, Laura Karikoski, has begun translating some of the texts into Finnish. All newcomers, visitors and travelers are most welcome!

Timo Huotari: timo.huotari@ymail.com