



Christian Meditation

NEWSLETTER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

www.wccm.org

INTERNATIONAL EDITION, VOL. 32, N°4; DECEMBER 2008

JOHN MAIN SEMINAR 2009

“WHEN GOD DISAPPEARS”



27 – 30 AUGUST
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

led by

ROBERT KENNEDY SJ

Come to next year's John Main Seminar on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico in Sarasota, Florida. The seminar will be led by Robert Kennedy, Jesuit priest, Zen master, author and professor of theology. He is also a practicing psychotherapist in New York City and a representative at the United Nations of the Institute for Spiritual Consciousness in Politics. In Christian mystical teaching every image of God can become an idol. Robert Kennedy has better understood this – and the meaning of God beyond words and images – through Zen. Fr. Kennedy's long experience of teaching meditation to modern Christians gives him powerful and much needed insights into the contemporary hunger for the experience of God. In the context of prayer, silent meditation, lecture, and open dialogue, these are issues Fr. Robert Kennedy will explore with us. There will be an optional **pre-seminar silent retreat** led by **Laurence Freeman OSB** in Sarasota from **24 – 27 August**. Complete information at <http://www.jms09.com/> or contact your National Coordinator.

Christian Meditation and The 11th Step

We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God – as we understood Him – praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. (Step Eleven of the 12 Step program of recovery suggested for problem drinkers by Alcoholics Anonymous.)

Members of 12 Step programs of recovery and other meditators met at the Christian Meditation Retreat centre at Cockfosters, London earlier this year. The retreat/workshop was led by Linda K. with her friend Sr Elizabeth, both Florida meditators. The aim was to share experience and to plan for the growing numbers of 12 Step fellowship members who also practice Christian meditation. The weekend included talks, discussions, five meditation sessions and an open AA meeting led by AA and Al-Anon speakers. Our mission statement reads: “We are a group of men and women from 12 Step programs following the teaching of John Main and The World Community for Christian Meditation.

We are not a replacement for any 12 Step program, but we are here to share the ancient path of contemplative prayer as a way to practice the 11th Step. We are available for those looking to deepen their faith and to support those already practicing Christian meditation.” We serve this mission through workshops, retreats and days of reflection. We encourage leaders of WCCM groups to encourage members who belong to 12 Step fellowships to find out more by contacting us via our website: webmaster@christianmeditation11step.org. We will hold a retreat for 11th Step meditators at Cockfosters, April 24-26, 2009. **For details of this retreat contact Tilde (tilde@post4.tele.dk)**

MONTE OLIVETO SILENT RETREAT - AUGUST 1-8, 2009



The Shape of a Wave: Life, Meaning and Meditation

Led by Laurence Freeman, Giovanni Felicioni and Robert Kiely

John Main said that meditation gives meaning, shape and purpose to our lives. Starting to meditate could be compared with dropping a stone into a pool of water and following the ever-expanding waves it creates. How do we perceive the new shapes of meaning in our lives especially in these troubled times as we move into a new social order? How do we see the eternal values of love and truth in the ordinary forms of our daily experience?

For more information and registration visit www.wccm.org or contact the International Centre, London (mail@wccm.org)



A letter from Laurence Freeman OSB

DIRECTOR OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Dearest friends,

Cometh the hour cometh the person best equipped to deal with the crisis of the hour. It is not only those who voted for Barack Obama in the American presidential election who feel such a profound relief and the renewal of hope that swept through the world with his election.

Even New York, where I was for our Way of Peace last month, a Christian-Muslim dialogue at New York University, seemed momentarily to feel a glimmer of this optimism through the filters of its characteristic urban anxiety. New Yorkers, though we love them as well as their city, often seem not a little addicted to their stress levels, absorbed in the daily minutiae of survival in a city of such artificiality and drivenness, collectively convinced (part of its charm) of its importance in keeping the world spinning. The world loves New York, at least as a place to visit, because it recognizes so much of itself in the city, a kind of dysfunctional home we still love. It was after all the doorway to new life and hope for millions of immigrants, a conduit from the exhaustion of the old worlds to the vitality of the Americas.

With Mr Obama's election the United States has regenerated itself once again. It has begun to restore this resourceful country, so energised by the sense of its own messianic destiny, to a worthy place in the community of nations. Mr Obama is wisely moderating the projection of these hopes onto his presidency as he faces our extraordinary, complex crisis. No doubt he is prepared for his ratings to fall at the first fence. Equally wisely he is not boasting of his strong mandate but remembering the many who did not choose him as their man of the hour. His measured approach to his cabinet appointments and sense of the need for collaboration and continuity in turbulent times make those who may still think in these traditional terms consider the practice of the virtues in the light of faith.

RECOGNISING KRISIS

How do we cope with crisis, personal or global? The Greek word, *krisis*, has the sense of *judgment*. The Chinese character carries the complementary meanings of *danger* and

opportunity. Buddhist teachers urge *mindfulness* in critical situations. Jesus burst from his long silence and solitude into public teaching with a dramatizing sense of crisis, not only of his particular social and political situation but also of the human condition. The *kingdom*, the pressing sense of the immediacy of the divine presence, is 'close at hand' and 'upon you, within you and among you', not just in his historical context but in all human life. In contrast to the belief that it takes myriad lifetimes to arrive at the goal and choose the real over the unreal, the spirit over the flesh, Jesus places his focus on the gift and drama of this life we are living now. (Mahayana Buddhism later developed the idea that liberation from *samsara*, the world of illusion, is conceivably possible in one lifetime). Jesus' teaching, like the biblical tradition that gave birth to him, is God-centred yet also intensely this-worldly, as if there is not time for too much metaphysics and speculation about what the next world is going to be like.

People who like to speculate about the next world or the spiritual realm often give the impression of evading this one. It is the danger of all religion perhaps and especially of its excessively devotional forms. When Desley Deike, the much loved former UK coordinator of our community, was dying recently I sat with her many times. We talked about what she was going through but also the latest projects and ideas her ever active and other-centred mind was coming up with. Once I asked her if she had any curiosity about what would come next and she confidently replied, no, but added "I think I know already what it's like". She described this in a few potent words that need to be heard rather than read for their effect, energy, peace, love. I felt it was the last word of a woman who had truly developed her Christian faith through facing the personal crises of her life and through prayer and service of others.

Death is the ultimate crisis but we are continually being prepared for it. We are not condemned to having to lurch from one crisis to the next, as the hubris and greed engendered by the last decade of the international financial system has forced us to. But we are rarely without some kind of crisis. Daily life is so full of problems created by our perceptions of fear and desire that we easily forget that life it is more than problem solving. It is about the penetration and revelation of a mystery. St James urges us to be prepared for this – the same constant vigilance and alertness that the Advent and Christmas seasons remind us of. To think that the period of calm and content we may be enjoying now will continue

unabated is to become drowsy and unready. St James goes further and has us make a virtue of necessity:

My friends, whenever you have to face all sorts of trials, count yourselves supremely happy in the knowledge that such testing of your faith makes for strength to endure. Let endurance perfect its work in you that you may become perfected, sound throughout, lacking in nothing (1:2-4)

If we are awake and alert crisis can even be a welcome stage and means of our development.

CONTEMPLATION IN A TIME OF CRISIS

Crisis is inevitable because everything, including our minds, is constantly changing. But there are different ways of handling crisis. If we don't handle it well, or we are unprepared, like the foolish virgins who did not have oil for their lamps, events spin out of control. Crisis then becomes meltdown, as we are experiencing already in economically and perhaps will soon also see ecologically.

The alertness and readiness that the spiritual traditions say is necessary for living wisely is the fruit of contemplative practice. Living morally and practicing common sense is a good foundation but it is not the same or as effective as contemplative consciousness. This is the goal as well as the way of specific spiritual practices and the orientation of our life in harmony with them. As all developed religions, with their rituals, myths and structures, have emerged out of an initial contemplative awakening they also, at least nominally, point human development in the direction of their source. Problems arise when the practitioners and teachers of the religion settle down in the mythical and ritualistic. They forget what these are signposts to and treat them as ends in themselves. It is another way of falling asleep on the job and being unready when the master unpredictably returns.

Christianity today is stirring awake to this source again and the global crisis is perhaps partly the cause. Although its structures and self-made boundaries remain largely oriented towards the dogmatic and the ritualistic and although its teachers often lag behind the spiritual awakening taking place among those they should be teaching, a crisis with positive potential is unfolding. When we see how this is happening at local levels, in parishes and communities we can better understand how it happens globally throughout the extended Body of Christ.

Contemplative consciousness is a marriage of mindful awareness and universal compassion. If it were only about awareness we would only have clever consultants to talk us out of the crisis. If it were only compassionate concern we would be unable to deal with the roots of the problems and be limited to responding to the symptoms. The highly evolved unity of contemplative consciousness may often seem impossibly hard to attain. Rationally it is hard to imagine. Emotionally it feels like a dream. But when we see its essential

simplicity (and how much children teach us about meditation!) it seems to come within range. Only a simple practice, followed in faith, realizes it in ways the eye has not seen, the ear heard or the heart of man imagined. It is not subject to analysis until it has happened, as Jesus says about the Kingdom itself. And indeed this contemplative consciousness, that both prepares us for crisis and helps us to handle it, is a direct result of the experience of the Kingdom.

The spiritual marriage that produces this offspring can be described in many ways. The alchemists often got lost in their symbolism but were on its track. Martha and Mary were taught by Jesus to aim for it in their domestic life. Theologians call it the apophatic and the kataphatic. Anyone who prays seriously know that the mind and heart seek unity and that, as the heart is the deeper centre of being, it is the mind that has humbly to come down into the heart. *"Let the mind rest in the heart"* as hesychasts and rishis alike, teach. Scientists explore the physical margins of this contemplative process in their neurological research – and how excited meditators can become when they find that something of their spiritual

practice can be measured and recorded in their brains!

Science and religion agree that meditation helps us deal with crisis.

It prepares us for its recurrences and even, as St James says, allows us to use it for our spiritual development; because meditation is itself a kind of controlled crisis. In personal or political crisis a shift of power or loss of control happens, both of which make everyone involved feel queasy or frightened. Security, stability, resistance to any kind of systemic change, can therefore become top priorities for us and our institutions. We can sacrifice our personal integrity or our civil liberties in order to feel safe. But in meditation we willingly allow power to drift out of the hands of the ego to another less familiar aspect of ourselves. We wonder at times if it is even ourselves we are risking ourselves for.

**"CRISIS CAN BE A WELCOME
STAGE OF OUR DEVELOPMENT."**

CRISIS IN A TIME OF CONTEMPLATION

As long as we are meditating for goals and clear objectives we feel safe. If we can measure these and if science assures us it is



worthwhile, the feeling of being in control reassures us. Difficulties – and real growth – happen when we come to a crisis in our meditation itself. This is usually when we are no longer convinced that it is even worthwhile. *I am not feeling anything. My distractions overwhelm me. I just can't do it when I'm feeling like this. Can I do it just for five minutes at a time (please)?*

The feeling that we are feeling nothing is a crisis in the spiritual life of extraordinary potential. Unfortunately it is also the reason why most people give up, even finally abandon, the discipline of meditation. As the *Cloud of Unknowing* says, most people give up the work just as they get to the point of a breakthrough. Medieval legend located the time of the birth of Jesus in the deepest and darkest moment of the night.

As John of the Cross describes the dark night crises, it is never easy. But to know that this feeling of feeling nothing is a pregnant place, to hear that the darkness is due to an excess of light, that our sense of knowing nothing is merely the opinion of the mind not the heart – these reassurances, to be found everywhere in the tradition and in the present support of one's spiritual friends, can help anyone to handle the crisis and grow through it. In conversation with others on the same path we can learn how to replace the word 'nothing' with 'poverty' or 'emptiness'. And we can find unexpectedly rich meaning in this simple shift of terms. The mystical poets like John of the Cross can teach us that the night is a 'happy night' or that the feeling of unrequited longing *is* the answer to prayer (as in Rumi's poem, *Love Dogs*). The scientific measurement of our brains does not have nearly the same power to sustain our practice in times of crisis as the voices of these friends over the centuries. Initially and ultimately, meditation is a way of faith and faith is nourished in community and by tradition.

While giving a retreat last month in Salvador, Bahia, in the tropical northeast of Brazil, I walked down as often as the schedule allowed to the beach which was just a few metres from the retreat house. There is a delicious time of leisure on retreats (at least for the presenter) between breakfast and the first talk. Everybody has had enough meditation for the time being and is occupied with cleaning teeth or tidying their room. Each of these mornings at the beach I sat at a *baracca*, a small kiosk offering drinks or fish snacks to the sun

worshippers. I watched the owners get their business ready for the day, in particular the work of setting out the plastic chairs and tables with colourful umbrellas in the sand. The man doing it knew his job. He knew how many he could carry in one go and arranged them quickly and accurately, pushing each chair just firmly enough into the sand. He looked neither ecstatic nor bored with his work. If asked, probably he would have said he felt nothing. But without it there would have been no business, no waiting for the much-needed clients, no readiness for them when they arrived. On the mornings I watched him work he did the same thing with minor variants. Perhaps occasionally he even made discoveries and improved his performance but not while I was there. Yet each day his routine seemed to me to begin with new promise and hope. His poverty seemed immensely rich and the humble enterprise full of human dignity. If only, I thought, we could approach the daily work of our meditation with the same quiet, purposeful zeal.

Historically it has often been in times of social and economic meltdown, like Europe in the fourteenth century or the world in the twentieth, that contemplative consciousness has awakened in profound and unpredictable ways in local communities. Today even this pattern is being globalised. More than ever we can imagine contemplative networks unifying the human family composed of spiritual *barracas*, small centres or groups where the business of the spirit is humbly and faithfully enacted. They cannot become places of commerce or competition without losing their soul, though they can have a beneficial influence upon those other centres in which the business of the world is transacted. They need small workforces, communities measured by faith not by numbers or success, alert, remembering their initial purpose and ready to keep learning and teaching. Above all they need a love for their work and a deep sense of its inevitability and importance.

CRISIS AND THE MIDDLE WAY

A ship in a storm, a marriage in a crisis, a meditator in a dark night, and the human body itself day by day, needs balance to get through. Moderation, prudence, is one of the classical virtues, along with wisdom, justice and courage. To have one of these in full measure is to have them all, to be deficient in one reduces the whole. Perhaps our most obvious cultural deficiency, with the worst consequences for the world, is in moderation. Our rapid technological and economic development has speeded up life so extremely that the balance of forces needed for virtuous living has been disrupted. Unhappiness, discontent and extreme crisis results in many fields, from ecology to economics.

Health in the physical body or in the body politic is a constant balancing act and is therefore always fragile. The spiritual wisdom of humanity has long understood this and developed the wisdom of the middle way. The Buddha



discovered that extreme spiritual practices might change mental states but could not lead to enlightenment. St Benedict had also been trained in extreme solitude and self-control but came to share his wisdom by advocating discretion ('nothing in excess'). Ever teaching through practice, he applied this to the measure of wine the monks should be given. In the old days, he said, monks would avoid wine altogether but 'as today monks cannot be persuaded of this' he ruled they should be allocated one *hemina* per day. The joke which he surely intended is that no one knows what a *hemina* means.

Moderation can only be evaluated by the mother of virtues, discretion. It cannot be rigidly regulated. What is moderate today may be extreme tomorrow. A *hemina* means different things for different people.

In modern culture moderation often seems an alien virtue. Profits are meant to be maximized. Consumer demand is meant to increase indefinitely. We want to get the most out of life. Inevitably this outlook leads to fantasy – because life and human nature have limits – and actions driven by fantasy lead eventually to crisis and breakdown. In a time of crisis like ours today we revisit the meaning of moderation and – with the good global leadership we hope we are seeing at last in the new President – we see how different moderation is from mediocrity. God disdains the mediocre, the lukewarm (Rev 3:16). But moderation is the obverse of mediocrity; it is cutting edge, the sharp sword of the spiritual life that separates truth from illusion.

Balance is necessary for happiness. As the ancient philosophers taught, happiness is not the result of the accumulation of pleasures but the harmonious fulfillment of human potential in the light of reason. Nothing that is not against nature, said Clement of Alexandria, is against Christ. The Christian wisdom path has always respected this relationship between grace and nature, faith and reason; and it teaches that our inner life determines the kind of society we inhabit and the relationships that make up the true values we live by. The way you pray, in the end, is the way you live.

THE EMPTINESS THAT IS FULL

If we cannot reduce wisdom to rules ("there is no law dealing with such things as these," St Paul says about the spirit) what do we find on the knife-edge of the middle way? Not law but grace, the overwhelming self-giving of God. It is indeed so overwhelming and baffling to the unassisted mind that we reduce it to our familiar experience of gift. (Only when the mind has begun to rest in the heart can it start to understand). Normally we give expecting or requiring something in return. So, surely, we conclude, God gives in the same way. God gives, but demands that we behave in a certain way. It is true that to receive the gift there are certain

conditions built into the limited human condition. But the gift is unalloyed grace. Agape is boundless and without conditions. That is why it changes us and is hard to accept.

When we try to live virtuously in pursuit of true happiness, we find ourselves approaching ever closer to the edge of the waterfall of being. Eventually we are swept over the edge into the free fall of the huge torrent of the divine stream of love.

Knife-edge or, perhaps better, the eye of the needle. It is through this fine, tiny aperture that reduces us to nothing that everything comes together and the great unions are realised. Through this passage of emptiness – the scriptural term is *kenosis* – God himself passes, and emerges as the long anticipated, the fulfillment of the ancient intuition that the Word must become flesh, the messiah who is the embodiment of wisdom. This birth happens, as the early teachers said, in three realms, in eternity, in history and in our own hearts over the course of our lives. This birth is also a crisis, a point of radical turning, in history, indeed in cosmology. It brings not breakdown, however, but healing, the divine medicine for our wounded condition. It is the ultimate meaning of the middle way, the union of extremes, and it can be entered only through the emptiness by which the prophecy was fulfilled.

The resources of language and thought are too limited to express the fullness of this self-emptying incarnation. We approach it best through the attempt to live in accordance with it. 'Christianity is the imitation of God', said St Gregory of Nyssa. In early Mahayana Buddhism the Bodhisattva vow, committing oneself and the fruits of one's spiritual practice to the well being of others, was seen as a rare and extraordinary achievement. From the beginning of the Common Era it became seen as a vow to which all should aspire. I don't know if this change represents at some level the influence traditions exert on each other, but it would make sense if it does. It was to all that Jesus said, '*be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*'.

In Jesus, God's presence to the human is amplified beyond the limits of the human. It *becomes* human, embodied in a particular person who was to grow through the stages of human growth, the consummating gift of self in the emptiness of death to become a universal presence communicating the ever-flowing torrent of the divine love.

It is this presence that fills us, through our own emptiness, and stays balanced and steady through our booms and busts, our failures and follies, through every kind of crisis.

With much love,



Laurence Freeman OSB

"FAITH IS NOURISHED IN
COMMUNITY AND BY TRADITION."

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

TEACHERS AND THEIR TRAVELS

FR JOE PEREIRA (INDIA)

Here in Mumbai we have felt blessed during our recent tragedies by the love and prayerful support of meditators around the world. Thank you! This Fall I was giving yoga programmes in North America in which I include Christian Meditation. On 3rd Oct. I spoke at the Calgary Yoga Centre on World Peace and Meditation which concluded with a meditation for over a hundred people. I have prepared a DVD and booklet called "Yoga for Christian Meditation" which will shortly be published by Medio Media. *Fr Joe is National Co-ordinator, India. (jpst_1995@yahoo.co.uk)*

KIM NATARAJA (UK)

I have been writing 'The Letters from the International School' for the South American meditators and putting the final touches to the 'Roots of Christian Mysticism' book. I have been working with my daughter Shanida on 'The School' website and with Lucia Gayon on the Meditation with Children site. Concerning Meditation with Children I gave an evening talk at the Cornerstone Centre in Phoenix in April and have been in contact with several people from the UK and one in Malta about starting to meditate with children and passed on the information to Ruth Fowler (Coordinator Teaching Meditation to Students). In the UK I have been teaching a lot in London and round the country, talks and retreats and 'Roots' courses. This fall Shankar, my husband, and I were traveling to give talks and retreats in the US – Florida, Chicago and the new Christian Meditation Centre in Burlington, Vermont. In October I led a workshop in Paris with Dominique Lablanche and the UK School Retreat with Liz Watson in Wales last month. *Kim is the International Coordinator of the WCCM School and author of Dancing With Your Shadow. (kimshankarnataraja@googlemail.com)*

LAURENCE FREEMAN



Since September Fr Laurence has been on his annual UK tour and been the keynote speaker at the US Contemplative Outreach Conference. He concelebrated at Desley Deike's funeral in London, gave talks on meditation and dialogue in Sarajevo and taught in Indonesia for two weeks, including the leading of their first School. He met with the MedioMedia team (Dominic and Bernie Heng, Daulet Manacksha and Peter Ng in Singapore). He spoke at the Italian National Conference in Padova and at an inter-religious event in Rome. With Lukas Gruszka and Giovanni Felicioni, he led the annual Meditatio meeting in Warsaw. He spoke at the 2008 WCCM Way of Peace event, a Christian-Muslim encounter at New York University, and wrote the present newsletter during a two week tour in Brazil. He will be on personal retreat and writing until February.

THE HUNGER FOR DEPTH AND MEANING: AROUND THE UK

Laurence Freeman chose this theme of his 2008 UK teaching tour from the title of the new thematic anthology of John Main edited by Peter Ng (Medio Media 2008). Fr Laurence developed it through a series of talks relating to spirituality in a secular age. After one earlier talk at Guildford Cathedral in August, the mid September tour took in Manchester, Prestwich, Preston, Barrow, Penrith, Minsteracres Retreat Centre (Hexham), Newcastle, Middlesbrough, London (St Paul's Cathedral), Wormwood Scrubs Prison, Croydon and Hatfield. Fifteen talks in eight days. These tours – the brainchild of Desley Deike in 2005 – provide a way in his global schedule for him to meet meditators around the country as well as energising existing groups.

He spoke on the link between addiction and the spiritual life in Manchester and Middlesbrough. At Wormwood Scrubs Prison in London Fr Laurence was describing the idea of the "wheel of prayer" to the offenders and chaplains gathered in a circle in the prison chapel...when one of the audience spoke up – 'you mean something like that?' – and pointed to a large rose window up on the back wall of the chapel, twelve sections radiating from its centre. The perfect symbol to accompany Laurence's words, it was a moving moment of recognition and understanding, as was the profundity of the silence during meditation.

At St Paul's Cathedral in the City both Cathedral guides remarked on the atmosphere, and one is reported to have said that she had "never seen so many happy faces after an event" as at this one. Much of the publicity work for the St Paul's evening was aimed to attract City financial workers. On the day, Lehmann Brothers Bank filed for bankruptcy, and many who came were worried about the impact on their own lives. Nonetheless, the crypt was full, and one City worker wrote afterwards to say "Whilst I often meditate I never really knew if I was doing it right but I learned a lot about the how-to from this lovely and heartfelt evening."

Based on contributions from Sarah Kirkup, Pat Savage, Brijji Waterfield, Roger Layet, Bob Morley, Graeme Watson, and others involved in the tour.

SERVING THE SICK IN SINGAPORE

Since 2003, our Singapore Community has been running a meditation group at Gleneagles Hospital, for people coping with serious illness and for care-givers and health-care workers. It was started by our beloved Patricia Ng who taught us all how meditation helped her greatly to deal with her cancer. "I'm so surprised," she said, "that having [death] in front of my eyes has actually made life more joyful." Her doctor, impressed with her joyful spirit and strength, suggested she share her faith and experience with others. So in June 2004, with the help of her husband Peter and Sr Margaret Goh, she started the group at the hospital. Patricia died on 14 February 2005 but the group continues to meet regularly every Saturday. Even those who do not come regularly remain

connected and many come back on special occasions like our Christmas gathering. The group has supported patients, care-givers and those bereaved. The Hospital has been most encouraging and is making their boardroom available for our weekly meetings. The teaching on Meditation is presented in spiritual terms acceptable to all religious backgrounds. We put on a CD, short talks of no more than 5 minutes by John Main and Laurence Freeman on topics such as re-linking to our centre, wholeness, peace, silence, meditation and the patient – taken from Fr Laurence's *A Short Span of Days*. The teaching time is kept to a minimum to allow more time for sharing and questions. Participants are given a booklet containing transcripts of the talks, and details of the Gleneagles Group. The meetings with the cancer support group continue monthly. We are also considering how to join the hospital's home visit programme. This will be the next

step in our journey of serving the sick. *Daulet Manacksha, Singapore Christian Meditation Centre and Medio Media International (daulet@pacific.net.sg)*

NEW ONLINE WAY

of donating

TO THE COMMUNITY

Like all of us the Community is facing financial hardships at this time. If you can contribute, even a little to our work, it is easy to do so, either through your national community or now online at www.wccm.org.

IN FOCUS

The Long Road to Unity

I have been the coordinator in South Africa for a year now. I took over from Christa Roodt who moved to Scotland. My journey on this road of silence and meditation started more than ten years ago when I visited Egypt as part of an ecumenical delegation. At that stage I was a chaplain in the South African National Defence Force. I studied theology during the apartheid years at the then very conservative University of Pretoria. In Egypt in the desert monasteries I was confronted with silence, peace and love. I returned to South Africa without realising what exactly had happened to me. But the mystery of God led me to learn more about the desert spirituality. I started reading about the desert fathers and the prayer of the heart. At first I was introduced to another way of silent prayer. But it was when I learned more about John Main, Laurence Freeman and the work of the World Community for Christian Meditation that I really felt I had come home. The teachings of Cassian which I experienced in Egypt now made sense in my life and connected me to a tradition that went back to Jesus and the apostles. In 2004 I returned to Egypt where I stayed for a month visiting different monasteries to learn more about the desert fathers and their prayer life.

Silence and meditation is a tradition that was completely lost in the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) which I belong to. In the post apartheid era the churches in general but specifically the DRC was flooded by a very superficial charismatic theology that swept in from America. The complete ignorance regarding the long history of the Church before the reformation, the lack of ecumenical understanding, the strong charismatic movement and the fear of the new political dispensation made meditation seem something to ignore and, even more not only to steer away from but to expose as something unbiblical. We are currently two pastors from the DRC in South Africa who are trying to spread the message of

meditation and silence. The resistance is crumbling, but oh, so slowly. The big issue on the agenda of our church is the unifying process between the four Dutch Reformed Churches.

Although these churches are open to all they are still divided on grounds of race. You have the white DRC, the Black DRC in Africa, the Brown Uniting Reformed Church and the Asian Reformed Church in Africa. Where to put the blame? During the apartheid era it was easy to place the blame on the "white" church. It was the white church who divided the church on the ground of race. Now almost 15 years down the line we still cannot unite. (Interesting enough, during the first unifying process between the Black and Brown churches, we were left with two churches, a uniting church and part of the Black church who did not want to unite). If only we could take the leaders of these different churches on a weeklong meditation retreat and have them sit together in silence before our Lord.

In the black traditional religions and the independent churches that grew from them, silence is something to be feared. Drums are beaten at night and lamps are lit to chase away evil spirits. Fortunately the Catholic tradition is rediscovering silence and helping us in spreading the message of silence and meditation. There is also the post modern generation who are discontented with the churches who are seeking silence and meditation. So the journey to unity now continues with the help of meditation and the global community it has called into existence.

Dr (Rev) Johan van den Heever
National Coordinator, South Africa
 (www.wccmsa.wordpress.com / www.wccmsa.co.za)

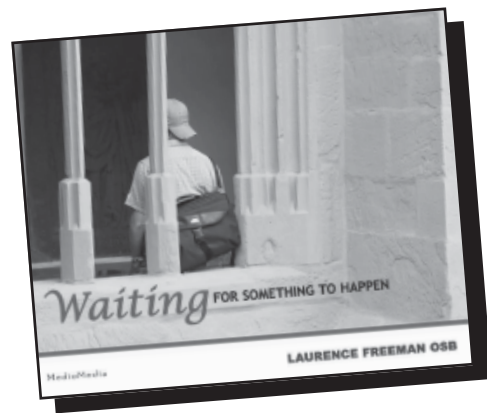




TRANSPARENCY MEDITATION & LEARNING TO SEE

Our ability to see reality is often obscured by the fears and desires of the ego, and by the speed and anxieties of modern culture and institutions. We need clarity and purity of heart today in new, more urgent ways. In these talks, Father Laurence teaches that meditation is the daily practice that purifies our seeing and transforms our whole way of living. It gives us the power to see through illusions and addictions that once seemed as solid as reality itself. The result is simplicity and truth reflected in the supremely human gifts of forgiveness, love and the peace that passes understanding.

Audio CD – Set of 4 #6196 US\$30.00 £18.00



WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN

We are all waiting for something to happen; perhaps with desire or fear, or maybe with openness and alertness. To wait fruitfully means to pay attention. To pay attention is to love – it is to sustain our unselfcentred gaze at the other, and to be open to their gaze towards us. The ego's reflexes – fear and desire – can block our capacity for waiting with the gaze of love. But we can learn that the patterns the ego has created are capable of change. Being a disciple of truth in reality leads to more than a temporary change. It opens up the permanent transformation which listening to the mantra reveals.

Audio CD – Set of 6 #6194 US\$44.95 £20.00

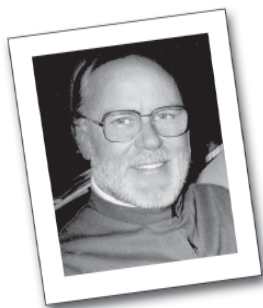
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Words by John Main....

*In saying the mantra we lay down our life
for the sake of the One we have not yet seen.*

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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