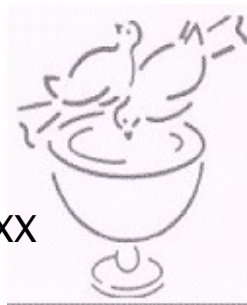


Christian Meditation in the UK



OCTOBER
2011

St Mark's, Myddelton Square, London EC1R 1XX

The community is registered in the UK as 'The Christian Meditation Trust (UK)' reg charity no. 1101900

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FROM OUR NATIONAL CO- ORDINATOR

After three years it is time for me to relinquish the role of National Coordinator and I am delighted to say that Janet Robbins has agreed to take it on. Janet is currently Coordinator for Wiltshire and some of you will know her from UK conferences, and in particular in organising or MC roles at the John Main Seminar in Canterbury 2010 or at the UK conference in Swanwick this year. Fr Laurence and the National Council have endorsed her with great enthusiasm and I hope you will want to do the same. Janet will take over during the weekend of 18 – 20 November when the coordinators in the UK gather for the annual National Council meeting.

What I am very confident of is that she will experience wonderful support from the community and will learn more about what community means – as I too have done. Standing squashed into a very crowded Piccadilly line train this afternoon I was reminded that nowadays we might well be tempted to use the word 'community' to tack on to such a phrase as 'London tube ...', or even 'Piccadilly line.....' You know the sort of thing, 'the London tube community was unhappy with the frequency of planned maintenance on the Circle and Victoria lines and the subsequent severe overcrowding on other lines.' What has made us apply this rich word so gratuitously to pretty much any group of people with some sort of common interest however slight and transient? I guess it is because we know we are lacking something and hope that by applying the word as often as we can we might make something better happen. We might begin to change the reality of a fragmented, over-individualised society into a society where we can discover that we matter to each other. Well, applying the word is a start; it is the beginning of a recognition; we have an inkling that we need something else. However the reality of that sort of change turns about to be trickier than resurrecting a word. Maybe we make a start by trying to be tolerant of everyone. That is not too difficult for us to do in the comfort of our own chosen surroundings with people like ourselves.

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Nor is it too difficult in situations imagined from our armchairs. But it turns out to be much trickier in real life or in surroundings we haven't specially chosen for ourselves and with people who are not like us. What do we do when we feel hurt, angry or undermined by someone with whom we work or live? How can we tolerate it? Should we tolerate it? What should we do when the group we belong to makes a decision we strongly disagree with and the only options seem to be to give in or give up. What should I do if I want to implement a new direction in the group which I lead and there is strong opposition? What does tolerance mean then? If only everyone was like me, we find ourselves thinking, then everything would be fine.

Let us hear Rowan Williams on the subject. He notes our tendency to start by thinking that we can create community by avoiding our differences and pretending that, "when Paul says that there is in Christ neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, he means that instead of actual human beings (who are obstinately and irreducibly Jews, Greeks, slaves etc) there is, for Christian purposes, a standard issue subject." There isn't, and so what we need to develop is "a level of patience and attention that can properly be called contemplative." And of course meditation is a way par excellence of learning to do that. It is precisely what we do when we meditate, we attend, we learn to listen to ever deepening realms of silence and in so doing find we can offer something of that same listening to the reality of the other. And we are patient (as patient as we are able!) which in its original meaning signifies to 'lie open'; in a Christian understanding of meditation that is to lie open to the infinite love of Christ which can begin to expand our heart and make a bit more room for the other whom

we were previously unable to accept, understand or tolerate. We may at some point remember that this other is also made in the image of God.

What does it mean to be made in the image of God? Is it that each unique individual is made in the image of God and together we make up humanity? No, says 7th century monk and theologian Maximus the Confessor. It is precisely the other way round; it is humanity which is the image of God and the individual human is an instance of it, each a particular unique instance of it. The word Adam in Genesis means 'humankind'. The primary reality is unity, and we are individual instances of the inherent unity. We are made for community, we are members one of another, as St Paul – and my school motto - put it, or "now you are the body of Christ and individual members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). One way of thinking of the sin of Adam is that we tend to imagine that our primary reality is our individual identity. Following that line of thought, to find personal fulfillment implies working on ourselves and perfecting our individuality. Then of course, if everyone were like me, we would have perfect community, perfect harmony. What we discover in meditation is the truth which Maximus is trying to convey. We decline the impulse to make ourselves into something we imagine would complete us and allow ourselves to fall back into the primary reality of unity, the stillness at the centre of the wheel where all becomes one, where diversity falls back into its original unity. And when we come back to normal consciousness we discover that we have somehow become closer to the diverse group of people we meditate with, yet we feel more uniquely ourselves than ever. There lies the wonder of it.

The fruit that gradually grows from our daily practice is what John Main identifies as a double sense of responsibility: to support and encourage others, and to recognize our own need for support and encouragement. And then to extend the love we discover among ourselves into hospitality beyond the boundaries of our small community. These are, of course, simple things and like meditation, not always easy, but always worth the struggle.

So Janet, welcome deeper into the life of the community as it stumbles gloriously along the way.

Liz Watson

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Contributions to the newsletter are warmly welcomed. Please send items to me at 39 West Street, Coggeshall, Essex C06 1NS Tel: 0797 674 0093 email: davidjsimpson@btinternet.com. **Deadline for next issue - January 1st 2012**

David Simpson

GREENBELT FESTIVAL 2011

After one of our meditation sessions at Greenbelt Festival 2011, an experienced meditator asked the yurter full of people he had been leading, 'So, how was your meditation?' The immediate response came, 'Well, the base guitar was pretty loud, wasn't it?' Sure enough, the excited vibrations of the Greenbelt Mainstage just a few hundred yards away had provided the rather unusual backdrop to our sitting. 'Yes,' said the leader of the session, 'I was vibrating a little'.

But in spite of the general busyness of camping, music, talks, drama, alcoholic pints of 'Jonah and the Ale', and general high spirits at Greenbelt, there was plenty of stillness, plenty of silence, and a healthy dose of community as well. Perhaps the importance of a contemplative presence in very active places gave our team vitality and helped us to gel and connect.

The team led a total of seventeen sessions of chanting, Bible-reading, teaching and meditation, often for those looking for a break, and often for refreshingly inexperienced beginners. In the end we found ourselves turning people away from the yurt, and I was reminded at times of praying in the church in Taizé, where people sit almost knee to knee, crammed in close together, elderly priests next to children and teenage first-timers. All in all, our time together was highly rewarding and encouraging, and I have had lots of good feedback about members of the team taking the practice home into daily life.

At the close of the festival we came up with a number of thoughts for next year, including a bigger, perhaps quieter meditation space, and a programme for meditating with children. Those children who did come into the yurt for an impromptu session were an absolute delight (giggling is an underrated spiritual quality), and seemed, despite their excitement, to enjoy hearing about the mantra. Any parents in need of a bit of quiet at next year's festival, watch this space.



Phil Seal p.j.m.seal@gmail.com

MEDITATING IN THE ISLES OF SCILLY!



Some of you will know that Mark and I have for many years taken our holidays in the beautiful Isles of Scilly, some 28 miles off the Cornish coast. This year we have been fortunate enough to purchase a small two unit property that we will use partly as a base for our own times of retreat and the other as a holiday let. As a 'one off' this year we opened our own house free for anyone who would like to use it so there have been regular guests throughout the summer discovering some of the natural beauty that makes these islands so special.

I have often wondered about the possibility of having a meditation group on Scilly though to date have not been there consistently enough to bring this about. The islands have a natural capacity for stillness, silence and simplicity.

It was an exciting moment last October, when I came out of St. Mary's Parish Church one Sunday morning and met the new Chaplain of the Isles. Within a few sentences of general conversation we discovered our mutual affiliation with the WCCM. The Rev. Canon Peter Walker has recently moved from Truro where as a Canon at the Cathedral he conducted a meditation group much as we do here, in Norwich Cathedral. He planned an introduction to Christian Meditation as part of a Lenten series with an intent to set up a regular group. By good fortune I was in Scilly on the date of this session. It was a joy to sit and meditate with about 15 people in such a familiar, profound silence yet backed by an equally well known sound of sea and gulls.

Since then Peter has initiated a regular group that meets in 'The Star of the Sea' a delightful tiny R.C. Church tucked away at the top of a staircase in a granite building opposite St. Mary's harbour. I think John Main may have appreciated this nautical connection.

"We need to be sure, confident not blown away by the first storm winds that blow up. Meditation is a

way to this stability..saying the mantra is like dropping the anchor, anchoring yourself in the depths of your own being. We are so caught up with all that is happening on the surface that we don't have time to stand aside from the surface and go to the depths. Once we touch the ground of our own being, we make an extraordinary discovery. Final rootedness, real stability for each of us can only come when we are firmly anchored in God." The Hunger for Depth and Meaning p.151

There is plenty of storm wind in Scilly as well as days of pure calm. It is necessary to be constantly aware of what the weather is doing as communication between the islands and the mainland depends upon it. Whatever the weather these islands are a great place to 'drop anchor' for a while and listen also to our own inner calms and turbulences. The deep fall of the meditation anchor takes us away from our own pre-occupations to that silent place where clarity may begin to re-form.

During the summer a meditation group on St. Mary's meets every Thursday at 8pm (winter visitors need to check notice boards or phone the Chaplaincy.) I am sure Peter would be very pleased to meet any meditators who choose a holiday in Scilly. A combination of time spent in these islands alongside a WCCM meditation group is for me, something very special indeed.

Anne McDonnell

Regional co-ordinator East Anglia

MARTOCK AND GALMINGTON

MEDITATION GROUPS

A REPORT FROM OUR WEDNESDAY 7TH SEPTEMBER MEETING

The Bishop of Bath and Wells' Palace, with high walls, a wide moat and the remains of a drawbridge, adjoins the cathedral of Wells in the same city.

In the 12th Century, King John granted land for its building. It was as much a fortified defence as an official residence for some centuries, different incumbents adding to the building and its fascinating history. The two meditation groups from All Saints, Martock and Saint Michael's, Galmington, together toured the magnificent grounds in September 2011. There are far too many beautiful aspects of our short visit to record here so I've chosen three.

After climbing the staircase with griffons, the symbols adorning the newel posts: in the Long Gallery, encased in glass, is the cope worn by the Bishops of Bath and Wells for the coronations of Edward 7th, George 5th and 6th, and Queen Elizabeth 2nd. At the coronation of Richard 2nd, a mishap occurred; in procession, the boy King lost a slipper: the bishop may have retrieved it. Such a happening would be seen as a bad omen for the future reign.

Whatever service the bishop performed, the new king ordained that in future the incumbent of that church office would stand beside the monarch during the coronation.

By the knot garden is a sculpture made of black wood, created by young people with experienced professional help. Adam and Eve are fleeing, terrified, from the implacable Seraph, who is guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Knowledge with his fiery sword. The Serpent, who tempted humankind to betray the only promise God asked them to freely give, is held in the seraph's grasp. It is full of life and movement, terror and dismay.

The highlight of our visit, by common consent, was to Bishop Peter's private chapel, a Chapel of Reconciliation. The altar table is simple, square, in pale wood. Behind, the wall is adorned with iconic representations of the Fall of Humankind and God's work of reconciliation through history, by the loving obedience of His son, Jesus Christ.

Rather than an altar cloth, the wall panels behind the altar have strips of cloth in the colour of the Church's seasons: green at the time of our visit. The pews along the walls have been made by local craftsmen and on the walls are painted the coats of arms or symbols of all previous bishops.

To the right of the chancel there is a delicate icon, a copy of the 13th century Russian iconographer Andrey Rublev's, "The Holy Trinity", absorbing in every detail. What a privilege that, after a fascinating afternoon, we were able to meditate together in the Bishop's Chapel. With all its wealth of history, beautifully combined with contributions from more modern artists, this was a good place to appreciate anew how fortunate we are to be the inheritors of John Main's vision that the ancient practice of Christian Meditation practised by John Cassian in the 4th century should be revived in our worship to-day.

Sue Dunn

FREEDOM TO BE WITH OUR TRUE SELF

2011 was the third year that a few people from Bristol and Exeter got together to arrange a mostly silent weekend retreat for meditators in the South West. The venue was Ammerdown, in Somerset; the weekend was during that wonderfully sunny spell in late September; and 42 people participated.

We had regular periods of meditation, short talks from Rosemary Allan-Wilcox and Debbie Frazer, recorded extracts from John Main and Laurence Freeman, walking meditations, lectio divina. The sharing of thoughts about meditation and the spiritual path on Saturday evening was powerful – and preceded relaxation in Ammerdown's bar. The retreat finished with Sunday Eucharist.

Four retreatants camped in the grounds. The

photos show some of the tents, and the chapel.



After the retreat I received the following thoughts from one retreatant. Before you read them I would add that the theme of the retreat was A Journey Into Infinite Love: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer – and that we organisers forgot to bring name labels for all to wear, an omission welcomed by this writer:

Roger Layet

* * *

After the retreat these are my thoughts...

Freedom to be with our true self.

Creating the structure where we are held in turning inwards, being with myself, the 'deep well within me'.
Doing this in a held silence with others
Creates a powerful atmosphere where we
Become more whole and true.
And we know that it is OK.

We are held in the presence of others –
While turning inward we are in an unseen way
Creating an invisible bond.
We know we are held in love.
Where from?
The deep ground of being is infinitely loving.

We have submitted to being prevented from losing ourselves in projections
From losing ourselves in labels – 'I am Xxx' 'Who are you?'

After being in silence we know each other in a deeper way, beyond labels.
Refrain from labelling ourselves
Giving ourselves the freedom just to be.

We are connected to the benign aspects of the self.
The destructive aspects belong to the vulnerable ego which reacts like a mistreated animal or builds itself a fantasy empire.
Quite simply ego disconnects.

Meditation puts us in touch with the ground of being
Which is love.



Christian Meditation
as an
11th Step PRACTICE

A time to pause, reflect and deepen our meditation in fellowship with others. There will be input, discussions and period of meditation.

Facilitated by May Nicol

“...an unshakeable foundation for life.” Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions p98

KEEPING IT SIMPLE ☞ A Day Retreat
Sunday 13 November 2011 – 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

THE KAIROS CENTRE Mount Angelus Road, Roehampton, London SW15 4JA

£30 includes lunch
(Financial costs should not prevent you from attending. Please contact us if you need assistance.)
Booking essential. Please complete form below.
For further information please email maymbnicol@aol.com or call 07788 310666

“Meditation is our step out into the sun. How, then, shall we meditate?”
Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions p98

meditatio
Outreach of
The World Community for Christian Meditation
Registered Charity No 221173

JUST THIS DAY

NOVEMBER 23RD 2011

PROGRAMME AT ST MARTIN IN THE FIELDS

8.00 am Morning Prayer in the Church, the Big Shhh in the courtyard.

9.30 am Singing from Discantvs Choir.

10.00 am. Half an hour of silence for meditation and silent reflection. All are welcome

11.00 am Silence and Stillness in Schools

This session will be led by Claire Foster, Director of Development at St Martins. She will introduce four speakers who will focus on aspects of introducing silence and stillness in Schools. Helen Lees, Shanida Nataraja, Kim Nataraja and Laura Hyde.

5.00 pm Choral Evensong in Church

6.15 pm Holy Communion (Dick Sheppard Chapel)

6.30 pm Doors Open for Meditation, during which there will be singing by Discantvs

7.00 pm Performance of Music for Stillness commences, featuring the celebrated soprano Emma Kirkby with the St Martin Singers, the Cerutti Quartet and Discantvs. Tickets are available from the St Martin in the Fields Box Office Telephone Number 0207 677 1100

For more information and to register your interest in attending Silence and Stillness in Schools contact info@justthisday.org.

UK OBLATE DAY

WITH FR LAURENCE

18TH DECEMBER 2011

Venue: Benedictine Centre for Spirituality, Christ the King, Cockfosters

Time: 10.30 am – 1600hrs – tea/coffee available from 10.00 am and throughout the day

Theme: "How we live in hope: the teaching of Jesus and Benedict".

Lunch: 'Bring and Share' to allow time for sharing

Attendance: Open invitation

Suggested donation: £10.00

Contact: UK oblate Eileen Dutt coordinator

email: eileendutt@yahoo.co.uk m. 07721 574767

Weather? Hopefully more favourable than last year!

UK RETREAT

OCT 12TH – 17TH 2012

In 2012 instead of a national conference there will be a 5 day retreat to be led by Fr Laurence, held at the Belsey Bridge Conference Centre near Bungay, on the Suffolk/Norfolk border. It is in a quiet rural setting and we have booked the whole centre which will offer around 100 places. This advance notice is to alert you to the dates (Fri evening Oct 12th- Wed lunchtime Oct 17th) and in the new year a flyer with details of the theme, cost and booking arrangements will be available. This is the first time we have held such a large retreat in the UK, so come and share in this experience of intensive practice. Priority will be given to people able to commit to the whole session of 5 days.

Margaret Comerford

margaret.comerford@btinternet.com

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID WOOD



Twenty years ago or thereabouts, David introduced me to Christian Meditation, and he has been an encouragement and inspiration to me ever since. So I was delighted to be asked to 'interview' him for the

newsletter. *Bob Morley, September 2011*

Q: What influence did silence have on your life before Christian Meditation?

A: I pursued silence down the years knowing it was important. I walked a lot on my own on the fells/hills. I went on long silent retreats [all Holy Week in Taizé!]. I led prayer workshops and would introduce a 24 hour silence as normal. But I did not know how to pray silence, be silent in prayer, until one November evening in 1988 a small wispy nun standing before us said "I'm just going to read a few lines from a man called John Main". As soon as I heard those words from him I knew I was home. Home. [And so many have said the same thing]. The simplicity I yearned for – how to pray in silence.

Q: You often seem to find things to laugh about and enable others to join in?

A: Indeed it seems I was given a great sense of fun, of the ridiculous. Everything so often seems like a great cosmic joke, full of contradictions, full of paradox; and we all take our ego-selves far too seriously. When you come to the impossible brick wall, the impasse, no way on as far as you can see or know, you can either sink to your knees with a great 'woe is me', or you find something to laugh about.

And Meditation multiplies the paradoxes until it dawns on you that everything is paradox in the end. Which is a great help in getting through the real trials – nothing is quite what it seems – and dismantling apparent brick walls.

And stories help. Help us to let go, stop carrying stuff around, particularly when we can't see the way ahead. The teacher said to the disciple "What have you got in your hand?" "Nothing" said the disciple. "Well", said the teacher "drop it". – I like that. The teacher also replied to a question from a disciple, "Oh no! The last Valley is not the Valley of Death. It is the Valley of Laughter".

Q: What have been the benefits in your life attributed to meditation?

A: Patience. Waiting. Patience is the gateway to humility, and then discovering, as T.S.Eliot says, that humility is endless.

Q: 'Humility is endless?' Can you say a bit more?

A: It's difficult isn't it? There's a teaching I think is Buddhist – about being always unclenched, open-

handed. New things can only be put into our hands when we let go of what we are holding onto. Again, being always ready to let go in order to receive more, much more than we ever thought possible: we keep constantly clenching up and have constantly to learn to unclench in our ever-changing situations.

Becoming empty. Emptiness. Emptiness means darkness and we have to have faith, the humility, to trust that the darkness will eventually dazzle.

Laurence in his book 'First Sight – an Experience of Faith' says this, "The emptiness of infinite depth is what we mean by the mystery of Jesus. We begin to touch it in meditation". Let's just leave it there!

Q: Has your approach to meditation changed in the last 20 years?

A: It's the 'dare' of it. Staying faithful and finding the horizons of faith expanding all the time. To keep on discovering that it's all just beginning, all the time, and encouraging others to have faith in this too.

Q: What do you see as the future role of meditation within (or without) the Church?

A: Where there is no contemplative life and practice, the Church will die in that place. That's O.K. , we're not very good at death, hanging on is more the style, but dying is part of the life cycle of the Church. Outside Church more and more people are becoming aware that without a developing contemplative dimension in themselves, the most important part of them will die. Church is very slow to hearing from secular life what it needs to hear, but it usually gets there in the end.

Q: How has meditation assisted inter-faith relationships in the last 10 years – and for the future?

A: Meditation is a bedrock common to all faiths and is helping dialogue to develop in all sorts of directions: people learn to listen, through the gift of meditation, to languages and peoples they do not understand. It is the movement from 'knowing about' to 'knowing'.

Q: Your dedication to teaching meditation in Cumbria – how has this affected your outlook on life?

A: It's really what the whole people of Cumbria (in the first instances and then beyond) have given to me. I have met so many who were hanging in with such faithfulness, having been fed on crumbs for years, people at the end of their spiritual tether. And in John Main and Christian Meditation I have been given some wholesome strong slices of ordinary bread to share around, nothing fancy. So that's what we did, Sheila my wife and I, each with our different gifts. It's always the people, what they give you and so make possible goodly community, communion.

Affected my outlook on life? John Main constantly returns us to focus on the goodness that is there in every human heart; so to stop passing

judgements. Not that I have stopped of course, I still do it all the time, but I am more immediately aware of doing it as I do it, and that is so much better.

Q: What led you to record introductions to meditation on C.D. ?

A: I was invited to have a go and I realised immediately that what is needed for most everyday people and group meetings are short, focused, purpose-made prefaces rather than chopped up bits of longer talks, good though they may be. Less talk not more. And peoples' reactions to the C.D.s seem to bear this out.

Q: Which people have influenced your life the most?

A: So many, so many, the wise ones always seem to turn up at the right time (wispy nuns!) through all the mistakes and wrong turnings – if you keep on looking. But yes, one dear man especially cleaned up the gospels for me when I was in training, and so enabled me to see through the myth and comment which the gospels contain, to the heart of what is there, for me. And he lived it. And he put 'The Cloud of Unknowing' my way.

Q: What would you say about meditation now as a way of prayer?

A: For me it is a way of life, **the** way of life. My prayer word is everywhere, and every day twice a day I am able to gather all the day presents, with its vast complexities, its helplessnesses which are so many, and the many joyful, simple things too, into that one place - and for everything to be deeply held there. Whatever that means: here is my word, distracted or not, wholehearted or not, it is all of me.

STRIKE THE CLOUD

UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTISING THE TEACHING OF THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

GRAEME WATSON PUBLISHED BY SPCK £8.99

The publication of 'Strike the Cloud' by Graeme Watson is most welcome. Many years ago when I first opened my copy of the 'Cloud of Unknowing' by a fourteenth century anonymous author, I wondered if I should go on; was my desire for God steadfast enough? When I read the opening prayer I realised that the 'Cloud' would become my guide and constant companion.

Let me quote from the original text: 'If now and again they taste something of contemplative love in the very core of their being, should such folk read this book, I believe, they will be greatly encouraged and reassured.'

The message is timeless and open to all who, through grace, sometimes feel this mysterious stirring to love. Graeme Watson was not daunted by the challenge. He has courageously and lovingly opened

up the contents of the 'Cloud' to a contemporary readership of seekers.

I totally agree with him that: 'The danger of the 'Cloud' being misunderstood is far less than the danger of it being unknown, unnoticed and unpractised.' His written style is concise, direct and informative. In seven chapters he takes us through the main themes of the 'Cloud' with useful references to the original text. I suggest that it is useful to have copies of both books. Passages from both books weave so seamlessly together that sometimes I was unaware of which text I was using. This is not surprising since both authors are steeped in the scriptures, and the writings of the Fathers of the Church. They wear their learning lightly. Both are wise spiritual directors, well aware of the pastoral needs of their own eras as their teaching is rooted in actual experience.

In chapter one Graeme poses the crucial question raised by the 'Cloud', how do I know I am called to this contemplative path? In the next chapter he continues with the theme of 'naked intent unto God'; the need for total attention and listening. The author of the 'Cloud' suggests piercing heaven with a simple word such as 'God' or 'Love'.

Chapter three contains a succinct and beautiful account of the two clouds: the cloud of unknowing is the way of darkness and dispossession; the cloud of forgetting is the putting behind us of all thoughts, images and ideas. It is love and love alone that can bring about union with God.

In his fourth chapter Graeme brings the Lucan story of Martha and Mary up to date showing how the contemplative and active sides of our personality must work together. In the fifth chapter he connects the necessity for interior humility, which he calls 'self awareness', with how we react to one another in our everyday relationships. This charity is directed towards the whole of humanity. The sixth chapter outlines the healing power of humility and charity.

The seventh chapter outlines the 'Cloud's' teaching on Christ. I quote from Graeme: 'To put it very simply, as the contemplative deepens his attention on Jesus, he or she sees through the veil of His humanity to adore His divinity'.

The concluding chapter introduces contemporary teaching and practice such as centering prayer and Christian meditation.

Graeme has enlivened a seven hundred year old spiritual treatise and it is up to us to put its wisdom into practice.

Gina Garrett

available from Medio Media
email: welcome@wccm.org
tel: 020 7278 2070

FIRST SIGHT. THE EXPERIENCE OF FAITH.

**LAURENCE FREEMAN. PUBLISHER – CONTINUUM. PRICE
£10.99**

‘Christianity has today embarked on a radicalizing project: of recovering and updating the contemplative dimension in all aspects of its life’ (Page 7)

‘First sight’, the book, is about us learning, ‘to see again with wonder and surprise as a child sees’, looking at something as if for the first time. ‘Faith is the capacity to see again for the first time’. (Page 62) And that is the gift that contemplation/meditation and its faithful practice brings, the gradual unclouding of our jaded, often strait-jacketed vision.

‘First Sight’ is an invitation to anyone wishing seriously to explore contemplation/meditation and wanting to reconnect with something worthwhile in their lives, but it is aimed primarily at the Christian Meditation Community. And for anyone who is a serious reader of this newsletter, this is essential reading, a book not to be put down. I say this because as Laurence would say this book requires ‘work’. Laurence is always challenging us forward, to go beyond, to enter deeper into the mystery of our faith through the practice of meditation. If you are looking for gold nuggets about meditation, faith and life, there are plenty, but you have to be prepared to do some serious mining. There are for me numerous and marvellous one-liners which stop me in my tracks and that have to be explored before I can move on; but to quote any out of context would diminish them.

There is a vital and necessary exploration of the fundamental differences between faith and belief, between mental seeing and spiritual seeing. We need continuing clarity about this for ourselves particularly in relation to the Community and the World, and Laurence shows how meditation practice continually illuminates us and expands these insights. There are three excellent teaching chapters in the classical style on Purgation, Illumination and Union, relating these to meditation practice.

And the final part of the book is really urging the reader to have more faith in other faiths, and as Christians, bring more faith to all aspects of life we might brand as secular because faith is never static, always expanding. To bring the gift of ‘First Sight.’ Contemplative prayer will certainly help us to see in new ways, often as if we are indeed seeing for the first time: secular life is not the enemy but it needs our faithful meditation practice and the constant deepening of faith – and the humility which this brings – to purge it and help create a full spiritual awakening at the heart of all secular life.

There are encouraging notes finally about the

tradition of Christian Meditation through the teaching of John Main and where it all might be going. Civilisation is built not upon technology but upon acts of faith, faith relationships at any and every level. Meditation begins and ends in faith.

A final advice if I may – buy the book, do the homework, explore it perhaps with others, be prepared for some good surprises. ‘Faith grows and takes us forward by surprises, around bends we once thought were dead ends . . . I wonder whether beginning and end are the right terms to describe the way of faith; whether something in between the two isn’t in fact simply the unfolding of something unbelievably obvious and present’. (Page 133)

David Wood

available from Medio Media
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tel: 020 7278 2070

THE SILENCE IS REST

I saw an advertisement on the back of a bus in Norwich the other day. It read: “Sunday – day of rest”. But the word ‘rest’ had been gleefully crossed out in red by the ad’s designer and – also in red – had been replaced by an excitedly scrawled ‘Shopping!!!’.

Sunday – day of shopping. At this point the temptation is strong to offer a blog entry that you’d all be able to write for yourselves... with your eyes closed. Our hectic, busy lives... constantly harried... forces of neo-liberal capitalism... persuaded that we must consume to have meaningful identities... live to shop... neurotically and blindly co-operate... the spiritless military-industrial-complex... shop until you finally drop, your life unexamined, unfulfilled and – most tragic of all - un-lived.

I think it would go something like that.

And these are indeed the messages that the back of the bus is mooning at unwary drivers, drumming their fingers against the steering-wheel, being unconsciously programmed to do the zombie shuffle on the Seventh Day, into the latest retail mall to be opened in the fine city of Dame Julian, England’s greatest mystic. But rather than write my “Thought For The Day” blast against the commodification of all of our thoughts, each of our waking and sleeping moments (let’s take that as read), I found myself chewing on that word “rest”, and a rich inversion it turned out to be.

God does it after he’s spent six days creating sea and stars and creeping things and humans and a whole lot else beside – Creation, in fact. Maybe it’s this – the proto-break – which has forever given us the idea of rest as a cessation from work. From that point on we have habitually thought of rest as stopping doing

something. This understanding of rest implicitly celebrates the fact that we can down tools, give up the unequal struggle of our daily lives and just chill. The mantra for this approach to life seems to acknowledge that we humans have less stamina than the Divine Creator. TGI Friday! We clock off a good twenty-four hours before our Maker.

There's something fundamentally reactive (and maybe reactionary) about this kind of resting. We've been busy and now we're busy doing nothing. We have stopped and then we will start again. Nothing will have changed, nothing will have happened. We have just had a day (or two days, or thirty minutes or a week) 'off'.

Look what other activities appropriate the word. We build 'rest homes' for senior citizens. The implicit invitation is to stop doing what you've been doing and to snooze and drift your way towards... a 'chapel of rest' - where even less activity is expected of you. And then there's the greatest euphemism that our American brothers and sisters have given us - the restroom. Where we can take a break - I suppose - from controlling ourselves, from being continently civilized.

All these 'rests' are rests from. They're about stopping, no longer labouring - in some senses, giving up. But there's one definition of 'rest' given by the OED which chimed with a different sense that I instinctively felt in the word:

rest, v. 3. a. To be at ease or in quiet; also...to continue without change or removal; to stay, remain, lie, have place or station.

What great hints dictionaries give us. What if we understood our 'rest' not as a passive, negative, slightly narcotic pastime, but rather as the most active, the most engaged, the most alive we can be?

I remember a quote (but I don't know from which Church Father or Saint - let me know if you know) which has stayed with me since I first heard it. It affirms that "There is no leisure, save in the pursuit of wisdom". At first hearing, this prescription sounds incredibly harsh. Are all our (non-wisdom) leisure pursuits just mere distractions? Are they only pointless displacement activities (shopping)?

The longer I sit with those questions, the more ready I am to say, well, yes actually. They are neurotic distractions if we don't have the possibility in our lives for that dynamic rest, continuing without change or removal that meditation can bring. It is in this activity that we can stay, remain, lie, have place or station. This definition of the word starts to sound like The Word - Logos. We start to hear those simple, central words which are so important in the Gospel. To rest and to stay. At the root of these words are earlier forms: *estar* and *ester*. To rest is simply to be. And to be is always to be with.

This 'rest' is not a breaking off, a rest from. It is

a rest into something, towards someone. We rest in God's arms. We are God's arms - every day.

Jim Green

This article was posted by Jim on the Meditators' Blog on the main WCCM web site (www.wccm.org) - I recommend a visit.

FROM THE TABLET

Consumerism is the false immediacy of what's coming next. Prayer is the immediacy of presence. The rush felt in buying something new evaporates with the packaging; the satisfaction of prayer drills deeper into a bottomless well of happiness. Like meditation, celebrating Mass with leisure defuses consumerism because it is the Christ-like art of giving oneself, of sharing not possessing. Taking time to break the word and share its multiple meanings unites mind and heart. Let's hope that the new Order for the Mass will help do this; but as Augustine said it is not the words but the communion of minds that makes the sacrament. Furthermore, you can fail at this while staying in the monastery and surprisingly - occasionally - succeed at it while crushed in economy class on a plane.

Laurence Freeman

It was at the time
when the winter moon enlivened
the darkness of the day,

when the crystal -
stirred by the nearness
of nativity -
enthroned the king,

and enchanted by the sound
of approaching voices
we marvelled
at the secret of Life.

Margrit Dahm

SHATTERING THE MIRROR

If you practice meditation, or what I call the art and science of stillness, but have not yet become absolutely clear that you are willing to pay the price to become an enlightened person, the mere act of paying attention won't really help you be more awake. It will just end up being the ego watching itself, which is like looking in the mirror. There are many different forms of spiritual practice that can help us to cultivate awareness, focus, and attention. But only if we want to evolve beyond ego will paying attention have the power to shatter the ever-selective mirror of pride, narcissism, and self-concern.

Andrew Cohen

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REGIONAL EVENTS

WEEKEND RETREATS

THE NORTH EAST

April 2012 – Meditatio Seminar on Mental Health. This seminar will take place in York, England. Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, Professor Peter Gilbert and others from different faith traditions will be addressing the impact of spirituality in general and meditation in particular on mental health issues.

THE NORTH WEST

Friday 25 – Sunday 27 November, The Boarbank Retreat.

The Quiet Waiting. “Day after day, we discover that to which Jesus beckons us. It is to be born. Our identity as human beings goes from one birth to another. And from birth to birth we end by bringing to the world the child of God that we are. The incarnation for us is to allow the filial reality of Jesus to embody itself in our humanity.” Christian de Chergé

Our faithful daily practice of Christian Meditation awakens us to this discovery. At the heart of our practice, there is The Quiet Waiting: we wait with patience, with humility and with hope for the reality of Jesus to be born within us.

Alex Holmes will lead this weekend retreat at the beginning of Advent. £110. Deposit £25. Only a few places remain.

UK News October 2011

June 8-10, 2012; Exploring Silence with Cameron Butland and Vera Dolton. Location: Glenthorne Quaker Centre in Grasmere.

LONDON

May 7-9 2012 – Meditatio Weekend Retreat; Starting Friday evening and finishing after lunch on Sunday. Christian Meditation as an 11th Step Practice. Location: The Kairos Centre, Maryfield Convent, Mount Angelus Road, London SW15 4JA

DAY EVENTS**CUMBRIA**

All enquires (unless otherwise stated) to Sarah Kirkup, 01768 341 258 sarah.kirkup1@virgin.net

Saturday 19 November. 'Integrating Body, Mind and Spirit in our Contemplative Practice' The Tithe Barn, Grasmere LA22 9SW. 10.00 for 10.30 – 4.00 p.m. with Paul Golightly. £15. Bring your own food, drinks provided. A day of meditation, bodily prayer and teaching that will draw on ancient wisdom and the insight of the New Cosmology.

Paul is based at St Antony's Priory, Durham, where he leads the monthly Together in Meditation morning – a speaker who explores the frontiers of the Christian Mystery.

Tuesday 1 November. Living with the Mystics. A day with Ette Hillesum. At Quaker Meeting House, Elliot Park, Keswick (next to Booths). Bring your own lunch, drinks provided, 10.00 – 3.00 p.m. Please contact Bob Morley, rgm1@live.co.uk 016974 72644 if you think you would like to come.

Saturday 28 January, 2012. 'The Silence of Love in the Heart of Nothing.' The Tithe Barn, Grasmere LA22 9SW. 10.00 for 10.30 – 3.30 with Bob Morley. £12.50. Bring your own lunch, drinks provided.

Saturday 21 April 2012. Diarmuid O'Murchu is returning to Rydal Hall. Details later, but note the date in your diary.

MANCHESTER

In addition to our weekly groups, we meet on the last Saturday of each month at 1.30pm, in the Parish Hall of Our Lady's church, Raby Street, Moss Side, Manchester. M16 7JQ. Contact - Sheila Wood - 0161 226 2354 johncotling@aol.com New and experienced meditators welcome.

www.christianmeditationnorthwest.org

THE SOUTH WEST**BRISTOL**

Saturday 29th October. Thomas Merton and Contemplation. A day of the life, thought and prayer of one of the most inspiring spiritual figures of the 20th century with periods of meditation. Venue: Clifton Cathedral. Leader: Fiona Gardner, formerly Chair of The Thomas Merton Society. Contact: bristol@christian-meditation.org.uk or call Roger Layet on 01275 463727.

LONDON EVENTS

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION CENTRE, ST. MARK'S, MYDDELTON SQUARE, LONDON, EC1R 1XX

TEL: 020 7833 9615 EMAIL: UK@WCCM.ORG

DAILY MEDITATION 1- 1.30 MONDAY – SATURDAY.

Daily Meditation

Monday to Saturday 1pm

All are welcome to these 30 minute drop-in sessions. A short introduction is given for newcomers.

From Addiction to Grace Sundays 2.30-3.30pm

Led by Noel Brennan

The practice of meditation can assist healing from addiction. Teaching on meditation, followed by informal discussion and tea. No charge.

Meditation & Yoga Mondays.

Led by Lucy Barnes

Meditation 7-7.30pm, Yoga 7.30-9pm You are welcome to attend one or both sessions. Yoga Cost £12 (£8 concessions)

Special Events.

29th October. Group Leaders' Day. 11am to 4pm.

Time for discussion in the morning with lectio divina in the afternoon. Please book. The suggested donation is £10 including lunch.

26th November 2011. Word Made Flesh. Retreat .11am to 4pm. An intensive retreat day to help us deepen our meditation practice. Led by Liz Watson. The suggested donation is £10 including lunch. Please book.

20th December 2011. Advent evening with Fr. Laurence.

Meditation Surgery. 2nd Saturday of the month. Facilitated by Eileen McDade

12th November. 11.30am. Too Busy to Meditate?

Frustrated because you want to meditate and can't fit it in?

MEDITATIO (CHRISTIAN MEDITATION RETREAT CENTRE)

**17 PEMBROKE GARDENS,
KENSINGTON LONDON, W8 6HT**

Daily Meditation: at 7:00 (8.00 am Saturday and Sunday); 12:00 and 18:00

Mondays: 19.30 Introduction to Meditation led by Fr Laurence Freeman OSB or others.

Wednesdays: 18.00 Young Meditators meet for meditation, yoga and dinner

Sundays: 12.00 Children's meditation group

THE BENEDICTINE CENTRE FOR SPIRITUALITY

29 BRAMLEY ROAD

LONDON, N14 4HE

WWW.BENEDICTINECENTRERETREATS.ORG.UK

Saturday 17 December, 10am - 4pm Advent Day, with Fr

Laurence Freeman. Contact 020 8449 2499

retreats@bsuk.wanadoo.co.uk

Sunday 18th December (Oblate day) Speaker: Fr. Laurence

Freeman OSB. Contact: Eileen Dutt – E-mail:

eileendutt@yahoo.co.uk . Mobile: 07721 574767

WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL

First Wednesday Quiet Days. The first Wednesday of each Month is a retreat day held in the Hinsley Room in Morpeth Terrace, next to Westminster Cathedral from 12noon to 4.30pm.

November 2nd: The Gifts of the Holy Spirit...Self

Control...Led by .Mary Lean, writer & spiritual director.

December 7th: The Gift of The Father.... Led by Margaret Lane, lay contemplative.

June 21, 2012, 10am-5pm; Meditatio Interfaith Dialogue

between Fr Laurence Freeman OSB and Alan Wallace of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

SILENCE IN THE CITY

All talks at: Westminster Cathedral Hall, Ambrosden Avenue, London SW1P 0QJ. www.silenceinthecity.org.uk; email:

info@silenceinthecity.org.uk. 0207231 6278 or 020 7252 2453

Suggested donation £10. Prebooking necessary.

Tuesday, 6 December 2011 7-9pm; Speaker: Dr Ursula King:

“The Universe as Epiphany: Teilhard de Chardin's discovery of the heart of God in all creation

PERSEVERANCE

Closely linked to the Benedictine vow of 'Conversion' is the vow of 'Stability'. Benedict was very aware that the continual conversion, the constant turning to the Divine in prayer and in life required on the spiritual path, was a difficult and often discouraging process. He therefore stressed the virtue of 'stability', by which he meant first and foremost the quality of perseverance, a rootedness in the tradition and in the practice.

What do we do, when we feel reluctant to meditate? What do we do, when we feel afraid to let go of control? What do we do, when we feel a failure in meditation, because nothing ever happens? The virtue of 'Stability' teaches us the following: we just sit down at the usual time and say our word. We persevere with our practice regardless of what happens or doesn't happen. We faithfully sit and say our mantra without expecting anything.

The beauty is that something is happening, but at a level beyond our surface personality; the real change is taking place in our deep centre. We are not aware of it, as it is beyond our rational consciousness. If we just let it be and trust, meditation allows a conversion of heart, a shift of emphasis from the surface self to our true self in Christ.

Benedict was very influenced by the teaching of the Desert Fathers and Mothers through John Cassian. This boredom, this aridity, this 'what is the point?', which requires the antidote of stability, was also known to them. They called this paralysing emotion the 'Demon of Acedia':

The demon of acedia - also called the noonday demon- is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all. He presses his attack upon the monk [the meditator] about the fourth hour [10 a.m.] and besieges the soul until the eighth hour [2.00 p.m.]. First of all he makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long. Then he constrains the monk to look constantly out of the windows, to walk outside the cell, to gaze carefully at the sun to determine how far it stands from the ninth hour [3.00 p.m. the only meal of the day] to look now this way and now to that to see if perhaps one of the brethren appears from his cell. Then too he instils in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred for manual labour [a hatred for meditation]. He leads him to reflect that charity has departed from amongst the brethren, that there is no one to give encouragement. Should there be someone who happens to offend him in some way or other this too the demon uses to contribute further to his hatred. This demon drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities more readily find work and make a real

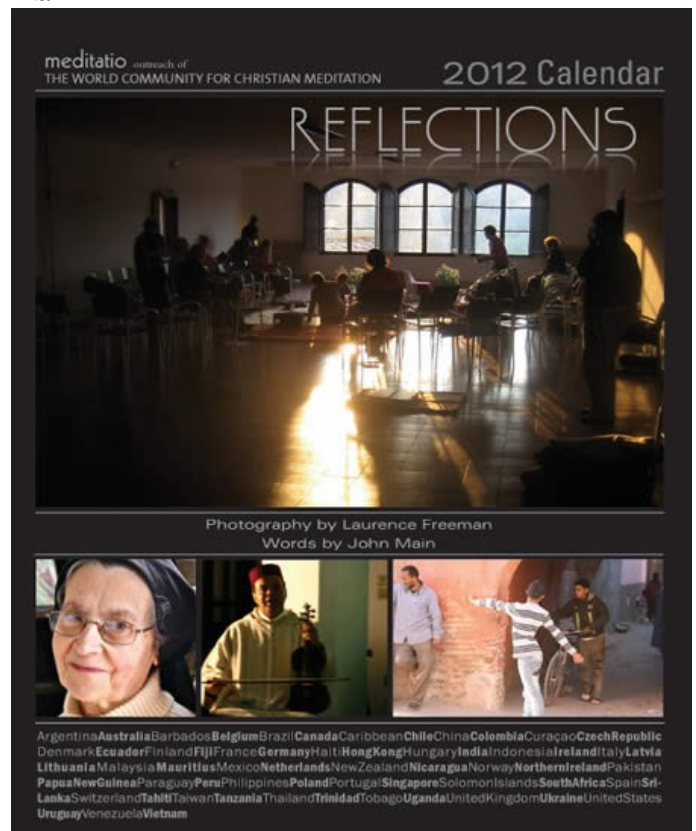
success of himself. He goes on to suggest that, after all, it is not the place that is the basis of pleasing the Lord. God is to be adored everywhere. He joins to these reflections the memory of his dear ones and his former way of life. He depicts life, stretching out for a long period of time, and brings before the mind's eye the toil of the ascetic struggle [meditation practice] and, as the saying has it, leaves no leaf unturned to induce the monk to forsake his cell and drop out of the fight. No other demon follows close upon the heels of this one (when he is defeated) but only a state of deep peace and inexpressible joy arise out of this struggle.

We recognise so many of the feelings expressed here: time is crawling; no one has a word of encouragement; I am not achieving anything; it is so difficult to sit still; how boring to just repeat our word; wouldn't it be better just to read a book about meditation and spirituality? Wouldn't a walk in nature be just as good? But the message is very clear, don't let the 'demon' win, persevere and peace will reign.

Kim Nataraja

CALENDAR FOR 2012

The WCCM Meditatio Calendar for 2012 contains memorable photos by Fr Laurence from around the World Community together with sayings from John Main.



available from Medio Media
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