



The stages of the journey (2)

by Kim Nataraja

As we have seen meditation leads us to a greater awareness of our conditioning and hence to self-knowledge and ultimately freedom.

One helpful way of entering the silence is to remember that all our thoughts are thoughts about the past or the future. We need to let go off thoughts and stay in the present moment, but as we all know from experience, that is easier said than done. In Christian Meditation the mantra is our way of staying in the present moment, fully focused and aware.

I remember years ago there was an advert for meditation. On a poster there stood an Indian Guru, in typical attire and appearance, on his surfboard, balanced perfectly, riding the waves. Underneath was the phrase: "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf". The mantra is our surfboard. You cannot suppress or get rid of your thoughts; they will be there just like the waves. You accept them as the part of you that they are and just ride them skilfully. At times you fall off your surfboard, but just climb back on again. As Samuel Becket said: Try and fail, no matter. Try again, fail again, fail better. At other times it is easy to stay on your surfboard and joyfully ride the waves, and thus enter the silence.

At this stage, when we enter the silence, it is important to remember, that our conditioned self, the 'ego', does not want us to move out of its sphere of influence, it wants to keep us on the surface. It encourages us to identify with these thoughts, emotions, masks and roles. It does not want us to get in touch with the deeper parts of our consciousness, because it has deposited there in the first level any experiences that threatened our survival and it does not want us to deal with any of them.

We do need the ego, the survival instinct, but it is sometimes like an over-protective parent, wanting to keep the children safe and close by, not allowing them to develop and learn independently. Going into the silence, is initially like leaving home, in order to arrive at our true home.

What does the ego do, when we take the plunge into silence? Often it increases our thoughts. When, however, we manage to surf those and enter the silence, the ego encourages us to let go off the mantra. We may convince ourselves, that the mantra disturbs the peace. If we listen to the voice of our ego and let go off our surfboard, we just float (or sink!) in "pax perniciososa" or "holy floating", and thus the ego has succeeded in hindering our progress. If this fails, the ego may ask us: "Isn't this boring, just repeating a word? What a con!" If we are still meditating after that, it might try a different approach, prompting us to ask, "Am I sure that this is the right method or the right mantra? Should I change my mantra? Again the ego is making sure you are not going anywhere! The only way is to persevere is to faithfully meditate despite distractions.