



## Why do we start to meditate?

by Kim Nataraja

The impetus for starting to meditate is often the moment when we are faced with something out of the ordinary, something that shakes us out of our ordinary perception of reality. It can be a crisis point or major life event at any stage in our lives, when the seemingly secure and unchanging reality we live in is bewilderingly turned upside down: we are rejected by an individual or a group; we face failure, loss of esteem; we lose a treasured job or our health suddenly fails us. The result can be either a refusal to accept the change, a descent into negativity, mistrust and despair. Or faced with the fact that our reality is not as immutable as we considered it to be, we may rise to the challenge to look at ourselves, our habitual framework, our opinions and values with different eyes.

Sometimes it can be a moment of exquisite beauty that makes us realise there is more than meets the eye. Bede Griffiths', the Benedictine teacher and sage, describes how awareness of true Reality did not spring out of a crisis but out of contemplation of Nature. He describes in 'The Golden String' how he was led by the beauty of bird song and hawthorn bushes in full bloom to a profound feeling of awe at the sight of the setting sun, whilst a lark "poured out its song." He felt that he "was made aware of another world of beauty and mystery" and especially at evening he felt on many other occasions as well the "presence of an unfathomable mystery."

Not always is this moment as dramatic; our perceptual awareness varies enormously from person to person, from moment to moment. Some of us may have had a moment of 'transcendence', an awareness of a different reality, an escape from the prison of the 'ego', whilst listening to music, poetry or being absorbed in a work of art. Others may never have been consciously aware of an actual moment of insight, and yet at some level may always have been aware of the existence of a higher reality and are without knowing becoming gradually more in tune with this reality. Quite early on in meditation we often touch the experience of real peace and even joy bubbling up. Moments like these when we are released from self-preoccupation are Divine gifts.

In any case this glimpse is not the end, but the beginning: an impetus for growth. The longing to know more about this intuited reality gets stronger and we look round for those who could help us to approach it. At this point we often discover meditation in one form or another. It is the start of the work of clarifying and integrating the experience and so allowing the ascent to spiritual awareness, personal authenticity and a transpersonal Truth.

The fact that an insight, a glimpse of another reality, is often the start of our journey into deeper prayer also means that we cannot bring anyone to meditation, who has not felt this longing need for 'more' in their own being. When we feel called to start a group, all we can do is advertise this in our locality and church, and invite people, but whether they will take up meditation as a discipline of prayer is not in our hands but in the gift of the Divine. We can't 'convert' others to meditation, we can welcome and encourage them to try, but it is their free choice whether or not to take up this offer.

N.B. Laurence Freeman's book 'A Pearl of Great Price' is very helpful when considering starting a group.