



Leaving thoughts behind

by Kim Nataraja

We saw the importance that the Tradition lays on letting go of our thoughts. One of the important consequences of doing this is that it helps us to stay in the present moment. By focusing on our 'word' we leave thoughts behind, which always link us to the past and to the future. Just watch your thoughts for a moment. Are they not all about your concerns, hopes and fears about what has happened and what may happen? We use the present moment merely as a stepping stone to the future or a place to look anxiously back to the past. We do not leave any room for the present moment itself. And yet we hear from Scripture that God's essential nature is 'pure being'. When God first called Moses he said 'I am the God of your forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob.' This is the aspect of God in human history. But when Moses asked God for his name he replied: 'I am; that is who I am.' God's 'name', his essential nature, is therefore 'pure being' in the present moment. Therefore the present moment is the 'narrow path' by which we can enter the Presence of God that dwells within us.

Leaving thoughts behind is therefore an essential part of our practice. But again the question can be raised as to where Jesus tells us to leave thoughts behind. Once more Matthew's Gospel gives us clear guidance: 'Therefore I bid you put away anxious thoughts about food and drink to keep you alive, and clothes to cover your body. Surely life is more than food, the body more than clothes.' All our worries are basically about our survival. And Jesus says quite clearly that life is more than mere survival. We need to 'Set our mind on God's Kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well.' Instead of dwelling on our thoughts we need to focus one-pointedly on God by repeating our prayer, 'maranatha', one of the most ancient Christian prayers. This prayer is our anchor to root us in the Divine Presence.

This way of prayer, this 'letting go of self' requires trust – trust that God is there also for us. Jesus is aware of our difficulty and stresses that God looks after all creation, the birds, the lilies in the field, even the grass and encourages us to have faith that therefore especially we too are in God's care, we too will be clothed and fed, as 'your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.' All we need to do is to remain focused on our relationship with God in the present moment: 'So do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself.' We need to deal with the challenges that present themselves in every moment. We will be able to do that with centeredness and peace of mind through 'continual prayer', constantly repeating our mantra, constantly anchoring ourselves in God's Presence. We find the same recommendation in Scripture: 'Pray continually!' (Thess 5:17) and 'They should persist in prayer and never lose heart.' (Luke 18)

John Cassian too stresses: 'You should, I say, meditate constantly on this verse in your heart. You should not stop repeating it when you are doing any kind of work or performing some service or are on a journey. Meditate on it while sleeping and eating and attending to the least needs of nature.'