



# The universality of meditation?

by Kim Nataraja

Meditation is a universal spiritual discipline central to most of the World Religions and Wisdom Traditions. There are many different forms of meditation in these various traditions, all equally valid in their own way. In all the emphasis is on practise and experience rather than theory and knowledge.

It is also an authentic discipline in Christianity, although it sometimes feels that this is the world's best kept secret. As Laurence Freeman always stresses, Jesus taught contemplation and that is the reason why this way of prayer flourished especially in the 4th century amongst the Desert Fathers and Mothers of Egypt and Palestine, who based their life on Jesus' example. John Cassian collected their teachings in his book Conferences. It is in these writings that John Main OSB, a Benedictine monk, re-discovered this tradition for our time and opened it up for all people, calling it Christian Meditation. It is not only the way of prayer of the Desert Fathers and Mothers but also of countless Christian mystics throughout the ages up to our present time. It is also a way of prayer established long before the Reformation and before the split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. It is therefore a beautiful ecumenical way of praying together.

We must not forget that all ways of prayer are valid. In Laurence Freeman's words "Meditation is the missing dimension of much Christian life today. It does not exclude other types of prayer and indeed deepens reverence for the sacraments and scripture." He explains the connection between all the different forms of prayer through the image of an old-fashioned wooden wheel:

"The purpose of a wheel is to move a cart. Prayer is the wheel that moves our life spiritually towards God. To turn, the wheel must make contact with the ground. If the wheel does not touch the ground, it cannot move the cart; the wheel will just spin. So there must be a real time and place in our daily life that we give to prayer. The spokes of the wheel are like the different forms of prayer. All forms of prayer are valid and effective. We have the Eucharist, intercessory prayer, the sacraments, the reading of Scripture and personal devotions. What holds the spokes together and turns the wheel is the hub. The spokes converge at the hub. We can think of the hub as the Prayer of Christ dwelling in our hearts. At the hub of the wheel, there is stillness. Without the still point at the centre, the wheel cannot turn.

Meditation is coming to stillness at the centre of our being. When we meditate, we come into that central stillness which is the source of all our action, our movement towards God through Christ within us. The movement of the wheel requires stillness at the centre. This is the relationship between action and contemplation."