



# Conversion

by Kim Nataraja

The three vows that are taken by Benedictine monks and nuns and Benedictine Oblates, who are committing themselves to live their lives according to the 'Rule of St Benedict', are 'Obedience, Conversion and Stability'.

Let's look at the second vow 'Conversion' first. In the Benedictine tradition by 'Conversion' is meant a continual conversion of the way you lead your life and the way you behave to others. He is not talking about a one-off conversion experience as of St Paul on the road to Damascus.

Indeed, it can happen that at the start of our journey there is a 'one-off' experience. During either a period of deep grief or loss or a moment of intense joy we are graced with a sudden deep spiritual insight, which helps us to turn away from our usual preoccupation with ordinary reality. At that moment we experience profoundly that there is more, that there is an Ultimate Reality that penetrates and upholds our ordinary reality.

The early Church Fathers called this the moment of 'conversion' or 'metanoia', a change of heart and mind, an insightful conversion, which allows us to temporarily step over the threshold between different levels of perception and consciousness, to become aware of the Divine reality that unfolds us.

That experience - or sometimes just an unaccountable longing - leads us to a strong call to go deeper in prayer, to discover for ourselves this Reality and our connection with it. This is often the moment we discover meditation, contemplative prayer and start on the journey with enthusiasm. Meditation soon leads us into silence and "in a deep creative silence we meet God in a way that transcends all our powers of intellect and language." (John Main 'Word into Silence')

Unfortunately after this initial 'honeymoon' period we are more often than not faced with all our whirling thoughts relating to our ordinary reality, and touching this deep silence seems merely a dream. And yet we need to start each day anew, whatever happens, by sitting down in all faithfulness to our twice daily period of meditation with loving commitment. Then we will experience that committed meditation, regardless of any experiences, leads to transformation. Without us really realizing it we move away from who we think we are in all our fragmentation towards "the creative wholeness that we possess, and begin to feel that we know ourselves for the first time." (John Main 'Word into Silence')

This is what St Benedict's meant by his interpretation of conversion as a continual process. It is a continual willingness to turn towards Ultimate Reality in meditation and prayer, which will strengthen our intuitive knowledge of that Reality and will allow us to live from that perspective. "The all-important aim in Christian Meditation is to allow God's mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more not only a reality, but the reality in our lives; to let it become that reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are." (John Main)