

July 17 Readings



From Laurence Freeman OSB, *Letter Twelve, WEB OF*

SILENCE (London: DLT, 1996), pp. 132-134.

Anyone who has ever sat down to be still immediately engages the first level of consciousness a little below the immediate surface of the mind's daily functioning awareness.

It is a rude awakening to the degree of indiscipline and restlessness in our monkey minds. St Teresa compared it to a ship whose crew has mutinied, tied up the captain and is chaotically taking turns to steer the ship. Some days may be better than others in terms of distractedness but even that only proves how wayward our surface mind is, how dependent on external conditions, how uncentered we are. . . .

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? (Matthew 6:26). We aim to be in the present moment, which is the only moment of reality, of encounter with the God who is *I Am*. Yet within seconds we are thinking thoughts of yesterday, making plans for tomorrow or weaving daydreams and wish-fulfillment in the realm of fantasy. Set your mind on God's kingdom and his justice before everything else, and all the rest will come to you as well. So do not be anxious about tomorrow, tomorrow will look after itself? (Matthew 6:33). [. . .]

The discovery of our surface distractions is humbling. So it helps to remember that it is a universal discovery--why else did John Cassian recommend the mantra (he called it a *formula*?) sixteen hundred years ago? . . . At this discovery it is easy to be discouraged and to turn away from meditation. It is not my kind of spirituality. I am not the discipline kind of person. Why should my prayer time be another time for work??

What we need above all at this . . . stage is an insight into the meaning of meditation and the thirst arising from a deeper level of consciousness from the one we seem stuck at. It is here right at the outset, therefore, that we encounter, although we may not yet recognize it as such, the prompting of grace. It comes from outside us in the form of teaching, tradition, spiritual friendship and inspiration. From within, it comes as the intuitive thirst for deeper experience.

Christ, who as Spirit is no more within us than outside us, seems to push from outside and pull from within.

It helps to understand clearly from the beginning what is the meaning and purpose of the mantra. It is not a magic wand that blanks the mind or a switch that turns on God, but a discipline, "beginning in faith and ending in love," which brings us into poverty of spirit. We do not say the mantra to fight off the distractions but to help us remove our attention from them. Simply discovering that we are, however poorly, free to place our attention elsewhere is the first great awakening. It is the beginning of the deepening of consciousness, which allows to leave the distractions on the surface, like waves on the surface of the ocean.

Meditate for Thirty Minutes. Remember: Sit down. Sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly, begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer phrase "Maranatha." Recite it as four syllables of equal length. Listen to it as you say it, gently, but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything spiritual or otherwise. Thoughts and images will likely come, but let them pass. Just keep returning your attention "with humility and simplicity to saying your word in faith, from the beginning to the end of your meditation.

After Meditation, from Ken Wilber, "The Self in Transcendence," NO BOUNDARY (Boston: Shambhala, 1985), p. 129.

If you persist at such an exercise, the understanding contained in it will quicken and you might begin to notice fundamental changes in your sense of "self." . . . This . . . "center of the cyclone," will retain its lucid stillness even amid the raging winds of anxiety and suffering that might swirl around its center. The discovery of this witnessing center is very much like diving from the calamitous waves on the surface of a stormy ocean to the quiet and secure depths of the bottom. At first you might not get more than a few feet beneath the agitated waves of emotion, but with persistence you may gain the ability to dive fathoms into the quiet depths of your soul, and lying out-stretched at the bottom, gaze in alert but detached fashion at the turmoil that once held you transfixed.

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