The World Community for Christian Meditation

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Stilling the mind

When we begin to meditate, we soon become aware of the fact that the discipline is simple but not easy.

When we have countered our outer restlessness, it will now try to find a different outlet: if we can?t move physically, we let our thoughts do the walking. We wander about in daydreams, down memory lane, planning, hoping, worrying; internally we are still filled with perpetual noise and movement, the mad whirl of disconnected thoughts.

Soon we start to feel discouraged and are tempted to give up, when we are trying to quieten the mind in meditation but instead are constantly assailed by all these thoughts. The thought occurs that perhaps we are not meant to be doing this. However, the message from John Main and Laurence Freeman is: persevere!

Not until we actually try to let go of all our thoughts and images, do we become aware of how essential our mind considers them to be to our sense of identity. As long as we are thinking, we know who we are and we feel we have a modicum of control over what happens, however illusory that may be. We feel we are in charge and therefore secure.

Moreover, we soon realise that we are actually addicted to thoughts, since we have been brought up in a worldview, in which thought is considered to be the highest activity we can engage in. Descartes in his statement ?I think, therefore I am?, actually linked existence with thought. Not thinking feels like a threat to our survival.

It is not surprising that people are fearful, when faced with a discipline like meditation that encourages letting go of thought and even images, in fact all the operations of the rational mind: thinking, memory and imagination. But we are more than our thoughts!

The most important way of dealing with our chaotic thoughts is to accept them. They form the surface part of our being after all. But this is not as easy as it sounds. We are so used to criticising and judging ourselves as well as others, that we get irritated when we sit down to meditate and the thoughts just crowd in. But the more we get irritated with ourselves, the more

we try to suppress our thoughts, the more persistent they become. Instead of unifying our mind we are dividing ourselves: one part of our mind is fighting another. But the more we accept our thoughts the quieter they get.

It is inevitable that thoughts enter our mind. It is only a problem if we get hooked by them, if we get tempted to follow their lead. But we have a choice we can either tag along with our thoughts or focus on our mantra: it is a free choice. All we need to do is gently come back to our mantra over and over again, whenever our thoughts have tried to tempt us away.

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