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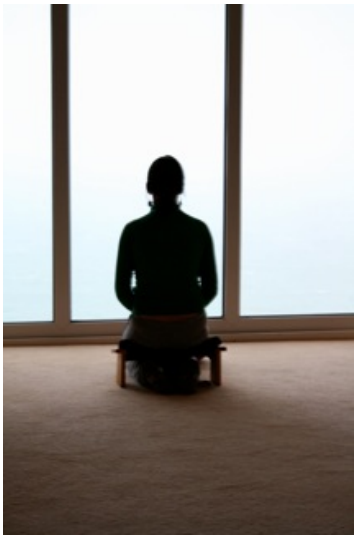
What is Meditation?



What is Meditation

Meditation is a universal spiritual wisdom and a practice that we find at the core of all the great religious traditions, leading from the mind to the heart. It is a way of simplicity, silence and stillness. It can be practised by anyone from wherever you are on your life?s journey. It is only necessary to be clear about the practice and then to begin ? and keep on beginning.

In Christianity this tradition became marginalised and even forgotten or suspect. But in recent times a great recovery of the contemplative dimension of Christian faith has been happening. Central to this now is the rediscovery of a practice of meditation in the Christian tradition that comes to us from the early Christian monks _ the Desert Fathers and Mothers and allows us to put into practice the teaching of Jesus on prayer in a radical and simple way.

John Main has a major role in this contemporary renewal of the contemplative tradition. His teaching of this ancient tradition of prayer is rooted in the Gospels and the early Christian monastic tradition of the Desert.

Open to all ways of wisdom but drawing directly from the early Christian teaching John Main summarised the practice in this simple way:

Sit down. Sit still with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly. Then interiorly, silently begin to recite a single word ? a prayer word or mantra. We recommend the ancient Christian prayer-word "Maranatha". Say it as four equal syllables. Breathe normally and give your full

attention to the word as you say it, silently, gently, faithfully and above all - simply. The essence of meditation is simplicity. Stay with the same word during the whole meditation and from day to day. Don't visualise but *listen* to the word as you say it. Let go of all thoughts (even good thoughts), images and other words. Don?t fight your distractions but let them go by saying your word faithfully, gently and attentively and returning to it immediately that you realise you have stopped saying or it or when your attention is wandering.

Silence means letting go of thoughts. Stillness means letting go of desire. Simplicity means letting go of self-analysis.

Meditate twice a day every day. This daily practice may take you sometime to develop. Be patient. When you give up start again. You will find that a weekly meditation group and a connection with a community may help you develop this discipline and allow the benefits and fruits of meditation to pervade your mind and every aspect of your life in ways that will teach and delight you. John Main said that ?meditation verifies the truths of your faith in your own experience?

Meditation has the capacity to open up the common ground between all cultures and faiths today. What makes meditation Christian? Firstly the faith with which you meditate ? some sense of personal connection with Jesus. Then the historical scriptural and theological tradition in which we meditate.

Also, the sense of community it leads to: ?when two or three pray together in my name, I am there among them.? And the other means by which our spiritual life is nourished ? the other forms of prayer like scripture, sacraments and worship. Meditation does not replace other forms of prayer. Quite the reverse it revives their meaning.

Finally - but also primarily - we meditate to take the attention off ourselves. In the Christian tradition it is seen as a work of love. Not surprising then if we find we become more loving people as a result of meditating and this will express itself in all our relationships, our work and our sense of service especially to those in any kind of need.

Meditation is both solitary and communal. You can connect with others who meditate through these pages and find your journey deepened and strengthened. There is a lot to learn about this way ? through our School, readings and dialogue. But the bottom line is always your personal practice. As John Cassian said in the 4th century: ?experience is the teacher?.

Meditation helps people of all ages and cultures to find a simple and practical way to awaken and deepen their spiritual life. Children can and like to meditate and their example shows us all how simple and natural it is.

To learn about meditation groups and to find a group, search on the map on the home page or click **here**.

Why do Christians use the word "mantra" in their tradition of meditation?
Download HERE this article by Fr. Laurence

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