A Seminar on
The Contemplative Dimension of Faith

Led by

Laurence Freeman OSB
Director, The World Community for Christian Meditation

With

Ashvin Desai
Venerable Chuan Guan
Habib Syed Hassan Al-Attas
Master Huang Xin Cheng with
Master Chung Kwang Tong (Wei Yi)
Mother Mangalam

7-8 January 2012
Catholic Junior College, Singapore
Programme

**SATURDAY 7 January 2012**

8.30 am  Registration

8.50 am  *Pilgrimage (1) – Video*

9.20 am  Opening: Seeking Common Ground

9.30 am  Welcome Address

ARCHBISHOP NICHOLAS CHIA

Opening Address
Ashvin Desai
President of the Inter-Religious Organisation
SINGAPORE (IRO)

10.00 am  Coffee Break

10.30 am  Session 1

FR LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB
Talk, Introduction to Meditation Practice, Meditation & Readings

12.00 pm  Session 2

VENERABLE CHUAN GUAN

12.45 pm  Lunch

2.45 pm  Session 4

FR LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB
Talk, Meditation & Readings

3.45 pm  Tea

4.10 pm  Session 5

MASTER HUANG XIN CHENG with
MASTER CHUNG KWANG TONG (Wei Yi)

4.50 pm  Meditation & Readings

5.00 pm  Conclusion of Day 1

**SUNDAY, 8 January 2012**

9.00 am  *Pilgrimage (2) – Video*

9.30 am  Q & A

10.15 am  Break

10.45 am  Session 6

FR LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB
Talk, Meditation & Readings

11.45 am  Session 7

MOTHER MANGALAM

12.30 pm  Lunch

1.45 pm  Q & A

3.00 pm  Session 8

FR LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB

3.45 pm  Tea Break

4.15 pm  Meditation & Readings

5.00 pm  Conclusion of Day 2

5.30 pm  Eucharistic Celebration

**PANEL** Fr Laurence Freeman OSB, Ashvin Desai, Venerable Chuan Guan, Habib Syed Hassan Al-Attas, Master Huang Xin Cheng with Master Chung Kwang Tong (Wei Yi), Mother Mangalam
LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB is a Benedictine monk of the Congregation of Monte Oliveto, Italy. He is Director of The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) and travels worldwide giving talks and leading seminars on meditation. He actively nurtures inter-faith dialogue through the Way of Peace programme of the WCCM. His published works include *First Sight: An Experience of Faith*, *The Selfless Self*, and *Light Within*.

ASHVIN DESAI is the current President of the Inter Religious Organisation (IRO), Singapore, and he represents the Jain faith in the IRO. He is a former President of the Singapore Jain Religious Society and currently serves as a committee member. He runs his own family business and volunteers his time in the Jain Society and the IRO.

VEN. CHUAN GUAN was ordained under Master Miu King (妙境長老) in 2002 and began monastic training at Fa Yun Monastery, New Mexico, where he learned the sutras and meditated in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition while studying the Theravadin Pali Canon. In 2006 he returned to Singapore and continued his training under Ven. Kwang Sheng at Kong Meng San Phor Kark See Monastery. As resident monk at the Buddhist Library since 2009, he gives Dharma and meditation classes and uses all the current media facilities to reach out to the Buddhist community.

ASHVIN DESAI has been Imam and Head of Ba’alwie Mosque, Singapore, for over 30 years and is affectionately known as Habib Hassan. His lineage can be traced to the beloved Prophet Muhammad, 37th generation. His great-grandfather was an eminent scholar (Ulama) at the Grand Mosque (Masjid-il-Haram) in the holy city of Mecca. Author of over 40 books, his authority on Islamic law and teachings is sought by the religious fraternity locally and internationally.

MASTER HUANG XIN CHENG began his religious practice at the age of 17 and studied at the China Taoist College (1990-92). He was High Priest of the White Cloud Temple in Beijing (1987-93), and Assistant Team Leader of the Taoist Orchestra. He came to Singapore in 2000 where he is Tutor of Rites for the Lorong Koo Chye Sheng Hong Temple Scripture Chanting Class, Leader of the Singapore Taoist Orchestra, and lecturer at the Taoist College, Singapore.

MASTER CHUNG KWANG TONG (WEI YI) is Secretary-General of the Taoist Federation Youth Group, and Council Member of the Inter-Religious Organisation. He practises the Taoist scriptures and rituals at Singapore Hiang Tong Keng Temple under Hong Kong Taoist Master Leung Tak Wah. He was appointed High Priest in 2009. He is currently undertaking graduate study at the Malay Studies Department, National University of Singapore.

MASTER HUANG XIN CHENG has been Imam and Head of Ba’alwie Mosque, Singapore, for over 30 years and is affectionately known as Habib Hassan. His lineage can be traced to the beloved Prophet Muhammad, 37th generation. His great-grandfather was an eminent scholar (Ulama) at the Grand Mosque (Masjid-il-Haram) in the holy city of Mecca. Author of over 40 books, his authority on Islamic law and teachings is sought by the religious fraternity locally and internationally.

MOTHER MANGALAM is Life President of Pure Life Society, Malaysia. She met the late Swami Satyananda, founder of Pure Life Society, when she was ten, and he became her spiritual mentor. Though trained as a teacher, she was moved by social concerns to devote her life to the cause of orphans and homeless children. Her service to humanity has been acknowledged through many awards including the national Merdeka Award in 2010. She has written many articles and books on social, religious and cultural issues.
Common Ground

SEMINAR

PURPOSE

The aim of the seminar is to contribute further to inter-religious dialogue by deepening the spirit of friendship and collaboration among all faiths in Singapore and the region. As a secular state with its multi-cultural richness and commitment to religious freedom, Singapore is an ideal location to develop a model for how dialogue can be prepared for and put into fruitful practice. COMMON GROUND will focus on the contemplative practice of religion and how the shared experience of silence in meditation can enhance inter-religious dialogue.

THEME

We wish COMMON GROUND to show that inter-religious dialogue can take many forms. There is the dialogue between scholars, of shared practices among followers of different faiths, especially the practice of meditation, of collaboration on alleviating suffering and promoting peace and justice, and pilgrimage to each other’s sacred places. We believe that dialogue should create greater religious friendship, conviviality, personal kindness and collaborative work for the poor and marginalised.

Effective dialogue needs preparation. Before we sit and talk, we benefit greatly from sitting in the silence of the mystery that all religions recognise as the essential nature of God or ultimate reality.

Silence is central to the depth dimension of all dialogue. Sitting in this unity of silence does not compromise or merge our important differences which deserve permanent respect. In silence, we are not arguing about who is right or trying to persuade each other. But after silence, we return to speech and action with a new level of understanding born of the experience of silence and a clearer recognition of each other as brothers and sisters of the great originating mystery. This makes an immense difference to the quality, depth and effectiveness of dialogue.

The seminar will thus focus on the experience of silence and meditation. It will also be the 2012 “Way of Peace” event of The World Community for Christian Meditation.

FORMAT

The seminar will be led by Benedictine monk Laurence Freeman OSB. Fr Laurence will give several talks on the Christian tradition of meditation and members of the different faiths will share their own contemplative traditions.

The two-day programme will incorporate periods of meditation each day. Each meditation session will conclude with a sharing from scriptures pertaining to the silence of the mystery of the common ground we share.

The structure of the seminar will be participatory and the format will incorporate suggestions from the representative leaders of the various religions taking part.

FOLLOW-UP

We hope that the seminar will create a forum for further spiritual and intellectual discussion on the interiority and contemplative practice of each religion, and how this can be fostered within our own traditions in order to deepen inter-religious friendship.

One possibility is to set up an inter-faith meditation group that will meet monthly. A second idea is a sacred space in the city which will be non-denominational and which will emphasise the virtue of silence in the noise and busyness of a city environment. A third idea is to explore how meditation could be introduced in schools.
Seeing from the Other’s Point of View

LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB

The Word of God is not Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, or Jewish, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Tantric, or Shamanistic. Religions are like the senses of God. But, like the senses, religion can sacramentalise God, if we practise our religions with the sense of the sacred arising from the silence of God within us.

If the religions can meet in peace, joy, and mutual reverence, every human act of aggression and intolerance is stripped of the justification it claims from its own interpretation of religion. Aggression and intolerance stand exposed as the naked and ridiculous childishness of the isolated ego.

Christians need to be rooted in the inner experience of their faith, so that their meeting with other religions will have depth and sincerity and be freed from the religious ego’s quest for supremacy.

~ Laurence Freeman OSB, Introduction, John Main, Word Made Flesh

Silence is a powerful medium of communication and transformation. It betokens trust, openness to transcendence and mutual acceptance at a level deeper than the greatest differences of belief or opinion.

~ Laurence Freeman OSB

Dialogue between religions and faith traditions – and the friendship that grows from it – is an indispensable component for peace, prosperity and happiness in the new era dawning on the human family.

Not only must we renounce the aggressive attitudes towards other faiths which have long grown in the fields of ignorance and suspicion of the unknown other; but we must positively embrace the work of dialogue and mutual understanding in the very field of our differences. This enthusiastic engagement in dialogue is needed in order to ensure that the friendship born of shared insights and from the spirit of wisdom will over time prevent differences from forming into the divisions which are the perennial source of prejudice and conflict.

NEW WAYS OF SEEING DEPEND ON OUR APPROACH TO THE OTHER

A new way of seeing is needed to actualise any new stage of human evolution. This will be marked by a more pronounced element of the spiritual dimension of consciousness in human culture and interaction. With this will come a new understanding of holiness and enlightenment as the goal of human existence. This understanding will be born of the faith and courage needed to risk our identity and past experience by seeing the truth from the other’s point of view. It will gradually transform the motives of the institutions and systems in all societies. Social and political action of course remain crucial to change and development. But because of the scale on which this action operates today the spiritual dimension also needs to be made conscious. Experiment and experience must be nurtured and centres and networks developed to host these new ventures into human progress.

DIALOGUE IS NECESSARY TO DIS-EMPOWER THE REFLEX OF VIOLENCE

We are acutely aware today of crisis on many levels of the environment, social and psychological life, and international relations. The pace and scale
of change has generated fear and insecurity because we are scared of change that we cannot control. This has created the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism, born of a literalist reading of scripture and the fears of threatened religious identities. New forms of violence – this perennial human addiction – seem to be replacing conventional warfare. They continue to justify themselves, however, in the name of the very religions that, at their core, unanimously reject violence. At the heart of every spiritual tradition, in the deep structures and scriptures of all religion, violence is recognised as an unintelligent and counter-productive way of conflict resolution. As a failure both of wisdom and of creative imagination, violence inevitably leads to forms of insanity and thus to the defeat of its own aims.

CONTEMPLATIVE VISION: A NEW WAY OF SEEING

Religion has never been stronger amidst the triumphs of modern science or the attempts of atheist ideologies to eradicate it. Like art or science, religion is hard-wired into humanity. But just as science can be abused or used unwisely, or art can become merely entertainment or propaganda, so there are forms of religion that become degenerate and ossified. Whenever religion becomes disconnected from its mystical source-experience, its power to lead to transcendence and transformation diminishes. Beyond this point it can then become its own counter-image, as a rallying point for ethnic cleansing or the justifying of injustice.

Yet, religion has its own immune system. The means of its self-purification lie within its contemplative wisdom. But this needs to be revived in consciousness again by every generation, taught by religious leaders, and practised from the early stages of training and education in religious and spiritual life. An experience of the common ground awaits any individual or group that discovers and explores this contemplative core. It is this experience that directly though subtly generates the new way of seeing.

Dialogue will be effective in relation to the level of spiritual development of those who conduct it. When religious traditions and spiritual wisdom-transmissions meet at the depth level of contemplative experience, a new consciousness is born. In the past this has been explicit only in remarkable individuals – the spiritual masters and teachers and the small group of enlightened founders. The Book of Wisdom says, “The hope for the salvation of the world lies in the greatest number of wise people.”

Religious institutions and their leadership themselves need to be conscious of this. But the awakening and radiation of wisdom does not depend on institutional religious authority alone. It is generated by personal practice at the grass roots among ordinary people.

Evidence suggests that a small leaven of ‘ordinary people’ is the first to understand and practise meditation. Even these small groups, in our experience as a community, begin with individual awakenings and leadership. Personal discipline is needed for transformation. Prayer is then gradually rediscovered as being, in the first instance, concerned with changing the one who prays rather than as a magical attempt to change external reality or the laws of physics.

Local centres, small weekly groups and global webs and networks are needed to seek and connect those who are seeking this experience and discipline. They then support this leaven as it grows gradually into spiritual maturity. While we are talking of a radical change in global consciousness we must nevertheless proceed, with painstaking faith and perseverance, on the small scale and local levels.

Such global webs of meditation and dialogue, and the necessary local centres within these networks, need to be risked and supported. They may function in varying degrees of relationship with conventional religious structures. But they should not be seen or understood as competing with or rejecting these institutions. Collaboration between the institutional and mystical levels will produce benefits for the greatest number. Often these centres and networks will help restructure and update the institutions they are connected with. They will also take a prophetic lead in developing new forms of inter-religious dialogue at the local level as well as organising occasional inspirational larger events.
In true dialogue no attempt is made to compete, convert, or win the argument. By listening to and sharing with each other everyone learns to see from the other’s point of view without rejecting or losing their particular and precious perspective.

Two elements are necessary for the dialogue that promotes this new way of seeing. Meditating together is one, with each participant meditating within his or her own tradition. This is why it is important that each tradition deepens its own contemplative wisdom. Christianity, which is an important player in the development of global dialogue, especially needs to recover its own meditation wisdom if it is to sit in the equality of friendship with the other great contemplative traditions of Asia. Silence is a powerful medium of communication and transformation. It betokens trust, openness to transcendence and mutual acceptance at a level deeper than the greatest differences of belief or opinion.

Meditation engenders communion and communion takes form in community. Community facilitates communication.

Another element in dialogue that is also enriched by meditation is the opening of our scriptures to each other. This is a more popular and easily-run form of dialogue than the academic or philosophical discussions conducted between scholars. The most simple believers meeting at a local level can share their favourite or key texts with each other and invite response and discussion. To those who believe in inspiration or some form of revelation, the opening of the sacred books releases the living and active power of the Word in ways that change perceptions and open hearts more deeply than a narrowly conceived intellectual exchange.

I would like to give one illustration of how inter-religious and ecumenical dialogue can be deepened by meditation.

In 1980, John Main and the Dalai Lama met in Montreal and shared a common vision of the need for a spiritual renewal of consciousness through the teaching of meditation within their respective traditions. In 1995 the Dalai Lama led the annual John Main Seminar “The Good Heart”. The participants were drawn from Buddhist, Christian and many other faiths. All meditated together three times a day, each in their own way and discipline.

The Dalai Lama had courageously accepted to comment upon a selection of Gospel texts reflecting different aspects of Christian faith, ranging from non-violence to the Resurrection. He read these sacred texts with curiosity and deep insight to the benefit of all present. After each of his commentaries a dialogue took place. There were profound moments of sensing an almost transcendent unity, as if all differences had been resolved. These moments inevitably resolved into ways of seeing in which the differences re-emerged but were now transformed and no longer barriers to friendship. The very differences became means of transcendence. Friendship and mutual recognition grew stronger as the differences were accepted along with the similarities. The regular meditation periods in silence refreshed speech and sharpened thought.

The influence of this breakthrough event has subsequently been spread widely through the book *The Good Heart* in many languages. This model of dialogue, that combines both meditation and the reading of each other’s scriptures, has since proven successful on many other occasions. It is regularly used, for example, at the John Main Centre for Meditation and Inter-Religious Dialogue at Georgetown University.

**THE WAY OF PEACE**

The “Good Heart” seminar developed into a three-year programme called “The Way of Peace”. Each year a different aspect of dialogue was emphasised but the essential model of meditation and commentary on each other’s sacred texts was preserved.

The first of these dialogues took the form of a pilgrimage in which the Dalai Lama greeted a large group of Christian meditators to Bodhgaya, sacred to all branches of Buddhism as the place of the Buddha’s enlightenment. At dawn each day we began with meditation under the Bodhi tree and continued with periods of dialogue and meditation.

The following year the form emphasised was that of an intensive retreat led
by the Dalai Lama and Fr Laurence at a monastery in Italy. In 2000 the culmination was the millennium John Main Seminar in Belfast, with the support of the British and Irish governments and of most religious leaders, at which the Dalai Lama and many previous Seminar presenters spoke on peace. A number of iconic events were held such as a meeting of Protestants and Catholics at one of the most violent areas of the Falls Road, encounters between victims of violence from both sides of the divide, and meetings with young Catholics and Protestants. Together, the message was delivered that the friendship born of inter-religious dialogue, sustained at the level of meditation, can be applied as spiritual medicine to the wounds of division inflicted by religious groups upon each other.

The Way of Peace continues as a regular event in the life of the World Community and in recent years has expanded to embrace Muslim-Christian dialogue as well as underpinning material work for social justice in deprived areas of society and the developing world.

The World Community is pledged to this work of dialogue as an adjunct to its own specific role in helping to reinstate the practice of meditation at the heart of Christian life.

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Meditation in the Christian Tradition

An Introduction

LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB

**Be still, and know that I am God. ~ Psalm 46:10**

*Returning to our centre, discovering our own centre, is the first task and the first responsibility of every life that is to become fully human. In the discipline of meditation, you will discover from your own experience that to be at one with our own centre means to be at one with every centre. What we learn in meditation is that to be in our own centre is to be in God.*

~ John Main OSB Moment of Christ

**WHAT IS MEDITATION?**

Meditation is a universal spiritual wisdom that leads in silence, stillness and simplicity from the mind to the heart. It has many expressions and names. In the Christian tradition it is also called prayer of the heart or contemplative prayer.

The practical way of meditation taught by John Main is the faithful repetition of a prayer phrase or ‘mantra’ as it is often called today. He discovered this way of prayer in the teachings of the early Christian monks, the desert fathers and mothers. In the fourth century, they retired mainly to the deserts of Egypt to live an authentic Christian life based directly on the gospel teaching of Jesus. Prayer – *pure prayer* as they called meditation – was central to their vision of Christian discipleship.

The prayer-phrase John Main recommended is ‘Maranatha’. He chose this...
word because it is the oldest Christian prayer in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. Moreover, the word has no associations for us, so it won’t give fuel to our mind eager to go on thinking. The faithful and loving repetition of this prayer leads us to stillness of body and mind and helps us to enter the silence that dwells in the centre of our being. The famous fourteenth-century mystic Meister Eckhart said, “Nothing is so much like God as silence.” In Christian faith there in the silence of the true centre of our being dwells Christ, and there we enter the prayer of Jesus. In the context of Christian faith, John Main describes the mystery as follows:

It is our conviction that the central message of the New Testament is that there is really only one prayer and that this prayer is the prayer of Christ. It is a prayer that continues in our hearts day and night. I can describe it only as the stream of love that flows constantly between Jesus and his Father. This stream of love is the Holy Spirit.

STAGES OF THE JOURNEY

Our first aim is to be able to keep our mind on the mantra during the meditation period. This is quite difficult in itself, as thoughts keep coming in. Our mind just loves going off on flights of fancies, down memory lane, or listing all the tasks we have to do after meditation. We just need to be patient and gentle with ourselves. When you realise you have got lost in your thoughts, don’t judge or criticise yourself, but gently steer your mind back to your prayer word. Simply accept that this is natural and to be expected. Your mind is like a playful puppy, always wanting to run off and explore things rather than stay beside you. You would not get cross with a puppy, would you? You would gently and lovingly encourage it to come back. In the same way, we need to accept our distractions in order to go beyond them.

We make progress. We begin by saying the mantra in the face of distractions with constant interruptions to our attention. Gradually we come to sound the word for longer periods of attention and accept the distractions without being disturbed by them. Then we come to a deeper level where we listen to the mantra in a more subtle and faithful way. If we are led to a place where we seem to have no thoughts, we continue to say the mantra but now in a very subtle and gentle way. We may at times be led into complete silence, but as soon as we become self-conscious, self-reflective we return again to the mantra.

Understanding how to deal with distractions is important if you are to learn to meditate. Your thoughts may still be there in the background, but they are more like music in the supermarket or traffic noise outside the room— you don’t notice them much. The more you practise, the easier it gets. Soon, instead of saying the word you seem to be listening to it, and finally it will sound by itself in your heart. Then your body and your mind become like the centre of your being, in harmony and at peace. John Main describes this as follows:

The surface areas of the mind are now in tune with the deep peacefulness at the core of our being. The same harmonic sounds throughout our being. In this state we have passed beyond thought, beyond imagination, and beyond all images. We simply rest with the Reality, the realised presence of God Himself dwelling within our hearts.

UNIVERSAL AND CHRISTIAN

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 of them the emphasis is on practice and experience rather than theory and knowledge.

It is also an authenticated and ancient discipline in Christianity. Jesus taught prayer in terms of contemplation. That is the reason why this way of prayer flourished especially in the fourth century among the desert fathers and mothers of Egypt and Palestine, who based their life on Jesus’ example. They wanted to pray as Jesus taught them: to go into your inner room, to go beyond constant chatter and egocentric prayer, to let go of worries, to be mindful and to be in the present moment. John Cassian (360-435 AD) collected their teachings in his great work The Conferences of the Fathers which is one of the foundations of Western spirituality and a major influence on St Benedict. It is in these writings that John Main (1926-1982)
rediscovered this tradition of pure prayer (oratio pura) 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.

All ways of prayer are valid but 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. The connection between all forms of prayer can be seen 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.

John Main was introduced to meditation through the universal tradition when he was serving in the British Colonial Service in Malaya. During the course of his duties there he met Swami Satyananda, founder of the Pure Life Society, who lived a life of immense generosity and depth dedicated to serving others. John Main was impressed by the serenity and holiness of this monk, and when the official business was over they started talking about prayer, especially about the Swami’s way of repeating a mantra during the whole period of his meditation. Soon John Main found himself asking the Swami whether he as a Christian could learn to pray in this way. The Swami told him laughingly that it could only make him a better Christian!

In Christian Meditation – The Gethsemani Talks, John Main recounts how the Swami stressed the importance of meditating each morning and each evening for half an hour, saying:

If you are serious and if you want to root this mantra in your heart then this is the minimum undertaking... During the time of your meditation there must be in your mind no thoughts, no words, no imaginations. The sole sound will be the sound of your mantra, your word. It is like a harmonic. And as we sound this harmonic within ourselves we begin to build up a resonance. That resonance then leads us forward to our own wholeness... We begin to experience the deep unity we all possess in our own being. And then the harmonic begins to build up a resonance between you and all creatures and all creation and a unity between you and your Creator.

This was the start of John Main’s journey of meditation. Meditation leads into the silence conducive to contemplative prayer, deep silent prayer. It became the mainstay of his prayer life and his whole existence, and finally led him to become a monk. At that time meditation was not accepted as a valid Christian way of prayer and he had to relinquish it on becoming a novice, which he did in the spirit of Benedictine obedience. He sorely missed it, but saw this as being taught a form of detachment. He said,

I learned to become detached from the practice that was most sacred to me and on which I was seeking to build my life. Instead I learned to build my life on God himself.

Many years later, in the Conferences of John Cassian, he re-discovered the practice that he had been taught by the Swami. There he read of “the practice of using a single short phrase to achieve the stillness necessary for prayer. I felt I had arrived home once more and returned to the practice of
the mantra.” He learned how meditation practised in Christian faith can be seen in terms of entering the prayer of Jesus through the poverty of spirit to which the “constant repetition of this single verse” will lead us. He understood the “grand poverty” of the mantra as leading into an experience of the first of the Beatitudes: “Happy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God.”

WHY MEDITATE?
The impetus for starting to meditate can often be a moment when we are faced with something out of the ordinary. Something shakes us out of our ordinary perception of reality. It can be a crisis point or major life event at any stage in our lives, when the seemingly secure and unchanging reality we live in is bewilderingly turned upside down: we are rejected by an individual or a group; we face failure, loss of esteem; we lose a treasured job or our health suddenly fails us. The result can be a refusal to accept the change – a descent into negativity, mistrust and despair. Or, faced with the fact that our reality is not as immutable as we considered it to be, we may rise to the challenge to look at ourselves, our habitual framework, our opinions and values, with different eyes. Sometimes it can be a moment of exquisite beauty that makes us realise there is more than meets the eye, such as in the contemplation of nature. Some of us may have had a moment of ‘transcendence’, an awareness of a different reality, an escape from the prison of the ‘ego’, whilst listening to music, poetry or being absorbed in a work of art. Others may never have been consciously aware of an actual moment of insight, and yet at some level they may always have been aware of the existence of a higher reality and are without knowing becoming gradually more in tune with this reality. Quite early on in meditation we often touch the experience of real peace and even joy bubbling up. Moments like these when we are released from self-preoccupation are divine gifts.

In any case, this glimpse is not the end, but the beginning: an impetus for growth. The longing to know more about this intuited reality gets stronger and we look round for those who could help us to approach it. At this point we often discover meditation in one form or another. It is the start of the work of clarifying and integrating the experience and so allowing the ascent to spiritual awareness, personal authenticity and a transpersonal Truth.

The fact that an insight, a glimpse of another reality, is often the start of our journey into deeper prayer also means that we can bring anyone to meditation, who has not felt this longing need for ‘more’ in their own being. When meditators feel called to start a group, all we can do is advertise it and invite people. Whether those who turn up start meditation as a discipline of prayer is not our responsibility. We can’t ‘convert’ others to meditation. But we can welcome, explain and encourage them to try.

HOW TO MEDITATE
John Cassian had sat at the feet of the Christian hermits in the desert of Egypt to learn about prayer in an authentic Christian life. Cassian stressed that this practice led to the silence of ‘pure’ prayer, contemplative prayer, without words and images. “The mind thus casts out and represses the rich and ample matter of all thoughts and restricts itself to the poverty of a single verse.” He continued by stressing the importance of the mantra:

This [mantra] must always be in your heart. When you go to sleep let it be by saying this verse, till having been moulded by it you grow accustomed to repeat it even in your sleep.

The faithful repetition of a prayer phrase, just saying our word is, however, not as easy as it sounds. We need to prepare for this period; we can’t expect to become fully focused on our prayer without preparation. Once, when John Main was asked how we should prepare for meditation, he said “by small acts of kindness”.

This suggests how meditation is not separate from daily life but embedded in it. This is why although nothing seems to happen during the meditation period, a process of radical change is initiated that pervades our whole life and inner being. We have to be in the right frame of mind; trying to meditate after a heated argument with someone is not really going to work, is it? Our ordinary life and our prayer life are not separate: “As you live, so
you pray” was a very common saying amongst the early Christians.

In the world in which we live today, our lives tend to be increasingly busy and stressful. And if we find that we are really very tired, it may well be advisable to have a short nap before we meditate. Doing a few stretching exercises, or some refreshing body-movements will also help to get the energy flowing. Otherwise, perhaps all we will be doing is ‘holy dozing’, and that is alright too, but often it is accompanied by the sweet sound of snoring! Snoring and other noises that occur during meditation, however, can actually be excellent practice in detaching ourselves from extraneous matters and gently coming back and focusing on our word. Noises on the whole do not really disturb us, as long as we do not get irritated by them. We just need to accept that that is the way it is. No judging, no criticising.

Every spiritual practice begins and begins again with self-acceptance – acknowledging you are as you are and accepting that. Perfectionism and idealism are not part of the meditation practice at all.

The reason we sit with our backs straight and shoulders back and relaxed, is that this position also helps us to stay awake: our chest is free and open, so we can breathe well and oxygen can flow freely round our body keeping us alert. Relaxing and falling asleep – however much needed – is of course not the purpose of meditation; the focused attention needed for meditation is in fact a way to alertness and being energised. It may help to start our session with a few deep breaths into the abdomen, which both relax and energise us.

The essential task in meditation is “to say your word”. That is the focus. The word John Main recommended is maranatha. It is the oldest Christian prayer in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. We say it as four equally-stressed syllables: ma-ra-na-tha. It does not matter, whether you say it with an English ‘th’ or with a ‘t’ sound. The pronunciation is not so important. What is important, however, is that you say it with full attention, lovingly and faithfully. Whenever your thoughts have distracted you, just gently bring your mind back to the word. Some people find it helps them to let the word rest on the breath, but if that causes distractions just focus on your word and say it at the speed and in the way that best suits you.

Sit down, sit still, with your back straight. Close your eyes lightly and begin to say your mantra. Stay with the same word throughout the meditation and from day to day. Let it take root in your heart and it will open up the grace of continuous prayer during the day and the night. Let go of all thoughts, good and bad ones alike.

Meditate twice a day. Early morning and early evening are the best times. If you feel you want to but don’t have the time, learn from someone who is busier than you and who does make the time each day. Don’t evaluate or analyse your meditation too much. Allow it to become, both interiorly and externally, a way of faith.

SOLITUDE AND COMMUNITY

In a sense meditation is a very solitary practice because we cannot do another person’s meditation for them. Solitude means the recognition and acceptance of our uniqueness. But when we are in this solitude we are ready for and open to real relationship. Meditation, as John Main understood, creates community. We cannot meditate for each other but we are naturally drawn to meditate together.

So, to learn to meditate it is very helpful, perhaps for most of us it is necessary, to feel a sense of connection with others on the same path. The weekly meditation group has grown up as a contemporary form of contemplative community adapted to people’s modern lifestyle. The World Community for Christian Meditation is a sign of this communal dynamic in the contemplative experience and exists to introduce people to the practice in the Christian tradition, to develop dialogue with other religions, and to share the spiritual fruits of meditation with the secular world and our institutions today. The Community’s website www.wccm.org also has many resources designed to help people continue to grow on this pilgrimage into the full wonder of our own humanity, the full mystery of Christ, and the fullness of the divine splendour for which we are destined.
Contemplation in the Jain Tradition

From the Teachings of Lord Mahavir

Silence and self-control is non-violence.
~ Lord Mahavir

Through meditation of the soul Param Samadhi (highest state of concentration; state of liberation) is attained.
~ Lord Mahavir

Contemplation is the means of obtaining stability of mind.
Even though one is severely persecuted, one must obey the law of silence.
~ Lord Mahavir

The Contemplative Dimension of Buddhism

The Buddhist Perspective on Contemplative Meditation

VENERABLE CHUAN GUAN

To avoid all evil, to cultivate good, and to purify one’s mind — this is the teaching of the Buddhas.
~ Khuddaka Nikaya, Dhammapada 183 法句經

By oneself is evil done; by oneself is one defiled. By oneself is evil left undone; by oneself is one made pure. Purity and impurity depend on oneself; no one can purify another.
~ Khuddaka Nikaya, Dhammapada 165 法句經

Those peaceful in mind, discerning, mindful and meditative, have perfect insight into things, unconcerned with sense desires.
~ Khuddaka Nikaya, Itivuttaka 40 法句經

Establish the mind, set it up in one-pointed stability; look upon all things and thoughts as alien and as not self.
~ Khuddaka Nikaya, Therigatha 177

Meditation is central to Buddhism and it was through the unique form of Buddhist meditation known as vipassana that the Buddha attained perfection, perfectly awakened to how things truly are, perfectly free from distorted perception, perfectly free from suffering and stress, perfect: a Buddha.

The Buddha penetrated the true nature of how things are (Anicca, Dhukka, Anatta), how sentient beings arise and go through beginningless cycles of birth and death (dependent origination) and also the Four Noble Truths, attaining Buddhahood. The teachings and practices He taught, have led many to become awakened, to become an Arahant, or a Bodhisattva striving for the fruition of Buddhahood in the future.

Buddhists have no belief in a creator God. Whether one has such a belief
or not, if one engages in harmful acts, it brings fear and stress and one is admonished by others. Instead, “As a mother would risk her life to protect her child, her only child, even so should one cultivate a limitless heart with regard to all beings.” If one treats others in such a manner then, regardless of one’s beliefs, such a person is of good to all, a friend to all.

In Buddhist meditation, we develop and cultivate the mind in positive wholesome states. The word “meditation” is a loose translation of the Pali / Sanskrit word “Bhavana”, which literally means 修習 xiū1xiè2, or cultivation. In Buddhism, this refers to the cultivation of bodily, verbal, and mental qualities or habits. In a way, Buddhist and non-Buddhists alike, are all cultivators, we are cultivating all the time. It is just that the kind of habits we cultivate are different, leading to different habituation, different results.

When we read the papers, watch television programmes, or surf the net, we interact – we respond, we act. We may become more familiar with it or, being repulsed, we become more familiar with not wanting (repulsion). Knowingly or unknowingly, we cultivate such habits. At home or at work, with friends or strangers, in pleasant or unpleasant situations, we act and we strengthen or weaken our habituation. We cultivate, we develop.

Buddhist meditation encompasses two branches namely samatha 止 (stilling) to develop concentration 定, and vipassana 觀 (insight meditation) to develop wisdom 慧.

While there are various objects of meditation, such as the forty found in the Vissudhimagga (Path of Purification), for this sharing, we will briefly look at Mindfulness of the Breath⁵ as found in the Foundations of Mindfulness (Satipatthana⁶) that spans both samatha and vipassana meditation.

Samatha meditation comprises the application of the mind to a meditation object such as the breath. Different objects were taught by the Buddha for individuals with different temperaments. The breath is a common object used and leads to calming of the mind and the body.

When one uses the breath as an object, “always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out”. When one is “breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long’. Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, he discerns ‘I am breathing out short’”. This forms the basic method for developing mindfulness of the breath.

To discern that one is breathing in and breathing out, one does not rationalise, think, or guess that one is breathing in or out. One knows when one is breathing in or out by being aware and mindful of the breath itself. One simply feels the breathing in and breathing out.

Some people say they cannot meditate because their mind is not still nor mindful. But in fact, it is precisely because our mind is not still nor mindful that we try to meditate!

When we meditate and our mind wanders off into discursive thoughts, don’t worry; that is common and very normal. Know clearly and acknowledge that this wandering mind has arisen, then bring it back to the breath – the awareness, the experience and sensation of the breath.

Be patient with yourself. The athletes of the world did not reach mastery of their field by being impatient or angry with themselves. They did so by not giving up. They did so by trying again, and again, and again.

As we do so over time, the mind quietens and becomes tranquil. At the same time, we become more mindful of the wandering of the mind and are more adept at applying it back to where it should be, the present moment.

Vipassana meditation builds on top of this and further develops mindfulness of the feelings (sensations), mind and mind-objects, encompassing all aspects of our very existence. Through this gradual practice, we develop insight into the true nature of all phenomena: that all formations are impermanent (anicca), subject to change, subject to suffering (dukkha) and is no-self (anatta); that as much as we may have our own ideas and wishful thinking about how things should be, they change – not according to our whims and fancies, but according to conditions.

A clear and direct application of mindfulness in our daily life is the ability to better manage our emotions and stress. Emotions arise gradually over time but we seem to hear people speak of how someone just “snapped”. As we
develop more mindfulness of our body and mind, we begin to see how a series of discursive thinking precedes the “snapping”. Being aware and mindful of this internal dialogue early enables us to better manage it before it spins into full-blown frustration, stress or anger. By bringing the focus back to the breath, one can break this negative cycle over time.

While this is useful, the root of our stress and suffering is craving and attachment. This can be removed with insight wisdom developed through vipassana at the later stage.

Regardless of our age, gender, race, nationality or religion, the breath is something that all human beings possess. Bringing mindfulness to the breath calms the body and quiets the mind. This can serve as a preliminary yet powerful tool to help us manage and master our mind, emotions and heart, and ultimately lead to Nirvana.

In Buddhist teachings and practices, we often refer to the mind (名/心 nama) and body / physicality (色/身 rupa), with the mind encompassing, feelings (受 sensations), perceptions (想), Mental processes / intention (行, inclusive of emotions) and consciousness (識).

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Meditation and Contemplation in the Muslim Tradition

HABIB SYED HASSAN AL-ATTAS

This silence, this moment, every moment, if it's genuinely inside you, brings what you need. There's nothing to believe. Only when I stopped believing in myself did I come into this beauty. Sit quietly, and listen for a voice that will say, 'Be more silent.' Die and be quiet. Quietness is the surest sign that you've died. Your old life was a frantic running from silence. Move outside the tangle of fear-thinking. Live in silence.

~ Imam Jalaluddin Rumi

In the name of God Most Benevolent Most Merciful

The word meditation is derived from the Latin word meditatio, meaning to think, to ponder, to contemplate or to reflect upon. Meditation is an art through which one trains his or her mind to obtain peace.

The word Islam is derived from the Arabic root word salama which means peace, tranquillity and in this view of the world, peace begins with oneself. A Muslim is asked to begin any situation, with a salam – that is genuinely, sincerely, with a true heart, to pray and wish peace and happiness to all, be it an acquaintance, a friend or a foe.

To obtain peace and tranquillity one has to go through many stages. First is tafakkur or contemplation, and it may be that the word and the idea of contemplation more closely fits the way that Muslims are taught to reflect on themselves, on their place in the world, and on the inter-connectedness of all the worlds. The word ‘meditation’ seems to belong to the same family of ideas but with a slightly different connotation or ‘feel’ and perhaps a sense of quietly looking inwards.
In Islam, man is encouraged to contemplate the existence of God, to contemplate His commands and to reflect on the wisdom underlying the creation of humankind, the order of the universe and all the teachings that identify the inter-relatedness of existence, such as the teaching that “there is not a creature crawling on the Earth or flying creature, flying on its wings, who are not communities just like yourselves.” (6:38)

One who is able to contemplate the manifestations of the Divine Power expressed in the universe will ultimately acknowledge his own weakness. The heart, thereby, becomes filled with the light of piety with which contemplation achieves its most consummate blend.

In the eyes of God, the worth of a person is not through his external appearance or through his financial standing in life but rather through the maturity of his heart, and the depth of his spiritual attributes and capabilities.

The second stage is Dhikr. Dhikr is Remembrance, invocation or glorification of God, through repetition of one of His names or a phrase that speaks to His Glory. True Dhikr is a spiritual state in which the one who is engaged in it concentrates all of his physical and spiritual powers upon God so that his entire being is united with the Absolute. This is the fundamental practice of the Sufis and may be undertaken in solitude or in gatherings, and is sometimes done in a vocalised manner or in silence, in brightness or in darkness.

The third stage is salat or prayer. It is the essence of worship. Prayer is the answer for every need. It is the resting place for those in want. A shelter for those disturbed. A relief for those with desires.

If the first word of revelation in Islam was the instruction to “Read” or “Recite” then the invitation to contemplate or reflect is at the centre and the source of the teaching. And if perhaps the first act of contemplation is the personal statement of peace, that then moves outwards to all of the Word and Work of our Creator, only to return through an inner process to a heightened and deepened sense of quietness, respect and peace. This then is part of what it means in Islam to engage in contemplation.
functions, achieve longevity and good health, and achieve harmony between the Universe and humanity (天人合一).

**MEDITATION**

The scripture of health preservation mentions that Meditation (打坐) and Regulating of Breath (调息) are the fundamental techniques to achieve a state of tranquillity and silence (静). Silent Meditation, or “Jing Gong” (静功), can be traced to the time of the Yellow Emperor (黄帝) around 2697 BCE, as recorded in the Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor (黄帝内经). The benefits of such techniques help to preserve health, treat illnesses, and achieve longevity.

Taoist rituals are also a form of meditation and inner alchemy. The high priest uses the human body as a furnace to refine the three vital energies (Essence, Breath and Spirit) into “One”, which allows the priest to communicate, through visualisation (存想), with the divine and to preside over rituals for both the living and the dead. The Anterior Heavens Ritual to Save, Refine and Feed Spirits (先天斛食济炼幽科) highlights how the priest uses the true “yang” energies in the furnace (body), refining the three vital energies from three elixir fields “dantian” (丹田) located in the lower abdomen, upper abdomen, and top of the head (真阳鼎里炁徘徊, 升降中黄密往来。更从太乙存三一,通感群真上玉阶。). This is the practical aspect of Taoist inner alchemy.

**BENEFITS OF MEDITATION IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY**

Lao Tzu (老子) observed that many do not treasure their life, and waste their energies on competing with others. Lao Tzu urged us to treasure life (贵生), and to rid our minds of negative thoughts. Desire is the greatest enemy to health preservation.

There is a Taoist saying: “No disaster is greater than not knowing our limits.” (祸莫大于不知足). Lao Tzu preached that the desire for material things such as wealth, fame, power will only bring us misfortune and harm our health, and reminded us not to pursue materialistic things and to curb the desire for them. We must learn how to empty our mind of such desires and reflect on good values. Lao Tzu also reminded us to know our limitations and what we really need (知足). Hence the wisdom saying: “One will always be happy if he is not greedy or when he knows to be satisfied.” (知足常乐).

Lao Tzu observed that all things in nature, including man, after maturing will age, grow old, and die. Flowers bloom and eventually wither and die. Lao Tzu gave the example of a newborn that is full of vital energies. Babies have tendons and bones which are soft, yet they can clench their fist firmly. Man should learn how to preserve the vital energies within the body, just like a newborn, so he could preserve his health.

Meditation is a very good technique to regulate one’s breathing and calm one down. It enables the mind and body to achieve a state of tranquility and calmness, which will contribute to the well-being of the individual. This is a state of inner peace. You can see why the Chinese regard the tortoise as the ambassador for longevity. Some practitioners of meditation practise a form of breathing technique known as “tortoise breathing” (龟息) where they inhale and exhale at the pace of a tortoise!

**TAOIST WAY OF SILENT MEDITATION (静功)**

Taoists believe in and follow the way of nature. Therefore, there is no “standard” posture a person should adhere to for meditation. One may sit down (座式), stand up (站式), lie down (卧式), and even meditate while walking (散步). The most important rule is to maintain the upper body in an upright position, and to breathe naturally.

Meditation may be practised in any quiet spot. Free your mind from desires and stray thoughts (杂念), and your body will naturally be relaxed. Sit upright with the shoulders relaxed and dropped naturally. Taoists view stiffness as “lifeless”, but softness and gentleness as life. So, do not tense
your muscles and sit like a block of wood, but allow your body to adapt to its natural posture, in a relaxed state.

The eyes are able to capture images from the external world and practitioners usually close their eyes while meditating so as not to be distracted by the surroundings. But closing the eyes may cause the practitioner to feel drowsy and easily fall asleep. Taoists therefore lower the eyelids naturally, just enough for some light to pass through.

One should breathe normally and naturally during meditation. Holding one’s breath (憋气) and sighing (叹气) are taboo in health preservation. With experience, a practitioner of meditation will gradually be able to breathe deeply (深长), evenly (均匀), and softly (细微).

Taoists also practise cupping of hands. Male practitioners cup the left hand over the right, and female practitioners cup their right hand over the left hand. The left hand of the male is regarded as “yang” (阳), and the right hand of the female is regarded as “yang”. The hands are usually placed at the lower abdomen about three inches below navel (肚脐), the position of the lower elixir field or “dantian” (丹田).

One may also take a stroll in the park, preferably with even and well-paved paths. Walk slowly, breathe normally, and listen to your breath (听息) as you walk. This requires the practitioner to listen to his own breathing, where the ears no longer pick up external sounds from the surroundings but listen to the inner vibrations (breathing) in the body.

There are Four Periods (四正时) of time which are regarded as the best times for meditation. These are the hour of the rat “zi” (子) from 11.00pm to 1.00am, hour of the horse “wu” (午) 11.00am to 1.00pm, hour of the rabbit “mao” (卯) from 5.00am to 7.00am, and the hour of the rooster “you” (酉) from 5.00pm to 7.00pm. It is ideal to practise meditation for half an hour, but preferably not more than two hours. One should avoid practising meditation half an hour before or after meals, or going to bed immediately after meditation.

There are many other Taoist Meditation skills such as “voiding of the mind” (坐忘), “listening to the breath” (听息) or “regulating the breath” (调息), “preserving the One” (守一), “counting of breath” (数息), “observing the light” (观光), “curbing desire” (止念) et cetera, which are preserved and still practised by many today.

The above methods of silent meditation introduce one to the basics of meditation and how to search for inner peace and simplicity in a sophisticated world. Lao Tzu mentioned “a journey of thousand miles begins with the first step” (千里之行，始于足下).
There is something beyond our mind which abides in silence within our mind. It is the supreme mystery beyond thought. Let one's mind and one's subtle body rest upon that and not rest on anything else. ~ Maitri Upanishad

There is a Spirit which is mind and life, light and truth and vast spaces. He contains all works and desires and perfumes and all tastes. He enfolds the whole universe, and in silence is loving to all. This is the Spirit that is in my heart. This is Brahman. ~ Chandogya Upanishad

The practice of Hinduism is aimed at reaching the state of a higher level of consciousness where the mind gets absorbed in Divine consciousness.

The human body is a complex structure. Beyond the body is the mind or psyche of man, the emotions and the Divine Principle.

The coordination and balanced development of these integral parts are at the mercy of three entities: desire, volition, and action in Man. If the three entities are directed by a mind that remains focused in the Divine principle, the outcome – thoughts, words, and deeds – will be beneficial to all life. The moment of connection with the Divine, in common language, is “becoming one with God”. This is the state of yoga.

The Bhagavad Gita mentions four ways leading to the state of yoga:

- The way of loving devotion to God (Bakthi Yoga)
- The way of selfless service, (Karma Yoga)
- The way of discovering knowledge through meditation (Jnana Yoga)
- The way of self-discovery by knowing oneself (Raja Yoga)

A YOGA

Raja Yoga is the study of the mind, its functions, its relationship with the body and spirit as well as with all forms of life. It teaches us how to harness our hidden potential for self-development because self-development is a necessary step towards living harmoniously with all forms of life around us. In simple language, we have to be spiritually strong enough to face life and all its challenges in peace and harmony.

In the practice of Raja Yoga, there is meditation, deep breathing exercises aimed at raising our consciousness to a high level and energising the centre between the eyebrows which is known as the Ajna Chakra (pineal gland). When we raise our consciousness to the pineal gland during this exercise, the creative energy in man, which rests in the Muladhara Chakra, the centre of the mystic energy of the soul (Kundalini) at the base of the spine, converts into ojas (spiritual energy).

To be able to practise Raja Yoga, one has first to practise loving devotion to God, which in the course of time expands to embrace mankind and all forms of life. While engaged in unselfish service, the experiences gained bring about an awakening in the mind of man. The body, mind and spirit settle down naturally into a meditative state.

THE MENTAL OR PSYCHIC ENERGY

If man can train the mind and control it enough to keep it focused on the Centre (the Divine Principle) within us, everything will fall into place.

To help us in this respect the sage Agastya of pre-historic times, who is believed to have been an anchorite of great learning, a musician and a grammarian, with tremendous mental energy, gave us what is called Kalpam. Kalpam is the word for a mixture of different types of ingredients for the correction of any physical ailment. Here the word is used metaphorically for “a mixture for the mind”. The sage Agastya recommends training of the mind in positive thinking while stressing the importance of
purity of thought and the importance of not hurting others in thought, word or deed. (*Bhagavad Gita* Verse 1, 2, 3 Chapter XVI) Patanjali’s *Raja Yoga* recommends throwing away wandering thoughts by performing one’s duty in God consciousness and detaching oneself from the fruits of one’s action.

Once the mind has been trained along the righteous path, it becomes a fit instrument to govern the elements in the human psyche. The state of meditativeness will then come more spontaneously and naturally to us. Actions that result from inner passivity emerge dynamic.

THE PSYCHE

We cannot avoid talking about the psychic being when it comes to wholesome development.

In the words of Yogi Shuddhananda Bharati,

*Health is not measured by weight. Health is an inner condition.*

*The doctor and the X-ray machine may be able to penetrate the physical parts of our being but there are deeper secrets beyond the senses and the mind. There are fountains of cosmic energy in the psychic centres within us which are revealed only to the person of introspection...*

To enable us to make maximum use of the cosmic energy in us, there are techniques: equalising the breath; meditation; recitation of holy words (mantras – deflections of the primordial sound, the word of God); physical postures which cause acupressure (*Mudras*), stimulate the different glands and increase the Life-force (*pranic force/Qi*, in Chinese). These help to raise our consciousness to a higher level and create in us a sense of well-being and mental poise.

When mental poise is attained, the thoughts, words and deeds of the person will be productive.

1 KALPAM - by Sage Agastya

1. Think only what is good. Avoid unnecessary and bad thoughts and think of God and surrender.

2. Do not think of what has happened. Try and avoid thinking of the same thing. Do not waste your time imagining the future. Remember that our greatest enemies are:
   a) anxiety about the future;
   b) present tension; and
   c) past actions.

3. Do not dive deep into unnecessary thoughts. Keep the mind completely pure. Do not waste your time brooding. The result of success depends on how purely we concentrate.

4. See that you do not pain others. By hurting others, it reacts on you and brings more sickness to you.

You know everybody’s soul is the same. It cannot be separated and it is not separate. It is by our actions we see them separately. See that no damage is done to your soul by your actions. Then the sickness also will be cured.

2 December 2011
FROM THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

A Reading from the Dhammapada

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is
founded on our thoughts and made up of our thoughts. If a man
speaks or acts with an evil thought, suffering follows him as a
wheel follows the hoof of the beast that draws the cart.

All that we are is the result of what we have thought: it is
founded on our thoughts and made up of our thoughts. If a man
speaks or acts with a good thought, happiness follows him like
a shadow that never leaves him.

Hatred does not cease by hatred; hatred ceases only by love.
This is the eternal law.

Many do not realise that all must one day die. In those who
know this fact all strife is stilled.

As the wind throws down a shaky tree, so temptation
overthrows him who lives only for pleasure, who is immoderate,
idle and weak.

As the wind does not throw down a mountain, so temptation
does not overthrow him who lives without looking for pleasure,
who is moderate, faithful and strong.

As rain breaks into an ill-thatched house, so craving breaks into
an ill-trained mind.

As rain does not break into a well-thatched house, so craving
does not break into a well-trained mind.

The man who talks much of the Teaching but does not practise
it himself is like a cowman counting others’ cattle: he has no
part in the Brotherhood.

The man who can repeat but little of the Teaching, but lives it
himself, who forsakes craving, hatred and delusion, possesses
right knowledge and calmness, clings to nothing in this or any
other world, he is a follower of the Blessed One.

A Reading from Contemplation of Thought in Siksasamuccaya

Translated from Sanskrit by Edward Conze

A thought is like the stream of a river, without any staying
power; as soon as it is produced it breaks up and disappears.

A thought is like the flame of a lamp, and it proceeds through
causes and conditions.

A thought is like lightning; it breaks up in a moment and does
not stay on.

Thought is like space, and it is defiled by adventitious
defilements.

Thought is like a bad friend, for it generates all kind of ill.

Thought is like a fish-hook, which looks pleasant although it is
not.

Thought is like a blue-bottle-fly, because it looks for what is
lovely in what is not.

Thought is like an enemy, because it inflicts much agony.

Thought, though one searches for it all around, cannot be
found. What cannot be found, that cannot be apprehended.
What cannot be apprehended, that cannot be past, future or
present. What is not past, future or present, that is beyond the
three dimensions of time. What is beyond the three dimensions
time, that neither is nor is not ...

Contemplation of Thought, Siksasamuccaya http://taoofmedicine.com/2010/07/what-is-thought/
FROM THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

A Reading from the New Testament –
Gospel according to John 14: 27-28; 15: 4, 5-12

Jesus said,

“Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give. Set your troubled hearts at rest, and banish your fears.

Dwell in me, as I in you... I am the vine, and you the branches. He who dwells in me, as I dwell in him, bears much fruit; for apart from me, you can do nothing...If you dwell in me, and my words dwell in you, ask what you will, and you shall have it... As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands, you will dwell in my love, as I have heeded my Father’s commands and dwell in his love.

I have spoken thus to you, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete. This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you.”

FROM THE HINDU TRADITION

A Reading from the Chandogya Upanishad

There is a Light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the highest, the very highest heavens. This is the Light that shines in our heart.

All this universe is in truth Brahman. He is the beginning and end and life of all. As such, in silence, give unto him adoration.

There is a Spirit that is mind and life, light and truth and vast spaces. This Spirit contains all works and desires and all perfumes and all tastes. This Spirit enfolds the whole universe and, in silence, is loving to all.

This is the Spirit that is in my heart, smaller than a grain of rice, or a grain of barley or a grain of mustard seed, or a grain of canary-seed, or the kernel of a grain of canary-seed. This is the Spirit that is in my heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than heaven itself, greater than all these worlds.

This Spirit contains all works and desires and all perfumes and all tastes. This Spirit enfolds the whole universe and in silence is loving to all. This is the Spirit that is in my heart, this is Brahman.
To this Spirit shall I come when I go beyond this life. And to this Spirit will come the one who has faith and doubts not.

A Reading from the Mundaka Upanishad

There are two birds, two sweet friends, who dwell on the self-same tree. The one eats the fruits thereof, and the other looks on in silence.

The first is the human soul who, resting on that tree, though active, feels sad in his unwisdom. But on beholding the power and glory of the higher Spirit, he becomes free from sorrow.

When the wise seer beholds in golden glory the Lord, the Spirit, the Creator of the god of creation, then he leaves good and evil behind and in purity he goes to the unity supreme.

In silent wonder the wise see him as the life flaming in all creation. This is the greatest seer of Brahman, who, doing all his work as holy work, in God, in Atman, in the Self, finds all his peace and joy.

A Reading from Sri Gnanananda on Meditation

Enter into yourself to the place where there is nothing, and take care that nothing enters there.

Penetrate within yourself to the place where there is no more any thought, and take care that no thought arises there!

There where there is nothing – Fullness!

There where nothing is seen – The Vision of Being!

There where nothing more appears – Behold, the Self!

A Reading from the Sufi Poet Baba Kuhi

In the market, in the cloister – only God I saw.

In the valley and on the mountain – only God I saw.

Him I have seen beside me oft in tribulation;

In favour and in fortune – only God I saw.

In prayer and fasting, in praise and contemplation,

In the religion of the Prophet – only God I saw.

Neither soul nor body, accident nor substance, Qualities nor causes – only God I saw.

I opened mine eyes and by the light of His face around me

In all the eye discovered – only God I saw.

Like a candle I was melting in His fire:

Amidst the flames outflanking – only God I saw.

Myself with mine own eyes I saw most clearly,

But when I looked with God’s eyes – only God I saw.

I passed away into nothingness, I vanished,

And lo, I was the All-living – only God I saw.

A Reading from Farid al-Din Attar

Whoever leaves this world behind him passes away from mortality, and when he has passed away from mortality, he attains to immortality. If you desire to reach this abode of immortality, and to attain this exalted station, divest yourself first of self, and then summon to yourself a winged steed out of nothingness, to bear you aloft. Clothe yourself with the garment of nothingness and drink the cup of annihilation. Cover your breast with nothingness, and draw over your head the robe of non-existence. Set your foot in the stirrup of complete renunciation and, looking straight before you, ride the steed of non-being to the place where nothing is. You will be lost again and again, yet go on your way in tranquillity, until at last you shall reach the world where you are lost altogether to Self.
FROM THE TAOIST TRADITION

A Reading from the Tao Te Ching – Chapter 16

Empty yourself of everything
Let the mind rest in peace.
The ten thousand things rise and fall while
The Self watches their return.
They grow and flourish and then return to the source.
Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature.
The way of nature is unchanging.
Knowing constancy is insight.
Not knowing constancy leads to disaster.
Knowing constancy, the mind is open.
With an open mind, you will be openhearted.
Being openhearted, you will act royally.
Being royal, you will attain the divine.
Being divine, you will be at one with the Tao.
Being at one with the Tao is eternal.
And though the body dies,
The Tao will never pass away.

A Reading from The Way of Chuang Tzu

Still water is like glass.
Look in it and you will see the bristles on your chin.
It is a perfect level
So that carpenters can use it.
If water is so clear, so level,
How much more the human mind?
The heart of a wise person is tranquil.
It is the mirror of heaven and earth
Reflecting everything.
Emptiness, stillness, tranquillity,
Reserve, silence, non-action;
These mirror heaven and earth.
This is perfect Tao.
Wise people find here their point of rest.

Organised by

The mission of The Archdiocesan Council for Inter-Religious and Ecumenical Dialogue (IRED) is to promote, organise, and coordinate activities and dialogue among brothers and sisters of different faiths. It also contributes to the formation of Catholics in the area of understanding and appreciation of other religions.

Meditatio is the outreach of The World Community for Christian Meditation. It shares the fruits of meditation and engages in dialogue with the secular approach to the problems of our time. Formed in 1991, the World Community develops the vision of John Main by working to renew the contemplative dimension of Christian life and engaging in dialogue between faiths from the common ground opened by meditation.

In its three-year programme, Meditatio will host seminars and workshops on Education, Mental Health, Business and Finance, the Environment, Inter-religious friendship, and Citizenship.

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FOR YOUR NOTES