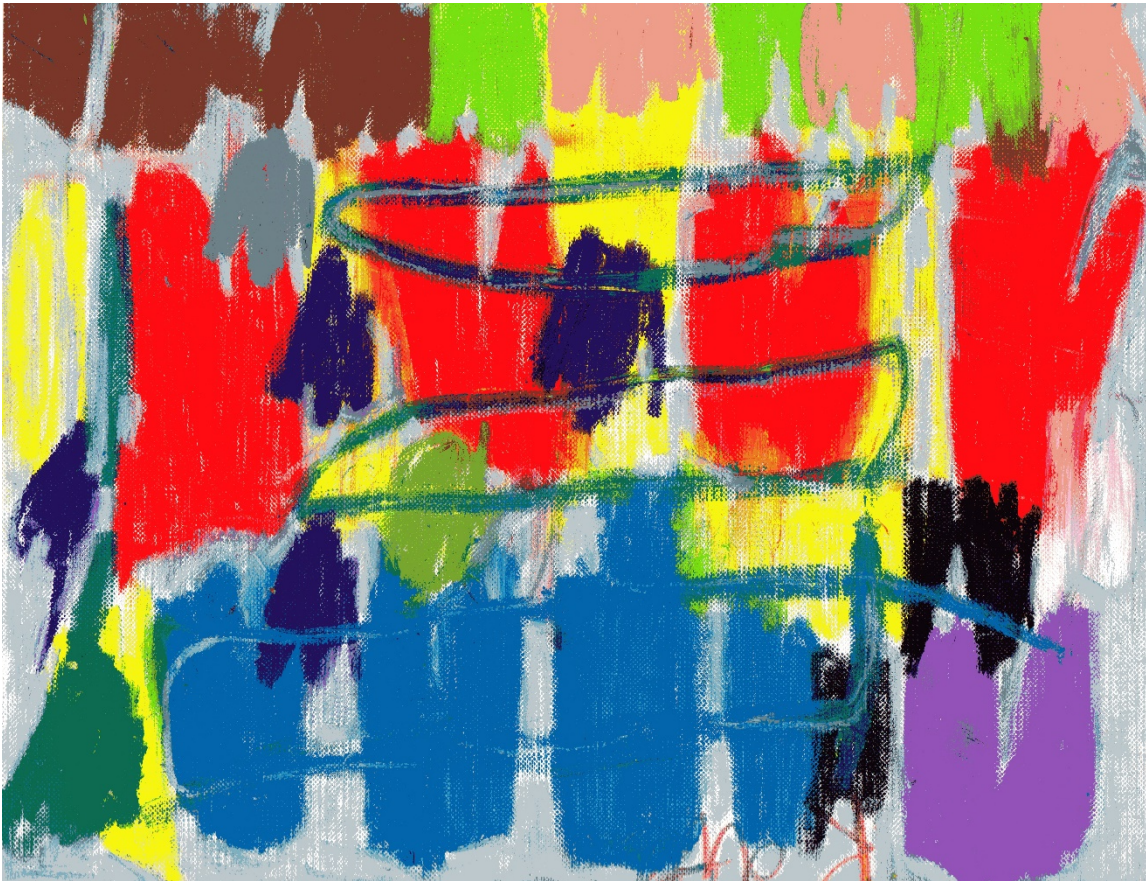


Silence *and* Encounter

Meditation in L'Arche



Hazel Bradley

Mary Kelly Robison

2021 Revised Edition

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All artwork by members of L'Arche Boston North, USA, unless otherwise noted.

Front cover artwork by Katie Benulis.



Jimmy Sawyer

Foreword

The friendship and collaboration between L'Arche and the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) expressed in this book can teach us much about the essential values needed to rebalance our turbulent world: interiority and relationship, contemplation and service.

We are both contemplative communities. We would add, we are also both active communities. We approach the center from different angles but there, in the heart of the human, we find a love that always shares itself. L'Arche represents the transformative power of compassion released by caring for the dignity of those who are marginal in this world. The World Community represents the power of love, touched in stillness and silence that overcomes the fear and isolation that block compassion and so keep us from enjoying the fullness of life with others.

When Jesus was asked when the kingdom of heaven would appear he said it could not be observed from the outside. In a L'Arche house, as in a meditation group or community, there are no observers only participants. Transformation happens when we give up the cold, isolated eye of the voyeur and instead see from the inside, seeing others in ourselves and ourselves in others.

Jesus added that the kingdom of heaven is (in the Greek) "*entos hymon*". This means both "*in you*" and "*amongst you*". Meditation creates community. Community deepens meditation. Relationship needs solitude. Solitude leads to relationship.

May this book help many in L'Arche go deeper into the life of community by meditating together. May it help many in the World Community to see that the gift we find in meditation expresses itself – inevitably – in love and service.

Laurence Freeman, OSB

*Director of The World Community
for Christian Meditation
and of the Bonnevaux Center for Peace*

<https://bonnevauxwccm.org/>

About this Book

This book comes from lived experience in both L'Arche and The World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM).

Part One: *Being With*, teaches the practice of Christian Meditation to those who wish to support people with intellectual disabilities.

Part Two: *Meditating Together*, teaches those who wish to lead groups of people with and without intellectual disabilities in Christian Meditation.

All of us who have worked together on this joint project hope that this book speaks to those who feel called to be attentive to the "other" and to learn the secret of relationship.

You can use **Part One** in assistant formation, a spiritual life group, or for personal reading. (In groups, it is important always to include an opportunity to meditate along with any teaching.)

Part Two may call to you as the way of beginning a Christian Meditation group for your entire community, including anyone with or without intellectual disabilities. If you begin here, you may then find some people being called to Part One, in order to deepen their personal experience.

The last section of Part Two, **An Easy-Read Guide to Meditation**, is written for L'Arche communities or any group that includes people with learning disabilities. You can photocopy the Easy-Read guide for anyone who might find it useful at home.

We also hope that this entire book will provide a way for WCCM meditators to get to know L'Arche, and that it will be an invitation for those in nearby L'Arche communities to meditate with them.



Meghan McCarthy



Frances Marchesini

The practical steps being taken to foster WCCM and L'Arche meditating is the most positive sign I have witnessed in over 40 years that L'Arche is essentially a contemplative community and will deepen as more and more of us practice contemplative prayer.

- George Strohmeier (Founder of L'Arche Erie, USA)

PART ONE

**Being With:
Christian Meditation and Selfless Attention**



Frances Marchesini

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Introduction to Part One

What is it that we need most in the world? Surely, it is love. So what is it that can put us on the path of loving and of being loved? In meditation, we practice a way for cultivating a selfless love that is inclusive, disciplined, and other-centered.

Christian Meditation is part of a perennial wisdom found in all major traditions. We can learn this discipline with or without reference to religion. Whatever approach we take, the discipline of a committed practice is the way towards realizing our spiritual harmony. Each of us can come to know a deeper reality, not through ideas, but from our own contemplative experience.

For those among us who consider ourselves Christians, religiously or culturally, it is important to learn that there is a long-hidden but unbroken tradition of meditation since the time of the early Christians. Jesus himself was a teacher of contemplation. John Main, OSB, was one of those who recovered and adapted this tradition for our times. This book introduces the practice of Christian Meditation as taught by him. Within L'Arche homes where people with and without intellectual disabilities live together, the practice of meditation can align with the nature of L'Arche. This essential nature is learning to pay selfless attention to the other, and to the Other.

Part One: *Being With*, is a complement to **Part Two: *Meditating Together***. I offer Part One to all those in L'Arche who gather together with people with intellectual disabilities to experience the silence, stillness and simplicity of Christian Meditation. For meditators without intellectual disabilities, Part One helps to deepen an understanding about fidelity in saying the mantra. This discipline of meditating with a mantra gradually develops the "muscle" of attention in the midst of lives full of uncertainty and distraction. In this way, we can develop the sensibility to "be with" rather than "do for".

As a Christian Meditator, my practice is grounded in my faith and tradition. However, meditation is experiential and universal. The Christian references in this book are selected to highlight the universality and inclusiveness of this experience. Thus, I hope everyone, of any faith or of none, will feel welcome to experience the beauty of this tradition.

Mary Kelly Robison

Benedictine Oblate of the World Community

for Christian Meditation

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How to Meditate: *The Fidelity of Saying the Mantra*

Sit down comfortably, still and upright. Close your eyes lightly.

Silently, interiorly, begin to say a single word. For most beginners, a good word to use is "Maranatha." Recite it as four syllables of equal length: MA-RA-NA-THA. Become aware of the repeated short sound of the vowel "A", becoming like a harmonic tone.

Breathe normally and give your full attention to the mantra as you say it, gently but continuously. Don't think or imagine anything -- spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions during the time of meditation, so keep returning simply to saying the word. Don't judge your progress.

Meditate twenty to thirty minutes each morning and evening. Start with what is achievable and gradually increase your time.



Christine D'Amonville



Meghan McCarthy

Preparing to Meditate

Facilitating a Meditation Session

1. Welcome everyone into a quiet space, with a candle and possibly flowers or an icon in the center.
2. Use a sensory stilling exercise from Part Two, if desired. (See p. 45.)
3. Share aloud to the group: "In this way of meditation, we learn to use a mantra with precision. The repetition of our mantra is a tool for the busy mind to find its natural stillness. We will begin our time together by listening to the simple teaching for this practice". Read aloud "How to Meditate", p. 4.
4. Then, say: "Before we begin to meditate, we will give our bodies time to settle physically. This guided experience of 'Finding One's Seat' will be followed by a gong sounded three times to start the meditation period. There will also be a gong sounded three times at the end of meditation, to enable us to emerge gently from the silence. Tell the group how long

the meditation period will be (perhaps 10 minutes at the first sessions, then lengthening to 15-20 minutes, then perhaps to 30, as meditators gain experience).

5. Read aloud "Finding One's Seat", from p. 7.
6. Use the **WCCM Meditation app**, available for both Android and IOS devices, to a gong sound and set the meditation timer.
7. Gong/Time of meditation/Gong.
8. Close the session by reading aloud the following (or the Closing Prayer on p. 9).

*Above all, it is our commitment to the discipline of meditation
that helps us to realize that meditation is not a technique for self-improvement,
but a self-giving practice.*

Silence means letting go of thoughts.

Stillness means letting go of desire.

Simplicity means letting go of self-analysis.

Daily practice may take you some time to develop.

Be patient with yourself.

When you give up, start again.

A weekly meditation group can be a source of support and encouragement for you.

*The fruits of meditation will begin to pervade your mind
and every aspect of your life in ways that will teach and delight you.*

Peace be with you.

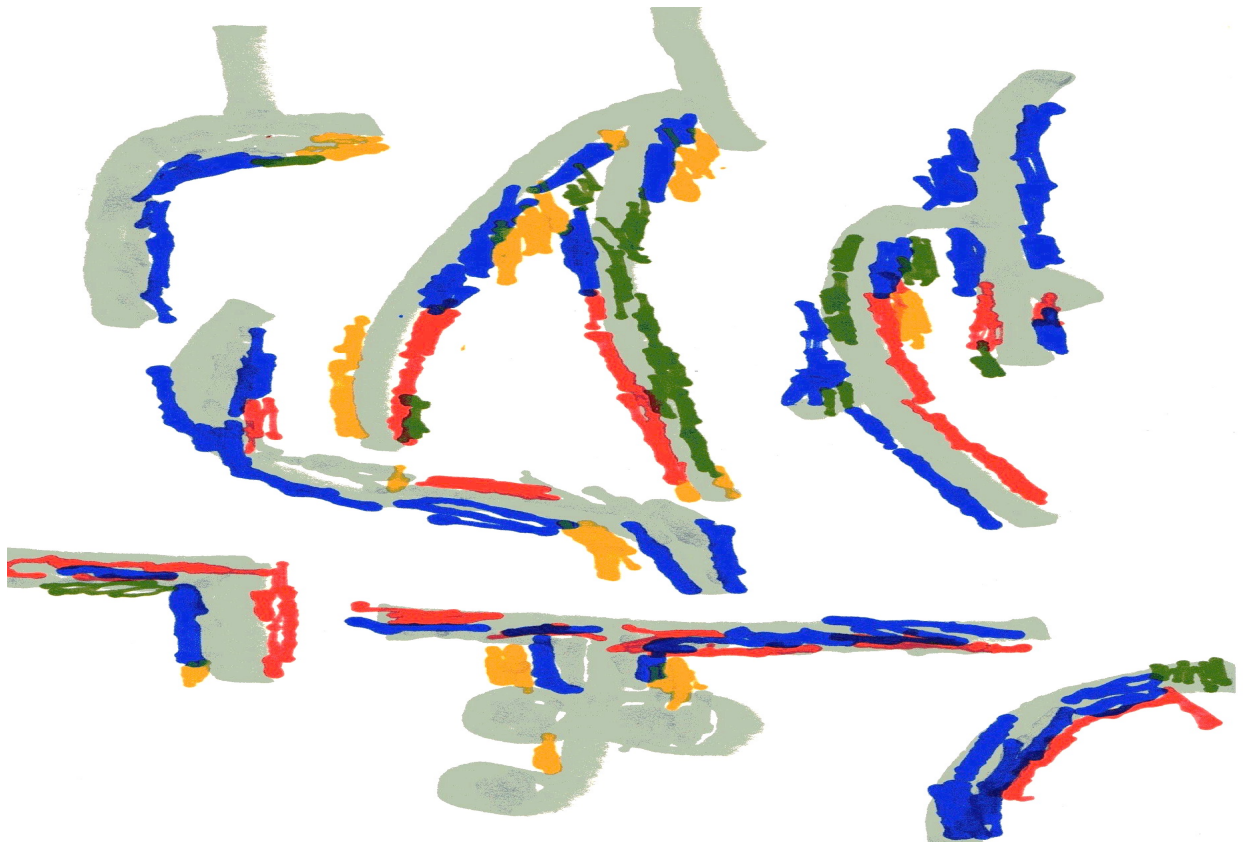
9. Let the group know that: "It is always appropriate to leave the meditation in silence".
10. Have copies of the Teachings 1-8 available for people to take with them.

Meditation creates community. - John Main

Finding One's Seat

Let's take a few moments before we begin to meditate,
to let go of anything that may be trying to pull us away mentally or physically,
and allow ourselves to simply settle,
to find our seat.

Here we can experience our contact with the ground,
and with the force of gravity,
that leads us into a greater sense of groundedness, of connection, of belonging.
This leads us to find greater stability and stillness.



Tom Degan

Within this stillness we can bring our awareness to our natural breathing,
with nothing to force, nothing to change.

We simply observe our natural breathing.

We welcome it in . . . and we let it go . . .

And, as we observe our natural breathing
we may begin to notice that it naturally begins to deepen
helping us to become more even more grounded.

We may also notice that our natural breathing helps
to soften us and to expand us from the inside.

Within this greater sense of space, our spine is free
to find its own way to become naturally erect,
and become for us the support that it's meant to be.

Our heart center can brighten and expand.

Within this experience of being grounded *and* upright,
stable *and* expansive, relaxed *and* alert, at the same time,
we can begin to let our mind float down into our heart.

* * * * *

Closing Prayer

May this group be a true spiritual home for the seeker, a friend for the lonely, a guide for the confused.

May those who meditate here be strengthened to serve all who come, and to receive them with selfless attention, which is love.

In the silence of this room may all the suffering, violence, and confusion of the world encounter the power that will console, renew and uplift the human spirit. May this silence be a power to open the hearts of men and women to true being, so that we may be open to the hearts of each other, in love and peace, justice and human dignity. May the beauty of life fill this group and the hearts of all who meditate here, with joyful hope.

May all who come here weighed down by the problems of humanity, leave giving thanks for the wonder of human life.

Peace be with you.



Katie Benulis

1 - Paying Attention

The beauty of sensory-stilling exercises, such as in Part Two of this book, is that through them we can discover the possibility of being *relaxed and alert* at the same time -- that physical relaxation and mental focus are something we can actually experience now, as a way of coming into the present moment.

Being in the present moment, and not just our *idea* of the present moment, is where meditation will lead us. We come into the present moment by paying attention. And, as our attention moves from our head to our heart, we come into a deeper reality.

Unfortunately, we do not have to look very far to realize the distracting elements of our modern culture that can make a calm focus difficult. There is so much importance given to multi-tasking, dependence on electronic devices, influence of all kinds of media, information overload, consumerism. And, even without these things there is the cultural tendency towards analyzing, judging, worrying, complicating -- that is, being pre-occupied with our thoughts and feelings that are perhaps dominated by an insecure ego -- to the point where our body is agitated and our mind is stressed.

Is this all that human consciousness consists of? I think that our experience at L'Arche tells us that it is not.

Meditation, in the tradition as recovered and adapted by John Main, OSB, uses the repetition of a mantra, sometimes simply called a "word", to cut through our typical mental activity -- thoughts, images, distractions -- that familiar level of consciousness that we sometimes mistake for our very identity. This is why it is so important that meditation helps us learn to pay attention *by taking the searchlight of consciousness off ourselves*. Thus, meditation leads us from our head to our heart, where love -- our true identity -- abides.

The mantra is a *tool* for learning to pay attention, and we learn to use it with precision. We repeat the mantra from the beginning to the end of our meditation, *and return to it whenever we have strayed*. We give up our mental fixations as best we can, always willing to return to the mantra and begin again. Above all, we need to learn what it means to *practice without judging ourselves*. Brought this way into the depth of our own heart, we go beyond our self-centeredness, so that our experience can become unself-conscious, and open to a reality beyond our accustomed states of mind.

There is, in fact, nothing to accomplish or achieve in meditation. It is not just another method for "self-improvement". We gradually learn to let go of our expectations and to ignore any "experiences". We need make no judgments. These would all be self-conscious distractions at

the time of meditation. Meditation is simply a loving discipline of selfless attention. Practicing meditation is simple, but not easy.

In the spirit of simplicity, the only real “progress” to make in meditation is in a commitment to the practice of saying the mantra on a regular basis. Anything else would be trying to control the process, and make it complicated, putting the ego and the intellect back in control. We can see that choosing to point our attention toward the mantra and thus away from our mental conditioning, from our ego, is an important choice -- maybe even a life-changing one.



Debbie Essler

2 - Saying the Mantra

What is “the mantra”? How can a *word*, a continuously repeated word, possibly lead us into inner silence? And, does the word we choose to say as our mantra matter?

“Mantra” is a Sanskrit term, meaning a word or sound repeated silently and interiorly, to help with calm focus in meditation. Early Christian teachers of meditation referred to such a word as a “formula”, and today we might say “prayer word” or “sacred word”. As an aid to calm focus in meditation, the mantra serves us as a tool. It is a sturdy tool because it can help us cut through the surface layer of our consciousness (thoughts, images, distractions), and bring our awareness deep into the mystery of our being. And, it is also a delicate tool, one we use gently, being gentle with ourselves, letting go of judgments about how we are doing with saying our mantra, and letting go of any expectations about meditation.

What mantra should we use? Consider choosing a word that is sacred in your own tradition. A recommended word for beginners of Christian Meditation is “Maranatha”, said as four syllables of equal length: MA-RA-NA-THA, meaning, “the Lord comes”, in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. But, in meditation *we don’t think about the meaning of our word*. Rather, in the silent, interior repetition of our word, we learn to *listen to the sound of it*. Notice the repeated sound of the vowel, “A”, in “Maranatha”. We can think of that continuous tone like a harmonic, a harmonic sounding in our own hearts, helping us come into harmony with ourselves, and, so, coming into harmony with our deepest being, and with each other.

Suggestions for other sacred words in the Judeo-Christian tradition might be “AB-BA” (Jesus’ intimate name for his Father), or “RU-AH” (Hebrew for “spirit, breath”). Choose a word with a sacred quality, a harmonic sound that does not incite thoughts or images. And then, *stick with it*.

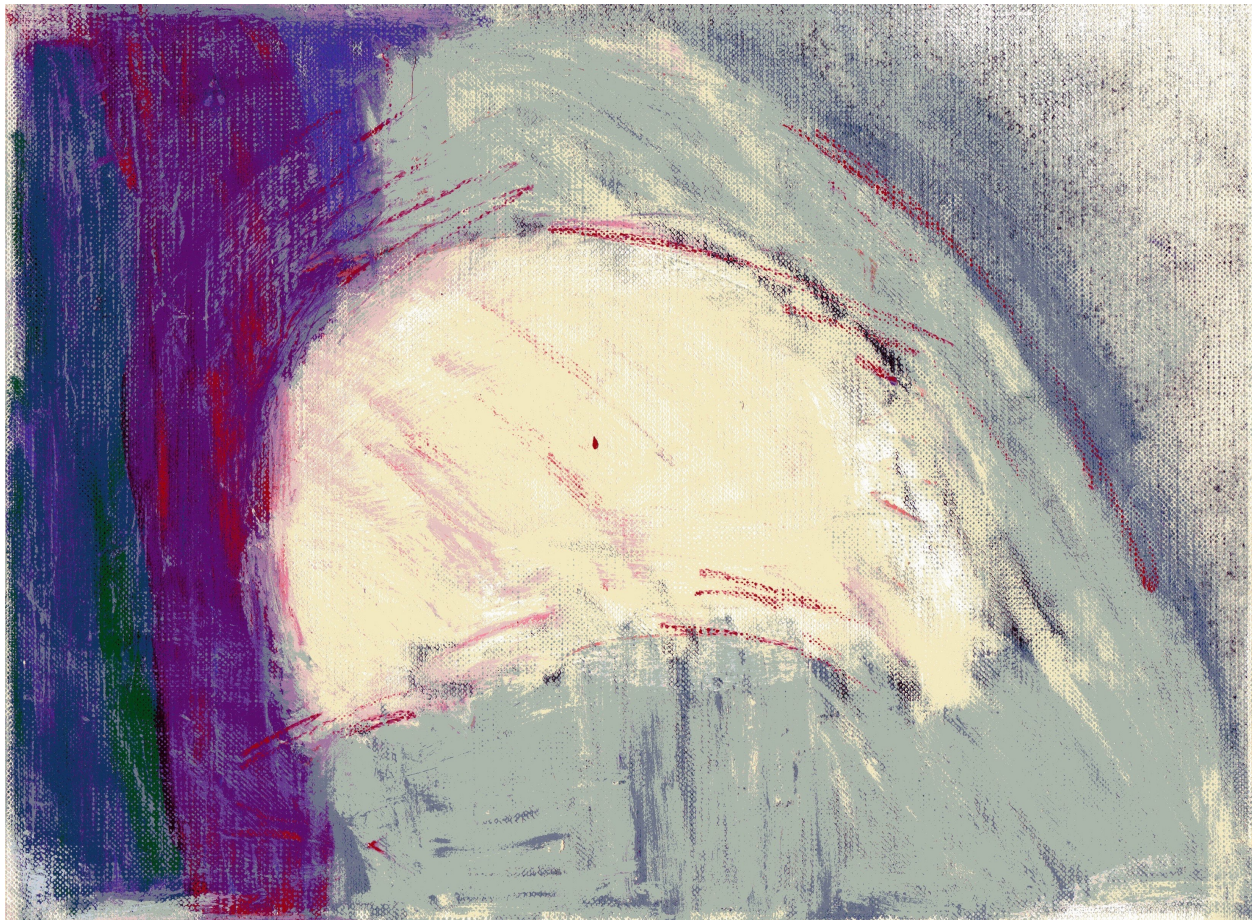
The mantra helps us to create inner silence, stillness, and simplicity. These are imperative conditions on the path of getting to know ourselves inwardly, essentially.

But whatever our reasons might be for meditating, we must be willing to let go of all them, -- willing to let go of our ego’s efforts to control -- so that our consciousness can learn to shift from **intention** to **attention**. The intention to meditate is good, but it is only a beginning, and one that we may have to return to often. The mantra puts us on the path beyond our intentions, towards pure attention -- an attention that can be called *selfless*. Beyond our superficial layers of consciousness, beyond our ego, is where we discover our True Self.

So, we practice saying the mantra with fidelity and gentleness. We let go of distracting thoughts or images, even “holy” ones. If we become frustrated with “how we’re doing” with saying our word, if we realize we’ve stopped saying our word, if we find ourselves pleasantly “floating”

instead of saying it, we return, gently, to saying the mantra. There is no limit to the times we can begin again. In meditation we are always beginners.

Learning to say the mantra faithfully, for the whole period of meditation, takes time. Developing a discipline of meditating twice a day, for 20-30 minutes each time, is necessary to allow the mantra to become a tool of transformation. We need to learn patience, discipline, and even humility in the meantime. We may not think we are good at these things, but we are not relying solely on our good intentions. We need confidence and endurance, trusting that our deepest being is calling out to us, and will sustain us on the way.



Katie Benulis



Dan Gallant

3 - The True Self

What is the personal secret that we call “The True Self”? That which we call the True Self points beyond all thoughts, words, images, even feelings, to an *experience* that transforms what we mean by the word “self”.

It might be easier to grasp what the True Self is about, if we think of what it means to “get in touch with ourselves”. We intuit that this means an awareness beyond the familiar, surface level of consciousness to a knowing that includes every aspect of our being.

We are so accustomed to giving our full attention to the busy-ness of our minds, that we can easily start to identify with whatever we think -- our thoughts and feelings can seem to be the ingredients of our sense of self. We may never stop to think how transient these ingredients are, and that there may be a consciousness, a state of existence, a reality that completely eclipses our thinking mind.

So, to find our “True Self”, we need to be willing to give up our small, familiar sense of self, or at least to suspend our dependence on it for a while. To be willing to do this requires an openness to a discipline, which is what the mantra gives us. It also requires faith in some kind of creative force that contains the universe and keeps it running. This creative force is something larger than ourselves that is calling out to us. Placing our trust in this call can put us on the way of the mantra. This is where we can downshift from the mental overdrive that we use to pursue a false sense of “being in control”. We allow ourselves, instead, to enter into a more fundamental relationship with our Source.

In saying the mantra we allow ourselves to venture forth on a disciplined path. In time, our knowledge of who we are, why we are here, of what it means “to exist”, will not simply be “notional,” that is, not simply made up of words and ideas. The mantra will lead us on a journey of discovery towards our True Self, so that we will be able to know who we are *from our own experience*. Our True Self is to be found in the silent depths of our heart, in relationship to our Source.

4 - Relationship

"What is it that we need most in the world?" Consider that the discipline of meditation shifts us toward *right relationship* with all of life. At first, we are guided to come into touch with our True Self, our essence beyond ideas and images. This leads us to come into touch with the Source of divine energy that gives us life that sustains us, that can give our life meaning and purpose.

Moreover, it is in relationship to our Source that we discover that we are already loved. And because of this, we are able to love others.



Christine D'Amonville

We are able to love because God first loved us into being. This is our source, and the source of mutually transformative relationships. In the expansion of our own heart we may find that we become more alert to the hearts of others. As we learn to pay attention to what is authentic in

ourselves, we learn to pay attention to what is authentic in others. Right relationship has no bounds -- right relationship with our True Self, with our Source, with others, with all of creation.

As we persevere in meditation, we may begin to experience the fruits of practice, a shift taking place in our daily lives. We may notice over time that we become more patient, more kind, more aware of the needs of others. A greater sense of compassion or feeling of peace may come to us. We may realize how people who are intellectually disabled, and others who are already more grounded in their hearts, seem to have been waiting for those who are constantly busy and distracted to settle into a stillness and quiet with them. We may sense a connection with the unifying energy that sustains us and all of life. Our priorities and purpose may begin to clarify. We may develop an awareness of where we choose to place our attention. All of this is pure gift.

This gift of becoming more authentically ourselves is how meditation creates that aspect of human life that is essential for growth: community. In the practice of selfless attention, meditation purifies our vision, helps us to see a reality beyond our ideas, and so recognize our essential communion with each other.

5 - Contemplation

As we persevere in meditation, we may begin to notice that simply being side by side with someone, quietly and undistractedly, with no thoughts of self, can become a sacred moment. A smile, a gaze, a touch can radiate a sense of peace and connection with another.

Meditation helps us to discover this gift from the depth of our own being. From this depth we also recognize the depth of being in another. And thus, together we may be flooded with the constantly renewing love that comes from our Source. This is a contemplative consciousness. It can occur in the most ordinary of moments.

In fact, such peace of mind is fundamental to our being.

At this point, it might help to clarify how the discipline of meditation, as we have been looking at it, relates to the experience of contemplation. For our purposes, let me suggest that meditation might be seen as a *practice*, leading toward contemplation, a *state of being*.

How we practice meditation, then, becomes very important, if we are to move, or to be moved, toward a truer state of being. It is the all-important shift from *intention*, even our best intentions, to the *pure attention* of saying the mantra. It is this shift toward pure attention that leads us to an expansion of spirit, in which we can receive the gift of contemplation.

A key word that connects the community of L'Arche with the World Community of Christian Meditation is *contemplation*. Contemplation refers to a state of being, a state of pure attention. This state can change the way that we perceive time. Both contemplation and being with people who are disabled, for instance, can slow down time, and give us the opportunity to listen deeply and with selfless attention. This is a kind of prayer, this act of taking time, of remaining, of abiding with.

However, it may help to point out that both prayer and contemplation are not necessarily religious words, but universal spiritual beatitudes of inner silence, of resting in the heart, of being selflessly attentive and responsive to the presence beyond one's self.

Each of us has a potential for selfless attention that can reveal our contemplative nature. This means we have the potential for being *with*, rather than doing *for*. An "experience of God" has a relevance far beyond doing good things for people with disabilities. They can be a source of illumination for us, the community and the world.

We all have a contemplative birthright that can be recovered with faith and discipline. And, there is perhaps no better place than in a community of mutually transformative relationships, to discover the mystical meaning of life.



Meghan McCarthy

6 - Personal Experience

The mystical meaning of life is not merely a set of concepts. If the ultimate truths of love, life and relationship were just concepts, then they would be no more than fictions. However, as the fruits of selfless attention emerge in our lives, we can begin to see beyond the limits of our “notions” about reality, and come, in time, to verify reality *in our own experience*.

For instance, in my Christian faith, I am taught that the human consciousness of Jesus dwells in my heart, and that it is through Jesus that I am united with God, the Father. In speaking to his apostles about his resurrection after death, Jesus says, “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20). To me, at one time, that sounded like an abstraction, maybe even a kind of a diagram. But through fidelity to the mantra, guiding me to place my attention in my heart, I am understanding the plan of God to draw me nearer to the indwelling presence of Christ. The unifying energy of love is no longer an abstraction. In other words, what had been notional for me is becoming experiential.

In this way, I can experience *being already loved* in the deepest part of myself, and so find the longing and the conviction to extend love to others. This does not discount my human imperfections, and certainly not my many distractions at the time of meditation, but it does alter the balance of my being toward a simple unity in my heart, rather than toward the complexity of my mind. As we become sources of this conscious, loving energy in the world, all of humanity expands its potential to live from the depths.

If we are going to become conscious people in the world, we will need to be people who know from our own experience how to pay attention beyond self-centered preoccupations. In many ways, living and working with men and women with intellectual disabilities can help us to discover this directly. We may experience a sense of loss as we lose reliance on our familiar ideas, opinions, and points of view, but what we gain is confidence in the riches of simplicity and other-centeredness.



Christine D'Amonville

7 - Poverty of Spirit

What can meditation teach us about being poor? What might we learn from the words of Jesus when he said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit”? (Matt. 5:3). Is this a phrase romanticizing poverty, or a kind of riddle?

From the very beginning, meditation challenges us to give up trying to be in firm control of our habits of thought, our acculturation, our surface consciousness, our accustomed sense of identity. We are also asked to give generously of ourselves, to be humble and patient and faithful in practice, to prioritize time for meditation, and persevere even when we don’t feel like it. We are asked to shift from a primarily material consciousness, to a deeper, eternal one. We are asked to give our all to saying the mantra.

This self-emptying can perhaps be understood as a voluntary poverty. And, in this process we will likely also discover our insecurities, our inadequacies, conditions that make us feel frightened or weak in their own right.

If saying the mantra were only a practice of poverty we could easily lose heart. But the mantra is poverty and paradox. In giving up much, we gain much more. With commitment to the discipline, we become free to discover that silence is not a void. We discover that we can have a light step on the path to our deepest Self. Our spirit expands as we respond with openness to the call of our Source.

Poverty of spirit becomes a detachment from whatever keeps our spirit from experiencing its natural joy. So, by becoming poor in spirit, we become rich in joy.

The full beatitude that Jesus spoke was, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Meditation teaches us that heaven is not a place nor an idea nor a myth. Heaven is the experience of being fully alive, within ourselves and among a communion of hearts, here and now.



Katie Benulis

8 - Purity of Heart

As a practice of selfless attention, saying the mantra is a sure and simple guide to coming into relationship with our True Self, with our Source, and with each other. As meditation is a way of selflessness, or poverty of spirit, it leads to purity of heart.

Our heart is purified by silence, stillness, and simplicity, as the saying of the mantra cleanses our consciousness. In this process, we experience the paradox of what it means to “lose our life” in order to find it (Matt. 6:25). This demands a great giving up of the limits and distractions that our ego imposes on us. Notions of who we think we are, are replaced with recognition of our True Self.

The fruits of meditation grow from pure heart. We may not even notice at first that we are becoming more patient, more kind, more compassionate, better listeners, more tolerant, more aware of the stream of loving energy that constantly sustains us. These fruits of meditation are also known as the fruits of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22-23).

Every person alive, no matter what their ability or disability, has the capacity to grow in selflessness, and to manifest these fruits. Every part of ourselves, from head to heart to body, can become radiant with the brightness of the Spirit. And in this way, one heart communicates to another by “being with”. That is, I believe, what we mean when we say that L’Arche is a place where mutually transformative relationships can grow.



Meghan McCarthy

How to Find an Online Meditation Group

Meditating online may seem a surprising and unlikely way to meditate. But, in fact, members of WCCM, and now also members of L'Arche, are discovering the potential of the internet to create a supportive silence and community among meditators. Online meditation has been helping us to realize the purpose of our L'Arche/WCCM Interaction to enhance the contemplative lives of both communities.

It is enriching that both communities are international in membership, which means that with online meditation we are connecting locally within our own communities as well as with those around the world.

In short, online meditation works.

For information about how you and/or your community can participate, please contact us at: larche.interaction@wccm.org

Further Resources

L'Arche/WCCM Interaction Webpage: <https://wccm.org/outreach-areas/social-justice/>

WCCM International Website: <http://wccm.org/> for more information about Christian Meditation, and a rich collection of audio and video resources with many links on the home page. This website is also a resource for finding physical meditation groups and retreats.

Look especially for two talks by Laurence Freeman:

<https://soundcloud.com/wccm/sets/finding-oneself-1>

<https://soundcloud.com/wccm/sets/finding-oneself-2>

For more teaching resources: <http://wccm.org/content/school-meditation>

John Main and The World Community for Christian Meditation

John Main, OSB (1926-1982) was an English Benedictine monk. As a young man in the Foreign Service in Malaya, he learned how to meditate from a Hindu swami, who taught him how to use a mantra as a Christian. Later, as a monk, he realized that Christianity has its own long-hidden but unbroken tradition of taking a word or a phrase and repeating it to clear the mind of thoughts and “to rest in God”.

This realization helped him to recover and adapt ancient Christian teachings about contemplative prayer that had been largely forgotten.

Fr. John understood that a tradition of contemplative prayer is not merely for religious specialists, but for all of us. We all have, at heart, a contemplative dimension, and we all long for union with our Source. He believed that the world sorely needs people who can learn to live consciously, and so he sought to teach anyone who came to him how to practice the discipline of Christian Meditation.

His work lives on in The World Community for Christian Meditation, a worldwide network of meditators and meditation groups, including people from all walks of life who are faithful to the unchanging simplicity of his essential teaching.

Today, the worldwide work of WCCM is directed by Laurence Freeman, OSB. WCCM is refurbishing an ancient monastery, Bonnevaux, near Poitiers, France, as a new contemplative and meditation retreat center to help make the world more peaceful.

www.bonnevauxwccm.org

Brief Readings from John Main

Any one of the following passages, taken from the book, *Silence and Stillness in Every Season: Daily Readings with John Main*, can be read aloud to an appropriate group, prior to ringing the bell at the start the meditation period.

* * * * *

A way of limitless life requires on our part, openness, generosity and simplicity. Above all, it requires commitment. Not commitment to a cause or ideology but commitment in our own lives to the simplicity of the daily return to the roots of our own existence, a commitment to respond to life with attention, to create the space in our own lives to live fully. What we learn in meditation, in the silence of it and in the simplicity of it, is that we have nothing to fear from the commitment to creating this space.

* * * * *

I think all of us fear commitment because it seems to be a reducing of our options. We say to ourselves, "Well, if I commit myself to meditating, then I'll not be able to do other things." But I think what all of us find is that this fear dissolves in the actual commitment to be serious, to be open, to love not out of the shallows of our being, but out of its depth. What we all find in the experience of meditation is that our horizons are expanding, not contracting, and we find, not constraint, but liberty.

* * * * *

Never forget the purity of heart involved in saying the mantra. Faithfulness to the mantra from the beginning to the end of every meditation brings us to this simplicity and innocence because it enables us to leave self behind. The confidence to proclaim Christ, the discretion needed to see how we should do this today, and the courage to witness to Christ from our own experience of him, arise from our fidelity to meditation each day and to the mantra.

* * * * *

There is nothing less shining in our hearts than the glory of Christ. That glory is not triumphalist but it does triumph over hearts hardened by the wounds of life. Poverty, purity, simplicity are strange weapons to minds trained on images and values of violence. But our survival, spiritually and even physically, depends upon our recovering an awareness of the redeeming power of these qualities of humanity. This is the way of the mantra.

* * * * *

Set your mind on the kingdom before everything else and all else will be given to you as well, says the Gospel (Matt. 6:33). The fact that we are, in our most real being, rooted in the silence of this center seems to us the most elusive truth of our life. But the problem is our distractedness, our possessiveness. In fact the Spirit waits patiently for us in its own eternal stillness. Our pilgrimage of meditation teaches us that in spirit and in truth we are there already, with our Father who has called us to be there, who created us to be there and who loves us to be there.

* * * * *

One of the things that we must clearly understand is that meditation, this pursuit of wisdom and love, must take place in an entirely ordinary, natural way. Meditation must be built in to the ordinary fabric of everyday life. We must learn to see the whole of life shot through with the divine, in harmony with the divine. We must also understand that it is our destiny to enter this divine harmony, to be in harmony with God. It is not a question of trying to fit a bit of spirituality into our lives. The spiritual quest, the permanent spiritual invitation is getting our lives, ourselves, into permanent focus with the ultimate truth, ultimate goodness. Not in any self-important or exploitative way but in a very simple, childlike way. It is by being still, by paying attention and by becoming mindful of the one who loves us.

* * * * *

Consider all the innumerable things that can go wrong in our lives. Then reflect, what can undo these catastrophes? What can heal the inevitable wounds? In every case the answer is "the power of love." Love it is that heals, that makes new, that fills us with hope, that delivers us from the prison of our own egoism. In meditation we learn to be still, to be calm, to be recollected and to become aware of the love of God's presence in our hearts. This awareness arises from his revelation, not our manipulation. What we have to do, though, is to be still. His presence is not just another theory, some speculative theology. It is a dynamic personal presence that is to be found in the heart of each one of us, found if only we will be still. Stillness is the door through which we enter the state of transcendence that leads us into the greater reality.

* * * * *

The most important thing to remember is that there is only the prayer of Jesus. This is *the* prayer. His prayer is the torrent of love and power flowing continuously between Jesus and the Father, and that is the Spirit.

... The extraordinary mystery about Christianity is that although we can never understand it we can experience this river of love that pours itself out in the Spirit, and as the Spirit, between Jesus and the Father. We can experience it through the human consciousness of Jesus. This ability to share His consciousness is the Spirit's great gift to us. Indeed it is the meaning of redemption.

Our salvation is precisely that in His human consciousness we are delivered out of our own egotism and isolation. The crucifying sense of our separateness and alienation is penetrated and dispelled by the rising within us of the knowledge of our oneness: one with ourselves, with others, one with the One who *is*. Delivered from our egotistical sense of separateness we enter the mystery of God as we travel in that stream of love.

* * * * *

In meditation, by learning to say your mantra, you learn to trust, you learn to be. Indeed the joy of meditation is that it is a celebration of being, a celebration of sheer joy in receiving our life as gift, and doing what [William] Blake called kissing "the joy as it flies". Prayer is not possessing, not controlling but sheer celebration of being. We come to this celebration because meditation leads us to centeredness, to the still point. In each person there is a still point that is me but is not *exclusively* me. What you will learn from your own experience in meditation is that there is only one center, which is the center in all centers. This is the understanding we come to in meditation, again out of our own experience, of the profound unity of being, the unity that is in us and the unity in which we have our being.

* * * * *

This command comes to us from Christ Himself: that he who loves God must also love his neighbor (John 13:34-35). Let us be quite clear what St John is saying, namely that we cannot love God *or* our neighbor. We love both or neither. And what love means is rejoicing in the otherness of the other because the depth of this awareness is the depth of our communion with the other. In this communion the discovery of our own true self and that of the other is the same discovery. So, in the people we live with we find not objects to be cast in our own superficial likeness but, much more, we find in them our true selves, for our true selves only appear, only become realized when we are wholly turned towards another.

In meditation we develop our capacity to turn our whole being towards the Other. We learn to let our neighbor be just as we learn to let God be. We learn not to manipulate our neighbor but rather to reverence him, to reverence his importance, the wonder of his being; in other words, we learn to love him. Because of this, prayer is the great school of community. In and through a common seriousness and perseverance in prayer we realize the true glory of Christian community.

* * * * *

The children who come [...] to meditate are a marvellous witness of the naturalness of this way of meditation. They are a real example for the adults who come. They show the essentially childlike quality that we need to tread the way. 'Unless you become like little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven' (Mark 10:15). It is a simple way. Its simplicity is its great challenge to us because we are trained to seek the truth, for accuracy, only in complexity. It is a simple but not necessarily an easy way. It requires trust and perhaps indeed a certain

recklessness to begin and it requires courage to persevere, but all we have to lose are our own limitations.

* * * * *

St Peter tells us of the importance of holding the Lord Christ in reverence in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15). Rooted in Him we are rooted in the principle of all life, in reality itself, and, founded in Him, nothing else has ultimate power over us, not even death itself. [...]

Our Christian life is not just a question of finding a way of getting through our lives. Every word of the New Testament suggests to us that it is of supreme importance that we live our lives in a state of continuous expansion, expansion of heart and expansion of Spirit, growing in love and becoming more firmly rooted in God. Each of us has to understand our potential, that we *are* an expanding universe, and so each of us possesses the potential for an energy-expansion that is not less than infinite.

* * * * *

PART TWO

Meditating Together



An Icon of Friendship

made in L'Arche London, UK

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*In our meditation we seek to be;
to be who we are and to come into the presence of God
who is as he is...*

- John Main

Introduction

Two Benedictine sisters, Benedict and Aelred of Minster Abbey near Canterbury,

discovered the gift of meditation and their vocation to be contemplative sisters

through their friendship with John Grist, a man with intellectual disabilities.

John was a member of L'Arche Kent and communicated powerfully, but without words.

He taught many people how to rest in silence, how to be present,

how to pray without words, how to contemplate.

You can listen to their story on: <https://wccm.org/outreach-areas/social-justice/>

As Christians, we believe that Jesus is alive within us. When we meditate, we "sit" silently with him. There is no talking. It is a time to just "be", to rest in God as the early Christians described this way of praying. It is one of the deepest forms of prayer, a prayer of the heart, and is open to all irrespective of intellectual ability.

Yet for many people, silent prayer is hard and counter-cultural because we live in a very noisy world with many distractions. Often people with intellectual disabilities have a greater freedom to be present in the moment because they are less distracted. Less able to communicate verbally, they often love silence and can meditate with a trust and a faith which other people often struggle with. They can be naturally gifted in meditation, sometimes called the prayer of the heart, as they live already at the level of the heart. Their ability to be still and silent means that they have much to teach us about how to reconnect with our source, as John Grist taught Sisters Benedict and Aelred.

We all need tools to calm our intellect and to help us to pay attention, to be mindful of our inner source. The World Community for Christian Meditation, which has its roots in the mystical tradition and in the writings of early Christians, recommends the silent repetition in our hearts of a sacred prayer word, also called a mantra. They suggest the word, "Maranatha", four syllables pronounced evenly: MA – RA – NA – THA. It is Aramaic and means 'Come Lord'. Simpler words could be used such as Abba, Jesus, Peace, Love, Amen, Thank you. It is very

helpful to have a prayer word which does not bring to mind images or memories, since through meditation we practise leaving the self behind to enter into union with God.

Many people with intellectual disabilities do not use words. Most may not repeat a mantra in their heart. Our experience is that this doesn't matter. Some may be able to repeat a simple word such as those suggested here. Many are well able to rest in silence. The offer of the mantra is there, but whether people with intellectual disabilities use it or not, they are generally able to enter into the silence. What happens in the silence is up to God.

Sometimes, "silence" can be a relative word. It does happen that someone makes a noise or says something in the meditation period. It is helpful to introduce the meditation by telling people not to worry about any sound. Whether there is noise outside or inside the room, just let it go. Our experience is that people very quickly get the sense of silence. It is more a question of a sense of stillness rather than a complete absence of sound. The trick is to be very relaxed and open about what emerges rather than trying to shut down any sound.

When we are truly present to people with intellectual disabilities they can draw us into their silence and so into deep meditation. Encouraging each person to listen is a good way to help everyone be more present to the here and now.

Some people with intellectual disabilities may at times feel anxious in the silence, or there may be resistance. This can be expressed through sounds or fidgeting. Some people simply need a gentle acceptance which then frees them to relax into the silence. Encouragement or support from someone sitting close to them helps them to participate in the silence/prayer as fully as they can. It can help some people to be given a small task such as ringing the gong to signal the beginning and end of the period of silence, or helping to prepare the space, or lighting the candle. Experience shows that over time most people experience more peace in the silence and can be still and quiet. The leader needs to trust in the practice. Being still and silent with others is a great way of trust!

Sometimes however, a person may decide that they don't want to be present for the time of meditation or that it is not working for them. They can be gently invited to move to another room if they wish. The next time simply ensure that they have a choice about joining or not.

It is important that the leader has their own practice of Christian Meditation. The leader needs to be confident and skilled in leading a group. The more the leader can model in their own body and way of being a gentle groundedness and presence to each one in the group, the more people will be able to enter into meditation and feel safe and held. With groups of people with intellectual disabilities there may never be total silence. This is all right. There can be a quiet stillness in the midst of noise and if the leader models being still and quiet there will be no need to "shush" people during the meditation. Over the weeks silence becomes more and more familiar and safe.

It is recommended that any meditation group meet regularly, at the same time and in the same place. Once a week is good. Some people may even manage twice a day in their own home if supported well.

People in L'Arche London for some time now have practised meditation in the craft shop each Friday afternoon. One community member described meditation as something that has “transformed the relations in the craft shop”, where they work daily. Another person said that in L'Arche, “We always speak about equality but in meditation we experience it.”

N.B. See Part One of this book, *Being With: Christian Meditation and Selfless Attention*, for a resource to help group leaders.

Hazel Bradley

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Whatever you do in a state of communion, connection, love ... is prayer.

*When you're acting out of a state of conscious loving union with God,
with the person who's across from you, that's the deepest meaning of prayer.*

- Richard Rohr

*Meditation is the great way of trust. We sit down, we sit still,
we say our mantra with growing fidelity and trust our whole selves utterly to God.*

*We do that every morning and evening of our lives
and thus we learn to live out of the trust,
to live out of the love that faith reveals and liberates.*

- John Main



Frances Marchesini

An Outline for a Session of Christian Meditation *for a Group of People With and Without Intellectual Disabilities*

1. Creating a prayerful space

It is important to arrange a suitable prayer space where there will be no interruptions:

- *Put a "Do Not Disturb" notice on the door if it would help to prevent interruptions*
- *Choose a tidy space so there are few distractions*
- *Choose a place with no unnecessary noise*
- *If there is no special room consider creating the space around the dining table or in a corner of a room*
- *Place a lit candle in a candle holder on a beautiful cloth as a focal point and place some flowers or a plant and/or an icon (the Icon of Friendship or the Icon of the Trinity are good ones to use)*

Creating a multi-sensory sacred space really helps: lowered lighting, candle, incense, bell – convey in a bodily sense that this is a different space, a space for silence and encounter with God.

People with intellectual disabilities can help in setting up the space, for example, lighting the candle. Long matches are safer. If a participant is blind, s/he could have a small candle lit and held near them so they can feel the heat of the flame. The candle could then be positioned safely and at the end the person could blow the candle out.

It is helpful to use the same space and things each time so a familiar ritual is established. Following the same format in the same order each time also helps people to feel more at ease.

2. Welcoming everyone; sitting in a circle; explaining what is going to happen

Leader: Welcome everyone, especially visitors (*ask for names*) and (*name*) who missed the last session (*if this is relevant*).

Could we sit in a circle where we can all see one another? Help this to happen. Good, now we can all see each other.

How is everyone today? How do you feel? Did you notice the wind, (or the sun, or the rain ...) on your way here today?

[Name], would you be willing to help me ring the gong at the right time? Thank you.

It is good to do everything slowly, to allow plenty of time, to allow for gentle pauses and moments of silence throughout the session. A moment of silence and stillness at the beginning allows people to arrive and to settle quietly.

Check that everyone is comfortable: maybe someone is too hot and needs support to remove a jacket; someone else may need to sit near a friend they feel comfortable with; someone else may need help to sit facing into the circle. The more the leader knows the people in the group the better they will know how to be aware of and to respond to individual needs. If someone is anxious it is helpful to ensure there is someone close by to give the appropriate support. Remember: repeat the same things each week to develop a sense of familiarity which gives safety.

Leader: We are here to pray together in silence: we will begin by singing our song together. Then we will become aware of our bodies. After that we will listen to a story. Then we will sit together praying in silence for quite a while. After the silence we will say some prayers out loud for those who wish. We will end by saying the Lord's Prayer together.

Leader (if there is a blind person in the group): (Name), I am lighting a candle for the time of prayer. Can you feel the heat? I am putting it on the table/ground in front of you. You can blow it out at the end.



Christine D'Amonville

3. Singing a meditative song

A meditative song could be sung a few times to help people to center. This can become an important part of the ritual and so it can be helpful to always sing the same song, provided it remains fresh. A person with a learning disability might be happy to accompany the song with a musical instrument.

Leader: Now (Name) is going to help me sing our song, ".....".

4. Presenting a sensory stilling exercise (See p. 45 for some examples.)

We are embodied people and are not all blessed with a whole fully-functioning body. It might be important to give attention to the body before meditation if you meditate with people whose senses and ways of expression are partly limited.

Our physical posture is important: sitting in a way that is relaxed and comfortable helps people to be awake and alert. For those who can, it is helpful to close the eyes lightly.

For shorter people it can help to put a cushion under the feet, to support their legs comfortably and provide contact with the ground beneath.

Leader: Put your feet straight on the ground; stamp them a little to warm them. Now sit still. Feel your back on the chair. Sway a little on the chair forwards and backwards, and sideways, until you find a way to sit comfortably and upright.

I invite you to sit with your back as straight as you can. It really helps when you sit in silence to pray.

Let's warm our hands by rubbing them.

And now rub your fingers through your hair.

Now rest your hands comfortably on your laps.

In L'Arche Bognor Regis they find that sitting around a table and inviting people to lay their hands on the table in front of them helps people be still and centered, and lessens fidgeting.

Choose one of the sensory stilling exercises (see p. 45) and lead the group in this.

5. Reading a Bible story (See p. 47 for some examples.)

It can help to choose a short Bible story to tell or to read now. Feel free to find other stories than the examples given in this booklet and to use your own words. It is good to

tell the story directly to the listeners rather than reading it. Make the story short, simple and clear. Use short sentences with simple words. Explain why the story you chose is linked to the practice of meditation. Afterwards, ask what people heard in the story.

6. Becoming aware of one's breathing

Leader: I invite you now to become aware of your breathing,
and to know that God is loving you into life with each breath.

So now, breathe in,

And breathe out. *(Repeat three times.)*

An alternative, if people are able, can be to invite people to hold up the fingers of their left hand, then with their right index finger to slowly trace up and down the outside of each finger and the thumb of the left hand, breathing in as the finger moves up, and breathing out as the finger moves down.

7. Preparing for the time of silence

Leader: Now we will sit comfortably on our chairs. *(Show image 1, p. 55).*

It can help to put our hand on our heart. *(Show image 2, p 56).*

We are going to sit in silence for ... minutes. This means no talking. *(Show image 3, p. 57).*

If you find you are thinking about lots of things, it can help to say in the silence of your own heart a sacred word like: the word "Ma-ra-na-tha". It means, "Come Lord,"

OR the word "Ab-ba" which means "Daddy / Father". God is our Father.

Use only the word that is most suitable for your group: Maranatha or Abba. Don't change the word.

If it is helpful for your group you could practise repeating the word that might work for them. For example:

Shall we practise saying this word? Ma-ra-na-tha OR Ab-ba ...

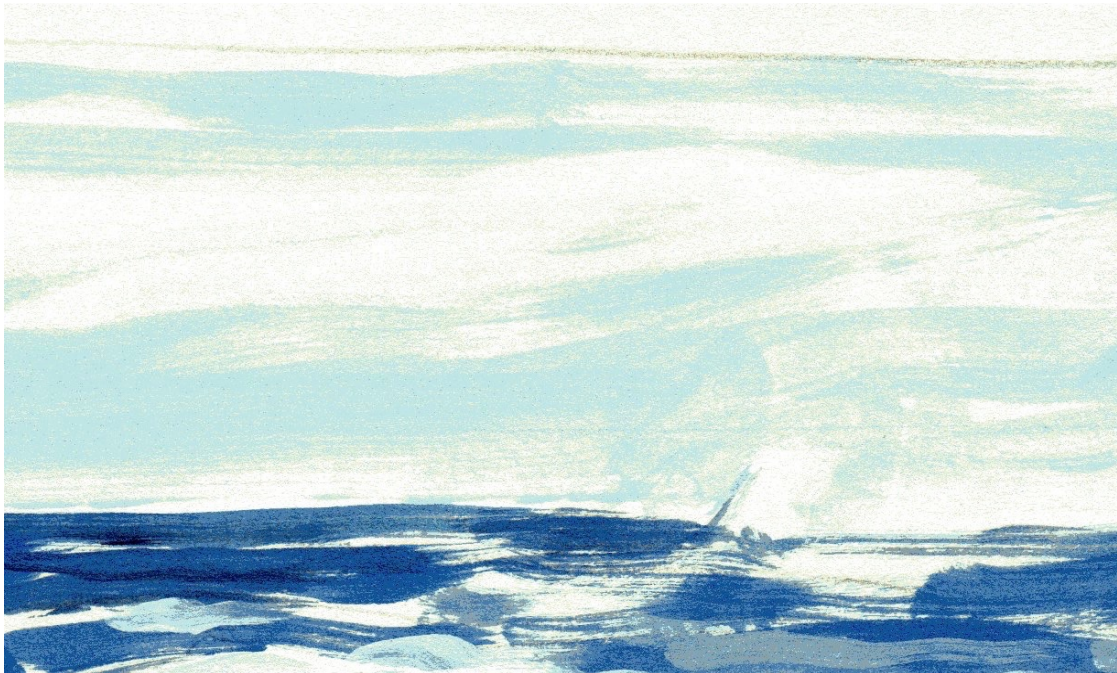
Now hear the word in your own mind in silence.

It is helpful for those who can to close their eyes. *(Show image 4, p. 58).*

8. Ring a gong three times to start the silence

Your group may use some other sound rather than a gong, or a CD can be used with the sound of a gong on it. There are also apps with the sound of a gong beginning and ending a period of silence. Do whatever works as a gentle signal for your group to begin and end the time of silence.

Leader: (Name) is going to help me ring the gong. (Name), hold the stick very lightly and tap the gong gently.



Frances Marchesini

9. Being silent

After the ringing of the gong, sit in silence for five, ten, fifteen, or even twenty minutes with some more experienced groups. The first times could be just for five minutes. Gradually increase the time depending on the capacity of the group.

10. Ring a gong three times to end the silence

Quietly go to the person who helped ring the gong at the beginning, and then gently tap them on the shoulder to get their attention.

Leader: (Name), Can you help me ring the gong again? Gently

11. Inviting those who wish to pray out loud

Leader: We will now take some time if anyone would like to say a prayer out loud or you can say your own prayer in the silence of your hearts.

Everyone can respond to each prayer with 'Amen.'

12. Saying The Lord's Prayer

Leader: Now let's finish with the Lord's Prayer.

It can help to use signs. It could be said by all or said by one person while the others listen, depending on the group.

A Summary of the Basic Format for a Time of Meditation

1. Creating a prayerful space
2. Welcoming everyone; sitting in a circle; explanation of what is going to happen
3. Singing a meditative song
4. Presenting a sensory stilling exercise. (See p. 45 for examples.)
5. Reading a Bible story. (See p. 47 for examples.)
6. Becoming aware of one's breathing
7. Preparing for the time of silence
8. Ringing a gong three times to start the silence
9. Being silent
10. Ringing a gong three times to end the silence
11. Inviting those who wish to pray out loud
12. Saying The Lord's Prayer

Adapt this format as is appropriate for your group.

Eight Possible Stilling Exercises Using the Senses

It can help to become aware of the senses by doing an exercise such as one of the following:

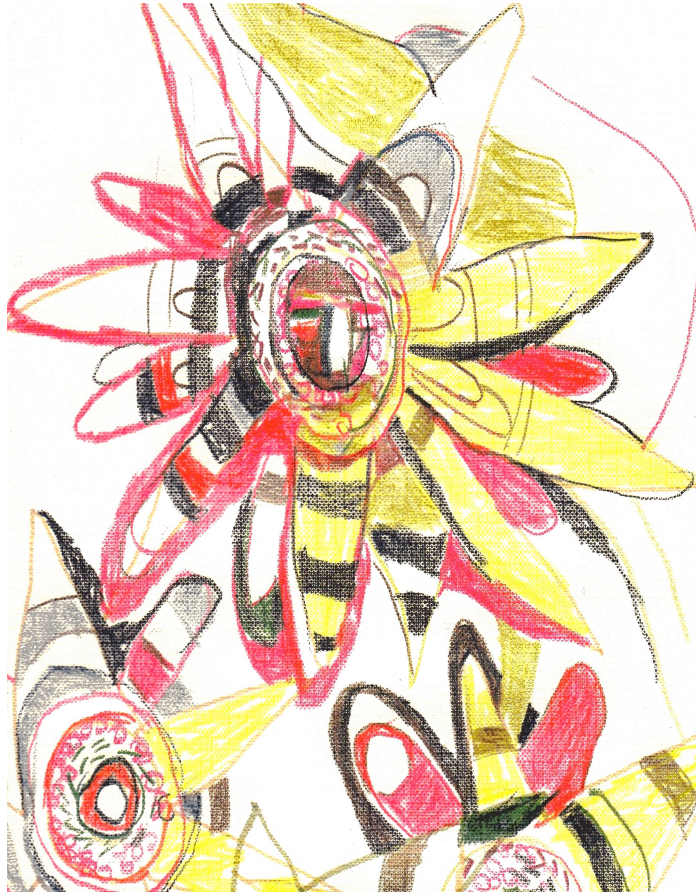
- Listening to the sounds outside the room e.g. the traffic, birds; then listen to any sounds inside the room . . .
- Warming hands by rubbing them, then rubbing them through the hair . . .
- Stamping with the feet, then clapping the hands, stroking our hair ...
- Passing a flower round with a magnifying glass to look at it closely . . .
- Passing around a feather to stroke your cheek . . .
- Cutting an apple or an orange in half to observe the center and taste a slice . . .
- Passing round a chestnut in a half open very sharp spiny burr . . .
- Looking at a dandelion which is in seed -- then gently blowing the seeds away . . .

You may well have other exercises of your own you could use.

These exercises are to help people to be centered and grounded but it is not necessary to spend a long time on such exercises. People love to meditate and the aim is to do whatever helps them to do just that!

*Somewhere we know that without silence,
words lose their meaning,
that without listening, speaking no longer heals,
that without distance, closeness cannot cure.*

- Henri Nouwen



Donald Nason

Twelve Bible Stories which Teach Us Something about How to Enter into Silence

1. **Jesus is with us** (Mt. 8:24-27/Mark 4:37-41/Luke 8:23-25)

One day Jesus asked his friends to go with him in a boat to a quiet place across the lake. While they were in the middle of the lake a HUGE storm pulled the boat high and low on the waves.

Water was coming into the boat and the friends were afraid of dying.

Jesus was sleeping on a pillow.

His friends woke him up, saying 'Master, we are going to drown!'

Jesus stood up and said to the wind, 'Be quiet.' The wind dropped and the waves calmed down.

Jesus said to his friends: 'Why were you afraid? I am with you.'

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, we can trust Jesus is with us even when our minds are full of worries and fear. He can calm us, like he calmed the storm in the story.

2. **Jesus is a friend** (Mt. 19:14)

One day Jesus told his friends off. Do you know why?

His friends were telling children to go away and not to disturb Jesus.

When Jesus heard this he said that what they were doing was wrong. He asked them to bring the children to him.

He laid his hands on the children's heads and blessed them. If they were sad he put his arms around them.

Maybe they told him their worries or anxieties, or a secret.

Jesus was very kind and gentle with them. He listened to them.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, Jesus is still with us. When we are upset or anxious or not well, we can call on Jesus and remember that he welcomes us and blesses us as he welcomed and blessed the children.

3. **Finding a treasure** (Mt. 13:44)

Jesus teaches us by telling stories.

One day he told a story about a man who was digging in a field. It is very, very hard work to dig under the burning heat of the sun and in the dry earth. While he was working and digging in the field, the man found a wonderful treasure in the ground. But he didn't take it away with him. Instead he put it back into the earth and went home to sell everything he had, in order to buy the whole field with the treasure.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate we set everything aside to have quiet time with Jesus. Sitting quietly with Jesus in peace is our treasure.

4. **Welcoming Jesus** (Luke 19:1-10)

There was once a man who was named Zacchaeus. He was a tiny man and people did not like him because he was a kind of thief. He wanted very much to be with Jesus. But many people wanted to be with Jesus and these people didn't like Zacchaeus. So when Jesus came to his town, Zacchaeus climbed up a tree to see Jesus. When Jesus walked by he stopped and looked up. 'Zacchaeus, Zacchaeus', he called, 'come down out of that tree and bring me to your house, I want to stay with you and have supper with you.' Zacchaeus welcomed Jesus to his home. They had a lovely time together and Zacchaeus stopped being a thief.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, we are welcoming Jesus, and can enjoy being with him just as Zacchaeus did. Being with Jesus can change us, just as Zacchaeus was changed.

5. **Being with Jesus** (Luke 10:38-42)

Jesus had many friends. One day he was with Martha, Mary and their brother, Lazarus, for supper. Of course many other people wanted to come as well, so a big meal was being prepared. Martha was extremely busy baking bread, cutting vegetables, setting the table and many other things. Her sister, Mary, was sitting quietly at Jesus' feet, listening to him. Martha asked Mary to help her. When Jesus heard Martha, he told her that sitting at his feet and listening to him and being with him was the most important thing to do.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, it is as if we are sitting at Jesus' feet like Mary, enjoying listening to him.



Christine D'Amonville

6. **The Annunciation** (Luke 1:26-38)

Do you remember the wonderful story of the birth of Jesus? Do you remember how it began with an angel called Gabriel who entered Mary's house and said: "Rejoice, you are greatly loved by God. The Lord is with you."

Mary was deeply troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.

The angel comforted her with the words, "Do not be afraid, Mary; God is pleased with you." And then he told her that she would have a baby and should call him Jesus. So Mary answered, "I am simply a servant of God. Let God work through me."

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, we sit still and wait for God to work through us, as Mary did.

7. **Elijah listening to the silence in which we heard the voice of God** (1 Kings 19:1-12)

Elijah was a friend of God. He tried to convince people to live a good life and to follow God's laws. Many people didn't listen to these words and didn't want to change their way

of living, including the king of Israel. He became very angry with Elijah. Elijah was scared of the king's anger and so he had to hide. He ran away. He walked for days through the hot and empty desert to a mountain, where he found a cave. Elijah stayed the night in the cave. God then spoke to him. He said, "Go outside. The Lord is about to pass by." A great, strong wind tore into the mountains and broke rocks into pieces. But God was not in the wind. An earthquake followed and the ground shook, but God was not in the earthquake. The earthquake was followed by a fire. But God was not in the fire. After the fire there was sheer silence. Then Elijah heard it -- the still, small voice of God. He wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave, to listen to God.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, we listen in the silence for the still small voice of God.

8. Psalm 131

In one of the songs in the Bible, the poet sings about how he has become quiet and calm. He says he feels like a young child, safe in his mother's lap.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, it is as if we are sitting in the lap of God, our mother, safe and calm. We know we are loved as a child knows it is loved by its mother.

9. The Creation (Gen. 2:1-3)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, the trees, the fish and birds, the animals and people. He did this in six days. On the seventh day, God rested. God called this day the Sabbath and said it was holy.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, it is like taking a Sabbath time with God, resting with him. The time is holy.

10. Jesus praying alone (Mark 1:35/ Luke 4:42/ Luke 5:16)

Jesus went off early in the morning to a place where he could be alone. There he prayed. He spent time with God, his father.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, we take time to be still and silent with God, as Jesus often took time to be still and silent with God. He did this because he loved God and because God loved him. He wanted to have time with God, resting in God's love for him. We can do the same.

11. The invitation of Jesus (Mt. 11:28)

Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are tired, and who are full of worries, and I will give you rest.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we meditate, we are invited by Jesus to find our rest in him.

12. Jesus taking his disciples away to rest (Mark 6:31-32)

Once when Jesus was with his friends there were so many people coming and going that they did not even have time to eat. Jesus said to them, "Come with me to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a place where they could be alone and rest.

Linking the Bible story to the practice of meditation: When we are really busy it is even more important to take time alone with Jesus and to rest in silence with him.



Meghan McCarthy

Another way to enter into meditation:

Say the line below from Psalm 46:10 and repeat shortening the sentence each time:

Be still and know that I am God

Be still and know that I am

Be still and know

Be still

Be



Katie Benulis

**In meditating together
we accept one another as we are.**

Welcome one other, as Christ welcomes us.

(Rom. 15:7)

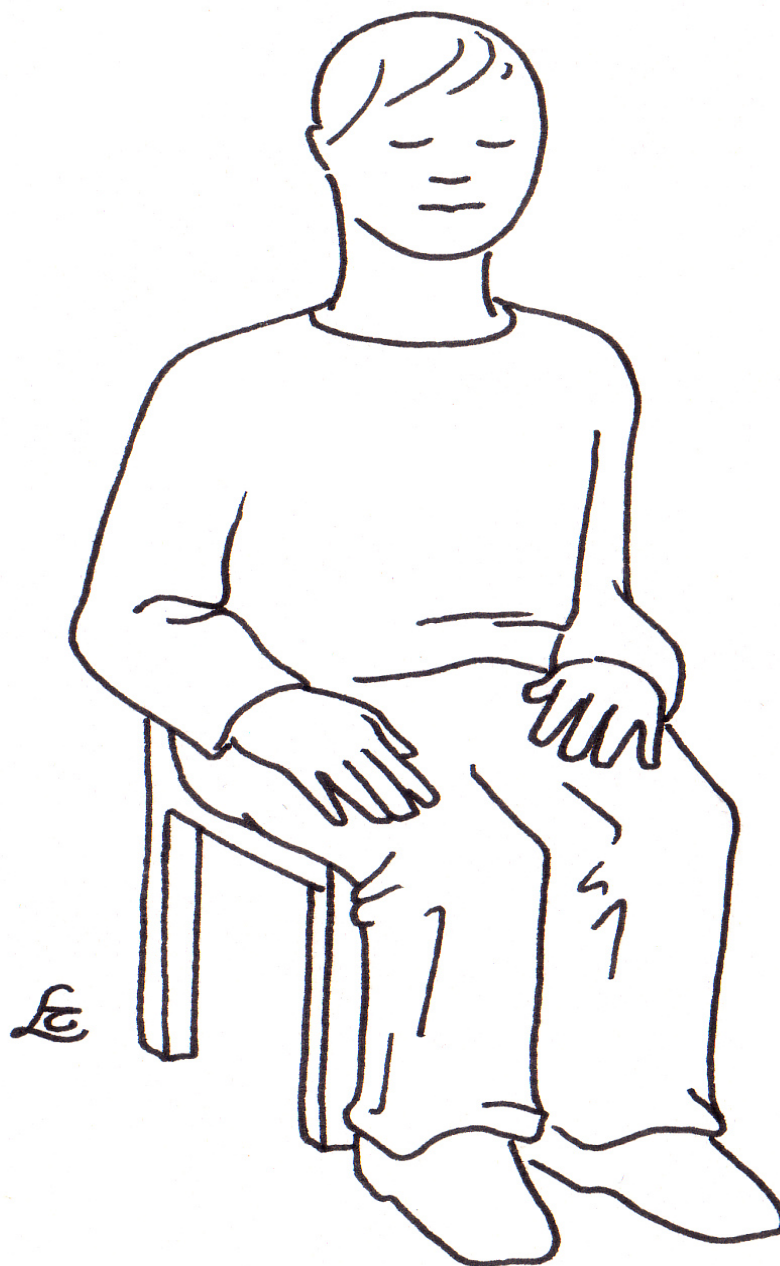
**Prayer is essentially coming to God as a friend.
It is to be in communion with God.
It is to remain in God's love, in trust, resting in Him.
It is to allow Jesus to make his home in us,
and for us to make our home in him.**

*** * * * ***

Four Images Showing a Helpful Way to Sit for Meditation

The next pages have four images by Thomas Lacroix showing a helpful way to sit for **meditation**: (See p. 42, point 7, for when and how to use these images in a group which includes people with intellectual disabilities.)

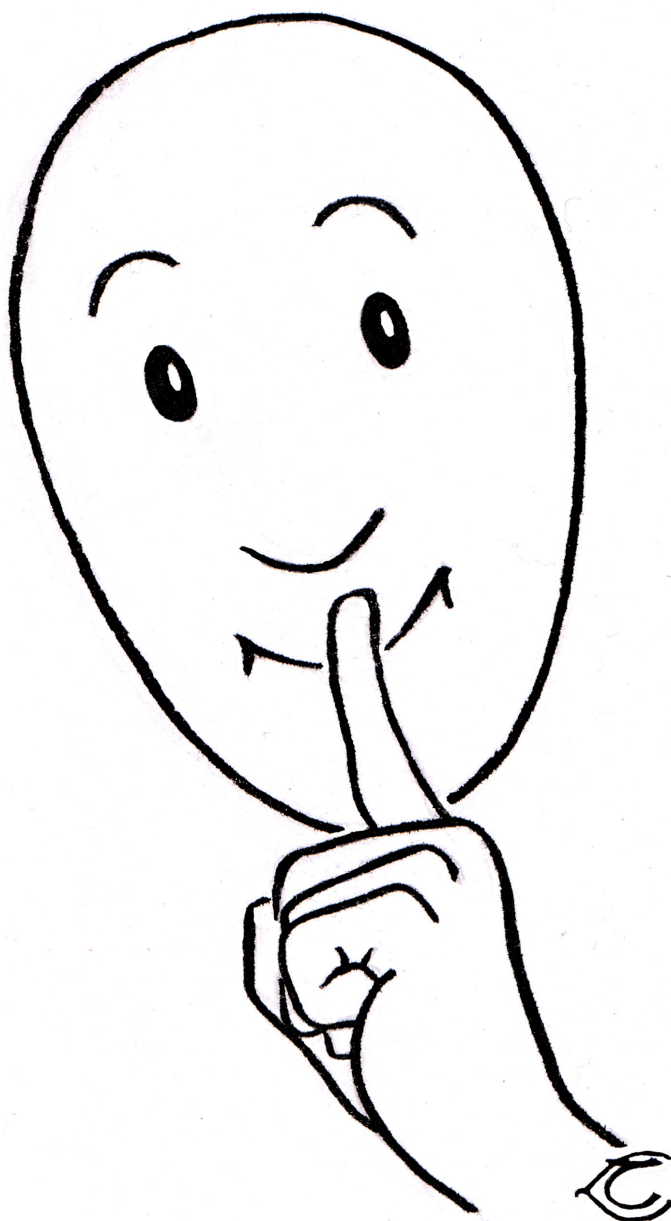
1 - Sitting comfortably and upright on a chair



2 - Hand on heart



3 - Being silent - no talking



4 - Eyes closed



Easy-Read Guide for Meditation

*When we are silent and meditate we sit with God.
We try to keep still and quiet our body and our mind.
We rest with God in our heart.*



WE GET READY.

We sit upright.
We try to be still.
We sit comfortably.

WE HAVE A PRAYER WORD. We remember this word.

Our word helps us to keep still .

We could use the word **MA-RA-NA-THA**. It means "Come Lord".

Or, we could use the word **JE-SUS**, or, the word **AB-BA**.

ABBA means "Father" or "Daddy". God is our Father.

Choose YOUR word and keep the same word when you meditate.

MA-RA-NA-THA

PRAYER WORD

JE-SUS

AB-BA

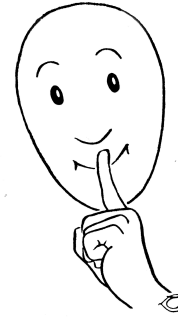


WE REST WITH GOD IN OUR HEART.

We don't say our word out loud.
We keep saying it quietly, in our heart.
It can help to put a hand on YOUR heart.

WE ARE QUIET FOR THE MEDITATION TIME.

We don't talk.

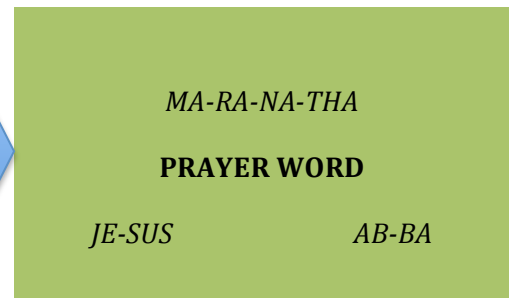


WE CLOSE OUR EYES IF POSSIBLE

This helps us to be still.

WE LET GO OF THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

When we think about other things, we gently go back to saying our word in our heart.



A bell rings to start our quiet time.

**A bell will ring again when the
quiet time stops.**





The World Community
for Christian Meditation

Contact us at:

larche.interaction@wccm.org

*Downloadable PDFs of this book in English and in French,
information about Weekly Online Meditation
and more resources are available at:*

<https://wccm.org/outreach-areas/social-justice/>