

The Christ within

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We have been looking at how the brain is a beautiful God-given instrument, which allows us to tune into different realities. This different way of perception, this '*metanoia*', can come about gradually by meditating faithfully with all our loving attention focused on our mantra. But our dedication and loving commitment to our path is underscored by the workings of grace. But this total change can also happen as a sudden unique grace-filled event.

St Paul's experience is an especially striking example of the latter. His knowledge of Jesus was not based on personal meetings and sitting at his feet, listening to his teaching; he did not know him '*after the manner of the flesh*'. He met Jesus on the road to Damascus in a blinding vision of light and heard his voice: '*While he was still on the road and nearing Damascus, suddenly a light flashed from the sky all around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Tell me, Lord', he said, 'who are you?" The voice answered, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you have to do."*' (Acts 9: 3-7).

Paul's vision of Jesus was a transpersonal experience; he met the risen Christ, which suddenly and totally changed his life: from persecutor to apostle. The sudden enlightenment even made him blind for a while to ordinary reality: "*when he opened his eyes he could not see.*" Prayer and the laying on of hands made "*scales fall from his eyes, and he regained his sight*". Now he was able to perceive ordinary reality in the light of his experience of the Higher Divine Reality. The suddenness of this experience made it so shattering, that he lived in Arabia for three years trying to make sense of this revelation before heeding the call to take Jesus' message to the Gentiles. All of St Paul's teaching came out of this experience. It is the risen Christ, whom he met and who guided him ever after as the indwelling Spirit of Christ in the human heart. Yet this experience was not a reason for boasting but a call to service, to spread the Good News.

"Paul, like subsequent Christian mystics, emphasizes the priority of experience over the fondness of religious people to dispute about 'mere words' that do no good and is the 'ruin of those who listen'. (2 Tim 2:14) Yet also later teachers in the mystical tradition, influenced by the model that Paul set, warn of becoming caught up in 'experiences' for their own sake.....Christian mysticism focuses not only on the subjective experience, which can so easily puff the ego, but even more on the work of God in the greater context of the world and the service of others. Thus Julian of Norwich is in a great tradition when she understood her 'revelations of divine love' as being given her for the benefit of others." (Laurence Freeman)

Experience of the '*Christ within*', experiences during meditation, have no value in themselves. We need to be watchful: the 'ego' loves high jacking our spiritual experiences, using them to enhance our esteem in the eyes of others. They only truly have significance, when they become a transformative force in our being: changing us from persons who only think of themselves to those who care for others. Only an increase in love is proof of Christ's spirit at work in our being.