

Texts on Watchfulness

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An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, “Dearest Friends,” WCCM International Newsletter, December 2000.

Attention is the essence of contemplation. We are all aware – or should be – how weak and unfaithful our attention span can be. This is why we need a daily practice of meditation, embodied in the routines of our private lives. It is not by thinking about it or even by willing it that we grow in attentiveness but through practice. [. . .] Attention purifies our hearts and changes the world. We can see this because our own personal afflictions are blessedly relieved if someone genuinely gives us their attention when we need it most. Compassion is the first fruit of attention. It is the life that flows from the death of selfishness. [. . .]

Listening to the mantra with attention gradually reduces the frequency and volume of our disruptive thoughts and impulses. It resharpens what the ego blunts. We come to say the mantra, to sound it and to listen to it with finer, more subtle and more whole-hearted attention. It aligns us on that frequency of the Holy Spirit that runs through every instant of time and every cell of life. In its silence and stillness is our strength.

After Meditation, from St Philotheos of Sinai, “Texts on Watchfulness,” in THE PHILOKALIA, VOL III (London: Faber and Faber, 1984, p. 26.

Let us go forward with the heart completely attentive and the soul fully conscious. For if attentiveness and prayer are daily joined together, they become like Elijah’s fire-bearing chariot, raising us to heaven. What do I mean? A spiritual heaven, with sun, moon, and stars, is formed in the blessed heart of one who has reached a state of watchfulness, or who strives to attain it; for such a heart. . . is enabled to contain within itself the uncontainable God.

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