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Gaining self-knowledge is a hard task. Laurence Freeman reminds us in *Jesus, the Teacher Within*: “Even with the ‘rabbuni’ so close – closer to us than we are to ourselves according to St Augustine – the power of self-deception and illusion can be overwhelming. Often the path disappears beneath us as we struggle with the demons of anger pride, fear, pride, greed and ignorance.” This reminds us of the teaching of Evagrius, the 4th century Christian Desert father. He along with all early Christian teachers was very aware of the wiles of the ‘ego’. He saw this as a struggle with the ‘demons’, the negative tendencies coming from our wounded ‘ego’. The wounded ‘ego’ is like a spoilt child determined to get what he/she feels was denied in the past. This is in this case some of those survival needs that are essential to our continued existence – love, security, esteem, power, control and pleasure. If in our perception any of these needs were not met – wholly or partly – we try to compensate for this lack throughout our lives. From this intention come the ‘demons’ Laurence Freeman mentions in the quote above.

Evagrius and his contemporaries saw the main ‘demons’ that drive us as being ‘greed’ and ‘pride’, with all the other ‘demons’ following logically from these two. The normal, ordinary acceptable need to have sufficient for survival for instance becomes an overwhelming drive i.e. ‘greed’ for things and people to possess. From that drive comes inevitably ‘anger’ (and envy) towards those who have what we lack. Then ‘pride’ follows fast on its heels – we want to show off our possessions and achievements. It is not difficult to see that these ‘demons’ are rampant not only in the 4th century but also in our time.

All this points to our need to listen to the advice of spiritual teachers: become aware of your motives, thus understanding your ‘ego’. If we do not accept that coming to self-knowledge is part of the spiritual path, we can meditate for many years and yet be not transformed by it. Transformation, becoming who we are meant to be, requires us to be silent, which allows us to be open to the call of the indwelling Christ, offering us insights, however painful they may be. Otherwise we can still find ourselves caught in the same illusions for years to come. The temptation in this case is to use meditation purely as relaxation and stop there, closing our ears to any help coming from within. Meditation can then become a way to escape our problems and to continue to suppress parts of our nature we do not like to be confronted with. Of course escape into a world of dreams and fantasy is more pleasant than facing the way things truly are. But change and transformation will only come about through openness to insights lovingly offered and a willingness to acknowledge and accept ourselves, faults and all. How true the words of Socrates are: ‘The unexamined life is not worth living’.