

The importance of Community

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I find it fascinating how in the last few years, science more and more validates in rigorous experiments what those on the spiritual path know from personal experience. Last week I talked about the importance of community and how a meditation group supports us on our journey. That this is true in more ways than one is proved by the following experiment: a group of Franciscan nuns were wired up to a brain wave machine during a prayer session. Whereas at first each individual had their own individual brain wave pattern after praying together for about 10 minutes all the brainwave patterns were identical.

This inevitably also plays a role in our groups. Meditators often tell me that, especially at first, they find it easier to meditate in a weekly group than at home alone. The above experiment gives us the objective evidence that we *are* supporting and reinforcing one another. Moreover, we are therefore during the meditation period all tuned in to the same wave-length – in Christian terms the wave length of the Spirit. We already know that the Spirit that is there in our deepest centre unifies our own being and unites us all, as John Main says in *'The Present Christ'*: *"even our own centre, our objectifying consciousness, is being unified. All this, the process of 'one-ing, is the work of the Spirit."*

Since in our ordinary life we live from the ego, we only see the separateness not the underlying unity and inter-connectedness. We forget how integrally linked we are. Meditation fulfils an essential role in changing our consciousness, our awareness, in this way. By meditating, by praying together *"we experience that the basic condition of humanity, man and woman, is not separateness but communion, being – with and as God is Love: "In direct communion 'being with' is 'to be in love'. ('The Present Christ') How different our world would be if we were all aware of our essential unity?"*

At some level we know how much others influence us – parents are always concerned about the influence friends have on their children's thinking and behaviour; we talk about the importance of like-minded friends. In an article by Eric Kandel *'Small Systems of Neurons'* in the *Scientific American* he presents his findings that: *"Even during simple social experiences as when two people speak to each other, the action of the neuronal machinery in one's person's brain is capable of having a direct and long lasting effect on the modifiable synaptic connections in the brain of another."*

What we discover in the silence, in the centre of our being, based on our experience there, is a trusting, loving sense of relationship, of communion, in fact the true meaning of faith. Laurence Freeman says in his latest book *'First Sight' – The Experience of Faith: "Community – like marriage – is an outcome of faith."*