

The importance of Community

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We have seen how on our journey of meditation we have the interior guidance of Christ, but externally we are also supported, namely by the meditation community. In our innermost being, in our essence we are a spark of Divine Love and are essentially acceptable and lovable. Once we have realized this truth for ourselves we accept it as true of others too. We then can truly *'love our neighbour'*, as Jesus teaches us to do, *'as ourselves'* because we see ourselves in our neighbour. Yet this takes time, as a Desert Father pointed out, it is not easy to achieve: *"I have spent 20 years to see all human beings as one!"* Nevertheless the more we become aware that we are accepted by God as we are, the easier it becomes to also accept others as they are *"We learn to let our neighbour be just as we learn to let God be. We learn not to manipulate our neighbour but rather to reverence him, to reverence his importance, the wonder of his being."* We then start to connect with others from the depth, from our essence not from our wounded surface self, our 'ego'. John Main in *'Word into Silence'* says: *"The essence of community is a recognition of and deep reverence for the other."* Our behaviour will then be based on a sense of oneness and inter-connectedness, resulting in empathy, respect as well as a longing for mutual service. On the spiritual path personal relationships and community living are essential opportunities, where this love and respect for ourselves and others is best honed. In rubbing up against one another we become aware of our habitual conditioned responses to certain behaviour and situations. We need to understand that these are shaped in the past and not appropriate in this present moment. Our irritation,

even anger, envy and pride show our deep woundedness coming from another time and place. Thus friends and loved ones make us aware of our 'shadow'. Especially when this is accompanied by regularly praying/meditating together, it will help us to transcend our brokenness. Praying together means growing together, hence *prayer is the great school of community.*" (*Word into Silence*) Slowly this growth leads to true self-knowledge and thus deeper awareness of the Divine Presence. John Main says in *'The Inner Christ'*: "We can become fully present to the now of the divine moment, only if we can leave the past totally behind." This in turn allows us to grow into the person God wants us to be.

The meditation group and the community this creates facilitate this in a very important way. Moreover, as Laurence Freeman says in *'A Pearl of Great Price'* "There is nothing new about Christians coming together to pray. 'The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul; they joined in continuous prayer'. This was said of the small Jerusalem church that formed after the death and resurrection of Jesus." As Christianity spread the early Christians met to pray in small groups in each other's houses, just as we do in our meditation groups. Especially in these early times when Christians were an often persecuted minority, mutual comfort and support were essential. We too need this support of fellow travelers in a world that does not understand, even denigrates, our spiritual search.

Moreover, prayer becomes much more powerful when people pray together, as Jesus taught: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (*Matthew 18:2*).

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