

# What makes our meditation Christian?



The discipline of meditation is to be found in one form or other in all the major World Religions. In all it is a way of attention, a way of totally focusing the mind in a one-pointed way. It is a way of clearing the mind of all surface thoughts, so that our object of attention is uppermost in our consciousness and will lead us beyond the material world into the Divine Reality, whatever name we give to that.

But in our modern world it is often used solely as a relaxation technique. Research has proved that meditation produces important physiological effects on the body – lowering of breathing rate, blood pressure and heart rate – the '*relaxation response*' -by counteracting the effects of stress. This stress reduction helps not only with physical ailments but also with anxiety, depression and even tolerance of pain. It also decreases the urge involved in addictions of many kinds, which are often a negative way of trying to lower stress. Patients suffering from serious illnesses, such as heart disease and cancer, find that this decrease in tension improves their general health, mental outlook and even seems to halt or slow down the progress of the disease.

Therefore it is perfectly understandable that many use meditation purely for its health benefits as a body and mind altering relaxation technique. It is wonderful to stop the endlessly chattering mind; it feels great to have 'time out' from the concerns, anxieties, hopes and fears that generally beset us, to stop the drain of energy of a mind going round and round in circles. But that would be a missed opportunity; there is much more to meditation than its physiological and emotional effects on the body. These are really only a first step on the road to a transformation of our being, to clarity of vision and total awareness. As Laurence Freeman recently said, in our tradition we relax in order to meditate, not to meditate in order to relax. For a serious practitioner relaxing the body is seen only as preparation, leading to the real purpose of meditation: leaving our ordinary consciousness – our thoughts, images and emotions – temporarily behind and thus entering in the ensuing silence the higher consciousness that dwells at the centre of our total being – our true self, which is one with the Divine Presence. This awareness of a different way of being will transform our ordinary consciousness and hence our attitude and behaviour in daily life. It will fundamentally change us from people living at the surface to fully alive human beings. It allows us to realise our full potential, which all main religions and wisdom traditions encourage: *“I have come that they may have life, life in all its fullness.”* (*Gospel of John*)

John Main said, that *“The reason why in the Christian tradition we meditate is that we believe that Jesus has sent His Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Or to use other words: The Spirit of God, the Spirit of the Creator of the Universe, dwells in our hearts, and, in silence is loving to all. Meditating is simply being open to the Spirit of Love, the Spirit of God.”*

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