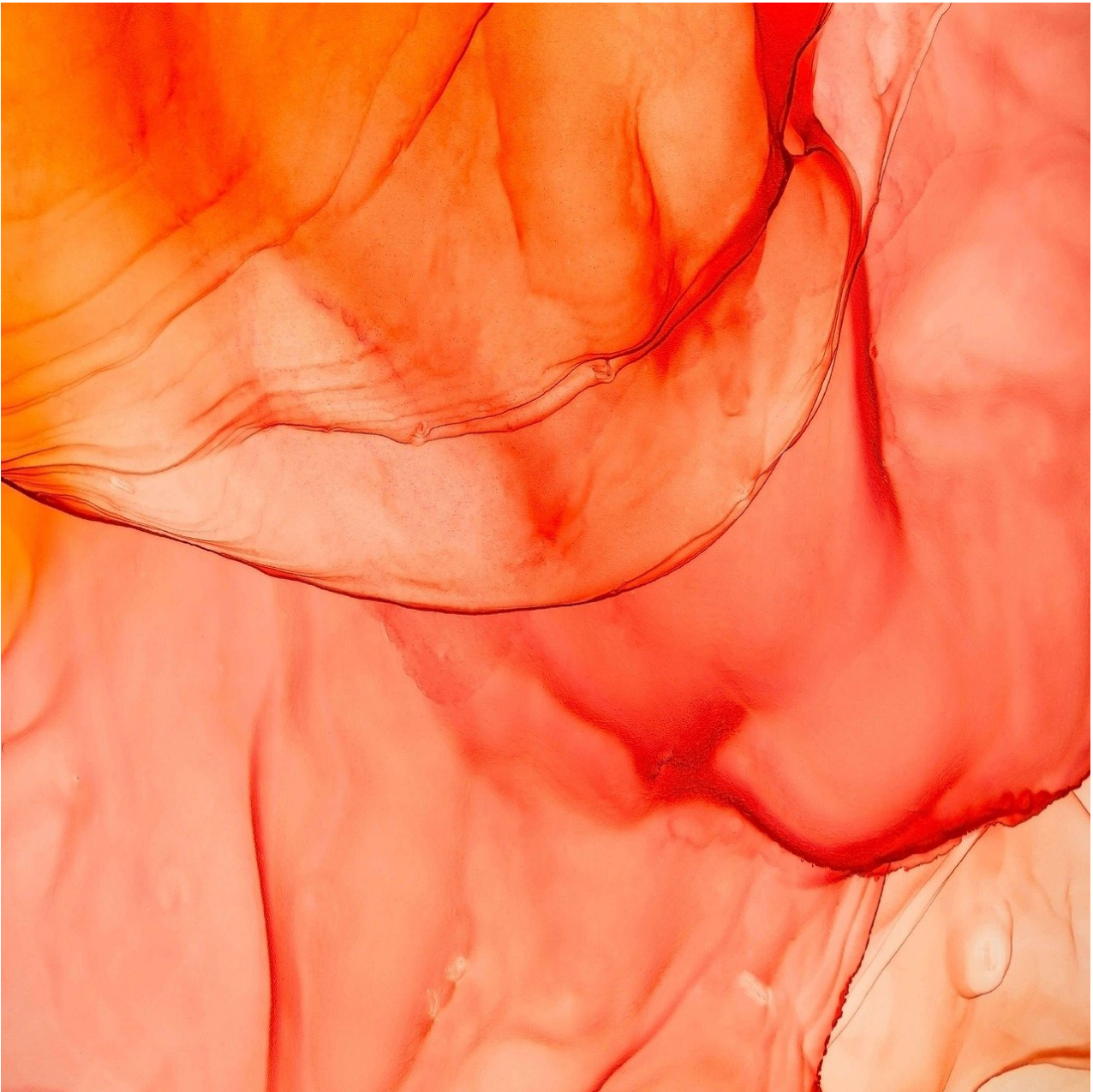


# The Stages of the Journey

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“Meditation is a way of breaking through from a world of illusion into the pure light of reality”.

John Main

The world of illusion that John Main refers to in this statement is the world we build up out of our thoughts. Many of us equate who we are with what we think. Who do you think you are? The image we have of ourselves, the image we have of others, and the world we live in is made up out of thoughts: our own thoughts and, often, the thoughts of others we have unthinkingly made our own. From the moment we are born we accept the views of those who are significant in our life without question: our parents, our siblings, our wider family, our community, our peer group, the society we live in, and the religion and culture

we are brought up in. We shape our view of reality based on the accepted views of others in an attempt to fit in, to be accepted, to be loved and respected. In other words driven by our need to survive, we adopt the opinions of others and adopt expected roles and attitudes. Often in doing so, we forget who we really are and become imprisoned by all this conditioning.

As we grow up, some of us have the self-confidence to challenge and examine these thoughts and views. We feel the urge to find out who we really are under all the conditioning, masks, roles, and functions. But *'breaking through'* in the words of John Main, is not easy. The fact that we are dominated by thoughts can be discovered the moment we start to meditate. We become aware of what John Main referred to as *'the chaotic din of a mind ravaged by so much exposure to trivia and distraction'*, whilst Laurence Freeman refers to *"the monkey mind level of distraction"*.

Yet, we find it difficult letting go of our thoughts, since we have been brought up to believe that thought is the highest activity we can engage in. Descartes in the 17th Century said, *"I think, therefore I am"*, and in doing so linked existence with thought. T.S Eliot illustrates this in his 'Four Quartets', in which people sitting in an underground train, stuck in a tunnel, feel they are faced with *"the growing terror of nothing to think about"*. Not thinking feels like a threat to our survival. No wonder people are fearful when faced with a discipline like meditation that encourages letting go of thought. The stages on the journey of meditation, our *'breaking through'*, are therefore our changing relationship with our thoughts.

*"Breaking through"*, requires courage and perseverance in meditation, but will lead us to the *"pure light of reality"*, where we remember and experience that we are *"children of God"*, *"the temple of the Holy Spirit"*, and that *"the consciousness that was in Christ is also in us"*.

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