

The path to wisdom and forgiveness

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An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, *Dearest Friends* in the Newsletter of the World Community for Christian Mediation, Vol. 35, No. 2, July 2011, pp. 4-5.

We can let go of our worries and anxieties as Jesus advises us in his teaching on prayer. These anxieties are manifold, the daily glitches that pass with a good night's sleep, the losses that are still awfully present when we awaken, the deeper patterns of our character with their roots in pre-conscious memory. Wisdom and forgiveness begin their work as soon as we step back and stop blaming the world or our parents or our enemies and realize that we are the problem. The first step on a mature spiritual path may take years. Once taken, however, we are able to discern the different levels of suffering and dissatisfaction we have to work through, those we can handle ourselves, those we have to seek help for, and those we simply have to transcend.

Meditation sharpens and accelerates this discernment. In all traditions deep, silent, non-conceptual prayer is seen to occupy the heart of faith and to open the door to union with God. The Sufis speak of dhikr or the remembrance of God which is arrived at through the repetition of the name of God. In its simplicity it is said to contain all forms of prayer and frees us from all confusion and discomfort Jesus' commandment of love's God

neighbor, and self and the urgency of his tone similarly translates into the mindfulness with which we pay absolute attention to God. We can then willingly sell as we have in the sheer joy of finding the treasure of the Kingdom buried in our heart.

Nevertheless, the cares of life easily overwhelm us. They can make us self-fixated, forgetful, insensitive, ignorant and stupid. We forget that God exists. We ignore the needs of our neighbors. We lose the capacity for wonder. We sleepwalk to the grace. Ascetic spiritual work is the cure for the careworn. It teaches us to handle problems and to live in freedom despite them. It dissolves hardness of heart as we become more sensitive and responsive, more open to the beauty of the world and the needs of others, including those who greedily grab before they ask. Asceticism like our twice-daily meditation transforms the energy blocked in our ego and negative patterns of thought and behavior. Wisely we come to accept that we will not in this life of cares ever have everything we want. But then liberation dawns as we accept that the real problem lies not in the not-having but in the wanting itself.

After Meditation, The Trail is Not a Trail, Gary Snyder, LEFT OUT IN THE RAIN: North Point Press, 1986); posted in the 9.24.11 Writer's Almanac.

I drove down the freeway
And turned off at an exit
And went along a highway
Til it came to a sideroad
Drove up the sideroad
Til it turned to a dirt road
Full of bumps, and stopped.
Walked up a trail
But the trail got rough
And it faded away
Out in the open,
Everywhere to go.

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