

# Reconciling contradictions and opposites



**An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, *Meditation*, in *JESUS THE TEACHER WITHIN* (London: Continuum, 2000, p. 197-98.**

Meditation is the deepest primal therapy of the suffering human condition. It is not an elite practice for the spiritually advanced . . . Not only the terminus ad quem but the terminus a quo. Nor is meditation the get-away-from-it-all narcissistic indulgence which advertising proclaims to the stressed and hyperactive commuters of the Western (and increasingly Asian) world. . . . Meditation is not leisure activity though it takes time and requires relaxation. From a spiritual perspective, we relax in order to meditate rather than meditate in order to relax.

Meditation is the work that harmonizes the usually discordant dimensions of consciousness. It reconciles contradictions and opposites. All tradition agree that its fruits are preferable to their opposites. These fruits need little definition or defense: compassion and wisdom, generosity and tolerance, forgiveness and kindness, gentleness and peace, joy and creativity. By liberating these qualities, meditation advances human goodness and wholeness.

You can survive without it. But it is the wind in the sail of the spirit.

**After meditation: Black Swallowtail by Mary Oliver in RED BIRD (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), p. 40.**

### **Black Swallowtail**

The caterpillar,  
    interesting but not exactly lovely,  
humped along among the parsley leaves  
    eating, always eating. Then  
one night it was gone and in its place  
    a small green confinement hung by two silk threads  
on a parsley stem. I think it took nothing with it  
    except faith, and patience. And then one morning  
  
it expressed itself into the most beautiful being.

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