



Event: Love in the Time of War

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Transcript from the talk by Laurence Freeman

We have met with Albert and Maria several times since the Russian invasion in February 2020. Each time, we have hoped this would be the last time in a situation of war. Sadly, it is not. The madness continues.

What meditators are doing is the opposite of what is happening in parts of Ukraine.

We as meditators are trying to become more human and closer to the divine. Others want to dehumanise and de-sacralise. We are doing the opposite of what the individual ego of a dictator is doing and what the collective ego of a country is doing to other countries and peoples. We meditators are a sign of contradiction.

The meditator does not withdraw from the world, even from a world at war. He or she creates an island of stability deep within him or her to better cope with the instability around them. What is exactly what meditation does to us? It makes us more balanced, stronger and humble. We submit to the mantra which is already a sign of humility. We meet the divine and the sacred in the silence. We breathe in the good and breathe out the evil. This unique encounter makes us stronger. We are not alone. When we are weak, only then are we strong says Paul in the second letter to the Corinthians. I say it in another way. He who forgets his ego, who becomes poor in spirit, is on his way to becoming another, a better and therefore a stronger person. Meditation is not a sign of softness or of cowardice but of strength. No one can touch our freedom to seek the better Self that is open to others. We feel strong also for that reason. The meditator seeks what he lives for, what gives meaning to the one life he has. That makes him happier even though he is

surrounded by unhappiness. The trained inner life does not stay inner but it opens our heart, our attention and our commitment to the external life outside us. It is going backwards for a while and then jumping better.

Of course we are for peace but for peace in freedom, a just peace. We are not pacifists in the sense of peace for peace's sake, as an end in itself. We want a lasting peace based on values, on the right of each of us to live a life of dignity, an authentic life so not in submission and blind obedience.

The meditator literally straightens his back during meditation. He also straightens his back to show his strength of character. He or she does not give up. They are less afraid. Remember the motto of Pope John Paul II “Do not be afraid”. He came from a totalitarian country and resisted it because he was not afraid. He knew what he was talking about. We miss his powerful voice today. We are not afraid because we know what and for whom we live.

Many people in the world including those far away from war feel that there is a kind of return of tragedy in history, they feel that fate may strike at any moment. Each of us wants to live a normal life and suddenly water and storms overwhelm the most peaceful people like today in Spain. It also happened in my country two years ago. Or suddenly people crawl out of tunnels in Gaza and kill their fellow human beings en masse. And a few days after that came a reaction with a multitude of deaths, again often defenceless mothers and children. The outcome of the US election is not a victory of the soft forces either. It was a sad week.

And difficult weeks and months may follow in Ukraine. Much responsibility now lies on the shoulders of the EU. Member states are aware that the fate of Ukraine and that of the 27 EU countries are closely linked. This is a 'common destiny'. But between awareness and already drawing the consequences from this in terms of military and financial support, is something else. Seeing the right

thing and doing the right thing is sometimes completely different. Usually, the Union outdoes itself when its back is against the wall. The same will have to happen now. We have no right to fail. If the word 'solidarity' means anything it is now.

The world is sick of extremism. In many Western countries, there is a sense of anger and frustration despite prosperity for most. Those negative feelings need to be listened to but the leaders who are still fuelling it need to be combated. The moderates need to stand up and bring a positive message. Extremists make people believe that their country, their culture, their language, their religion is superior to others. That message has been the source of much mischief in the past and today. In contrast, we say that every human being counts, that we are all equal, that we are all children of God. Nationalists and extremists say that God is with them. We must ask ourselves if we are on God's side. The God of good and of love.

Hope requires effort more than ever. It is a verb. Hope is a sign of life. Despair is a victory of negative forces. Hope is not something you do alone. We need to strengthen and empower each other. That is what we are doing here today, virtually but no less real. It is a nice paradox.

Meditators of all nations: unite! Unity of heart, not unity of hate. Ukrainians must be helped to defend themselves. That is their right and our duty. However, they do not want to become morally the same as those who invaded and partially occupied their country. We must win that moral battle. Not because we consider ourselves superior to others but because we do our best not to give in to revenge or mere negativity.

Meditation pushes back the mere focus on the ego and thereby gives way to the focus on others. That is our simple recipe. This turnaround does not happen by itself. Great things are born in silence. Even in the silence of meditation. The silence in the midst of the storm.

Mary and Albert: we wish you less storm and more silence. This also benefits the world and especially the people living on the planet who all long for a normal, ordinary life.