

Freedom from the prison of the ego

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An excerpt from John Main OSB, “Letting Go,” JOHN MAIN: ESSENTIAL WRITINGS, Modern Spiritual Masters Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), p. 127.

One of the most difficult things for Westerners to understand is that meditation is not about trying to make anything happen. But all of us are so tied into the mentality of techniques and production that we inevitably first think that we are trying to engineer an event, a happening. According to our imagination or predispositions, we may have different ideas of what would happen. For some it is visions, voices, or flashes of light. For others, deep insights and understanding. For others again, better control over their daily lives and problems. The first thing to understand, however, is that meditation has nothing to do with making anything happen. The basic aim of meditation is indeed quite the contrary, simply to learn to become fully aware of what is. The great challenge of meditation is to learn directly from the reality that sustains us.

The first step toward this—and we are invited to take it—is to come into contact with our own spirit. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of all is that we should complete our life without ever having made full contact with our own spirit. This contact means discovering the harmony of our being, our potential for growth, our wholeness—everything that the New Testament and Jesus himself, called “fullness of life.”

So often we live our life at five percent of our full potential. But of course there is no measure to our potential; the Christian tradition tells us it is infinite. If only we will turn from self to other, our expansion of spirit becomes boundless. It is all-turning; what the New Testament calls conversion. We are invited to unlock the shackles of limitation, to be freed from being prisoners within our self-limiting egos. Conversion is just this liberation and expansion arising when we turn from ourselves to the infinite God. It is also learning to love God, just as in turning to God we learn to love one another. In loving we are enriched beyond measure. We learn to live out of the infinite riches of God. (WMF, 19-20)

After meditation: “Finding a Teacher,” W. S. Merwin, MIGRATION: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2005), pp. 206-207

FINDING A TEACHER

In the woods I came on an old friend fishing
and I asked him a question
and he said Wait
fish were rising in the deep stream
but his line was not stirring
but I waited
it was a question about the sun

about my two eyes
my ears my mouth
my heart the earth with its four seasons
my feet where I was standing
where I was going

it slipped through my hands
as though it were water
into the river
it flowed under the trees
it sank under hulls far away
and was gone without me
then where I stood night fell

I no longer knew what to ask
I could tell that his line had no hook
I understood that I was to stay and eat with him.

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