

Process of simplification

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An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, “Letter Three,” WEB OF SILENCE (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 1996), pp. 28-29,31.

“Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed” (Romans 12:2).

The life of the spirit in human nature is a continual repatterning. The step of faith we spend our lives perfecting is simply the one step by which we let our minds be remade and our whole being transfigured. For “this present world” let us read “ego”: the part that thinks it is the whole. It has come involuntarily to block and unconsciously to distort the mystery of life because of the patterns it had formed through pain and rejection; the perception of a world without love. [. . .]

Even if meditation were no more than a brief daily dip into the kingdom within us, it would merit our complete attention. But it is far more than a temporary escape from the prison of our patterns of fear and desire. Complex as these patterns are, making us fear the death and the true love that are necessary for our growth and survival, meditation simplifies them all. Day by day, meditation by meditation, this process of simplification proceeds. We become gradually more fearless until, in the joy of being released from the images and memories of desire, we taste total freedom from fear. And then—and even before then—we become of use to others, able to love without fear or desire. . . released to serve the Self which is the Christ within

After meditation: “The Map” by Marie Howe, originally published October 27, 2016 in Poem-a-Day at Poets.org.

The Map

The failure of love might account for most of the suffering in the world.

The girl was going over her global studies homework

in the air where she drew the map with her finger
touching the Gobi desert,

The Plateau of Tiber in front of her,

and looking through her transparent map backwards

I did suddenly see

how her left is my right, and for a moment I understood.

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From Laurence Freeman OSB, "Forgiveness and Compassion," ASPECTS OF LOVE (London: Arthur James, 1997), pp. 72-74.

The only way to deal with the complexity of human relations is the simplicity of love. In love we do not judge, we do not compete; we accept, we revere, and we learn compassion. In learning to love others we release the inner joy of being that radiates outwards through us, touching others through our relationships. This is why communities, families, and marriages do not exist solely for the perfection of the people in those . . . relationships. They exist also to radiate love. . . . beyond themselves, radiating joy, that simplicity of love beyond themselves, to touch all those who come into contact with it.

It was John Main's vision of human community, that community is made possible by the commitment we each make in solitude to the most profound relationship of our lives, which is our relationship with God. This is why in learning to love others we come to a new insight into the unity of creation and into the basic simplicity of life. We see what it means to say that love covers a multitude of sins. Forgiveness is the most revolutionary and transforming power of which we are capable. It teaches us that love is the essential dynamic of every relationship, the most intimate, the most antagonistic as well as the most casual. It's the very ordinariness of our daily meditation that reveals to us how universal is the way of love.

After meditation: from Thomas Merton, THE WISDOM OF THE DESERT: SOME SAYINGS OF THE DESERT FATHERS (Boston: Shambhala, 1994), pp. 66-67.

A brother in Scete happened to commit a fault, and the elders assembled, and sent for Abbot Moses to join them. He, however, did not want to come. The priest sent him a message, saying: Come, the community of the brethren is waiting for you. So he arose and started off. And taking with him a very old basket full of holes, he filled it with sand, and carried it behind him. The elders came out to meet him and said, What is this, Father? The elder replied: My sins are running out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I come to judge the sins of another! They, hearing this, said nothing to the brother but pardoned him.