

# Why is Meditation Difficult?

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**An excerpt from John Main OSB, “Why is Meditation Difficult?” THE WAY OF UNKNOWING (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 87.**

We live in such a materialistic society. It sees everything in terms of possession and possessing and, even if we happen to be more spiritual in our outlook, we can easily become spiritual materialists. Instead of accumulating money we try to accumulate grace or merit. But the way of prayer is the way of dispossession and of surrender, and that is hard for us because we have been taught the importance of winning, not losing. But Jesus tells us that if we would find our life we must lose it. And saying the mantra is exactly our response to that command.

Meditation calls for generosity because it calls for everything. It calls for abandonment of desire and desiring and, positively, it calls for generous openness to God. So many people when they hear about meditation for the first time think of it as some extraordinarily dry, intellectual, unemotional, unaffektive way. But it is none of those things. It is commitment to and openness to infinite love, and that love is like a mighty fountain bursting through in your heart.

The mantra is like the needle of a compass. It heads you always in the direction you must follow, away from self and into God. And whichever way your ego may lead you, the compass will always be faithful. The mantra, if you say it with generosity, with faithfulness and love, will always point you in the direction of God.

**After meditation: “Witness” by Denise Levertov in THE LIFE AROUND US (New York: New Directions, 1997), p. 71.**

*Witness*

Sometimes the mountain  
is hidden from me in veils  
of cloud, sometimes  
I am hidden from the mountain  
in veils of inattention, apathy, fatigue,  
when I forget or refuse to go  
down to the shore, on a clear day,  
to reconfirm  
that witnessing presence.

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