Meditation – a different way of learning

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Learning to meditate and learning what meditation has to teach us are both different kinds of learning from what we are used to. We are not learning anything ‘new’ in our usual understanding of novelty. We are relearning something known in childhood and lost before we could maturely integrate it .We are unlearning much, conditioned by our education and training, that is inadequate for a fully developed life. What we are learning by this process of relearning and unlearning is something too direct and simple for us to understand, except in and through experience. We are too complex and self-conscious for the experience when we begin. Some teaching, not only by example (the best teaching) but also by words and ideas, is needed to keep us on the way that prepares us for the `magisterial experience’ itself. Let me try to summarize this most simple of teachings, the essential elements of meditation. Let me begin by placing us in the context of the essential Christian teaching in the Scripture. St Paul here is reflecting upon the potential we all have for a richer and fuller life, for a life rooted in the mystery of God.

‘I kneel in prayer to the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, that out of the treasures of his glory he may grant you strength and power through his Spirit in your inner being, that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts in love. With deep roots and firm foundations, may you be strong to grasp, with all God’s people, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, and to know it, though it is beyond knowledge. So may you attain to fullness of being, the fullness of God himself’ (Eph. 3:14-19).

This is a marvelously comprehensive description of the destiny that each of us has, as Christians, as human beings. Our destiny and call is to come to a fullness of being, which is the fullness of God himself. In other words, each of us is summoned to an unlimited, infinite development through the way of faith and love, as we leave the narrowness of our ego behind, and enter into the ever-expanding mystery of God’s own self.

The one quality we need to begin is courage. Beginning to meditate is like drilling for oil in the desert. The surface is so dry and dusty, that you have to take on faith the findings of the geologists who tell you that, deep within this dry earth, there is a great source of power. When we begin to meditate for the first time we cannot help expecting something to happen, that we will now see some vision, now come to some deeper knowledge. But nothing happens. Persevering past this stage, one of many hurdles our faith will encounter leads us to see that quietly at work in the heart of faith is love. When we see this, that it is not only by

faith that we proceed but by faith and love, then we have really begun. Through this faith Christ dwells within us in love. His indwelling is the constant companionship of the teacher. Our initiatory courage has led us to find a teacher.

But it really is because `nothing happens' that you can be sure that you are on the right path, the path of simplicity, of poverty, of an empowering surrender. Jesus has told us that his Spirit is to be found in our hearts. Meditating is uncovering this truth as a present reality deep within ourselves at the center of our lives. The Spirit that we are invited to discover in our hearts is the power source that enriches every aspect and every part of our life. The Spirit is the eternal Spirit of life and the eternal Spirit of love. The call of Christians is not to be half-alive, which means being half-dead, but to be fully alive, alive with the dynamos of the Spirit, with the power and energy that St Paul speaks of, and that is continually flowing in our hearts.