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The Teaching of

JOHN MAIN on

WHY We Meditate

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Edited by Peter Ng

Fullness of Being



The destiny that each of us has, as Christians, as human beings, is to come to fullness of being, the fullness of God himself. In other words, each of us is summoned to an unlimited and infinite development. As we leave the narrowness of our own ego behind, we enter into the mystery of God.

Jesus has told us that his Spirit is to be found in our hearts.

Meditation is uncovering this truth, this reality, deep within ourselves. The spirit that we are invited to discover in our hearts is the power source that enriches every part of our life.

The Spirit is the Spirit of life, the Spirit of love.

We can be fully alive with this power and energy if we undertake the discipline to make our way to it, day by day. This is the way of meditation. It is essential to tread the path, to be on the way, each day of our lives.

Sitting still in meditation, and saying our mantra, is the first step away from egoism, away from concern about ourselves, opening our consciousness to what is beyond, to the infinite reality that expands our spirit into generous love.

Meditation is bringing us to a state of undivided consciousness where

we become one with the One who is one.

This is how St Paul describes our potential for richer 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)

For our lives to be fully human, we must encounter that spirit of love within ourselves.

This is not a journey just for spiritual experts.

It is a journey for everyone who would live their life to the full.

John Main OSB, *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*



Fullness of Life



The most important thing for all of us is to live our lives to the full; insofar as we can, to realize our own potential. Meditation is the process whereby we are in contact with the creative centre of our being, and whereby creative energy is released within us.

In our modern secular world, we easily forget that we have a divine origin, a divine source.

We forget that God is our Creator, and that the energy of our spirit emanates from the Spirit of God.

In the forgetting, we lose contact with our own essential nature. We become dehumanized.

We can become just consumers in a materialistic, commercial society. We live our lives in some sort of mechanical way, going through routines each day, but losing the sense of freshness, of creativity, of freedom. We live our lives in a sort of rush, one routine following the next, distracted perhaps for a bit by entertainment, by pleasure, or deadened by the pressures of work or play.

I want to put before you two things that we must do if we want to break out of this cycle.

First, each one of us has to learn to stop the rush of activity. We must learn the priority of being. We must learn to be still.

That's what our regular times of meditation are about.

Second, we have to learn to be profoundly silent. We have to learn to stop the racket going on around us and in our head.

It's easy enough to switch off the radio, the television or the stereo. But it is not so easy to switch off the ideas and imagination going on within our own heads. That's the purpose of saying the mantra.

John Main OSB, *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*



From Self-centredness to God-centredness



The essence of meditation is learning to stand back and to allow God to come into the forefront of your life.

Meditation is taking that step away from self-centredness to God-centredness.

The result is that we find our own place in the world. We find where we should be.

We find our relationships in the right order – our relationships with one another, our relationships with creation, and our relationship with God. We discover that we do have an essential place in God's plan, each of us responding uniquely to the gift of our own creation. We discover our own dignity, our own unique gift, the gift of our own creation.

Meditation is the discipline of learning to stand back, learning to focus our attention, or perhaps even better, focus our whole being on God.

In meditation,

we are not seeking to possess God. We are not seeking to come to some profound insights about God.

We are seeking simply to become the person we are called to be.

We are seeking simply to accept as fully as possible, and to respond to as fully as possible, the gift of our own creation. To do that, we have to learn to be still, to be silent, to be truly humble.

In meditating, you give yourself the opportunity to BE, to be in utter simplicity, to be in humility.

During this time of being, you put your self-reflective ego aside.

Basically, in meditation, we are leaving the ego behind. When we meditate, each of us must learn to be humble, patient, and faithful. We must learn to be still.

We must learn to empty our heart of everything that is not God,

for he requires all the room that our heart can offer.

We learn that purity of heart by saying our mantra with absolute fidelity.

The purpose of saying our mantra is so that it becomes the focus of our attention, of our concentration. You are not thinking about anything. You are not pursuing any insights that are coming to you, any thoughts that are coming to you. You let them fall away. What you do is come to a greater and greater silence, where the only sound in your mind is the sound of the mantra.

John Main OSB – *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*



Living from the Centre



The great problem with the lives of so many of us is that we live at an incredibly shallow level. We tend to be concerned about what is new, what is the latest. Instead of seeing our life as a whole and as a process of growth, of maturity, of increasing depth, we simply move from one thing to another. We lose the sense of the connection between events, and so our lives can so easily become distracted. If we live our lives moving from one novelty to another, very quickly we find a sort of dullness setting in. Nothing seems to satisfy us if we are just concerned with things that are outside of ourselves.

We cannot find ultimate meaning outside of ourselves.

By meditating, we seek to find our way to the depths of our own being. We leave the shallow levels of our life behind, and enter into something that is profound. In meditating, we leave behind the passing, ephemeral things of life and enter into what is eternal.

Our own spirit is enduring. Our own spirit is eternal in God.

The call of Christianity is the call of every truly spiritual doctrine.

**The ultimate goal of all religion is a re-linking.
The re-linking is a re-linking with our own centre.
To be in one's own centre is to be in God.**

In the words of Jesus, "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." (Luke 17:21)

We must remember that the Kingdom is not a place, but an experience. The experience is the experience of the reality of the power of God. In the Christian vision, it is knowing that that power is the power of love

That's the purpose of all religion, that we are re-linked to our own centre.

The call is to open yourself to your own eternal spirit, to be open to your own rootedness in the Eternal.

Now what is the way? The way is the way of poverty, of simplicity. It is the way of meditation. Sit down, sit still and say your word faithfully. We say the word because the pilgrimage is a pilgrimage beyond ourselves, beyond our own limitations.

To go beyond ourselves, we must transcend thought and imagination. The word is the way, the vehicle that takes us forward.

The way to riches is the way of poverty. The way to enlightenment is the way of darkness.

We have to go through with ever greater discipline, with ever greater faithfulness.

But understand this. The way is simple. The way is not complicated. Just simple faithfulness, simple poverty of spirit; every morning and every evening devoting your time, not to what is passing, but to what is enduring – your own spirit alive and full of light in God.

John Main OSB, *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*





The Experience of Love

The truly spiritual man or woman is the man or woman who is in harmony with everyone they meet. You meet people not on the basis of competition or of projecting any image to them of who you might be, or would like to be, or think you ought to be. You begin to meet everyone as you are, the person you are, comfortable, accepting of your own being. You accept it because,

in the silence of your meditation, you come to the knowledge that you are accepted.

In the Christian vision of meditation, you discover something even more.

You discover in the silence that you are loved, that you are lovable.

That is the discovery that everyone must make in their lives if they are going to become fully themselves, fully human.

St John said, "God is love."

That is the vision proclaimed by Jesus. The extraordinary thing is that

this love is to be found in your own heart.

That is what I personally would like to be able to communicate to everyone I meet. This is an astonishing truth. In the hearts of each one of us, in the depths of our being, is to be found the source of endless, infinite love.

This is the love that casts out all our fears. Our spirit is expanding. Our heart is opening. We are becoming more generous.

The change in us comes about because, in meditation, we encounter the power to make this change possible. All of us would presumably like to be more kind, more understanding, more selfless, more sympathetic, more compassionate, and so on. But, at the same time, we recognize ourselves as weak, mortal, fallible, human beings.

What we discover in meditation is the power source to enable us to live this way. We discover that this power source is established right at the centre of our being.

John Main OSB, *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*





Leaving Self Behind

These are the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew:

"If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me. Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self. What will a man gain by winning the whole world, at the cost of his own true self? Or what will a man give that will buy that self back?" (Matt 16:24-26)

Jesus achieved his mission by total abandonment of self, by handing his life to the Father: "Not my will but thy will be done."

**That is the precise purpose of all meditation:
To lose our lives, to lose ourselves, and to become
totally absorbed in God through the human
consciousness of Jesus.**

Learning to say the mantra continually, ceaselessly, is the way in prayer to leave self behind, to lay down our life so as to be absorbed in the infinite mystery of God. Meditation takes us into the life of God.

It is an entry into divinization through Jesus.

Through Jesus, we become one with God.

**Through him, we utterly transcend ourselves,
leaving the whole of ourselves behind, and
becoming a new creation in him.**

John Main OSB, *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*

