

Meditatio

Newsletter of The
World Community
for Christian Meditation



Registered Charity No. 327173 - INTERNATIONAL EDITION, VOL. 38 N° 2; July 2013

Brothers in arms

The World Community and L'Arche came together for a silent retreat with Jean Vanier and Laurence Freeman in France. Read more on pages 2-5 and 9



Photo: Kayte Brimacomb

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A letter from Laurence Freeman, OSB

"When I drove to meet Jean Vanier at Heathrow on the day he was to begin leading the John Main Seminar in 1990, I was secretly pleased to be getting away from the place where all the setting-up was taking place. We had become rather stressed by all the organizational details and the cracks were showing. (Today we've learned better how to hide the strain and we also have a bit more experience at organizing events.)

However I created my own stress on this occasion by getting lost as I drove Jean across London to the Seminar. There are few things to make you feel more silly and embarrassed than being responsible for transportation and doing the transporting the wrong way. Nor can it be very reassuring for the guest speaker you are supposed to be transporting. But Jean either felt or showed no irritation; perhaps because he lives with people with mental disabilities he has learned to recognise and accept them in anyone he meets. Eventually, with the help of the map-reading abilities that he must have learned during his years in the navy, we arrived in harbour. He had already taught me an important lesson before what was to be a wonderful seminar began.

In May this year, when we led a retreat together at Trosly, the motherhouse of L'Arche, I remembered this incident that I think he had politely forgotten. Over the intervening years his sense of direction, the power of his intuitive compassion and his insight into how we can accept the mistakes and weaknesses, equally of others and of ourselves, have grown stronger and evolved into a rich and deep theology of life.

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L'Arche is a worldwide community of communities composed of the disabled who live with those who feel called, as to a vocation, for longer or shorter times, to this very demanding life. It might seem a long way on the spectrum of spiritual life and community from The World Community for Christian Meditation and its focus on the practice and teaching of the

contemplative path. As different, but as complementary, as Martha and Mary. As *the Cloud of Unknowing* says, and as St Benedict well knew, there is no life that is completely contemplative or totally active. You always find a trace of ying in yang and some yang in every dose of yin. The life of Jesus, that exemplifies the human quest lived most humanly, reflects this interweaving of stillness and action, silence and expression.

The retreat itself was composed equally of members of L'Arche and of the World Community, many with overlapping identities and many common experiences. As the days of the retreat – 'Entering into Silent Prayer' – proceeded it struck me pow-

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erfully how deeply Jean and I were saying the same thing; and how strangely, yet at the same time so obviously, the 'core experience' we were coming from leads to a transformation into the same, all-inclusive, infinitely tender, non-dual mind of Christ.

In my first talk I recalled John Main's belief that the most important thing for modern people to remember and recover is the meaning of silence. This means, in effect, to understand anew for our time what prayer always means. In our secularized society there is not a wholesale rejection of prayer. Statistically, more people pray than say they believe in God. But there is great confusion about what prayer is - and what it isn't. For many, prayer is either telling God what we are feeling especially when we are in trouble or asking him to do something about the causes of our feeling unhappy. The feeling that prayer is primarily about changing

external situations runs deep in us - even in the scientific research conducted on the effects of praying for people who are sick.

This is very understandable. Nature – either in the diseases that attack us and prematurely end our life in the tornadoes that rip through a town and destroy a primary school in seconds - is frighteningly unpredictable and mighty and terrifyingly impersonal. I recalled the night I was walking through the thick darkness of a Caribbean island without electricity towards the beach. What started as a pleasant stroll became increasingly terrible as I passed through a narrow canyon with the sound of the pounding surf ahead giving me my only sense of direction. I had never before felt, in my cells, how powerful the forces of nature are and also how insignificant the individual human being, and the human species, is in their presence. How casually and unconsciously the precious personal, with its unique and fragile story can be casually swept away by the anonymity of an iron fate. It gave me a small insight into how a Jew being rounded up in the holocaust must have felt. Or an insect we step on without even being aware of what we are doing.

So, it isn't surprising that, when we are confronted with this impersonal, anonymous power of nature, we imaginatively, desperately, associate it with God and invoke this imagined God to save us from it. Like the psalmist we may mystically hear and see God in the wild whirlwind and the devastating earthquake or the cold clinical diagnosis of cancer. But then we personalize these forces of natural energy - or biology - as expressions of God's anger or our own deserved punishment for sin. We anthropomorphise God, attribute our moods to him and project our fears onto him. Even in our culture of technology, which gives us explanations for many of these phenomena, we revert, in times of crisis, to this easy, emotive idea of God.

Whenever we are thrown up against the limits of our power to control events it

commented deeply on the word that is so significant in St John's gospel – *menein* – which can be translated as dwelling, living, resting, staying, abiding, making your home. This is to pray deeply and truly to pray is to have already decided to live in a new way.

As the meditator discovers by persevering faithfully in the practice of silence each day; as the L'Arche assistant discovers by choosing to spend part of their life living with the disabled – the inner and the outer levels of life cry out to be synchronized. As soon as we begin to live in an authentic way a signal is sent to all our relationships and values, exposing whatever in us is inauthentic, shallow or false, demanding that it be harmonized with whatever is the highest level of reality we are in touch with.

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'Prayer is not a flight from pain' Jean taught. It is the way, he said, that 'we let Jesus into the place where I feel not a success, into my core wound.' It is in this place of the wound – where our limitations are most rawly exposed – that love meets us. Jean told us movingly how he has learned this by living with the handicapped and with those who live and care for them.

So, as we run into our limitations and fears, we also learn to wait. But we wait on a downward slope, getting weaker as we approach the great meeting with the infinitely tender power of God. As the desert monks knew, silence is the essence of prayer – its radical purity and its transformative simplicity. When we discover the silence and stillness that dwells in the hub of the many-spoked wheel of prayer, we uncover the secret, the mystery, of authenticity. Until this happens we remain - periodically or chronically - beset by doubts and the shame that arises from our failures in relating to the real. Soon we realise that this new silence is not a privation – not merely being deprived of words or thought. We are not less silent when we stand in the roar of a windswept cliff or in the middle of a forest with birdsong and the sound of the wind in the branches. Silence is simply being oneself, no more, no less. What a relief and how absurdly, graciously simple and obvious. It is then that

we awaken to the mind that is this silence. It is what Buddhism calls the luminosity of mind and what the Christian in the intimacy of faith knows as the light of the mind of Christ. Silence draws into (or out of) us a mind that is so much greater, more inclusive and more compassionate than our own small ego-centric consciousness. By this silence we may on different days be soberly intoxicated or wretchedly terrified of losing our own identity.

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In this silence of the mind of Christ we are content to be our selves because there is no need to perform or pretend to be anyone else. This contentment is the peace we have ever been thirsting after. For the religious imagination, this freedom from acting a part is a nonviolent revolution that unfolds as long-held images of God and of self fall away like old masks. But the struggle goes on. If silence is so natural and simple – we see

*Prayer is moving from
being dominated by
our fears of nature to
experiencing (in faith)
the infinite power of God
whose nature it is never
to use force*

this in every class-room of children who so readily grasp the opportunity to meditate – and if it is so refreshing and renewing, why in the flow of life do we run away from it and resist it? Why find weak excuses for avoiding the time it demands of us?

The desert monks mined and labeled this bedrock of resistance. They saw it was composed of different layers that they called the obstructions or the principal faults. Only later were these called the 'seven deadly sins'; not a good choice of words because sin came to mean 'what is my own grievous fault' that merits punishment and penance. The legal rather than the medical model of grace thus came to dominate the Christian mind and Jesus became seen as just the opposite of what he said he was – as a judge and enforcer.

But he called himself a shepherd and a physician. Shepherds pay attention and care. Physicians deal with problems and heal. They don't play the guilt card. A shepherd doesn't punish the lost sheep. The physician doesn't inflict more pain on the suffering.

The 'faults' or obstructions we face as we enter the silence of prayer are universal, as human, in fact, as all the virtues on our credit side: greed, lust, over-indulgence, depression, laziness, anger, vanity and pride. These fault-lines are the 'logis-moi' or 'thoughts' of the Christian desert teaching. ('Prayer is the laying aside of thoughts'). The warrior monks identified the stages by which these states of mind take us over. Assault – when we first feel them forming. Interaction – when we start entertaining them. Consent – when we give in to them. Defeat – when they hold us hostage. And, Obsession – when they become addictive and cyclical.

The distractions we have to deal with in every meditation are often the visible waves of these deep currents and tidal patterns of our personal consciousness. They are the personalized forms of universal forces. They are waves of these movements of the soul that hit the shore of mental consciousness, gently or in a storm. By laying them aside we patiently change the patterns of the ocean. Silence is the work of laying the thoughts aside and returning to the pure, non-objectifying work of attention that makes meditation itself a work of love.

In this work we learn, by direct encounter with the master, that divine love is the ground of reality. And, that this love is non-judgmental. Judgment happens, as a reaction in ourselves, as the result of the total acceptance and unconditional love that we discover as the heart of reality. Judgment means seeing the difference between the real self that I am shown to be in this experience of love and the other self that I falsely identified with and which led me to act inauthentically. To the objection that this personifies the transpersonal we can only say that, for as long as we remain human, there is no better way than love for expressing it. It is also the essence and only reason for religion. As Ber-

Meditation and recovery from addiction

We invited people in recovery from alcohol and other drugs to speak about meditation. How does the practice help them to be free again?

“The Daily Practice and the group are essential to my continued sobriety”

By Anne



Step 11: “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

Recovery from alcoholism requires a continual shedding of my ego. Meditation is a very concrete and specific way of doing that. For 20 minutes a day, twice a day, I try to let go of my

agenda, my plans, my feelings, the day’s pressures, successes and failures, to simply be in the presence of God. Some periods of meditation I am able to let go, others I’m not. Usually it’s a little bit of both. These meditation periods are microcosms of my daily life. Some days I make progress in shedding my ego; other days I don’t. Most days it is mixed.

My morning meditation period helps me gather strength for the day. The evening meditation provides a time to surrender the day into God’s hands. In between, I try to live as I think God would want.

On Thursdays at noon, I attend an 11th Step meditation group. We begin with a reading from John Main or from Laurence Freeman. Then, we meditate together for 20 minutes. We close the meditation period with a reading from

AA literature. We then share our experience, strength, and hope with each other.

The twice a day meditation periods, and the once a week meditation group with others in recovery are essential to my continued sobriety. They keep me grounded in what is true, what is important, and what is enduring.

It took me a long time to become faithful to the twice-a-day meditation periods. The process of becoming willing to become faithful, and then becoming faithful, were important steps on the path of letting go of my ego... leaving self behind. In the process, I discovered God’s love for me and for all of us. His desire is that we be whole and holy.

ONLINE: Read a text by Mike M. and check our page on Meditation as an 11th Step in www.wccm.org

“I used to feel as if there were 1000 conversations in my head”

By Steve

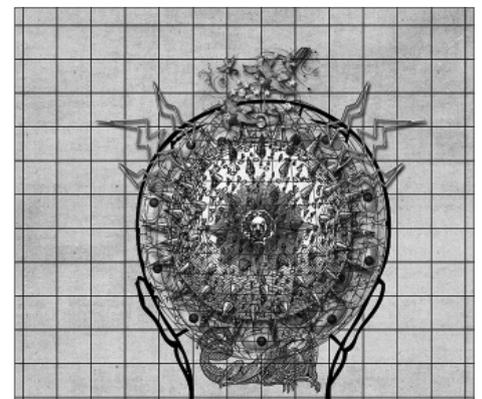
My name is Steve and I am a recovering drug addict. After trying all available methods to stop using drugs on a daily basis I found the twelve step recovery programme. I try to follow this spiritual programme in all aspects of my life and my life has quite literally taken on new meaning.

Prayer and meditation are (I believe) an essential part of my daily reprieve from a life filled with dishonesty, self seeking and despair and pain. As an addict I used to feel as if there were 1000 conversations and

thoughts going on in my head at all times.

Meditation enables me to take a step back away from the madness, to clear my head and to start with a clean slate. After being shown the discipline I now use meditation at least once a day to centre myself and my thoughts, a friend of mine calls it the matrix moment when everything around you slows down to a speed that I can handle without having to panic. In other words, I use it as part of a programme which means I have a

life to live instead of just an existence.



The mind, By sbpoet/CC

Once you do learn that discipline you will begin to live your life in harmony: harmony within yourself, because everything in your life will come into harmony with God, and harmony with all creation, because you will have found your place, your place in creation. (John Main)

News

Meditatio

Ray Dalio: "Meditation is the biggest gift I could give to somebody"

The Meditatio Forum "Leading From the Center" at The McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University



Over the last year, WCCM has been collaborating with the Georgetown McDonough School of Business and has begun to introduce meditation

to their MBA students. On 9th April, this collaboration resulted in an event led by Dean Thomas, alongside Laurence Freeman, Ray Dalio (founder

of Bridgewater Associates) and Sean Hagan (General Counsel of IMF). The event, entitled Leading From the Center focused on how the practice of meditation can not only enhance the professional effectiveness of leaders but also help them to examine their own values.

These were the opening words of Ray Dalio: "Meditation is the biggest gift I could give to somebody. Do it, find out what it is like and then you will know. I will tell you my story and why I think meditation is the greatest reason for whatever success I have had."

The next step will be the introduction of an accredited course, dedicated to this subject, to be held in the McDonough School in 2014. It will be taught by Laurence Freeman and will include well-known leaders as guest speakers.

Meditatio Seminars

Environment

A one day seminar is being planned on this topic to be held in October in London.

If you have an interest in environmental issues and action and would like to be part of a group to help develop our work in this area (and you don't have to live in London for this!) please contact briji.waterfield@gmail.com

Meditation with Children

Cathy Day and Ernie Christie who have been pioneers of meditation in schools will be leading Meditatio Forums in the US and Canada from 18th September to 2nd October (Sept. 20th: St. Paul,

MN; Sept 23: Houston, TX; Sept. 24,25: San Francisco, CA; Sept 27:Phoenix, AZ); Sept. 30: Jacksonville, FL; Oct 4,5: Toronto, Canada). For more information and to send your enquiry to wccm-usa.org

Breaking the Cycle of Violence

Laurence Freeman and James Alison will explore this topic in a Meditatio Seminar in Mexico City, 11-13 October. For more details email Enrique Lavin: wccm.mexico@gmail.com

New resources in Meditatio Store

The talks of the Meditatio Forum "Leading from the Center" and the first

two sessions of the Roots of Christian Mysticism are available in video at www.meditatiostore.com

Activities at Meditatio Centre

The new course of Roots of Christian Mysticism was opened on 25th April, at the Meditatio Centre in London. Booking is now closed for the summer term but you can still attend individual classes, and you can book for the autumn term which starts on 12 September. There are many other activities at the Centre, like workshops, Yoga sessions, A Moment of Calm and Meditation. You can check the full programme at www.wccmmeditatio.org

News

Meditation in the Arctic Circle of Canada

By Paul Harris



A new Christian meditation group has just been formed, two degrees north of the Arctic Circle in Canada, in one of the coldest areas of the world and in what is termed: "The land of the midnight sun" (the summer sun never sets). Based in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories of Canada, the new group meets in what is called the "Catholic Igloo Church" in this community of 3,600 souls. This new meditation group includes the parish priest (from the hot weather country of Nigeria), a

deacon, a college president, nurses, social workers, students and other professionals.

Inuvik is the homeland of the Inuit and Dene aboriginal peoples, as well as the residence of other people and cultures transplanted from the south. In addition some families are ancestors of European whalers and prospectors from the days of the gold rush in northern areas of the country.

The members of the group feel that beyond the bustle of a small town, where the temperature sometimes reaches 40 degrees below zero, one can feel the vast silence of this snow covered land. They point out that the Arctic thrusts one into the world of stillness, and the frozen environment is an assist to the contemplative dimension of spirituality in this area of the world.

Contemplative leadership was begun in the Arctic 30 years ago by the late Oblate missionary from France, Fr.

Henri Tardy who began to meditate following the teaching of John Main in the 1980's at a mission north of the Arctic Circle. Fr Henri once wrote this beautiful passage in the book: "The Heart of Silence: Christian Meditation by Those Who Practice It" about the Arctic and the contemplative life.

Wrote Tardy: "I spent years looking at the frozen ocean as far as the eye could see, listening to the silence of the snow-covered land and the wind, which so often forces you to stay home. I also observed the Inuit hunter, who remains motionless for hours, waiting for a seal to harpoon. I observed the silent Inuit traveler riding on his dog sled or building an igloo to shelter from the storm. The whole lifestyle plunged me into the world of silence".

"That's it" according to Inuvik meditators: "The Arctic is made for contemplatives and the practice of Christian Meditation".

Understanding the Guiding Board

By Roger Layet, Chair of the WCCM Guiding Board

The WCCM constitution lays down that we have a Guiding Board (GB) to "articulate a vision to sustain and share the development of Christian meditation around the world and to oversee the Community's life and growth".

The GB meets annually for two or three days, and sometimes also during the John Main Seminar. At the main meeting it reviews reports from the Director, The School, and the national communities. Recently we have discussed the future directions of the community, drafting "The Way Forward" which was sent to national communities for comment. (This

document, which includes ideas for central and local actions, will be discussed later this year at meetings of national coordinators). We have discussed priorities for the Meditatio programme of outreach to the secular world. We have endorsed the need for a stronger central staff - to relieve Fr. Laurence of administrative tasks and to facilitate outreach to the secular world. We have nearly completed an overhaul of our decision-making process, clarifying the roles of the GB itself, the Trustees, and the Executive Committee of the GB. The Trustees have the ultimate author-

ity, because the WCCM is a charity registered in law. The Executive Committee meets bi-monthly by WebEx, overseeing the central staff and helping the Director address operational issues.

The GB comprises 17 people, 3 each from the USA and the UK, and one each from Australia, Belgium, Brasil, Canada, China, Malaysia, Poland, Singapore, Switzerland, and Venezuela – plus Fr. Laurence, surely a citizen of the world! Seven of the 17 are national coordinators in their countries. Profiles of members are on the international website (www.wccm.org)

New Resources

Books

A Pearl of Great Price, Laurence Freeman

In this new edition, Laurence Freeman encourages meditators who appreciate the treasure they have discovered in meditation to share it with others by starting a meditation group. "All it takes to start a group", he says, "is the faith to begin and the support of those who have gone before". Contributors include many teachers of the community, including John Main OSB (excerpts from his writings), Laurence Freeman OSB, Kim Nataraja, Paul Harris, Peter Ng and Carla Cooper.

Sharing the Gift - Resources Book for Passing on Christian Meditation

This book contains a wealth of articles to support you in sharing the gift of Christian Meditation with others at all levels. The range of contributions allows you a great choice and covers all the aspects of the Essential Teaching of the tradition as taught by The World Community for Christian Meditation. These resources could be used for deepening your own knowledge, nurturing a group you are leading, or as inspiration for giving a talk or organizing a meditation event. Contribu-

tors include John Main OSB (excerpts from his writings), Laurence Freeman OSB, Kim Nataraja, Paul Harris and

other teachers of the community.

To order, go to our Meditatio Store (www.meditatiostore.com/)

Audio

New Thinking for a New Era - Richard Rohr and Laurence Freeman Febr. 15-17th, 2013, Chicago, US

Sharing a long friendship, Richard Rohr and Laurence Freeman are each deeply engaged with the renewal of

the spiritual dimension of our era. In this conference, these two spiritual friends offered ways we can put our deepest aspirations for personal realisation and social transformation into practice.

John Main Seminar 2013

Desert Wisdom & Oriental Spirituality: Inner Silence Led by Joseph Wong OSB Cam Hong Kong September 20-22



The practice of Christian meditation taught by John Main can be traced back to the Desert Fathers, in their effort to achieve inner silence and thereby union with God through purity of heart and unceasing prayer.

The contemplative-prophetic spirituality of our time is a development from this tradition. Joseph Wong will explore this ancient wisdom, showing its affinity with some Buddhist practices and indicating its contemporary relevance. Fr. Joseph is a Benedictine monk of the Camaldolese Congregation. He holds MTh from the University of London and STD from the Gregorian University, Rome, and is a member of the Pontifical Academy of Theology.

Pre-Seminar retreat led by Laurence Freeman OSB - September 16-19 (Limited Places, please contact Secretariat before enrolment)

Post-Seminar Interfaith Journey- September 22-25

See more in www.johnmainseminar2013.com

To order: Please contact your resource center or supplier for the price in your local currency

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