

## **THE FIRE OF SILENCE AND STILLNESS (from an anthology of quotations for the spiritual journey – edited by Paul Harris)**

Be still and know that I am God. *Psalm 46:10*

The Kingdom of God does not come in such a way as to be seen. No one will say “Look here it is!”, or “There it is!” because the Kingdom of God is within you. *Luke 17:20-1*

Heavenly Father, Open my heart to the silent presence of the spirit of your Son. Lead me into that mysterious silence Where your love is revealed to all who call. MARANATHA Come, Lord Jesus. *Dom John Main (1926-82)*

To find our own centre is the reverse of becoming self-centred. It is to awaken to the centre beyond ourselves, whence we are created and to which we return with Christ, the centre where we find ourselves and Him in that experience of communion we call the Kingdom. *Dom John Main (1926-82), The Present Christ*

The recovery of the contemplative dimension of our lives, therefore, goes far beyond a change in behaviour. It is nothing less than a spiritual revolution that awakens deep levels of consciousness in us: not just the surface consciousness of our superficial self, but the inner depth consciousness of our real self, which we experience as nothing apart from the Being of God. It is what the Fathers of the Church, especially the Eastern Fathers, like to call the discovery of the heart: the heart, not as a physical organ, but as the center of my being, the place where I am most truly myself, the place where I experience God, the place where I find my brothers and sisters in an entirely new way. *William Shannon, Seeking the Face of God*

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. *Matthew 13: 44-6*

Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams. Love in dreams is greedy for immediate action, rapidly performed and in the sight of all. Men will even give their lives if only the ordeal does not last long but is soon over with all onlooking and applauding as though on the stage. But love is labour and fortitude .... Just when you see with horror that in spite of all your efforts you are getting further from your goal instead of nearer to it - at that very moment - you will reach it and behold clearly the miraculous power of the Lord who has been all the time loving and mysteriously guiding you. *Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-81) The Brothers Karamazov*

The mystery of our relationship with God is one that embraces such a vast canvas that only by developing our capacity for awe-filled and reverential silence will we ever be able to appreciate even a fraction of its wonder. We know that God is intimately with us, and we know also that he is infinitely beyond us. It is only through deep and liberating silence that we can reconcile the polarities of this mysterious paradox. And the liberation that we experience in silent prayer is precisely liberation from the inevitably distorting effects of language when we begin to experience God's intimate and transcendent dominion within us. *John Main, Word into Silence 7.*

**MEDITATION (from John Main Essential Writings pp 94-95)**

*If philosophy, as Plato said, begins in wonder, meditation, for John Main, begins with an overwhelming sense of reverence. This remains the best preparation for meditation. The loss of a sense of the sacred, including the sacredness of our own humanity, poses a great danger to the world. And therefore growth in spiritual awareness is today's highest priority. For this to be accomplished, we must recover the experience and meaning of silence.*

Silence has psychological aspects, of course, but John Main is interested in the spiritual discovery awaiting us if we enter the silence that is within us. What we experience in that eternal silence is the love of God. And once experienced we know that love is the "supreme reality."

Simplicity is another great challenge because of the inveterate temptation to complicate things. The mantra itself meets and resolves these challenges, but the mantra is a great challenge too. That is why it is important to understand from the beginning that the process of growth that the mantra launches is organic, not mechanical. John Main showed how this process of growth allows time for the mantra to become rooted before the prayer of Jesus flourishes and flowers. The challenge of faith is to repeat lovingly, not mechanically. We must learn to see the times of meditation not as our own times of prayer but as time for the prayer of Jesus to expand in and through us.

John Main's essential concern is to help people get started.

He is therefore reluctant to describe in detail more "advanced" stages of the practice of meditation as this could easily pander to mere curiosity, while what people need is to jump in and to learn from their own experience. His teaching dispels the misconceptions or fears that prevent people from doing that the idea, for example, that meditation is foreign, esoteric, or a dangerous technique.

### **Cassian on the Mantra**

This is the verse that the mind should unceasingly cling to, until strengthened by saying it over and over again and repeating it continually, it renounces and lets go of all the riches of thought and imagination. Restricting itself to the poverty of this single verse it will come most easily to that first of the Gospel beatitudes: for he says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." *John Cassian (c400AD), Conference 10:11*

Once you have begun this as a simple daily practice, there are a few guidelines concerning your attitude to the experience that will help you to go deeper. First, don't assess your progress. The feeling of failure – or success – may be the biggest distraction of all. Do not expect or look for "experiences" in mediation. You don't have to feel that anything should be happening. This may seem odd at first, because the experience of silence is so unfamiliar to most of us personally and so different from what we may think that prayer means.

And we are not used to being simple. The silence, stillness and simplicity, however, do have an ultimate purpose. In one of the parables of the Kingdom, Jesus compared the Kingdom to a seed that someone plants in the ground. The person then goes off to live an ordinary life while the seed grows silently in the earth "how he does not know". The same thing happens to us, as the word is rooted evermore deeply in our hearts. And, as in the parable, there will in time be signs of growth. You will not always find them in your meditation itself, but in your life. You will begin to harvest the fruits of the spirit; you will find that you are growing in

love. And if you ever stop the practice of meditation, whether for a day or a month or a year, simply return to it again with confidence in the infinite generosity of the Spirit that dwells in and among us all.

**On John Main & the Christian Contemplative Tradition:**

“One of the essential teachings I have taken from John Main and the Christian contemplative tradition that he has helped restore is the importance of a particular kind of stability or faithfulness in the daily practice of meditation. In being faithful to and with the mantra we are staying. That relates directly to what the Desert Fathers teach about stability. The whole practice of staying with the mantra and the discipline of meditating, the saying of the prayer 'formula' makes most sense within the context of the kind of life the Desert Fathers talk about. That means a life where we are always trying to put our self-preoccupation and self-dramatizing, our compulsion to be in charge to one side.” *Rowan Williams, Silence and Honey Cakes*