

## ***The practice of meditation – rediscovering of an age old tradition***

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### ***Before we start the session – 5 min of silence***

Let us immediately get into the deep end of the pool:

1. *Sit down*: The body is at rest but not in the usual position for sleep.
2. *Sit still*: The body expresses the whole person's attitude of attention and reverence.
3. *Keep your back straight*: The body is alert and wakeful.
4. *Breathe normally*: Ideally from the belly.
5. *Be relaxed but alert*: Now for 5 minutes, in silence say your prayer word, I recommend *Maranatha*.<sup>1</sup> Say it slowly, for the whole duration of time.

This is how simple and easy meditations is, but let's look at the back ground of this practise and try and answer the following questions

Where does it come from?

Is it Biblical?

What are the benefits?

### **1. Introduction**

When I talk about meditation as a spiritual discipline, I want to do so from the perspective of a mystical spirituality. In the first 300 years of the history of the church, the church grew every decade by 40%. (Hann & Aquilina, 2003: 17). During the conversion of Constantine, it is estimated that in the Roman Empire with its 60 million people, 35 million were confessing Christ as Lord and saviour. Yet, it meant your death to confess "Christos Curios!"

How did this happen? Why were people willing to risk their lives? These people discovered the reality of the mystery of Christ. Christ was more than they ever knew or believed in. The Mystery got hold of them. The Church even called the sacraments, the mysteries. Catechism was an introduction into the Mystery.

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<sup>1</sup> An Aramaic formula used in transliteration without explanation at 1 Cor. 16:22, av. In the *Didache* (10. 6) it figures as part of the eucharistic liturgy. The phrase is probably to be resolved as *māranā t̄ā*, 'our Lord, come!' The anticipation and longing expressed in this early Christian prayer may be seen reflected in 1 Cor. 11:26 (*cf.* the context in the *Didache*) and in Rev. 22:20. The occurrence of the phrase at 1 Cor. 16:22 derives from the idea of judgment implicit in v. 21, which is closely linked with the idea of the second coming. (*New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed.) (726). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.)

Tertullianus (197 AD.) tells us that the mystery was only for those who confessed Christ and that there was a certain silence that was kept about what actually happened at the Eucharist.

*“For it could not have been by the Christians themselves, I suppose, since by the very constitution and law of all mysteries the obligation of silence is imposed. How much more would this be the case in such (mysteries as are ascribed to us), which, if divulged, could not fail to bring down instant punishment from the prompt resentment of men! Since, therefore, the Christians are not their own betrayers, it follows that it must be strangers. Now I ask, how could strangers obtain knowledge of us, when even true and lawful mysteries exclude every stranger from witnessing them, unless illicit ones are less exclusive?” (Roberts en Donaldson (ed) 1997, p210).*

Because of the intimacy of the Mysteries they were considered to be holy and therefore revered and not spoken off.

## 2. What is this mystery or μυστήριον?

The mystery cannot be explained, but only experienced. It takes you on a journey away from self to the intimate presence of God (See Welzen 1995: 86-103). Let's look at the Bible to see how the writers of the New Testament tried to explain this.

- *Rom 8:29* For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be conformed* to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
- *2 Cor 3:18*. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are **changed** into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord.
- *Mark 9:2* And after six days Jesus taketh *with him* Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was **transfigured** before them. <sup>3</sup> And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.

The word used is metamorphoses; it explains the mystical transformation which takes place in relationship with God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But what is this relationship with God in mystical terms?

- *Joh 17: 21* That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.
- *Joh 17:3* And this is life eternal, that they might **know** thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (Jada – intimacy)

This is what is called by the early church fathers – theosis, to become one with God, not in His essence but in His energy, which is love (Stavropoulos 2003:184). God changes the world through His energy, love.

Theosis, or enlightenment, is like the moon reflected on the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and the entire sky are reflected in dewdrops on the grass, or even in one drop of water. (Zen Master Eihei Dogen, 19 January 1200 – 22 September 1253)

The question remains: How is this achieved?

- The tradition was lost but recovered especially by the desert monk, John Cassian (360-435). “The whole purpose of the monk and indeed the perfection of his heart amount to this - total and uninterrupted dedication to prayer” (Cassian 1985:101). It was from the desert fathers that Cassian learned that theosis was the outcome of uninterrupted prayer. These prayers however followed a certain pattern. Fr Isac (May 30, 383) taught Cassian that the process starts with:
  - Lectio – the reading of the scripture
  - Meditatio – the uninterrupted repetition of scripture
  - Oratio – praying the scripture
  - Monologistos – taking only one word of scripture in prayer
  - Contemplatio – moving into silence and staying in silence
  - Theosis

(This method of reading and praying is again picked up in *Letter of Dom Guigo the Carthusian to Brother Gervase, about the Contemplative Life*, written about the year 1150 <http://www.umilta.net/ladder.html> )

To conclude then this first part: To attain theosis or enlightenment, the desert fathers taught silence as a way of prayer to achieve this. But is it Biblical and how can we practise it.

### 3. Meditation is it a Biblical practise?

In the Old Testament, especially the Psalms, there are two words used for meditation, contemplation and muse, *haga* הָגָה and *shiag* שִׁיחַ

- Psalm 19:14:- הָגָה Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.
- Psalm 77:6:- שִׁיחַ *I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.*
- Psalm 143:5:- הָגָה *I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse (שִׁיחַ) on the work of thy hands.*
- Ps 39:3 *My heart was hot within me, while I was musing (הָגָה) the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue,*

We are also familiar with the story in 1 Ki 19:11-12 *And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.*

Let us now look at the way that Jesus explained prayer. In Matthew 6:5-13 Jesus is first saying what prayer is not: Focussing on the self, something to boast about in public, standing up for everyone to see, using lots of words as though you can persuade God with long sentences and arguments. Then He teaches the simplicity of prayer: *Go into your private room*, literally storage chamber, storeroom or secret room. The only room in the house with a door, except of course for the house itself, was the storeroom or pantry. This was the only secret room in the house.

The key to understanding the meaning of the secret room, is the next verse: *“...pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”* The place which is secret is the inner most sanctuary of my being. It is there where God dwells and there where He can see. There He sees my needs, desires and emptiness. All that is needed for me is to go into my secret room and

whisper the word “Maranatha – Come Lord Jesus”. He will reward me with His holy presence.

It is there where the Spirit is already praying in us. *We do not even know how to pray but the Spirit himself prays within us.* (Romans 8:26) This means that we must move beyond the level of mental prayer – talking to God, thinking about God, asking God for our needs. We must go to the depths, to where the spirit of Jesus himself is praying in our hearts, in the deep silence of his union with our Father in the Holy Spirit (Freeman 2008:9).

#### **4. How should we pray:**

Faith is love. God is love. To believe is to love (1 Jh 3 en 4). What is the language of love? Silence is God’s first language; all other translations are poor translations (Keating 2003:90). God’s desire for us is to enter into an intimate relationship – Theosis. The purpose of prayer is to enhance the intimacy with the Father. Christian prayer, therefore, means entering the life of the Holy Trinity in, through and with the human mind and heart of Jesus (Freeman 2008:13). We do this in simplicity, through faith and in silence.

#### ***This is how we do it:***

Get a place where you can enter into the silence daily. This is your sacred space. Enter into this space with the expectation that God is already waiting there for you.

1. Sit still with your back straight.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Repeat your prayer word interiorly, and continuously.

The meaning and the sound of the word are both important. But as you say the word, do not think about the meaning. The prayer word leads us deeper than thought, to pure being. It leads us by faith. We say the prayer word in faith and love. Listening to the prayer word as we say it is the ever deepening work of a journey of faith.

Choose a quiet time and place every morning and evening, and meditate for about 20-30 minutes each time.

Four rules to help you to persevere:

1. Don’t have any demands or expectations.
2. Don’t evaluate your meditation.
3. Integrate it into your daily life, with morning and evening practice.

4. Live its consequence, day by day.

### 5. What are the benefits?

The fruit of the spirit Gal 5:22 "...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control." I would however like to highlight one of the fruit; peace. You will experience more and more how the peace of God fills you, enables you to handle whatever life throws at you.

You will also start living in the moment and experience life as God-filled events.

God will become a reality.

You will be busy with His agenda of transformation.

*"The wonderful beauty of prayer is that the opening of our heart is as natural as the opening of a flower. To let a flower open and bloom it is only necessary to let it be: so if we simply are, if we become and remain still and silent, our heart cannot but be open, the Spirit cannot but pour through into our whole being. It is for this that we have been created."* John Main OSB (1926-1982).

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