Meditation on Ascension

This reflection and meditation can be done without the Youtube video (recommend the use of Youtube if you can). For those who struggle with hearing, the text below can also be used to support the video. Our Youtube presentation is an invitation to spiritually join regular meditators at Wisdom Centre (presently isolated and meditating in their own homes). The tradition we meditate in is Centering Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions

The text is on the screen with narration. Music and a count down timer are part of the presentation. For technical reasons, the reflection occasionally has some disruption to the sound quality. To overcome this, a transcript is below.

Begins with usual opening prayers and introductions (Audio Visual or follow using text below)

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition, followed by some guidelines on the steps of meditation (Lectio Divina)

Opening Prayer: Through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, by whose breath our souls are raised to life. We, in meditation in this time of crisis pray with all others, as one community and one world to One God, we unite with our brothers and sisters of all world traditions.

With God are Wisdom and understanding. May our ears be attentive, may the meditation of our hearts be for understanding. Through Christ, may we seek and find you, acting only according to Your will. May we follow His teaching, also seeking, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we commit to love of earth, faithfulness, community, stability, peace and justice making.

Letting go of all else, in contemplation we surrender in love to you. Let our sacred word be a symbol of our consent to your loving presence and healing. May we be faithful to this word so that it rises in our hearts, awakening that sense of Your presence. **Amen**

Reflections on Ascension put together by Fiona

Quote 1: Since we are approaching Ascension Day, I thought I would share some of my own experiences through an early encounter with the writings of Thomas Merton.

Merton, a Trappist monk and spiritual author, said of the Ascension. “This is the grace of Ascension Day: to be taken up into the heaven of our own souls, the point of immediate contact with God.” Heaven is where God is present. He is present within each of us, closer to us than any human being. So when we are looking for God, there is no need to look up into the sky, as we often do, but rather to turn our glance inward… To rest on this quiet peak in the darkness that surrounds God.” (Merton, 2002). [Fiona] Of course Jesus’ ascension in Acts 1:9 is a whole journey where the darkness and the utter poverty of the crucifixion made the light of the resurrection and ultimately the ascension possible.

I thought I would begin this meditation by sharing some of my early experience of spirituality. Following an experience on a business trip almost ten years ago, I abandoned my agnostic views, dabbling with Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, I also abandoned my paid work after having attended properly to the practicalities. One thing I had learned from Buddhism was to search inward to reach the God that I felt I had experienced.

Quote 2: Needing to talk about my experience I turned to a lapsed Roman Catholic friend who suggested I read Merton's Palace of Nowhere, by James Finlay a former Trappist monk and student of Thomas Merton, the renowned Christian author. In the introduction of the book was the invitation to prayerfully enquire 'Who am I, not relative to this or that aspect of my being, [relationship, occupation etc] but rather who am I ultimately before God? (Finley, 1978,p.xxii) The question set me on my Christian journey and It was through Thomas Merton (1915-1968) that I discovered, Daisetsu Teitaro Suzuki (1870-1966) and his writings on the Christian medieval Meister Eckhart (1260-1328). This subsequently opened up the Bible and the entire Christian mystical tradition for me.

Quote 3: Often Spiritual people imagine Ascension to mean some lofty religious experience. Merton invites us to reflect each day on God's presence to us. However, he mentions "darkness that surrounds God", the via negativa, or way of mysticism. Here we look for the hidden God who is present within ourselves and each brother and sister that God created. Paradoxically, in Ascension, we can travel inward, descending deep into our own souls to nourish a deeper and more intimate relationship with God, the fruits of which flows outwards and upwards into our relationships with one another.

In other words the way to ascend to God and appreciate relationship with the created order is to descend into oneself; —"If thou wishest to search out the deep things of God, search out the depths of thine own spirit"; — said St Victor Hugo, the 12th century Augustinian.

Sister Catherine said to her spiritual director Meister Eckhart around 1300 AD. "Sir, rejoice with me, I have become God" and she knew he would understand.[2]

Meister Eckhart, the fourteenth-century mystic, himself remarked: "I am converted into Him, not as a similar being but so that He makes me one with Himself."

And St Paul writing to the Corinthians two millennia ago was equally explicit:

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17

Bernard of Clairvaux is perhaps the most astute in talking about the fact that we ascend by the poverty of humility and descend by pride or ego. Yet this in a sense is a two way street. Humility and pride have to work together to achieve this end.

Quote 4: **I [Fiona] am using this passage from Mertons Birds of Appetite to talk about the descent that is required before ascension:** "Blessed are those who are poor in spirit" Eckhart defines "he is a poor man who wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing." This is possible when a man is "empty of self and all things," when the mind is thoroughly

purified of knowledge or ignorance, which we have after the loss of innocence. In other words to gain innocence again is to be poor. What strikes one as somewhat strange is Eckhart representing a poor man is knowing nothing. This is a very significant statement. The beginning of knowledge is when the mind is filled with all kinds of defiled thoughts, among the worst is "self." For all evils and defilements start from our attachment to it, …This is the greatest stumbling block in our spiritual discipline, which in actuality consists not in getting rid of the self, but in realising the fact that there is no such existence from the first. The realisation means being "poor" in spirit "being poor" does not mean "becoming poor," "being poor" means to be from the very beginning, not in possession of anything and not giving away what one has. Nothing to gain; nothing to lose, nothing to give: nothing to take; to be just so…This is to be "poor" in its most proper and characteristic sense of the word. This is what all religious experiences tell.

Quote 5: "In this respect, Eckhart had a wonderful insight into the nature of what he calls die eigentlichste Armut **eegen tlich ste** or poverty. We are genuinely apt to imagine that when the mind, or heart is emptied of "self and all things" a room is left ready for God to enter and occupy it." [Fiona] In fact Eckhart once controversially said 'I pray to God to rid me of God.' Now Eckhart was quite clearly in the ascendant here. How often do we believe that others should believe as we do and do as we do and work as we do, this attitude is not one of emptiness.

Quote 6: Eckhart believes:

"If it is the case that a man is emptied of all things, creatures, himself and God, and if still God could find a place in him to act, then we say, as long as that (place) exists, this man is not poor with the most intimate poverty. For God does not intend that a man shall have a place reserved for him to work in, since true poverty of spirit requires us to man shall be emptied of God and all his works. So that if God wants to act in the soul he must himself be the place in which he acts…For if God once found a person as poor as this, he will take the responsibility of his own action, and would himself be the scene of action, for God is One who acts within himself. It is here in this poverty that a man regains the eternal being that he once was, now is, and evermore shall be."

Merton interprets Eckhart, "God is at once the place where he [God] works, and the work itself. The place is zero or "emptiness as being" whereas the work which is carried out in the zero-place is infinity or "emptiness as becoming." Perfect poverty is recovered only when perfect emptiness is perfect fullness.

Quote 7: **[Fiona], now we talk about Ascension:** In the passage above, perfect emptiness is perfect fullness. In the passage to follow Merton combines Buddhist thought with Eckhart. When he speaks of Sambodhi, the breaking through towards enlightenment, we can imagine ourselves rising out of the depths of darkness to pierce the cloud towards glorious light. Merton quotes Eckhart:

"In my breakthrough…I transcend all creatures and am neither God nor creature: I am that I was and I shall remain now and forever. Then I receive an impulse (Aufschwung) which carries me above all angels. In this impulse I conceive such passing riches that I am not

content with God as being God, as being all his godly works, for in this breaking through I find that God and I are both the same…" and as D.T. Suzuki says "All is realized when we go through the experience of breaking through which is nothing else but enlightenment."

Merton refers to the Zen Master DT Suzuki to ensure that in our final ascent to God we must not become attached to 'breaking through.' and must in effect learn to 'transcend' or 'cast away' the experience of ascension itself to avoid any trappings of achievement. "Then and only then do we find ourselves again to be the ordinary Toms, Dicks and Harrys we had been all along." [Fiona] Only now do we realize perfect emptiness as perfect fullness and perfect descent as perfect ascent and vice versa.

Beginning Meditation

Before beginning our meditation you may wish to adjust posture, you may wish to pay particular attention to the rhythm of your breath, taking a calming deep breath in through your nose, and a slow breath out through rounded lips, letting go fully. Then repeat this 4-6 times. If you have a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps in time with breath. During meditation, feel free to notice what it is you need today, whether it be your normal practice or to watch the candle, or to stretch your body and release tension. There is no need to complete the full 20 minutes if that is not for you. Simply allow your inner rhythm to be heard. We begin the meditation now.

Bell Sounds…

20-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Ends with usual closing prayers: Through Jesus Christ, by the Spirit, by whose breath our souls are raised to life, we in meditation in this time of crisis pray with all others, as one community and one world to One God, we unite with our brothers and sisters around the world. Moments of your personal prayer follow**…Amen**

Thank you for meditating with us, please join us again soon

For meditation groups, prayer groups, spirituality, wellbeing, retreats, workshops and our labyrinth garden, please visit our website: **wisdomhouseromsey.co.uk**



Our peaceful outdoor spaces promote wellbeing and are open to all, free of charge.