Meditation Group: Purification

A Meditation on Purification, in the Centering Prayer Tradition, words by Rob.

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.

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

Opening Prayer: Rob opens with the usual Wisdom House Prayer

Good evening everybody. This is my first attempt at recording. To I will endeavour to speak to you as if I were sitting with you in the prayer room at Wisdom House. I start with our usual opening prayer: Wisdom, source of all being, saviour, Holy Spirit. We welcome your presence at the centre of our being. We bring to you those people, thoughts and situations we have our own on our own hearts, that you may work in us and others in accordance with your will.

May we celebrate the depths of mysticism and self-understanding. May we celebrate love of earth, the body, and commitment to faithfulness, community stability, peace and justice making. May the words of the mystics assist us in our awakening. May we travel lightly through life, while contributing to the shared commitment of creating a future worthy of our nobility as sons and daughters of Wisdom, the source of all. 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.**

Rob: Friday just gone, the 1st of May, was the ancient Celtic feast of Beltane, a feast of purification and renewal in which the participants would leap between two fires which represented the burning away of their old habits. As they did so, they make new commitments and vows for the future. So, I wanted to make the theme for tonight, one of purification and renewal. This is central to all religions, in *The Beatitudes*, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus said, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. In *The Dhammapada*, the teachings of Buddhism are summarised in three things: do not do evil, do good and cultivate a pure heart. These things sound easy, but they're not.

In our modern, rational world, we look outwards to the world and seek to accumulate knowledge about things; scientific knowledge or skills to get things done. In our spiritual

practice, the focus is different, we look inwards and our practice is one of letting go, of not accumulating, of gradually wearing away the unhelpful aspects and finding the pure, loving self within. In the in the prayer which we just said, the opening prayer, we say “letting go of all else, in contemplation, we surrender in love to you.” So, this is a process of letting go, of gradually wearing away, and it is a gradual process. Later on, in the *Dhammapada* the Buddha explains it in this way; he says, “make an island for yourself, strive hard and become wise, rid yourself of impurities and cleanse yourself of stains. One by one, little by little and from time to time should a wise person remove their own impurities, just as the Smith removes the dross off silver.”

So, this is a gradual process, which we do from time to time, gradually wearing away at the dross and revealing the pure shining silver, the pure heart within. But the process is not an easy one, it takes honesty, honesty with ourselves and courage. In his book, *First Sight*, Fr Laurence Freeman describes the first stage of faith, which he calls purgation. Fr Laurence begins by talking about St Anthony, a desert father, before talking about his own, letting go and coming to realisation and understanding. He goes on to say this about the process of purgation: “Purgation is hard, but natural and life giving, as we experience also in meditation, it is a cleansing of the memory.” We too, like St Anthony have to face the dead, to see through the ghosts of our past and look at them without being scared to death by them. In the same batch, we have to face our dead or archive selves, our dormant attachments, repressed fears and guilts, and above all the losses we have endured. We have to look them in the eye, because there is no other way of being free from their influence than completely updating, refreshing ourselves into the present. Sometimes on the internet, you go to a favourite homepage, and notice that nothing has changed since you last visited. If you click the refresh page, however, things go whirling in cyberspace, and when the page reappears, you see the latest update version. So, to be alive and enjoy our freedom, we have to stop living in the past and to get updated, we have to break with the habits that keep us controlled by our personal history or cultural conditioning.

A repositioning of ourselves happens through a combination of our own efforts sustained by faith and grace, which will surely reach us eventually if we stay faithful to the process. So, its a hard task, but we have to recognise the need to do it. All these habits, beliefs and ego, which are ingrained and rooted in us are not in themselves bad or wrong, they've come from billions of years of evolution. As Lawrence Freeman says, the cultural influences throughout our lives and past have been necessary and essential to our development, but when they’ve become outdated and archaic we need to appraise them. We can do this because we have made the connection and grown into knowing and awareness. In doing this, we have to recognise also, that our mind, our egos, our past conditioning, are very stubborn and headstrong and wayward, they're very difficult to tame.

The wayward ego was illustrated by the 12th century pictures and poems by the Chinese master Kuòān Shīyuǎn, known for his bull herding, pictures and, and verses. In this tradition, the bull is represented as being a metaphor for the mind and the ego. The herdsman, first of all, finds traces traces of the ego [the bull] and has to go in search. He eventually has to train

the bull and bring under control. He brings home the bull, the mind and ego, which he does sitting on the bulls back playing his flute, but the process is a difficult and painful.

Rob reads some verses from master Kuòān's poems which illustrate this practice and the stage of purifying:

With great effort, the herdsmen succeeded in catching the bull, but stubborn, wilful and strong, this bull is not easily gentled. At times he breaks out and climbs up to the high plains or rushes down into boggy marshland to hide himself there. The herdsman holds the reign tight and does not let go since many of the sapless faults are not yet uprooted. No matter how gently the herdsman pulls at the nose rope, the bull may still rear and try to bolt back to the wild. Though caught, where the sweet-scented grass reaches sky high, the headsman must not let go of the reign tied to the bull's nose. Although the way home clearly beckons already, the headsman must sometimes indulge the bull, by the blue stream or on the green mountain. The practice must be firm, but gentle. The bull is natural, and our minds and egos are also natural. They have been important to us throughout our evolution, and throughout our lives. They have served us well and we need to treat them with gratitude and with gentleness.

As the bull hunting poem says; we must occasionally indulge them [the bulls], at the blue stream, or the green mountain. We must not treat them as bad or evil, but simply as archaic things to be brought up to date, to be reappraised. We are able to do this because we're able to make connections with ourselves, with other people, with the world and with the environment. And in doing that, we recognise two things, first of all, from the connection; in making the connection, we give up a little of ourselves, and in doing so we take on a little of the other. We take on that knowing, that knowledge, and in so doing, we also come to appreciation of the other. So there are these two things, knowing and appreciating, understanding and love, or wisdom and compassion. It is from this root that we are able to make a gradual transformation. The rubbing away of the dross, like the silversmith, we attend to the gradual removing of our old habits, old prejudices, old beliefs and old attitudes. Gradually we release, let go of all the dross, hindrances and obstructions surrounding the pure heart within.

The end process just described is illustrated by a famous story of a Japanese Samurai who gave up following his troop as a warrior and instead went in to a monastery for training and instruction. He was there for many years undergoing training under the Abbot Master. After many years of practice, he went to the Abbot and asked if he was ready to go out into the world. Because he'd practice well, the Abbot gave him permission. He walked on his way down the mountain from the monastery and as he went along the path, he happened to pass a warrior, a Samurai warrior on his horse who he recognised as a member of his old troop. The warrior looked down on the monk and realized he recognised him as someone who left the troop and abandoned the work of the warrior class; because of this, he held the monk in great contempt. He issued what was the worst insult the samurai warrior could give at that time; he spat in the monks face. The monk, describing this instance said that as he wiped away the spittle from his face, he realised that before he'd done the practice, before he went into the monastery, great anger would have risen in his heart at this insult. He

realized he would have immediately reached for his sword and attacked the warrior who had insulted him. But now, he simply treated it with calm and wiped away the spittle. As he did so, he looked back towards the monastery, he said these words; “the mountain is still the mountain, and the path is the path of old, all that has truly changed is my own heart.”

So, I would like to end with another illustration of the ending of the process. I'm going to read one of the recent poems, the final poems in the life of Fr Thomas Keating. We were really blessed to have commentary on these poems by Cynthia Bourgeault during her recent international conference, organised by the South African branch of Contemplative Outreach.

This poem is called ‘Stillness.’
Our true nature is stillness.
The source from which we come
It manifests itself within us
as a righty rising tide of silence,
A flowing stream of peacefulness,
a limitless ocean of calm
or just sheer stillness.
The deep listening, a pure contemplation
is the path of stillness all words disappear into it
and all creation awaken to the delight of just being.

Rob introduces meditation, and the importance of posture and comfort…

I invite you to make yourself comfortable for the centering prayer meditation. Keeping our back straight; being aware of our body touching the chair or the cushion, the ground within us, placing our feet on the ground, coming into that place of stillness, the deep listening of pure contemplation and into the delight of just being. Letting go of all the activity and business of the day, knowing that we're here, meditating together, although at a distance from each other. The meditation will be 25 minutes, beginning with the sound of the gong

Beginning Meditation

Bell Sounds…

25-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**