Meditation on 'letting go' – Reflections 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 introductory text is on the screen with narration. A countdown timer is part of the presentation, and will sometimes be accompanied by music.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona Jenvey, one of the group leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. Our Meditation this week is led by Rob. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate in the Centering Prayer tradition, beginning with an opening prayer followed by reflections and then 25 minutes of silence. We hope you enjoy your meditation with us.

Opening Prayer: Eternal God, through our meditation may the ears of our hearts be attentive to your Word. May we seek and find You. Awakened to Your presence may we be joyful, embodying peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-awareness. May we follow Your teaching, seeking also, the wisdom of the Holy Fathers and Mothers. May we, therefore, commit to community, love of earth, stability, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction: All the spiritual traditions emphasise the need to "let go", but the concept can be confusing. Let go of what? How do we let go? Sometimes we think of it as relaxing or 'chilling out'; but although that might be a part of it, it is not quite it. Sometimes we think it is making the mind blank or not thinking; but that is virtually impossible and letting go does not mean escape from awareness or avoiding responsibility – in fact it is quite the opposite. Sometimes we think that it means focussing intently on something and not letting any other thought in, but then we find ourselves gritting our teeth and tensing up, and not letting go at all. A little while ago there was a story in the news about a young girl who fell into a pool above a waterfall in Wales and before her father could reach her fell 100 feet in the waterfall. Miraculously she survived and was pulled from the pool below by a passer-by. This reminded me of an old Taoist story of a master and his disciples who saw a man fall from a waterfall, and when they went to see if he was alright he calmly climbed out of the pool at the bottom and said that he had been doing it since he was a boy. They asked him how he did it and his reply was "I accommodated myself to the water, not the water to me. Without thinking, I allowed myself to be shaped by it. Plunging into the swirl, I came out with the swirl. This is how I survived." Although he said, "without thinking", he did not make his mind blank; instead he attuned it to the water, totally immersing his body and mind in the environment. Similarly, the young girl did not lose awareness. She said that she felt a little frightened at first and that she saw a fish. What they both did was not to cling to anything, to let go of attachment. It is fairly obvious that if in that situation we were to try to grasp something physically like a rock or a tuft of grass or a plant, we are going to be in trouble. In the same way unless we are able to let go mentally, we will put ourselves at odds with the environment and in danger. The direction of the flow and unevenness of the surface continually and rapidly change, and we have to be open to the changes.

Jesus's Teaching: So letting go is about not clinging to anything, not attaching, but remaining open

and receptive to every possibility. To do this we have to allow our perception of ourselves as defined individuals with established positions and fixed needs which must be satisfied on our terms to recede.

One of the greatest expositions of the spiritual aspect of letting go is in the Sermon on the Mount at St Matthew 6: 25. The King James Version is the most poetic and evocative rendering of this well known passage:

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? [2] Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how the grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or What shall we drink? Or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek: for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

In this passage, Jesus is not saying that we should not work, but sit back and let God or the Universe care for us. The lilies of the field, do in fact work. Extracting carbon, collecting water and catching photons to photosynthesise is hard work, and we know that the fowls of the air, with the possible exception of cuckoos, labour tirelessly to build their nests and feed their young. Seeking the kingdom of God and righteousness in fact means engaging fully in the world and pulling our weight. But when the lilies and fowls do it, they don't think about it but act instinctively in accordance with their own nature, and importantly, they don't worry about anything, but just get on with it, coping with any difficulty without despairing.

So, Jesus is telling us not to worry, but to trust that things are as they should be in spite of the inevitable setbacks which we will face. The Chinese character for worry combines the symbol for a hook with the symbol for the heart. Worry is hooking the heart – attachment. When we worry about something or are anxious that something bad may happen, and then if it does, we have suffered twice – once by worrying about it and again when it happened. If it does not happen, we have worried unnecessarily. Having faith and trusting does not mean being complacent, or that we should not try to change things both for ourselves and others. In fact, it frees us up to make necessary changes by severing the restricting and stultifying attachment, the hook of the heart, and it also empowers us to deal better with challenges when they do arise.

The Monkey Mind: The nature of the mind is to cling. It is sometimes called "the monkey mind" because it continually leaps from one thing to another like a monkey swinging from branch to branch in a tree. We can see this in our meditation. We sit down with every intention to clear the mind and to stay with our meditation object, and there it goes, off again! Remembering, planning, doubting, worrying, imagining and day-dreaming! Every time we follow a thought, feeling or sensory experience, we attach; sometimes for a long time, completely oblivious to the fact that we have resolved to meditate. We absorb into the thought, making it our own. We identify with it. The value of meditation is that eventually we notice and can bring ourselves back peacefully without feeling bad about it. But when we attach to things in our daily lives, we don't always have the structure of meditation to rely upon. That is when the pain of worry and anxiety set in and when we are likely to lose concentration and care and do or say harmful things. This is when unhappiness and conflict arise.

It is important not just to avoid clinging to unhelpful things; we must not cling even to good and helpful things. In Shakespeare's King Lear, his youngest daughter, Cordelia represents purity and goodness, but at the end of the play, she dies in his arms. My English Master at school set us as an essay the question "Why does Cordelia die?" I have been writing the essay for almost the last 60 years, and I am not sure when to hand it in! The play can be seen as portraying the spiritual journey of a tortured soul and the painful but wise message at the end is that eventually we have to let go even of things which have been good and helpful.

Professor Martin Laird O.S.A. writes in 'An Ocean of Light': "There is a special challenge for luminous mind: not to cling, not even to enlightenment – the flower of awareness. We see the importance of non-clinging in both the teaching and example of Jesus. In his Letter to the Philippians, St Paul observes that Jesus did not cling to his equality with God, ' Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something that could be grasped. Rather he emptied himself and took the form of a slave' (Phil 2:6-7). Jesus' equality with God could not be realised by the means of grasping."

The poet and mystic, William Blake wrote:

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the very life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.

Our meditation practice is the seeking of the kingdom of God and his righteousness, which Jesus speaks of, and which is to live "in Eternity's sunrise". So it is important to carry the practice of emptying ourselves and thereby allowing the arising of clear seeing and understanding, the kingdom of God, into our daily lives.

Beginning Meditation: So let us find and move into a comfortable position, relaxing the body, noticing its contact with the chair or cushion and with the floor. Letting go of the efforts, difficulties and worries of our day, and bringing ourselves into the peace of the present moment. Noticing 4 our breathing as it slows and deepens. Giving attention to any points of tension or discomfort. If you use a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps co-ordinating it with the breathing, or simply focus on the candle or on the breathing, returning to the point of focus whenever you are aware of the mind wandering off, in a spirit of non-judgmental acceptance. Accepting everything which arises, whether it be a sound, a thought a feeling, pleasant or unpleasant or another distraction, noticing it just as it is and letting it go without following or attaching to it. Knowing it as just a part of nature and not something which we have to make our own, but returning with ease and joy to the meditation object. In this way we seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The meditation will last for 25 minutes and will begin and end with the sound of the bell.

Bell Sounds…25-minute meditations begins…Count down timer starts

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Reflection after meditation

Stillness – Thomas Keating

I have previously in these meditations read Fr Thomas Keating's poem 'Stillness', but it is relevant to the practice of letting go, and is well worth repeating:

Our true nature is stillness
The source from which we come.
It manifests itself within us
As a rising tide of silence,

A flowing stream of peacefulness,
A limitless ocean of calm
Or just sheer stillness.

The deep listening of pure contemplation
Is the path of stillness.

All words disappear into it
And all creation awakens to the delights of
Just Being.

Closing prayer: Loving and Eternal God, we thank you for the gifts of prayer, meditation and contemplation. We thank you for being with us and for this community. May we, therefore, pray with all others, as one community, one world and one spirit to One God…Moments of your personal prayer follow…**Amen**

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

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