Meditation on 'Importance' and Priorities – Reflections by Hazel

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 Hazel. 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**

Reflections on 'importance' and priorities

Introduction: In these meditations during the covid crisis, I have reflected on aspects of life that come to the fore for me in the evolving situation. This month, has been a time of adaptation as I have faced a lot of additional tasks associated with new ways of doing things in a changed 'covid-aware' world, and I have felt a sense of overload or resentment at times. Each person I speak to has their own unique experience. Some have additional caring responsibilities. Others such as key workers, have been through so much from the start of lockdown and are still needing to make fresh adjustments as circumstances change again. Some have found it hard to find anything they want to do. A lot of people are experiencing a shortage of energy after so much change, exacerbated by lack of sleep, or anxiety, alongside changes in work or home-life expectations.

In all situations, choices still have to be made as to how we spend our day, what we do in this moment, even if we do nothing, or do something that distracts us from that which we put off doing! So how do we prioritise what we do in this month, this day, this hour, this moment? How do we become aware of what is important, and what makes something important?

What is important? The first passage that I was drawn to reflect on, was the story of 'Rabbit's busy day' in AA Milne's book, 'The House at Pooh Corner'.[1] Rabbit wakes up with his mind buzzing about the things he is going to do. The story begins:

[1] AA Milne (1928) 'The House at Pooh Corner'

> 'It was going to be one of Rabbit's busy days. As soon as he woke up he felt important, as if everything depended upon him. It was just the day for Organizing Something, or for Writing a Notice Signed Rabbit, or for Seeing What Everybody Else Thought About It. It was a perfect morning for hurrying round to Pooh, and saying, "Very well, then, I'll tell Piglet," and then going to Piglet, and saying, "Pooh thinks – but perhaps I'd better see Owl first." It was a Captainish sort of day, when everybody said, "Yes, Rabbit" and "No, Rabbit," and waited until he had told them. He came out of his house and sniffed the warm spring morning as he wondered what he would do.'

So, although Rabbit felt that he had so many things to do, when put in perspective, the tasks were actually less important than they seemed to him, and the reality was that he needed to fill his day in order to feel fulfilled and have a sense of status. The story describes how he goes off to seek recognition from others in his woodland community. I wonder how much of what I choose to do is egocentric, pride-driven, and how important it really is?

Martha and Mary: Lawrence Freeman[2] explores the story of Martha and Mary in relation to the stress that Martha is experiencing in her daunting list of tasks, and her irritation at Mary sitting down listening to Jesus whilst she struggles on.

> **Jesus Visits Martha and Mary -** Luke 10:38-42 (NRSV)
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> **38** 'Martha welcomed him [Jesus] into her home. **39** She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. **40** But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." **41** But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; **42** there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Freeman reflects: 'And then like a good friend, he [Jesus] puts a mirror in front of her, he leads her to self-knowledge, saying, "you are fussing and fretting about so many things; you're scattered, you're fragmented, you're doing too much and you've lost your centre; you've lost your sense of priority." And then he defends Mary in a way that has been used down the centuries to defend the contemplative life from those who say that it's a waste of time, that it's useless, the time you spend meditating doesn't do any good. He says, "Mary has chosen the better part, and it will not be taken away from her." He says that only one thing is necessary. He doesn't define it - it is up to us to interpret this story, and perhaps the one thing necessary is to realise that Martha and Mary are not just two personality types, the introvert and the extrovert, in conflict, but that they are the two aspects of the human soul. In you, in me, in everyone, there are these two dimensions, like the two halves of the brain, the intuitive and the logical, the active the contemplative; and that the happy house, the friendly self, the true self is when these two aspects of our identity are in harmony and integrated. …The power of Jesus's comments to Martha is to recall her to that deep inner wisdom, to put herself back into harmony with the other half of herself.' This isn't a put down to Martha; it's reminding her that 'being' comes before 'doing'. And if we lose touch with the essential harmony, the essential peace and goodness of our own being, then our work, our activity, our daily lives will begin to fall apart.'

The deep inner wisdom: So, in practice, how do we move towards what Freeman alludes to and connect with the deep inner wisdom that guides us to our priorities, to what is important?

[2] Laurence Freeman (2009) 'Martha and Mary' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ph9Qt_kFtGs

In the deep presence of each moment, that we can practice attending to in contemplation, James Finley[3] suggests that we are called to adopt "an inner stance that offers the least resistance to being overtaken by the God-given, godly nature of myself just the way I am." Finley[4] also warns us that, that which is essential (namely love), never imposes itself, for love is always offered, it's never imposed; and that which is unessential is constantly imposing itself.

Of the bigger picture in our lives, Richard Rohr[5] writes: 'As we come to know our soul gift more clearly, we almost always have to let go of some other "gifts" so we can do our one or two things with integrity. Such letting go frees us from always being driven by what has been called the "tyranny of the urgent."[6] Soon urgency is a way of life, and things are not done peacefully from within. What if we choose to simply do one or two things wholeheartedly in our lives? That is all God expects and all we can probably do well. Too much good work becomes a violence to ourselves and, finally, to those around us.'

What Life wants from me: It seems to me that the task of prioritising and discerning the important is not one that we can do effectively from the place of egocentric consciousness, or we are in danger of entering a place of restlessness, overwhelm or pointlessness. It is not about us deciding what to do, but opening to, and listening to, the deeper self, the deep inner wisdom, the soul. Someone said to me recently, she asks herself the question: 'What is it that 'Life' wants from me?'

So I conclude that I have to listen, and to ease my small, egocentric self out of the way of Life and then I might hear what Life identifies as important and what Life wants from me.

I'd like to finish this reflection with a poem that seems to capture something of the switching between 'doing' and 'being', and an integration of what is important:

The Washing - By Jaan Kaplinski

The washing never gets done.
The furnace never gets heated.
Books never get read.
Life is never completed.
Life is like a ball which one must continually
catch and hit so it won't fall.
When the fence is repaired at one end,
it collapses on the other. The roof leaks,
the kitchen door won't close, there are cracks in the foundation,
the torn knees of children's pants …
One can't keep everything in mind. The wonder is
that beside all this one can notice
the spring which is so full of everything
continuing in all directions - into the evening clouds,
into the redwing's song and into every
drop of dew on every blade of grass in the meadow,
as far as the eye can see, into the dusk.

[3] Finley, J. in Rohr, R. (2020) https://cac.org/order-disorder-reorder-part-two-weekly-summary-2020-08-22/
[4] Finley, J. (2020) https://cac.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TTTM_Transcript_TMS2.pdf
[5] Rohr, R. (2020), 'Change comes from the inside'. https://cac.org/change-comes-from-the-inside-2020-07-27/
[6] Charles E. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent* (InterVarsity Press: 1994, ©1967).

Beginning Meditation: Before beginning our meditation, you may wish to adjust your 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, letting go fully. Then repeat this a few times. If you have a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps noticing how your word is in time with the breath.

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

Bell Sounds…Meditation ends

Reflection after meditation

Invitation - by Mary Oliver

Oh do you have time
to linger
for just a little while
out of your busy

and very important day
for the goldfinches
that have gathered
in a field of thistles

for a musical battle,
to see who can sing
the highest note,
or the lowest,

or the most expressive of mirth,
or the most tender?
Their strong, blunt beaks
drink the air

as they strive
melodiously
not for your sake
and not for mine

and not for the sake of winning
but for sheer delight and gratitude –
believe us, they say,
it is a serious thing

just to be alive
on this fresh morning
in the broken world.
I beg of you,

do not walk by
without pausing
to attend to this
rather ridiculous performance.

It could mean something.
It could mean everything.
It could be what Rilke meant, when he wrote:
You must change your life.

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