Reflections on 'Equipping Ourselves' –3rd February 2021 – prepared by Rob

Welcome! Thank you for being with us: We meditate in our own homes at 7.30pm on Wednesday. The tradition we meditate in is Centring Prayer which is fully inclusive of all traditions of Christian Meditation and welcoming of World Traditions. We have attached some pictures / resources to accompany the words to help you in your meditation.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centering Prayer Tradition: A very warm welcome from Fiona, Marie, Rob, Hazel and Paul, the leaders of the Christian Meditation group at Wisdom Centre, Romsey. The whole session is about 50 minutes. We meditate 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: Even in these dark times, there is a glimmer of hope for the future. The vaccines are being rolled out, and a promise of Spring is in the air with snowdrops, crocuses and other bulbs coming up. We are beginning to realise that we need to prepare ourselves to move on and embrace a new world of changed activity and attitudes. There is much to do.

This is the traditional time for soldiers to prepare their defences against an approaching time of campaigning, and also for farmers to start preparing the ground for the new season. I would like to share two passages which use those two metaphors to illustrate the equipment we need to prepare ourselves spiritually both to defend ourselves against unwholesomeness and to move forward together towards transformation of our hearts and liberation.

The first is St Paul's exhortation in his letter to the Ephesians to take on "the whole armour of God", a passage which I was encouraged to learn by heart when I was at school. The second is the Kasi Bharadvaja Sutta from the Sutta Nipata in the Buddhist scriptures, a story which I love especially having been brought up on a farm. The Buddha, like Jesus, lived in an agrarian community and both of them used images from farming in their teaching, such as the parables of the sower and of the workers in the vineyard. The Buddha described his first experience of meditation as occurring when he was a young boy and was left by his nurse to sit under a Rose Apple tree during a ploughing festival organised by his father. On 10th January, this year the Church celebrated "Plough Sunday", blessing the work in the fields at the time when it starts again after Christmas. When I was young we always had a special service at this time when a local farmer brought a pony plough into the church to be blessed.

In many ways these two passages are similar, using their respective metaphors to list the resources with which we need to equip ourselves. They have a different emphasis in that St Paul is concentrating on resisting temptations and evils whereas the Buddha's emphasis is on going forward with productive practice, but they both actually include both aspects of our spiritual life, and the resources which they list are remarkably similar.

The Whole Armour of God - Ephesians 6:10–20 (ESV): 10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication to all the saints.

Discourse to Bharadvaja, The Farmer - Sutta Nipata 1.4:

Thus have I heard: On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Dakkinagiri (a monastery), in the brahmana village Ekanala, in Magadha. Now at that time, it being the sowing season, five hundred ploughs of the brahman Kasibharadvaja were put to use. Then in the forenoon the Blessed One, having dressed himself, took bowl and (double) robe, and went to the place where brahman Kasibharadvaja's work was going on. It was the time of food distribution by the brahman, and the Blessed One drew near, and stood at one side. Bharadvaja seeing the Blessed One standing there for alms said to him: "Recluse, I do plough, and do sow, and having ploughed and sown I eat. You also, recluse should plough and sow; having ploughed and sown you should eat." "I, too, brahman, plough and sow; having ploughed and sown, I eat." "We do not see the Venerable Gotama's yoke, or plough, or ploughshare, or goad or oxen. Nevertheless the Venerable Gotama says: "I, too, brahman, plough and sow; having ploughed and sown, I eat."

Thereupon the brahman addressed the Blessed One in a stanza:

1. "You profess to be a ploughman, yet your plough we do not see; asked about your plough and the rest, tell us of them that we may know."

[The Buddha:]

2. "Faith is my seed, austerity the rain, wisdom my yoke and plough, modesty is the pole, mind the strap, mindfulness is my ploughshare and goad.

3. "Controlled in speech and conduct, guarded in deed and speech, abstemious in food, I make truth my coulter; arahantship (enlightenment), my deliverance complete."

4. “Exertion, my team and yoke, draws me to Nibbana’s security (ending the heat of the passions), and it goes on without stopping, whither gone one does not suffer.

5. “Thuswise is this ploughing ploughed which bears the fruit of Deathlessness; having ploughed this ploughing one is freed from every ill.”

Then brahman Kasibharadvaja filling a golden bowl with milk-rice offered it to the Blessed One saying: “May the Venerable Gotama partake of this milk-rice; a ploughman indeed is Venerable Gotama who ploughs a plough for the fruit of Deathlessness.”

Reflection: So we must guard ourselves with the shield of faith. This is also the seed, the beginning of the spiritual journey. We must wear the belt of truth and use it and the sword of the Spirit to cut through illusion. We must act with wisdom and mindfulness – which St Paul alludes to in his reference to “keeping alert with all perseverance” which also brings in the exertion which is the Buddha’s oxen team and yoke. The breastplate of righteousness and helmet of salvation do not have literal equivalents in the ploughing, but are implicit in the modesty, wisdom and self-control and in the goals of enlightenment and deathlessness.

Those goals also reflect Jesus’s overcoming death on the cross. Deathlessness does not mean that the body does not die, but it refers to a state in which we come fully to understand that our little selves are but bubbles on the surface of a vast ocean and to realise our connection with the whole ongoing process of existence. So, duly armed with the equipment of transformation, we can come to see death as a natural part of the continuation of that process.

Preparation for Meditation: So let us now 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, triumphs and worries of our day, and bringing ourselves into the peace of the present moment. Noticing our breathing as it slows and deepens. Giving attention to any points of tension or discomfort in the body. If you use a sacred word you might notice its rhythm, perhaps co-ordinating it with the rhythm of the breathing. Or you may wish simply to focus on a candle or to follow the breath. Returning to our meditation object or point of focus whenever we are aware of the mind wandering off, in a spirit of non-judgmental acceptance. Keeping alert with all perseverance. Accepting everything which arises, whether a sound, a thought, a feeling either pleasant or unpleasant or some other 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 need to make our own, but returning with ease and joy to the meditation object.

We will now meditate for 25-minutes.

Post Meditation Poem

Ending with part of a poem by William Blake.

What is Above is Within

What is Above is Within, for every-thing in Eternity is translucent:

The Circumference is Within, Without is formed the Selfish Center,

And the Circumference still expands going forward to Eternity,

And the Center has Eternal States; these states we now explore.

For all Men in Eternity, Rivers, Mountains, Cities, Villages,

All are Human, & when you enter into their Bosoms you walk

In Heavens and Earths, as in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven

And Earth & all you behold; tho' it appears Without, it is Within,

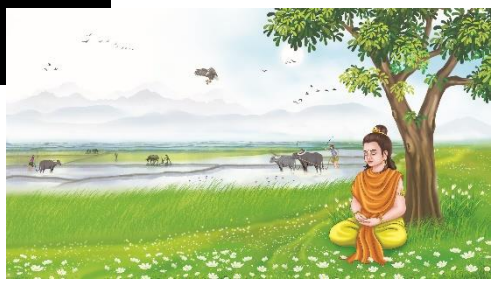
In your Imagination, of which this world of Mortality is but a Shadow.

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. Stay safe and well.







Resources:



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