What is Truth? Meditation: April 7th 2021 prepared by Rob

Opening words: This week, we have a transcript. We are no longer providing video resources every week but may continue to create these important seasons of the year. We have attached some pictures/ resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate in our 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.

Welcome to Christian Meditation in the Centring 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, peace and justice making. **Amen**

Introduction: When Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judaea, he told him: "My task is to bear witness to the truth. For this was I born; for this I came into the world, and all who are not deaf to truth listen to my voice", and Pilate responded with the question "What is truth?" (John 18.38). As an educated Roman, Pilate will have known that for centuries the classical philosophers had wrestled with questions such as "what is truth?" He did not give Jesus an opportunity to reply, but he did tell the crowd "I find no case against him." However, Pilate was weak and feared rebellion, and sentenced Jesus to death anyway.
Earlier Jesus told his disciples "If you dwell within the revelation I have brought, you are indeed my disciples; you shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8.31,2), and when Thomas asked him about his journey Jesus said "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14.6 - words which echo the three jewels or refuges of Buddhism: the Master's way, the truth of the teachings and the holy life lived by his followers). What is truth? Truth is what we know, or what we understand. So, what can be known and understood, and how do we know that it is true?

The Leaves of the Forest: When I was younger I read that in ancient times to qualify as a Chinese Mandarin or civil servant, the candidates were confined to a room with a supply of paper and ink and told to write down "all they knew". I was astonished at this and thought that it would be an endless task. But I was looking at it from a Western perspective. In the West we 'learn' myriad things from many different sources and think that we know them.

But in reality we have just learnt them from teachers, books technology etc. and we do not really know those things. We may take them on trust and believe them to be true but we do not know them for ourselves. We have not experienced them or discovered them. What the Chinese exercise was examining was what the candidates truly and directly knew for themselves, and that is a great deal less, but also a great deal deeper than Western so-called knowledge.

On one occasion the Buddha was standing in a forest with his disciples when he picked up a handful of leaves and asked them "Which is more – the leaves in this forest or those in my hand?" The disciples naturally replied that there were a great many more leaves in the forest than in his hand, and the Buddha said "So it is with the truth. The truths which can be known are as numerous as the leaves in the forest, but those we actually know are in comparison like those in my hand....and yet, those few are enough."

Where there is a doubt: Some light can be shed on how we can resolve doubt and know what is a correct understanding by another story about the Buddha. On one occasion he was walking through the land of a people called the 'Kalamas'. They were spiritual seekers, but were very frustrated because whenever a holy man came into their country (and there were many in ancient India, as there are in India today), they would explain their own doctrine and say that it was the true faith and that everyone else's was wrong! They had heard that the Buddha had a reputation for wisdom, and asked him "Which of these reverend monks and brahmans spoke the truth and which falsehood?" The Buddha answered them, "It is proper for you, Kalamas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumour; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias towards a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, ' The monk is our teacher.' Kalamas, when you yourselves know: 'These things are bad; these things are blameable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill,' abandon them, and when you yourselves know: 'These things are good; these things are not blameable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness,' enter on and abide in them". Working things out for ourselves in this way reminds me of the wise old judge of the last century, and Hampshire man, Lord (Tom) Denning who, in speaking of justice, used to say "Justice is what right-thinking people know to be right." It always humbles me, as a lawyer, when we renew in our opening prayer our commitment to 'justice making'.

So not just for the 'woke generation' but for all of us to "speak our truth" is good and proper – but with one caveat. It must come from the heart and not from the ego or from some attachment or perceived trend which we may be keen to follow. When he heard something which did not come truly from the heart, my teachers' teacher, Ven. Ajahn Chah, a wise forest monk, used to say in an enigmatic Zen-like way, "It is true, but not right; it is right but not true!" What he meant was that it was true that this was what the speaker genuinely felt, but it was not right understanding, and that it was right in the sense that this was the stage which the speaker had reached and where he or she was at, but that they had not yet reached the truth. There was also a formidable Rishi in the Japanese tradition who used to teach at the London Zen Centre, named Ven. Myokyo-ni who used to conduct interviews with her disciples to gauge their progress, and it was said of her that she could tell from the sound of their

footsteps as they approached her room whether or not they were bringing their egos with them!

Trancendence and beauty: So the truth can be recognised if we are very attentive both inwardly to our own hearts and outwardly to the complex world around us. And when we do see it, we can recognise that there is a certain beauty about it, a delight rather like that a scientist or mathematician might experience when an experiment or a calculation suddenly falls into place and makes sense. With it there goes an easy, not forced, confidence and a sense of authority. After relating the Sermon on the Mount, St Matthew comments "When Jesus had finished this discourse the people were astounded at his teaching; unlike their own teachers he taught with a note of authority." (Matthew 7.29.)
In the Buddhist scriptures the truth of the way things are (the Dhamma) is described as "present here and now" (not a complaint about the past or fantasy about the future), "inviting investigation" (looking deeply and not just on the surface), "timeless" (transcending time and eternity) and as "capable of being realised by the wise in this very life". It is also described as being eternal (dhammo sanantano); although there are individual truths which come and go, this is on a conventional level, and there is an eternal truth underlying it all. Above all, the truths which we can know are described as "beautiful in the beginning, beautiful in the middle and beautiful in their ending." This is echoed in Keats's poem 'Ode to a Grecian Urn' in which he has the urn saying, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty", and he adds, "that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

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. 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 appreciating the beauty and the rightness of the way things truly are.

We will meditate together for 25 minutes.

I will end with the last stanza of **'Ode to a Grecian Urn'**

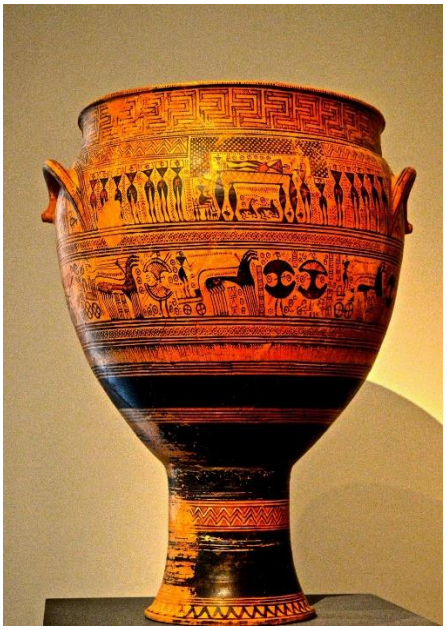
O Attic shape! Fair attitude! With brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to a man, to whom thou say'st,

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

.

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.









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