Reflections on 'The Fruits of Meditation ' –6th October 2021 – prepared by Rob

Opening words: This week, we are meditating in person again and have a transcript for those unable to join us. We have included some resources to help you in your meditation. If you are meditating alone but would like to feel 'with us' we meditate at 7.30pm on Wednesday in Wisdom Centre/ our homes. 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: Why do we meditate? We may have wondrous ideas or intentions about becoming close to God, one with the divine or becoming enlightened. However, for most of us those ideas are merely hopes for the distant future; the spiritual journey is a long and sometimes tedious one. Even so, it is good to practice in a spirit of joyousness, and one way to achieve that is to reflect on the day to day benefits of our meditation practice. These are not confined to religious practice. Many in the secular world are also realising the benefits of meditation and mindfulness and these techniques are increasingly being used for example in the health service.

Sometimes a purely secular approach does lead to religious experience and spiritual understanding. On one occasion Ven Myokyo-ni, who used to be the director of the London Zen Centre was approached by a student who was not a Buddhist or religious at all but who had agreed in order to make some money to pursue his studies to be confined in a small container underground for a period of a month as part of a research study. He wanted to learn the techniques of meditation to help him cope with the experience. Ven Myokyo-ni agreed to his request because she felt that he had a genuine reason for doing it. In the end the student was not only helped to complete his task by the benefits of what he had been taught but continued with them afterwards and became a devout Zen practitioner.

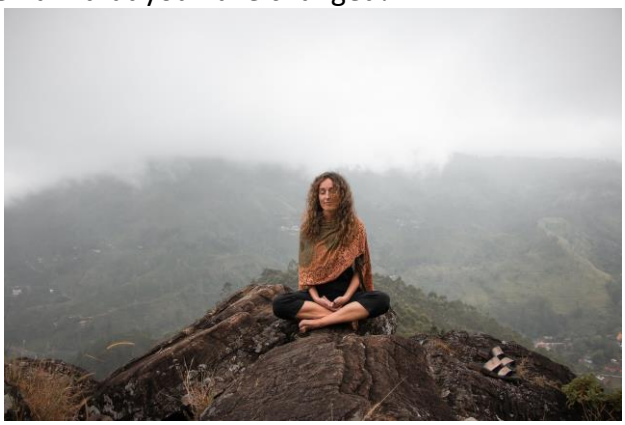
The Christian Perspective: Father Laurence Freeman, the director of the World Community of Christian Meditation writes: "What 'happens' in the actual times of meditation is not very important. Often, in fact usually, nothing happens. Like a long plane journey, you look out of the window and see clouds, nothing but clouds and blue. Sometimes, though, it gets bumpy and you fasten your seat belt and trust the pilot. Sometimes you see the most beautiful dawn or gorgeous sunset or staggering displays of light. But what matters is that you are flying steadily onwards to your destination. However beautiful or turbulent or uninteresting the journey, you do not think of asking the pilot to turn off the engines!

"Meditation is not about getting into altered states of consciousness or seeing and experiencing anything out of the ordinary. It is about entering more fully into the ordinary and discovering thereby

the absolute wonder of it, the presence of God: that the ordinary is shot through with the extraordinary.

"As you grow more steady in keeping your twice daily meditation periods, you will find that the regularity becomes important to the whole balance and peacefulness of each day. If you miss a meditation period, you feel the lack of something essential. Even if your meditation time is turbulent or distracted, it is still the most important part of the day. You are living in a daily discipleship by following so simple a discipline.

"It is in your daily life and especially in your relationships that you will notice the fruits of meditation. Your awareness of this personal inner change may not be rapid or dramatic. It may be reflected to you from those you live and work with. They may remark that you have changed!



"The change can best be described in what St. Paul called the 'harvest of the Spirit' (Galatians 5.22):

> love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control.

"Think of each of these qualities in terms of your own personality. You know better than anyone, except the Spirit, which ones you most need.

"Notice that love is placed first – the 'highest gift'. In its path we also find a new joyousness in life, even in times of stress and suffering.

"Joy is deeper than pleasure or happiness. It is found in a new taste for the simple and natural things in life.

"Peace is the gift Jesus gives us in his Spirit. It is the energy of his own deep inner harmony with himself, with the Father and with all of creation.

"Patience is the cure for our bursts of irritability, rage and intolerance, and all the ways we try to control and possess others.

"Kindness is the gift of treating others as we would like them to treat us.

"Goodness is not 'ours' but we are essentially good, and our human nature is godly because we were created by God and because God lives in us.

"Fidelity is the gift that comes through the discipline of the daily meditation and the mantra. For any relationship to be fully human and loving, it is necessary that we deepen it with fidelity.

"Gentleness is the practice of non-violence, towards others as well as towards ourselves.

"Self-control is necessary if we are to enjoy life in the full liberty of the Spirit. It is the fruit of the balance of meditation, the middle way between all extremes.

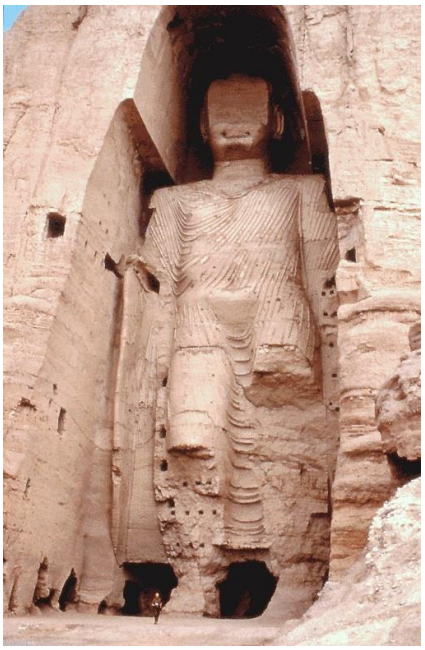
"'Sinners make the best contemplatives' according to the Cloud of Unknowing. This is the heart of the Christian gospel and life: Jesus came to call sinners not the righteous. The fruits of the Spirit grow gradually in us because we begin to turn to the power of love at the centre of our being.

"All of these gifts are released as we learn to listen to the language of the heart, which is the silence waiting for us beyond the orbit of our noisy self-fixation.

"The source of our being is also the source that heals us and makes us whole. To be whole is to be holy. In meditation we are sanctified in and by the process of being healed."

Harry Glover adds to these what he calls "broader fruits", namely heightened sensitivity, sharper memory and recall, better sleep and relaxation, better physiological control such as coping with pain, a better life balance, increased energy and what he calls a "conscious awareness of the silence". Many of these benefits have, in fact been confirmed in scientific studies carried out in recent years.

The debate of King Milinda: King Milinda or Menander to give him his Greek name was a descendant of one of Alexander's generals who ruled the kingdom of Bactria in the second century BCE. His kingdom covered much of present day Afghanistan including the Hindu Kush and Bamiyan where the great statues of the Buddha were destroyed by the Taliban. The Milinda Panha or Debate of King Milinda is the story of his introduction to Buddhism by Ven. Nagasena, who described to him twenty-eight virtues of practice:



Bamiyan Buddha

"The keeping of the vows is a pure mode of livelihood, its fruit is blissful, it is blameless, it brings no suffering to others, it gives confidence, it doesn't oppress, it is certain to bring growth in good qualities, it prevents back-sliding, it doesn't delude, it is a protection, it fulfils one's desires, it tames all beings, it is good for self-discipline" and he went on to describing further benefits for a practitioner: "His conduct is pure, his practice is fully accomplished, his actions and speech are well-guarded, his thoughts are pure, his energy is stirred up, his fear is allayed, views of personality are dispelled, wrath dies away and love arises…he is honoured by all beings, he is moderate in eating, he is full of vigilance…he detests evil, he delights in solitude and he is always heedful."

Our Own Practice: It is good and helpful to reflect on our own meditation practice and the changes which it has brought about or is bringing about in our lives. We are all different and our experiences will be individual ones. As Father Laurence said, we know best what we most need and how the practice can help us most. I have been meditating regularly for 35 years, but have still got a long way to go in realising these fruits. The practice has certainly been instrumental in reducing anxiety and worry and helping me to sleep peacefully and well. I would say that it has particularly helped me to be contented in each moment, to appreciate the world as it is and not to keep looking for something better or different. Others may not consider that my patience or tolerance levels are remarkably high, but to them I would only say 'Imagine what I was like before I started the practice!'



Preparation for Meditation: So, we will now enter a period of formal meditation. Moving into a comfortable position relaxing the body and letting go of the efforts, difficulties, triumphs and worries of our day. Bringing ourselves into the peace and the completeness 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.

We will meditate together for 25 minutes.

Post Meditation Thoughts: I end with some thoughts of Harry Glover inspired by the early 20th century psychic, Edgar Cayce.

"Be open and receptive to the gifts of the Spirit. Be alert for messages, signals and various signs given for our direction and guidance. Many times, these messages are very subtle and difficult to grasp. Here is where daily meditation becomes a valuable tool; it helps us to gain an awareness of these signals. Guidance often comes in business meetings, chance encounters with persons much wiser than ourselves, and new connections bringing new opportunities into our lives. We can learn from everyone, even from thieves and those who practice subterfuge. Don't expect others to change. We cannot change others, but we can change ourselves as the need arises."

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:

Christian Meditation, Your Daily Practice Laurence Freeman, OSB – Novalis/Medio Media
Meditation – The Light from Within Harry Glover - A.R.E. Press
The Debate of King Milinda – The Milinda Panha Edited by Bhikkhu Pesala – Antony Rowe Ltd#
Pictures from Pixabay



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