



Dear Meditators

Contemplative Living

In the latest WCCM newsletter, Fr Laurence shares with us what contemplative life means:

Contemplation is essentially other-centred. Even though we know we will be reaping benefits from it ourselves, that is not our immediate purpose.

This was the theme of the School of Meditation Retreat held in August at an ancient monastery in Fara Sabina, Italy. Fr Laurence's insights on 'contemplative happiness', 'contemplative discipline', 'contemplative relationships' and 'contemplative reading' will help us all to persevere on our journey with greater depth and meaning.

Group Leaders Gathering

Seventy Singapore Group Leaders and their assistants will gather on Sunday 19 November to meet our newly appointed Spiritual Director Fr Eugene Vaz. Fr Vaz will address us on how he would like to work with us in drawing more people closer to God in Jesus, through the daily discipline of meditation. We will share Fr Vaz's reflections with you in our next newsletter.

Introduction to Christian Meditation Programme

We will be holding an introductory programme on Christian Meditation in January 2018. It will run over three sessions Tuesday 2, 9 and 16 January at the Church of the Holy Family. Fr Vaz will welcome the participants and I will lead the presentations. We will give more details later. In the meantime, please note the dates if you would like to attend or have friends who might be interested.

Testimony from Ho Ai Jit

I would like to introduce to you Ho Ai Jit who has been meditating with the Tuesday evening group at the Church of the Holy Family for over five years. In her short article attached overleaf, Ai Jit shares how her life has been transformed by the practice of meditation. I am also grateful to Ai Jit and several other meditators in the group for regularly sharing their reflections and perspectives as they persevere on the journey. They have been courageous and generous in helping me take care of the group with their sharing and teaching.

May the Risen Lord raise us to new life in him.

PETER NG

Difficulties Encountered and Insights Gained

Sharing by a fellow meditator - HO AI JIT

On the first Tuesday of July 2012, I walked tentatively into the Church of the Holy Family to attend meditation, two years after reading Lee Kuan Yew's interview with *The New York Times* that he had been practising meditation for two to three years with Laurence Freeman and Ng Kok Song, Peter, and that brought him greater serenity. 'I too could do with more serenity in my everyday life,' I thought.

The instant that evening when I heard Peter's message that meditation is a way to union with the indwelling Spirit, I knew intuitively that I had made a spiritual discovery. Since the late teens, I had harboured a vague but persistent sense of life being not quite complete. What I had been yearning for I was unable to pinpoint – until I heard that message. It was a hungering to be close to God.

Thus I commenced my path of meditation with the strongest of motivation. For about a year, I meditated once a day just before bedtime. A fitting prayer of thankfulness to end each day, it brought serenity. Gradually, however, occurred an unexpected problem, a 'happy' problem in that it indicated a possible fruit of meditation – that in the stillness and silence of meditation, one's energy expands – which explained why I soon found myself so energised after each session that I would stay awake and read late into the night. This, I enjoyed enormously, but was disastrous for the next morning! So I rescheduled the meditation to earlier in the evening after work, sometimes as part of my evening walks. That took care of the nocturnal hyperactivity.

When I decided to progress to meditating in the morning as well, I found it painful having to get up earlier. Truth to tell, it is still a painful exercise on many mornings, but nowadays I am better able to muster the will to do so. The source of this wonderful willpower comes from an insight gained from John Main's illuminating sense of time and *being*. He had the insight of 'the shortness of time, how time was never days or weeks or months'; and 'the rare gift of appreciating the present moment, something that never happened before, something that will never happen again'. To him, 'Simply *being* is your greatest gift' and 'an awareness of *being* leads to the joy of *being*.' (Patrick Murray in *John Main by those who knew him*, pp 124-125, edited by Paul Harris)

This insight has made me constantly conscious that often, while one's body is in the present, the mind is not – transported by thoughts into the past or the future. Therefore the need to focus consciously on being an integrated whole by living in the present moment at the three levels of being: the physical, mental and spiritual. At the level of one's daily existence, to not allow the mind to be so distracted, so that one can more efficiently conduct one's various duties, while balancing the need to learn

from the past and plan for the future. At the spiritual level, living in the present moment enables one to be in the same time in our heart with God. Thus I appreciate meditation as the discipline to experience daily His love and peace.

The other difficulty I encounter is the perennial difficulty of concentrating on the mantra during meditation, for as soon as one starts to sound the mantra, distracting thoughts flood the mind.

In John Main's basic teaching on meditation, he says sounding the mantra ceaselessly during meditation is the way we learn to be disciplined and to leave all thoughts and imagination entirely behind. He likens the mantra to a beacon keeping us on course through the storm of distraction, and we must keep our attention on it or be lost in the storm.

Initially, I sounded 'maranatha' in two syllables: 'maranatha' but found it difficult to let go of thoughts to focus on the mantra. Rereading John Main's teaching to sound 'maranatha' in four equally-stressed syllables and to listen to the word as it is sounded, I soon began to *sound the mantra in four chunks*, 'ma-ra-na-tha', and *actively listen to each syllable* as it is sounded. Active listening, rather than passive hearing, I discovered, is key to channelling attention to the mantra. This has helped to reduce distractions over time. Rooting the mantra grows the capacity to enter the present moment more and more fully to pay attention to the Indwelling Spirit and not to what has been in the past and what might be in the future.

I had set out to meditate as a way to enhance serenity in daily life and then was presented with meditation as a way to union with God. These first five years have taught me that the two ways are one same journey of meditation. As my daily meditation leads me to become more and more wholly present in the present moment with God, I experience His love more deeply. That gives the spirit serenity. This serenity of one's spirit cannot but cascade into one's daily life. Father Laurence once said to Mr Lee Kuan Yew when the latter reflected that he was achieving the goals of his meditation: To get serenity of mind and clarity in decision-making, that 'serenity is the sustaining energy of good action and intelligent thinking and clear decision making. Serenity flows into action.'

In my case, serenity of the spirit has also led me to be more serene in my daily life. Serenity shows in my being kinder to myself as I appreciate my being as God's gift. Serenity shows in my being kinder as well to all who come into my life as family, friends and colleagues. So life becomes more joyful. This to me is the essence of John Main's teaching: 'Simply *being* is your greatest gift and an awareness of *being* leads to the joy of *being*.' And meditation *is* a way to being and being with God. ■