



# Monthly Online Meditation

World Community for Christian Meditation (Singapore) SESSION 21 | 2022 March

## Being and Existence

### REFLECTION – Peter Ng

Welcome to our March 2022 monthly meditation session. We are meeting tonight in troubled times, in times of war between Russia and Ukraine. Many Ukrainians and Russian soldiers as well as civilians have died because of war in the past week. And more than a million refugees have fled from Ukraine into the neighbouring European countries. What is happening in the Russian invasion of Ukraine is something that we as human beings need to be conscious about – why war happens. And our practice of meditation has very much got to do with war or peace in the world. Because ultimately, meditation is the way of relating to God, of relating to Jesus, that will enable us to be peacemakers and not warmongers.

Each of us in our own personal life is capable of causing war with people that we don't like, with people that we don't get along with, or with people who we feel have hurt us, who endanger us. So, at the personal level, we are all quite capable of violence. And this violence of course stems from our false self, from our ego. So tonight, I want to reflect with you on the meaning of meditation in these troubled times. And I've entitled, the subject of tonight's talk, Being an Existence.

Each of us is a human being. And we are all a composite made up of a body, a mind and a spirit. Not everyone is aware that there's that component of the spirit. Some people think they are just a body and a mind. But as meditators, I think most of you, I hope all of you have come to understand that we are not just a body and a mind but we have a spirit. And in meditation, we experience our spirit. That is the meaning of our practice of meditation.

So when we meditate, we come to a stillness of the body. And we also try to come to a stillness of mind. So when we are able to come to this stillness of body and mind, we begin to sense and to experience our spirit. If we are just existing in our body and our mind, that is the cause of violence, because we are stuck at the level of our ego, our self-centeredness, because the ego functions in such a way that we are concerned with our survival, we are concerned with our security, we are concerned with maintaining our power, or even

clamouring for power. Those are the manifestations of an ego that has gone wild, that has become inflamed, inflated. That is what we call the ego, the 'false self'. And we can see this existing at the level of a person, for example, a political leader who is paranoid, who is concerned about his own security, and has got no compunction about endangering the security of others. It can also happen at the level of a country, where the country rallies people to go to war. Usually some reason is concocted, which is really related either to the acquisition of territory, the acquisition of economic resources, or the acquisition of power.

So the ego is something that we have to deal with as human beings in order for us to become peacemakers. We have to go deeper within ourselves, beyond the body and the mind, and touch our spirit. Our spirit is our true self, the self that God created. That is the source of peace and the source of love. So when we speak about meditation, we say that we meditate in order to *be*. By that we mean we are not just thinking or desiring or doing things at the level of the body and the mind. We are going deeper than that. We are learning to be, because at the deepest level of ourselves we are not just doing or thinking. We're not doers or thinkers. We are learning to be and it's essential for us to learn to be, to go deeper than our surface level of the body and the mind.

So what is the difference between being and existence? Later on, you will hear from Fr John Main when he answers this question. But basically, he's saying that existence, that I exist as a human person is a description of how we feel – I'm alive, I'm thinking, I'm talking. It's about what I'm doing, what I'm feeling; that is existence. But when we talk about being we are talking about *who* we are. Who are we really at the deepest level of our being? When we are able to enter that level of being we are able to answer that question, to say I am a being with a small letter 'b', and my being comes from Being with a capital 'B', which is God. So I am a human being created by God, who is ultimate Being, who is absolute Being.

And the other difference between being and existence is that existence is temporary. It's the body and the mind. Existence will come to an end; sooner or later we die. But our being is not temporary. Our being is eternal in God; our being does not die. So, in order for us to live a full life as a human being, we must be capable of existing at the level of the body and the mind, but more importantly to be able to live at the level of being. So, when we sit still, keep our bodies still, and when we still our mind by letting go of our thoughts, our desires, our plans, our worries, our problems, we are able to transcend the body and the mind and therefore, capable of entering deeper within ourselves where we find our spirit.

So, this is the answer to how we ourselves can be at peace, how we can find peace, and how we can become peace itself. Because when we meditate and we go to the deepest level of our being, our spirit, we encounter the Spirit of God, we encounter the source of all peace, the peace that is beyond all understanding. And once we touch that, we are then capable of becoming more peaceful people. And in that way, we become peacemakers instead of warmongers. And as citizens of any country. We need people who have found peace in their hearts, who will then wisely choose leaders who are not warmongers. This is how we as citizens, if we become more peaceful, that is how we contribute to our own country being

more peaceful, because we do not think of our country as 'my country, I don't care about any other country, the people of other countries, are not so important as me'. This peace-loving attitude is something which is so important for peace in the world. So I'd like us to keep this in mind that when we sit down to meditate each day, we are learning to become peacemakers, and that that will help us to contribute to a more peaceful world.

So, let us now listen to Fr John as he explains to us about being and existence and he will then lead us into meditation.

## **BEING AND EXISTENCE** -John Main

In meditation we begin a journey, and the journey is the journey to *being*.

There is a distinction that I think we can draw between being and existence. Being is the fact that we are. Existence is concerned with how we are. Existence flows out of being. Being is before consciousness. In being it is the fact that we are. Existence is all that we are familiar with, all that by which we know how we are.

Meditation is the journey beyond our existence to our being, to our own being. It is the journey to the essential core of who we are.

Even more than that, it is the journey into the heart of Being itself. It is the journey into God, the One who made us who we are, the One who made us what we are. It is the journey into absolute being. Into essential being – Being who is God, the God who is Love.

Each of us is rooted in the eternal being of God, and we learn to be in the presence of Being.

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Transcript of extracts from: *The Way of Unknowing, John Main, Collected Talks Vol IV, 'Being and Existence'*

# **Meditation**

## **THE BASIC FACTS OF MEDITATION** -John Main

The most important thing when you are starting to meditate is to have the basic facts of meditation absolutely clear in your minds, because meditating is so simple in itself. All we have to do when we meditate is to sit still and to recite interiorly, silently, our word, our mantra.

The word I recommend you to use when you meditate is the Aramaic word *maranatha*. Aramaic is the language that Jesus spoke, and 'maranatha' means 'come, Lord'. I recommend you to say it, to recite it, to sound it as four equally stressed syllables: ma-ra-na-tha. When you begin, you don't want to be too hooked into the technicalities of it. You say your mantra as you can. The ideal way of saying it is to breathe it in and to breathe out in silence. Some people haven't enough lung power to do that, and if you can't then say it as you can. The ideal way: breathe in 'ma-ra-ne-tha' and breathe out in silence.

Meditating is very important for us because it brings us into the experience of total unity of body and spirit. Therefore a good sitting posture is important; sit with your spine upright. And absolute stillness is important. Then you enter into the experience of body and spirit one, still, attentive.

To learn to meditate you must build meditation into the fabric of your lives. It's necessary to meditate every morning and every evening. You start your day then from an experience of wholeness, oneness. And in the evening you gather it together – all the various strands of your day's activities brought to the same oneness, the same wholeness.

Meditation is a time of poverty, of silence, of self-forgetfulness. It's not a time for analysing ourselves or thinking about our motives or imagining ourselves to be spiritual or simple. It's a time to be absolutely still. The way is a very simple way. It's the way of silence, the way of faithfulness, the way of poverty of spirit, a generous poverty in which we surrender all our thoughts, all our imagination, all our words, and we stay with the one word: ma-ra-na-tha.

#### **OPENING PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, open my heart to the silent presence of the spirit of your Son. Lead me into that mysterious silence where your love is revealed to all who call. Maranatha, maranatha, come Lord Jesus.*



<https://www.wccmsingapore.org/timer/in-the-beginning>

## **Scripture Reading & Reflection**

### **BE STILL AND KNOW (PSALM 46:1-11)**

*<sup>1</sup>God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.*

*<sup>2</sup>Therefore we will not fear,  
though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,*

*<sup>3</sup>though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.*

*<sup>4</sup>There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy place where the Most High dwells.*

<sup>5</sup>God is within her, she will not fall;  
God will help her at break of day.  
<sup>6</sup>Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;  
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.  
<sup>7</sup>The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.  
<sup>8</sup>Come and see what the Lord has done,  
the desolations he has brought on the earth.  
<sup>9</sup>He makes wars cease  
to the ends of the earth.  
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.  
<sup>10</sup>He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth."  
<sup>11</sup>The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

## **REFLECTION** –Fr Eugene Vaz

Good evening, dear friends, nice to be with all of you.

As Peter was saying at the beginning of our evening, we are living in very challenging times, very disturbing times, very trying times in a warlike situation in the Russia-Ukraine, relationship that's unfolding quite frighteningly, and we are meeting to meditate in this kind of a backdrop. And it's so interesting that we are invited to contemplate Psalm 46: 'The God of Jacob is with us, He is our stronghold. Be still and know that I am God.' (I am not interested in war, I do away with war I break all the fetters of war. Be still and know who I am.) And I think that line is very important as you and I try to go deeper into the appreciation of our meditation.

Every day in the morning and in the evening, we have this opportunity to be still. And in that stillness, we come to know who God is. In fact, as I was listening to John Main just now, that instruction that he was giving really struck me, the ideal way – you say the word 'maranatha' as you breathe in and you breathe out in silence. I thought that was very interesting, because breathing is what you and I *have* to do, the moment we don't breathe we die. But look what Christian meditation is helping us to do. Christian meditation is helping us to breathe God in and to breathe God out. Wow! And I think that ties up very beautifully with Peter's choice of the topic for today, Being and Existence.

Being comes from breathing in 'Maranatha, come Lord Jesus.' That breathing in is actually

developing our being, and the breathing out is the expression of our being. As Peter was Trying to explain together with John Main just now, the essence is our being, and how that being is being lived is our existence. That cannot happen unless we have the consciousness of being. And it's interesting that we are having this reflection this evening not just within the backdrop of an impending war and very disturbing times in Ukraine but we are doing this reflection also in the time of Lent.

Lent is a very, very special moment of grace. Actually, listening to a Peter just now and listening to John Main, it just struck me that we Christian meditators, we could describe Lent as being with the Being. Wow! The whole of Lent is not just 40 days, and that's the problem that I think all of us have. We try to be very rigorous for 40 days, and the remaining 225 days of the year we don't care a hang – you know what I mean. Which doesn't make sense. These 40 days of Lent being with the Being is so that every day of our life we are with the Being.

So today, I just want to open up a few thoughts about being, using the backdrop of Lent and the experience of our daily meditation. Every day, morning and night, in Lent and outside Lent, every day we are doing our meditation. Every day, we are getting an opportunity to really ask, 'Who am I?' Really, who am I? We are looking at our being especially in this time of Lent because it's a journey to God. It's a going into the being so that we can be with the Being. You cannot be with the Being unless we want to move into the Being, which is what the Lenten journey is doing.

But who am I? And how is that affecting my life, my existence? How is that coming out through my existence. Just imagine, who am I? I am the image and likeness of God. That's what we learn from the book of Genesis, chapter one: 'God made man and woman in His image and likeness (Gen 1:26 and the following). So that's my being.

Of course, the existence question will ask, 'Am I really living as the image and likeness of God? So that is a huge area that develops in our meditation, in our contemplation. In our being still. Being still actually is not just about not moving. Being still actually is also being so focused on the Being, God, who makes you and me in his image and likeness. And that's who we are, that's our being, that constitutes who we are. But I'm not sure we are conscious of it. Of course, the existence question will then emerge, if I am the image and likeness of God, then how do I talk? how do I think, how do I act? how do I relate? how do I make choices? what are my values? what are my principles? What is the *modus operandi* of my life, because my being is the image and likeness of God? Is that coming out in my existence, in my everyday being?

I'm a child of God, image and likeness of God; it's every human being. 'Child of God' is a religious experience, it's a very personal relationship. And religion in the strictest sense means being 'tied up with God'. Being tied up with God. Religion is not just a set of do's and don'ts. Religion is not just about rules and regulations. Religion is not about commandments. Religion is about being tied up with God. God and we are so tied up. The word comes from Latin *religio, ligare* meaning ligation, tying up. Religion is to be tied up

with God. So the existence question will be: 'How am I being tied up with God?' My everyday way of life isn't expressing my being tied up with God. And there again, my thoughts, my words, my deeds, everything I do every day is coming from that deep stillness, that deep focus, that single-mindedness, that attentiveness to the being, to the Being God, and the being me who is made in his image and likeness. So there's no way I can ever get out of him. That's the awesome mystery, isn't it? And yet, how much of that mystery is actually being consciously lived? It's what Christian meditation helps us to do. I am a fellow man and woman. So all these other human beings around me, they are also images and likenesses of God, they are my fellows. Together we constitute humanity.

So the existence question would be, then: 'Who are they to me? And who am I to them? Or, who am I supposed to be to them? Well, that comes out beautifully when we say, 'Who am I? I am a brother or sister, not just at the level of the family, but the level of the human society, because God is *our* Father.' If God is our Father, then all of us are brothers and sisters. That's the being.

Now the existence question is: 'What sort of brother, sister am I? How am I being brother, sister?' That's what Jesus is saying in the Gospel: 'Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you are doing to me. (Mt 25:40)' That's the existence, that's the action. You are doing because of the being. You are in the image and likeness of God and therefore you are Christlike, added to the fact that you are also from a deliberate choice and intentionality, his disciple. That adds on to the being. Who am I? I'm a disciple of Jesus. And what do disciples of Jesus do? They live life the way of the master.

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