

## **MEDITATION: SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL WEALTH AND BODILY HEALTH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Meditation is a vital tool for anyone who wants to make progress in his/her social and spiritual life. When one meditates properly one gets an abundance of physical health and well as spiritual wealth. Meditation is highly valued in the Eastern tradition and in the Christian world. The psalmists valued meditation, mentioning it sixteen times, and urged us to reflect on aspects of God's character (such as unfailing love, Ps. 48:9), God's works (Ps. 77:2; 143:5; 145:5).*

*The use of Scripture for meditation is very beneficial for Christian growth. Just as there are many ways to pray and study Scripture, Christians throughout the ages have found many ways to meditate on the scripture. Silence, posture and place are of utmost importance when we meditate. Bible study should not be confused with meditation, but Lectio Divina (reading a passage, meditating on that passage, praying and contemplating God) is closely associated with it.*

*That meditation is good does not mean that there are no difficulties with it. We often battle with distractions, feel sleepy, cannot stop the mental chatter in our heads, feel restless, cannot achieve the state of absolute focus.*

*To meditate properly, we need to visualize the scene of the bible passage and make active use of our five senses. To get the fruit of meditation - bodily health and spiritual wealth - we need to do our meditation regularly and faithfully. Meditation needs discipline, fidelity, consistency and resilience.*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Tim 4:15).

Christian meditation focuses on the Word of God in the Bible. One of the ways of encountering God is in *Meditation*. It is not meant for Priests and Religious alone. It is meant for all believers. Meditation is the prayer of the heart when we stay silent, remain still and simple as we ponder the Word of God in scripture.

Meditating on God is like taking spiritual medicine, which will make you feel better and act better and do a better job. These days, even Medical personnel seriously recommend meditation as a healing process for their patients. They ask them to do it daily for five, ten, fifteen minutes or more. This is good, but Christian meditation is different from this. Christian meditation is also different from Eastern style of meditation, though some of their methods do enhance Christian mediation.

All spiritual practices recommend using meditation, prayer or quiet time daily. Meditation helps us to progressively connect with our senses, calm the mind, detach from our emotions and harmonize our whole being. As we practice regularly, we can begin to contemplate abstract qualities to consciously move into experience of the universal. Meditation also strengthens our ability to use intuition to connect with the divine. There are many different approaches to meditation and prayer, and lots of wonderful resources available to guide us in learning the art of going into silence.

### **SCRIPTURE BASIS FOR MEDITATION**

One important but often overlooked way to connect with God is meditating on Scripture. Joshua wrote that as you meditate, you become “careful to do everything written in [the book of the Law]” (Josh. 1:8). God moves beyond the door of our inner being through Scripture meditation and works important heart changes. The psalmists valued meditation, mentioning it sixteen times, and urged us to reflect on aspects of God’s character (such as unfailing love, Ps. 48:9), God’s works (Ps. 77:2; 143:5; 145:5), and God’s precepts and ways (Ps. 119:15). Just as there are many ways to pray and study Scripture, Christians throughout the ages have found many ways to meditate.

**EXPERIENCE AND ENCOUNTER WITH GOD:** I urge us to desire to have an encounter with God. We should let the Word of God take root in us through the daily practice of meditation. We cannot be the same again when we encounter God. If the Word of God takes root in us, we simply cannot be the same again. If we experience God, our life will change. An experience and encounter with God will help us. Let’s desire it. Twenty or thirty minutes of daily meditation on scripture is ideal. Yes, we live in a busy world. There is noise all around us, but we must struggle to find that time in our bedroom, chapel or parish Church and meditate on the word of God. Read the Bible two or three times or more, think over the passage that has been read. For example, it is only in meditation that we can understand the gospel reading that Jesus is not casting any negative shadow on Mary who bore Jesus in her womb, but that Jesus is inviting everyone to receive God’s blessing. I can assure us that when we meditate, things will be revealed to us. No one will need to go after people with higher spiritual power. The Spirit of God will give us answers from within the center of our hearts.

Meditation is *experiential*, it is not *theoretical*. It is also called mental prayer. Many John Cassian, John Main all explored the beauty of meditation and the different methods that can be used. Early morning is the best time for meditation. There is no distraction yet – no phone calls, no television and newspaper yet. Evening time, after the day’s work is also a good time for some people. The best way to meditate is first to sit down, sit still, keep one’s back straight, breathe from the belly, be relaxed but alert. The place and posture adopted is very important for fruitful meditation.

### **THE FIVE SENSES**

Let's look at how we can use the five senses approach for meditation. One of the best-known ways to meditate is to enter into Scripture with all five senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell (a format originated by St. Ignatius of Loyola). Scripture itself urges us to use our senses: "O taste and see that the Lord is good"; "My sheep hear my voice" (Psalm 34:8; John 10:27). Using the five senses allows you to experience the text in a fresh way.

We place ourselves fully within a story from the Gospels. We become onlooker-participants and give full rein to our imagination. Jesus is speaking to a blind man at the side of the road. We feel the hot Mediterranean sun beating down. We smell the dust kicked up by the passersby. We feel the itchy clothing we're wearing, the sweat rolling down our brow, a rumble of hunger. We see the desperation in the blind man's face and hear the wail of hope in his words. We note the irritation of the disciples. Above all we watch Jesus—the way he walks, his gestures, the look in his eyes, the expression on his face. We hear him speak the words that are recorded in the Gospel.

The best-known example of this use of the imagination in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola is the contemplation on Jesus' birth in the second week. St. Ignatius suggests that we imagine "the labors of the journey to Bethlehem, the struggles of finding a shelter, the poverty, the thirst, the hunger, the cold, the insults that meet the arrival of God-with-us." In the course of the Exercises, Ignatius proposes many such scenes from the Gospels for imaginative contemplation. He chooses scenes of Jesus acting rather than Jesus teaching or telling parables. He wants us to see Jesus interacting with others, Jesus making decisions, Jesus moving about, Jesus ministering. He doesn't want us to think about Jesus. He wants us to experience him. He wants Jesus to fill our senses. He wants us to meet him.

For example, as you enter into the text of Mark 10:17-22, you may take the role of the rich young ruler and see what he saw. In verse 21, Jesus "looked at him and loved him," then immediately challenged him to give up what he apparently loved best: his wealth.

## **LET'S GO TO THE MEDITATION LABORATORY NOW AND HAVE SOME PRACTICALS**

Shut your eyes now. Imagine Jesus' look of love followed by this challenge. I began doing that years ago, and ever since, I have repeatedly had a sense of God looking at me with love and challenging me to give up ingrained habits: self-centered thinking, judgmental attitudes, the need to be right. When I just can't give those things up, that picture of Jesus' loving yet challenging gaze resurfaces and I gradually relinquish them. As I meditate on a passage, I wonder what the biblical scene looked like. While meditating on the transfiguration of Christ, I've imagined Jesus' radiant face. Once as I imagined the scene, I wondered (as a skilled movie director would), What was Jesus doing when his appearance changed? I peeked at the original script and found that Jesus was praying (Lk. 9:29). I prostrated myself on the floor and said to God, 'As I pray, change me too'. Make me the person You wish me to be.

Another meditation question I use is, "How would I have behaved if I'd been a disciple sitting in the boat?" As Jesus talked to Legion in that graveyard by the sea, how would I have responded to the screams of the demonized man and the smell of blood from his cut flesh (Mk. 5:5)? What would I have thought of my teacher, who was not intimidated by this naked, crazy man, but cared for him? Would I have wanted to run for the hills? Would I have gotten out of the boat to watch Jesus in action?

### **BIBLE STUDY IS DIFFERENT FROM MEDITATION**

Meditation requires that we pay attention to the details of Scripture, but it's different from Bible study. In Bible study, we dissect the text; in Scripture meditation, we savor it and enter into it. In Bible study, we ask questions about the text; in meditation, we let the text ask questions of us. Meditation helps us absorb scriptural truth, see in our minds how God behaved in Scripture, and become open to behaving the same way.

### **"SACRED READING"- LECTIO DIVINA**

As I tried to meditate on the New Testament letters and Old Testament poets and prophets, I found that another classic method helped: lectio divina. This widely used method consists of four parts: reading a passage, meditating on that passage, praying and contemplating God. After the Scripture is read aloud, participants wait for a word, phrase or image from the passage to emerge and stay with them. From this phrase or image, the participant asks, What does this passage say to me right now? (Bible study is good preparatory work because it asks, What did the passage say to listeners then? This keeps us from coming up with absurd answers to this question.)

### **DISTRACTION**

During meditation, I have had to battle with distractions. Sometimes I fall asleep. Many times I could not stop the mental chatter in my head. I feel restless. The day to day stress keeps pulling me out of mediation. I have also severally asked myself 'How do I stay awake during meditation? Can I be focused during meditation? Am I doing my meditation.

### **CONCLUSION**

My personal experience tells me that the key to good mediation is being absolutely focused. To get the fruit of meditation, bodily health and spiritual wealth, we need to do our mediation regularly and faithfully. We need to visualize the scene of the bible passage and make active use of our five senses. This takes discipline no doubt, but it is achievable. We need consistency and resilience in order to reap the fruit of mediation.

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