

### *Meditation, Prayer, and Daily Rhythms*

**M**ANY PEOPLE WISH for an answer to the question: How is meditation related to prayer? Not very long ago there appeared an article by the Marburg theologian, Friedrich Heiler, in which we were asked to choose whether we want meditation or prayer. If we were to choose the former we should sink back into Buddhism. Only prayer was really Christian. In this way of thinking the greatest Christians of the Middle Ages would be expelled from Christianity, for they have really meditated upon the death and resurrection of Christ in a way quite similar to that here recommended. And they owe their wonderful religious strength to the power of their meditation.

Naturally, it is not our opinion that anyone who is accustomed to say his prayers morning and evening should now give up prayer and put meditation in its place. But if an inquiry were held into the subject, one would learn that the number of people who no longer pray is terribly great. They go through life, have now and then by chance childish and usually superstitious thoughts about the higher world, and never notice what they miss. The frightful carelessness and demoralization which has seized upon the inner lives of men is, as a rule, not realized in religious circles. A course, like this, of instruction in meditation, must include a discussion with those who expect everything from prayer. However, even to look at those who still

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Detail, oil on canvas, Paolo Veronese (1528-1588), Musée du Louvre, Paris

#### *The Supper at Emmaus*

*Christ Jesus prays to the Father before the breaking of bread.*

pray is not encouraging. One can, indeed, never fully know. And occasionally an impression shows us that there is greater reality than one had thought. But how many who pray still do so out of real inward need, and not from custom or superstitious fear? How many pray from joy, without any intermingled fear of what would chance if they did not?

By far the greater number must confess that they simply do not know how to set about praying rightly. Prayer with them is dull and ineffectual. They continue willingly enough to pray, but they sometimes ask themselves if there is any sense in praying, and if it were not better to give it up entirely. The contact which they have with the divine world is weak. And sometimes it seems to them that they are scarcely honest with themselves.

A university professor of theology, who was strictly orthodox, once said to me, almost in tears, that he had always wished to be able to pray as his mother had prayed—but he left me in no doubt that he felt himself very far from that goal. And when people pray together, as in saying grace or in church, it does not require much sensitiveness of feeling to notice how much of it is done mechanically while the thoughts are entirely elsewhere. If one could hold an investigation into the prayer of men of our time, one would see *how rapid is its decline*. Quite apart from the egoism and all, the superstition which creep into men's prayers, the powers of the soul out of which alone men can pray still exist only in a terrifyingly small amount.

When it is told of Christ that He lifted His eyes to heaven, He looked up to His Father, it must have been as if a soul's pure mirror was turned towards the heaven of stars, which mirrored itself brightly in it

with great peace. The Gospels give us this impression very strongly, for example in the high-priestly prayer (John 17). When *we* turn our souls towards heaven, they are like mirrors which have become dull and blind, where, perhaps, a feeble reflection shows; but no starry heaven.

Thirty years ago, as a young theologian, I tried to find out what occurs in the souls of men when the word "God" is spoken. The result gave sufficient cause for thought. Only a quite common-place turning to the world above could be observed—an unilluminated longing and feeling for it. In the theology of today, which knows only a God who is mysterious and afar off, this fact is becoming apparent.

In this need of today, the need of an age which has learned to look outward and down, and thereby forgotten how to look upwards and within, it is in many respects only meditation which can bring help. First of all, we shall learn again by meditation how to represent to ourselves that which is

spiritual. We shall learn it slowly, but in a quite honest way. In every meditation, we practice taking something spiritual into our soul and pondering it. That will, as a matter of course, be beneficial to prayer also. For is it such a bad form of prayer to do nothing for once, but look steadfastly at the divine? Instead of asking, which we often do, heedlessly, we learn to be silent and look. Thus we are on the way to worship, which our race has lost.

It always seems to me that the first three petitions of the Lord's Prayer are meant to lead us upon such a way, and that we ought first of all to seek really to behold and to perceive that of which

they speak: the divine name, the divine kingdom the divine will. In the instruction of candidates for confirmation and in preaching, one is fond of calling prayer the converse of the soul with God. But that which we would not permit ourselves to do when talking to anyone of high position, we do in this case;

we do not wait until we are spoken to, we bring forward our own wishes and requests, we go fully into everything. And when we have said our say, we go hurriedly away without asking if the other has not also something to say. Many prayers would at once be answered if we could only once really look at God.

Meditation leads to a much purer kind of prayer than that which is usual. It allows God to speak. It teaches us to hear, and so it leads to the "hearing of prayer," which is quite a different thing from the prompt granting of our desires. It teaches us to become aware of the Divine Being, and from it really to receive the divine will for our life. That is a more worthy way of having intercourse with God, and a much more effectual way than when we think that He must be immediately at our service to do our will. Of course, direct help comes from our asking in all times of need. And he who knows how to ask aright will sometimes feel absolutely afraid when he sees how near help was, and how

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he is surrounded by the heavenly servants of Christ at every moment in which he understands how to call them. But more important than that we ourselves should be helped, is this, that we should grow into the divine will. And meditation is of service to us in this.

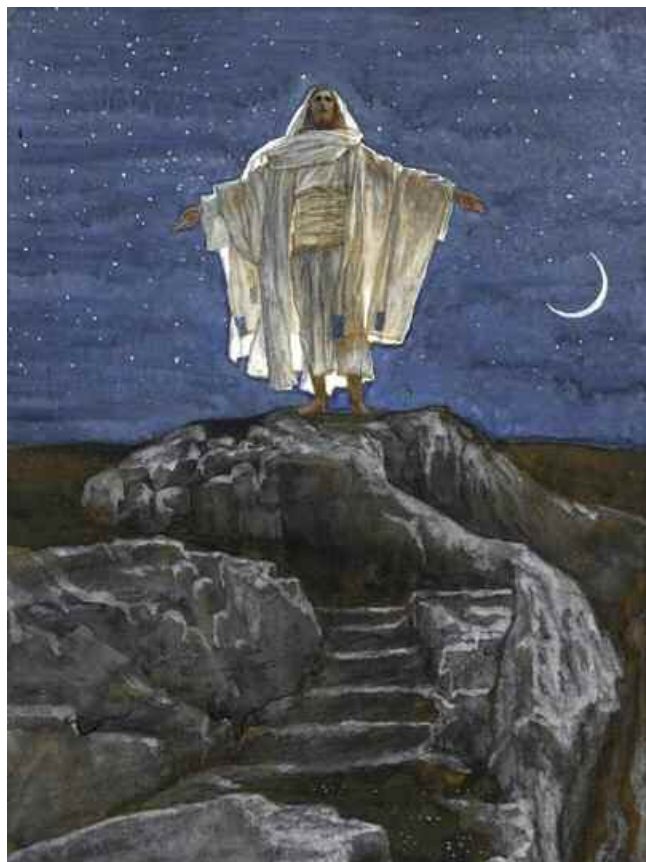
But the last and greatest help is that it changes us wholly into petition. That is not saying too much. The more we learn to meditate, so much the more does our soul assume an attitude of petitioning and expectation. The highest meditation is the highest petitioning. Without understanding this one cannot meditate on a safe and high level. We learn to open ourselves more and more. We learn with a longing which we did not know before, which is itself a prayer, to look towards the divine world; we learn to change ourselves inwardly into prayer, not that we may attain the fulfillment of any particular wishes, but that we may ourselves become the vessels of divine “fulfillment.” It seems to me as if Christ had desired this of His disciples.

When we read His farewell talk, it occurs to us again and again how strangely and impressively He speaks of asking in His name. The picture of the disciples as He wished them to be is one of men who shall do outwardly much greater deeds, who shall show forth “greater works” in the world than He Himself, who shall lead their lives in mighty accomplishment of divine acts—but at the same time inwardly they are much more mighty in their continual petitioning. Their whole inner life is intended to be a perpetual asking from above, petitioning from above, receiving from above. One has the impression that Christ has imagined this inward power of receiving from above as being so great that we can scarcely divine it. To do mighty works outwardly, inwardly to receive the spirit—this is the mark of the true disciple.

The saying, “Ask in My Name,” which occurs so often and so urgently in the farewell talk, and which is usually so little and so externally practiced, is translated in the Act of Consecration of Man\*: “May Christ live in our praying.”

The meditation which we are here describing

*\*The Act of the Consecration of Man is the Communion Service of the Christian Community, a movement for the renewal of religious life through a living experience of Christ.*



Watercolor, James J. Tissot (1836-1902)

### *Jesus Going up into a Mountain to Pray*

leads to this, that first of all Christ can really be present with us; and then that Christ begins really to live in us. And if He begins to live in us, then no other thing can happen than that He also begins to pray in us. For this is His true life within. And then we understand in a new and clear and living way what it means to pray in Christ’s name. It is the highest happiness of man to experience something of this praying of Christ within us—it is a divine happiness. The Act of Consecration of Man brings us to those heights when it leads us after the transubstantiation to pray Our Father. Quite of itself it makes it easy for us to let Christ pray within us. With the words which He Himself once spoke, and which, at their request, He gave to the disciples as a prayer, He begins His most intimate life within us, and thus passes into us.

But we must reply to those who come to us with the complaint that they have made many attempts to meditate and yet have made no progress. In their impatience people always expect much more rapid

progress than is at all possible. We cannot fly up on to the mountains, we can only go slowly step by step. In my case it happened that after a year of straining to meditate I detected scarcely any progress. Then when I came to Dr. Steiner he immediately began to speak of progress; and when I began to express a different opinion he said: "You have made great progress, but you are not yet conscious of it." And so I have accustomed myself not to be always measuring my progress, but to think of the plants, and I have always reminded others, who were dissatisfied with themselves, of the plants.

One cannot be always digging in a flower-pot to see if the seed has grown ; that would be the surest way to kill the plant. One must see that it has light, air and water, and then be able to wait. Even when a plant is already visible in a flower-pot, it often looks for a long time as if it were making no progress. A growing child also often seems for a long time not to be growing, although it is well-fed every day. Then suddenly a month comes in which it shoots up. It is exactly the same in the inner life. We must have for our inner life, if it is to prosper, the same mood of trust which we bring to the plant and the growing child. If we are dissatisfied, we must see to the air and water, but must not touch the growing seed. It will surely grow of itself if it has the right food.

For a long time the first and only thing that comes is the feeling that one is upon a good way. But sometimes not even that comes. Perhaps a kind of hungry feeling comes if we leave off our inward working at ourselves. There is something remarkable about this hunger of the soul. Usually it comes on, if we regularly cultivate our inner life, exactly at the hour when we have accustomed ourselves to meditate. Like an awakener, it recalls to us our duty. People who are obliged to travel much, and who are thereby thrown out of the regularity of their lives again and again, suffer very much from this lack of rhythm. The feeling is as if one were completely thrown into confusion. In this we can already discover something of the meaning of that which spiritual science calls the etheric body or the vital body. This lowest part of the being of our soul lives strongly in time and rhythm.

Therefore rhythm is so beneficial in meditation as well as in ritual. But besides this benefit, rhythm means also a strengthening of one's power; one learns this little by little. In the revolving stream of time, life ever brings back to us that which we last wrought inwardly, and we can then begin there, where we left off. Every right meditation, every deeply experienced Act of Consecration of Man, every Lord's Prayer strongly prayed, brings its own blessing when we turn to it the next time. It then seems as if friendly hobgoblins had built up the house a little further in the time between.

Still worse off than those who do not feel that they are making progress are those who cannot succeed in meditating at all. One often hears sad complaints that someone has for years tried vainly to meditate. The cultus [*forms of worship, here referring to the liturgy of Holy Communion —Ed.*] may be for many people a way by which they may also come to meditate. By the pictures and words which one calls to remembrance again in one's daily work, the service will awaken and train in the right way the mood of reverent, loving self-immersion. Of course the cultus is not simply meant for such people as do not or cannot meditate. Each word which is derogatory to the cultus is keenly felt, by those who know what a ritual really is, to be a sin against a solemn divine reality. In the Christian cultus Christ is present and is dealing with men. All selfish wishes are dumb in the presence of the sublime act which is being performed. But it is the characteristic and truly Christian mark of the cultus, that it comes down to those also who are not able to meditate actively themselves. It helps those, as it helps others also in another way. Let each one see what most helps him forward, and that is best for him. And then there can be no dispute.

But it can also be said that the honest attempt to meditate, repeated unweariedly, already leads one forward, even when one must ever admit one's powerlessness and lack of skill. I must admit that I know of exercises which I have attempted a thousand times throughout a whole decade, and yet have never been able to complete. Just this calm, consecutive endeavor, even when it does not succeed, may have high spiritual and moral value. But

in many cases it happens that one has no idea of what actually occurs. For example, many people complain that they cannot attain to a living feeling of tranquillity. That is really because for the first time they discover how poor and weak their feelings generally are. In their life up to now in which one feeling has trod upon the heels of another—and the feelings have always been reflected by the outward world, and so have seemed greater than they were—they did not become conscious of the fact.

And it is the same when a man complains that he cannot hold fast a spiritual content. It is an advance when he begins to notice how feebly until now his thoughts have flickered like a will-o'-the-wisp. Michael Bauer, to whom I owe many very helpful inspirations to meditation, once told me of an acquaintance who said to him: "As soon as I sit down to meditate, it is as if I had upset a bee-hive and all the bees had flown out; my thoughts flutter about like that." The bee-hive had always been there, and the bees also, but not the man who saw them: he had first awakened in meditation.

But if we wish to proceed in building up the content of our meditations, it would be well if in the background we kept a firm hold upon the two great fundamental meditations for day and night: I am Love! and, I am Peace! He to whom Christ is not yet a living reality may think of God or of the ideal man. From these fundamental meditations let us now go on to become more at home in the "I" which is speaking.

It would indeed be of very great significance if we could come to feel directly this "I" which is speaking. That would be the very greatest gain for a man's life. One may prepare oneself for it by trying to feel other "I's." For example, read a few lines of Goethe, put the book aside and ask yourself, what kind of a man, what kind of an "I" has there revealed itself to me? So one would look into a being whose spirit was light and free and open to the world. One can always find refreshing food in such an "I" without distinguishing any particular perceptions or feelings. As a contrast, one may then read a page of Nietzsche and look closely at this spirit or rather this "I." One then looks into an unusually distinguished, finely developed "I"



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*"This is my whole desire, that my heart may be united to Thee."*—Thomas à Kempis, *My Imitation of Christ*

which scorns liberty. Such experiments are seldom made by men to-day; but they open up great depths of human spiritual history.

After such preparation, it may be a unique experience to look at the "I" which speaks in John's Gospel. Its purity is that of pure light. It has a sure force which contains in itself no violence, a freedom which radiates sincerity yet contains no license, and endless power of giving, in which is no weakness. When a man's senses are awake to this, he knows of nothing higher than simply to gaze into this "I" and take a "sun-bath" in it. It is still more, it is a baptism of purification, a Lord's Supper which ever endures. In this, one can hold fast to history. One understands so well the evangelist John, who also desires simply to gaze into this light and who, after he had heard this word "I" in Christ's mouth, does not like to use it for himself—he calls himself only "the disciple whom the Lord loved." (Continued) □