

Meditation and Oneness

Transcript of Talks at Monthly Online Meditation 2025, July

REFLECTION BY PETER NG

I'd like this evening to explain why meditation is so important. The reason is that it leads us into an experience of oneness. So what do we mean by 'oneness'? Oneness means unity; when we are one, we are united. So oneness is unity of being. Sometimes meditation is described as the process of one-ing, becoming one. In other words, not separated, not scattered, but coming to a unity of being, becoming one. As you know, our practise of meditation is the prayer of one word, that one word, the mantra, leads us to the experience of oneness. Now, we can understand this oneness at three levels.

First of all, meditation leads us to an experience of oneness with ourself. What we mean by oneness with ourself is that we come to a unity of our body and our spirit. Our body and our spirit come into a harmony in the stillness of meditation.

Secondly, we experience a oneness with God, with God through Jesus in the Spirit who dwells within us. So in our heart dwells the Spirit of Jesus. And when we meditate, in our stillness we come to this oneness with Jesus whose spirit dwells within us, and through the Spirit of Jesus we come to a oneness with God. In other words, we come to a harmony, harmony of our spirit with the Spirit of Jesus and with God.

The third level of oneness that we gradually experience in our life as a result of our practice of meditation is a oneness with the whole of creation. When I talk about the whole of creation, I mean the entire universe – with every human being, with animals, with plants, the whole of creation. We come to experience a unity of being with the whole of creation. Now, this matter of oneness with ourself, with God, and with the whole of creation is no small matter.

I think that is the goal of every spiritual practice, and that's why John Main says 'the truly spiritual men or women lives in harmony within themselves, with God, and with the whole of creation'. So this is the goal of our meditation, it's very significant. If we can be faithful to our practice, then gradually we come to experience this oneness within ourself, with God, and with the whole of creation.

Let me share with you now how this personal oneness, the oneness with ourself comes about. When we talk about the personal oneness, we're talking about a perfect stillness of our body and spirit. In other words, we are together, we are whole. Wholeness, and oneness, and harmony, these are synonyms. And so that explains why it's so important for us in our meditation to come to this stillness of body and spirit.

We want to bring the body and spirit together to become one, not scattered, not separate. So the way to stillness of body is simply by sitting still. What we have to do in our meditation is to find a comfortable position to sit still and to remain still. This stillness of the body is extremely important to come to this wholeness, this oneness. Then the way to the stillness of spirit is to let go of all distractions by saying the mantra faithfully throughout the time of meditation. That is the reason why we say the mantra faithfully, so that we can let go of all thoughts, all ideas, all distractions. And that's how we collect our spirit together. Then by sitting still and by saying the mantra, we come to experience ourselves as one, as whole, as unified in body and spirit. So always remember this. This is the reason why we sit still and why we say the mantra during our time of meditation. This is the level of personal oneness.

Then the next level of oneness that we come to experience in our meditation is a oneness with God, a oneness with God through Jesus in the Spirit. So when you talk about God, Jesus, and the Spirit, we are talking about the Trinity: God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Spirit. So what's happening in our time of meditation is, we are experiencing our oneness with God through Jesus in the Spirit. We are participating in the life of the Trinity, and the life of the Trinity is our Christian faith: Father, Son, and Spirit. So over time, as you practise your meditation, you begin to understand that you are doing something extremely profound, participating in the life of the Trinity, becoming one with Jesus in the Spirit, and then through Jesus becoming one with the Father. That's the second level of oneness, oneness with God.

Now, our Christian theology, all of us as Christians, we are taught from young that we are created by God, that we are redeemed by Jesus, and that we are temples of the Holy Spirit. But when we are young, we tend to receive this truth as taught to us in the catechism class, but we don't really understand what it means. We say this is very mysterious. What meditation does is, it helps us to actually know these truths, not just as theology but in our own personal experience. This is extremely important not to just take theology as theory. Theory must become practice, theory must become experience. So coming to the experience of our unity with God, with Jesus in the Spirit is what meditation helps us to come to. And that is why John Main, in one of his talks, asked the question, where are we in our meditation?

So when we are meditating, as we do every morning and every evening, we ask ourselves this question, where am I? We are in God. We are in God. In the silence and in the stillness we are in God. Where is God in our meditation? God is in us. This is the most important experience that every human being must come to, our oneness with God. We are in God and God is in us, and meditation helps us to come to this experience.

The next level of oneness that is very significant is our oneness with the whole of creation. Now, this takes a little bit of understanding. When all the religions of the world speak about God, what we call universal wisdom, it means a wisdom that is being taught in most of the religions.

Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Taoism, they all speak of what they call an 'ultimate reality', what we call God.

But nowadays people don't like to talk about God. Instead of using the word God as we do, they call it the ultimate reality. So what is the ultimate reality? What is God? Actually all the major religions teach that God or ultimate reality is the single, unchanging, infinite reality. Every word is important. Single, not divided; unchanging means basically no beginning and no end; and infinite means without limitation. God is this single, unchanging, infinite reality from which everyone and everything derives their apparently independent reality. Now what do we mean by that? When we look at each other we see a body, when we look at the plants, the trees and the rivers, when we look at the animals, everything looks separate. But actually that is an illusion. It only appears separate, but in reality we are all one. We've all come from this unchanging, infinite single reality.

I think a good way of understanding this is to see that everything that we perceive with our eyes, with our senses, everything that we see is actually what you call matter. But in reality it is energy. Energy is not visible. Energy is not visible, so there's this vast infinite field of energy – that is what ultimate reality is. But to the human eyes and the human senses, everything, we and others, look quite separate. But in reality we are not separate. And that's why in Christian theology, St Paul spoke about God is 'all in all' (1 Cor 15:28). There is nothing in the world except God. So every appearance – our body, what you see, the trees and the mountains and the seas – this is just what you call *finite* reality. It's an appearance. But the reality is, we are all one. And that's why we say God is all in all, in all of us. Each one of us as a human being, every animal, every tree, every mountain, we are all expressions of God. We are all manifestations of God.

Behind our appearances is God who is the ultimate reality. So that's why we say God is the source and the sustainer of everything, and nothing exists outside of God. In scripture it says 'in (God) we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28). Now, if we can come to this understanding of our oneness with the whole of creation, then we come to the realisation that we are not separate from other people, we are not separate from the environment, we are not separate from nature.

If we can understand that and come to an experience of that, that will be the end of conflict, we wouldn't kill each other; we want to go to war with each other because we think that we are all separate, but in reality, we are one. So the key to peace in the world, to the absence of conflict is the experience, that hopefully each of us will come to, that we are one with others, we are not separate from each other. And that's why Jesus says 'love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 13:34). We are one with Jesus in love. In the same way, everybody else is one, equally loved by Jesus. So he says, 'love one another as I have loved you' (Jn 13:34). This

understanding of oneness with the whole of creation which meditation leads us to is extremely important for peace in the world.

That's all I want to share with you tonight. What I'd like us to do now is to listen to Fr John Main as he leads us into meditation. In this teaching on how to meditate, he teaches us to understand how our meditation leads us to this experience of oneness.

REFLECTION BY JOHN MAIN

Meditating is utter simplicity. It's a oneness of body and spirit. And when we sit down to meditate, we sit down as the entire, the whole person that we are, body and spirit.

In the Christian vision, what each of us has to discover is the wonder of our own creation, that we are created by God for an infinite expansion of spirit, that God has sent his Son Jesus to reveal both his greatness and our potential. The Spirit of Jesus dwells in our heart.

Now, it's about body and spirit. And the first thing each of us has to learn when we begin to meditate is to sit still. The essential rules of posture are that the spine is as upright as possible and that you sit as still as possible. And that's a discipline that every one of us must learn. We're not used to sitting still, we're not used to being still. But the spirit must come to stillness in a profound unity with the body.

As you'll find out from your own experience, the bodily stillness is not the most difficult stillness, it's the stillness of spirit. It's going beyond thinking, reasoning, considering, analysing. In meditating, we're not thinking about God, not analysing God. We are being still and learning to know the love that is God in our own hearts. And the way that our tradition teaches us to approach this revelation of God is not to think, not to analyse, not to reason, but to learn to be like a little child, to learn to be humble. And this we do by the simple and constant repetition of our word.

And so to meditate, you need to sit still and to sit upright, and you must learn to say your word. The word I recommend you to use is the Aramaic word *maranatha*. Ma-ra-na-tha – four equally stressed syllables.

To begin with, you'll say your word once or twice or three times, and then you'll begin to wonder, 'am I too hot or too cold?' or 'what am I doing tomorrow?' or 'where shall I go from here?' You must learn to let those distractions just fall away from your mind and return to the mantra. You'll find as you go on that you could be saying your mantra at one level and there's one level of thoughts going on below, another on top, another at the side, another on the other side. Ignore them all; say your mantra. And that is the art of meditating: sit still, sit upright, and say your word. Ma-ra-na-tha.

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. Come, Lord Jesus.

MEDITATION

READING FROM THE GOSPEL OF JOHN (17: 20-26)

excerpt from the Farewell Discourse of Jesus to the disciples

May they all be one; as thou Father art in me and I in thee, so also may they be in us, that the whole world may believe that thou didst send me. The glory which thou gavest me I have given to them, may they be one as we are one; I in them and thou in me, may they be perfectly one. Then the world will learn that thou didst send me, that thou didst love them as thou didst me.

Father, I desire that these men who are thy gift to me may be with me where I am, so that they may look upon my glory, which thou has given me because thou didst love me before the world began.

O righteous Father, although the world does not know thee, I know thee, and these men know that thou didst send me. I made thy name known to them and will make it known so that the love thou hast for me may be in them and I may be in them.

REFLECTION BY FR EUGENE VAZ

A warm welcome to everyone. Thank you, Peter, for that lovely introduction that sets the tone for our appreciating the gospel passage and also helps us come to grips with the deeper dimension of meditation, not just as an exercise of a spiritual sort but a whole way of being, a whole way of living.

So my dear sisters and brothers, the gospel passage that we have listened to just now is the third part of the famous John chapter 17. And John chapter 17 by itself is usually addressed by scripture scholars as the Priestly Prayer of Jesus. And this whole chapter 17 comes within a larger section of John's gospel called the Farewell Discourse running from chapter 13 verse 33 right down to the end of chapter 17, which is today's gospel passage that we have just heard.

So it's a very important passage at the level of understanding what Jesus is really desiring because you've got to put his prayer, in the whole of chapter 17/ The whole of chapter 17 is the Priestly Prayer of Jesus, and that becomes the heartfelt prayer of Jesus. It's in the gospels in terms of a kind of timeline you would say, it is just before his suffering, death, and resurrection. The end of chapter 17 is the end of the Priestly Prayer, and in chapter 18 verse one Jesus is in the Garden and he will be arrested and tried and taken to the cross where he died, was buried, and rose on the third day. So this is the last speech of Jesus, and it's the speech of a dying

patriarch to the people who will survive his death. It's very much in the form of the great farewell discourses all through the Old Testament. Moses, all the great figures of the Old Testament, they all had their farewell discourses where they kind of got their family and people together and passed on their last testament, the last will. The will is very important, and we always honour the will of the person who has passed away, isn't it? We even have an executor who makes sure that the will is carried out.

Now, this chapter 13 to 17 of John is the will of Jesus, it's the final testament. It's his will, and he has made us, believers in him, the executors of his will. So that's something very important. We come to realise as disciples of Jesus, what we are doing. We are the executors of his will means we are making happen what he came to do, to establish, and wants us to continue doing that. That's his will. We disciples of Jesus are the ones who make that will and desire and way of Jesus happen in the world today. So you've got to situate this within the much, much larger context, going way back to the book of Genesis chapter one and chapter two in which we are given the whole purpose of God creating (that is chapter one), God creating everything – everything neutral, everything vegetating, everything animal, and everything human. There's nothing that God has not created and the whole of creation is seen as good, it can achieve what it is meant for. That's the Hebrew understanding of 'good'. It's not a moralistic thing, it's not the opposite of 'bad'. For the Hebrews, good means you can be what you have been made to be. So the whole of creation is good. The whole of creation can function in the way which God has in mind.

Now, what does God have in mind for the whole of creation? Very beautifully, in Genesis chapter two, he wanted the whole creation to be a paradise. It's a very difficult word because so many people have all kinds of ideas about this – paradise is an ideal place of absolute happiness and joy, and you've got the best, it's the most idyllic place, it's the most beautiful place, it's the most peaceful place, you can go on and on. One word puts it all together – God wanted the whole of creation to be paradise.

He wanted the whole of creation to live in joy, not just happiness. Happiness is materialistic. It fades, it disappears. You can be happy now for whatever reason, and 20 minutes later or maybe even less, you are not happy for again all kinds of reasons. So happiness is kind of materialistic, fleeting. You don't seem to be able to keep it forever. God didn't make us for that kind of fleeting happiness. God made us for joy. Joy cannot come and go. Joy is from within, it's from the inner being, and therefore God made us for a joy that's the end result of a harmony.

So at the beginning of our evening today Peter introduced us to that harmony. He also used the word 'oneness', he also used the term 'unity of being'. Wonderful. God made us for that oneness. Very often when we do scripture studies, and especially when you are doing the scripture study either in terms of salvation history or you are studying the book of Genesis, we have to look at chapter one and two as the divine desire, the desire of the creator, God. What did he deeply desire at the very beginning of creation? We are talking about millions of years

ago, what did he desire? He desired a triple harmony. He desired a triple harmony. Harmony of every man and woman with God, a harmony of every man and woman with each other, and a harmony of every man and woman with nature.

So Peter in his introduction brought out these three elements, and he was substantiated by John Main. So this is the deep desire of God where every man and woman be one, be in harmony, be together, be connected, live this unity, this oneness. This is the whole mind of God. And that whole mind of God, man and woman went against. By Genesis chapter three we have the whole dimension of sin. Sin is to go against this desire of God, sin is breaking this desire of God. God wants every man and woman to be with him, but man and woman want to be somewhere else. God wants man and woman to be one with each other, but man and woman are at each other. Instead of being with they attack, and so we have a lot of problems. And God wanted men and women to be with nature, but we are abusing nature for our own selfish purposes. So the whole reality becomes so ugly because we have lost the understanding, we've lost the experience. We've lost the very *raison d'être* of our being.

Right from the very beginning, we are for God, for one another, and for nature. But man and woman went against him in Genesis chapter three. While man and woman went against God, God did not go against man and woman. God said, and that's the wonder of God, 'I will bring them back'. I will bring them back to this harmony, to this unity, to this oneness, this togetherness of them with me, them with one another and them with nature. I will make that happen. And he did, in Jesus. So the whole ministry of Jesus is actually the huge effort of bringing everybody and everything and the whole of creation back into oneness with God.

And to cut a long story short, this third part of John chapter 17 is a part of that prayer where Jesus is saying, 'Father, may all this that you sent me to do, may it be done, not only now but forever. So I am praying (if you look at the first sentence of today's reading) I am praying not only for these, the people around me (some 2000 years ago), I'm praying not only for these but for those who through their words will believe in me.' And 2000 years later, that number has grown dramatically, hasn't it? 2000 years, through the preaching of the disciples, through the preaching of the apostles, so many more people have come to believe in Jesus. So many more people have become disciples of Jesus. And the work of the disciple today is to make known that whole purpose of Jesus, it's to bring everybody back again to the state of joy. That's what we must be looking for, not happiness.

Happiness is materialistic. Anything materialistic does not last and is the source of a lot of conflict, everything material. Is money is the reason why you are happy? Everybody is fighting about money, everybody is greedy about money, everybody's selfish about money. How can money make you happy? It cannot even make you satisfied. You're never satisfied – you never have the best computer, you always find you're one degree less; you don't have the best sound system, there's another sound that's better. You're never satisfied with whatever. You got half

a million dollars in your bank, you're not satisfied, you want one; after you got one, you're not satisfied, you want two, and you can go on and on. We have lost it. Jesus came to bring us back to the source, and what is the source? 'Father, may they be one in us.' That's the source of our joy – when we are one with Jesus, 'As you are in me, Father, and I in you, may they be one in us.' And there's a purpose for this oneness: 'so that the world may believe it was you who sent me'.

So our faith is not just for our own personal little whatever. Our faith is for a witness to the world. So our way of believing is not just about dogma or like Peter said about theology, or all these holy devotions. The whole purpose of our being disciples of Jesus is to let the world know God's plan for peace, which is the end result of a joy which itself is the end result of a oneness, a harmony, a unity.

Now my dear friends Peter has already mentioned this, so therefore I didn't want to dwell on it too much, but I have to refer to it. Christian meditation really keeps us every day, at least twice a day in the morning and in the evening, Christian meditation gives us the experience of being one with God. Therefore, you don't have any distractions. You try and chase away all these – you don't think, you don't analyse, don't dissect, you don't do any kind of intellectual mumbo jumbo. You don't need all that, you're just caught up in God. That's the joy. There's nothing more that can fill anybody but God, isn't it? And every Christian meditation is an experience of being caught up in joy in that call 'maranatha' – come Lord Jesus, you are the one in whom we get everything we were made for, everything we are living for, everything we are longing for, every desire which the world cannot satisfy; you are the one who gives us that lasting accomplishment. Therefore, the dying words of Jesus in St John's gospel is, 'It is accomplished.' Sometimes translations have, 'it is fulfilled,' 'it is finished' – the work you sent me to do, this oneness that you sent me to establish, I've done it.

And if you look at the prayer that we have just heard this evening, this third part of John 17 verses 20-26, actually this is the great desire of Jesus: 'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am.' Wow! Where is Jesus? Jesus is in the glory of God the Father. And that's the prayer of Jesus. I want them to be where I am. I want them to be in that glory. And therefore Jesus says, 'Father, righteous One, the world has not known me but these have known me', and they are now caught up in my will, in my desire, in my way. That's the meaning of oneness. Oneness is not just juxtaposition. It's not just a physical placement close by, that's not oneness, that's not even close. You know what I mean? You may be next to each other, but you may not be close to somebody.

You're sitting in the train, you're very close to that fellow standing by you or sitting by you, but you're not close to him. You don't even know who he is or she is, isn't it? Closeness is not about physical juxtaposition. It's about how we are in each other, how we know each other, how we are with each other, how we journey, and it's a coming to know more deeply. And every day, through our meditation, we can come to know Jesus and we come to know what he's all about

and why he came. And in this prayer that we heard just now, Jesus says, 'I have given them the glory that you gave to me. Father, I want those you have given me to be where I am so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you love me. I've already showed that glory to them. I have given them the glory you gave to me that they may be one as we are one.'

My dear friends, all this becomes very important in our meditation. We are not just doing some spiritual exercise, we are not just going through some discipline. We are going through a whole experience of being one with God. And that experience of being one with God doesn't last 20 minutes. That experience lasts throughout the day. Every day we not only have the exercise of meditation, but we have the experience of being with God, and that experience of being with God we make known by the way in which we are family, community, and society, whether we are at home, whether we are at work, whether we are at play, wherever we may be. This never leaves us because it's the very core of our being to be with God, to be one with him so that we can be like him and we can continue doing that mission of Jesus, which is the last part of today's gospel passage that we have heard. 'I have made your name known to them and will continue to make it known so that the love with which you love me may be in them, and so that I may be in them, and if I am in them, they cannot but be like me.'

So this is a big question. Jesus is in us. Are we aware of it? Our meditation cements it by creating that 20 minutes of utter togetherness, and therefore we don't want anything to distract us. We just want to enjoy God so that after these 20 minutes are over we can live with the joy of this Lord by the way in which we continue doing whatever we are called to do as part of our daily responsibilities.

Thank you, dear friends, for this moment allowing me to share this with you and I hope it's been helpful. I hope you've got some points for your ongoing consideration and meditation. I just want to end by reading this text again. In the light of what I have just shared with you, maybe the reading becomes a little bit more poignant.

'Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said' – so this is a very deep moment, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven. This is a whole connectedness with God, this is deep prayer. Prayer is not muttering, prayer is not just doing some mumbo jumbo, hip hop. that's not prayer. Prayer is a deep connectedness and Jesus is connected.

'Holy Father, I pray not only for these but for those also who through their words (that is the witness of their life) will believe in me. May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me.' We Christian meditators have a mission. We must never forget this mission. The whole purpose of our being Christian is that the world will come to know Jesus and that can only happen by the way you and I are living our Christian lives. The problem is we Christians, we are counter witness. Very

often we say one thing, but we do another thing. We say we believe one thing but we behave another way. Now, meditators must be aware of that danger.

'So that the world may believe it was you who sent me, I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realise it was you who sent me.' There's always this universalistic dimension which we must never forget. 'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you love me. Father, righteous one, the world has not known you, but I have known you and these have known that you have sent me. I have made your name known to them and I will continue to make it known so that the love with which you love me may be in them so that I may be in them.'

Thank you, dear friends. God bless.