

My Prejudiced Mind Was Enlightened

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I had heard of Christian meditation for more than 20 years, but had never felt that it was 'my type' of prayer as I understood meditation to involve not thinking of anything but only saying the mantra repeatedly. I am by nature one who tends to think and ask a lot of questions, always seeking to understand why and how things work, why people think and act the way they do, and whether there can be a better way. Hence, mass, scripture and spiritual reading, attending talks and retreats, and other devotional prayers or quiet time with the Lord using my mind and the gift of intellect, were my usual forms of prayer for many decades of my Christian life.

Furthermore, I had witnessed and heard a number of seasoned meditators say that falling asleep during meditation is quite normal, and that one just has to resume saying the mantra when one becomes aware of having stopped saying the mantra. It gave me the impression that falling asleep for a few minutes during the 20 minutes of meditation is common and is alright. This was hard for my logical mind to accept. It was not until I happened to attend a meditation conference that my prejudiced mind was enlightened. The priest who was instrumental in correcting my understanding of meditation and convincing me was one whose talks I would rather avoid because of my impatience to quickly receive the key points of the message instead of having to listen at length. Yet, this is the priest who woke me with a jolt with his blunt question: 'if you are spending time with someone you truly love, would you fall asleep and not be present and attentive to your beloved?'

This was the beginning of my journey. With some curiosity and a slight openness, I wanted to learn more about why and how people meditate, as a form of prayer to encounter God.

After a few weekly Zoom sessions with the parish meditation group, the opportunity arose to attend a silent retreat in Penang at Stella Maris Retreat Centre, to be conducted by Fr



Laurence Freeman. My husband, Dominic, was very supportive and encouraging as together we embarked on this blessed journey of learning and experiencing meditation.

Indeed, all that happened before, during and after this retreat, has been pure grace from God, in his love for me and in his perfect timing. Even my wanting and desiring to meditate now happened by the gift of pure grace, not by the brute strength of my will or the rational conviction of my mind. I understood that the only work I have to do, is to open my mind and heart to 'receiving this GRACE, by making space for it, and burying it into my life, with the daily practice of meditation'. For me, knowing and believing in the purpose and goodness of doing something for myself and others is a strong motivation to begin and provides the sustenance for me to continue.

During this retreat, I was reminded that everyone of us created by God with the breath of his life, already has the seed planted in our heart to desire and seek truth, goodness and beauty. We will never be fulfilled or be at rest, until we return to and rest in God, the source of all truth, goodness, and beauty. 'When will the kingdom of heaven come?' Jesus was asked and He replied, 'The kingdom of heaven is within you.' Hence, I learnt that this requires a journey back to my heart, where God resides. And this journey would require me to contemplate, to quietly make time to reflect and make space to listen, in my heart. 'This gift of attention that I give to God, in unison with Him, will eventually transform me to be more other-centred, more compassionate and more loving towards my neighbours, towards creation and towards myself. This attention towards God, is the essence of prayer. And meditation is one of the important foundations of prayer. However, meditation is work, requiring effort on my part and an act of the will. But meditation is good work, because it is work that brings out the best in me and will benefit others – it is the work of love.' Those words are summarised from Fr Laurence's teaching during his conference talks. I am sold! My small logical mind is enlightened by God, through Fr Laurence!

But what is my personal experience in meditation so far? Fr Laurence said during the retreat, 'Christ came for sinners and sinners make the best contemplatives.' I certainly have not become the best contemplative and definitely will not any time soon, even though I am very aware of my own sinfulness. But the reminder and great consolation to know that Christ came for me, suffered and died for me to redeem me and the whole of creation, is indeed a powerful gift for me, especially during this period of Lent. Honestly, it is still very hard work for me to try to meditate even once a day, as I have to contend with the super active 'monkey mind' in me. Yet, by His grace, when I make time and give my attention to him, saying silently the mantra, 'Come, Lord Jesus', a sense of peace and joy wells up within me, subtly etching a smile on my lips, as I seek and encounter my greatest Lover and Lord of my life.