

The Power of Silence

Chichester

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- Go placidly amid the noise and the haste and remember what peace there may be in silence. (Max Ehrmann 'Desiderata')
- Jesus said, "I took my stand in the midst of the world, and in the flesh I appeared to them. I found them all drunk, and I did not find any of them thirsty. My soul ached for the children of humanity, because they are blind in their hearts and do not see, for they came into the world empty, and they also seek to depart from the world empty. But now they are drunk. When they shake off their wine, then they will repent. (Gospel of Thomas)
- "Humanity is just as unconscious of what they do when they are awake as they are of what they do while they sleep." (Heraclitus Greek Philosopher 535 – 475 BCE)
- 'Most people live...in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness, and of the soul's resources in general, much like a man, who, out of his whole body organism, should get into the habit of using and moving only his little finger. (William James American philosopher and psychologist 1842 - 1910)
- What the world values is money, reputation, long life, achievement. What it counts as joy is health and comfort of body, good food, fine clothes, beautiful things to look at, pleasant music to listen to....If people find that they are deprived of these things, they go into panic or fall into despair...They are so concerned for their life that their anxiety makes life unbearable, even when they have the things they want. Their very concern for enjoyment makes them unhappy....In so doing they are alienated from themselves, and exhaust themselves in their own service as though they were slaves of others. The ambitious run day and night in pursuit of honours, constantly in anguish about the success of their plans, dreading the miscalculation that may wreck everything. Thus they are alienated from themselves, exhausting their real life in service of the shadow created by their insatiable hope... thirst for survival in the future makes them incapable of living in the present. (Chuang Tzu - 4/3rd Century BCE)
- In our Western Culture the need for silence and solitude is not acknowledged, in fact it is taken as a sign of being slightly odd or even anti-social.
- John Main OSB saw that the greatest challenge to modern people is to rediscover the value and meaning of silence. Modern people, need to recover the contemplative dimension of their prayer.
- "The Christians of the future will be contemplative or else there will be no Christians." Karl Rahner SJ (Theologian 1904 – 1984)

Benefits and Fruits of Meditation

- Meditation leads to interior silence
- counters stress and enhances well-being
- accesses a different way of being
- re-connects with the Spirit

- optimises potential
- Meditation's/Mindfulness' impact on stress underlies many of its proven physical health benefits.

Meditation increase Serotonin levels:

a happy state is associated with increased levels of serotonin.

Stress reduces Serotonin levels:

an unhappy state is associated with decreased levels of serotonin.

Meditation reduces cortisol levels :relaxation response.

Stress increases cortisol in our blood stream, which triggers our 'flight or fight' reflex.

- This is why meditation is of the utmost importance in our world today. Recent research in Neuroscience has shown a chain of processes within the human brain that mediate our access to higher states of consciousness. The sequence is as follows: the pre-frontal cortex in our brain is involved with thoughts, images and daydreams, as well as attention. By focusing our mind in one-pointed attention - in our case on a mantra - we encourage increased activity in these attention cells. As our focus deepens, the activity in the cells involved in thoughts and images on the contrary decreases considerably; this is reflected in a lessening of beta waves, our thinking waves - the 'ego' part of our consciousness. (Kim Nataraja – Weekly Teaching Year 4)
- Focused attention prompts shift from left to right brain
- We predominantly use our left brain
- Attention is right brain function; focused attention promotes shift from left to right brain (Dr Shanida Nataraja 'The Blissful Brain - Neuroscience and the proof of the power of meditation')
- By paying one-pointed attention in regular meditation slowly we are able to switch more easily to our right-brain thinking with its emphasis on intuition, creativity, spirituality and its wider more all-embracing perspective, which includes taking into account the emotional importance of the effect of our actions on others and their consequences for the world that surrounds us.
- The perspectives of both hemispheres are partial but complementary – both are necessary for an integrated approach to life. By having access to both hemispheres, our rational and the intuitive/spiritual part of our being, both can thus influence our actions, leading to a more balanced and harmonious way of being. (Kim Nataraja 'Weekly Teaching' Year 4)

The power of Attention

- Paying attention and sitting still in silence also form the foundation for stability, standing on firm ground, spiritually and psychologically rooted. This is a rootedness that lasts not only the duration of your meditation sessions, but will become an attitude of mind. This will transform your life and allow you to live and act permanently from that deep centre of silence at the core of your being, our meeting place with the Divine. (Kim Nataraja)
- "Meditation produces mindfulness in daily life as one of its benefits. Mindfulness prepares the mind and body for meditation" (Laurence Freeman OSB in a Financial Times interview on 1st June 2014)

- If there is any monk who wishes to take the measure of some of the more fierce demons so as to gain experience in his monastic art, then let him keep careful watch over his thoughts..... Then let him ask from Christ the explanation of the data he has observed. (Evagrius)
- Evagrius' sequence: Sensations, feelings, emotions, thoughts, desires and action.
- "Silence is really about being fully attentive to who we are and where we are and what is going on inside ourselves and outside ourselves...it is about being peacefully attentive, not self-consciously, but simply attentive, aware." (Laurence Freeman OSB)

Connection between attention and prayer

- "In meditating we have to learn to become wholly inserted into the now of the present moment...to say our word with pure attention." "The mantra stills the mind and summons all our faculties to the resolution of a single point." (John Main)
- By sitting still and focusing on our mantra we allow ourselves to become aware of the silence that lives at the Centre of our being. This silence is not just an absence of noise, a mere absence of sounds, but a creative energy, that then allows us to become 'pro-active' out of our own creative impulses, rather than 'reactive' to external stimuli. Thus we listen to the silence of God. (Kim Nataraja)
- We will never understand the words of Jesus if we don't first understand his silence. (St Irenaeus (2nd century CE))

God and Silence

- Mother Teresa: 'Silence is God speaking to us.'
- Meister Eckhart, 14th Century Dominican mystic: 'There is nothing so much like God as silence.'
- Who do you think you are?! "Nothing is as difficult as not deceiving oneself." (Wittgenstein)
- "Ego is essentially the image we have of ourselves, the image of ourselves that we try to project. All illusion, all false perceptions of ourselves and others and God are the offspring of the ego." (John Main OSB)
- "The limits of my language [thoughts] are the limits of my world." (Wittgenstein)
- When Alice complains to Humpty Dumpty that he is misusing words, Humpty Dumpty scornfully replies: "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."
- "To her lover, a beautiful woman is a delight; to an ascetic, a distraction; to a wolf, a good meal." (Zen tradition)

The shadow

- The silencing of our surface thoughts allows us to become aware of the personal unconscious, where the 'ego' has deposited all that seemed to threaten our adaptation to our environment, which constituted our survival, when we were young. We are now in the psychological/emotional world, which John Main called: "darker level of consciousness of repressed fears and anxieties" and Laurence Freeman: "psychological distractions". (Kim Nataraja Weekly Teaching Year 1)

The ego does not like being switched off, even temporarily

- Increases awareness of thoughts

- Stresses saying the mantra is boring repetition
- Tell you to not just sit there, do something!
- Asks whether this is really the right mantra?
- Even is this the right type of meditation?
- Whispers that a better group leader would help!
- Makes you feel that this is self-indulgent, but “Acquire inner peace and thousands around you will find salvation.” (St Seraphim of Sarov)
- Let’s you fall asleep – ‘holy dozing’

Personal Unconscious

- Sudden tears
- Feeling of irritation
- Waves of anger
- Boredom
- Feelings of dryness and pointlessness

Ego questions: ‘What is the point if I feel worse afterwards?’ and ‘It is better to let the past be!’

- Joy bubbles up, peace reigns, tears flow; feelings of anger and irritation come to the fore. Accept all that happens: the tears are the tears you did not shed, when you should have done so; the anger and the irritation were also not expressed at the appropriate time. These emotions are blocking your path to your centre. Let them come up, name them and accept them; be aware of them without acting them out. It is Christ the Healer at work. These suppressed emotions are frozen blocks of ice; hold them up to the Light and Love of Christ and they will melt and a further step on the path can be taken. There is no need to know the causes of these emotions: “just name your demons and your heart will tolerate them better.” (Kim Nataraja Weekly Teaching Year 1)
- Survival needs: love, security, esteem, power, control and pleasure

Ploys of the ego - ‘Unmet need’ tapes

- ‘God can’t love you unconditionally. You are not lovable!’
- ‘Aren’t you out of control?’
- ‘I don’t know whether this is safe!’
- ‘No one prays like this. You are the odd one out!’
- “Of the demons opposing us in the practice of the ascetic life, there are three groups who fight in the front line: those entrusted with the appetites of greed, those who suggest envious thoughts, and those who incite us to seek the esteem of men. All the other demons follow behind and in their turn attack those already wounded by the first three groups.” (Evagrius)

Embracing the rejected shadow self

- You are more than you think you are!
- It takes courage to leave our thoughts, images and especially our opinions - our ‘ego’ - behind, to leave the comfort of our conditioning, to let go – however temporarily - of our sense of identity and individuality that we have shaped out of our thoughts. But it is essential “to leave self behind” to follow Jesus into the Silence and discover, who we truly are, a child of God. (Kim Nataraja Weekly Teaching Year 1)

- "The task we have is to find our way back to our creative centre, where wholeness and harmony are realized, to dwell within ourselves, leaving behind all the false images of ourselves such as what we think we are or what we think we might have been, because these have an unreal existence outside of us. " (John Main 'Word into Silence')
- A human being is part of a whole, called by us 'Universe' – a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of consciousness.' (Albert Einstein)
- St Francis' prayer: "Who are you , O God, and who am I?"
- "The holy Spirit dwells within each of us in such a way that we are all of us, quite literally 'temples of holiness.'" (John Main)

The spiritual path

- This is the reason for our meditation. To be open to the divine reality that is closer to us than we are to ourselves. (John Main)
- "Prayer..... is the life of the Spirit of Jesus within our human heart....There is only one prayer, the stream of love between the Spirit of the risen Jesus and His Father, in which we are incorporate." (John Main)
- "Only when we live in and from love do we know that miraculous harmony and integration of our whole being which makes us fully human." (John Main 'The Inner Christ')