



World Community for Christian Meditation  
(Singapore)

## Monthly Online Meditation

with Peter Ng

SESSION 2

JULY 6, 2020

In our first session last month we reflected on the purpose of meditation. We read from the Letter of St Peter where he spoke about the Christian vocation – the call of the Christian is to union with God. St Peter speaks about it as ‘to share in the very being of God’, the very life of God. In other words, the goal of our life is union with God. God is the source of our being, he's our Creator. And God is also the goal of our being. The beginning, as well as our end. So if we understand that each of us is being called to share in the very being of God, to come to union with God, then the question is: How do we do that? How do we come to share in the life of God? The Christian faith proposes that the life of God is to be found within us, in the Spirit of Jesus, in the indwelling Holy Spirit. In other words, the life of God is present to us in the life of Jesus, in the Holy Spirit that is present within us. And so tonight we would like to reflect on this indwelling of the Holy Spirit and to listen to the words of Jesus as to how we can come to participate in his life by following him, by coming into union with him. So the theme of tonight's reflection is ‘Leaving Self Behind’. Let's now listen to John Main's teaching on this, and I will continue with the reflection later.

## Leaving Self Behind

### **LEAVING SELF BEHIND** -John Main

Excerpt from *In the Beginning*, John Main: Collected Talks Vol VIII, ‘Death and Resurrection’, Medio Media, [www.mediomedia.com](http://www.mediomedia.com)

This is from the Gospel of Mathew:

If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind. He must take up his cross and come with me. Whoever cares for his own safety is lost. But if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self. What will a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his own true self? Or what can a man give that will buy that self back? (Mt 16:24-26)

I think all of us who have read the gospel and all of us who have tried to open our hearts to the call of Jesus can sense the truth in those words, the paradox that Jesus puts before us: to find our life we must lose it. And the challenge that each one of us faces is this: How are we going to lose our life, to lay down our life so that we *can* follow Jesus at the centre of our life, to the depth of our own being?

From the beginning of the time when people have listened to Jesus and tried to respond to him, his disciples knew the way of prayer. He himself was the great example. As we know from the gospels, he often withdrew from his disciples to be alone with his Father. That is exactly the invitation that we have, to be at one with Jesus, to be with him in the Father.

Meditation is to enter into that experience of being free for God – transcending desire, leaving it behind; transcending ego, leaving it behind – so that the whole of our being is utterly available to God. Meditating is having the nerve to take the attention off yourself and to put it forward, to put it forward on God.

The way of prayer that we follow is the way of meditation. That is, each time we sit down to pray, we try to lose ourselves in Christ and find our true self in him, the person we are, the person each of us is, redeemed by his love.

The Christian proclamation is death and resurrection. Jesus has died and is risen, and he is the way, the way we must follow. We must die to self and rise to new life in him. As we sit still and become still in meditation, we die and rise in his power.

## **REFLECTION** -Peter Ng

Death and resurrection, that is our Christian faith. And our teaching on meditation is focused on this centrality of our Christian faith in dying with Christ and rising to new life with him. And Jesus gives us a very simple, although very demanding way of following him. He says we have to leave ourselves behind. Anyone who wants to follow me, anyone who wants to be my disciple 'must leave self behind. He must take up his cross and come with me.' If we want to win our life, we must be prepared to lose it. What does it profit anyone if you gain the whole world but you lose your true self?

So what Jesus proposes to us is that in our way of life, and also in our way of praying, we have to leave ourselves behind. In other words, in our time of prayer, when we seek to enter into union with the Spirit present within us, we have to let go of all our self-preoccupations. Our thoughts, our desires, our worries, our plans, all these self-occupations, we have to leave them behind so that we can be totally available in mind and spirit to his presence within us in the Holy Spirit. So when Jesus speaks about the challenge to die, he's not calling us to a physical death on the cross. That was what *he* did, but he's simply telling us, 'you, in turn, if you wish to come into the union with me, if you wish to follow me, just leave yourself behind'. In other words, give your total attention to me, focus on me, and not focus on yourselves. Basically, at the time of prayer, stop thinking about yourself. And we all know how difficult it is. Most of us have been brought up in a culture of prayer where we are asking for this, we are asking for that. It's very natural to do that, but that's not how we enter into the depths of

prayer if we are asking for things, we are going over the past, or we are full of desires for the future – a lot of anxiety at our time of prayer when actually what Jesus asks of us at the time of prayer is to ‘give our attention to *me* and stop focusing your attention on yourself’.

Meditation is a helpful way for us to learn to leave self behind because, at the time of meditation, as we sit still and as we humbly repeat the mantra, ma-ra-na-tha, we are effectively, leaving our desires behind, our thoughts behind. These are all distractions at the time of meditation. By choosing to place our attention on repeating the mantra, listening to the mantra, as we sound it, we are giving our total attention to the presence of the Spirit of Jesus within us. So Fr John Main speaks of the mantra, the word ‘maranatha’ that we use in our meditation, as a sacrament. It is a sacrament in the sense that it is something that we do externally, we are sounding the word, but the reason why we do it is to enter into this inner reality. And this inner reality is the presence of the Spirit of Jesus within us. So we have to understand the recitation of the mantra as the way in which we learn to leave ourselves behind so that, at the time of meditation, we can give our undivided attention to the presence of Jesus within us. That is how we leave ourselves behind. That is how we die to our self-preoccupations, to our self-centeredness. And then we rise to a new life with him in the sense that we move from self-centeredness to other-centredness, to Christ-centeredness, and through Christ-centredness to God-centredness.

So let us now put into practice this faithful recitation of the mantra during our meditation. That’s the way of leaving our self behind, our thoughts behind, so that we try as much as we can to give our attention to the Lord during our time of prayer. Let’s listen to John Main’s teaching on how to meditate.

## Meditation

### **HOW TO MEDITATE** -John Main

To meditate, each of us must learn to be still, and that’s a discipline. When we meditate in a few moments together, all of us should spend a few moments just getting into a comfortable sitting posture. Then all of us at some time probably during our meditation will feel like moving. And not moving, staying still, will perhaps be for us the first lesson in transcending desire, transcending that fixation that we so often have with ourselves. So I want you to understand that meditation does involve this discipline. And the first discipline you have to learn probably is to sit still, to *be* still.

When you sit down and sit still, close your eyes gently, and then begin to repeat your word. The word I suggest you use is ‘maranatha’. That’s four syllables: ma-ra-na-tha. The purpose of repeating the word is to gently lead you away from your own thoughts, your own ideas, your own desire, and to lead you into the presence of God by turning you away from yourself towards God. Say the word gently, but deliberately. Say the word in a relaxed way, but articulate it silently in your mind: ma-ra-na-tha.



<https://wccm-singapore.webflow.io/meditation-timer-moment-of-christ>

*Letter of St Paul to the Romans: 12:1–2*

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

## Questions and Responses

### THE PURPOSE OF THE MANTRA

**[Q]** *The first question is on sounding the mantra and breathing. During our meditation, we say the mantra maranatha to keep our monkey mind still or we can focus on our breath. So the question is, is breathing with the mantra during meditation important? That's the first question. And how can I focus on the mantra all the time during meditation?*

**[A]** A very useful question for anyone who meditates is regarding how we say the mantra. Quite often I get questions from meditators, especially newcomers, and they ask me: 'How do I know that I was doing my meditation correctly? We just finished our 20 minutes of meditation, so how do I know that I'm doing it properly?'

### A WAY TO LEAVE YOURSELF BEHIND

The answer to that question is, you can ask yourself this question: 'To what extent, was I able to sit still, the bodily stillness? And to what extent, was I able to say the mantra faithfully throughout the time of meditation? So your progress in meditation can be understood in terms of how still you can be in body, and how still your mind can be. And the stillness of mind consists in the faithful recitation of the mantra. So in other words, learning to say the mantra well is crucial, because that's how you leave your thoughts, your desires, your plans, your worries behind. This is how we leave *ourselves* behind at the time of meditation.

You'll find that there are different ways to meditate. There are two common ways, basically.

The first is to focus the mind, to concentrate the mind on the breath. And the other way is to have as your object of focus and concentration, the sounding of a mantra. Both ways are equally effective. Some people find that it's easier to come to stillness by the awareness of the breath. In other words, they still the mind by giving all the attention to the breath as it flows in, and to the breath as it flows out. You find that your awareness of the breath helps to slow down the thinking mind. That's one form of meditation, very common especially in the Buddhist tradition. But what we teach in Christian meditation is, coming to stillness of mind by the faithful recitation of the mantra. And therefore the breathing technique you might say in our practice of meditating with a mantra is: to what extent does the breathing contribute to our ability to sound the mantra more faithfully?

Some of you who came to our first session will remember that I gave you some guidelines on how to sit still and also how to say the mantra, so let me repeat that.

#### HOW TO SAY THE MANTRA

CLEARLY, GENTLY, CONTINUOUSLY - How do you say the mantra? First of all, the mantra should be sounded clearly, gently, and continuously. *Clearly* means to articulate, to pronounce the mantra clearly – there are four syllables, ma-ra-na-tha, ma-ra-na-tha. Say it *gently*, in other words don't use force, in a rhythmic way, ma-ra-na-tha. And say it continuously. *Continuously* means 'ma-ra-na-tha' and the moment you reach the fourth syllable 'tha', you begin again with 'ma' – ma-ra-na-tha, ma-ra-na-tha. Not rushing, but saying it clearly, gently, and continuously.

SOUNDING THE MANTRA - Now, the mantra, when you first learn to meditate, is strange to you, is not familiar to you. So you have to *learn* to say it. Some people get all the syllables jumbled up. So what you can do if you are a beginner is, if you sit down let's say for 20 minutes of meditation, for the first minute, vocalise the mantra, saying it out loud because you're meditating on your own, not with other people, so you won't be distracting other people. So you can learn to sound the mantra by practising it, sounding it aloud for one minute, ma-ra-na-tha, ma-ra-na-tha, ma-ra-na-tha. As you sound it the sound fades into the silence. By doing it you're practising sounding the mantra clearly and continuously. So that's the first thing.

LISTENING TO THE MANTRA - The second thing in order to be able to say the mantra, is to listen to the mantra as you sound it. So when we say 'ma-ra-na-tha' the sound is echoing away in the chambers of your heart. It's echoing away. So what you need to do is to give your listening attention, to listen to the sound as it is going on within you. How is that helpful? That is helpful, because you become more absorbed, you're giving your listening attention to the sound of the mantra. So in that way you're able to hold on to the mantra, better. It's more difficult, you might say, for the mantra to escape from you. But you're not sort of watching it, clutching it. You're just learning to listen to it so that you're able to stay with the mantra. So that's the second thing. Listen to the mantra, as you sound it.

BREATHING WITH THE MANTRA - Then the third thing is the breathing. Now, it is very good if you can develop a way of synchronising your breathing, with the sounding of the mantra. For

example, for myself, I've been meditating for a long time and I've found that after practice what I'm doing is that I sound the mantra on the first two syllables 'mara' as I'm breathing in and as I breathe out I breathe out 'natha' – 'mara-natha'. So it's as though the mantra is riding on my breath. It's like a jockey on a horse, you might say. The jockey is the mantra and the horse is the breath. You are resting the mantra on the breath. Now, that requires some practice, and so you mustn't force it. So when you first begin, don't try to force it, but just simply learn to sound the mantra and listen to it. But what you will find, maybe after several weeks or months of practice, is that your breath naturally gets synchronised with the mantra. That's one way. Some other people find that they can breathe in the whole mantra 'maranatha', and then they breathe out in silence, and then they breathe in the whole mantra again and they breathe out in silence. And other people find that they breathe in in silence and they breathe out the whole mantra. So there are different possibilities.

SAYING FAITHFULLY - I think it all depends on each individual which one seems to be the most natural thing to do. The important thing is to understand that we need to try to say the mantra as faithfully as possible during meditation, and these are all ways to help us to do it better. We must be patient and allow it to develop naturally, but it's good to remember these simple guidelines.

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## PRAYER OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY FOR CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

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May this community  
be a true spiritual home for the seeker,  
a friend for the lonely,  
a guide for the confused.

May those who pray here  
be strengthened by the Holy Spirit  
to serve all who come,  
and to receive them as Christ himself.

In the silence of this room  
may all the suffering, violence and confusion of the world  
encounter the Power that will  
console, renew and uplift the human spirit.

May this silence be a power  
to open the hearts of men and women  
to the vision of God, and so to each other,  
in love and peace, justice and human dignity.

May the beauty of the Divine life  
fill this room  
and the hearts of all who pray here  
with joyful hope.

May all who come here,  
weighed down by the problems of humanity,  
leave giving thanks for the wonder of human life.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen

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