



World Community for Christian Meditation  
(Singapore)

## Monthly Online Meditation

with Peter Ng

SESSION 3

AUGUST 3, 2020

Welcome to our Monthly Online Meditation with Peter Ng. As we continue to live in these turbulent and uncertain times, our practice of meditation remains a constant but with an added sense of purpose and meaning. We are not immune to the fear and anxiety of the pandemic, but we can count on the peace and promises that come from a life of spiritual interiority. Recently the church celebrated the feast of Mary Magdalene, commonly referred to as the apostle of apostles because she was the first to witness the resurrection of Christ. When Jesus said to her 'don't cling to me', he was indicating that the time for physical closeness was in the past. Mary's love had to release the finite in order to reach a more expansive spiritual dimension. All authentic spirituality is about letting go. Last month Peter spoke about leaving self behind, letting go. Yearning for a new way will not produce it; only ending the old way can do that. So let us now put ourselves in the right disposition as we invite Peter to share with us spiritual insights. (JAMES LOH)

## The Meaning of Christian Meditation

PETER NG

Meditators and friends, tonight I'd like to reflect with you on the meaning of Christian meditation. In other words, what does it mean for us as Christians, as disciples of Christ, to meditate? How is Christian meditation similar and different from meditation practice in other religious traditions? I'd like to start this evening by asking you to listen to these words of the founder of our community, John Main as he speaks about the universal Christ, reflecting on what St Paul wrote in his Letter to the Colossians.

### **THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION** -John Main

*Transcript of excerpt from Word Made Flesh, John Main Collected Talks Vol VI, 'The Universal Christ', Medio Media, [www.mediomedia.com](http://www.mediomedia.com)*

Listen to St Paul writing to the Colossians:

He is the image of the invisible God, and his is the primacy over all created

things. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only things visible but also the invisible orders. The whole universe has been created through him and for him and he exists before everything, and all things are held together in him. He is moreover the head of the body, the church, the community of the faithful. He is its origin, the first to return from the dead, to be in all things alone supreme.

For in him the complete being of God by God's own choice came to dwell, and through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross, to reconcile all things whether on earth or in heaven through him alone.

The secret is this: Christ in you, Christ the hope of a glory to come. He it is whom we proclaim. (Col 1:15-20, 27-28)

The secret is Christ in you – this is what meditation is about, coming to understand the essence of Christianity in your own experience, in your won heart. St Paul is writing out of his experience and each of us is summoned to the same experience, to be made one with God through Jesus, through his human consciousness dwelling in our hearts; and our destiny is to open our consciousness wholly to his, and with him and through him and in him to be taken to the Father, to be expanded into infinity.

What I think we understand in the experience of meditation is that all of us, every single human being alive, is in a creative relationship with God through Christ. And why meditation is so important for each of us individually is, that as each of us comes closer to Christ the whole fabric of human consciousness is knit more closely together. And I think when we begin to understand that as individuals we begin to see that the development of our consciousness is not just a personal thing but it is a responsibility we have for the whole human race – that the deeper we enter into the mystery the more truly humane we become, each of us. And that deepening commitment to our own humanity is a deepening commitment to the whole of humanity.

The experience of meditation is a commitment to the whole of creation and for a love of everything in creation – the beauty of nature, the beauty of man's spirit as expressed in art. Every part of our life is deepened as we enter the mystery of the universal Christ.

## **REFLECTION** -Peter Ng

There are a few points that I wish to highlight that we have just heard in John Main's reference to St Paul's Letter to the Colossians.

- *Everything has been created through Christ.*

The first point: The whole universe, everything in heaven and on earth, things visible or invisible has been created through Christ.

- *Christ existed before everything.*

The second point: He existed before everything. So although we might say Christianity since the coming of Christ is just over 2000 years old, yet the Christ that we believe 44existed from

the beginning of time. St Paul says he existed before everything. So one helpful way to understand this is to distinguish between Christ and the person of Jesus. The person of Jesus that we know, the historical Jesus, came over 2000 years ago, but the Christ that we are talking about existed from the beginning of time. And if you reflect for a moment on the Gospel of John, St John began his gospel by saying, 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and it was through this word that everything was created. (Jn 1:1-3)' So St Paul in his Letter to the Colossians is echoing what John said at the beginning of his gospel: 'And the Word became flesh.' The Word became flesh in Jesus. That is the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. So this is very important for us to understand, that Christ existed before everything.

- *Through Christ God reconciled the universe to himself.*

The third point: St Paul says, 'through Christ God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself'. Through Christ, our release is secured and our sins are forgiven. What does this mean? In our first session, I spoke about the purpose of meditation as coming to share in the very being of God. In other words, to come into union with God. For us, the path to union with God the Father is through Christ. This is what it means when St Paul speaks about God reconciling everything to himself through Christ.

- *Christ is in you.*

The fourth point: St Paul spoke about the secret. This is the secret of our Christian faith. 'The secret is 'Christ in you, the hope of a glory to come.' In other words, the secret of our faith is the living presence of Christ within us. Christ *in* us.

#### DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIAN MEDITATION AND MEDITATION IN OTHER FAITH TRADITIONS

So with that as the backdrop, let me try to share with you what it means to meditate as Christians. What is the difference between Christian meditation and meditation in other faith traditions?

##### *The Method*

If you look at the method of meditation, the use of a mantra, a prayer word in meditation, this method is not exclusively Christian. You find the practice of meditating with a mantra in other religions as well, for example, in Buddhism and in Hinduism. Our tradition of using a prayer word or a mantra in meditation goes back to the very earliest Christian monks in the Egyptian desert. We call them the Desert Fathers and Mothers, and they taught contemplative prayer, a way of meditation, as taking a word or a phrase, and repeating this word over and over again so as to come to poverty of spirit. And that is the tradition that we follow, but it is not exclusively Christian because, as I said, the use of a mantra in meditation to still the mind is also practised in other religious traditions.

##### *The Fruits*

Neither are the fruits of meditation, the effects of meditation – they are not exclusively Christian. So when you have people practising meditation faithfully over a long period of time, as we try to do, then we begin to manifest in our life the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control – the fruits of

the Spirit which St Paul mentioned in his Letter to the Galatians (Gal 5:22-23). They are the fruits of the Spirit because they are the fruits of spiritual practice, and anyone who follows a spiritual practice sincerely and with devotion, will begin to manifest in their lives these fruits of the Spirit. So they're not exclusively Christian. We can find holy men and women in all religious traditions.

### *Our Faith*

So then the question is, what is the difference between our practice of meditation in the Christian tradition compared to the practice of meditation in other religious traditions? I think the key here is that our meditation is focused on the person of Jesus Christ. We call our meditation 'Christian' meditation because it is Christo-centric. In other words, the focus of our meditation is on the indwelling Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ within us. So when we meditate using the mantra 'maranatha' laying aside our thoughts we are expressing our faith in Jesus, in Christ. And we are choosing to leave behind our thoughts, to leave ourselves behind, so that we can give our total attention to the presence of Christ within us. So that is our faith.

### *Our Goal*

For us, our practice of meditation is prayer. It is a deep form of prayer; it's what we call contemplative prayer. The word 'contemplative' comes from the Latin word *contemplare*, which means 'to be in the temple'. What temple? It's the temple of our heart. The temple of our heart where the Holy Spirit dwells, where the presence of Christ dwells. So therefore, when we meditate we want to come into a state of union with Christ present within us. So as Christian meditators we speak about the prayer of Christ. Christ is present within us and he is constantly at prayer to the Father – that is the prayer of Christ. What we do in meditation by our simple recitation of the mantra, focusing on the presence of Christ within us, we seek to join in his prayer to the Father. So this is our way to the Father through Christ.

### *Our Understanding*

And then the third thing to understand about our practice of meditation in the Christian tradition is that we experience the fruits of meditation, the fruits of the Spirit. These fruits of the Spirit are not our own achievement. They are the result of us being transformed by the power of Christ, by the love of Christ that we encounter in our meditation. So we understand the fruits of meditation, you might say the benefits of meditation, as our personal transformation. We have been transformed by the power of Christ, present within us.

So I'd like you to understand these very important points so that when you discuss this with your friends, among yourselves as Christians, or when you discuss about meditation with people from other traditions, you can respect what they practise but you can share with them that our understanding of meditation is Christo-centricity, our focus is on the presence of Christ within us. Because, as St Paul says in the Letter to the Colossians, God has chosen to 'reconcile the whole world to himself' through Christ, and so we seek union with God through our Lord Christ present within us.

# Meditation

## **MEDITATION IS SIMPLE** -Peter Ng

Now I'd like to invite you to a period of meditation, because what we have just reflected on, you might say, is the theology of meditation. But the theology would not be meaningful unless we practise it faithfully, as we are going to do now and every day, every morning and every evening, so that increasingly our whole life becomes anchored in Christ. Meditation is very simple. You want to come to a stillness of body and a stillness of mind.

### *Still the body*

For the stillness of body, just remember the few points that I shared with you previously. Sit with your back straight, with your spine upright, put your feet on the floor so that you are nicely anchored and you don't have to move. Put your hands on your lap or put one palm on top of the other. Then close your eyes very lightly so that you are not distracted by what's going on around you. Relax the muscles of your face to release the tension that we carry with us. Then take a few moments to be aware of your breath. Be aware of your breath coming in and flowing out, and then you realise that as you give your attention to your breath your thoughts slow down. So that is a very good preparation for the stillness mind that we want to enter into.

### *Still the mind*

To come to the stillness of mind, we learn to say the mantra. The mantra helps us to put aside our thoughts, to leave our self behind so that we can enter into this experience of joining in the prayer of Christ. So the mantra we use, maranatha, expresses our faith in Christ, and our love for Christ. So learn to say this word clearly as four syllables, ma-ra-na-tha. Say it gently as an act of love, and say it continuously so that you are not led away by other distracting thoughts. And as you sound this word quietly within you, ma-ra-na-tha, it's important to *listen* to the sound of the mantra within you so that you are less easily distracted, so that you're able to hold on to the mantra. And then gradually over time you will learn to synchronise the sounding of the mantra with your breath. But for today, do not be too worked up about it. Simply learn to say the mantra as well as you can. You will find that with practice, the combination of the mantra with your breath will happen naturally. So as we go into meditation now, sit still, sit with your back straight, and then begin to introduce the mantra, ma-ra-na-tha. So let's meditate together now for 20 minutes.

## **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.

#### *Opening Prayer*

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, maranatha, come Lord Jesus.



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

*Let us listen to scripture taken from St Paul to the Romans (Rom 8:9–11)*

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

The quotation from the Letter to the Romans again emphasises the indwelling Holy Spirit. And that is the focus of our meditation.

## Questions and Responses

### **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION**

**[Q]** *Mindfulness meditation is popular today. What is the difference between mindfulness practice and meditation in a spiritual tradition? And what makes our practice of meditation 'Christian'?*

**[A]** I'd like to take this opportunity to answer a question which many people have raised about the difference between meditation in a spiritual tradition and mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is very popular and has helped many people to find relief from stress, so it is important to understand what is mindfulness, what is meditation. Often people ask me whether I teach mindfulness. I say that I teach meditation. Then I have to explain the difference between mindfulness and meditation. So that's what I want to try to share with you tonight.

### *Mindfulness Practice*

The leading exponent of mindfulness was Dr Jon Kabat-Zinn. He is an American professor of medicine from MIT. And he was the person who developed this practice, MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction). He taught this in the 1980s and so it has become a very popular form of stress-reduction practice. I think the attraction of mindfulness comes about because it has been presented in a secular way. In other words, they don't talk about religion, they don't talk about spirituality. They talk about stress reduction. But actually, the practice of mindfulness was extracted from Buddhism, just as Transcendental Meditation was extracted from Hinduism. So the practice was taken out of its religious context and presented to a secular audience, people who are who are turned off by religion, who do not want to be practising anything that is religious but they need to get relief from stress.

What in essence is the practice of mindfulness? First of all, mindfulness helps you to be aware of what's going on inside you and outside you, moment by moment. So it's about learning to stand back from your thoughts and feelings, to observe them, to name them – these are my thoughts, these are my feelings – but not to pass judgment, to accept them as they are. So that helps a lot of people to be aware of the sensations of their body, their thoughts, their desires – you might say these are the distractions that challenge you whenever you try is still in mind.

### *Meditation in a Spiritual Tradition*

Now, how is that different from meditation the way that we practise it? You notice that when we meditate, we come to a stillness of body and a stillness of mind. Now, we might be aware of the sensations of the body, but we don't pay attention to that. Our emphasis is on learning to sit still. And similarly, when we meditate we are aware of all the thoughts or the ideas that are going through our mind, but in meditation we don't give our attention to these thoughts and ideas or what's happening. We lay aside our thoughts. In other words, we transcend our thoughts. And in order to transcend the thoughts, we say the mantra, we give our attention to the mantra.

### *Key Difference – the Focus of Attention*

So the key difference between mindfulness and meditation is that in mindfulness, the attention is on ourselves – what's going on in our body, what's going on in our mind. So notice that the attention is focused on yourself. But when we meditate. We take the attention off ourselves. We transcend our thoughts by giving our attention to the mantra. So mindfulness is a good practice for people looking for relief from stress, but it does not go deep enough. It does not go deep enough in terms of personal transformation, because the

personal transformation that we are looking for, the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. These fruits of the Spirit, they emerge when we leave ourselves behind, when we let go of our thoughts, when we transcend our thoughts, when we are other-centred. So the other-centredness of meditation, you might say, is in contrast to the self-centredness in mindfulness.

So those of you who are practising mindfulness it's good. It's a good start to a spiritual practice, but go further, go deeper. Go deeper by the practice of meditation. And then you will begin to realise the fruits of the Spirit in your life.



## **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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