

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

By Edith Schlosser

It is an ironic fact that, despite its development of the materialistic sciences, the Western world has determinedly ignored the existence of a wider science that has a history extending back thousands of years. Now that it has been proven, to the satisfaction of most modern scientists, that matter resolves itself into energy, the basis of scientific materialism is being called into question. Science now accepts, as a legitimate interest, man's consciousness. An awareness that consciousness, as well as form, is evolving has long been the basis for man's practice of meditation.

Therefore, it is not surprising that many people today are seeking for answers not supplied by science about this inner state. The Christian religion, perhaps because its orthodoxy has also largely ignored the ancient wisdom, has failed the esoteric seekers in general, which is why modern youth has been turning to the oriental religions and philosophies for something missing in their own culture. Among other things, they have turned to yoga and to the practice of meditation, using the techniques that have been recorded from time immemorial.

It is a second ironic fact that these techniques are not really strangers to our Christian religion. They are forgotten relatives, ancestors pushed into the background behind the curtain of dogma that keeps them hidden successfully from all but the persistent few, some of whom have recorded their experiences and the techniques. It is therefore possible to discover that they were using the same techniques as do the yogis and others who gain enlightenment. All seekers have followed the path approved by their own religion—the goal was ever the same. Many modern Christians, aware of the need to return to the hidden wisdom, are not abandoning their childhood faith, but are exploring it in depth and practicing meditation along Christian lines. It is impossible for any orthodoxy to eradicate the ancient wisdom.

An examination of the writings of the mystics shows how men and women have experienced exactly what has been presented as the goal of yoga: union with the divinity within, the God immanent. Surely, if well over a hundred of them dared to write of their inner discoveries, presumably hundreds of others have experienced the fruits of their meditation but have kept silent through fear of the charge of heresy, which at one time brought such cruel punishment.

The studies that have been made comparing the techniques described by Christian mystics with those recommended in other religions reveal the universality

of method, regardless of the path. What a pity it will be if Christianity fails to restore and teach what its own great saints, poets, and philosophers know to be hidden—the forgotten truth of the Christ within. Christianity has failed generally to teach the techniques, and it is for these that many have turned to any available books from other sources. Unfortunately, the one thing the books cannot give is a shot of *intensity*, so that many practice techniques remain indifferent to this major inner requirement. This has led to some criticism from those who say there is a lot of talking about it, a lot of concentration on methods, but there is a missing ingredient. Dr. I. K. Taimni has reminded us of this in his *Gayatri*:

There are a large number of people who allow themselves to be lulled into spiritual sleep by brilliant expositions of philosophical doctrines by intellectually clever people, and who wake up too late in life to find that their theoretical study is not the slightest use to them in solving life's problems or in gaining any measure of inner peace.

However, some who make this criticism are creating pitfalls for themselves, and then discovering how difficult is the path and how easy it is to be lulled into byways instead of following the path.

The first step in meditation is right intention, which includes a strength of application not easily achieved. On this, the mystic John Ruysbroeck has written, in an "Essay on Simplicity of Intention," in *Flowers of a Mystic Garden*:

In every action of our lives we must hold to this simplicity . . . It is the single eye . . . It is this simplicity which will, at the last, offer to God our whole vital activity.

This simplicity of intention is to be fortified by love. This is what our young people are often stressing. Ruysbroeck puts it this way: "The intelligence shall know God in its light; love shall enjoy God without intermediary."

Juliana of Norwich and Ramon Lull can be quoted on this topic. Juliana's often-quoted phrase is: "Wouldst thou wit thy lord's meaning in this thing? Wit it well. Love was His meaning. Who shewed it thee? Love. Wherefore shewed He it thee? For love." (*Revelations of Divine Love*)

Ramon Lull, in *The Book of the Lover and the Beloved*, recorded his "mystic converse with the All-Powerful" and wrote: "What meanest thou by Love? said the Beloved. It is to bear on one's heart the sacred marks and the sweet words of the Beloved. It is the desire for 'the above all things.'" Extravagant phrases, but indicative of the complete abandonment of all desires save the one. And without quoting Brother Lawrence, it seems timely to refer to his constancy of meditative thought on love and his intent to make every act, however menial, an expression of love.

Detachment is another goal for those engaging in meditation. This was the subject of a sermon given by Meister Eckhart, the mystic who did not spare words to describe his experiences. He admits to reading “heathen philosophers and sages” in his search for “the best and highest virtue whereby a man may knit himself most narrowly to God” and concludes that “It is none other than absolute detachment from all creatures.” In another place we find the phrase, “to be empty of creatures is to be full of God, and to be full of creatures is to be empty of God.” He uses the words “crowd” and “creatures” to mean activities of the mind. “If you are to experience this noble birth [of the Christ within] you must depart from all crowds. The crowds are the agents and their activities: memory, understanding and will in all their diversification. You must leave them all: sense perception, imagination, and all that you discover in self or intend to.” Does this remind us somewhat of Krishnamurti?

The problem in Christianity has been that of reconciling the teaching of the Trinity, including Jesus as the Son, with the teaching of God immanent and the Christ as the divine spark within all men. It is interesting to read how early scholars who were inclined toward mysticism tried to reconcile their personal discoveries with Church doctrine. Many of them were in serious trouble, and who knows how many whose names are now forgotten were burned as heretics?

Meister Eckhart struggled with this problem in many of his sermons. He described “the apex of the soul” as “a barren wilderness, barren Godhead, negative divine.” If only he could have safely used the ancient gnostic teachings, how much easier it would have been! We think of the “not this, not that” of Hindu teachings relating to the Absolute. One of the best and most concise books on the subject is *The Teachings of the Mystics* by Walter R. Stace, in which Meister Eckhart’s descriptions of this “apex of the soul” and “the birth of Christ” which takes place in it have been extracted from his sermons for our convenient use. Stace makes it clear that this is identical with the Self of the Upanishads and the Mind-Essence in the Buddhist book, *The Awakening of Faith*. His extracts are so selected that it becomes obvious that meditation as practiced by Christian mystics is the same as that of all others seeking union with the divine Self. It is the discipline we are still urged to practice—the concentration, right use of imagination, detachment, leading to the higher discipline of contemplation. We, too, know the difficulty of this last hurdle, the momentary glimpse of the Real, the problem of being constantly drawn back by our own attachments to the illusory world of the personal self.

A book report by Robert Kirsch in the *Los Angeles Times* of September 8, 1970, cited the Italian critic, Cesare Pavese, as saying, “The surest and quickest way for us to arouse the sense of wonder is to stare, unafraid, at a single object. Suddenly—

miraculously—it will look like something we have never seen before.” This describes exactly one of the early steps in meditation, so it is interesting to compare it with Eckhart’s words: “The soul gets at things by means of ideas and the idea is an entity created by the soul’s agents. Be it a stone or a rose or a person or whatever it is that is to be known, first an idea is taken and then absorbed, and in this way the soul connects with the phenomenal world.” This taking of an object and seeing it differently can certainly lead to some deeper understanding of the true nature of matter.

It is interesting in these days of drug-culture to read the warnings given about visions. The writings of St. John of the Cross are seeded with warnings about mistaking visions for reality. While still a young man, he was the Father Confessor of St. Teresa of Avila, whose rapturous descriptions of her visions indicate her intensely emotional nature. Her Lord visited her, spoke with her, and seems to have somewhat embarrassed her by appearing at the most inconvenient times, according to her autobiography. St. Teresa and St. John were both members of the Carmelite order and were making efforts toward reform, which got them into considerable trouble with the higher powers. St. John was imprisoned for, and his life greatly endangered by, his activities. The point for present consideration, however, is that under his guidance, St. Teresa learned to distinguish between the visions and the final goal, which she seems to have reached. For once her description is terse, for when she says she has reached the highest point, she adds: “By highest point I mean when the faculties are lost through being closely united with God.” She advises her reader that he will recognize that point, for “he will neither see, nor hear, nor perceive.” But, she adds, “This complete transformation of the soul in God lasts but a short time and it is only while it lasts that none of the soul’s faculties is able to perceive or know what is taking place.”

It was fortunate for this saint that she had so brilliant a mentor as St. John of the Cross, whose phrase “dark night of the soul” is familiar to most Christians. He calls meditation “a discursive mental activity by means of images, forms and figures that are produced imaginatively . . . as happens, for example, when we picture in our imagination Christ crucified.” But he adds, “The soul must be emptied of all these imagined forms, figures and images, and it must remain in darkness in respect to these internal senses if it is to attain Divine union.”

This is clearly in line with the teaching of ancients that the visions are still in the illusory world; the Reality is beyond and involves plunging into the silence or darkness beyond the mental world. St. John wrote, “Though in darkness the soul walks securely” — a beautiful phrase. Although the safety of the ladder of the intellect has finally been abandoned, the soul walks in the security of eternal Love.

This article so far has called on the past, upon those who had to surmount the dangerous obstacles of imposed dogma in times when the topic, “How many angels can dance on the point of a needle?” was a nice safe one, while that of the immanent God or the Christ in all men was not permitted and could bring charges of heresy.

Today we are in a new age for Christianity. Alvin Boyd Kuhn’s book, *A Rebirth for Christianity*, is a good source for information on how Christianity was deprived of its rightful heritage, the ancient wisdom of the world. Sometimes stern in his denunciation of “two thousand years of a literal reading of the cryptograms of arcane wisdom,” Kuhn is nevertheless aware of the transition now in progress, which could “push the human mind far ahead in its progress toward illumination.” Priests and nuns are breaking away from the bondage of dogma, and young people are seeking freer air, turning again to the hidden truths. Christianity is in jeopardy only if it refuses to take a new look at its esoteric meaning and fails to allow a new independence for the individual seeking his own Selfhood.

The rebirth has started in such people as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. He knew the need to develop a Christianity suitable for modern times. He was like the bird that could not be free while held by even the smallest thread. The invisible thread holding Teilhard was his vow of obedience as a Jesuit; it prevented him from soaring as high as his wings would otherwise have taken him. In his *Divine Milieu* he wrote:

Nothing is more consistent or more fleeting—more fused with things or at the same time more separable from them—than a ray of light. If the divine milieu reveals itself to us as an incandescence of the inward layers of being, who is to guarantee us the persistence of this vision? None other than the Ray of Light itself. The diaphany. No power in the world can prevent us from savoring its joys because it happens at a level deeper than any power, and no power in the world—for the same reason—can compel it to appear.

Despite his efforts at allegiance, this writer traveled the solitary path through meditation and reached peaks of understanding beyond the heights to which most of us have climbed so far.

There are other modern figures struggling to change the tide. The Theosophical Society has been in the vanguard of progress toward restoration of the ageless wisdom, and many of its leaders have been Christian, yet free of bondage to dogma. Annie Besant rebelled against orthodoxy, became atheist, then found in *The Secret Doctrine* the key to real Christianity, and her faith was restored. C. W. Leadbeater, Geoffrey Hodson, and Clara Codd have contributed to the spread of theosophical teachings without disclaiming Christianity. There are others who know the beauty of truth in all religions and dream of closer relationship between world faiths. They

know that the Master-teachers have used these faiths as chalices for the precious wisdom in differing world cultures. Theosophy is a unifying force, not a separative teaching. Meditation has been the topic of many theosophical books and, in reading them, we become aware that it can be a universal experience; the discipline and techniques are applicable everywhere because they are a part of a science of human evolutionary development of consciousness. Whether a person be Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, or even agnostic, if they begin with right intention and love they can use their intellect to start toward the right use of knowledge, thus opening the intuition until they rise above the polluted air of prejudicial dogma into the clear atmosphere where those who have traveled separate roads meet in perfect unity and love.

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