

Meditation—Guidance of the Inner Life

WHEN FRANCIS TOOK leave of Mount Alverno, upon which he had received the stigmata, he cast a last glance back towards the sacred heights. He kneeled down and said, “Farewell, thou mountain of God, thou Holy Mountain; *mons coagulatus, mons pinguis, mons in quo bene placitum est Deo habitare*; farewell, Mount Alverno, may God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost bless thee; peace be with thee for we shall see one another no more.”

He who is alive to the soul of words like these can feel what the still places of prayer meant in the soul of Francis and what the man of today lacks. Where now has man his mount of worship? An impression from nature, upon a lonely mountain height at sunrise, is the last dying whisper of the memory of that which the men of past ages felt upon their mountain tops. We must regain that which echoes in such sayings of Francis, if the very best is not to be lost from humanity.

Solovieff speaks in one place of the “inner Athos” which every man must have. The spirit of Russia in him looks back to the sacred mountain in Greece, from which so much blessing has streamed out over Russia. But Solovieff knows also that the past does not return. The man of today must found his own cloister within himself. This is true in a very much wider sense than one imagines. This longing for the cloister in many men comes



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from deep reasons. But were we to flee to the Roman Catholic cloisters, we should find a world other than that which we expected, a world in which we could no longer feel at home. Even at the best we should admit to ourselves that our longing had been for something different from what we found there. But in the Protestant church this call for the foundation of evangelical cloisters has largely died away. It was really a misunderstanding. The call for the cloister is born out of inner need. But it means something other than men themselves think. It really calls for that which we are trying to do here. What is here taking place is the founding of an order. But each must build his cloister within himself; out of freedom in solitude. Those who belong to such an order may indeed sometimes meet or talk with one another. But what is most important comes in being alone. All the

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cloisters of the past are prophecies of that which must happen within the soul.

But let us return from the Catholic to the Biblical picture. When, in John's Gospel, the Samaritan woman points Christ to Mount Gerazim and its sanctuary, Christ speaks words full of meaning for the future: "God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." The mountain of which Christ speaks is within, and He calls it "the spirit." The temple of which He speaks is invisible; it stands upon no spot of earth, and He calls it "the truth." The mountain of the spirit, upon which stands the temple of truth, is what we seek. We want to build it within us as an "inner Athos," as "the sacred Mount Alverno." And when we go to men and to our daily work, then shall we "come down from the mountain." Once when Christ came down from the mountain, with the glory in which He dwelt there shining around Him, His disciples entreated Him: "Lord, teach us to pray; to pray as thou canst pray." When we are able to rouse in men longings for the mountain of the temple from which we draw our strength, then shall we be the healers of our age.

Rudolf Steiner once said that if this hurried, external life of ours continues for a few more decades, the children will be born already trembling. Such words can most forcibly impress upon our souls the seriousness of the mission which we have to ourselves and to our times.

The "truth" of which Christ speaks is a great kingdom which we must first discover for ourselves. One can find it only when one has the quality which corresponds to it, that is: sincerity. If one suggests to oneself a thought to which one has no inward right, one takes a destructive element into one's soul. That is why it is so misleading when Coué can recommend to mankind as a meditation, "Every day, in every way, I get better and better." One may, of course, attain something by such meditation, as one may often cure a disease by simply ignoring it or, as in Christian Science circles, by simply treating illness in humanity as if it did not exist. Yet the tendency of this is false and dangerous and its failure to preserve entire truthfulness to the facts must somewhere and somehow lead to a

relapse. It would be better to meditate thus: "I wish that it should go better with me," or "I wish that the illness may be overcome." Then we need only ask further if such a representation to oneself of one's bodily condition and health does not overlook still deeper associations with reality, and invite into one's inner life spirits of egoism and materialism,

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which may indeed help against the evil of the moment, but later demand a worse penalty. We have the right to defend ourselves against every illness. But true insight knows also that every illness is meant to bring its own blessing into the house, for the soul and . . . for the body also. We ought to let no illness depart from us without our having wrung from it its blessing. One can apply to it exactly the old saying: "I will not let thee go except thou bless me."

That for which we are here striving bears within itself bodily health also. But this is spread through the body through the soul's becoming healthy. This feeling of becoming healthy ought to occur after every right meditation. "Through Thy word my soul becomes whole," says the Act of Consecration of Man.* For my part I must admit that I never rightly knew what health meant until I experienced it through meditation. A real feeling of health permeates soul and body. Some may think they know this feeling after a strenuous mountain climb or vigorous exercise in a game. The feeling described here is similar, only very much more spiritual. And in this way one feels oneself safe, and in the long run gets further than by curing oneself of some

*The Act of the Consecration of Man is the Communion Service of the Christian Community, a movement for the renewal of religious life through a living experience of Christ.

particular illness by auto-suggestion.

From such false advice men have come to think that every meditation is self-suggestion. It is no more and no less so than if a man should undertake to master his temper, or to bear a pain, or to behave decently to someone else. By accusing it of being auto-suggestion, one can throw suspicion on every effort of the will. One can even forbid any kind of influence exercised by teachers upon children, because it may be suggestion. In reality the question is whether that to which one wishes to give the mastery in one's soul is a truth or an ideal which one has understood, and which one may safely make a lasting possession. In the very nature of suggestion and autosuggestion is implicit an unreality which one would like to press upon oneself and others, or at least the unlawful interference with another's freedom. Through such confused conceptions it comes about that men do not trust themselves to exert their wills against their natural instincts at that moment in their history when it is all-important that they should learn to do so, in order to remain human, and even to become human. Concerning the exercises of the soul which are here recommended, one can only repeat that they should be practiced only in the land of truth and freedom. In it even the strongest will can bring no harm, but will be a real help and benefit.

So that we may first learn the value of inward occupation with oneself from exercises which everyone who comes to them from without can share, let us here discuss fully such a preliminary exercise. But first it is well to reply to a question often asked by beginners: "What bodily attitude is best for meditation?"

Certainly the bodily attitude is not unimportant. And from the body difficulties arise, which we shall discuss more fully later. The Eastern man brought his body to rest by sitting down upon his crossed legs. But, apart from the fact that we are unaccustomed to such a position and assume it

only with difficulty, it cuts men off from certain currents which pass from the earth into the body. By such a bodily position the Oriental man assists his striving away from the earth, which striving is the content of his meditation and the spirit of his view of the world. We see almost exactly the opposite of this in Western man, who for centuries has



Ink on paper, courtesy of Harry Menne

prayed upon his knees. In such a bodily position man is outwardly nearer to the earth, but he receives the earth influences, though naturally quite gently and unconsciously, yet more strongly into himself. This occurs the more readily, as we indeed can feel, because the feet have much more spirituality of their own than the knees have. We feel them in a much more living way. Therefore, when we kneel, we unite ourselves still more closely with that which streams forth from the earth, and also by kneeling to pray, the mission of the

West to the earth is prepared and furthered.

And now what is our position? For us, it is not right to allow ourselves to be supported by any natural spiritual force whatsoever, which we do not understand, but we must seek the higher world out of a clear consciousness and out of a free will. Therefore, there is only one rule for us: our natural bodily existence must disturb us as little as possible. The position in which our spirit feels itself as little disturbed as possible, is best for us. One can find this out only by experiment. One man requires greater comfort, which makes another man go to sleep. The other requires a more rigid posture, which would distract the first. One can only say, "as much comfort as is possible without laziness."

The meditation of which we are now about to speak is an aid to acquiring calmness of spirit. It is so arranged that it is of especial benefit to the man of the present day in his hurried life, and at the same time shows how one can rise to the very highest from what is quite simple.

Let us simply turn our attention to the word "rest." At a time when the quiet life of the hermit

is common, it would not be good to choose it, but, in the age of incessant haste, it may be to innumerable people a rare benefit to body and soul to come to be at home with this word “rest.”

Here again the treasures of remembrance must come to our aid. Where, in my past life, did I most strongly experience what rest is? We think of a quiet evening in a wood. We sat upon a seat by a lake. The waves rippled gently at our feet. The trees rustled almost imperceptibly in the evening wind. Twilight spread itself like a sheltering garment over the land. That day we had done our full measure of work. Now we had rest at evening. The more living and concrete the picture is, the better. When we have called the picture strongly to life, then we dismiss it and retain only the feeling; the feeling of a great refreshing peace filling all around.

What an evening in a wood is to one man, the impression made by high mountains with eternal snows may be to another, as he saw them quite suddenly, far before him in the distance, as he went on an expedition, like an unfathomable premonition of a higher world. And still another may recall the starry heavens, as they made their strong impression upon him when he came out from some stormy public meeting or lively private assembly. . . . It is always important that all the details of one's recollection should serve only as a help to reaching a feeling of great rest.

This rest must be felt as strongly as possible. We may say to ourselves in such a case: “You have now a strong feeling of rest, but there are certainly people who feel it ten times as strongly as you do.” It is not only necessary in this meditation, which may last from five to fifteen minutes, to continue to hold fast to this rest as consciously as possible, and at the same time to assent to it inwardly, but it is also necessary to let it become ever stronger, as far as this is possible, and to fill the whole body with it and to pour forth the body with it. We may also, in order to remain inwardly active, bring our limbs to rest one by one. Then we will notice how much tension there is in our limbs, in our hands, our feet, our brain and in the neck muscles which carry our head. We look upon rest as a drink which flows throughout all the kingdom of the body.

Certainly some will say “That would send me to

sleep,” and is it such a bad thing if one has a means of going to sleep? This meditation may help him to sleep who finds it hard to do so. He relaxes himself in it. He goes around his body like a watchman round a house and sees what is unwilling to sleep and brings it to rest. Especially there, where the head joins the body, it is well to see that everything is right, so that the head may be quite relaxed. One lets “rest” really rest within one. If a man really wishes it, he may even in apparently difficult cases, go to sleep by means of the exercise; but he will often notice that he is not really willing to do so; rather that he is in love with his disturbed thoughts and feelings, and will on no account give them up for such a rest. But if he really cannot get to sleep by these means, yet the rest which fills him when he really ceases to think of particular things and rests only in this rest, may be also as beneficial as a real sleep.

If anyone is trying to find rest at night in sleep, I would advise him as far as possible to make himself a part of the following picture: Here I rest upon my bed, around me are the walls of the house, but outside is the procession of the stars; stars are above me, stars are around me, stars are under me. I should see them through the earth, had I the eyes. The walls of the house, the whole house around me is passing away, even the earth itself is passing away, but that which lives in the stars, remains. I give myself to it, I go out among the stars, I share myself among them until nothing of myself remains here, all is outside with the stars. I move along with them in their courses, slowly, calmly, majestically, I eternally. . . .

[T]his way, with our conscious wills, we go to meet that which sleep requires of us. Such a rest can be of inexpressibly great benefit to us, and when we know it we might almost choose to sleep no more. But if, after this conception of a picture, we can come to the conception of a voice and hear the whole heaven of stars singing this song of praise: “Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to men of good will,” and if we can further retain the living feeling which lies at the root of this conception of sound, can keep the sacred spirit of peace, which turns in praise to the heavenly Father, the joyful heavenly rest, the restful joy of

heaven, as one keeps a taste upon one's tongue, and can have it throughout our whole being, then we are really with the angels, and can spiritualize and transfigure our sleep in a way of which we have not had hitherto even a distant idea.

But, throughout, we have to do, not with the ability to sleep, but really with the ability to awake. As one can imagine eyes which see by day the starry heaven which is always around us, there can at least be a spirit which dives down so deeply into peace of soul that he feels deep within him that the starry heaven is above him by day also. The spirit of the stars, as we may call it, accompanies him upon his life's way.

As one can take in rest like a medicine, so one can, of course, take into oneself all other possible spiritual contents. An especially health-giving exercise is: *purity*. One can build it up and shape it in the same way as we have done with *rest*. In this, it may help us to plunge ourselves into the innocent life-stream of the plants, or into the crystal pure glory of a snowy landscape, or the picture of the Sistine Madonna, or again, the heaven of stars. In the same way a man can learn to draw into himself strength of will, sincerity, kindness. He will find that a great spiritual store of healing, which he can never exhaust, is at his disposal.

If we turn back to the exercise on *rest*, it can present itself to him as a sanatorium, which he has built for himself. He does not require long and costly journeys into the mountains when he wants rest and refreshment. He enters into his own rest. At first, I often imagined to myself that I lived in this rest, as a diver stays under a great glass bell in the sea. Outside the waves pass, the fish go by, the sharks and other sea pirates seek their prey, but he is safely sheltered in his transparent house from which he looks out at what is around him. Thus may a man look out in spirit from his house of rest upon the noise and haste outside. So one can strengthen the feeling of rest by contrast.

Many people will in such ways gradually learn what rest really is. Up till now they have known it only in the form of unconscious sleep. Rest itself passes into us, rests in us, awake and living, feeds us, heals us, makes us divine. When I first experienced that, I had the feeling that now, at last, I saw



Planet Art

Oil on panel, Raphael (1483-1520), Gemäldegalerie, Dresden

The Sistine Madonna

Its harmonious composition and purity of conception make the Sistine Madonna an inspiring subject for meditation.

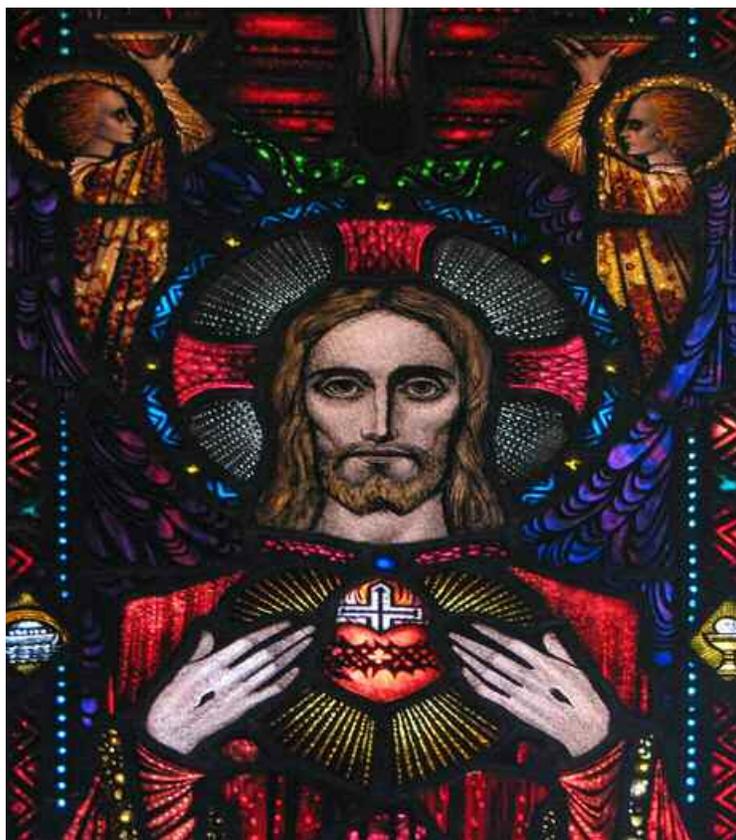
the possibility of doing something for "nerves." As we can lift a load if we can get a grip beneath it, so now we find a realm which lies below the nerves, and we need only think of the word "rest," and we are already in our house of rest. In the worst of street noises, in the most excited meeting, if we only think of it, *rest* rises up like a temple and receives us into its peace.

When we put this into words, we are working at the spiritual life of humanity like a nerve specialist. No drug will help men like these exercises in rest. If humanity would only take seriously what is here written, the danger of neurasthenia and of other worse mental illnesses, which arise from distracting haste, would be overcome in a few decades.

In this study, we have, up to now, spoken in such a way that even the man who is furthest from religion can accompany us. In conclusion, let something more be added out of the world of which

religion speaks. Let him who finds grounds for it in his life, change this rest into a great and complete trustfulness. Let him look up to the spirit which rules behind and above all the starry worlds, and permit the peace, which streams to him from afar, to flow back in a great, deep, perfect trustfulness of heart. He will then notice that, in so doing, very much within him will be relaxed which he did not even know was strained. He will be able to “re-act away” much hidden anxiety and fear, without first bringing it by psycho-analytical methods fully into his consciousness. Only it must be a living trust which does not sink down into a fatalistic resignation. For the man of today needs the power of active world-conquest. Resignation has been reached by many men of the past. That which is told of Roman Stoics and still more of Buddhist monks, and especially of Buddha himself, arouses reverence before these heights of self-trained humanity, but it is not yet Christian peace.

Therefore it is good here also to look at Christ. Is He not the Word; the Word for the world? Does not that which spoke to us out of all the depths of the starry heaven, sound forth also from Him? Is not the angels’ song of praise upon that holy night really His own being echoing forth? In His farewell discourse Christ said to His disciples, “These words have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace: in the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” And this other word, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you.” This word of Christ is found in the Act of Consecration of Man, as it was also in the ancient Mass. In the former it is born again out of His innermost spirit in the words “I am at peace with the world. This peace with the world can be with you also because I give it to you.” And after the resurrection Christ greets His disciples in words full of meaning: “The peace be with you.” One may think of this word as spoken once in the past of Christ’s history. But one can also think of it as spoken out of the present, as it is every evening in the starry sky, when the revela-



Stained glass, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth give I unto you....These words have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace” (John 14:27, 16:33)

tion of the highest and most divine Spirit is seeking for our souls. If we experience this out of the greatness of the universe, then there is no danger, either that our peace will be merely personal, as so easily happens in a religion of forgiveness of sins, or that we should remain in passive peace, as so easily happens in a religion of trusting in God. But the stern progress of the great world-clock there outside is in sympathy with our inmost feelings. And that is why it is there. Then we are at peace with the world, but we make ourselves one with its progress, as that can come about through Christ. “My peace,” says Christ with emphasis in John’s Gospel. That means, the peace which is I. From that we receive authority to hear Him speaking to us also: “I am the peace. The peace which is I, be with thee I.” If one can so experience the meditation on *rest* that one hears the voice of Christ Himself out of all breadths, depths and heights, then one has carried it upward to the greatness and divine power which can be attained by men.

The reader will now wish to ask: Yes, but which meditation ought we then to pursue, that on Love, suggested in the first letter, or this on Peace, which is here suggested? Such questions will become more urgent for many when we discuss a whole series of other meditations in the following studies, from which it will, we hope, become more and more clear what meditation is and is intended to be. The fact is that one cannot, in advice given in letters, name for everyone the exact meditation which is suited to him. Therefore we can here develop only an organism of inward exercises in which lives the whole Gospel of John. Out of it each must choose that which is right for him. But he may also choose the whole of it, and then his life-work may be to make it inwardly his own. He is upon a good path. For the spirit of John's Gospel, which is so near to the spirit of the coming age, lives in all its fullness in this organism. But we must always keep our eyes fixed upon the central saying which sums up all: "I am Love." We shall unfold the meaning of this saying as we proceed to experience this "I" in the seven "I am's," and then look on "Love" in its divine revelation, in the seven stages of the passion, and lastly see, in the seven miracles of John's Gospel, the "am" in its actual earthly life, and receive it into ourselves.

But the words "I am Peace," which we are considering today, are as a background to this. I can imagine a reader finding that he first requires peace more in the sense of John's Gospel; then he might so meditate that he lets peace sound out until it dies away into love, so that it can be no selfish and passive peace, but the peace "which unites itself with the world's evolving." Another might prefer to remain at the word "love." Then he might first let the word "peace" sound out so that love acquires the greatness, the purity, the rest of the cosmic background, out of which it came with Christ, and so does not lose itself in unhealthy worries or in human pettiness. For the "world's evolving through Christ," of which the Act of Consecration of Man speaks, comes out of "being at peace" with the world.

But we can also think as follows. We take the word "peace" in the evening, so that it passes away into "love," and the word "love" in the morning, so that it proceeds out of "peace." We can let the word

"love" arise over us with the sun and the new day; just as we hear the word "peace" resound from the starry heavens and the sheltering night. A great rhythm comes into our life, like the rhythm of day and night, which, indeed, bears within itself the very spirit of this rhythm. This is like a daily divine breathing. A breathing-in when we meditate upon the word "peace," a breathing-out when we meditate upon the word "love." It is like a going out from, and returning into the Father, which corresponds to the hidden rhythm of the life of Christ Himself, as it is shown to us in the Gospel in His day and His night life. Yes, this rhythm lies deep in the background of the proclamation of Christ Himself, as it is shown to us in John's Gospel. "I come from the Father," says the first part; "I go to the Father," says the second part.

And so we learn in these two meditations to take Christ into our life, as He is described to us by His nearest disciples and friends. . . . [T]he great divine life bears within itself its mighty and solemn rhythm, since ever, after a world-day of a million years, there comes an evening of rest for the world, when the world returns to God, to come forth from him again newer and greater. With the words "love" and "peace" we come as near as is humanly possible to this rhythm in the life of the Father God.

And let us not keep silence about one secret more, even if to most of our readers it is only like a tale that is told. If our being bathes itself in peace, in harmony with the deepest powers of the cosmos, then gently and inwardly another body builds itself up for us out of the cosmos. If love, the divine spirit of the cosmos, streams through our being, our blood is actually renewed. And therefore in this twin meditation one can experience the highest communion and receive from Christ, to whom we may ever look as far as we may understand Him, His body and His blood.

This is the highest to which we can rise by meditation, that we should simply look into Christ, pass into Him, learn to be in Him and live in Him. To make this possible for men, in all its life and fullness, is the purpose of these studies. Man can feel himself as if enfolded in Christ, breathe in Him as in a higher air, awake as in a higher light, arise as in a higher body. (Continued) □