

MYSTIC LIGHT

Meditations: I am the Door; I am the Good Shepherd

A YOUNG GIRL once explained to me how difficult it was for her at home to get any time, even if it were only ten minutes, in which she might quietly occupy herself with herself. If she withdrew to her room, immediately someone knocked at the door: "What are you doing in there? Have you nothing to do?" Christians are not allowed by their fellow Christians to carry out Christ's advice: "When thou prayest, go into thy chamber and shut thy door." To most men a prayer in the daytime, apart from a grace said at table, would appear to be extraordinary, probably even a piece of idleness. Many people who wish to meditate, especially women and young people who are growing up, simply do not know how to make it possible to be alone in their own homes. As regards our inward life we are still living in a state of unheeding barbarism.

The fundamental right of a man to be quite alone by himself, in order that afterwards he may be more to other men, is far from being recognized to be a matter of course. In this state of affairs nothing but a tenacious struggle, which must be carried on in the most friendly yet unyielding way, even in the face of deliberate obstruction and derision, can be of any use. We shall choose the suitable time and opportunity, and shall withdraw for inward quiet, attracting as little as possible the notice and the attack of other people. But we must clearly recognize that it is usually the bad conscience of the other people which is the real adversary. The others feel that one is right and that they ought to do it also. If one perceives this one will go one's way more peacefully.

Women have often said to me that their first opportunity of a free quarter-of-an-hour in the morning comes after the husband has gone to business, and the

This is the fourth in a series of articles taken from Friedrich Rittelmeyer's Meditation, Guidance of the Inner Life, published by Floris Books, Edinburgh. Reprinted with permission.



Engraving, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)

"A fundamental right of a man is to be quite alone by himself, in order that afterwards he may be more to other men."

children to school. But then they must beware lest the cares of the household break into their spiritual temple. Others find no chance until evening. Then arises the danger that weariness will overcome us, or sleep. I have been able to help many with this advice, that they could at least begin their meditation immediately after a meal, when the digestive system begins its work, and rest five or ten minutes with closed eyes, but quite awake, perhaps lying down, so that they may have strength for inward activity. For many it is easiest to turn to meditation immediately after awaking in the morning, while they are still lying down, and perhaps have not yet opened their eyes. One must sometimes secure this morning meditation with some trouble. But it is very good and effective, thus to pass from sleep into one's spiritual temple and dwell there before one begins the day.

But personal and household relationships are so dif-

ferent that it is almost impossible to give general advice. Only this can be said with great emphasis to everyone who seeks to cultivate his inner life: "Fight to secure the quiet quarter-of-an-hour, under all circumstances, if possible morning *and* evening, and if it is possible (we shall speak later of the reason why it is important) also at mid-day. Our higher self is at stake. The time which we withdraw from our work and from those who belong to us, comes richly back in the quality of our being. And if we shorten our time for rest by this quarter-of-an-hour, we need not worry. As necessary as the daily bread; yes, even more necessary are these free times, and they ought, like eating, to be a matter of course in our lives.

We shall soon find out that the actual opponents of our meditation are to be looked for not among the other members of our household, not in outward circumstances, however difficult our household circumstances maybe, but in ourselves. It is true that the housewife can with difficulty repress the restless business which makes her remember all the possible things which must be done at once, and the man whose profession causes anxiety also finds it difficult to do this, although they both well understand that everything can well wait a quarter- of-an-hour. But when we are obliged to say to ourselves in the evening, "today again we did not succeed in finding time for meditation," and when we try to excuse ourselves, "this time it was impossible, absolutely impossible," then if we think it over carefully, we shall usually find that we ourselves were not really willing. We ourselves have always put something else forward which was supposedly a hindrance, but was really a self-made excuse.

And so we first notice how much cunning insincerity we possess within, which always seduces us from our higher duties; how unwilling a man is to follow his own will, as soon as anything of the divine will enters into this will. He does not want to exert himself, but wishes to have everything through "Grace." And so, again, we first notice how many objections to "self-redemption" through meditation, which are alleged to come from a "belief in God's grace," are nothing else but the unwillingness of man to go one step to meet the grace offered to him, or even to open his hand to receive the gift presented to him. For all that we here describe is nothing but opening of the hand to take the divine gift offered to us.

Behind the most pious upward glance an evil may dwell, which will not suffer the true God to enter into us. If we have once discovered in us the evil habit of willfulness, which would cheat us of meditation, as it

would cheat us of any earnest inward exertion of our wills, and if we begin to keep strict watch on it and to pass over nothing, then we have taken an important step in our inward life. Truly the adversary of meditation is *in* us, and really never outside us.

We shall notice this especially in the hours when we set about paying more attention to ourselves, and exam-

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ining and changing the content of our souls, in those hours when we formerly allowed our thoughts and feelings to flutter about aimlessly. A woman, when she is busy with her household affairs, has an especially good opportunity of "pondering in her heart" this thing or that. And one's real being is formed by it. A man has similar opportunities when his work is mechanical, or when going to and returning from his place of business, or when he has a pause, or has a wearisome journey to make. It is of great importance to come gradually to control all the times when we formerly let ourselves go and dreamed. But we shall see—this may be observed especially when we are going to sleep—with how much headstrong insistence our thoughts go their own way, and defend themselves against any kind of control. If we then look back at what has been occupying us for perhaps a quarter-of-an- hour, we shall find that it is not worthy to be entertained in our soul. But with stubbornness, as if for dear life, our souls insist upon going their own ways, whether after little pleasures and fancies with which we enjoy ourselves, or after all kinds of vexations and resentments, with which also we obviously enjoy ourselves just as much, for we cannot get free from them. It really is a matter of death, the death of the old man in us.

The more we succeed in ennobling our unconscious and involuntary life, in spiritualizing it, in making it Christlike, the greater heights shall we attain in our conscious and free life. What is best will come forth at the right moment from a soul which, in the freest play of its thinking and feeling, has a great and good content which feeds and forms it.

The "I ams" help us to a new view of the world, at which we must work, not only in our solitary thinking,

but in our daily lives. In the saying : “I am the Bread of Life,” we look down. In it we discover that which gives, which sacrifices in the world beneath us. And thus we look into the face of the person of the Father who speaks through Christ. The bread is the messenger and the spokesman of this kingdom. But its word is true for all which is under us, even for the stone and for the animal. In the saying, “I am the Light of the World,” we look upward. The light is the representative of the higher kingdoms. As the world below us feeds us, so the world above us gives us light. The light makes known to us everything which happens to our spirits, when we draw near to the higher worlds. Spiritual light fills us from above. And through the light appears to us again the face of the person of the Father, who speaks in Christ.

The third “I am,” “I am the Door” (John 10:7), leads our glance outward to the people around us. And the fourth “I am,” “I am the Good Shepherd,” will then lead us within, to the inward guiding.

In Christianity it is a matter of course that one should



Duccio (1260-1320), 39.7 x 52.2 cm, Museo dell'Opera della Metropolitana

The Apparition of Christ Behind Closed Doors

He Whom no door bars has become the Door to the Kingdom of Heaven.

To such new prayer this third “I am,” “I am the Door,” may lead us. Then the question which one often hears, “Is intercession of any use?” would answer itself. Does not God Himself know what is good for the others? Ought He at my feeble prayer to do anything which He would not Himself have done, or to leave undone anything which He would otherwise have done? We should like to oppose this with a mighty fact in the opposite sense. Often in life one receives the impression, “If this person had been prayed for, rightly and earnestly, he would not have come to this.” One feels that angels are looking down and asking, “Are there people who are praying for him? Then we can do much that otherwise is impossible.”

Prayers rise as spiritual power to the divine world. There, humanly speaking, they alter the whole state of the case. They create new spiritual possibilities for the divine guiding powers, quite apart from the fact that they act directly upon him for whom prayer is offered, especially when he is aware, but also when he is not aware of it, because they fill the whole spiritual atmosphere around him with good thoughts and impulses, which can inspire him, even when he thinks they are only chance ideas of his own. Many people have felt very clearly, especially in sickness and at the time of death, that they are being prayed for. But quite apart from all this, such prayers are in the higher world, to use an illustration, like new living threads, which the angels can weave with their own into the web of fate, and for which they often wait. Thus man becomes a fellow-worker upon the fate of his fellow-men, within

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pray for others. Christ prayed for His own, and, especially in the High Priestly prayer, has allowed us to look deep into the matter of His prayer for the disciples. One can never learn from it enough of the way in which, quite without illusion, and yet with inward sympathy, He brings His disciples before the Father. One becomes ever more thankful that there is this prayer, whose benediction Christians are still far from realizing. The Apostle Paul also prayed for his churches. What he says in his letters, and the manner in which he says it, would not have been possible had not the very soul of his apostolic work been a similar strong praying for his churches. The intercourse of men would be inspired quite differently, inspired by a breath from a higher world, if we knew how to take our contemporaries rightly into the divine light. We must first lose in this divine light all the short-sighted selfishness which we harbor in respect of them. And this may be the first effect of such new prayer.

modest limits certainly, but one cannot yet trust him beyond that.

But, even counting the fact that through prayer from beneath the powers and possibilities of the spiritual world are made richer, we cannot form a lively enough or free enough conception of the intercourse of men with the divine world. The higher world listens to man, it pays attention to him, it takes him seriously. Often, certainly, his prayer cannot be answered, because it would be harmful to him if it were, and because in the higher world one lives in the light of a wisdom into which a human being cannot penetrate. But we need only read through the farewell talks of Christ, and the ever-repeated invitations to pray in His name which occur in them, and one will know that Christ wishes to have with men such intercourse as “when a man speaks with his friend,” to apply the wonderful phrase about the conversation of Jehovah with Moses. He expects that man should know with whom he speaks, but He is also ready to enter into the man who is united to Him, and share his fate with him.

Everyone who has even the slightest idea of prayer as Christ thought of it, knows that the heavenly helpers of Christ are, when they are called, so quickly at hand and so near to us, that one almost trembles, and is sacredly afraid of summoning them too lightly, and also, that one is surrounded by them as by a heavenly host, and that they do all that can possibly be done.

What this saying, “I am the Door,” is capable of meaning I learned decades ago, when I myself had not yet thought much about it. I then sought, as a teacher of religion, some help to thought which would put me in the right mood when I went into the school. Then there occurred to me the saying of Christ in His High-Priestly prayer, “Thine they were, and Thou gavest them me and I have manifested Thy name unto them.” I represented to myself that this saying should be the actual door through which alone I dared to go to my children. I put away all thought of the physical door. “Thine they are and Thou gavest them Me, and I must manifest Thy name unto them”—through this, as through an invisible spiritual door, ought I to go my way to the children.

So this word has been of extraordinarily great service to me, and it would have been of still greater service had I had the courage and the strength to take it more

earnestly. One can indeed regard such a saying as the door through which one goes to the sick, the prisoners, or the poor. Then we shall come in quite a different way to the realization of such a saying of Christ as this: “I was sick and ye visited me not.” Such sayings would hover above one like an invisible spiritual world.

In these studies we are trying, not only to become familiar with the different sayings of Christ, but also in different ways to make them our own. This saying about the door is specially suitable for those who wish to be leaders of men, and it has many sides which we are leaving in the background. But one is acting in the spirit of Christ and the higher life when one makes Christ the door through which one goes in thought to other men. It is as if one placed a sphere of purest self-

lessness between oneself and the other, and permitted oneself only through this sphere to go to him, to speak to him, and especially, to think of him. Truly, we ought to accustom ourselves not to think of him so outwardly, but only through this pure sphere. Soon we shall have a deep understanding for the saying of Christ

which Christ speaks at this very point: “All who do not go through this door are thieves and robbers.” We shall more and more appear to ourselves to be really intruders when we think with selfish wishes and interests of others.

The intercourse of men with one another is still very primitive and troubling to the soul. A few polite customs do not help us. In no way can we work to ennoble human intercourse better than by taking this saying, “I am the Door,” seriously. It will first begin to give us of its inexhaustible blessing if, in our quiet hours, we regularly meditate with the help of this saying upon our fellow men, even upon those nearest to us. We place them before us in the spirit and do not permit ourselves to go to them through any other door than Christ. Then we become aware, not only of heights of intercourse of which till then we have known nothing, but we begin for the first time to see our fellow men and our “neighbors.” We do not interfere egotistically with their inner life, but allow them to live, just as they are, in our thoughts. And so we begin to rejoice in them, as they are, in their actual beings, in spite of their faults. We become thankful just because they are there. And this thankfulness that the other is there is the atmosphere in

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which he can best thrive, feel himself most at ease, and can best make progress. We feel deeply the best in the other, the God's thought which hovers over him, the "Glory" which he has "in God," and can thus unite ourselves to this his true ego. Intercourse with men acquires a solemn radiance of which we have known nothing before.

We know that in the marriage ritual of the Christian Community [a movement for religious renewal] the "gate of community of life" is mentioned, and that in the course of the marriage service the rings pass from one to the other over the picture of Christ. In this a high ideal of marriage stands before us that the wedded pair go to one another through Christ as the door, in every thought and feeling if possible. This also must be practiced in our quiet hours. So will this saying, "Thine they are," become ever more living for us.

But in this way one will find out that one must enlarge the sphere of selflessness still more. To be selfless is not to be without an ego. He alone can be selfless who has an ego. Yes, the stronger our own ego is the more strongly will the ego of the other echo in us, the more will the other ego be in consonance with it—be so in consonance with it that we are united within a higher common Ego.

There are many mysterious events in intercourse with men, and this is one of the most wonderful. In every hour in which we have such intercourse with another ego in the sphere of selflessness, we hear this saying: "All are one in me." Here men are placed before the greatest and most beautiful of all experiences—a real unison in Christ, in comparison with which the most beautiful harmonies and accords of music belong to a lower sphere. The "I am" is the door. Only the ego must sound in us as it has sounded in Christ.

We therefore make the following suggestion for meditation. Let us create between ourselves and others a sphere in which we let unselfishness shine forth like pure light. Let us let this light become the "I am" of Christ. Let us go through this door to those whom we love and to those whom we do not love. Let us look at them as they appear to us if we go through this door. Then that which takes place within us will lead us to a new kind of intercession. We shall learn how many people will "open their hearts" to us, but also how many are closed, because, until now, we have thought

about them with curiosity and in a false and hasty way. We shall acquire quite different standards of judgment, shall not speak as formerly of sympathetic and unsympathetic, of strange and hostile, but we shall see the egos in their unfathomableness and in their connection with one another.

We shall begin to understand sayings like those of Master Eckhart: "As long as thou dost allow to thyself more than thou allowest to that stranger whom thou hast never seen, so long hast thou failed to see into the depths of God"; or that [saying] of Christ, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." We shall have with every man an experience like that of Alcibiades with Socrates: "A poor dwelling, but in it lives a God." We shall find that the guardian of the door opens to us, to whom he would not otherwise have opened. We shall come nearer to the goal of humanity in John's Gospel: "I in them, and they in Me, and all one in Me." Gradually will it become sacredly dear to us to go to men through this door, and we shall wish to go then in no other way than through this door.

If, in order to draw in like a breath the greatness of this revelation for the history of the world, we look again towards the East and towards the West, we shall see that in the East men had often this door to others, *Tat twam asi*: "It is thou." But the ego was markedly absent. "It is I," said Christ, when He said to us, "That which ye have done unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." And therefore in the East indeed, there comes a feeling of belonging to one another, but in such a way that the souls seek to realize how in their primal source in the godhead they are still one.

The fellowship which is pointed to in John's Gospel is quite different. In it men will be made one in the future, but now no longer the souls but the egos are made one. And it is not identity but unity, which can be reached only through Christ. In the West it is quite different. As in the West men live as far apart as possible in their houses, so in life they stand over against one another as individuals. And although one may be enthusiastic for democracy, that is not real community, but the rule of the majority of individuals. The ego has always the tendency to try to impose its own will, and only in order to attain this personal rule does it condescend to bring others over to its own opinion. There is no real door to the other. It is shut, and opens only when the bell rings for some particular purpose. And so we

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see what we must conquer for the whole of humanity when Christ says to the East, "The door is my *ego*," and to the West, "My *ego* is the door."

Now when we have looked below, above, and outward, we are drawn to look inward also, "I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11) This saying raises especial difficulties for a man of the present time. In the first place, it savors of sentimentality. Secondly, the shepherd's vocation is now far in the past for him, and the lamb is felt to be a picture of helpless imprudence and of patience which puts up with anything, rather than a picture of purity and obedience. It is not easy entirely to get over such feelings and become at home in the feeling which for thousands of years the shepherd has had to his flock, and the animals to their shepherd. The sheep feel their shepherd to be a higher being. And the shepherd gives himself to his sheep, even sacrificing life itself for them.

And this brings us to Christ Himself. His ultimate being is clearly expressed when the next sentence after the saying, "I am the good shepherd," says nothing about leading or following, but points to the above fact: "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." A human vocation, which through immeasurable ages has had the greatest significance among humanity, and which, in opposition to the warrior's calling, has embraced the world of peace and prosperity, is here taken up into a higher sphere, and exalted there for ever.

We may now, following the indications given in the parable, try to rise to the worlds of experience in which the secret of inward guidance manifests itself. The first experience is pointed out in the words: "My sheep hear my voice." "I know my sheep and am known of mine." In other New Testament writings also one finds this experience of a deep "knowing." "Then shall I know, even as also I am known." Plato says that all true knowing rests upon a re-knowing of that which the soul already experienced in a higher world before birth.

The kind of knowing which is here spoken of lies one step higher. The unique love which is aroused in us for Christ, when we once see Him as He is, comes solely because the thought arises in us: There is our true being as it ought to be: there is our divine ego. Man has this experience of Christ at the moment when he sees



Engraving, Peter Bruegel, the Elder (1525?-1569)

The Parable of the Good Shepherd

Bruegel's busy pictorial narration is an illustration of John 10:1-16 showing Christ and those who hear His voice, surrounded by thieves, robbers and violated sheep. Over the lintel are the Latin words: "I am the door of the sheep."

Him as He really is. But it is good to bring it fully into one's consciousness, and this meditation will serve to do so. We may begin in this way, that we seek to become aware of ourselves in the Light of Christ, as we are meant to be. Then can a "knowing," than which there is none deeper, pass over our soul. Now the divine thought about our being flashes out. Now our real ego shines forth. As when the light of the sun falls upon a diamond which lay dark under other stones and earth, so Christ and our real ego greet one another. They shine as one mutual light, like the diamond and the sun.

In this picture we may seek to meditate upon the truth: "I know my sheep and am known of mine." This experience may rise to the thought: none but Christ knows me by name: I was hidden, even from myself, until He called me by my name; but now I know myself, or at least guess what I am, and know that I am known. When I think of Christ, then I think at the same time of my best self, and when I think of my real ego, then Christ in whom it is hidden shines out in me, "To Him the porter openeth." There is really a porter in us who opens only to Christ. We are closed until he comes. In every moment in which we really do what is right for us, we do it out of such a deep "knowing."

When one learns this, then there comes an indescribable feeling of safety. One feels that one was in a strange land before, that the shepherd, to quote the parable in Luke's Gospel, has found the lost sheep and is carrying

it. One did not know before how far astray one had gone, or how safe one could feel in the world. “They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” But this is only so when one obeys the voice of the Leader. Otherwise a feeling of being completely lost sets in. One did not know that one had always lived in this feeling of being lost.

After the feeling of security comes the feeling of safe guidance. This guidance comes entirely from within. We need expect no guidance in signs or beckonings from without, or if there seem to be such, we must enquire carefully into them. The guide lives within. But not for one moment does sure guidance fail when once we are able to distinguish the voice of the guide amid the babel of voices within. Men will learn to listen in quite a different way to the voice of the guide in their soul. Christ has said to us that He will dwell in us. One would choose to go always in the guidance of this leader alone. But it is hard to attain to this. An inward obedience, pure and watchful, will lead us upon a marvelously sure way through life.

The last feeling is the feeling of being rich. We enter worlds of blessing. A sure development begins: “I give unto them eternal life.” We know that the true pasture of the soul blossoms there. And all the gardens of the higher worlds open to us.

If, in the previous meditation, we have heard Christ’s “I am” before us so that it was the door through which we went, now we may hear it as if it were behind and above us. And it may often be that, when we turn to Him with some important question, if we only have patience to let this “I am” become strong enough, it is as if out of this “I am” we hear the voice which leads us, while it calls us in our true being which it lovingly spares and tends. It is usually only our feeling which prevents us hearing the voice. We are afraid that it may tell us to do what we do not wish to do. This fear often conceals the voice of Christ in us.

In the Eastern world men have sought the “Master,” but he was *outside* man. In the Western world men have indeed had the guidance *within*. But no higher ego was there, no divine master who led. Here again in the announcement of Christ in John’s Gospel, we have the uniting of the worlds that are falling asunder, and their exaltation by the Christ’s gift of the ego. But it is necessary in this meditation to be fully conscious that just here, where He speaks of guidance, Christ is careful to claim His rank as guide only from His power of self-devotion: that on the one side He points to the Father: “I and the Father are one,” and on the other side He says just here, of men: “Ye are Gods” (John 10:34). We



William Dyce, c1820-1859, Manchester Art Gallery

The Good Shepherd

have not space here to speak of the many details of such a chapter. But we must know, and be always able to bring to life within us, the emotional background out of which Christ’s word is spoken.

But the most important thing is this, that it gradually becomes clearer to us how our whole world is now changing. Whenever we look, the divine “I” shines upon us. When we look *down*—the bread is the representative of this kingdom—an “I” looks upon us, Who gives His life to us. When we look *up*—the light is the prophet of this world—then again an “I” looks upon us that allows us to share His life. When we look *outward* we find in our fellow-men the divine radiance, the darkened “I” in the Father. And when we look *inward* again, the great divine “I” stands there, behind us. Everywhere worlds of light arise. But the word “light” is much too thin and lifeless. Out of the light appears everywhere an “I.” If we are not to stop short at our first feeling of it, then we must conquer for ourselves this world under us, above us, outside us, in us. And then behind the old world arises a new world, spiritually great and full of love. Wherever we look, we look into the face of a father of whom Christ is the expression of the ego. We begin to feel the far-off greatness of the central saying of the gospel of John: “I in the Father.” (Continued) □