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LATE ADDRESS GIVEN TO MEMBERS OF THE ETHICAL CHURCH,  
CHURCH HALL, BATHWATER, 1913

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(AN ADDRESS GIVEN TO MEMBERS OF THE ETHICAL CHURCH,  
QUEEN'S ROAD, BAYSWATER, 1935)

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| First published | 1935 |
| Reprinted       | 1940 |
| Second reprint  | 1951 |
| Third reprint   | 1956 |
| Fourth reprint  | 1959 |
| Fifth reprint   | 1970 |

*Printed in Great Britain by  
Billing & Sons Limited, Guildford and London*

## MEDITATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

A YOUNG friend on hearing the title of this paper remarked, 'H'm, how pedestrian!' Though crushed for the moment, I am luckily old enough to remember the days when 'pedestrian' was not necessarily a term of reproach, days in which we regarded our feet as useful and estimable agents in enabling us to respond to the calls of duty or pleasure. So, on reflection, I welcomed the term 'pedestrian' in connection with this subject of meditation, as helping us grasp from the outset that it is a subject which, if put into practice, will be of continuous service to us in life, whether the way be smooth or rough. And it is important to realise this fact. Otherwise we are prone to think that meditation is too difficult for the ordinary person, or that it is suitable on special occasions only. Whereas the truth is that anyone who chooses can learn to use this system of inner control simply and unostentatiously in any circumstance.

That some such training in the control of our inner states is an urgent need in modern life is being brought home to us by the ever-increasing number of books that survey man's place in his present stage of development and ask 'What next?' I do not mean those that deal primarily with the danger there is of civilization being destroyed by warfare, but rather those that maintain that man is being ruined by civilization.

A few years ago authors of a reforming turn of mind impressed on us that if we would consolidate our position in evolution and prepare for further triumphant advance we must clamour for a special form of government, or build model tenements, or settle down in the middle of three acres with a cow; and we were almost coerced into believing that we could found a modern Utopia by making great changes in the outward conduct of our lives.

But now the campaign is carried right into the heart of man, and reformers seek to show that unless he has harmony at the centre of his being his activities are vitiated at the source and can only lead to confusion and disaster. Like the Fat Boy in *Pickwick* such writers say, at least implicitly, 'I'll make your flesh creep.' They adjure us to look at the state of the world, and then to realize that it is due to the confusion in our own minds, to gaze on the misery and distress on all sides, and then to realise that it is the outcome of unresolved conflicts in the hearts of apparently harmless people like you and me.

Man's increasing knowledge of 'this mysterious universe', his so-called mastery of space, his perfection of design in all kinds of machinery, the advances recently made in surgery and medicine and scientific research generally, none of this has led him into paradise. Man may have escaped from some miseries, but only to become the prey of others. Statistics, we are told, show that nervous and mental diseases are on the increase; knowing exciting facts about the stars does not make it any easier to live happily with your family; flying from Hammersmith to Honolulu in record time is not a sure way of escape from jealousy or greed or selfishness. Further, the most admired inventions of science, say some of these writers, are outpacing man's ability to adapt himself to his swiftly changing environment, the majority of us were not sufficiently developed to use the inventions wisely, and so such things as cheap cars, the wireless, aeroplanes, cinemas, have given us extra opportunities of being foolish, and in conjunction with the pressure of 'mass-suggestion' exercised by newspapers have made it harder for us to acquire that individual sense of proportion and value without which we shall not even make the effort to achieve stability and unity in the inner life.

To mention but a few recent books on these lines, *These Hurrying Years* (Gerald Heard), *New Minds for Old* (Wingfield Stratford), *A Life of One's Own* (J. Field), *Freedom in the Modern World* (MacMurray), *Reason and Emotion* (Ib:) — all stress the belief that unless we achieve such stability and unity we shall be ruined by those very inventions which the human brain has brought into being for our comfort, amusement and even edification!

The books I have named have divergent means to suggest for saving us from the danger in which we stand, but they meet at this point, namely, that it is having intelligent, harmonious feeling that is of the prime importance, because feeling is the basis of life. Feeling underlies all we do. Feeling is dynamic. Feeling determines not only how we act, but what action we perform. For making a success of life, knowledge alone is not enough. We have for some time now recognized the importance of cultivating our minds, but 'we have neglected the training of our emotional life' (MacMurray). Yet unless emotion and intellect are in harmony, our lives as a whole cannot be rational. Indeed it is quite common to see very intellectual people bringing misery upon themselves and their families because the

emotional side of their nature has been neglected, and the light of reason has never reached it.

Moreover, experience shows us that it is possible genuinely to appreciate what is good and beautiful and true and yet to be unable to make that appreciation a living force in our daily lives. For instance, it is likely that many of us number among our mental riches the concluding of Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound':

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy power which seems omnipotent;  
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the things it contemplates. . . .  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free.

Our intellect may approve, our hearts may thrill to the ideal so wonderfully expressed by the poet. And then . . . perhaps a letter comes announcing the frustration of some long-cherished plan, or I hear some unjust criticism of my conduct, or someone I trust injures me, and at once my inner serenity is shattered and I suffer every gradation of feeling from petty irritation to despair, according to the gravity of the circumstance. I may control the expression of my untoward feeling, but I still feel it. Far from being 'good, great and joyous, beautiful and free', I am bound by my anxiety or disappointment or grief or hate: much as I should like not to have these feelings I cannot rid myself of them; I am enslaved by them, and that though my brain tells me they are useless and wrong.

We are forced to admit in the light of such an experience that it is not sufficient to grasp with the intellect the value of goodness, or to have an aesthetic appreciation of its beauty. The values we perceive must not be left as abstractions isolated in the brain. Somehow or other we must make them part of the very fibre of our lives. As William Law quaintly puts it, 'That which the life eats not, the life has not'. It is when we realise the need for assimilation that the practice of meditation, as taught by Dr. Porter Mills, perhaps begins to appeal to us, for it is the purpose of such meditation to enable us not merely to have ideas about integrity and holiness and

wisdom and peace and goodness, but actually to experience those feelings for which the words stand.

We are taught in this *New Order of Meditation* (i.e. Contemplative Meditation) to hold the mind still on some great concept, such as Wisdom or Peace, until the mind, owing to its power of receptivity, becomes like that which it contemplates. As we leave off thinking, we gradually absorb something of the quality for which the Word stands; this feeling penetrates through all the layers of our consciousness, transmuting as it goes, till it verily becomes part of us. More than this, we are taught not to contemplate the subject of our meditation as something quite apart from us in some remote and exterior pattern of perfection which we must laboriously strive to imitate. We are taught rather to understand that in a deep sense this desired perfection already forms part of our being, is latent in us, waiting for our recognition to come to the birth and fill our consciousness.

So the method in this kind of meditation is to quiet all the surface activities of the mind in order to penetrate beneath them and open up tracts of consciousness of which we are generally unaware. Because we are thus unaware, it is very difficult for the great teachers of the race, who have already enjoyed some portion of their hidden heritage, to describe it in terms that we can understand, or even to convince us of its existence.

Probably we have all been puzzled by such injunctions and assertions as 'Know thyself'; 'Look within'; 'Seek the Kingdom within thee'; 'To mount to God is to enter into oneself'. We have thought perhaps to follow their directions by analysing our motives and thoughts and feelings, and may have been left in a state of intense depression as the result of our introspection — My inner life seems to be a thing of shreds and patches; full of inconsistencies; stunted here, over-developed there, a veneer of civilized habits over the primitive feelings of the cave-man, or even of the beast of the jungle. This inner realm of my discovery can hardly be the kingdom which Christ told man it was worth making any sacrifice to enter!

At least our self-scrutiny may do this for us: it may make us so dissatisfied with the inner life we are leading that we long to get away from it. We may begin to see that our habitual way of thinking and feeling constitutes that very life we have to 'lose', 'lay down', if we are ever to enter that kingdom which in varying terms has been described

to us as a state of expansion of consciousness, of freedom not from difficulty but from what poisons and dwarfs the true personality. Thus, if our dissatisfaction is intense enough we may be ready to adopt the method of meditation, which to begin with is apt to offend us by its very simplicity. We cannot see at first that anything can be accomplished by sitting still and repeating a word. Yet if we once consent to make the experiment we find that it does free us from the tyranny of our old thoughts and feelings. We refuse to attend to them when they obtrude themselves, and by a gentle and patient repetition of the word chosen we gradually induce the mind to brood on some aspect of Perfection; that is, we are not *thinking about* Perfection, not in the ordinary sense thinking at all, but being in that state of receptive passivity towards it, which Roger Fry has told us to practise when looking at Chinese art. The mental attitude he advocates when we look at a picture helps us to understand what the state of mind should be when beginning to meditate, not blank, not idle, but in a state of purposeful receptivity.

So, in order to meditate we take a word or sentence that embodies some aspect of the Highest man can conceive, and repeat it again with the intention of absorbing its spirit. Gradually the mind begins to 'listen' in a new way: the senses no longer disturb it with impressions from without; attention has become one-pointed, and memory and association are no longer distracting it with a multiplicity of fresh ideas. To use an analogy from nature, the mind is no longer like a sea anemone putting out eager filaments, but resembles a tortoise that has gathered in all its limbs under its shell.\*

By degrees some feeling which corresponds to that symbolized by the word held (Peace, for instance) wells up and replaces the old feeling and is there as the basis of thought and subsequent action. It needs practice to reach this stage in which the change of feeling is effected. The mind is not accustomed to staying still. After countless ages we have trained ourselves to think consecutively, and we naturally want now to move from one concept to another, to compare ideas and to reach conclusions; and all our past experience rises up and says, 'You are wasting your time' when we first try to hold the mind stationary. Nothing seems to happen. Yet if we persevere we find that far from being idle we have entered upon a new sort of mental activity in

\* Indian Simile

which the self is unified, and thought, will and desire are in harmony.

But each one of us has to make this discovery for himself. It is no use to go on accumulating theory, any more than you will ever learn to drive at golf by reading volume after volume about it. Read enough to take your clubs and not a butterfly net, and to know which way up to hold them; but then go out and swing them yourself. So with meditation; by all means read enough psychology to know something about the working of your mind. It will encourage you in the early stages before you have much power of concentration to know that by practice it will increase, and that the receptivity of the subconscious mind is working all the time and will eventually respond to the truth which you hold before it.

Before, however, attempting to put the method into practice in daily life it is really vital for us to realise that we must never use the words in meditation as though they represented our present consciousness as we know ourselves and are known of others. They are emphatically not true of man's life as he at present lives it. To say while I am boiling with impatience, 'Peace reigns within me. I am an expression of perfect Peace' may, by putting the law of suggestion into action, cause my impatience to abate. But only at the cost of my mental integrity. Lying to oneself is a most dangerous and disintegrating practice. To use such formulae — and they are seriously advocated in some systems of mental training — can never bring us into greater knowledge of Truth. If you imagine that the Wisdom, Peace, Love, etc., that you may have experienced yourself or seen in the lives of others is perfect, if you even suppose that we are as yet capable of forming an adequate conception of perfect Wisdom, Peace and Love, then you are assuredly wasting your time by meditating, because you have shut yourself contentedly inside your own necessarily limited experience and are in danger of glorifying that very self which it is essential to 'lose' if you are to make any advance in finding that greater one, which according to the symbolic story in Genesis is made in the likeness of God.

Therefore in this kind of Contemplative Meditation the qualities dwelt on are predicated not of man's being but of God's. That is, we conceive of Wisdom, Peace, Love, Joy, Goodness, Beauty, Truth as existing eternally and as not subject to change or limitation.

In our own lives we know that our experience of feelings we call good

is marred by the strife of opposites. We know that every day man's peace is shattered by disaster, joy turns to sorrow, an impulsive act of folly overthrows a life apparently grounded on wisdom; even our love may dwindle into indifference or veer into hate.

Yet we are just able to form a conception of Love that has no opposite, of Peace that could never be broken, of Holiness never sullied, of Truth and Wisdom untouched by ignorance or folly. And further we can by practice accustom ourselves to the idea that such Love and Holiness, etc., because Eternal, are always available, so to speak, for us to contemplate. It is the object of meditation to enable us to draw our feelings at all times from this Eternal Source, which in this teaching we call God, but God conceived not as something or someone apart from man and issuing arbitrary decrees from a distance; but as an indwelling Power, the very breath of man's life and the mainspring of his being, though immeasurably transcending all man's present experience of what is good.

It is on the presence of this indwelling Power that students of meditation try to rest the attention; frequently throughout the day, whatever we may be doing, we can for a few seconds redirect our power of receptivity, and instead of having it turned 'outward' to the world of transient, human experience, turn it 'inward' to draw from that quite different order of consciousness which Christ called the Kingdom of Heaven.

Constantly we have to refuse to have our feelings dictated to us by what is going on in our surroundings, and we do this not by ignoring the surroundings — that would often be neither possible nor right — but by repeating a word that stands for the Kingdom of Heaven consciousness, repeating it again and again till our feeling is inspired by it and not by the circumstance in which we find ourselves.

For instance, suppose you are delayed on a journey; it may be important for the comfort and welfare of others that you should arrive. You do not ignore the facts, you do not try to persuade yourself that the delay does not matter. But you so use your mind that it is fully charged with tranquillity and power to help when you do arrive. You can keep your mind fixed on the fact that eternal Wisdom is ever present, and meet all negative suggestions with a repetition of that truth.

In the same way when you go to see a sick person, you do not assert to yourself or to the invalid that he is not ill. You do not say the symptoms are not important when they are. But you do not accept

your feeling from the sad condition in which the patient is. To be constructively sympathetic it is useless to respond in kind to distress. The physical and mental suffering do not sum up the whole situation. There is still the world of inner Peace and Joy and Holiness of Health — and it is only to the extent that you have trained yourself to recognize this world and to enter it mentally whatever may be your surroundings, it is only to this extent that you are able to help the sufferer to enter it too, and so to find relief.

In the time at my disposal it is impossible to do more than indicate very briefly the view taken of bodily healing in this teaching. We believe that the object of meditation is to effect a change in the nature and quality of our feeling, and that in this change of consciousness the body is necessarily included; for what has been found out about the work of the subconscious mind warrants the conclusion that we should not make a great gulf in thought between mind and body, but rather look on them as forming one unit of consciousness.

It is now hardly necessary to stress the point that the subconscious mind functions through the involuntary nervous system; that it is almost certain, further, that every thought and feeling is motor in its consequence, i.e. that we can have no thought or feeling without some physical change taking place. Hence we can legitimately regard the body as the outer and visible layer of consciousness. Therefore, when the body is ill we gladly avail ourselves of medical aid, but we also believe that the illness is a sign that the person behind the illness is in need of help: the great thing to be done is to increase our knowledge of the Highest and enter into greater harmony with It.

Even if you cannot as yet admit that illness is the outer sign of some inner lack of harmony, you probably find little difficulty in seeing that, if it is at all true that our feelings affect our physical states, it is worth while having the most vital, happy, wholesome feelings we can, to help us get well and you can begin to work with meditation on that assumption, keeping your mind away from the disease as much as you can and holding the attention on some word of life.

If possible, at such a time of illness, ask someone who is well and who has had some experience in meditating, to help you. This help is given not by 'willing' you to be well, not by sending out thoughts of well-being to you, not by using the power of suggestion or by exerting any form of personal influence. The helper must himself *be* in that state

which he desires for his patient, a state of conscious awareness of the Most High. To achieve this he must lay aside all his own personal feelings, his own plans, his thoughts and hopes and desires — all the mental riches that stand between us and the Kingdom. He must be able also to turn mentally from all signs of distress in the patient, in order to give his whole attention to the Peace and Wisdom that are eternal, that by so doing he may receive some realisation of them into his own consciousness, whence that realisation awakens a corresponding feeling in the consciousness of the other. This feeling, drawn from and inspired by Eternal Truth, on being accepted by the subconscious mind works through the involuntary nervous system and affects the bodily state, sometimes with what seems amazing rapidity.

To bring help in this way to a sufferer it is not enough simply to have the desire so to do. We must submit to the discipline of training; and that training we can only get by steadfastly bringing the practice of meditation into daily life on every opportunity. It is not enough to read about it; it is not enough to go to classes where we can practise it with others — though that is very important, if not essential, for most of us at the beginning — it is not enough to keep our fixed times of silence faithfully. What is involved is a readiness to remake our ordinary habits of thought and feeling in our everyday life; and, until we try, we have no idea how much energy and determination that demands! Yet the control of our inner states and the capacity to respond to the Highest can be developed only by repeated acts of our own will, and in no other way.

Effecting a change in our habitual feelings is not an easy way of living; and we make a great mistake and shall be deeply disappointed, if we begin to learn meditation in the expectation that it will quickly free us from all our personal troubles and enable us to live like the Lotus-Eaters. It will give us courage and serenity in facing difficulty, wisdom in dealing with it, rather than skill in avoiding it. Above all, as we go on, we shall realise more and more that by being joined in meditation to a Life greater than our own, we bring into human experience as a whole a Power that will transmute it and raise it to a fresh level; and it is more than likely that as our sensitiveness to this Power increases we shall find we are led into the Holy of Holies where the only feeling possible for the heart of man is that of worship.

M. V. DUNLOP

## DIRECTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

1. Learn from a teacher, if possible.
2. Practise regularly several times a day for five or six minutes.
3. Relax the body and shut the eyes.
4. Repeat the words of the Meditation slowly and purposefully, and often enough to keep other thoughts from filling the mind.
5. Remember to avoid both reverie and consecutive thinking.

## SENTENCES SUITABLE FOR MEDITATION

1. That I may know the Power of Peace (or Wisdom or Truth or Goodness or Love) within me.
2. May the Eternal Love within me come forth to inspire my mind and heart.
3. That I may grow more and more aware of Almighty Righteousness within me.
4. That I may enter into the Kingdom of Truth within.
5. Let the Will of Love and Peace be done within me.
6. That in my daily life I may manifest the Joy of Creative Goodness.
7. I will be still and learn from Infinite Holiness within.

