



Meditatio

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LAURENCE FREEMAN OSB

Prayer in the 21st Century



Laurence Freeman is a Benedictine monk of the Olivetan Congregation and Director of The World Community for Christian Meditation. He gives retreats, leads seminars worldwide, and nurtures inter-faith dialogue. His books include Jesus the Teacher Within, and Light Within. In these talks, he addresses the question facing the modern Christian: How do we remain in the Church and encounter the world today without despair or compromise? The answer Fr Laurence says is in re-connecting with the wisdom of our tradition that will allow us to respond not with condemnation but with compassion. He explains how meditation offers a path to this wisdom.

*These talks are drawn from
Laurence Freeman's talks on his UK Tour in 2005.*

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Laurence Freeman OSB

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Two Ways of Looking at and Experiencing Life

I would like to begin with two readings which show two very different approaches to life. The first is from the Book of Ecclesiastes:

Sheer futility. Everything is futile. What profit can we show for all our toiling under the sun? A generation goes and a generation comes, yet the earth stands firm forever. The sun rises, the sun sets; then to its place it speeds, and there it rises... Into the sea go all the rivers and yet the sea is never filled, and still to their goal the rivers go. All things are wearisome... What was will be again; what has been will be done again; and there is nothing new under the sun. (Ec 1:3-9)

By contrast to that, here is Solomon in the Book of Wisdom:

So I prayed, and wisdom was given to me. I entreated and the spirit of understanding came to me. I esteemed her more than sceptres and thrones. Compared with her I held riches as nothing.... I loved her more than health or beauty, preferred her to the light since her radiance never sleeps. In her company all good things came to me.... For she is to human beings an inexhaustible treasure, and those who acquire her win God's friendship... For wisdom is quicker to move than any motion... She is a breath of the power of God. (Wi 7:7-25)

So these are two ways, fundamentally different ways, of looking and experiencing time and life. What is the difference? It is not just a question of mood or personality. The difference between these two ways of looking at and responding to experience, time, life decide what kind of world we live in. They decide our overseas aid budget. They decide how important the arms trade is. They decide our foreign policy. They decide levels of inequality or injustice in the world and infant mortality figures. These two attitudes determine not just a philosophical approach but also actually how we live and the kind of world we contribute to. What makes the difference between these two attitudes, one that is weariness and despair, depression (let's just get through life), or wisdom and compassion? Wisdom and compassion always flow together. The wise are always compassionate.

The difference between these two attitudes, I think, is our experience of prayer – how we really pray, what prayer really means to us. One of the oldest and most central ideas of Christian thought is expressed in the little Latin tag, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which literally means ‘the law of praying is the law of believing’. We might say that the way you pray is the way you live. The quality of your prayer is going to be the quality of your life. The depth of your prayer is going to be the depth from which you are living. What is prayer? How do we pray? How do *I* pray? What does it mean for us personally in determining which of these fundamental attitudes, Book of Ecclesiastes or Book of Wisdom, we take to light? What does it mean to the Church and to Christianity today? And what does the experience of prayer mean to our world?

First of all it might be helpful to say what prayer is *not*. That is how Jesus actually begins his teaching on prayer in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 to 7. He begins by getting this out of the way right at the beginning so that we don't start off with the wrong conception about what prayer is. He said,

When you pray do not be like the hypocrites who like to stand on the street corners, wearing long robes winning the attention and admiration of others.

Prayer is not something that is really to do with externals: with external rituals, with external procedures, with customs, conventions, words, however beautiful they may be, however exquisite they may be, however reassuring it may be to know that that ritual and those prayers will always be there at that time every day in the church or in the bedroom or wherever it is you pray. We cannot identify prayer even with these reassuring rituals and beautiful liturgies, however satisfying it may be at a certain level. Prayer itself is something different from that, deeper than that. If it is no more than those comforting rituals that give us a feeling of reassurance and security – God's okay and I am okay with God, I've done my prayers for the day, I've gone to church and the church is always there – if prayer is no more than that, then it is not valid, not valid in the light of the teaching of Jesus. If it is valid and if we really do get to what prayer is about then it will be beautiful, it will be reassuring, and it will be deeply satisfying. And it will produce beauty around it. But in itself, these external forms of rituals and conventions are not what valid prayer means according to the teaching of Jesus, and according to our own common-sense as well.

In the Eastern Church especially, they speak about the *art of prayer*; they call it the *art of arts*. It is the highest human art to learn how to pray. This art of prayer is an art that produces something beautiful, an experience of beauty, which transforms our consciousness; an experience of beauty that can shift us, move us from that rather depressing and wearisome view of life of Ecclesiastes to the more hopeful and inspiring vision of the Book of Wisdom. It is an art that does make things happen, an art that does change us. First of all it is an interior art. Then it produces visible beauty, tangible goodness, and perceptible truth. This interior art of prayer is what Jesus then goes on to describe in the Sermon on the Mount, "but when you pray," he says, "go into your inner room," by which he means the heart, one's deepest interiority, one's true self, "and close the door," he says for that time of prayer "and pray to your heavenly Father [the ground of being that is there] in that secret [or mysterious] place".

So I think the challenge that we face today in the Church and all our churches of Christianity is really to recover a sense, an experience, of this art of prayer. Great Christian prophets of our time, people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Simone Weil have understood that this is the challenge to Christianity today. Monks like Thomas Merton, John Main and Bede Griffiths also understood that the recovery of this art of prayer, this interior art, is our challenge and it is made possible for us because of this great contemplative tradition that we possess in Christianity. This contemplative tradition, these monks especially have taught us, is there like an unused bank account hardly known by most Christians, hardly taught in parishes or in schools. This is where we find what we are looking for today. This is what people are looking for.

I was very struck the other day as I was looking at the website of Ken Wilbur, an American, slightly off-beat, but probably a very prophetic philosopher, an extremely brilliant mind working on an integral approach to religion, psychology,

science and social institutions – a great genius really. He is predominantly a Buddhist in his religious orientation, although he probably does not like to have any particular label attached to him. I was struck by something he remarked in an email he sent me. He said, however influential Buddhism is in the Western world today, and many people who have felt that the Christian tradition does not give them enough of this wisdom and enough of this teaching of depth have of course gone to Buddhism to look for it but, he said, “Buddhism will never transform the West We are too deeply immersed in the Biblical, Judeo-Christian tradition.” This is where our roots are, where our imaginations are, and where our symbols lie. This is where our language is. So, he said, it will have to be through a renewal of the Judeo-Christian tradition in the West that the force of spiritual change will come.

Some of these great teachers of Christianity in recent times have understood that it is by going into our *inner room* as Jesus said, guided on that search by this rich contemplative tradition of the Church, that we will find everything that we think we have lost, but we have actually misplaced. This experience of recovering what we think we have lost restores us to an experience of joy that underlies the attitude of the Book of Wisdom: wisdom and compassion.

Forces of Change in Our World Today

It is very painful for a religious tradition like Christianity today – in turmoil, in division, with lots of doubts, lots of internal tensions and dissensions, failing numbers, closing parishes, and a very poor media image – it is very difficult for modern Christians who are concerned for their Church, tradition and community really to encounter the modern world directly. It is very easy for us to see all the problems in the modern world and failure of connection between the modern world and the Church, and we just retreat into the Church, into our religious enclave as an escape from all the problems in the world. It is very difficult for us to remain in the Church, with the mess that it is in, with the confusion it is facing with its uncertain future and still, holding that ground, look directly into the eyes of modernity and say, “Where are we going?” How can we get back some sense of direction, some kind of control over the rollercoaster to destruction that we are on?

The Second Vatican Council did that in an amazingly prophetic and influential way, but it is difficult to sustain it. Yet, burying our heads in the sands of forgetfulness or denial, even if we call that sand *tradition*, that will get us nowhere; it will achieve nothing, either for our Church or for the world. The challenge for us is to connect this great religious tradition, this great tradition of spiritual wisdom that will overcome the wearisome-ness, depression, despair, and confusion that is at such a high level in our world. So the church, if it is a church of prayer, the kind that Jesus was talking about, will not be a refuge for the frightened, or a refuge for the angry and the violent. But it will be what St Benedict understood a monastery to be – a school of the Lord’s service, a house of prayer for the nations, a holy people. Understanding what is happening in our world with as much clarity as we can, not just condemning modernity, not just condemning all the things that are obviously wrong with the world, I think this will help us recover what we have misplaced, what we have lost touch with in our own deep mystical tradition. Then making this connection will enable us to share this wisdom, compassion, and joy with the world. That is the mission of the gospel – to spread the good news, *evangelion* in Greek, “a good announcement”.

Let us look briefly at the four main forces of change in our world today. You might say the first thing is terrorism, but terrorism although it is in the headlines and is a fact and a tragic fact of the world, it is a symptom rather than a cause. It is a symptom of the fact that we are not handling these forces of change very wisely or very compassionately.

First, the very obvious force of change in our world today is what we call globalization. The world is becoming more and more unified in some ways, although this globalization also is increasing levels of conflict. Globalization then is not just about economic, social, or technological unification. The really interesting kind of globalization that is happening is a globalization of consciousness. What creates this? It’s instant communication: the exchange of information, the ease and rapidity of travel. The media has transformed the lives of even people living in very remote villages in China, India, or the barrios of South America who are never going to travel

probably, but their consciousness has been awakened to the world around them, to what is happening in technology and what is happening in New York, and what is happening in the youth culture. Through the media even the most remote person in the world now is aware of what is going on in the rest of the world and makes their judgments accordingly. The use of the internet. In our Christian Meditation community we are increasingly conscious of how our website www.wccm.org is part of this globalization of consciousness. Many people I meet, who are now leading meditation groups or are actively involved in the work of the community in passing on this tradition, when I ask how they first came in touch with the community more and more say through the website. So technology that is used in wisdom can develop wider and deeper compassion in the world. It can spread a spiritual awakening. So globalization of consciousness is certainly a big new obvious force of change in our world.

The second great force of change is what we might call re-evaluation of religion, that religion is changing its shape. A dominant form of religion that we see in the media today in particular, and it is a very powerful force, is fundamentalism. We see this wave of fundamentalism, which perhaps is due to the insecurities, and tensions of the world – fears of losing identity, anger at being treated unjustly. Fundamentalism is a way, although not a very good way, of dealing with the problems of the modern world. It is a fairly modern phenomena, fundamentalism. It is not really going back to the good old days at all. Fundamentalism is a modern response to a modern mess. Fundamentalism is a major direction that religion is taking in all forms in all religions. And it is a very dangerous direction because it is exclusive and it is marked by a strong tendency to violence, because if you think you have exclusive truth then you are God's representative on earth and whatever comes into your head must be God's word speaking directly to you.

But there is also another wave in religion – maybe less popular and less high-profile but maybe hopefully more enduring – which is a contemplative reorientation of all religious traditions, a getting back to that level of interiority, of contemplative depth of experience that Jesus was talking about. It is this contemplative reorientation of religious traditions of worship, of ministry and leadership that is creating a new kind of religion in the world. It changes the meaning of priesthood, it changes the way we think of monasteries. It changes the way we think of sacraments, or of marriage, or of the sacrament of reconciliation. Dietrich Bonhoeffer shortly before he was executed in 1945 wrote about a 'religionless' Christianity. He also spoke about the need in Christianity for what he called a 'secret discipline' to be restored to the heart of the Church in order to protect the mysteries of our faith, the restoration of a secret discipline, which I think, must mean contemplation, to the heart of our faith in order to preserve the mysteries. This is another movement in religion today which doesn't quite get the same attention as the fundamentalist movement in religion but it is where I imagine most of us would put our money for the future.

Above all there is probably a friendship between religions that is developing that is really quite remarkably new, if you think where we were 20, 50, 100 years ago. This friendship between religions is an enormous theological difficulty for us, a huge challenge to a Christianity that is Euro-centric, allied to the imperial power and economic force of the Western world and suddenly finds itself developing a new spirit of equality, respect, and reverence for religions that in the past were treated as inferior, or superstitious, or pagan. Again it is the speed of change that is really quite dazzling and disorienting for us. The Church, the thinkers and theologians in the

Church, are facing as big a challenge in interpreting the gospel in contemporary life as the primitive Church did as it looked at its Jewish exclusivism and had to say that the gentiles can also share in the good news; or as the Christians did in the fourth century as they looked at the wisdom of the Greeks and said yes the word of God was working there as well. We are facing an equally great and exciting challenge in relating our Christian faith to other religions.

The third major force of change is what you might call shifting tectonic plates of morality: What is right; what is wrong. Should we develop an embryo with two mothers? Does God condemn all forms of homosexual activity? Sexual morality and ethics arising from technology and science, attitudes to marriage – these are the questions, new questions as the old certainties have been lost forever. You might take a fundamentalist stand or an ultra-liberal stand but we do not have very clear moral authorities or guideline today. And everybody to some extent will pick and chose. That creates a lot of confusion because we like to know what is right and wrong; this is very important to us as human beings, that we do the right thing. Where do we get the advice from? So this is another major force of change.

We are sent back to the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Good Samaritan is an extraordinarily revolutionary story that shatters the traditional ethics that Jesus was addressing. Ethics means the habits of behaviour in your ethnic group; ethos or ethics – the same thing. What Jesus was saying is that it is not just the person who belongs to your own household or race or religion or class who is your neighbour, but the person you chose to be your neighbour, that is your neighbour. The person you meet whoever that might be – the person you are sitting next to on the plane or the train – that is your neighbour. And you *chose* that person to be your neighbour. That returns us to a universal morality much bigger than local ethics: the morality of love. John Main said, “The only morality is the morality of love.” So again here we see a huge shift in contemporary consciousness. Even though there is a lot of conflict and condemnation going on about differences of moral opinions, there is at the same time a sense of a new morality based on love, based on neighbourliness and the choice of who is our neighbour, which again puts us back into touch with the Sermon on the Mount.

The fourth major force of change is change itself, the fact that everything is up for grabs. We see rapid and frequent change – some necessary some not so necessary. All institutions have this feeling of insecurity and instability today. Where is it all going to end, we say. In each of these areas of modern change we face a choice. Do we go with the Book of Ecclesiastes or do we go with the Book of Wisdom? In the face of all this change do we go for a betterment of the world or do we go with the consumer mentality just for a selfish increase in our own short-term level of comfort and prosperity?

It is the context in which we ask the question about prayer: What do we mean by prayer in this world that we are living, in the light of these forces of change and in the light of the gospel? The circumstances we find ourselves in socially and globally which are frightening and unsettling put us into the role of people seeking. We feel we have lost something, and we are looking for something. That is a wonderful position to be in because it puts us into the position of people who can really *listen* to the teaching of the Sermon of the Mount. It actually puts us into relationship to the gospel in a way that will enable us to understand what the gospel is saying. We may find ourselves being lead by the spirit of wisdom into a new place.

Prayer and the Forces of Change

Prayer today offers us the picture of a global spirituality, not a global religion, but a global spirituality. This puts us in touch, not only with the interiority of Jesus' message (go into your inner room, he says), but also in touch with its universality. And this is a very remarkable and interesting aspect of meditation as we practise it, because when we meditate we are doing something that is very interior and solitary. You couldn't say to me, "I'm too busy to meditate. Would you mind meditating for me?" In that sense meditation is a very solitary practice. It leads us into solitude because it is something we can only do and take responsibility for personally. On the other hand, we do have a sense of meditating with others of good will around the world every day. Then we realize that although I cannot meditate for you and you cannot mediate for me, we can meditate together. In that meditating together we move into the second of those forces of change in relation to prayer, which is finding a common ground between religions that will respect and even highlight their differences, but will over-ride the collective ego of religion: "My religion is better than yours. Therefore you are inferior to me; therefore I'm closer to God than you." We over-ride, we just short circuit, delete that ego-religious attitude when we touch this common ground that meditation leads us into.

What we also discover in that common ground is an inner authority, an inner moral authority, through the experience of our own goodness. After all, what is morality about? Being good, good being – discovering that at the very core of my being I am good, and I can touch the source of that goodness. "Only God is good," Jesus said to the rich young man. Only God is good. And it is that goodness of God that we find as integral to our own identity and existence because we are created in the image and likeness of God. Why do people meditate? They meditate to feel good, not in a gin-and-tonic kind of way, but to experience the goodness of God at the core of our being. Therefore, there is a great moral power in meditation. Perhaps we need some external moral guidance and authority as well, especially early in life, but the external authority needs the *inner* authority of a mature spiritual person if it is not to become tyrannical. Otherwise, we just go through life in an infantile morality, being frightened of guilt, being frightened of being punished by God, being frightened of committing sin, terrified of punishment and that everything we are doing is wrong and that we are bad people, and we never live, we never come alive with the spirit of joy of the Book of Wisdom. So that inner authority of moral goodness allows us to call to account our moral authorities externally, and then *change*, that fourth great force in our world – just everything is up for grabs.

What do we find in mediation, in the 'prayer of the heart'? What we find is that *we* are changing. That is the best response to the world around us that is changing, in flux. Not the fundamentalist response of fear, which is "let's create this artificial environment in which nothing will change, in which I reinvent old certainties and protect them violently against anything that will threaten them". but "*I* will change, and I will be a stable point of change in this changing world". Because life is about

change. Life is growth. By the time we get to the end of the journey of our life and we die, let us pray to God that we have grown and changed continuously as St Benedict has us understand in his vow of conversion. A monk does not take a vow only of stability, but also a vow of change – to be constantly in change, in conversion, in the process of conversion from moment to moment.

Therefore, we have to see that prayer first of all changes the person who prays. That is what changes. Otherwise, we think that prayer is all about changing the outside world. We think that for some reason, because we go to church at the time that's convenient for us on a Sunday morning and at the particular kind of church we like to go to and with the particular priest we like to hear say mass, because of all this kind of consumer choice, then in that two or three minutes that we have for the bidding prayers after the gospel and a sermon which put us to sleep, I will ask God to help the people in Louisiana, to bring peace in the Middle East, and to save the souls of all those who died in the last week. And because of these little prayers I make God will therefore change everything eventually, sometime before we have coffee after mass. Well, it would be nice if it worked like that but unfortunately it does not. And it cannot actually be what Jesus means when he said whenever two or three are gathered in my name... or ask and you will receive and you will get everything you want. It does not quite work at that level of literalism.

What changes then? What changes is us. That is what meditation is about. Why do you meditate? Because I *want* to change. I am *open* to change. What am I being changed into? Nothing to be frightened of. What does it mean to lose your self? Nothing to be frightened of. Losing is finding. Lose yourself so that you can find yourself. What we will be changed into is of course *who* we are. What all this leads us to is a pretty obvious and simple conclusion: that prayer in the 21st century is contemplation. That is not so surprising when you come to think that this is also the prayer that Jesus is speaking about. Jesus is a teacher of contemplation. We need to draw on the contemplative and mystical tradition rather than just our institutional or theological traditions in order to bring this about. Some of the greatest theological minds and some of the most prophetic spirits of Christianity in recent times have understood this perfectly clearly. Karl Rahner, a great Jesuit theologian said that the Christian of the future will be contemplative or there will be no Christians.

What Is Contemplation? How Do We Do It?

Thomas Aquinas said contemplation is “the simple enjoyment of the truth”, which is being in the present moment. It is being still and knowing that God *is*. To John Main it is the work of meditation, in which we are not speaking to God and not thinking about God, but *being* with God. For Evagrius, a great teacher of John Cassian in the 4th century and one of the great spiritual masters of the Christian Desert, says: “Prayer is the laying aside of thoughts.” The laying aside of thoughts. How do we do it? When John Cassian in the 4th century went to Abba Isaac in the Desert and asked about prayer, he was given a wonderful talk on prayer, which became the *Ninth Conference* of Cassian. Then he went back to his cell in the Desert and sat and thought about it, and then he suddenly realized: It was a great talk, but he didn’t tell me how to do it. So he went back to Abba Isaac and he said, “Tell me how to do it.” Abba Isaac said you are next door to understanding if you know what question to ask, when you are asking the right question.

So, how do we do it? How do we simply enjoy the truth? How do we enter the present moment? How do we become still and know that God is? How do we stop thinking and talking to God, about God and *be* with God? How do we lay aside our thoughts? It is not a question of having a magic technique. It is a question of a discipline. The Christian contemplative tradition from the very beginning has agreed upon a very simple and effective discipline of contemplation, of meditation, that John Main recovered and went on to teach, perhaps more widely than it had ever been taught before in history. This very simple discipline of meditation, or pure prayer as the early Christian monks called it, is about practising silence, stillness, and simplicity.

Silence is not only the absence of noise, physical noise, as there will always be some noise around you even if it is just your tummy rumbling. The real essence of silence is *attention*; paying attention. What do we pay attention to? Most of the time we are paying attention, more or less, to what is going on in our heads. To a stream of thoughts, imagination, fantasy, anxiety, that is just flowing through our minds in a constant stream of consciousness. Because we are so deeply in the habit of paying attention just to that stream of mental activity it seems to us that that is what prayer is all about – paying attention to nice thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts about God, or nice words. What the contemplative tradition tells us is that there are perfectly valid forms and good forms of prayer that we can do at that level of consciousness, with our minds – thinking, reading, and speaking – but they point to something deeper, the prayer of the heart in which we lay aside thoughts, words, and images.

We do this by simply taking the attention off them. It is not therefore that in this meditation period now we will be repressing our thoughts or fighting them or trying to blank them out. We cannot blank them out as if we were turning off the TV. What we can do, to a very limited degree at first, is to take our attention off our thoughts, words, and images and place the attention somewhere else. That is what meditation is

about. That is really what 'leaving self behind' is about as well. Now, to do that we have first of all to remember that it's about taking our attention off *all* thoughts, not only bad thoughts but even good thoughts. It is obviously better to have good thoughts in our heads than bad thoughts, but at the time of meditation we are taking the attention off all thoughts, good and bad, and moving to a deeper level of prayer, a deeper level of being all together. That is the challenge for us.

We do this in a very simple way recommended to Cassian by Abba Isaac and recommended by Fr John, in the same tradition, to us. We take at the time of meditation a single word or a short phrase; Cassian called it in Latin a *formula*, we call it a *mantra* or a sacred word, a prayer word. And during the time of the meditation we repeat this word continuously, faithfully, attentively, from the beginning to the end of the meditation. If you are very good at it you will be able to do it for two seconds before you get distracted by good thoughts or bad thoughts, by plans, what you're going to do tonight, what you didn't do yesterday, fantasies, daydreams, hopes or anxieties, and compulsive thoughts. As soon as you realize that you have stopped saying the mantra (maybe one minute before the end of the meditation, but at some point you will be aware that you are not saying the mantra because you are wondering off on some other thought) as soon as you realize that this has happened just simply, humbly, like a child, come back to your word. That is the art of meditation in this tradition: coming back to your word, coming home to your word, over and over again. That is why it is important also to stay with the *same* word throughout the meditation, and from day to day, because that enables the word to become rooted in your heart.

Choosing the word therefore is important. You could take the name *Jesus* a very ancient Christian mantra, or the word *Abba*, the word that Jesus made sacred by his way of describing God. The word I would recommend is the word *maranatha*. Maranatha is a beautiful Christian mantra. It is the oldest Christian prayer. It means 'Come Lord'; it's in Aramaic, the language that Jesus spoke; and St Paul ends his first letter to the Corinthians with it. So it is a very ancient and beautiful Christian prayer word or phrase. If you chose that word say it as four syllables: ma-ra-na-tha, maranatha. Listen to the word as you say it, silently, interiorly. Articulate it clearly in your mind. Do not visualize it but just say it, sound it interiorly, and listen to it as you say it, giving it your attention.

The essence of all prayer, the essence of all loving is attention. This is the work that we do: saying the word faithfully, lovingly, attentively and continuously. Letting go, not fighting, but letting go of that stream of mental activity which is made up of our thoughts, words, and images. The stillness of meditation that we are learning by doing this takes us beyond all ego desires; that is the letting-go. But it will also put us into touch with our deepest and truest desire: "Happy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God." The poverty of spirit is the letting-go; the Kingdom of God is finding what you really want. The simplicity of this is obvious. What could more simple? It is a great relief from self-analysis, self-consciousness, self-centredness and it leads to an integration of the self, which is the real meaning of simplicity.

So the saying of the word, of the mantra, is a very simple, profoundly simple, discipline of contemplative practice or prayer, and it takes faith to do it. That is one aspect of the word faith. To do something on faith you take a risk; and you need that element to start. It is also a way of faith as it is about being faithful to it: saying the word faithfully and then doing the practice faithfully day by day.

Take a moment to sit comfortably, with your back straight. That will help you to be alert and wakeful; it is not a holy nap after all. Sit with your back straight, not rigid but alert. You might ease into this by taking a moment just to be aware of your breath. As you breathe in feel it physically entering into your body. Be aware also of the breathing out, the letting-go. We breathe in the gift of life and because it is a gift we let go of it. We are all sitting on chairs, put your feet on the ground, hands on your lap or on your knees. Relax your forehead or wherever you feel any tension such as in your shoulders or neck. You want to be comfortable, but alert. Close your eyes lightly. Then silently, in your heart, in your mind, begin to say your word. The word I recommend is *marantha*. Ma-ra-na-tha, ma-ra-na-tha.

Listen to the word as you say it.

Give it your attention.

Keep returning to it gently without force, patiently not in a hurry, and simply.

Ma-ra-na-tha.
