

New Creation Teaching Ministry G. C. Bingham

—The Making and Meaning Of Christian Meditation —

1. Introduction: Why Study This Subject?

Christianity, that is to say its Gospel, constitutes first of all the way to life, and then the true way of life. in fact it is true life itself (John 17:3, I John 5:20, 3:14). Hence matters like meditation are not its be-all, and end-all. Meditation receives little attention in dictionaries of theology and practice. The word ‘meditation’ is virtually passed over because the exercise of meditation is not considered of great importance. Perhaps it is truer to say that meditation is recognised, simply, as part of normal and intuitive Christian living.

With the emergence in the West of principles of meditation practised in the East, great interest has been shown in the subject of meditation. Naturally those Christians with an apologetic bent have sought to show (a) That Eastern meditation is deficient, if not wrong, and (b) That Christian meditation is of another and higher order. Given things as they are, it would be foolish to ignore the impact of Eastern thinking with its practices of meditation. It would also be foolish to range the Gospel in competition with Eastern meditation, seeking to protest that Christians have always had good meditation, and can surpass Eastern meditation. In other words, if Eastern meditation has stirred Christians to examine their own principles of meditation, then well and good! At the same time there is no need for Christians to think that lacking this developed skill of Eastern meditation, the Gospel is in any way deficient.

2. Mode of Studying The Subject

Our purpose is not to refute Eastern meditation simply because we think it is wrong. The more positive approach is to study meditation in the Scriptures and – where possible – Christian history, and see the value of meditation in itself. On the way it will be inevitable that some comparison be made with other forms of meditation. We will first attempt to examine the fact of meditation in the Scriptures and the principles which obtain in its practice. This should help us to discern between helpful and unhelpful practices of meditation, and also to see the bases upon which true meditation rests. It may also enhance our own personal practice of meditation, if that proves to be a good thing.

3. The Fact of Meditation Within The Scriptures

A concordance is always of great help in following a word through the Scriptures. Yet a concordance is not, in itself, enough, since there are other kindred

words which require studying. Also the practice of a principle such as meditation may not come directly under the heading or coverage of any particular word. Hence the difficulty of tracing the theme. Words in the Hebrew of the Old Testament often differ with the Greek translation (of the Septuagint) sometimes met in the New Testament. Sometimes words change in their meanings over centuries. Nevertheless, in spite of these difficulties we can gather some pattern of meditation in the Judaic (Old Testament) and Christian (New Testament) use of the words. When, in addition, we see the Judaic-Christian stream of thinking to be virtually the one, we are helped in understanding any particular word, principle or idea.

(i) Meditation in the Old Testament

It is a fairly simple matter to classify meditation in the Old Testament.

The first object of meditation – and naturally enough – is God. Psalm 77:3 has it, ‘I think of God and I moan; I meditate and my spirit faints.’ Psalm 63:6, ‘When I think of Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the watches of the night’. Psalm 119:55 connects remembrance of the Lord with the law. Psalm 25:5 links waiting for God and the law. See also Psalm 104: 34.

The second object of meditation is the law of God. To the Hebrew there was no difference, really, between the law and God. To meditate on the law of God was to meditate upon the nature of God and His demands. Paul echoes this in Romans 3:21, where he points out that normal knowledge of the righteousness of God is by the law. Joshua (1:8) is commanded to meditate on this law. The man of Psalm 1 delights in the law – ‘In it does he meditate day and night’. In Psalm 119 we meet many statements as to the writer meditating upon the law of God. See, then, verses 15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99 and 148 – amongst many. The words ‘way’, ‘laws’, ‘precepts’, ‘testimonies’ and ‘word’ all have equivalent meaning, even if they are viewed from somewhat differing angles.

The third object of meditation is the works of God. Time and again the Psalmist says, ‘I will meditate on Thy wondrous works.’ Such references are Psalms 77:12, 119:27, and 143:5.

The **fourth** point we meet in the O.T. is the desire of the one musing to have his meditations accepted by God, hence, ‘May my meditation be pleasing to Him, for I rejoice in the Lord’ (Psalm 104:34). In Psalm 19:14 the prayer is, ‘Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord...’.

(ii) Meditation in the New Testament

The word is scarcely used, although the idea of thinking upon things is present. In I Timothy 4:15 Paul says, ‘Meditate upon these things’ (A.V.), whilst the R.S.V. has it, ‘...devote yourself to them’, and the Jerusalem Bible, ‘think hard about this...’. Apart from the injunction of Luke 21:14 not to meditate beforehand what they are to say when brought before kings and judges, there is no other mention of meditation, as such. However, the famous ‘think’ passage of Phil. 4: 8–9 carries the idea of meditation, for here is rejection of things which are no good for contemplation, and the deliberate acceptance of things which are good for musing upon. In I Thess. 5:21 and I John 4:1 the readers are exhorted to refuse that which is evil. They must test all things before accepting any.

We conclude then that on the surface there is little in the Scriptures which suggests meditation as that kind of practice which will lead to life, or that is essential to the continuance of life in God. However, in both cases we would be lacking in understanding if we thought that, in fact, meditation is not essential to both. It certainly is, and so we need to penetrate more deeply to discover the value of the practice of meditation.

4.The Nature of True Meditation

(i) Introduction: Who Meditates?

There are two kinds of meditation, or rather two directions of meditation. One is for God, and concerns Him alone. The other is against God, and concerns man alone. In Psalm 10:13 the wicked person says in his heart, 'Thou wilt not call (my evil actions) to account.' This accords with Ecclesiastes 8:11, 'Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.' This is evil musing, contemplation, meditation.

We have already seen that the true man of God delights in the law after the inward man. He meditates in it, and on it, day and night. He delights to contemplate God, and muse upon His great works. This is true meditation. The question then arises that although man meditates in his heart, does he meditate with his heart, from his heart, and of things of his heart – whether good or bad? Does he not rather meditate upon what is not him, but that which is beyond him? Is there something put into him which is valuable and true for him to use as the object or materials of his meditation? These are some of the questions which confront us. One thing we may be sure of: The good man has a treasure, out of which he may bring things, new and old (Matthew 13:52). Jesus states plainly in Matthew 12:35, 'The good man, out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.'

We see then that meditation must to some degree depend upon the mind and heart of the meditator, as also upon the object of his meditation. If the heart of man is evil and the object of his meditation is evil, then meditation for him will be productive only of evil. For the good man it will be productive of good. This whole question of what is the intake and outflow, the input and the output is really the crux of our study.

(ii) Man the Meditator: 'When I consider...'

'Let us make man in our image', 'Man is the image and glory of God', are statements which mean, amongst many other things, that man is a rational creature. He considers, he contemplates, he muses, and he ruminates. He sees evidence and draws conclusions. His conclusions for the most part affect or stimulate his affections, whether these be felt negatively or positively. Man is a contemplative creature. He can be contemplative both in quietness and busyness. So then, for good or evil he is a meditating creature.

The term 'meditate' in the Old Testament has variant meanings. Vincent¹ says that the LXX represents seven Hebrew equivalents. Generally speaking, meditation is a speaking in the mind. This may be expressed in murmuring. It also carries the idea of speaking out what one has meditated, and even putting it into action by practice and exercise. The basic thought is a whispering in the heart, and this expresses itself in a murmur, a movement of the lips, possibly whilst contemplative. In Psalm 2:1, 'Why do the people imagine a vain thing', the word 'imagine' is quoted in Acts 4:25 by the same verb as in I Tim. 4:15 (i.e. 'meditate'. Gk. **meletao**).

¹ 'Word Studies in the N.T.', Eerdmans, Michigan, 1946. Vol. 4, p.253.

Man, then, is habitually and functionally a thinker. He imagines, muses, thinks, reflects, contemplates, ruminates, gives expression to inner thoughts, comes to conclusions, expresses and acts upon these. These all come under the heading of the word ‘meditation’

These things must mean that all truth, knowledge and wisdom is not immediately known to man in a conscious manner. He ferrets around within himself. He sees himself against the background of the world in which he lives. He ratiocinates the thoughts which come to him, and the information which is gathered for intellection. Out of this process he arrives at certain conclusions. In the process of arriving at conclusions – especially those conclusions which will be helpful to him – he needs and uses teachers who are others who have meditated, and reached conclusions.

Man has certain limits placed upon his thinking so that it may prove to be true thinking. Such limits cannot be understood apart from the doctrine of creation. That God made man in His own image means man must reflect Him and none (or nothing) else. Anything which does not reflect God is not truly human. Some have conjectured that man is restricted by his finitude. Apart from the fact that the term ‘finitude’ is an artificial measurement to apply to humanity, yet man is not restricted as man by being a creature within the creation. This is, indeed, his genuine and authentic being as person. He may range within all the possibilities contained within creatureliness. Only when he rejects being a creature does he find the eternal nature of God galling to him and restrictive. Isaiah 55:8ff shows that God’s thoughts are not man’s thoughts, nor His ways man’s ways. This is natural. God is Creator; we are creatures. Man – if he will – can know all that a man needs to know. Man, especially man who is in union with God, has no restrictions within his manhood. His meditating can be authentic, useful, and full.

(iii) The Problem of Human Meditation

If true meditation has God as its object, and the law as its guide and instructor, then man’s meditation is valid. Man as created was in union with God. It is interesting to note that in Eastern meditation, especially with Hindu background, yoga means ‘yoking’, and this yoking is with Brahmin, i.e. the Ultimate Reality. This ‘Reality’ is formless, inexpressible, unknowable and unknowing, neither personal nor impersonal: both Creator and all that is created. Brahmin is all and all is Brahmin. Thus Hinduism poses a ‘monism’, that is that good and evil are both part of the system, so that there are no absolutes of good and evil.

Man, created to be in union with God, forsook the union for the temptation, ‘You shall be as God’. Man was already like God so that he aspired to be more than he was as man – i.e. to be as God Himself. This brought about a radical change in man, and one which precludes assured validity to his contemplation and meditation. We must state that although in outward action, and inward attitude man radically changed, yet he could not – from a creational point of view – essentially change. Dislocated and dissociated though he may be, he is still man. His dysfunctional and malfunctioning operations do not alter his essential manhood, but only the expressions of that manhood. They are incongruous with his true humanity.

Man, as created, is depicted as the reflection of God. God is ‘the fountain of living waters’ (Jer. 2:13), and man is to ‘keep the heart with all diligence for from it flow the issues of life’ (Prov. 4:23). When man rebelled (Gen. 3:1–6, Romans 1:18–32) then a terrible change took place in man’s will and affections, and so, also, in his thinking. It is well to tabulate what actually happened, since it radically affects his thrust of thinking and meditation.

(a) A Change of Mind

Romans 1:18–32, coupled with Romans 5:12–21 and Genesis 3:1–24, forms a revelation of the radical change that came to the mind of man when he rebelled against God. It also shows how that change still obtains. The gist of Romans 1:18–32 is that God reveals His wrath upon those who suppress the truth by deeds of wickedness. This can only mean that man suppresses truth by that which is false, purity by that which is impure, love by hatred, and so on. This is inexcusable since man knew God, for God could be known by the creation He had brought into being. Yet when man knew God he did not honour Him as God. Man was not thankful for God and what He created. Paul says in verse 21 and 22, ‘...they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools...’. The passage following describes the fall into idolatry (to which we must return), sexual immorality, sexual perversion, the development of a base (reprobate) mind, and the consequent breakdown in all relationships.

When we look at the ‘futile thinking’, ‘senseless and darkened minds’, and ‘wisdom claimed but in fact the arrival of a senseless and darkened mind’ we have the most terrible description of the changed state of mind. It is horrible to contemplate. Man now has become incongruous with his true self.

What then has happened? Romans 5:12ff says that man is now under the grip of two terrible tyrants – sin and death, and man lives in their bondage. Genesis 3 depicts man as aspiring to be as God, but in fact finding himself naked and fearful, afraid to meet the God who created him. Romans 1:21ff is saying that man cannot now think correctly. He has a bias to his thinking which precludes him from knowing the truth, and from recognising reality. His bias against God had caused him to reject things—as–they–really–are, and to re–rationalise them. We mean that he does not see that creation as it really is correlates with the God who created. Man rationalises the structure of the creation by ascribing it to a god or gods recreated by him, and he lines up the system of essential morality (in fact immorality) with these gods. Hence his understanding of all things is perverted, no matter how finely his rationales may be developed in terms of explaining things as they (seemingly) are. Consequently he has dislocated the true order of things.

It is this mind which would meditate! ‘Futile thinking’, ‘senseless minds’, ‘darkened’ – these are the terms which now describe man. How then will he meditate, and meditate correctly? Religions, then, which require such thinking, such ratiocination, must be based on premises which will ultimately prove inadequate or even false. In the epistle to the Ephesians Paul describes the state of man in terrifying terms. Man is dead (2:1, 5), and he is ‘darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart’, and ‘they have become callous (i.e. morally hardened and insensitive) and they have given themselves up to licentiousness, greedy to practise every kind of uncleanness (4:18–19).’ In 2:12 he describes man as ‘having no hope and without God in the world’.

In practical terms these things mean that man cannot think without his changed bias. Whilst, technically speaking, his powers of ratiocination still function properly, yet their bias or thrust is along the lines of error and evil.

This change of mind has developed to the point where man can call good evil, light darkness and bitterness sweetness (Isaiah 5:20–21, cf. Matt. 6:23). How then can such a mind meditate truly?

(b) Idolatry

Romans 1:21–23 says that man exchanged the glory of God for idols. This was part of his change of mind, his arrant foolishness. Verse 25 says they exchanged

the truth of God for a lie and worshipped the creature (creation) more than the Creator. This lie is idolatry. Hence all gods are false deities, correlating with man's changed and foolish thinking. Paul says elsewhere that there are no real gods or lords for such have no real (essential) existence. He insists that 'there is one God, the Father...and one Lord, Jesus Christ'. That is how things essentially are.

The problem of meditation in these circumstances is that although the gods do not have authentic existence, yet, because of man's perversion they have existence which is real enough to man. Doubtless they are perversions of the true order of things, but they are nevertheless very real, and very powerful. They exist as gods, but without genuine deity. Idolatry is linked with the worship of certain powers within the universe who themselves have perverted the authority the Creator has given them (cf. I Cor. 8:4, 10:19–22, Ephes. 6:12, Gal. 4:8–9, Col. 2:20).

Idolatry, then, is man's rationalisation of the creation he has rejected as being under the primacy of God. His substitute gods, whilst having no essential being, take God's place, and become deadly to man who has given them worship. When man meditates, how then shall he meditate? Shall, then, his gods give him wisdom, and aid him to a fine and wholesome destiny? When shall he then, with a perverse heart, truly see truth?

(c) Change of Heart

The heart for the Hebrew signified the elements of thinking, knowing and feeling. To love God with the heart, soul and mind is really to love God with one's whole being. Yet the heart which thinks is primarily concerned with relationships. It is intended to know and love God (Deut. 30:6). The heart is the hidden but real part of man where lie his deepest understandings, feelings, and from which flow forth the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). He is to guard this heart (Prov. 4:23). That is, he is to allow nothing in which will defile it. Proverbs 25:26 has it, 'Like a muddied stream or a polluted fountain is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.'

'The issues of life' are undoubtedly the great attributes of God as reflected in and by man, such as love, holiness, righteousness, goodness and truth, with their various affections such as peace, joy, kindness, and so on. Man did not keep his heart with all diligence when he rejected God. He opened it, even if unwittingly, to the powers of darkness. This heart–mind of man is of enormous significance, and exercises great power. Jeremiah says that it is 'deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (i.e. corrupt)'. Jesus described it as a fountain of every kind of evil (cf. Jer. 17:9 and Mark 7:20–23). Jesus said, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil (Matt. 12:34). The heart as created is good, but the heart that rejects the true God is defiled. Hence the significance of Proverbs 23:7 (A.V.) 'As a man thinketh in his own heart, so is he.'²

In modern terms we would say that the heart of man is a computer in which are stored all that a man has received as impressions, experiences, concepts, and so on. This mind has the power to store something like a billion such memories and impressions. According to Ephesians 2:2 it is programmed by the 'spirit who now works in the children of disobedience', or, as in Philippians 2:13, God is energising within it, and programming it. If the heart that has rejected God is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, then Jeremiah is correct in

² Other translations do not give this as the sense of the passage, but the principle remains true, even for the passage quoted.

asking, 'Who can understand it?' (Jer. 17:9). The only answer is that God searches the mind and the heart, knows, and judges (Jer. 17:10, cf. I Sam. 16:7, I Cor. 4:5). 'The purposes of the heart' are very subtle, and concealed. God will reveal them. Our question then is, 'Does man have full control of his own heart? If it is not under God is it then under man himself?' How then does a man meditate and have hope for a good outcome?

Jeremiah says, 'I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct himself.' This idea is echoed many times in the Book of Proverbs. In 20:24 it is said, 'A man's steps are ordered by the Lord: how then can man understand his way?' Proverbs 16:9 says, 'A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. We gather then that man is not complete in himself. He cannot know where he is going or plan correctly. Man's way is not within himself. Yet man seeks to travel without God. Proverbs abounds in such statements as, 'There is a way which seems right to man, but its end is the way of death.' Man takes many a false trail, perforce his reasoning which is wrong.

(d) Man in the Grip of Evil Powers

Man may think he is not in the grip of lords other than God, but he is. Isaiah 26:13 depicts man as having many lords. I Cor. 8:5 says, '...there be gods many and lords many'. Ephesians 2:1–3 depicts man as gripped by Satan. I John 5: 19 says the whole world lies in the Evil One. Hebrews 2:14 says men and women are under the fear of death and so in Satan's bondage. Gal. 4:8 says, 'Formerly, when you did not know God, you were in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods... whilst Col. 2:20 speaks of men being in bondage to 'the elemental spirits of the world'. Ephesians 6:12 speaks of evil forces composed of principalities and powers, and Romans 8:38 shows these seeking to separate true man from the love of God.

Man is in bondage to evil by virtue of his guilt. This evil is cunning and subtle, even blinding his eyes to God and His love (II Cor. 4:4). Doubtless evil also covers itself so that man does not recognise it. This is called, in the Scriptures, 'the deceit of sin'. This being the case, how then does man meditate? Is he totally free in his thinking from these powers which dominate him, or do they, by reason of his guilt and rebellion, seek to programme his ways of thinking? What then did Jesus mean by saying, 'He that has an ear to hear, let him hear'? Surely he meant that man is influenced away from hearing the truth. Jesus himself expounds this powerfully in John 8:45–47, '...because I tell you the truth you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.' In another place he had said, 'My teaching is not mine, but His who sent me; if any man's will is to do His will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority (John 7:16–17).' Jesus puts this inability to hear the truth down to the fact that those opposing him are in the grip of Satan who is a liar, '...has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).'

The question we have to ask again is, 'How can man who has rejected the true and essential nature of things, who has severed his creational connection with God, and who is now under the grip of guilt and the bondage of evil powers – how can this man meditate, and be sure that the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart can be authentic, and so wholly acceptable? Add to this the fact that his thinking is futile, his mind senseless and darkened, and his ignorance is profound, and it can be seen that meditation may not only not be helpful but even dangerous.

If the Christian from his Judaic–Christian background mediates on God, on

His works and His law, then on whom and what does the person meditate who is not a child of God? We need to see the problems which may generally bedevil such a person.

(e) The Problems of Unauthentic Man

In saying that the thinking of such persons is futile, and that their minds are senseless and darkened, we by no means are saying that they have inferior intellects or the inability to think and ratiocinate. To the contrary. Many of the most brilliant in thinking have been the ungodly, the atheists, and the others whose moral living has seemed above reproach. Some of the systems worked out by such men have been brilliant. Most of the world's great religions are very finely rationalised systems. Their philosophy and world systems are often quite profound. Whilst many of their devotees may have makeshift and crude ideas, or unattractive modes of worship, yet the founders and the subsequent apologists for the systems have been most astute. Were this not so, so many would not follow them.

Only three great religions claim to be revealed, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Christianity claims to be the fulfilment of the Judaic prophetic thrust, and Islam claims to supersede both because the prophet Mahomet came later in time than Christ, and with a fresh message which was mainly of submission to God. Most other religions are attempts to give a world-view which will explain life and metaphysics to man. They are the propositions of thoughtful minds, and, as we have said, have appeal.

From the Christian point of view Judaism was completed as a revealed system by the coining of Messiah, the Son of God. The church is the true follow-through of the old Jewish covenant-congregation. Islam to Christians is lacking continuity with the coming of Mahomet. He does not flow in the prophetic stream given by Israel and the New Covenant people. Whilst God still has His plan for the Jews, yet it is difficult for Christians to see how a man can come to true union with God except through Christ and the Gospel, that is Christ and the Gospel as communicated by the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. To the Christian attempts to meditate will be futile, particularly when the world-view of the meditator differs from that revealed within the Judaic-Christian Scriptures.

Biblically, then, the person outside of Christ has a deficient world-view. His connection with the gods makes this necessarily so. Whilst any such person may have great knowledge concerning the universe, yet his reasoning is blinded by his bias against the revelation of God through creation, the prophets, the word of God, and Christ the Son. Such a person will be seen as still under the bondage of Satan, and so without authentic hope for the future. Such a person is subject on the one hand to licentious use of the creation, or on the other to a heavy legalism which issues from attempts to justify oneself in one's universe. Guilt increases the tempo of self-justifying acts, and grace is virtually unknown. Since there can be no moral union with the truly holy God, then man must have his unions with other things. Hence it is logical for the Godless man to have his gods, his religious exercises, or to spurn such and live in a meaningless world. We ask again, 'How then can such a one meditate authentically and arrive at conclusions which constitute valid truth?'

(f) The Evidences of Anthropology

It is clear from history, especially from archaeological research, and the researches of anthropology, that man has not generally conformed to the functional principles which are set down in Scripture for created man, namely the moral law as set out in the ten commandments. It might be assumed by some that this invalidates the ethical pattern inherent in creation. Not at all. Romans 1:18-32 leads us to expect a departure from the true functional pattern. Whilst man may have to

fight that essential order continually, it does not mean that he easily capitulates to it. Hence the meditations he undergoes will have to be along lines which are other than essentially functional.

The further question arises, and this is the basic and most dynamic of questions, 'Do the personal forces of evil allow man to develop his own theories, world-views, and principles of life without influence, and without suborning him?' The Christian answer is that man is forced to follow the course (aeon) of this present age, and its prince, the spirit of the power of the air, the one who energises within the children of disobedience'.

(g) Conclusion as to True Meditation

Throughout this section we have looked at the problems arising with sinful man when he wishes to undertake meditation. It is certain that without meditation of some kind man cannot really live. He may vegetate, but not truly live. Input and outflow are essential. Hence man must meditate – whatever! How helpful, authentic and acceptable such meditation is must surely depend on whether he is in union with God, or with his idols, his universe, or unseen powers.

5. The Christian and Principles of Meditation

We take it that man created by God to be a son, a creature, and a servant– subject as correlating to God the Father, Creator, and King–Master, must come to know (a) God who rules the creation, (b) The Creation itself, and (c) Man, that is both his neighbour and himself. Doubtless created man had a complete know– ledge, that is he intuited correctly, and revelation was the norm for him. The fall of man, as we have seen, changed all that. Man would have needed to meditate, and such meditation presupposed the following:–

- (a) Man knew what he needed to know, and when he needed to know more would meditate through the aid of his mind, and his relationship with God and the world.
- (b) Meditation would itself draw upon given knowledge or data, and ratiocinate until what was needed for him to know thus emerged.
- (c) This achieved understanding would also be placed in his data bank to be used for further, i.e. progressive meditation.
- (d) Meditation would primarily concern God, secondly man, and thirdly creation, although thinking and contemplating would not select these atomistically, but holistically.

Fallen man has a problem, since (a) He cannot sensibly read the material in his data bank. He has a bias when contemplating it. (b) He has to work on two forms of data – (i) Essential data which is creational, and (ii) Data which he has introduced by his rebellion against God. As we saw above he has to keep rationalising creation to be as it is not essentially so. For this reason fallen man needs an action of God to clear the way for true meditation. We have already seen that man's mind is programmed by evil powers so that he needs to be released from such powers.

(i) Man is Renewed for True Meditation

The Christian Gospel speaks of renewing man in his mind. In Ezekiel 36:24–28 God speaks of cleansing man from all his uncleannesses and from his idols. He

speaks of taking out the stony heart (i.e. hard heart) and replacing it with a new, warm heart of flesh (soft and yielding heart).

In I Cor. 6:9–11 Paul speaks of those who were idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, alcoholics, thieves and robbers and says they have been ‘washed, sanctified and justified’. This is a tall order. It reminds us of Acts 22:16, ‘washing away sins’, or Acts 3:19, ‘sins blotted out’, or Acts 2:38, ‘sins being remitted’. Linked with this is Titus 3:5, ‘the washing of regeneration, and the renewal of the Holy Spirit’. Ephesians 4:23 (cf. Col. 3:9–10) speaks of the renewing of the mind, whilst Romans 12:1–2 reiterates the same thought. Linked also is the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31–34 where God says He will write His ‘laws on their hearts and put it in their inward parts’, meaning that there will be, internally, a personal knowledge of God and His law and a spontaneous desire to fulfil that law.

The paragraph just written is quite amazing. We saw in Matt. 12:34 that the heart is full. Just what it is filled with is our whole point. The unregenerate man has it filled with evil things, the regenerate man with good things. It must mean that regeneration renews the heart–mind of the person. All that was evil in him is changed. Hence II Cor. 5:17 where in the new creature ‘old things have passed away. Behold! They (i.e. the ‘old things’) have become new.’ This may be difficult to explain, but can be seen by reference to Titus 1:15 where Paul indicates that to the pure in heart all things are pure, but to the corrupt they are unclean. What has been stored in the living data banks has been changed in character. A man may now think purely! We do not mean that what was there before was relatively unclean and now it is relatively clean. We mean that man has a whole new sight of all things, and has not to follow the old programming of evil within his mind (cf. Ephes. 2:3, ‘the desires of body and mind’; Gal. 5:24, ‘the flesh with its passions and desires’), but through the regenerating work of the Spirit has a new programming, and this even of the old material.

In regard to this last point, man is able to decide what he will and what he will not receive. It may be true that a sinner only receives that which is not true, but then he also makes that choice, hence the statement of Psalm 58:3, ‘The wicked go astray from their womb; they err from their birth, speaking lies.’ Ezekiel 18 concentrates on showing that men, when young, make the choice of the way they will go, and this is not primarily dependent upon what the father is. Likewise man may screen what comes to him. He will take things which are pure and see them through lascivious eyes, so that they become lascivious to him. The power of the Holy Spirit to apply the cleansing to the heart cleanses to purity that which was impure, hence, ‘To the pure in heart all things are pure’, that is we see them again as they essentially are.

The renewal, then, of the heart and mind is a radical one, and a total one. The blood of Christ cleanses from all sin, and purges the conscience from dead works (I John 1:7, Heb. 9:14, cf. Heb. 1:3). This renewal means that what is within man need no longer distress him. The treasure of his heart is good, and he will bring forth things old and new, and the old and new will be good.

What we must keep in mind is that the crisis of renewal as we have described it in receiving of the new heart and mind, then leads to a process of renewal. Titus 3:5 speaks of the renewal of the person, and Romans 12:2 speaks of a continual renewal of the person. One is not to be conformed to the world, i.e. one is not to think and understand as the world would have its members meditate, but one is transformed from within (cf. II Cor. 3:18). This process is also continuous and processive, and (a) Counters the wrong thinking and conclusions of the world, and (b) Builds progressively by new ideas gained, and fresh understandings reached.

Later we will speak of the context in which the renewed person lives. It is

sufficient here to say that he lives primarily in the new man, the new age, and in relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. He is always learning new wisdom. The wisdom he has learned is always available or coming into use. The new wisdom leads him on to new experience, growth, action and maturity.

(ii) Meditation is in Union with God

We have seen that yoga really means a yoking, a union with the Brahmin which is everything yet nothing, comprising both good and evil, life and death, health and disease, and even the unreality of maya, i.e. illusion. In this yoking one is absorbed into the Brahmin, and becomes a Yogi, i.e. one who has attained union with Brahmin. Such union takes one away from all sense perceptions, and all family and other relationships. The Yogi is beyond all things, including space and time, religion, caste, country, yes, and even beyond good and evil themselves.

The Christian has union with God, but not in a scheme of things which rejects the normal phenomena of creation. God is true Ruler. He creates a universe which is 'very good' (i.e. functionally good). He has created all things good, and they are to be enjoyed (I Tim. 4:4, 6:17). Everything has been created appropriate (beautiful, functional) according to Eccles. 3:11. Also man has been made upright (Eccles. 7:29). Man has been made in the image of God and so has affinity with Him, especially as a son, a creature, and a subject-servant. There is, of course, a yoke (Lam. 3:27), and it is good for man to bear this in his youth. It is the yoke of discipline or obedience, the one so beautifully worn by Christ (Matt. 11:25-28). There is union with God. This is seen in Col. 3:3: 'Your life is hid with Christ in God.'

This union has been called one not of faith only, nor of mysticism only, but 'faith-mysticism'. Gal. 2:20 speaks of the believer living, yet not living alone. Christ lives in him, and he lives by faith in Christ. Ephesians 3:16-19 speaks of the Spirit and Christ indwelling the believer. John 15:14-23, and Romans 8:9-11 repeat the idea. However, it is John 17:20-26 which speaks most closely of the union of believers with Christ and the Father, Christ and the Father being one. 'I in Thee and Thou in me', says Christ. Again John 15:1ff speaks of his disciples abiding in him. In this case they will be one with him and can ask anything in his name and it will be given them. This union is shown in I Cor. 6:17 where Paul says, 'He who is united with the Lord becomes one spirit with him.'

Romans 6:1-10 speaks of a union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. What is Christ's is accorded to his followers, namely the action of the death-burial-resurrection events. One continues in such union, yet there is a vast difference in this from yoga. One is still one's true self. One is not absorbed into Christ. One puts on Christ (Gal. 3:27), yet each doing so remains a discrete person, just as the members of the Trinity are each discrete.

The union really means that one knows God, is known of Him and loved (I Cor. 8:3, Gal. 4:9). The benefits of His love are visited upon all who are in this union. This is the basis of true meditation – the thoughtfulness, musing, contemplation, and decision-making which constitutes true progress in the life of the believer.

(iii) The New Meditation is Aided, in That It is Informed

Life in Adam – the old way of life – was wrong. We have seen that the true man has come out of Adam, into Christ. He who once died to God and came alive to himself, has now died to himself (as he was) and come alive to God (11 Cor. 5:14-15). He lives to God. His old ideas have had to be transformed. The new man has

at his disposal all the media of revelation, namely the historic and salvific word, the law of God, the prophets and their teaching, Messiah and his teaching, and the Holy Spirit, who himself is the Spirit of truth. If we speak of reprogramming of the Spirit – and we do – then meditation is part of this.

We mean by this that work of regeneration reverses the disobedience of the fall. From rebellion against God it brings submission. It also brings a reversal of thinking. It re-educates the mind by information of the truth. God has never ceased communicating with man. By the various media He employs revelation of Himself has been happening all down through the ages. Creation has not ceased to beat out the message of God, even if man has not heeded it. In various ways, and at various times God has spoken in times past to their fathers, but in the last days has spoken by His own Son. He has sent angels, given visions and dreams. He has made covenants or contracts with man. He has kept alive His own image in man. He has formed a special race, selecting them to be a priest nation amongst the nations of the earth, and so to witness to Him. However, He has, in history, sent His own Son into the world to spell out in human terms (the terms man can really understand) the truth of divine Sonship and Fatherhood. This one has revealed God both by his life, and death–resurrection–ascension events. This revelating Son has secured permanent revelation of the Son and Father by sending the revelatory Spirit, and forming the church, the true people of God. Through the processes of history God Himself has formed His Word, uttered it, and formulated it in the very Scriptures – the Bible. Hence through all these media man–who–believes is now informed. He has been given the right mind to meditate. He has been given the correct information and teaching for his data bank. Moreover the Spirit is present to lead him into all the truth, continually and effectively.³

(a) The New Man is Equipped to Know, and So to Meditate, by the Spirit

John, in his first epistle (2:20–21), says, ‘...you have been anointed by the Holy One and you all know (or, know everything)... I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth.’ He adds, in verse 27, ‘...the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.’

What, then, is this anointing? The answer must be that as Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:16, Luke 4:18, Isaiah 61:1, Acts 10:38), so are Christ’s people, as is seen in Acts 1:8, 2:1ff, II Cor. 1:21–22. Christ promised that the Spirit would lead into all the truth (John 16:12–15), and that he would be teacher (John 15:26). Paul adds that we are taught by the Spirit (I Cor. 2:10–14), and says that he teaches the deep things of God. To this Paul adds the thought in Ephesians 1:17 that the believer may acquire an habituated ‘spirit of wisdom and revelation’, and that such ‘opens the eyes of his understanding that he may know...’. This is of course the Spirit who was to come upon the Branch from the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1–3). He was to be ‘...the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.’

True meditation then can obtain with the new man in Christ, and all his people, through the Spirit. When John says, ‘You all know,’ or, ‘You know all things,’ he is not saying that suddenly they have knowledge of everything, but that they have the ability to distinguish between what is true and what is false. That they have to learn many things is evident by the fact that he writes to them.

³ For a fuller treatment of the material mentioned in this paragraph see ‘The Knowledge of God’ by the writer, N.C.P.I., 1977.

Even then it is the Spirit who gives them understanding of what he writes. In fact the Spirit gives understanding of all things. He aids them not only in their intellectual understanding but also in their practical modes of living, and practical modes of living are the true context in which man meditates.

(b) The New Man is Equipped to Know, and So Meditate, by the Word of God

We have seen that when man rebelled he changed his God-view, his world-view, his man-view. Regeneration reversed that change. He had the true 'change of mind' which is repentance, i.e. metanoia. Yet his changed mind needs to be informed, and primarily by the revelatory Word. We mean that all about him is human and ungodly 'wisdom', and this needs to be counteracted and corrected by the Word. Hence in II Timothy 3:14–17 Paul says, 'But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.' He has just said, '...evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived,' i.e. their thinking will be wrong, and will deceive others. He is saying the Word will be profitable for you, will teach you, correct you, reprove you, and train you in righteousness. In other words, you will be aided for straight thinking and straight living.

A little later we will examine what it is to meditate on this Word, this Law, this Word of God, but here we can note that the new man is equipped for wisdom.

(c) The New Man is Equipped for Meditation by Dependence and Interdependence

We have seen (above) that meditation is in the context of union with God. This must also be seen as dependence. We mean that a person is not full as a human being unless he receives continually from God. He has no source of life or understanding wholly within himself. The 'of myself' (cf. Rom. 7:25) is not sufficient. Christ's 'Without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5) also means, 'With me, you can do all things (that are necessary).' Hence Paul says, 'I can do all things in Christ'. This means that man is not left alone to work out his life and destiny. Whilst his contemplation is his own, it is also dependent upon the Father, Son and Spirit.

This is again fortified by the fact that no man lives unto himself. Romans 14:5–9 shows us that we are dependent upon God. Yet at the same time we do not live only to God but also to one another. Paul points out that we are members one of another (Rom. 12:5, I Cor. 12:14–26), and as such need each other, and think not individually but corporately. This is clearly shown in Ephesians 4:116 where the body (the church) upbuilds itself in love by the functional operations of all members of that body. It is also seen in Ephesians 3:14–20 where the nature of God and the love of Christ is known by the whole congregation, rather than by individual Christians.

We must recognise that both dependence upon God, and interdependence upon the other members of the body is not a hindrance to personal meditation, contemplation, and growth, but is the expression of the true functionality we experience as persons in God's creation. Hence our thoughts are never merely inwardly turned, but rather are turned to God and oriented to the human race.

(d) Equipment Demands the Mind of God

Christ showed his 'mind-set' by his Sonship of the Father. He shows many times that he does not operate on his own, apart from the Father. Apart from

saying continually, 'As the Father has sent me,' he says, 'The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever He does the Son does likewise (John 5:19).' '...I live by the Father... (John 6:57)'. 'I do nothing on my authority, but speak thus as the Father taught me (John 8: 28).' 'The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does His works (John 14:10).' Paul says we have the mind of Christ, meaning we have the mind-set which was his. This is seen in I Cor. 2:16. It is also called for in Phil. 2:8ff.

In Romans 8:5–11 Paul speaks of having the mind-set of the Spirit. The Spirit himself has the mind-set of the Father and of the Son. Hence the believer, in his cogitation, knows the mind of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Hence his thinking, reasoning and conclusions will not come from unguided meditation. Even when he lacks innate wisdom he may ask this of God and receive it (James 1:5).

6. The Nature of Meditation

(i) Eastern and Hebraic Meditation

Now we come to the heart of our study. What is meditation, and how is it exercised and accomplished?

We have already noted some things about meditation, especially as it was understood and practised in the times of the O.T. Scriptures. There meditation is in the heart, is upon God, His works and His law, and we will examine these. There is also a meditation of terror (Isaiah 33:18).

Meditation then in Hebraic thought is a musing in the heart, a contemplation, an internal reflection, a whispering in the heart, a muttering, a coming to a conclusion which one may utter. One gives one's attention to the matter under scrutiny. One comes to certain conclusions about God, man, and the universe. One relates these things to the life-situation in which one lives. That is meditation.

Put another way, one has to rationalise the knowledge one has, and relate it to the matter of living. Hence all elements come under thought and scrutiny. When the fact of meditation is out of this, it can be seen how normal, sensible, and necessary it is.

Some Eastern meditation is not concerned with rationalising life where it is lived and the context in which it is experienced. Rather, such meditation is exercised to get away from life as it is about a person. The presuppositions are : –

- (i) This world is not genuine but illusory. That is the world of the three dimension and the five senses is deceptive. At the best this world is only a symbol of what lies beyond it. If one concentrates on this world then one will fail to know the true nature of things.
- (ii) The principle of monism is that what appears to be good, and what appears to be evil are parts of a whole, so that ultimately they can be seen as essential to the complete order of things.
- (iii) One should seek to expand one's consciousness to be freed from the illusory and take part in the true and authentic – beyond the senses and known dimensions.

- (iv) Meditation is not called so much an escape from this existence as an entrance into another state of being which will prove to be the highest, and will take meditative man to the utmost. As we have said, this is a state beyond all sense perceptions, beyond all human relationships, human distinctions of caste, country, religion, and so on. Meditation has taken one away from this worldly and illusory scene.

Hebraic meditation was within the created world of God. It meditated upon God as Creator, and upon His works, and saw them as wonderful. It was glad to have the formulated law upon which to meditate. The doctrine of creation gave sound reason and purpose for living in this world. The sinfulness of sin was that it terminated such a wonderful existence, in the beautiful created world of God. By meditation one did not seek to escape from the world but live more richly in the world itself, always relating to its Maker, God. One, whilst a discrete person, had to relate to others in the same world, since God too, had created them.

Meditation, creationally speaking, was man's method of learning in his universe. This learning would enable him to grow and mature. He would learn how to live with God, man, and his universe. The complication of man's rebellion would make it difficult for the believer, in that he would have to meditate on (a) The true order of the universe, and (b) The deceptive order inaugurated by sinfulness and the machinations of evil powers. Meditation would have to take all evil into account, but then as we have seen, the revelatory media of God would enable this meditation to be successful.

(ii) The Objects of True Meditation

In the O.T. we see the objects of devotion are God, His works, and His Word. We will, then, take them in that order.

1. God the Object of Meditation

We need to read Psalm 63:1–8.

‘O God, Thou art my God, I seek Thee, my soul thirsts for Thee;
my flesh faints for Thee,
as in a dry and weary land where no water is.
So I have looked upon Thee in the sanctuary,
beholding Thy power and glory.
Because Thy steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise Thee.
So I will bless Thee as long as I live;
I will lift up my hands and call on Thy name.
My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,
and my mouth praises Thee with joyful lips,
when I think of Thee upon my bed,
and meditate on Thee in the watches of the night;
for Thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of
Thy wings I sing for joy.
My soul clings to Thee; Thy right hand upholds me.’

Here we see the Psalmist as joyful because of his experience of God. He says, ‘My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises Thee with joyful lips, when I think of Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee, day and night.’ God is the cause of this meditation. The dimensions for meditation are limitless. Yet there is no mere metaphysical investigation. He actually

rejoices, 'For Thou hast been my help, and in the shadow of Thy wings I sing for joy!' The experience is rich and intense. It is his joy, then, to think about God, and come to conclusions concerning His nature, and His practical love. Psalm 4:4 has it, '... commune with your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.' One may commune in worship by one's heart, but the meditation is upon God. This then relates to Psalm 16:7–8, 'I bless the Lord who gives me counsel: in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved.' The Lord gives counsel where meditation obtains, and so the heart receives the true counsel and can instruct its owner. Psalm 42:8 speaks of the desire of the Psalmist to know God in the hours of the night, 'By night His song is upon my lips'. In Psalm 119:55 the Psalmist says, 'I remember Thy name in the night, O Lord, and keep Thy law.' The Name, of course, is the very Person of God Himself.

The other objects of meditation such as the works of God and the law of God are at the same time reflections upon God Himself, hence the Psalmist asks in Psalm 104:34, 'May my meditation be pleasing to Him, for I rejoice in the Lord.' Again, in Psalm 19:14, 'Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight'. The 'words of my mouth' are in fact the conclusive utterances of the meditations of the heart. What he meditates must please God.

2. God's Works the Object of Meditation

In Psalm 8:3 (A.V.) the Psalmist cries, 'When I consider the works of Thy hands...' Other translations have, 'When I look up...', but it is not just looking, but thoughtful, considering looking that the Psalmist has. He contemplates the vastness of God's creation. It is as in Psalm 111:2, 'Great are the works of the Lord, studied by all who have pleasure in them.' In Psalm 77:11–12 it is said, 'I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord: yea, I will remember Thy wonders of old. I will meditate on all Thy work, and muse on Thy mighty deeds.' Again Psalm 145:5 has it, 'On the glorious splendour of Thy majesty, and on Thy wondrous works I will meditate.' Psalm 119:27 says, 'Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, and I will meditate on Thy wondrous works.'

Meditation upon God's works makes them understood to that degree we need to know them. Paul tells us in Romans 1:18–25 that men did not consider the works of creation. Had they, they would have known God and wanted to go on knowing Him. They did not pause to meditate, so hasty were they to be independent of God. To understand these works is not to seek to opt out of them by meditation, but to be further involved in them by true meditation. The works show the nature and the greatness of God.

3. God's Word and Law the Object of Meditation

In Joshua 1:8 we see God telling Joshua to meditate in the book of the law. Doubtless as leader of his people he needed to know the law for their sakes, but then he also needed to know it as every man needs to know. The wilful human heart will rationalise disobedience until it seems to be acceptable. The man of Psalm 1 certainly loved the Law. He delighted in it, and meditated on it day and night. He was consumed by the rich things of the law. Psalm 19 shows the high nature of law, and the Psalmist again calls for his meditations to be valid ones, and so acceptable to God. The writer of Psalm 119 has much to say about meditation. In verse 15 he says, 'I will meditate on Thy precepts and fix my eyes on Thy ways.' In verse 23 he says, 'Even though princes are plotting against me, Thy servant will meditate upon Thy statutes.' Verse 48 has, 'I revere Thy commandments which I love, and I will meditate on Thy statutes.' Verse 78 says, 'Let the godless be put to shame, because they have subverted me with guile: as for me, I will meditate upon Thy statutes.' Verse 97, 'Oh, how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day.' Verse 99 gives us the clue we have

been seeking, for it shows the source of understanding and wisdom – the law. ‘I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation.’ Verse 148 says, ‘My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate upon Thy promises.’

When we understand that the law has many meanings such as ‘teaching’, ‘instruction’, as well as ‘word’, ‘testimony’, ‘precepts’, ‘statutes’, then we realise the greatness of law. Sadly enough, theological history seemed, often, to have demeaned law. This is because the law has been wrongly identified with its condemnation or an arid legalism, neither of which display the true nature of law. In the N.T. the law is seen to be love towards God and neighbour, and to serve others is to fulfil the law (Gal. 5:14, cf. Romans 13:8–10). However, meditation upon the law reveals so many things such as the true nature of creation, true morality, true ways of living, and the only true Way, the truth of God Himself, later shown in His Son, Jesus the Messiah. To meditate on law then is a rich occupation. In Romans 7:22 Paul says, after the man of Psalm 1, ‘I delight in the law of God after the inward man.’ He bemoans the fact that of himself he cannot keep this law, which he says is spiritual, holy, just and good.

Psalm 1 – as also others – can keep the law of love by the power of God, Christ and the Spirit. The promise of the New Covenant in Jer. 1:31–34 was that God would write His law in the heart, in the inward man, and there would be a drive for obedience. This of course proved to be so with the coming of the forgiveness of the New Covenant. The same covenant was responsible for the death of the old heart, and the gift of the new. This new heart ‘walks in His statutes... and observes His commandments (Ezekiel 36:27)’.

We conclude, then, that the objects of man’s meditation are the true ones, the authentic and valid elements of creation, with God over them all. He who meditates and considers often enough, long enough, and with right motive shall surely become wise, and understand what are the true things. He shall then walk accordingly.

(iii) The Modes and Means of Meditation

There are many means by which we may meditate. We have observed that not a great deal is said in the Scriptures about meditation. Against that, Eastern religions have a well-structured system (or, systems) of meditation. This is probably because meditation is essential to withdraw from the functional creational elements as Scripture would see them. Nevertheless there is Christian meditation and we must look at it, and its contexts.

(a) Meditation by Participation

It is interesting that almost every verse on meditation is spoken in relation to obedience to God. Men learn in the acts and action of life, rather than simply in reflection. Acts, if anything, are the material for reflection. In fact life for the most part is action. Hence one needs to meditate in order to learn how to live and act rather than to withdraw from action. Hence experiences and relationships are the substance of actions, and in themselves confront man with the necessity to sort them out, unscramble the scrambled and develop some rational understanding and some development of principles. All meditation must ultimately serve action as such.

(b) Meditation by Withdrawal

Jesus said, ‘Come ye, yourselves aside, and rest awhile.’ It is generally thought that the disciples were tired and needed refreshment. In the Sermon on

the Mount Jesus counselled quietness of spirit. He said, 'But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret... They were to seek quiet place. He himself would go out in the night, alone, and pray, and, doubtless, meditate.

We have seen that much of the meditation upon God, His works and His law are done by a person on his own. At night when others are asleep or have ceased to relate, the meditator muses, reflects and considers, and then comes to his conclusions. It is an obvious physical fact that the tired person cannot easily meditate.

At the same time, withdrawal is not for withdrawal's sake. That is, a person is not trying to get away from the action of life but rather refresh himself for the true action of life. In reflecting and meditating he is seeking to understand and gain wisdom for right action.

(c) Meditation by Waiting

Waiting in the Scriptures is simply trusting God for His care and concern, and not being hasty out of fear. In the O.T. there are many words for wait, and some of them differ in meaning. Sometimes the word means to wait earnestly, to wait with expectancy, to wait with hope, to stand still and even to be silent. Hence we have such statements as, 'Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and shield (Psalm 33:20).' 'I wait for Thee all day long (Psalm 25:5).' 'May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for Thee (Psalm 25:21).' 'I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I hope (Psalm 130:5)'. 'For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him (Psalm 62:5).'

There are many such passages, including a significant one in Isaiah 30:18, where God waits to be gracious to man, and finally man waits for God to give him judgement. Waiting also renews wonderfully (Isaiah 40:31). They that wait will find that wonderful things have been prepared for them (Isaiah 64:4). However the main idea is that man does not come to his conclusions, especially about the action he should take, without first referring to God. Then his conclusions will be correct. Waiting, however, also includes listening, which we shall now consider.

(d) Meditation and Listening

Hastiness of spirit will despise waiting and listening. These will be looked upon as impractical exercises. In fact 'He that believeth shall not make haste', for he trusts God. One can bear but not be listening. We mean that such hearing is not really listening.

We listen to God in many ways. We hear His word in the Scriptures, and in them in the law, the prophets and the words spoken to others. God often has to call a servant from some busy place to speak to him. Elijah did not hear God in the storm or the earthquake but in 'the still small voice'. Samuel heard His word but did not recognise its source. The Psalms tell of many crying out to God, and also of those listening for God. Daniel prays to God with fasting but three weeks later hears the answer.

In the New Testament the greatest listener appears to be Mary of Bethany, 'who sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him'. The more nervy, fussy Martha did not hear in that context, although she did later when Jesus came to the grave of her brother, Lazarus. She then believed and saw the glory of God.

Man, with his limited view of things, does not understand until he listens. Then the voice comes through and his meditations become useful and valid. Nevertheless he has to listen carefully. He has to distinguish

between the voices that are not of God and those that are. He has to train himself to hear beyond the clamouring voices of impatient men, and threatening or seducing evil powers. Someone has pointed out that to muse is good, but other elements try to amuse, since amusing is against musing.

(e) Meditation by Prayer and Worship

This of course is the obvious context for true meditation. ‘Pray without ceasing’ surely means keeping an attitude of prayer throughout one’s day. One can be busy and pray. One can be busy and not pray. One can be at leisure and pray or not pray. But prayer is communion with God, speaking to Him, and listening to Him. Prayer and worship are linked, for when one worships one knows God more, and understands more of His worth. One then is in a fit place and time to wait, to listen, to hear and to meditate. This conscious awareness of union and communion means that true thinking will result, and so true conclusions, confessions and utterances with also true and right living.

It is clear from the Psalms that all the elements of participation in life, withdrawal from it, waiting, listening, prayer and worship, have aided true meditation. In Revelation chapters 2 and 3 the word comes, time and again, ‘Hear what the Spirit says to the churches’. As the prophets and teachers minister to the Lord (Acts 13:1ff) they hear the voice of the Spirit, ‘Separate me Saul and Barnabas for the work of the ministry’. In Acts 15 James the Elder says, ‘It seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit’. Peter heard the voice of the Spirit bidding him to go to Caesarea, and Philip to go up into the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch. It has been down in the depths of the heart that those communing with their own hearts have heard the voice of God, and they have understood and gone on in their ministry and pilgrimage.

(f) Meditation Requires Vigilance, Alertness, Sobriety and Discernment

We have seen that meditation is really working out the rationale of life and action by reference to the guidance of God’s word, law, precepts and testimonies. We have seen that to listen to God’s voice is to be directed in right action. Hence the cry of David, ‘Teach me wisdom in my secret heart!’ Hence the cry of the Psalmist, ‘Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee.’ We have seen that meditation is filling up the data-bank with rich and useful information – that ahead one may take right action. Hence one must guard against what goes into such a bank, so to speak.

The servants of God are urged many times to be vigilant and sober, to be on the alert. On the one hand Satan goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. On the other he is subtle, disguising himself as an angel of light, deceiving and seducing. The person in God is open to sedation, wrong stimulation, and other similar hazards. He must ‘gird up the loins of his mind and be sober.’ Often when he sins, the sin he has committed was the result of the prior sin of lacking vigilance and alertness. Often he has been beguiled into false security, unbased confidence. Hence when he meditates under conditions of deception he mistakes the voice he hears for the true voice which can be heard only in the heart when a man is in communion with God. This conviction that it is God’s voice means his meditation has been false, and because of that, so much the more it is dangerous.

7. Conclusion: The Fruits of True Meditation

It is clear that when meditation is the result of union and communion with God, and being wholly filled by the Spirit of God, and led by him, that meditation

leads to the knowledge of the will of God (cf. Romans 12:1–2, Ephes. 5:17). This meditation, reflection, and consequent action is what increases wisdom. Meditation is above all the accumulation of (practical) wisdom.

Why do we come to that conclusion? Because wisdom is the authentic knowledge of things as they really are, and of things which are false when they pose as things as they really are. It is wisdom to be able to use such knowledge to live life with integrity, that is to be the true image of God in His creation, no matter how defiled it may be at the present time. The wise man has rejected the self-saving and self-extending wisdom of this present (evil) age. He has no idolatry. He sees the will of God is the way of true action. Hence he meditates on all things that he may choose the right thing.

If we refer to the evil in the unregenerate human heart, then we have also learned that it is not the material of the heart, but its orientation or programming which determines whether it is right or wrong. Thus the inward man, the secret heart, the new heart, the spirit of the mind, are terms for the true repository of wisdom. As the wicked man is restless, casting up mire and dirt, so the wise man is restful. His sea is like one of glass. He meditates, day and night upon God, His works, and His Law. He knows, then, the way of righteousness which is the way of wisdom.

He is the true thinking man, for he thinks truly. His discernment sieves off the wrong, the suggestive, the evil, the deceptive and the seductive. He allows only that to enter which is consonant with true meditation. Hence he meditates not on the unknown, but the known, not on the secret but the revealed (Deut. 29: 29). At the same time, he meditates on the deep things of God and not the deep things of Satan (cf. I Cor. 2:10–12, Rev. 2:24).

He also meditates on the unseen. He is no esoteric searcher, no Platonist or Neoplatonist. He is not opposed to the 'seen' as though beg material it were evil. It is simply that he is not deceived by the seen things as they are interpreted by the materialist, the scientific positivist, or the scientific reductionist. He knows that the truth is perceived by faith, and not by mere sight. It is that understanding of the unseen that gives him true knowledge of the seen. He knows God's entire creation has much that can be seen, much that cannot be seen. But the meditator of God endures by faith, as seeing Him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:27). Such a one knows that the present heavens and earth will be purged and the new will appear. By faith he sees them as though they now were.

Thus the most practical man is the Godly meditator. He keeps praying that the words of his mouth and the meditations of his heart will always be acceptable to God, because he then may live in the good and value of them.

We can do no better then to conclude our study by spelling out again the famous injunction of Paul:

'Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.'

Philippians 4:8–9

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