

MARCH 1

Remember that the journey, the spiritual journey, is a journey into the depths of God, into the depths of the divine mystery itself. It is a journey that requires of us only simple faith - the faith to return day after day with childlike attention to our meditation, not demanding anything, not asking for anything, but simply being in the presence. In those times we seek to be still, to be silent, so that we may leave the periphery and return to the centre.

Let me describe to you now the way of meditation itself. In saying the word you enter a great tradition, a tradition of men and women who have meditated over the centuries and who, in meditating, have sought to transcend their own limitations and to enter into the wonder of God, to enter into the heart of the divine energy and to do so by entering their own heart. When we meditate we are still, body and soul, body and spirit, entirely open to the presence of God, knowing that presence to be pure love, pure gentleness, pure forgiveness. In that presence we become who we are: creatures created by God, creatures redeemed by the love of Jesus, creatures who are temples of the Holy Spirit and in that experience we are made utterly free, free to be ourselves, free to love ourselves, our neighbour and God.

Meditation is a leaving behind of all slavery, of all limitations. It is an entry into the freedom of God, into the freedom of the life of the Trinity. All that we need do is open our hearts to that reality and the way is the way of the mantra.

In The Beginning

MARCH 2

There are two particularly important truths to get hold of when you are starting. First, that you must say the word from the beginning to the end - and this is essential to understand. In our tradition there is the basic teaching that you must say the word from the beginning to the end of the meditation period. What often happens is that after saying the word for a bit, you begin to feel very peaceful, perhaps very free. The burden of all your ideas and thoughts has been lifted and then you think, 'This freedom, this peace is rather pleasant, I'll just rest in it. I'll let go of the word, I won't say the word. I'll just enjoy the peace.' That is the high road to disaster. And you will waste a lot of time unnecessarily if you do not learn, at the outset, to say your word from the beginning to the end. Secondly, you must learn to meditate every morning and every evening. Again, make no mistake about that, that is the minimum.

When we look at the New Testament, at least when we look at it with eyes enlightened by the spirit of Christ burning in our hearts, we cannot but become intoxicated, amazed at the sheer wonder of the destiny that is given to each of us. But, we must always remember that the condition of being open to this, and of responding to our destiny, is always simplicity, poverty of spirit. It means we are invited by the same destiny to leave behind all complexity, all desire to possess God or to possess spiritual knowledge and to tread the narrow way of dispossession. We require faithfulness. We learn to be faithful by being simply faithful to the daily times of meditation and, during the meditation, to the saying of the mantra.

The Heart of Creation

MARCH 3

My recommendation for your daily medication is to start with a minimum time of twenty minutes. Try as soon as you can to put it to twenty-five; the ideal time is about half an hour. And take the same time, whether it is twenty, twenty-five or thirty minutes - the same time-slot – every day. A practical instruction to remember is that the best time to meditate is before a meal. So, if you can, in the early morning before breakfast, and, if you can, in the early evening before supper or dinner.

God is with His people. God dwells in our midst. And that is why we meditate. To be open to His presence. The presence is eternal. Our awakening to it is daily. We awaken to the great Revelation that transforms human consciousness and existence:

I heard a loud voice proclaiming, now at last, God has His dwelling among the human race. He will dwell among them and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them.¹

Repeat the mantra silently in your heart and keep it going. You will soon find a steady rhythm by which to say it, either with your breathing your heartbeat. Do not bother too much about the technicalities when you begin. Say it, recite it, sound it in your heart silently and the mantra will lead you to silence, to discipline, to concentration. If you are faithful to it, it will lead you eventually to the bedrock of your own being. Beyond the roles that you play, behind all the masks by which we hide behind all the images which we have of ourselves, we will find the person God creates and loves in eternity.

To learn to meditate, you have to understand that it involves a daily commitment. There are no short cuts. There is no instant mysticism. Meditating is like breathing and eating. It is part of the fabric of daily life. And as breathing and eating strengthen the body, so meditating strengthens the spirit, purifies it and makes it strong.

The Way of Unknowing

¹ Rev. 21:3

MARCH 4

The most important thing to remember is that there is only the prayer of Jesus. This *is the* prayer. His prayer is the torrent of love and power flowing continuously between Jesus and the Father, and that is the Spirit.

This is the first thing for us to try to understand about Christian prayer and of course we cannot understand it. The extraordinary mystery about Christianity is that although we can never understand it we can experience this river of love that pours itself out in the Spirit, and as the Spirit, between Jesus and the Father. We can experience it through the human consciousness of Jesus. This ability to share His consciousness is the Spirit's great gift to us. Indeed it is the meaning of redemption.

Our salvation is precisely that in His human consciousness we are delivered out of our own egotism and isolation. The crucifying sense of our separateness and alienation is penetrated and dispelled by the rising within us of the knowledge of our oneness: one with ourselves, with others, one with the One who *is*. Delivered from our egotistical sense of separateness we enter the mystery of God as we travel in that stream of love.

Word Made Flesh

MARCH 5

There are different levels of distraction. There is the distraction that comes just from the immediacy of our lives: the last TV programme we were watching, advertising, newspapers, the conversation we were just having. We must let all that go as we listen to the mantra. Then there are the personal distractions: the problems of our relationships and our family, our friends, our career, the loneliness we may feel. All those, too, we must let go as, we come into the presence, the presence of the One who is, who is love. Then there are the spiritual distractions: wondering about our spiritual progress, comparing our experience over against someone else's, analysing the state we are in or whatever. All those distractions we must let go and we let go of them by being really faithful to our mantra. If you find you are thinking about the TV programme or some problem in your family or about your spiritual progress, drop it immediately and return to the mantra ma-ra-na-tha.

The greatest of all distractions is self-consciousness and this arises because of the tendency we all have to look at ourselves, and in meditation we look beyond ourselves to God. The mantra expands our vision beyond ourselves. All those first types of distraction were external. Self-consciousness is internal. The power of meditation is that it tackles the source of all distraction at the root, and the root is self-consciousness. In meditating we learn to stop thinking about ourselves, to go on a journey, looking ahead and staying on the journey and the guarantee of staying on the journey is that we say our mantra, keep saying our mantra and constantly return to it.

The Door to Silence

MARCH 6

Meditation, as we know from John Cassian, from the whole of the tradition, is the way of poverty. We have to leave our 'prayers' behind and enter into *the* prayer, the prayer of Christ. Our way is the way of the one little word, our mantra. All other words, ideas, thoughts, we surrender, we leave behind. Our whole being must enter into this process of emptying: emptying out all distractions, all desire so that we may live and live fully in the mystery of Christ's redemptive love. When we consider the scheme of our redemption, the plan of our redemption, we can easily be totally intoxicated by the scale on which God has achieved our redemption and our potential for development in the power of Christ.

What each of us must find, from our own experience, is that the full vision can only come when our heart is set on God. The vision - make no mistake about it; every one of us is summoned to it - the vision is the blinding light of God's almighty love. We must learn silence, attention, humility, concentration and the vision is to be found in your heart and in my heart. It is not too hard for us, it is not too difficult for us, if only we can bring to the task our daily fidelity.

This is the problem with us Christians of the latter-day world. It seems so much that we would give a half-hour every morning and every evening. It seems so much. But it is nothing compared to the summons, to the vision, and to the love of the One who calls us. If the world is going to be renewed it must be renewed in sanity. If the Church is going to be renewed it must be renewed in sanctity, based on sanity. Every one of us in this room is summoned to this basic sanity and to the fullness of sanctity. Never let anyone lead you away

Fully Alive

MARCH 7

Meditation is a universal means to lead us to reality. The reality that we are, the reality that our neighbour is, the reality that history is and the ultimate reality, the reality that is God. Meditation is the means open to everyone who would encounter the Spirit in their own heart. And so I want to encourage each one of you to persevere in meditation. Courage is what we need, the courage above all to abandon all images, especially the images that we have of ourselves, which are the principal stumbling block. The way to abandon all those images is to say our word with deepening fidelity.

To enter into our own selfhood is to enter into God. This is the call given to each one of us, to know ourselves in God. It is an astonishing destiny and it has been given to us in Jesus to know that destiny. Our life's task is to respond to it, in utter seriousness and with total joy. So listen to the word of the tradition. Hold fast to it and reap the harvest of eternal love. That is the good news of the Gospel. Listen to St Luke again:

The seed in good soil represents those who bring a good and honest heart to the hearing of the Word, hold it fast, and by their perseverance yield a harvest.¹

The Way of Unknowing

¹ Luke 8:15

MARCH 8

In meditation, by learning to say your mantra, you learn to trust, you learn to be. Indeed the joy of meditation is that it is a celebration of being, a celebration of sheer joy in receiving your life as gift, and doing what Blake called kissing ‘the joy as it flies’. Prayer is not possessing, not controlling but sheer celebration of being. We come to this celebration because meditation leads us to centredness, to the still point. In each person there is a still point that is me but is not *exclusively* me. What you will learn from your own experience in meditation is that there is only one centre, which is the centre in all centres. This is the understanding we come to in meditation, again out of our own experience, of the profound unity of being, the unity that is in us and the unity in which we have our being.

The commitment in meditation is to be detached from self-conscious preoccupation, through fidelity to the mantra during the meditation itself, and to the twice-daily practice of this *discipline* of detachment. The times of meditation, then, become progressively more simple, more joyous, more centred. And our lives, which are deeply changed through meditation, reveal from our own experience what it means to say ‘God is love’. The centre of all centres is the God who is love.

The Heart of Creation

MARCH 9

Meditation, as the way of a life centred faithfully and with discipline on prayer, is our way into this true experience of spirit, of *the* Spirit. As anyone who follows this way soon comes to know for himself, its demands upon us increases with each step we take along the pilgrimage. As our capacity to receive the revelation increases so too does the natural impulse we feel to make our response, our openness, more generous, more un- possessive. The strange and wonderful thing is that this demand is unlike any other demand made upon us. Most demands upon us seem to limit our freedom, but this demand is nothing less than an invitation to enter into full liberty of spirit - the liberty we enjoy when we are turned away from self. What seems the demand for absolute surrender is in fact the opportunity for the infinite realisation of our potential. But to understand this we cannot flinch from the fact that the demand is absolute and consequently so must be our response.

The Present Christ

MARCH 10

We must therefore go beyond all concepts of God. We must transcend the language and the insights of the mind because these limit God in our experience. We are called to know God not with our own totally inadequate knowledge but with God's own self-knowledge: the Spirit we receive from Jesus. However perfect or skilled our human mind may be, it is as nothing compared to the wholly ineffable mystery we can enter only by treading the path of simplicity.

It is the simplicity of God, of the divine oneness, that calls us to meditate. It is also our greatest stumbling-block. For how can we with all our complexities know absolute simplicity? The mantra is the way beyond this stumbling-block. It is a sign or symbol of the unity and simplicity of God. In all the classical literature of prayer, in St Teresa, St John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, for example, we find the common idea that the way to total union and continuous presence is the way of a simple and selfless discipline.

Selflessness is the way of the mantra. It leads us out of the labyrinth of self-consciousness. By its constant repetition it brings us gradually, and with much patience, to the silence where everything is resolved in the utter simplicity of God. In the divine oneness we become one with Him.

Word Made Flesh

MARCH 11

For those of us committed to the pilgrimage of meditation we must remember the utter ordinariness of meditation. It is the ordinariness of it, in the daily return to it every morning and every evening, in simplicity of spirit, sitting down to meditate not with demands, not with expectations not for extraordinary phenomena. We sit down to meditate because we know that that is what our spirit requires. It is this ordinariness that gives our meditation its potential for that radical expansion of spirit beyond ourselves into God. That is why the commitment to the simplicity of the practice is of such supreme importance and when we sit down to meditate we leave behind all our analysis, and we are content to *be*, in the presence. If we want to live, our lives, to the full, then each of us must find our way into this perfect equilibrium, of the human and the divine.

Our own humanity must be brought into this harmonious oneness with God, and the inspiring thing about the Christian vision is that this perfect coherence is to be found in the person of Jesus. The mystery of the vision is that this experience of oneness, of wholeness, of harmony is to be found deep within each one of us, to be found within us in the Spirit of God who dwells in our hearts, Our meditation is the outward expression of our inward commitment to the presence of that Spirit of God, dwelling in our hearts.

The Door to Silence

MARCH 12

Saying the mantra is learning to die and learning to accept the eternal gift of our being - both in the one act. It is learning that all death is a death to limitation and that if we can die to self we rise to an infinite liberty of love: because love is the creative energy of the universe and also the creative centre of our own being. To find that centre we must go beyond our own self-centredness, we must die to everything that is passing away. As we make this journey and share it with others we enter into the truth that reality is not a final achievement but is a dynamic experience of the passing from self to the other. Only when we have lost our life can we find it.

The wonderful beauty of prayer is that the opening of our heart is as natural as the opening of a flower. Just as to let a flower open and bloom it is only necessary to let it be, so if we simply *are*, if we become and remain still and silent, our heart cannot but be open: the Spirit cannot but pour through into our whole being. It is this we have been created for.

Community of Love

MARCH 13

Let me stress for you again the importance of the daily fidelity to meditation, every morning and every evening, and of the fidelity to your word. A priest who was beginning meditation made this point: he said surely if you have a holy thought, a religious thought while you are meditating, surely you should follow it? I think the thing to understand is this, that in saying the mantra with growing and, indeed, perfect fidelity, we are not attending to any thought about God. We are attending to His_ real presence in our own hearts and in all creation and in attending to that presence any thought is a distraction. Our invitation is to become wholly absorbed in Him, to be one with Him. Listen again to the words of Jesus:

Set your mind on God's kingdom and His justice before everything else and all the rest will come to you as well. Do not be anxious about tomorrow. Tomorrow will look after itself.¹

Being On The Way

¹ Matt. 6:33-34

MARCH 14

Our Christian tradition proclaims that the faith each of us has received is that God is not absent but present to us fully in the Jesus whose life lives in our heart. Our prayer, as I have said, is best understood as our awareness of God in Jesus. And so our time of prayer must be a time committed to the fullest openness we are capable of - openness to this real presence and not to the dissipation of 'vain imaginings'.

All our images, and the phantasmagoria where thought and image are combined, derive from our own limited consciousness. All such images link us back to the central image of self, the great illusion we call the ego whose primary force is fear, the inversion of love, and which is the father of lies. It is an illusion because the true self has no image but is complete and undifferentiated consciousness. Our consciousness is limited, fractured, by the false image, the shadow of the ego, and it is set free and made whole by the light of Christ in whom there is no darkness, no separateness of being that can cast a shadow. Of Christ alone can we say that He is the image of God, the supreme Self, because of Him alone can we say that He is one with the Father.

Letters From the Heart

MARCH 15

We learn from the faithfulness of our daily meditation how to wait on God and to attend to God in the deepening patience of true presence and mindfulness. In a growing fidelity and clarity of consciousness I urge you to put aside all the irrelevant kinds of speculation: am I enjoying this, am I getting anything out of this, am I becoming wiser or holier?

We know that there is a pilgrimage to make. It is the journey away from self and into the mystery of God. It is an amazing grace that each of us can and does know this, or at least suspect it. To know it is really to know everything because then we have only to begin and to continue. To be on the pilgrimage is everything.

We must learn to become simple, one, whole. We must learn to become peace, so that we become ourselves. In meditation we learn to be and in learning this we learn with unshakable certainty that God is. When you meditate, sit upright, close your eyes and say your word, without speculation, without self-consciousness, without haste, simply like a child, until the end of the meditation.

Word Made Flesh

MARCH 16

This command comes to us from Christ Himself: that he who loves God must also love his neighbour.¹ Let us be quite clear what St John is saying, namely that we cannot love God *or* our neighbour. We love both or neither. And what love means is rejoicing in the otherness of the other because the depth of this awareness is the depth of our communion with the other. In this communion the discovery of our own true self and that of the other is the same discovery. So, in the people we live with we find not objects to be cast in our own superficial likeness but, much more, we find in them our true selves, for our true selves only appear, only become realised when we are wholly turned towards another.

In meditation we develop our capacity to turn our whole being towards the Other. We learn to let our neighbour be just as we learn to let God be. We learn not to manipulate our neighbour but rather to reverence him, to reverence his importance, the wonder of his being; in other words, we learn to love him. Because of this, prayer is the great school of community. In and through a common seriousness and perseverance in prayer we realize the true glory of Christian community.

Word Into Silence

¹ John 13:34-35

MARCH 17

Sit down and, in saying your mantra, loosen the chains, the bonds that bind you to unreality, to illusion and to fear. Understand that those bonds have no power over you, if only you are open to the experience of Jesus. His experience is that He is the beloved Son of God. What He has achieved for us is that we can be open to the self-same experience of knowing that we are sons and daughters of a loving, compassionate and understanding Father. In that experience we discover that our meaning is to be fully open to His love, wholly open to the nearness of His mysterious being which is wholly open to our own hearts, to our own centre. For in our centre He is to be found. Meditation, saying the mantra from beginning to end, saying the mantra every morning and every evening, is simply our pilgrimage to that centre where He is and where we are in Him.

Don't worry about how the time is passing. Do not be disappointed if you find that you follow your thoughts instead of saying your mantra. Return to it, return to it gently, return to it constantly. If you want to learn to meditate, if you want to set out on this road of transcendence and one-pointedness, it is essential that you learn the practice of meditating every day of your life, every morning and every evening. The optimum time is half an hour, the minimum time is about twenty minutes.

You will find that in the time of your meditation nothing happens. Say your word and be content to say your word. But in the perseverance along the way of meditation you will begin to understand the truth about one-pointedness, about centredness and from your own experience you will begin to understand what St Paul meant when he said, 'Remember that it is not you who sustain the root: the root sustains you.'¹

Moment of Christ

¹ Rom. 11:18

MARCH 18

Now think for a moment of your own experience of meditation. You know that you begin, you seem to make progress and then you fail. For most of us, all our experience of meditation is contained in starting and stopping, in getting somewhere and finding that we are nowhere, in elation and discouragement. What you have to learn from this experience is that you must simply say your mantra. It is perfectly natural for you to pose the question, ‘What good is this doing for me? What progress am I making?’, but it is also perfectly useless. Indeed, it is worse than perfectly useless, it is positively counterproductive.

I think that all of us have tried, all of us have wanted to pray and all of us have failed. But at some time we come to the conclusion that the wisdom we receive from the contemplative tradition of prayer is *the* wisdom that turns the failure into triumph. The silence and poverty we experience in our meditation become self-authenticating. We know that we cannot analyse God. We know that we cannot, with finite minds, understand the infinitude of God. But we also know, or at least we soon begin dimly to suspect that we can experience God’s love for us. Knowing that sets us on a road that somehow strikes us as authentic and it is this knowledge that keeps us going. It is this experiential knowledge that teaches us, too, that the images manufactured by the ego must all give way. None of them can be taken seriously. Every new strategy of the ego has to be laughed at and dismissed.

The Way of Unknowing

MARCH 19

The practicality of the message of Christian meditation is that by our fidelity to the pilgrimage and by our openness to the indwelling love we come to understand that the great work in life is to communicate this love, to help others to see by its light. If we ourselves understand this and see and judge everything by the light of this love, then we have learned to live our lives with supreme compassion. The way of meditation is at the same time the way of compassion, of simplicity and of joy.

Only one thing is necessary for us to follow this way and that is to tread the pilgrimage with utter seriousness, not half-heartedly but wholeheartedly and single-mindedly. The Christian mystery has always called us to this wholeness and perfect sincerity, where our poverty leads to the riches of the Kingdom and a life lived in active goodness of every kind. St Paul says:

We ask God that you may receive from Him all wisdom and spiritual understanding for full insight into His will, so that your manner of life may be worthy of the Lord and entirely pleasing to Him. We pray that you may bear fruit in active goodness of every kind, and grow in the knowledge of God. May He strengthen you, in His glorious might, with ample power to meet whatever comes with fortitude, patience and joy; and to give thanks to the Father who has made you fit to share the heritage of God's people in the realm of light.¹

To enter the realm of the enlightened is our call and we respond to it by entering into our own heart. By entering our own poverty we learn to live our entire lives out of the infinite riches of God.

The Heart of Creation

¹ Col. 1:9-12

MARCH 20

There is another important preliminary lesson in learning to meditate: the necessity for stillness. You must learn to be completely still during the meditation. That means, when you sit down choose a really alert posture, with your spine upright; place your arms and hands in a comfortable position, palms upright or facing down with thumb and forefinger joined. Then stay absolutely still. The temptation will come to scratch your nose or straighten your collar or tie or glasses. You will have all sorts of longings to stroke your beard, if you have one, or to rearrange your hair, if you have any.

If you are young enough and your bones are supple enough, you might try some kind of cross-legged position with the spine upright and the whole body peacefully together in a traditional posture, the perfect or lotus posture, for example. When you are beginning this, you may encounter a certain amount of physical discomfort, as well as the urge to scratch your nose. But you have to try to go through that as well as you can. If you are learning to sit in the lotus position, it would be wise to practise outside of meditation and then to sit in an ordinary alert cross-legged position to begin with and not undertake the lotus position during meditation until you have some proficiency in it. Alternatively, choose a chair with a straight back and a comfortable angle for arms and legs. Chair or floor is not of the greatest importance but the posture and stillness is of supreme importance. Posture is an outward sign of your inner commitment to the discipline of meditation.

The Way of Unknowing

MARCH 21

The saying of the mantra is an act of pure selflessness. Every time we say the mantra we renounce, we leave behind, our own thoughts, our own concerns, our own hopes, our own fears. In losing these properties or possessions of the self we lose the self. In saying the mantra we become, as the Zen phrase puts it, 'the eye that sees but that cannot see itself. A person meditating is a person looking straight ahead. One's vision becomes clarified because none of the distorting images of egoism can in any way refract the pure light of God which both enters and emerges from the eye of the heart.

Meditation is the way of love because its meaning and purpose is communion. But we simply cannot find adequate language to talk about meditation and that is why the Buddhist vocabulary, for example, or the sayings of Jesus, are so paradoxical to minds used to the half-truths of mundane experience. Nevertheless it is a true and necessary paradox that we must lose ourselves we must leave our self absolutely behind in order to find our self.

The word *communion* expresses as perfectly as any the experience of meditation: that we are in a common union. Jesus and ourselves united with the Father. The way of meditation is a way of knowing reality simply because it is only by this most complete and undifferentiated union with the Creator that we can live fully out of our own roots. To live fully is to be conscious of our origin and so live fully out of the power of God. For this awareness we need to be steadfast. We need that steel in the spine that will enable us to return day after day to meditation; not concerned so much with progress or enlightenment or success but with the faithful, humble return to our task.

In meditation as Christians our hearts are directed towards God's love. Each of us has to discover and then to remember, knowing it with absolute clarity and certainty, that we are infinitely lovable and infinitely loved. We must know it, not just as an intellectual proposition but with experiential knowledge, in our own hearts. It is the most important knowledge there is for any of us and that is why meditation is so important.

The Heart of Creation

MARCH 22

Through the experience of meditation we come to understand that each of us, meaning every living human being, is in a creative relationship with God through Christ. Meditation has such great importance because as each of us comes closer to Christ the whole fabric of human consciousness is knit more closely together. When we come to see this as individuals we also come to realise that the development of our own personal consciousness and the deepening of our own spiritual journey is not just a personal matter. It partakes of a responsibility for the whole human race.

Meditation teaches us something more: that the more deeply we enter into this mystery of unity the more truly human and humane we become. By deepening our commitment to our own human journey each of us is also deepening our commitment to the whole of humanity, in particular of course to that part of humanity that we encounter in our daily round.

This is to say our commitment is to the universal Christ. Even more, if that is possible, it is a commitment to the whole creation. This means a committed concern and compassion for the beauty of nature, and of the human spirit expressed in art, a respect for the environment, and all it encapsulates in terms of value and beauty. Every part of life is deepened as we enter the mystery of the universal Christ.

Word Made Flesh

MARCH 23

There is the generosity needed to put our whole life into harmony with the spirit in our heart - to see to it that we don't add to the distractions. All of us have distractions arising from our very life. We all have things we are concerned about, things we are worried about, things we are responsible for. So what we must do is put our whole life into harmony with this search, this pilgrimage, which is a pilgrimage to our own heart. It is a pilgrimage that leads us to a freshness of spirit, a clarity of heart and a vitality of spirit.

Meditation is not turning our back on our life or on our responsibilities. Quite the contrary, in meditation we seek to be open fully to the gift of the life that is given us. This is nothing less than the gift of eternal life, eternal life that we are invited to be open *to now*. We need to be responsible people, to be *responsive* people, responsive to the gift of eternal life. As Jesus tells us, eternal life is to know our heavenly Father. In meditation we turn aside from everything that is passing away in order to know what is eternal.

Moment of Christ

MARCH 24

What is meditation? In essence it is simply learning to say our word, our mantra, and the problem that most of us have to face is that the way is so simple that we cannot believe it, we cannot trust it. And so we are constantly running to books, to commentaries on books. We are constantly trying to learn about other people's experiences whereas the essence is the practice, the daily practice of learning to say our word, our mantra. Each morning and each evening... the art of meditation is learning to say your mantra from the beginning to the end without interruption. You have to learn, and it takes time and patience; you have to learn to let go of your ideas, to let go of the insights you have about yourself, or about God or about meditation. You have to learn what the ancient monastic fathers called 'the art of resting in the Lord'.

The mantra is simply our way to that simple, trust-filled silence, and as I say, we have to learn to say the mantra from the beginning to the end. When you begin you are bound to have questions, you are bound to ask yourself, 'Is this a complete waste of time? Are these monks talking complete nonsense, talking through their hoods?' All you can do is to continue to meditate and ultimately it is the practice itself that is authenticated. It is not what I say or what anyone says. The contact with your own spirit is what authenticates your meditation.

The Door to Silence

MARCH 25

We must set our minds on God's kingdom. There have been, in recent times two thinkers who have had a very important influence on our society. One of them is Simone Weil and the other Fritz Schumacker. Simone Weil thought that the most important quality we could acquire in our lifetime was what she described as selfless attention. Fritz Schumacker came to the same conclusion and he described the selfless attention that Simone Weil speaks of simply as 'attention', learning to attend. Both of them were influenced by the tradition from which we speak: the tradition of contemplative prayer, the tradition of meditation coming from the early monastic fathers.

This is the crucial lesson that we have to learn from meditation: to attend wholly and totally, to pay attention. We all know from reading the Sermon on the Mount that each of us must not only change but we must be transformed. We also know from reading St Paul that we can only be transformed in Christ, through Christ and with Christ. If you want to change something in your life you have two possibilities open to you. You can try to will that change, you can try to redirect your life by acts of the will. I think most of us discover from our own experience that our wills are appalling weak and shockingly inconstant. There is another way: the other way is the way of total openness of the whole person. It is not the way of intention but the way of attention.

Being On The Way

MARCH 26

When you start to meditate you hope that it is going to be a great help in your life. I suppose most of us then keep going because, in ways we perhaps did not imagine, it proves to be practical; it helps us. When we start to meditate, however, we should also be clear about the challenge that meditation will pose for us as we continue. At a certain point I think we are all tempted to give up. We are unsettled by the absolute nature of what appears, both of the mystery of God itself, and even by the absolute nature of the path of meditation.

In the encounter with the absolute we are tempted to hold back. We like to hang on to our familiar illusions. All of us, too, like to keep our options open. The best way to understand this inner contradiction is by reference to the ego. The ego is the father of lies, a prince of illusions. It is the ego who casts all the characters in our consciousness in their various roles. And the directing power of the ego remains unbroken as long as we are enchained to what is passing away by desire or regret which are both forms of possessiveness, forms of *being possessed*.

The Way of Unknowing

MARCH 27

The children who come to our monastery to meditate are a marvelous witness of the naturalness of this way of meditation. They are a real example for the adults who come. They show the essentially childlike quality that we need to tread the way. ‘Unless you become like little children you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’¹ It is a simple way. Its simplicity is its great challenge to us because we are trained to seek the truth, for accuracy, only in complexity. It is a simple but not necessarily easy way. It requires trust and perhaps indeed a certain recklessness to begin and it requires courage to persevere but all we have to lose are our own limitations.

Community of Love

¹ Mark 10:15

MARCH 28

The call to meditate is an invitation to stop leading our lives on the basis of second-hand evidence. It is a call to each one of us to come to grips with our spiritual capacity and so to discover for ourselves the astonishing richness of the human capacity that is anchored in the divine reality, in the divine life-power. And it is also an invitation to be simply open to that power, to be energised by it and to be swept along by it, into the depths of the divine reality itself.

The lived process is very important. We must always beware of being intoxicated merely by the message, merely by the good news, merely by the ideas of the gospel. We must enter in, taste and see. And meditation is the process of entering in, of tasting, of seeing. Saying your mantra every day, making the time available for meditation, morning and evening, and placing your spiritual journey and the spiritual reality at the centre of your life, *that* is what is important.

That is what meditation is about - returning to your centre and finding that your centre is the gateway to the centre of All. And for that we have to stop living on the surface, we have to come to the depths.

The Heart of Creation

\$ MARCH 29

If we are to realize the full potential of the gift of life we need to see that our destiny is the same as Christ's. Our destiny is to be wholly at the service of God, to worship Him in the depth of our being, to worship Him in spirit and truth. Through such worship it is also our destiny to receive His love fully. The humble, ordinary task of saying the mantra, and saying it faithfully, is simply our way of entering this worship, of putting ourselves wholly at the disposition of God. Scripture returns again and again to the simplicity and clarity of the state of commitment and how far removed this state is from the mind-made substitutes of thought and language. It is when we learn to be simple that we enter into the absolute, the absolute commitment to the absolute love of God. To be simple is to be like Christ, an unambiguous *yes* to God.

Meditation is our total openness to the Spirit, so that in the whole of our life we say *yes* to God, say it with commitment, with generosity, absolutely.

In God we are and we know ourselves to be lovable and loved. This is the supreme reality that Jesus came to reveal, to communicate, to live and to establish. It is established in our hearts if only we will be open to it.. This openness is what our meditation is about. It is only from this love and with this love that we can rightly understand ourselves and all creation. Without rootedness in love all we can see will be shadows and phantoms and we will never be able to make contact with them because they have no reality. Meditation is the invitation to journey deeply into your own heart, into your own being. What the traditional wisdom tells us is that only with such depth of experience and vision can we live our lives in real harmony with what is. This is what meditation leads us to: the understanding from our own experience simply that God *is*.

The Way of Unknowing

MARCH 30

Meditation in this sense is a total ascesis. And ascesis is the antidote for arrogance. It is a path to ground you more and more in the strength, the 'virtue', of Christ. You thus become aware that strength comes from beyond yourself, is greater than you and contains you. Yet it is your strength. This is the mystery of the experience of prayer, that the power released in your heart is your power because it is the power of God. Learning to say the mantra is learning to receive everything from God but to receive it fully, not passively or half-heartedly. We respond in meditation with our whole being to the gift of our whole creation. Prayer realises this inherent potential for expanding in spirit, in union.

As always, we return to the mantra because to see the vision we must become still. To come into contact with God's Spirit in your heart you must come into contact with your own spirit in the simplicity of utter stillness. That is why we must go beyond all analysis, all division and observation and move into unity. And then we move from unity to union.

Word Made Flesh

MARCH 31

Walter Hilton is a very good witness that there is no antipathy as it were between contemplative prayer, vocal prayer and liturgical prayer. He does trace a kind of progressive development through these forms but not in the sense that we ever get to a stage in our life when we have gone beyond liturgical prayer or vocal prayer. The development he really sees is a growth in the delight with which one enters into whatever form is appropriate at any time. And all these forms of prayer are, of course, complementary, provided that we know them as they really are: as entrances into the eternal prayer of Jesus which is His loving return to the Father. At all times in our lives all the various streams of prayer are coming together and binding us ever more closely to the Lord Jesus in the universal ocean of His prayer.

Christian Meditation: The Gethsemani Talks