

## Week 5 – Types of Meditation

So far we have been practicing only **Mindfulness** meditation. This can be thought of as a baseline or fundamental meditation practice, but there are other types of meditation. This week we are going to explore some of these.

### **Sensory Meditation**

Sensory meditation involved concentration on the senses, or more specifically on one sense. This can be touch (for example counting beads in a rosary is a form of focused meditation). Other examples can involve the use of incense or perfume, or natural odours. Also colour can be used as well. Smell is very powerfully connected with memory, and is particularly useful in processing issues in your past.

### **Movement meditation**

In almost all traditions, there is movement meditation. Buddhist monks and nuns practice walking meditation when there are careful to have no negative impact on sentient beings. Christians go on pilgrimage, and if not possible, use a Labyrinth to perform a virtual pilgrimage practice. St John's Cathedral has a regular group that walks a labyrinth.



<https://anglicanfocus.org.au/2019/08/22/labyrinths-ancient-practice-anglican-renaissance/>

### **Visualisation Meditation**

Visualisation is something that most of us are familiar with. We visualise something happening in our mind. If we concentrate we have make it a very vivid mental visualisation, even though

we know if it now physically present. I sport we visualise ourselves winning a race, doing a jump. Visualisation can be used to create positive feelings and motivations.

When we do visualisation in meditation we take this to another level. We develop an mental image of an object or a situation.

One of the most common meditation practices in Buddhism is a Metta (in Sanskrit it means “Loving compassion”) meditation. In this meditation we develop positive feelings of compassion and then we visualise this positive energy being directed to people and beings around us. This is in the form of white light, radiating from us.

### **Analytical Meditation**

Analytical Meditation is a method of philosophical and psychological enquiry that uses meditation as it’s tool. For example you can use Analytical Meditation to explore the destructive effects of Anger. Using this as an example, you might want to consider situations where Anger leads to negative situations like violence. You might reflect on a situation where you were angry – how did that anger play out? You might even like to consider how you may have contributed to the situation that made you angry, how your view of the other people in the situation became polarised, then reflect that no person is in fact 100% good or bad. So we see how anger distorts our perceptions. The goal here is to develop deep understanding and become more skilful in how we deal with emotions and situations.

### **Chanting of Mantras or formulaic Prayers**

Many of the oldest schools of meditation use Mantras - for example in Hinduism and Buddhism it is very common.

In Christianity the development of the Jesus Prayer started only a few hundred years into the common era, and is a bedrock of orthodox spiritual practice since the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The Jesus prayer says “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” In the Catholic traditions the Rosary might be considered an equivalent.

In modern Christian meditation movements, which have adopted Hindu meditation techniques, the use of the phrase ‘maranatha’ is recommended. This term means ‘our Lord I Coming’ in the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic, and was used by early Christians in the time of Roman persecution.

In Hindu and Buddhism, a phrase is used. These phrases have a conceptual, textual and auditory/physical characteristics. For example in Buddhism we have the phrase: Om, Mani Padme Hung. In Tibetan the letters are:



As HHDL explains, the that Om, has three sounds A, U, and M, representing mind, body and speech. These combined produce two levels: an impure level created by speech, body and impure mind, and a pure level, based on pure mind, positive thoughts and a 'pleasant body'. To transform from this impure to pure level, we MANI, meaning jewel (representing altruism) and PADME (meaning wisdom). HUNG represents combination, so MANI PADME HUNG means bringing altruism and wisdom together. So you can see, it is visual, auditory (sound) and metaphysical (meaning) - as you chant this, you are instructed to experience the sound in your ears, the vibration of the sound in your body, visualise the characters, and also then visualise the concepts described above, all while remaining in a meditative state. Buddhists believe when you do this, it is highly transformative.

If you want to use a Christian mantra like 'mananatha', its important that you approach this practice is a similar way. If we consider this phrase to be מְרַנָּא תָא (maranâ thâ) then it is a command to our Lord to come. If we consider that breaking it into the words מְרַן אֲתָא (maran 'athâ), a possessive "Our Lord" and a perfect verb "has come," are actually more warranted, then it would be seen as an expression of faith – a small creed. This sort of purposeful ambiguity is common in the Semitic languages, as is exploitation of similarity of character and sound to imply deeper textual meaning. So if you were to choose to use this as a Mantra, then you can incorporate reflection on this possible eschatological dualism – that Christ has come and Christ will come.

The Jesus Prayer mentioned before has a similar complex practice that has developed over 1400 years. A detailed analysis is beyond the time we have today, but it includes:

- Praying ceaselessly, as instructed by St Paul, as the path to a closer relation with God (1 Thess 5:17)
- Understanding the power of Names and Jesus's invitation to ask in his name (Jn 16:23)
- Prayer as a hidden Martyrdom or inner asceticism (St Ignatius Brianchaninov)
- Prayer of the heart - St Theophan (the Recluse) tells us to keep our "mind in the heart"
- An intercessory prayer

A final point – In this sections on Mantra and formulaic prayers, we have been comparing different traditions and different religions (some theistic, some not). While we can learn techniques from across the spectrum, I don't want to give the impression that there is an equivalence between them. For example the Jesus Prayer is not a yogic exercise, even if it has some similar points. We need to be careful of excessive syncretism – the homogenisation of different faith systems. It is on this point that I am (just a little) critical of movements such as the WCCM, but encourage you to explore for yourself, in whatever tradition makes sense for you.

### **Spiritual Meditation or Contemplative Prayer**

The goal here is connection – with the universal. Your understanding of that universal will determine if you prefer to think of this as 'Spiritual Meditation' or 'Contemplative Prayer'. It is about sitting in the silence and listening. Think of it as a development of our basic mindfulness practice we have started in this course.

Over the coming weeks we are going to explore this type of practice in more detail, so I will not go into too much detail about the practice today. So this is just a little introduction. In particular I'm going to introduce some of the Carmelite contemplative practices developed by St Teresa of Avila (1515 –1582) and St John of the Cross (1542 – 1591).

In The Ascent of Mount Carmel, St. John of the Cross writes:

The purpose of meditation and of mental discourse on divine things is to derive from them a little loving knowledge of God. (Ascent II, XIV, 2)

And St Teresa of Avila said repeatedly “Prayer does not consist in thinking much, but in loving much,” insisting on the subordination of thought to love.

For both of these Doctors of the church, the goal is union of the soul with God in Love, and this was done primarily, not by intercession, but by listening. It is only through experiencing God’s love for us, can we understand our own potential for love.

A warning, however. This is not a easy path. Both St Teresa and St John talk about the spiritual desolation that one must pass through before this state of ecstasy and union can be experienced. So do expect to sit down, start and arrive. The great contribution of both of these spiritual guides was the detailed systemisation of the path.

An anonymous 13<sup>th</sup> century English writer put the challenge well.

The first time you practise contemplation, you’ll only experience a darkness, like a cloud of unknowing. You won’t know what it is. You’ll only know that in your will you feel a simple reaching out to God. You must also know that this darkness and this cloud will always be between you and God, whatever you do. They will always keep you from seeing him clearly by the light of understanding in your intellect and will block you from feeling him fully in the sweetness of love in your emotions. So, be sure to make your home in this darkness. Stay there as long as you can, crying out to him over and over again because you love him. It’s the closest you can get to God here on earth, by waiting in this darkness and in this cloud. Work at this diligently, as I’ve asked you to, and I know God’s mercy will lead you there.  
—The Cloud of Unknowing, Chapter 3

So the first point in starting with this type of contemplative prayer is an acceptance of a long journey with lots of personal struggle. Beyond the hyper-active mind we have all experienced in meditation, this practice requires a willingness to struggle with our own inner cloud of unknowing.

## Exercise

We are going to do a small exercise in discernment. We are going to spend 10 minutes in silent contemplative meditation. In this time we will look for individual signs of what our personal meditation path might be. We will start with some basic mindfulness practice for a minute. Then we will visualise a path with many other paths leading off it, each representing one of the meditation practices that we have heard about. Then we will become as silent and as attentive as possible. Watch what arises naturally. Don’t chase it. Just observe.