



Biblical Meditation vs. Eastern Meditation

by Rev. Dr. Peter Toon

Thirdly, though the one word “meditation” is used, the actual spiritual discipline which is called meditation is not identical in all religions. There is, however, a distinct similarity in meditation in Hinduism and Buddhism on the one hand, and in Judaism and Christianity on the other. The simplest way to highlight the difference is to say that for the one meditation is an inner journey to find the centre of one’s being, while for the other it is the concentration of the mind/heart upon an external Revelation. For the one revelation/insight/illumination occurs when the inmost self (which is also the ultimate Self, the one final Reality) is reached by the journey into the soul, while for the other it comes as a result of the encounter with God in and through his objective Revelation to which Holy Scripture witnesses.

In both Judaism and Christianity meditation is always paying attention to, and responding in mind, heart and will, to the God who has made and makes himself known. For the Jew it is pre-eminently his revelation in the Law; for the Christian it is pre-eminently his revelation in Jesus, the Word Incarnate. In this sense meditation is upon that which is external to oneself – even though the believer is to receive the word of God into heart/mind and cherish it. For Christians, the Word made flesh upon which meditation is centered (through the witness to him of the New Testament) is at the right hand of the Father in heaven; yet, and here is the key to Christian talk of the interior life, Jesus is present in the soul in and through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Meditation is, then, for Jews and Christians thinking about, reflecting upon, considering, taking to heart, reading slowly and carefully, prayerfully taking in, and humbly receiving into mind, heart and will that which God has revealed. For the Christian meditating Christianly is being guided and inspired by the indwelling Spirit of Christ in the consideration of God's revelation.

Of course in Hinduism and Buddhism there is both the reading and study of holy books – though this is normally only for the minority. However, meditation refers to the use of specific techniques to cause the mind/heart to look and journey inwards to find the key to existence deep within one’s own self, for there is no “God” to be discovered elsewhere. The methods taught and used have been developed over the centuries in the context of certain religious beliefs and to achieve certain spiritual ends.

Rev. Dr. Peter Toon, *Meditating as a Christian* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), p.18-19