

HELPING US TO MEDITATE

a few things we find helpful at Retreat House Chester



Be still and know that I am God Psalm 46v10

*Remove the sandals from your feet
for the place on which you stand
is holy ground* Exodus 3v5



These two short pieces from Christian scripture are the only words in the simple decoration of our Back Room in Abbey Square. They remind us of the value of slowing down, pausing, not rushing or moving on, of being still... here... now... They remind us that this stillness and simplicity is a way of encountering God. Christian meditation is a way of putting ourselves before God, of sitting in the presence of God – removing the sandals from our feet – to meet the God who longs for us and seeks us. And to spend time there. Then these times spent in stillness spill over, even if just a little or gradually, into helping us notice God's presence at all times and bringing transformation.

If you find it hard to pray, don't give up. Be still; make space for God to come in; let Him look at you, and He will fill you with His peace. Pope Francis

A note: When talking about Christian prayer, the words 'meditation' and 'contemplation' are often interchangeable. It can be helpful to think of meditation as an action of the mind, and contemplation as an action of the heart – and in this way of prayer we bring ourselves body, mind and heart into the presence of God.

At Retreat House Chester we often ground our retreat time in silence and simplicity. There need be nothing more complicated than the decision to take the time for this. For meditation (or contemplation), though, Laurence Freeman (Director of the World Community for Christian Meditation) outlines the following 'ingredients' to help with a definition:

- meditation involves a method
- meditation relaxes the body
- meditation relaxes the logical mind
- meditation comes from us rather than through an external stimulus
- meditation needs a focal point of attention

In some ways of Christian meditation, this focal point of attention might be scripture, or an image, or something physical like a candle or a natural object – as ways to an encounter with the Divine. As well as nourishing us, it helps us to focus our attention away from all the many distractions that come to mind. So many ways of Christian prayer are an expression of this loving attentiveness. Many people today find an overlap here between prayer and mindfulness.

Just one way

Twice a month on our usual programme Retreat House Chester offers meditation sessions drawing on the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM). The focal point of attention they suggest is the repetition of a prayer word or mantra, to help us manage our distractions and grow in loving attentiveness. One of our regular meditators has written in to say: *Laurence Freeman likens saying our mantra to an orchestra tuning up. As the oboe gives out a clear note all the instruments move from the previous cacophony to a clear single sound - so it is with the mantra.*

If you would like to explore the resources of WCCM, which outline their practice of Christian meditation, its roots in tradition, its characteristics and its fruits, a good starting point is its UK website <https://www.christianmeditation.org.uk/index.php>. You might like to take time to browse the many talks on their soundcloud link (go to the top right corner of the menu bar for WCCM links): for our sessions at Retreat House Chester we especially like the talks by Laurence Freeman. There are many many resources and you'll need time to explore them. For an introductory video see their 10-minute film 'What is Meditation?' on the first page of their YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NK1jQM-Gwk#action=share>

*Many things, good or bad, nourishing or destructive, true or false can bring us closer together. The global health emergency is doing it by reminding us, as the environmental emergency should, of the reality that **we are a single family**; we share a beautiful home; our differences are really interesting not threatening; and we need to learn how to share better and to live in a more joyful way. This crisis can bring us together for the sake of goodness, for new depth of wisdom and kindness. It is not all about fear. The current health crisis is shaking modern lifestyle to its foundations, dramatically and rapidly... Social distancing can bring us closer together spiritually. We only need to go deeper. To go deeper we need only to be still. Meditation does both.*

Fr Laurence Freeman - March 2020

Through Spring 2020, if you would like to join in quiet prayer with others while apart, through Retreat House Chester, we suggest the times our meditation sessions would usually run: Tuesday afternoons any time 2-4pm and Wednesday evenings any time 7-9pm. Just take this time and know that others might be doing the same. Thank you.