Session Six Reading

The Fruits of Meditation

St Paul says that the fruits of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control.

We could think of the physical and psychological *benefits* of meditation in terms of what we are getting out of meditation. These are signs of grace working on nature and welcome gifts. But the *fruits* of meditation are less easy to measure and can best be understood in terms of becoming less self-centred and more loving. We often think too much about what we going to get and not enough about what we are going to lose.

This is not about literally selling all we have and taking to the road or doing anything extreme with our lives. Our lives change naturally, as the fruits appear, because of the radical simplicity of meditation becoming part of our life. Nevertheless we have to accept the changes as they appear.

There is joy and peace in thinking of others. For example, we go to the kind of movies that entertain us. But if we have young children we choose to go to movies they will enjoy. We find pleasure and satisfaction in the happiness of the child.

So the fruits of meditation (the fruits of the Spirit) cannot be seen as an egotistical kind of self-fulfilment. What we find is the fruits are for my good and the good of others intertwined. My love, peace, patience, kindness affects others because we are all connected. This insight is at the heart of the gospel and is deeply in harmony with the holistic understanding of spiritual growth.

In the New Testament we don’t find consumer spirituality. It is not ‘obey these rules and you will get everything you want’. What we find there and at the heart of all true spirituality is the commandment to love that is a revelation of truth.

Love is the self-giving act of the human person that fulfils us as individuals because it fulfils us as people in relationship with others. If you really want to understand the fruits of meditation then the best way you can do that is to understand it in terms of our relationships with others.

One of the universal insights of the Dalai Lama is that we all have a ‘good heart’ (the title of his John Main Seminar). Each religion has its own uniqueness but all religions share this insight profoundly in common: the idea of the essential goodness of the human heart. Every religion has as its goal the development of our innate goodness – our essential Godlikeness.

If meditation expresses itself in terms of compassion, kindness, forgiveness, gentleness, concern for others, the spirit of service – that is the good heart; and we recognize goodness of that kind in a human being regardless of their faith or lack of faith. We recognized it in Mother Theresa, we recognize it in the Dalai Lama and Pope Francis. We should also recognize it in ourselves.

The essential meaning of the human life is the development of this good heart. It is always directed in love and selflessness towards others and is particularly visible in compassion and forgiveness and small acts of kindness. John Main said the best way to prepare for meditation is with small acts of kindness.

We can look at all the fruits of meditation in this light. ‘Fruits’ is a good word to describe what happens when you meditate as the good heart that grows naturally in us is a result of regular meditation. It is like a seed planted in the ground, it germinates and starts to grow in stages. It eventually gets flowers then fruits, seeds and keeps the cycle going.

So the fruits of meditation are naturally part of the process of spiritual growth.

This is particularly important for Christians to remember. Many of us think of virtue or ‘being good’ in terms of our will. We think we have to overcome negative things by willpower and that being good has to be forced. Willpower by itself won’t bring about much spiritual enlightenment.

We need a certain amount of willpower, but willpower alone will not achieve liberty of spirit.

That is why it is important to trust the naturalness of growth in spiritual development. In the parables of Jesus, notice how many are about natural growth, seeds planted in the ground, vines that grow. The seeds of these fruits are already within us, as part of our essential nature. This is what we are actually like. We are essentially quite nice people. We are naturally good people.

To develop and realize those seeds of goodness – the good heart – is the purpose of meditation. It comes about in a combination between faith and grace. On the one hand there is our faith (e.g. the act of faith we make when we sit to meditate, when we say the mantra faithfully and humbly from beginning to end.) That’s the faith to make it part of our life.

And on the other hand there is grace. Grace is that mysterious presence of the energy of love, the energy of God in our lives which is never very far away, which we can forget or ignore but which is always there at work deep within us.

Between faith and grace this work reaches its full potential.

*Based On: Towards Fullness of Life, Fr Laurence Freeman, OSB, CD 2 : Track 5.*

*A similar talk can be downloaded from the website Talk 6.*