

# Contemplation as Alternative Consciousness

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## Session I

It is time now for a mature non-dualistic religion and we may ask ourselves why this has been re-discovered. The mystics saw more than the theologians, whose ego compulsion was to grab what can prove to be 'good', and the rest was forgotten. The other side was left open: the mysterious, the intuitive, the humble and these are not to be grasped by the ego. Written words have a wonderful function: they divide this from that, clarify and separate, but you come to a ceiling where words are no good. Words can't grasp love, death, suffering, God and Eternity. So atheism is a phenomenon of the west and America.

Jesus was the first non-dualistic spiritual teacher of the west; as Jesus says, the sun shines on both the good and the bad. He speaks of the wheat and weeds growing together until the harvest. It is only in the second half of life that those of us who are able, or the disabled, see that this is a non-dualistic view. We are poor in spirit because we are handicapped by our analytical ways of thought and education. We need to recover the non-dual and contemplative mind. Prayer has been misused. Prayer is a different consciousness and concerns the moment

*now.* Jesus said 'Don't babble on with announcements to God!' Prayer is thought often to be a matter for introverts or contemplatives! In the twentieth century it is Thomas Merton who initiated the rediscovery of the earlier contemplative mind. Merton said, 'You can't tolerate solitude if you have a dualistic mind. You need to think "nothing".'

Dualistic and non-dualistic thinking are both necessary in life, but there is a tendency to use our ego to shore up our boundaries. In deep love you are taken beyond the ego and outside all boundaries. The two sides do not contradict each other, they are both necessary. The Christian faith is nothing if not paradoxical: we believe in Jesus: God and Man, bread and Jesus' body, wine and blood, Mary, virgin and mother. Paradox took refuge in the desert fathers and mothers and their stories. This was a childlike subversion of the ego. The story about those who come at the eleventh hour and paid the same as those who work all day is totally non-dualistic.

The contemplative teaching in the work of Richard of St Victor in Paris in the twelfth century shows the older

contemplative way. This is essentially working with the pre-rational or the trans-rational and reveals a bigger landscape. The saints are happy because they do not judge, analyse, criticize; there are no 'I like/I don't like' preferences, which are a trap and create the sour look on Western faces! We have to go beyond. 'It is what it is'. We need to overlook and forgive offences, be engaged with the dark: the shadow makes life interesting. Jesus is so comfortable with disorder; he has no checklist, does no judging. We have to ask ourselves how we got from there to here. We should understand that God is *mystery*, dark, incomprehensible. This was explored in the monasteries of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The Reformation was almost entirely oppositional thinking. How can others not be loved by God? The Jesuits admit that Ignatius never taught contemplation, because by the middle of the sixteenth century they had got into dualistic thinking. In the work of Owen Barfield we see the study of how pre-rational peoples participated in the original participation. Ancient peoples were already connected with the divine through sex, music, chant and dancing. God was engaged with all our evolutionary stages. Is this absurd or is God involved in every single thing created in its 'isness'? The Incarnation happened 14.5 billion years ago! Nature is the fullest revelation of God. Barfield asserts that there is evidence that these ancient peoples were much more attuned than we are.

Jesus promised full and final participation and came in human form so that we could love him. There are many people who live in Christ outside the Church. Barfield says that the last 500

years have been the desert of non-participation. The Spirit is given—there before confirmation and it is the Holy Spirit who awakens us to non-dualism.

## Session 2

Rumi, who overlapped in time with St Francis, was a Sufi mystic, thinker and poet. His verse is affective and erotic. He says, 'Out beyond ideas of right and wrong, there's a field; I'll meet you there'. He is totally non-dual. In John 10.30 Jesus says, 'I and the Father are one'—it is all unitive thinking, and it's too good for us to believe! We are so practiced in the 'arrogant eye' that we don't see it.

The earth was created, then the waters, plants, trees, animals, humans, angels and saints up to the Divine. St Bonaventure wrote of the divine image in the whole chain of evolution. Christ is too much for us, too transformative. The Reformation debate was always about who's right? Always a win-lose situation. All the revolutions were dualistic, certainly not spiritual, since there was no bigger picture of faith in them. If you always transcend, you always include. There are 32,000 Christian groupings in the world! If we have been taught dualistically, it is hard to think in an inclusive way.

Is this why Buddhism is so attractive? We went to the 'what' of knowledge but we didn't do the 'how'—the process. Buddhism is all about process. We carry our shadow around and don't deal with it. We will all have pain and life is all about suffering. Are we *present* to Presence? It's a relationship term. There has been no transformation of consciousness and we are still mysteries to ourselves, however, when you are close to the light, the shadow shows more clearly. It is a daily

humiliation, but you must allow the transformation to happen, get the lesson, and you are a transformer for God. Our religion has secured people at low-level thinking, protecting the system, the tribal identity, my flag, my group. This is reflected in our period of history. We must allow God to be God, let the Trinity overflow in love. The message is a full-body experience, which cannot be grasped by the dualist mind which says 'no' and 'but'. The word-police are not the revolution. What do we need to do?

Develop practices whereby you know things for yourself, by inner experience.

Keep the heart-space open as a daily experience, so that you don't get hard and bitter. Make a simple, unitive connection which is true in higher seeing.

Learn to live inside our own bodies. This is the Achilles heel of the incarnated God. We have been taught that they are sexual, sinful, and bad. My body is my message board, so treat it positively, lovingly—be present to myself so as to give myself to others.

The name YHWH does not mean you have to add the vowels, but indicates that the name has to be *breathed*, received in your body. It is the first thing you do when you come out of your mother's womb—to breathe. This is known as *ruach, pneuma* after the Resurrection. The fears that assault you are *not real*. God is breathing in and through me. The last word we ever say will be, 'Yah-weh'. The Islamic name for God is 'Allah'. 'Al' = 'the'. The second 'l' indicates 'something special' and the 'h' is the out breath. This interpretation is grounded in God and believed in dialogue with Him.

American monks like the Cistercians and Benedictines have largely recovered

the unitive way. Centering prayer and classic contemplation are taught by Laurence Freeman, Thomas Keating and John Main, who are just discovering the recognition of our dualistic mind-sets. We have to ignore dualistic thinking and find the other way. There is a river of consciousness, let it go down the river, practice detachment, the stream goes on.

### Session 3

Kabir said, 'Hope for the guest while you are still alive'. This is the apostolic succession: a Christian is one who has met one. It is possible *now*. This is what happens when you see and practice non-dualism: 'God comes to you disguised as your life'. It's all here, now.

The older contemplative tradition has been brought back by Eckhart Tolle who wrote *The Power of Now*. What the mind worries about is the past and the future. What the mind can't do is stay in the present. Watch the story-lines! They give you a reason for your resentment. Give up the right to your grievance, your 'ticket' in the power game. Jesus says you come to God by doing it wrong.

Rohr has a book to be published next year called *Falling Upward*, in which he speaks of the two halves of life which each have a major task: the first half is 'building the container'; the second half is the question, 'what's the container meant to contain? What's it all about?' Previous projects have to fail, disappoint, otherwise you stay where you are, in the first half. Some never get to stage two. Then there is the second death and the birth of the true self. You have a different sense of identity, which can be called the 'Christ zone'. 'I live, but not I, Christ lives in me', says St Paul. Religion is there to grease

the wheels so you can keep going upwards. Spiritual directors will say it is a necessary darkness, in which one has to let the old game fall apart: out of the dualistic level I to where 'I and the Father are one'.

You move by faith, by being willing to not know, then God takes over and you aren't in control. You are being held. If God wants to lead you and guide you, you don't see where you're going, all is darkness. This is the sacred death. A large percentage of Western people aren't getting their 'sacred dance.' God can only transform you in periods of darkness. If God lets you in, you'd want to stop it, or take over yourself. If you can say, 'it is what it is', let it come to you, you don't need to win. The sacred dance is my truth. Learn to 'learn the rules' very well, so that you can disobey them properly! William Stafford in *The Way It Is* says it is a thread you follow. Don't let go of the thread, it leads you to a place of connection, where the in-dwelling Holy Spirit takes you on, like a spring welling up to everlasting life.

The Ten Commandments are a structure for the first half of life. You have to stumble over the stumbling stone (Gk: *skandalon*). Your first half has to crumble to bits, and then you can say God is in this, teaching me, though it doesn't feel like that. It may be loss, failure, but it is part of the deal. When it happens, don't blame anyone, but maybe God *is* in it and the psychic life is rearranged. Suffering de-stabilizes the ego, the success agenda is taken away, but it doesn't destroy you. You are called to learn how to deal with it. If you call on God every ten minutes, this makes you more present to God on bad days than on

good. Your identity transplant is taking place, you feel a groundedness and that you'll be OK. It is salvation now, not later. Don't let go of the thread, allow the flow. Move into the second half of life. It is counter-intuitive, but you won't avoid it. It creates freedom in the soul; desire creates it, and wants it. You may feel poverty, emptiness, but God always fills it. It is a rhythm of surrendering and filling. The Paschal mystery becomes the way it is in your life. Your DNA knows! Trust the inner voice more. Say yes! Yes!

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