

## Addiction & Recovery

### Meditation as an 11<sup>th</sup> Step Practice

My name is Linda Kaye and I am a recovering alcoholic-addict. My home is in Atlantic Beach, Florida and I am the director of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM) Neptune Beach Center which opened in the fall of 2008. The center is non-profit and operated exclusively by volunteers. We offer Christian meditation seven days a week, several times a day, along with monthly programs, retreats and workshops. People of all faiths, no faith, agnostic or atheist – all are welcome to join us in *silence, stillness and simplicity*.

*Addiction & Recovery* came about after Fr. Laurence Freeman asked me if I would help organize a website for people in recovery. I had been meditating in the Christian meditation tradition for about five years and had been giving meditation workshops and retreats with my spiritual director Sister Elizabeth Hellmann. It wasn't through any virtue of mine that this outreach program came about. It was because I had a need, a thirst, and found that there were many others in recovery like myself, now sober for decades, facing depression and anxiety. Many were being over-medicated and found themselves on the merry-go-round of addiction that led many of them back out to the 'gates of insanity' and death.

At this time, I invite each of you, if you would, to please join me in a moment of silence, followed by the serenity prayer. This is the traditional way that 12-step groups around the globe open their meetings and it gives me a great sense of comfort to begin with this familiar prayer in the unity of the Spirit.

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
Courage to change the things I can,  
And wisdom to know the difference.*

I would like to clarify, as I begin this talk, that I do not represent any 12-step program, nor am I a drug and alcohol counselor. I am simply a recovering alcoholic-addict who has found a way to not only stay sober, but to be restored to life as a useful member of society - *The society that rejected me and that I rejected.* (Alcoholics Anonymous)

We have, as a result of living the spiritual principles of the 12 steps, what are called '*The Promises*': *We will know a new freedom and a new happiness. We won't regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it, we will comprehend the word 'serenity' and we will know peace...*

These promises were coming true in my life; yet in 2001, after seventeen years of sobriety, I felt stuck in old patterns of behavior and in character defects that began to shift my sense of gratitude and enthusiasm for recovery into restlessness and a gnawing feeling of discontent. Although I became aware of the three C's in my attitude - criticism, cynicism and condescension - that knowledge, from the 10th step inventory, wasn't changing my behavior. Asking God to remove them, in steps 6 and 7, didn't seem to pry them loose. It seemed the harder I tried, the more stuck I became. It was grace that gave me the willingness and desire for spiritual growth, to persevere in 'conscious contact' with God. I never stopped attending meetings and I continued to carry the message to other suffering addicts, yet I always felt 'something missing' and no amount of 'doing' would bring that peace that passes all understanding that I had experienced, even though briefly.

That 'missing something' in my life, was exactly what Carl Jung wrote about in 1961 to Bill W, one of the founders of AA. He described in the letter exactly the root of the problem in my life: *...the craving for alcohol was the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God.* He went on to say that *Alcohol in Latin is 'spiritus' and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: spiritus contra spiritum.*

In the spring of 2001, I attended an afternoon program of Christian meditation. It was the first time in my spiritual journey of recovery that I finally felt I had come home. At last I had landed! (I was a flight-attendant for thirty-one years). It was the language of the heart, of truth, the experience of presence that I had been searching for. When I arrived at that afternoon workshop I was seventeen years clean and sober, divorced for the fourth time, the third time in recovery. The previous six months I had experienced the death of my parents, a woman I sponsored, my closest friend and my little seventeen-year-old yorkie.

When I first began to meditate in this way of Christian prayer, I was agnostic and, looking back, rather proud of my non-Christian spiritual journey in recovery. I had been meditating in the Eastern tradition for many years. When I was three months clean and sober I had a spiritual experience that left me knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is a God that has no name but is all-loving, all-powerful, all goodness in the mysteries of darkness. It was that place of peace beyond human understanding. Pure joy, pure peace, pure love.

Although the 'experience' lasted only a few days, the memory of the truth of love and goodness has never left me. That memory is embedded in my heart. This God-moment took me from the depths of depression to a seventeen-year search to find out the meaning and purpose of that moment. Grace led me years later to an afternoon of

contemplative prayer with a group of Christians. The last place on earth I ever wanted to be! Grace brought me home even though I was kicking and resisting all the way.

Up to the time Christian meditation found me through grace, I had tried every 12-step program that was out there and sought relief in a wide variety of spiritual teachings: A Course in Miracles, Joel Goldsmith, Infinite Way, Eckankar, Association of Research and Enlightenment (Edgar Cayce), The Triangle, Thich Nhat Hanh, Order of Inner Being, Self Realization Fellowship, chakra-balancing, rebirthing classes, healing breath work and sweat-lodges. They were all helpful and all part of waking up from the *coma of self-preoccupation*, but nothing sustained my inner longing. Soon I would be off and running again to find another seminar, retreat, guru or lecture.

Speaking of lectures, there is a saying that Heaven has two doors. One says *Heaven* and one says *Lecture on Heaven*. I was always the one lined up for the lecture on heaven. Surely, I told myself, the 'it' that I heard about in the rooms of recovery, the 'it' that would get better, must be out there someplace.

It continues to be my experience that many people come to the rooms of recovery and remain at the level of the lecture. The 12-step literature reminds us over and over that to friends, colleagues, family and clergy, the alcoholic is a riddle. But to us, he or she is not. For those of us in recovery, we understand the answer to the riddle. The spiritual life is not a theory; we have to live it. Failing to live a God-conscious life leads to relapse and relapse leads to jails, institutions and death.

*The main problem of the alcoholic centers his mind.* In my mind, even after years of recovery and dabbling in a variety of meditation practices, there remained a constant chatter of self-analysis and rehashing of the dramas - my own or somebody else's! The inventories turned into just another form of self-absorption. When I heard the term 'monkey mind' in Christian meditation, it really hit home for me. The 'mind' said that if only I did another inventory, worked harder, did more service work, then I would find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I was stuck in *Martha*, complaining that no one was helping me find the answer! Even though I wanted to stop spinning, and felt drawn to silence, I remained powerless through all my efforts to be *transformed in the renewing of my mind*. Christian meditation gave me a way to plug into that *current of love* that Bill W. wrote about in *The Next Frontier: Emotional Sobriety* and which John Main calls the divine energy, the *stream of love*.

We are all in need of the power of love that will restore us to wholeness and bring us to fullness of life. The addictions to drugs and alcohol are heartbreaking, but it is the socially acceptable and less obvious ones that lure the addict into painful compulsions in 'sobriety' - addictions to money, power, prestige and the need for approval amongst many. John Main speaks to this life of superficiality so profoundly: *The real tragedy of our*

*time is that we are so filled with desire, for happiness, for success, for wealth, for power - whatever it may be - that we are always imagining ourselves as we might be.*

One of the outreach programs that we offer at the center is Christian meditation as an 11th step practice. The group meets weekly and is for people who are involved in 12-step programs of recovery, but everyone is welcome. Sister Elizabeth Hillmann, my spiritual director for many years, who is not in recovery, led a Christian meditation 11th step retreat with me here in London a few years ago. Sister Elizabeth always starts out welcoming everyone by saying, *We are all addicted to something!* In his book, *Addiction and Grace*, Dr. Gerald May reminds us that *to be alive is to be addicted and to be addicted is to stand in need of grace.*

There are two quotes from John Main that continue to speak to me and to others who come to the 11th step group, looking for a way to leave self behind – to *Let go and Let God*:

*Meditation begins with a call that awakens us out of the coma of self-preoccupation. We are called, we are chosen. Meditation is our response to that call from the deepest center of our awakened consciousness ... by letting go in meditation we learn how to love.*

*We know ourselves loved and so we love. Meditation is concerned with completing this cycle of love. By our opening to the Spirit who dwells in our hearts, and who in silence is loving to all, we begin the journey of faith. We end in faith because there is always a new beginning to the eternal dance of being-in-love.*

I came to understand the root of the problem through the 12 steps: selfishness and self-centeredness and lack of power created our dilemma. Conscious contact with God would restore me to wholeness. The practice of the 11th step prayer and meditation would result in emotional balance. The only definitions I knew of prayer and meditation before coming to Christian meditation, were those I had learned in AA and as a young child. *Prayer is talking to God and meditation is listening to God.* I had a laundry list of my wants and wishes, and for the most part listening to God was listening to ‘the still small voice within’ which would be the voice of my own rationalizations and justifications to get what I wanted.

In some of the spiritual traditions that I had experimented with I tried ‘emptying my mind’. You can imagine how that worked! When I heard this quote from Evagrius, writing in the fourth century, I had a real moment of clarity:

*Prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God through the laying aside of thought.*

All I had to do was so show up with no agenda, be still and say a mantra. Plus this added benefit: I could still have 'monkey mind', but I just wasn't to give it any attention! So this is what it meant to give up worrying, give up all the *trying*. Simply allow the Spirit to pray in me. What a relief! This sounded so easy! I was quick to find it was simple but not easy, although these past years I have found it easier to meditate than to not meditate.

The teaching of Christian meditation is soothing to the ears of the addict recovering from a three-fold dis-ease of body, mind and spirit. *Silence is letting go of thoughts. Stillness is letting go of desire, Simplicity is letting go of self-analysis.* What a relief to find this simple way to practice this teaching: *Let go and Let God.*