

Are We Meditating Right, This Lent

A Lenten Editorial on True Meditation

Article Prayer, Repentance and the Spiritual Life The Scroll, March 2019

Matthew 4:1-2 (referenced)

Matthew 6:1-18 (referenced)

Forty is one of those numbers that seem to turn up everywhere. It has many symbolic meanings in Biblical terms, as well as in the Asian traditions. It points to the idea of a process, a time of trial or preparation during which people make themselves ready for the next stage in their spiritual progression; for Christians, it is the second coming of Jesus.

We observe that the Hebrews spent forty years in the wilderness before entering their promised land; Jesus spent forty days fasting in the desert before beginning His ministry on this earth; Muhammad spent forty days fasting in a cave, and the Buddha sat for the same length of time meditating under the bodhi tree.

We are, however, concerned with the period of Lent as Christians observe it. The Bible does not mention the custom of Lent; however, there are several mentions of the practice of repentance and mourning in ashes and sackcloth to be found in the Old Testament. In Old Testament times, fasting was observed to express grief and repentance. Starting in the New Testament, fasting took on a different meaning, as a way to focus on God in prayer, and reflect on Jesus Christ. Such a focus can be seen in Christ's fasting and prayers for forty days in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-2). He taught us all that we need to know about how to fast right. In Matthew 6:1-18, Christ gives us instructions on three related duties: giving alms, prayer or meditation, and fasting. In each case, He places a strong emphasis on the motive, and warns against religious pretensions for the sake of impressing others.

Christians should use this period of forty days, preparing for the Passion Week culminating on Easter Sunday, by observing a time of fasting, repentance, moderation and spiritual discipline. The purpose is to set aside time for reflection on the Passion of Jesus Christ: His birth, life, sufferings, particularly His redemptive sacrifice and death on the Cross, His burial, and Resurrection, all of which impact our Christian walk enormously, especially since we are sinners by nature. That brings up the subject of meditation. Meditation should have a focal point, a target; it should have a purpose. Therefore, the question before us is how to meditate right during this Lent. I am raising this question to myself as much as to all those who read this.

I wonder how many of us are able to reflect back on all those sermons

preached throughout the year. Can we attempt to sit quietly and think about the salient points raised in all those sermons? Messages preached during the year usually reflect on the fall of man, sin, the coming of Jesus, His ministry and teachings, finally leading to why He died on the Cross, and the impact of His Resurrection on our lives. Christian theology revolves around these points, and these should form the basis of our meditations.

Our five senses and physical life are intricately woven into our spiritual seasons. When our spiritual life is clouded by negative states of mind or recurrent patterns that keep us self-absorbed, our senses lose their edge. But when we are spiritually awake, our senses pick up the vitality of life, and we perceive matters right. The sensory part of our consciousness needs the spiritual part, and the spiritual needs the sensual. When they are balanced, they amalgamate and form a single, perfect language, and we experience wholeness.

The morning and evening meditations calibrate all this in a way that is natural and spontaneous. Through them, we lose ourselves wholly, and find ourselves in our wholeness. You don't have to keep looking under the bonnet of the car to examine the engine. You will feel that the car (rather like the human ego) is running properly and getting you where you want to go.

Finally, seek an answer to the one most critical question: how is it between You and me, my Lord Jesus Christ? May all of us have a meaningful period of Lent.

Anand Peter
Editor