



Many believe spiritual meditation to be a vague, inconsequential, and unnecessary spiritual exercise. But in all actuality nothing could be further from the truth. Spiritual meditation is directed contemplation, focused dwelling in thought, and conscious reflecting on those things which are good and holy abiding in the Lord Jesus Christ. It has been said by the

wisest of the desert fathers that there is *always* an honorable place for the man who thinks.

The Holy Bible associates the highest and most successful life with spiritual meditation. In the Holy Book of Psalms we read: *"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night (Psalm 1:1,2). Also in the Holy Book of Psalms 19:14, it is written, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer."*

Meditation helped one revered desert father guard against the reemergence of the demons from his past, enrich his fledgling spiritual life and find

internal peace. Such was the man, St. Moses the Black, who was born in Ancient Africa around the fourth century. He was an escaped slave of an Egyptian government official who was suspected of theft and murder. Following his escape he became the leader of a notorious mob of 75 robbers that terrorized and reeked havoc along the Nile River Valley. This was certainly not a very great beginning to be recorded of a saint whose power at that time was not in his mind but in the debauchery of evil deeds he would wield.

St. Moses, also known as the Ethiopian, was a large and foreboding man whose fame was grounded in seeking vengeance and spreading violence. Hiding from local authorities, St. Moses took refuge among monks in a colony in the desert of Scetis, near Alexandria. The meditation and prayerful dedication of their lives, as well as their inner peace and contentment, helped St. Moses find the meaning of life and end his journey in seeking out the one eternal and true God of the Universe. St. Moses was to discover happiness in his life, a peaceful meditative, soul settling type of happiness which would forever turn his life toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

He was led to his spiritual father St. Isidore, the priest of Scetis who introduced him to St. Macarius

to whom he then confessed his all too many sins. Following his confession, St. Moses the Black was taken by St. Macarius to St. Bishoys Monastery to be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In its infancy, his now new found spirituality immediately confronted a difficult time while he was adjusting to monastic life. Soon, while in his cell, St. Moses was attacked by a band of robbers. He fought them overpowering them with his physical prowess, and then dragged them to the chapel where the other monks were at solemn prayer. He abruptly reported to the monks that he didn't think it was Christian to hurt the robbers further and asked what he should do with the captured robbers before them. According to tradition, the extremely overwhelmed robbers repented, confessed, converted, and entered into monasticism under the leadership of their captor, St. Moses the Black.

Zeal manifest in all his undertakings and humbleness quietly brought about by the monastic life, he quickly became discouraged and concluded that he would never become perfect enough in his ascetic life. However, St. Isidore, the abbot of the monastery did not leave him to despair. Early one morning, he took St. Moses to the roof and together

they watched the first faint rays of sunlight come over the horizon.

St. Isidore taught St. Moses, "Only slowly do the rays of the sun drive away the night and usher in a new day, and thus, only slowly does one become a perfect contemplative." Thoughtful, practiced meditation took St. Moses into the realm of his inner nature. Through the course of monastic life, St. Moses the Strong came to realize that no man would ever be any better or higher than his meditations, the sum of what he contemplated on both day and night. The Holy Book of Proverbs states, "*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he*" (Proverbs 23:7).

In the monastery's austere environment, it took St. Moses years of patient endurance along with concentrated meditation to adapt to the simple, solitary, rugged, and disciplined life of a monk. As his mental and spiritual perception sharpened with meditation, he indeed was transformed and learned very well the life of concentrated search for salvation and unity with God, very well as. As it is also said in the Holy Book of Proverbs, "*Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established*" (Proverbs 4:26).

The legacy of St. Moses the Black was that of a great hermit, of modest personality, full of compassion

and kindness towards sinners. Tertullian (c. 210) of Carthage, North Africa, taught, "As for the man within, indeed, the apostle prefers its being regarded as the mind and heart rather than the soul."

St. Moses the Black was distinguished as being worthy to be ordained a priest at the hands of Pope, Theophilus the 23rd to assist St. Isidore. This was an uncommon occurrence at that period of time for desert monks. St. Moses founded a monastery of 75 monks, the same number as his former group of thieves, and was appealed to for spiritual guidance and counsel by his disciples.

St. Moses the Black grew to become an effective prophetic spiritual leader. He was known for his wisdom, as well as his non-judgmental attitude towards others. The story of St. Moses the Black's sandbag is known by all. Once a brother had been caught in a particular sin, and the abbot of the monastery asked St. Moses to join council that would convict the monk. He reluctantly came to the council, carrying on his back a leaking bag of sand. Seeing this strange scene, the brothers asked him the significance of it. He simply said, "This sand is my sins which are trailing out behind me, while I go to judge the sins of another." At such a reply the brothers forgave the offender and decided to focus

on their own salvation rather than their brothers sins.

It is said that through meditation the desert fathers learned to accept self, others, and any circumstance. Inasmuch, meditation then taught him acceptance of all things. St. Moses had to learn to accept himself including his past; "*Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*" (Matthew 6:2); others "*And why do you look at the speck in your brothers eye...*" (Matthew 7:3); and his current circumstance, "*for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content*" (Philippians 4:11).

St. Moses humility was continually seasoned by the desert way of life. It happened that on one occasion, St. Moses was accused of breaking a command from the monastery abbot whom he so respected. The abbot called a one- week- fast. During that week, St. Moses had unexpected visitors from outside the monastery. Seeing the smoke of his cooking labors, the neighboring monks reported St. Moses seeming disobedience to the Abbot.

After having discovered the true nature of St. Moses actions and knowing his remarkable way of life, these same monks confronted him saying, "You did not keep the commandment of men, but it was so that you might keep the commandment of God."

Some scholars see this recorded account related to St. Moses the Black as one of the earliest allusions to the Paschal Fast which developed later on in the fourth century and later became known as the Holy Great Fast in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In 405 AD, at age 75, St Moses welcomed a martyr's death when his monastery was attacked by a group of marauding renegades. Refusing to allow the monks to retaliate to the terrorism about to befall them and requesting all the monks to retreat rather than take up the sword; he and seven other monks remained behind and greeted the barbarians with open arms, at which time he was martyred by the bandits.

Many historians has marked the saints greeting of the invaders with open arms by honoring him as "the apostle of non-violence." He became transfigured (the final consummation of his earthly life) by his love for the Lord Jesus Christ and his diligence to be blameless. "*...be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless*" (II Peter 3:14). Such is said of the transfiguration of St. Moses the Black.

Fr. Isaac the Syrian said, "If you are pure, heaven is within you; within yourself you will see the angels and the Lord of angels." St. Pachomius said, "In the

purity of his heart he saw the Invisible God as in a mirror." Thus, it is not difficult to comprehend the spiritual growth and understand the transfiguration of St. Moses in his greeting with open arms those who were about to take his life and the life of his disciples.

The first of July is the commemoration of St Moses as an honorable fourth century desert father. St. Moses the Black's body is kept beside the body of his beloved spiritual father St. Isidore, within the main church of Al-Baramus Monastery. A part of his blessed relics was relocated to St. Mary and St. Moses Abbey in Corpus Christi, TX.

Through sober meditation and continued renewal of the inner man, St. Moses the Black discovered the deepest part of human nature, the love and peace of God, which only few have ever found. For it is written, *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day"* (II Corinthians 4:16).

In contemplation, we are all called to think, contemplate, and search for the deepest part of our human nature. Just as St. Moses the Black had discovered that no matter what our past may hold, or how gloomy life may be, hope is never gone for

the person who continues to meditate, reflect and do some serious soul renewal with the Lord their God as their source of inspiration.

Let us all pray, "*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy meditate on these things*" (Philippians 4:8) as did the renewed inner man of St. Moses the Black before us, Amen.

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