



## LIKE A PUPPET ON A STRING

I felt like a puppet on a string the first time I meditated. No longer a strange feeling, now I experience and enjoy being at peace. With a touch of humour, in this poem I refer to all who meditate around the world as puppets for a purpose.

Heavenly peace is not a place but an experience. The Ma-ra-na-tha string is our rhythm, our way of becoming active puppets yet accustomed to peace. The string on which we swing requires regular practice. Truly committed, we no longer have good or bad days. Stretching out daily, we ordinary puppets prove joy and faith is possible. The paradox is : an ordinary puppet in touch with the sublime.

The energy which makes imaginary puppets authentic flows through the Ma-ra-na-tha string. Physical, mental and emotional benefits result. True praise rises heavenly from every experience of praying with Christ. Silently and with humility, we see ourselves being found in the One who calls us. This is the mystery – our absorption in the divine beyond. This radical call is loving and urgent.

Every puppet has a power within, yet it is a power utterly beyond us. The transcendent One whom the eye cannot see or the mind imagine, has made this possible. His way, His love, His rhythm enables us to exist. A group of puppets together become a medium of revelation to the world. Giving witness, we puppets proclaim Good News from the great beyond. Our strange and somewhat suspended roles bring joy to those we encounter.

When puppets talk about prayer, the Ma-ra-na-tha string becomes the vital connection to the Father. A puppet is truly praying when one does not know, slowly and simply turning away from distractedness. The call to leave ego behind can be easily muted, compromised, postponed. People say "Too Busy". "The Work we are doing at this moment is too important" The courage needed is the courage to become a truly silent puppet. Stillness is essential to enable us to listen to each syllable : Ma-ra-na-tha.

Real and powerful is the ocean of love and yet, transformation does not impose itself on us by force. As natural as the opening of a flower, so too is the beauty of a willing heart. As a flower opens and blooms when we let it be, so too if we stay silent, love pours forth and flows into our being.

Puppets come alive if the chord is intact.

Our Ma-ra-na-tha string is providing us with selfless attention.

Puppets, please be conscious that the centre is not ourselves but God. Reciting a mantra, we enter the living stream. No need for a backward glance or wishful forward thinking; meditation simply combines old and new in the glory of the eternal present.

Puppets on a string become fully alive to the creative One.

Our liberty to move forward with the times is the fruit of stability.

To open spiritual eyes, puppets welcome a sense of mystery. The mystery is beyond words, yet we are invited to be with the One who says "I am." Our being is from Being itself. To be open to this great fact, we need the confidence of "returning." We call it "going back," "the returning home of the prodigal child." A return by a puppet to a real likeness is to realise time is becoming eternity.

As puppets, it may seem we are pretending, turning away from all we have and know. This is why Jesus said " No one can be a follower of mine without leaving self behind and following me."

This is faith. Every act of faith is a step further into the infinite expanse.

The simplicity and poverty of a mantra is so vital to the pilgrimage of puppets. In saying Ma-ra-na-tha,

we are doing all we can to turn away from self. The rest we leave  
to the free gift of God without desire or expectation.

The reality of God is like the sea. Puppets are like people standing on the  
shore. Some sit, ordering the tide to turn back.

Others gaze romantically at its beauty and vastness. Ma-ra-na-tha  
Is calling us to plunge in and allow powerful tides to direct our lives.  
The mantra in fact leads us into the sea. Once there, it keeps us in the  
currents. It feels like a place unknown, so deep and wonderful.

This power far greater than us came to us as a humble child in Bethlehem.

Utter simplicity is the call Jesus addresses to puppets. "Leave things  
behind, come follow me." Yes, let's look away from ourselves. Outside of  
Christ, all is complex, uncentred. With Christ is our peace, our centre. In  
and through stillness, puppets see that peace is not a kind of negation.  
Peace is pure affirmation.

Our destiny is to know that we are known. We discover harmony between  
God and ourselves. Language fails puppets but God pours forth love and  
confidence on a daily basis. We are being caught and taught. No longer are  
we coldly detached. There is a resonance within us to awaken us to a  
centre beyond ourselves. Puppets are not meant to be mere onlookers.

The loving mystery,  
an echo, Ma-ra-na-tha, flows like a current along a live-wire.

Baptism, Marriage, Priesthood are moments of transcendence.  
We are taken beyond ourselves, yet are never more truly the person we  
are called to be. Sacraments are the union of love, a total and  
unconditional acceptance. Silence is able to overcome time and space.

One of the fears we notice in people beginning meditation  
Is the journey inside the cave, namely their own heart. Like a puppet on a  
string, they feel a strangeness, a slipping away from the comfort of the  
known into the unknown.

Yes, leaving behind the familiar can cause a feeling of emptiness.  
It takes time to adjust to a new sense of belonging, a new pattern in our  
lives. Reflect a little on the homelessness of the stable at Bethlehem

where, in poverty, Jesus was born. In fact, a kingdom was being born. From that moment, whenever he is born in our hearts, we leave behind loneliness, confusion and isolation. We discover sureness, love, companionship. His Way is now our way.

A great deal of ink – and blood – have been spilled throughout the Christian centuries, over beliefs. We live now in. an age of scepticism. Some people plunge into fanaticism. We puppets on a string prefer to coexist with others, changing and being changed.

We become more attuned to the mystery, greater than any of us. In silence, our becoming is embraced by Being. What is visible, in time, passes away. What is invisible endures.

Meditation is rightly called a way of wisdom, a way of vision. Learning to meditate is like “falling in love.” When people fall in love, the beloved changes before their eyes, while remaining the same in all appearances to others. Loving another deeply, we see them in a new light. This new light allows the smallest gesture of another to reveal to us what no one else can recognise. So too, silence lovingly leads us away from a self-centred view.

How desperately our world needs men and women seriously committed to persevering on the simple path to God. In meditation, an amazing diversity of puppets have discovered a deeper and more personal faith. Breaking through the walls of egoism is a beam of light. We are transfigured. We burn with a light brighter than ourselves. However dark the world may be, this light cannot be extinguished. Once we open our hearts to this light, we become a beam of light. Puppets bring joy to those who are childlike.

Meaning arises from the sense of connection. Anxiety and confusion in the world can leave people feeling isolated, fragmented. Wandering in the forest of the internet doesn't solve this dilemma.

Harmony is another word for health. We are not just brains or bodies – we are emotional, intellectual and physical beings. All this energy working in harmony makes us creative. Good work gives us deep satisfaction. Creativity opens a door -- meditation takes us through. Puppets on a string enjoy spacious awareness.

Some people say: ‘I’m not ready to enter the cave of silence.’

Puppets describe it as a sense of coming home. Our home is “selfless attention.” As soon as attention starts to come off ourselves, we take off, heading in our true direction, feeling like puppets on a rocket ship. We see a farmer down below, ploughing a furrow in a field. He plans to plant seeds for future growth. Puppets use a mantra, instead of a plough, to create a space for future growth.

Don’t think of discipline as a restrictive yoke. Yokes have a good purpose. They give direction, keep us going in a straight line. Yokes are lighter than we imagine. They keep us single-minded. Saying a mantra is like learning to ride a bike. You are wobbly at first and often fall off. Eventually balance comes naturally. Ma-ra-na-tha  
Is a narrow path through the forest of your thoughts.

The mind is like a jungle, full of noises and overgrown bush. Following the narrow little path of your mantra, you realise you are on the way to peace and happiness. If you become distracted, remember – you are never more than one step away from your path. As the mind becomes calmer, attention can be sustained for longer periods. Paying attention becomes part of you. If you pay attention to others, it will be easier for them to pay attention to you.

Loneliness is one of the great problems of modern culture. Meditation is one solution, because it introduces us to solitude.

In solitude, we discover and embrace our unique identity. It gives us confidence to emerge from the crowd of uniformity and be resistant to becoming clones of consumerism. Life is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be entered. Meditation is not about levitation or becoming superhuman. Meditation is as natural as breathing – we are designed by nature to meditate.

Through silent prayer we take the searchlight off ourselves. The ego is a heavy piece of equipment to move at first. As soon as it starts to shift, we understand how free it will make us. Selfless attention is a way of discovering, for the first time, what love really is. Think of meditation as a relationship. It can be likened to falling in love. There's the magic of initial attraction, the hope of perfect happiness. There will be highs and lows. Learning is about faithfulness, love, forgiveness, all colours in the rainbow.

What a relief it is after meditation when you realise you are not there to evaluate or judge your results. Like puppets on a string, we simply keep dancing to the tunes given to us over the years by Fr. John Main and Fr. Laurence Freeman, whose spiritual input has influenced our lives. My poetic collection of thoughts from these two holy men may ensure us happy days are ours to enjoy.

*Fr. Michael Grace.  
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