



Being still

An address for the Cosmic Mass ● 20th July 2008 ● Rev Max

*God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult. [Selah]
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;
God will help her right early.
The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. [Selah]
Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has wrought desolations in the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear,
he burns the chariots with fire!
"Be still, and know that I am God.
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth!"
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge. [Selah]
Psalm 46*

Introduction

There is an experience that is a breath of fresh air to a person.

It is the experience of stillness.

Being still,

calm,

centred within yourself,

is to be connected with the world around you,

with people,

with the wider universe,

with a sense of meaning.

Being still stands in contrast to the experience of worry.

There is no sense of personal threat,

no fear,

no sense of inadequacy,

no loneliness.

Being still comes as a welcome surprise to virtually everyone.

When you are locked into constantly fulfilling demands,
when you feel you have to keep doing, doing, doing,
when you drive yourself until your body collapses,
a moment of stillness is a raindrop come from nowhere.

Stillness is the theme of this meditation this morning.

It is the chosen theme because it is a requirement for good living,
a pre-requisite for developing a genuinely new idea,
a precursor to the creation of a fresh outlook on life,
a beginning of new solutions to problems of living.

There are many many things to consider with respect to stillness,
its place in our daily lives,
and making it a foundation element in our experience.
Out of the many things we will take note of three.

1. Regularity is the first thing I wish to highlight. Being still is enhanced by making regular times for this to happen.

There was a time yoga was commonly practised every day.
Tai Chi is built into the daily life of folk in many countries.
In all parts of the world oases of peace have been lovingly created.
In private homes and offices they are sought after.
Folk are to be found in these oases every day,
the young and the old from every walk of life.

In our own small community we have been taught to sit quietly every day.
We have been taught that even ten minutes of quiet has great value,
that even in ten minutes you can let go of your worries,
feel the breath of life,
be aware of yourself sitting upright,
of your heartbeat,
of a feeling of going out toward the universe.

I like to think that every human being
will discover the truth of the words that many of you have sung:

*In the stillness dwells
help for every need.*

The truth of these words has been proved and continues to be proved,
and the creation of a regular practice sure helps.
The ability of a person enlarges as a result of the regularity.
Sensitivity to yourself grows.
Awareness of the surrounding influences enlarges.

2. The second thing I wish to highlight is the uniqueness of every human being and the value of each person creating a practice that is dovetailed to them

You and I have been taught to sit quietly every day,
and various practises have been recommended.
Yet it is needful to recognize that each of us is a unique being.
There is no-one else exactly like you
and your practice of quietness is best made just for you.

There is no such thing as a practice that suits everybody.

Sure it is good to gain inspiration from those who have gone before,
from wise people, saints, from the holy ones.

You are richly blessed
when you are uplifted by the lives and writings of a creative person.

Yet, when you are by yourself
it is good to forge something that works for you,
something that suits the person that you are.

You select a place where you can be quiet,
you discover what to do with your body,
you find out whether it is best to sit
or best to walk.

What you do on your own is different from what you do in a group.
In a group everyone is in the same place.
The whole group is involved in the same practices
and there is much gain from this,
yet when you are creating your own private practice
you may do well to free yourself from the group.

There are the many things you will remember about the group experiences,
memories of songs you love,
the words of memorable prayers come to mind,
and your body remembers its movements in the group.

Yet no matter how valuable the experiences in a group have been,
no matter how much you cherish those experiences,
no matter how much you may wish to repeat the experience,
it is still necessary to come to grips with your uniqueness
and to gradually build up your pattern
when being by yourself in the stillness.

I trust that each one of you will keep in touch with your changing nature
and are free to dovetail your practise to the changes.

3. There is a third thing I wish to emphasise. No matter what you feel, no matter what is going on in your life, you are not on your own when you enter a quiet place away from other folk.

There was once a very great person who discovered this.

He is at a point where he wanted to take his life.

His story is presented in the ancient book of Kings.

The story is also presented by Lilian Cox in her own words.

She writes in 1957 and the language is rather dated.

Here is part of what she has written:

He escaped across the frontier and across the next state.

He, one man alone,

had stood against tyranny in the name of God,

and invoking God's power, he had tried to rally the nation.

Then --- twenty-four hours warning.

He had used those twenty-four hours in a desperate journey,

knowing death was at his heels...

Time passed; how long he did not know.

The fever of flight having ebbed into numbness, life stole back,

and with it all the frustration, all the pain,

all the fierce accusing bitterness of doubt.

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*Where was God, the God of power,
and what was God doing about all this?
Surely God who rode the clouds,
the God who could send or withhold the rain,
was a powerful God.*

*God, who could hurl fire from the skies,
ought to be able to cope with a sacrilegious nation.
God, who held and wielded the forces of the universe,
surely should be equal to vindicating
his loyal, hard-pressed representative?*

*Then why had he not done so?
Why? Why? Why?*

*Then it seemed to the man that his challenge was to be answered.
He was there among the mountains, by some strong compulsion,
to face the climax of his experiences;
an encounter and reckoning with his God.
Breathless, he waited.*

*Storm clouds hung low.
A wind gathered, roared through tempest to hurricane;
was this it?
In a ghastly crescendo of titanic forces
the rocks beneath him split and crashed.*

*But no sense of encounter came with the forces of the storm;
this was not, the man knew, what he awaited.*

*As the very core of the earth beneath him heaved in earthquake,
he braced himself with shrinking vestiges of consciousness
to meet the Presence;
and the terror was empty.*

*Forest fire swept the foot-hills and lapped to the mouth of the cave;
but through the roaring, crackling menace
no Presence moved on invisible wings.*

*Power?
Power of storm, of earthquake, of fire
- but in none of these was the Encounter.*

*The clashing, flaring terror ended.
All that was left was a quietness over the earth,
a quiet so profound, so humble, and so serene
that it seemed to have its own intimate voice,
a sound of gentle stillness.*

*The man came to the threshold of the cave, and drew a deep breath.
Then he knew.
God, who had not been present
in the dark powers of the destructive forces, was there.
The quietness folded the man,
and he waited for the word of God.*

God spoke indeed.

The man heard his own name.

*Then, in five words of everyday directness,
came not an answer, but a question.*

'What are you doing here?' said God.

*Strangely, the man felt more himself than ever,
and free to answer vigorously.*

'I stood up to them,' he said quickly.

*'I was the only one who cared enough,
and I stuck to it.*

*Is'nt your power enough to support a man
who dares what I was daring for you?*

*They forswore their allegiance,
they turned their backs on you,
they smashed your churches,
they massacred your spokesmen.*

*They killed off all the rest of the resistance,
and now they're after me.'*

*Then it seemed to the man that only the ragged cloak
he had flung over his head and shoulders
was between his face and the face of God.*

*The gentle stillness took his words,
held them,
and dissolved them.*

Out of the stillness God spoke again.

'Go back,' said God.

*'I have work for you. And you will not be alone.'
So he went back.*

Let me now read to you the record of this happening from first book of Kings chapter 19 verses 9-16.

*And there Elijah came to a cave, and lodged there;
and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him,
"What are you doing here Elijah?"*

*He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts;
for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant,
thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword;
and I, even I only, am left;
and they seek my life, to take it away."*

*And he said, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord."
And behold, the Lord passed by,
and a great and strong wind rent the mountains,
and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord,
but the Lord was not in the wind;*

*And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake;
and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire;
and after the fire a still small voice.*

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*And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out
and stood at the entrance of the cave.*

*And behold, there came a voice to him, and said,
"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

*He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts;
for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant,
thrown down thy altars,
and slain thy prophets with the sword;
and I, even I only, am left;
and they seek my life, to take it away."*

*And the Lord said to him,
"Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus;
and when you arrive,
you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria;*

*and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel;
and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah
you shall anoint to be prophet in your place."*

It is very clear that Elijah had not been in good shape.
Prior to the section I have just read there are these words:

*But Elijah himself went a day's journey into the wilderness,
and came and sat down under a broom tree;
and he asked that he might die, saying,
"It is enough;
now, O Lord, take away my life;
for I am no better than my fathers."*

Yet in the midst of the despair there came the '*still small voice*.'
Elijah took hold of himself and stood at the entrance to the cave.

What a wondrous happening this is.
Well worth spending time taking it in.

The event is also celebrated in an Oratorio.
The Oratorio is 'Elijah' composed by Mendelssohn.
Listen to it if you can.
It is well worth the effort.

Concluding Remarks

I trust that these few words have been encouraging,
that they have lent significance to the your being in the stillness.

Let me conclude with words of Jesus.
They are from the record in Matthew's Gospel chapter 6:5-6.

*And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites;
for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues
and at the street corners,
that they may be seen by men.*

Truly, I say to you, they have their reward.

*But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door
and pray to your Father who is in secret;
and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

May you be richly blessed as you seek the place of stillness,
the place in which the reality of life becomes clear.

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