



THE MARK

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A Contemplative Christian Community
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The Sabbath Is the Rest of Creation

by Tim Cook

Back in the 1950's, there was a TV commercial that played catchy background music while a harried voice repeated the (unfortunately) unforgettable message: *Busy day, busy day, busy busy busy day. Just time for work, no time for play. Busy busy busy day.* It used to drive my Mom up the wall because it focused her attention on just how busy she felt and she knew that the product they were selling was not going to change a thing. Mom was busy. Dad was busy. We kids were not busy. Our lives were a pretty simple mix of school and play.

But that was almost 60 years ago. Now, in the 21st Century, even the kids are busy and moms and dads are even busier, getting the kids to and from the myriad activities that seem to be a necessary part of growing up in contemporary America. We, all of us, are busy people and the trend shows no sign of letting up. We are getting busier all the time, squeezing more and more activities and events into the same old 24/7 time span. We are people drawn along on a ceaseless round of mental, emotional and physical motion, and we are stressed out.

Too often, our attempts at recreation, *re-creation*, leave us more exhausted than when we began.

Though we may harbor a secret hope that maybe a more expensive pair of high tech athletic shoes will change things, we know deep inside that they won't. Our entertainment from TV, movies and music is often so violent, loud and fastpaced, it leaves us physically and emotionally drained. A bigger stereo system and a 54-inch plasma home theater will only aggravate our situation.

We may feel depressed and dismayed when we take an objective look at our way of life, and we wonder if there is any way out of this careening pace. Of course, deep down we know there is, and we know it is not just in doing more and different things. The answer scares the daylights out of us, and we reflexively recoil from it. We tell ourselves that it is impossible for us and that there is clearly no way we could ever do it. Maybe others could, but it is utterly impractical for us, the way our lives run...the way they run us. The answer is doing *no thing* in a very purposeful way. The frightening response to our very real need is the Sabbath.

The Creation Allegory in Genesis reveals that creation itself is accomplished in a rhythmic cycle of activity and rest in a 6:1 ratio. God created the heavens and the earth and everything in existence,

including us, in six days, and on the seventh day He rested. The story goes on to say that we human beings were created in the image and likeness of God. God is a spirit, and we too are spirits. God creates and rests; we too are designed to create and rest. In fact, our design specifications as expressed in our owner's manual requires that we give ourselves a specific kind of regular rest, and all warranties are void without it. The Creator's instruction is absolutely clear:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
EXODUS 20, 8-11

Now the word "holy" refers to wholeness. The commandment is not God's attempt to hem us in, or limit our freedom, or to scare us into being bored one day a week, or to get further behind in our "doing" than we already are. It is His offering of a

guideline that, if followed, will keep us whole, up to spec and running according to the design parameters that are vital to our fundamental human nature. We have complete free will to ignore the designer's recommendations, but we will not be whole unless we follow them.

Here is the key to understanding how this works. We are not stressed out from being busy or overworked. That's just the symptom and not the cause of our distress. We are stressed because we are disconnected from God, who is a part of our very being. We are not whole, not holy, and we will never be whole or holy until we make regular reconnection with God, the source of our being within us. We

are fragmented and separated from reality until and unless we rest in God. That does not mean different, so-called recreational activities and it does not mean an all-day nap on the couch. It means one day a week devoted to contemplating the Creator and thus reaffirming our own wholeness and a purposeful space for freedom from the ceaseless flow of events so that God's spirit can renew our lives and give them deep and real meaning.

Impossible in this busy age? No more so than in any other. It is simply a choice that we have the power to make in spite of what the culture of this age or any age or epoch considers normal or

necessary. God's eternal call to Sabbath is a call to wholeness and no one can answer it for us or prevent us from answering it ourselves. Sabbath is the way of Life.

To learn more about the deep meanings of the Sabbath and to help with the empowerment we need to choose it, I recommend two extraordinary books: *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel, and *Sabbath* by Wayne Muller. We carry both of them in the bookstore when they are in print.

Remember the Sabbath? It is the rest of creation. ☸

SEEDS It Is As Secret As God

There is and can be no special planned technique for discovering and awakening one's inner self, because the inner self is first of all a spontaneity that is nothing if not free. Therefore there is no use in trying to start with a definition of the inner self, and then deducing from its essential properties some appropriate and infallible means of submitting it to control – as if the essence could give us some clue to that which is vulnerable in it, something we can lay hold of, in order to gain power over it. Such an idea would imply a complete misapprehension of the existential reality we are talking about. The inner self is not a part of our being, like a motor in a car. It is our entire substantial reality itself, on its highest and most personal and most existential level. It is like life, and it is life: it is our spiritual life when it is most alive. It is the life by which everything else in us lives and moves. It is in and through and beyond everything that we are. If it is awakened it communicates a new life to the intelligence in which it lives, so that it becomes a living awareness of itself: and this awareness is not so much something that we ourselves have, as something that we are. It is a new and indefinable quality of our living being.

The inner self is as secret as God and, like Him, it evades every concept that tries to seize hold of it with full possession. It is a life that cannot be held and studied as object, because it is not "a thing." It is not reached and coaxed forth from hiding by any process under the sun, including mediation. All that we can do with any spiritual discipline is produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of his Presence.

By Thomas Merton
Originally published in *Cistercian Quarterly Review* #18 (1983)

We Taste In Him the Silence

by Babara Cook

O taste and see that the Lord is good. That is how the Psalmist calls us to relationship with God. We are more likely, though, to think of our relationship with Him in a physical way on the plane of history. That is natural enough since we have learned about God from His revelations to our ancestors.

Or we might take His invitation on a moral or social justice level, which are also valid responses.

We can also meet Him at the allegorical level, a way of meeting Him that has made profound differences in my life.

But in truth, the Psalmist is calling us to relate to Him at the

contemplative level, the deep present experience of God that is righteous reality. When we learn to hunger for and taste His presence in the eternal now we are not only deeply satisfied, but we find that He fulfills our relationship with Him on all the other levels, too.

We are so blessed to be given the practice of Centering Prayer. It allows us to let go of our usual and habitual ways of knowing and to open to directly knowing, “tasting” Him, as the very ground of our being, our only true righteousness. We taste Him in the Silence, with our spiritual faculties, which are always present but usually dormant

in us. Once we get a whiff of His divine perfume we begin to desire more of that fragrance. It whets our appetite and we begin to hunger for more and more of Him.

In silent prayer we relax our habitual outer senses and open to our deepest part, where we taste His presence and discover a new and truer way of knowing, feeling, and being.

Silence and Centering Prayer allow us to acquire a taste for His righteousness. Daily practice allows that taste to become a hunger that will most certainly be satisfied. For this we are eternally grateful. ☸

Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey. Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of *Lectio Divina*.

One principle will appear in these pages each month.

30th Guideline



Regular periods of silence and solitude quiet the psyche, foster interior silence, and initiate the dynamic of self-knowledge.



Annual Aim

Inner Silence

by Jack Stamps

The Lord was not in the wind...not in the earthquake...not in the fire. After the fire there was a sound of sheer silence. 1 Kings 19: 11-12

Growing up in San Antonio, I attended a Methodist Church. The part of the Sunday service that touched me the deepest was the period of silent prayer. The fact that I have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) may have played into the richness of my experience of sitting in the suddenly calmed and quieted Sanctuary. It felt like an invitation from the minister and the congregation to bring stillness to my non-stop brain activity and constant flood of multiple thoughts, images and imaginings. Then something strange and unexpected happened. One Sunday, midway through this oasis of silence, the organist began to almost imperceptibly play *Sweet Hour of Prayer*. I was stunned. Within a year, the period of silence became shorter and shorter as the music became longer and louder, and then one Sunday the Choir began to sing, too. My weekly retreat into grand silence began to shrink then disappear into what felt like a cacophony mirroring what was

constantly going on in my head. I had experienced, and then seemed to lose, at age 12 or so, the merciful healing, grace and psychological necessity of inner silence.

At age 50, I began to date Jackie, who at the time was attending The Church of Conscious Harmony. We talked about our spiritual paths and she asked if I was familiar with Centering Prayer. As she described the practice of quieting the mind and bringing the attention to the area of the heart, I felt a tinge of familiarity. She then suggested that one method was to imagine myself immersed in a river with my thoughts going by on the surface, like boats. She said the teaching was to let the boats go by without paying attention to them. When Jackie said this, I was catapulted back to the 12 year old, yearning for that lost oasis.

I began to attend CCH weekly, taking in and contemplating Tim and Barbara's offerings each Sunday. I began to study the Work and started my daily Centering Prayer practice. After two years of prayer

practice, I began to experience the mercy of extended periods of inner silence and stillness during the day. These periods became so much a part of me that I became confident enough to discontinue the medication I was taking to calm my ADHD.

There is a great mercy in inner silence. This mercy is felt inwardly and can also be experienced as a gift given to others. My first vivid experience of God's merciful gift occurred in an emergency clinic waiting room in South Padre. Jackie had taken me there to get treatment for severe pain from an inner ear infection. The waiting room was jammed with a very noisy crowd. Children were running unattended, bumping into me repeatedly as I thumbed through magazines, my right ear seemingly on fire. The thought came to turn to Centering Prayer. The second thought came immediately: yeah, sure, in this madhouse! I went with the first thought and sank down in the deep,

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still waters of the prayer and in an instant I was wrapped in the mercy of indescribable peace and solitude.

The other aspect of mercy came to me in a comment a dear friend made after four years of practice. He told me how pleasant it was that I had become quieter in my comings and goings at the Church. He said that when I quieted down and my personality was not so much of a presence, I left room for others. His loving words were recognized and accepted as a thank you for the gift of Mercy I had given to others. I have reflected on that conversation many times, particularly when I have been conscious enough to keep from lashing out in anger at someone when I felt I had been wronged. Or when, through the practice of inner silence, I have been open and receptive enough to lovingly hear the joys, laments or concerns of another.

My mother, Margaret Stamps, died several weeks ago. She was 94 years old and had been quite active all her life, up until just three months before her death. So much of our relationship centered on Christ. A few years back, Mom brought out a stack of old books and asked that I choose one. They were a selection of her own mother's books. I chose my grandmother's Bible. When I got home and was reading through it, I came upon her only bookmark. It was a poem based on the Bible verse, *Be still and know that I am God*. I drifted back to younger days, running around in my grandmother's

home with a gang of cousins, being cautioned to slow down and not knock anything over. And I know now what I may have suspected then, that within this towering and commanding grandmother was a core of deep inner peace and solitude.

My Mom's last comment to me, after I had visited her for a while, was, "You can go now." She then patted me gently on my knee, closed her eyes and smiled her gentle, sweet smile. She, at that moment, personified inner silence. From that moment on, she could no longer communicate. As I sat with her, it seemed she was moving from peaceful inner work, to painful suffering.

Last Sunday I took the Eucharist for the first time since my mother's death. As I was offered the bread and wine, I was blessed with a memory of a multitude of Sundays in San Antonio, kneeling at the altar rail in our small Methodist Church, with my Mom, Dad and sisters.

I realize now that God does come in a sound of sheer silence. And God is there without ceasing, in the din of a crowded emergency room, in the blare of my own negativity, in the confusing tremolo of an old Church organ, and in the presence of a silent loved one. All I need do is rest and be one with God in His language, inner silence. ☸

CCH Bookstore

Year of Mercy

July - Inner Silence

Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ condenses the accumulated wisdom of Fr. Thomas' many years of teaching and practice into nine essential areas for study, reflection and spiritual growth for our time.
Available in DVD or CD sets.



Centering Prayer Program
by Fr. Thomas Keating



The New Man
By Maurice Nicoll



For peaceful, contemplative
browsing & study
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Open Monday-Friday
8:30am-3:30pm
Sunday 9:00-10:00am & 11:30am-12:30pm



INTERIOR SILENCE

*The Lord was not in the wind ... not in the earthquake
... not in the fire.*

*After the fire there was a sound
of sheer silence.
1 Kings 19: 11-12*

*In the most real sense, we too are the body of God;
we too are a new humanity in which the Word becomes flesh;
we too can put ourselves in the service of the divine Word.*

*Then God is experiencing human life through
our senses, our emotions, and our thoughts.*

*Each of us can give the eternal Word a new way in which
He discovers His own infinite potentiality.*

*Thus, God knows Himself in us
and experiences the human condition
in all its ramifications.*

The Word lives in us, or more exactly, lives us.

*We are incorporated into the new creation
that Christ has brought into the world by becoming a human being.
We leave behind the false self and ... experience Jesus' consciousness
of the Father, the Abba of infinite concern, the God who transcends both
suffering and joy and manifests equally in both.*

Thomas Keating, Awakenings

*It is in interior silence and solitude that we come to know
and live from the Divine Mystery
within us.*



July Calendar

Visit consciousharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

Special Events

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
July 17 8:30am-4pm
\$15 Bring your own lunch.

2-Day Commuter Retreat
July 18-19 (may be combined with
Saturday for a 3-day retreat)
Sun 8am-7pm Mon 7am-4pm

Introduction to Centering Prayer
July 24 8:30am-4pm with
follow up classes 6 Wednesday's
Jul 28-Sep 6 at 7:30pm. Cost \$75

Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30pm
July 6 Sacred Chanting
July 20 Gurdjieff Music

Community Workday
July 31 9am-12noon

Weekly

Prayer Circle
Wednesdays 9:15am

Contemplative Lunch
Wednesdays 12noon

Mid-Week Communion Service
Wednesdays 6-7pm

Introduction to the Work Class
Thursdays 7:30pm

Daily

Weekday Centering Prayer Service
M-F 7-7:35am in Theosis Chapel



The Work

You have the Work in yourselves already.

I suppose that every one of you has had some dream that has made you wonder, some dream that you do not permanently forget, some dream that has some strange quality about it. To those of you who have had moments of Self-Remembering in life, when you have seen some quite ordinary thing or person in an entirely new way, it will not be astonishing if I say that such moments have the same quality or inner taste as have those rare and unusual dreams of which I am speaking. You suddenly see new meaning and in the case of dreams you feel that they have new meaning of the same order (although you cannot grasp it) as when you realize the Ray of Creation in yourselves and particularly the Side-Octave from the Sun. When you begin to see their significance you will not be surprised if I say that there are forces in you working upon you all the time to make you awaken, to heal you, to cure you – if you can only listen to them. The uproar of the personality prevents us from hearing. The continual action of the false personality with all its intrigues literally make us deaf, blind and dumb, so that everything is pseudo, even what we call our most sincere moments. You understand what a dumb man means in the Gospels? A man who can never speak from his understanding is a dumb man; a man who is always talking from the 'Ts of false personality is a dumb man – dumb because he can never *say anything real*. Just in the same

way a blind man is one who can never see anything, never see the meaning of anything; and a deaf man is a man who can never hear anything even when it is said time and again. He has no mental ears to hear with. We are all deaf, dumb and blind as regards the teaching as given through the ages, and only Christ – i.e. the Work – can cure us. Not only this, but we are deaf, dumb and blind to ourselves, to those higher centres in us that are continually telling us what to do, only we cannot understand their language. So please realize that you have the Work in yourselves already, all of you, and that the external form of the Work and the teaching and study of it and the practicing of it is to open you to what is already in you, to something that we have all lost contact with owing to falling asleep. So it is not strange that sometimes we have experiences that seem to have nothing to do with what we believe is our sole form of life, and that sometimes when the external senses are stilled we experience dreams that are quite extraordinary about which we understand nothing.

Now as regards dreams that have a trace of Emotional or Higher Emotional Centre in their formation, I will simply say that they are practically always about oneself. They tell you about your inner situation and inner state. Sometimes they represent your inner state in terms of people and situations. The people may or may not represent

different 'Ts in yourself. The general situation you are in psychologically speaking may be represented as buildings, scenery, and so on. The dream may be entirely subjective – i.e. entirely about yourself and your inner state – or it may have a certain objective reference as well, and refer to how you are behaving to an actual person and so on. Or it may represent your inner state in such a way as to shew you how you are taking something quite wrongly as from some former life-way of taking things. You know that we have to take everything in a new way in the Work. Sometimes a dream which has a trace of Higher Emotional Centre behind it will give you a picture of the Work and your relationship to it. Of course it will be mixed up with personal associations – i.e. with personality – but the general form and meaning may come through, as it were. I will quote an example of a dream of this kind which is about life and the Work and about the danger of mixing the two in one's thinking and in one's evaluation. It relates to the fact that if one wishes to work one must be very careful how one walks in life. The dream is as follows.... (A)

Pages 354-355, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, by Maurice Nicoll. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Introduction to the Work* classes held every Thursday at 7:30 pm at The Church of Conscious Harmony.