

Making Space for God

Elemental Spirituality—Breath

Opening Prayer

Grant me, O Lord, to know what I ought to know,

To love what I ought to love,

To praise what delights thee most,

To value what is precious in thy sight,

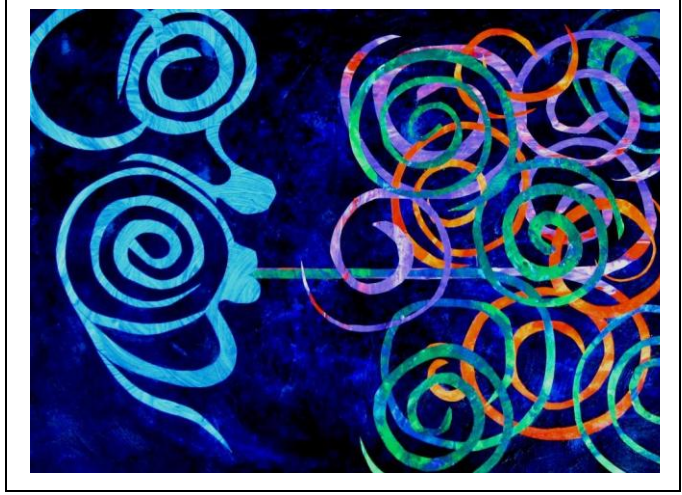
To hate what is offensive to thee.

Do not suffer me to judge according to the sight of my eyes,

Nor to pass sentence according to the hearing of the ears of ignorant men;

But to discern with a true judgment between things visible and spiritual,

And above all, always to inquire what is the good pleasure of thy will. Thomas a Kempis (1380-1471)



Arrival

Take five minutes to settle yourself by breathing deeply. Inhale for the count of five through your nose and as you do so pray silently, “I belong to Jesus.” Exhale through your mouth for the count of ten and as you do so pray silently “Body and Soul, in this life and the next.” Once you feel relaxed invite the Lord to guide and direct your thoughts for the day. Think back over where you have been in the last eight weeks. What burdens, emotions, and concerns do you carry? What are you thankful for? Offer these to the Lord.

Scripture—Read Slowly and Reflect

Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (note: the Hebrew word for man sounds like their word for ground) *Genesis 2:7*

“So listen to me, you people of understanding. Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. ¹¹He repays everyone for what they have done; he brings on them what their conduct deserves. ¹²It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice. ¹³Who appointed him over the earth? Who put him in charge of the whole world? ¹⁴If it were his intention and he withdrew his Spirit and breath, ¹⁵all humanity would perish together and mankind would return to the dust. *Job 34:10-15*

All creatures look to you to give them their food at the proper time. ²⁸When you give it to them, they gather it up, when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things. ²⁹When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. ³⁰When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground. *Psalms 104:27-30*

For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.⁵ The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.⁶ By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. *Psalm 33:4-6*

¹⁹ On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"²⁰ After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.²¹ Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."²² And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. *John 20:19-22*¹

Reflection—Breath

I was present the moment each of my three children took their *first* breath. Their grey slimy little bodies suddenly turned bright pink as they let out a joyful howl to announce their arrival into the world. I was also present the moment my younger brother took his *last* breath. In that instant, his face turned a lifeless grey and a sad silence declaring his departure filled the room. Both sacred occasions left me speechless (and even breathless). For a second the door between heaven and earth or the temporal and eternal seemed to open just a crack so the spirit of my child could enter or the soul of my brother could leave this world for the next.

A few years later when my mother took her last breath, I was holding her hand. I could sense the invisible life force that had animated her for 86 years and made her the person I knew and loved, ebb away. I remember looking around the room and wondering, "Where did she go?" I had no doubts that she still existed, rather she was no longer in her body. She became like the wind returning to her maker. The Hebrew language is more helpful than English in these life transforming moments. The Hebrew word for breath can also be translated wind, or spirit. The life-giving breath of God enters the bodies of every person on the planet. That divine gift energizes us and we are utterly dependent upon it to survive. Without it our bodies quickly decay and turn to dust.

God's presence with us is as close to us as our breath. But God's presence is also as illusive and easy to take for granted as our breath. Most of us rarely notice we are breathing except in moments of stress (e.g. asthma, cold winter morning, or walking up a flight of stairs). Our tears, struggles, and longings play a similar function in our life with the Lord. They potentially make us aware of our need of his Spirit to sustain us, encourage us, or give meaning to our temporary existence in this world.²

Benediction

1 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
fill me with life anew,
that I may love the way you love,
and do what you would do.

2 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with yours,
to do and to endure.

3 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
for all eternity.

Author Edwin Hatch 1835-1889

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² Reflection and Painting by Steven Stuckey 2018