

STILLNESS

Just another day in paradise as you stumble to your bed
You'd give anything to silence those voices ringing in your head
You thought you could find happiness just over that green hill
You thought you would be satisfied but you never will
Learn to be still – Don Henley

For Mother's Day, my youngest daughter, Sara, gifted me with a stress-reducing app called "Calm". It features a 10-minute "daily calm" meditation, sleep stories and more. I feel as if I've always needed this, and even more so during the pandemic. So, I was really hopeful that this would bring me some inner peace and quiet. Turns out, I really suck at meditation. My brain flies all over, and if my cat climbs up on my lap, which happens most of the time, I think: "he won't be with me much longer; I need to savor my time with him". I can't be still.

The sleep stories are great though. I have a hard time falling asleep, and I've identified the reason for that: My Dad. We never had a bedtime; in fact, Dad discouraged it by telling us that when you're asleep, you're dead. People are living their lives, and you're not. The takeaway was that I had to be doing something or I might as well be dead. I learned to judge my time – including weekends – by how much I accomplished. I know that's nuts – I have to work on that.

We know that constant busyness *keeps us from noticing* the best things in life. If a hiker concentrates too much on the goal of reaching the trail's end, she might miss the beautiful Columbine she passes in her mad rush. The sights and sounds of life all along our path are what make the trek special and awaken us to our connectedness to everything around us.

Have you ever been the passenger in a car, traveling the same route you usually drive? Have you noticed that you see things along the way that you never see while you're busy driving? When you have no choice but to sit there and do nothing, you can notice and enjoy that which surrounds you.

Being still isn't always about being motionless; the bigger problem is achieving *mental* stillness - silencing those voices in our heads. Our heads are full of regrets, guilt, worries, wishes, goals, fears, earworms . . . whatever; we have a hard time clearing it out.

Many of us find it difficult to impossible to clear all thoughts from our heads. It's like quitting a bad habit; experts say you don't just stop something – you replace it

with something healthier. Quitting smoking? Try gum or patches. Giving up sweets? Drink water or go for a walk. Watching less TV? Read or work puzzles.

You probably know what works for me when I need to empty my head: music. I used to sit at my Daddy's feet, transported to another plane, unaware of the passage of time, as he played his guitar and sang. I had no thoughts; I just floated in the sea of sound. Daddy's gone now, but live music is still the balm to my soul, so rock concerts are my greatest joy. Recordings have to suffice for now.

This pandemic has left many of us isolated; some more than others. Henley goes on: We're like sheep without a shepherd; don't know how to be alone.

So we wander 'round this desert; wind up following the wrong Gods home.

We're alone with our thoughts, and a lot of those thoughts are dark. It's an effort to be optimistic. It's an effort to be forgiving. It's an effort to maintain our sanity.

We risk following the gods of fear, anger, and despair.

But we have a superpower here at Namaqua. It's one we're happy to share.

You've heard me say many times over the last several months how grateful I am to know deep in my bones that I don't have to do any of this alone. I've never felt so connected anywhere as I do here. The pandemic has actually given me more opportunities to be with members of our congregation; I'm more available since I don't have a job, and Zoom makes the weather irrelevant. This is the interconnected web of existence we honor and treasure. My Zen Master leaves us with these words of encouragement:

Now the flowers in your garden; they don't smell so sweet

Maybe you've forgotten heaven lying at your feet

Though the world is torn and shaken, and even if your heart is breakin'

It's waiting for you to awaken.

Someday you will

Learn to be still

May it be so!

