

Lie Back and Let the Sea of God-Ness Hold You

During these pandemic days which seem to be unending, my mind seems to focus on what we are meant to do. Who are we meant to be and how are we to discover who we truly are? These days of social distancing afford us a unique, though admittedly not necessarily desired, time for reflection and renewal. They bring us, perhaps half-heartedly, into a room of silence and aloneness. Whether we live a solitary life or not, whether we are at home or in a residential facility, we are being offered the space of solitude.

A dear friend sent me a link to The Washington Post in which Michael Gerson considered a quote from Blais Pascal. "All of humanity's problems stem from man's [sic] inability to sit quietly in a room alone." Gerson then opined: "The question naturally arises: Can the quiet serve some constructive purpose? Not the kind of purpose found in reorganizing your spice rack, but in living a better life. Can the silence also bring some contentment, serenity and peace?"

He continued, "The mind is like a whirling hamster wheel of worry and ambition. Stopping it for just a moment to focus on the moment—on the hidden beauty of just being—is a healthy act.... There is refuge in inhabiting—even for a few moments—a calm, grateful, embodied present. And it would improve our lives if we lived there more often."

I was so taken with the article that I forwarded it to some family members. One of my sons-in-law responded to it with this

comment: "I really liked that quote by Pascal in the beginning of the article. Sometimes when we sit on the front porch quietly and just stare into space and think about things, I almost feel guilty that I should be doing something. Then I tell the world to just shut up for awhile and it always turns out to be time well spent. Thanks for the reinforcing article."

My son-in-law said it so well. So often we feel guilty that we are doing nothing but sitting and staring into space. Yet, the heart of life lies there. The heart of life is discovered, revealed, made wholly present as we give ourselves the gift of sitting in stillness and staring into its space.

There is both release and response in that new awareness. We become both awake and alert, eased and expectant at the same time. Suddenly, the eternity of time becomes real and really present in the sacredness of now... this very moment—which is all we have, anyway. Yesterday has disappeared into history, tomorrow is yet to be unveiled, 'now' is our only universe.

Gerson's article continued with a portion of a poem by Philip Booth about teaching his daughter to float in the ocean. It concludes: "As you float now, where I held you/ and let go, remember when fear/cramps your heart what I told you:/ lie gently and wide to the light-year/ stars, lie back, and the sea will hold you."

My 'now' immediately included a memory, now some 76 years old. I could 'see' my father and I paddling about in the waters of



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A Reflection

Long Island Sound. More than likely, I was furiously dog-paddling, frantically fearing I'd drown if I stopped. Daddy was engaged with his old-fashioned side stroke. Suddenly, he turned to me and said he'd teach me how to float. My fear level rose exponentially. Floating meant stillness. Swimming, however inadequate, meant movement which would prevent drowning. I'd opt for the movement, not the stillness.

Daddy did what the poem described. He held me...then let me go...and my heart cramped with fear. Yet, I did as he instructed. I lay back gently, wide to the sky with its stars hidden by daylight, and I let the sea hold me. I floated with glee at 'my accomplishment'.



In my youthful innocence, frightened though I might have been, I trusted my father and let the sea hold me. Now, the sea seems impoverished. It is becoming a sea of uncertainty, an ocean of indecision, a pond of perplexity, and a river of rumination. It seems impossible to trust that the sea, the ocean, the pond, the river could allow me to float with glee. I even begin to wonder if it ever will again.

As I wander through this wilderness, a desert time unlike any other, I read an excerpt from Joan Chittister's *Breath of the Soul*:

There is nothing done by humans that humans cannot undo. There is no reason to deny our own responsibility to get it done by foisting it on God. We must get up and do it ourselves...

The truth is that we must pray for the strength to do what we are meant to do. We must pray for the courage to meet the challenges of life. We must pray for the endurance it will take to go on even when nothing changes. We must pray that the spirit of God is with us as we do what must be done, whether we succeed in the process or not.

Lie back gently. Float into faithfulness, our deep wholesomeness. Be still. Know that God is God and we are God's people, God's holy ones. Lie back gently on the waters of wonder and watchfulness, the sea of solitude and silence, the ocean of omnipotence, the river of graced god-ness and do what must be done, whether we succeed in the process or not.

It's what we are meant to do.

Respond to Gerson's questions with affirmative permissions.

Let the quiet serve some constructive purpose. Not the kind of purpose found in reorganizing your spice rack, but in living a better life.

Let the silence also bring some contentment, serenity and peace.

Then work as collaborators with all creation, inspirited and together, to renew the face of the earth.

It will happen, if we let it happen. This is my belief.