

Text from the Tradition: A Testament of Devotion by Thomas R. Kelly (text drawn from pp. 13-14, 16-19)

The Light Within—Seeking Simultaneity

The first signs of simultaneity are given when at the moment of recovery from a period of forgetting there is a certain sense that we have not completely forgotten [God]. It is as though we are only coming back into a state of vividness which had endured in dim and tenuous form throughout. What takes place now is not reinstatement of a broken prayer but return to liveliness of that which it had endured, but mildly. Currents of...Love have been flowing, but whereas we had been drifting...now we swim...Again, it is like waking from sleep yet knowing, not by inference but by immediate awareness, that we have lived even while we were asleep. For sole preoccupation with the world is sleep, but immersion in [God] is life.

Periods of dawning simultaneity and steadfast prayer may come and go, lapsing into alternation for long periods and returning in glorious power...Though we begin the practice of secret prayer with a strong sense that we are the initiators and that by our wills we are establishing our habits, maturing experience brings awareness of being met and tutored, purged and disciplined, simplified and made pliant...in Holy Will by a power waiting within us.

There is no new technique for entrance upon this stage where the soul in its deeper levels is continuously at Home. The processes of inward prayer do not grow more complex, but more simple. In the early weeks we begin with simple, whispered words. Formulate them spontaneously. Repeat them inwardly, over and over again. For the conscious cooperation of the surface level is needed at first, before prayer sinks into the second level as habitual divine orientation. If you wander, return and begin again. But the time will come when verbalization is not so imperative, and yields place to the attitudes of soul which you meant the words to express...If you find, after a time, that these attitudes become diffused and vague, no longer firm-textured, then return to verbalizations and thus restore their solidity.

Longer discipline in this inward prayer will establish more enduring upreachings of praise and submission and relaxed listening in the depths, unworded but habitual orientation of all oneself...The process is much simpler now. Little glances, quiet breathings of submission, and invitation suffice. Voluntary or stated times of prayer merely join into and enhance the steady undercurrent of quiet worship that underlies the hours... Through the shimmering light of divine Presence we lookout upon the world, and in its turmoil and its fitfulness, we may be given to respond, in some increased measure, in ways dimly suggestive of the Son of Man.

There comes a time when prayer pours forth in volumes and originality such as we cannot create. It rolls through us like a mighty tide. Our prayers are mingled with a faster Word, a Word that at one time was made flesh. We pray and yet it is not we who pray, but a Greater who prays in us. All we can say is Prayer is taking place, and I am given to be in the orbit. In holy hush we bow in Eternity, and know the Divine Concern tenderly enwrapping us and all things within persuading Love...Here the autonomy of the inner life becomes complete and we are joyfully *prayed through*, by a Seeking Life that flows through us into the world...and we have our first-hand assurance that...[God] can transform intermittency and alternation into simultaneity and continuity.

Teaching on Text from the Tradition: by Christine Luna Munger

Thomas Kelly was a practicing Quaker. Within Christianity, Quakers have held an exquisitely privileged vantage point when it comes to language about God. Quaker collective worship is based primarily in silence, and we can only assume that this tradition is partly responsible for allowing Quakers to part ways from many of their Christian counter-parts as they freely use and draw upon many, many different names for God. This parting of ways, grounded in the ongoing practice of primary silence, affords Quaker tradition affinity with Eastern traditions, many of which name the expansiveness and oneness of Divinity with great ease. Most mainline Christian traditions have hovered closely to the highly personalized language of God as Father and Son, and occasionally, (with any luck!) as the person of the Spirit, which in practice, results in a narrowness of language and understanding of God (despite the many biblical references that are not so narrow!).

Wayne Teasdale was a Catholic monk who engaged intercultural and interspiritual practices throughout his illustrious life. In his text, *The Mystic Heart*, Teasdale suggests that perhaps *the* primary hurdle for deep interspiritual practice and understanding between Eastern and Western traditions, is how to reconcile the distinct notions of God/Being that mark the two tendencies of the pendulum between a Western, highly personalized, anthropomorphic understanding of God as a distinct, almighty Being and an Eastern, highly universal understanding of Being as the Oneness of all that is.

What I appreciate about Kelly's teaching on simultaneity and alternation is that it manages to hold remnants of the two poles together: oneness/distinctiveness, remembering/forgetting, rest/pursuit, All-that-Is/One-Who-Loves. The practical instruction that Kelly offers mimics the teachings of the early Eastern Christian masters who developed a method for praying unceasingly, or as we come to recognize it in its modern form, The Jesus Prayer. In the freshness of Quaker perspective, Kelly holds the ancient prayer in conversation with the world's current needs. Of course! All-that-Is constantly takes place while I find my place in it, and yet, I can savor a sense of accompaniment, resonance from a Heart beating bigger than mine in the cosmos.

My own personal and professional journey into the spiritual realm has been deeply marked by this tension as well. I feel concern and compassion for Christians when their sense of God matures beyond the narrow confines of images from their childhood; I feel attraction to the expansiveness of Being articulated in so many of the Eastern traditions; I feel at a loss for how to reconcile my own alternations of sensing God as meeting me exactly where I am, and, of sensing God as far away and so-down-deep so as to lose perception of the reverberations of the Heart. The concepts of alternation and simultaneity, and Kelly's description of the delightful dance that ensues between the two experiences, assures me beyond the stress of ambiguity, strengthens my capacity for befriending paradox, and assists in my attempts at reconciliation of opposites.

Questions for Reflection:

- **What catches your attention, in your mind, heart, or senses as you engage this teaching?**
- **How do you wrap your head/heart around simultaneity and alternation in life and in practice?**