

Silence and Hebrew Meditation

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### Abstract

This paper studies the reference to silence found in texts from Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Job to draw insight into the nature of meditation as prayer of the heart. The Lord does not appear to Elijah in wind, earthquake, or fire but in the silence that follows these events. It seems possible to suggest that the silence is sacred because it expresses the ultimate ground of being or the root of the possibility of meditation. It serves as springboard to action.

Key Words: Ground, Lord, Meditation, Nothing, Silence, Subjective Truth

## Silence and Hebrew Meditation

This paper is a study of the nature of sacred silence in some Hebrew texts in order to determine the connection between silence, meditation, and action. The action that follows meditation appears to be grounded in the nature of meditation (operation follows nature). At first brush sacred silence is the absence of sound. This suggests that the meditative state is attained by emptying consciousness of thought. But the ways of reason suggest that the attainment of absolute nothing is an illusion. We cannot maintain thought in the absence of its object. So the nothing of meditation must be about something because Old Testament meditation moves through silence to dwell on a spirituality of words, namely, the precepts, statutes, words, and commandments of the Torah.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew words for meditation *haga* or *siach* suggest the dual nature of meditation. The first movement of silence, passivity and subjectivity is followed by a focus on the word, action, and objectivity. This seems paradoxical. On the one hand, meditation invites us into a state of silent communion with nothingness, while on the other God's Law invites the whole person into action. The paradox does not force an either/or choice upon us, but is offered as an opportunity to reflect on the richness of Hebrew meditation as an experience of the both/and variety, however. The key to the synthesis of opposites exists in the fact that silence and reflection on the Torah take place in the heart. Both paths are complementary. Silence sets the stage for the presence of God in the human heart while reflection on this sacred presence invites us to make noises about the divine law. We need to roar even if only in the soft whisper of a voice. Thus, meditation invites us to dwell in subjective and objective truth. In this paper, the focus is on the first path; silence as the means

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5: 1-21. See also Psalm 19.

towards the divine image. How Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Job responded to God calling is detailed in Old Testament scriptures.

The word meditation originates from the Latin phrase *stare in medio* meaning to stand and centre, respectively; to stand in one's centre. We stand and meet the Lord at the centre of our being, namely, in the silence of the heart. The ways of the heart are not the ways of the mind and logic, though the heart moves the mind in knowing the ways of the Lord. So the silence of the meditative state must be other than the cessation of mental activity. Paradoxically, we look to the heart to grasp the state of meditation as something we do and do not do. The meditative state entails presence as well as absence; activity and passivity.

God put Abraham to the test when he called to him; "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a holocaust on a height that I shall point out to you." (Genesis 22: 2-3.) Early next morning Abraham took his son Isaac to the appointed place; "**Silently they rode for three days** (emphasis mine); but on the fourth morning Abraham said not a word but lifted up his eyes and beheld Mount Moriah in the distance."<sup>2</sup> Abraham tied Isaac to an altar he prepared, and raised his knife to slay him. Isaac begged for his young life.

What are we to make of this passage from Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*? Abraham's silence speaks volumes. He must have wondered how God could break a covenant by taking his only son; "he shall give rise to nations, and rulers of people shall issue from him" (Genesis 17: 16-17). No word seems adequate to express the emotional and logical conflict Abraham must have felt as he set out to do God's will. Still, his decision to obey the Lord suggests that something beyond logic, greater than logic, was going on in his heart.

I think that Abraham's silence speaks to us about the nature of meditation. In the words of Kahlil Gibran "Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing"<sup>3</sup> Abraham's silence gives evidence of a profound faith. He appears to find the courage necessary for action in this silence. It empowers him to abandon reason and selfish concerns in order to rise into a deeper relationship with the Lord. Because he did this, his son was spared. Abraham's silence exists in subjective truth—a place beyond reason, where the faithful stand in 'fear and trembling,' before the Lord. Subjective truth exists beyond logical truth and personal interests. It focuses on entering into relationship with the Lord. It is not for that matter illogical or laced with negative emotion since it stands on reason and emotion before letting go of them in fear and anxiety before the Lord.

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<sup>2</sup> Hollander, Lee M (trans.) (1960) p.122.

<sup>3</sup> Gibran, Kahlil (1923) p. 72

Abraham's silence and trust in the Lord is the foundation of religious meditation. In being quiet and/or passive we open ourselves to act towards the Lord. We open wide the door of human suffering to let the Lord fill our life with hope. This view is supported by Mohammad Shaffii, psychiatrist, who defines meditation as being "a psychophysiological state of active passivity and creative quiescence."<sup>4</sup> In subjective truth we are simultaneously drawn away from and attracted to God calling. The divine call to action is planted in this meditative soil.

In that regard, I can imagine the Lord speaking to Elijah (1 Kings 19) and how the voice of the Lord rises out of the silence of the nothing to provide instructions to Elijah on what he must do to escape the wrath of Jezebel. What is the structure of this sacred silence or subjective truth? Does the emptying of thought prepare the way for meditation, given that the absence of wind, earthquake, and fire prepare the way for Elijah's meeting with the Lord?

We know that Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Job experience the presence of the Lord in the centrality of silence. Moses encountered God in the well known story of the burning bush; "Do not come any closer. Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Exodus 3: 5-6.)"<sup>5</sup> Moses covered his face because he knew he was standing in the presence of the Father. He was afraid to look at God. Since we are not told that the fire actually consumed the bush, or anything else, we can only imagine it as being a metaphor for the absence of earthly activity and presence of the Lord in the silence of the moment.

Elijah, on the other hand, 'walked a day in the wilderness to hide from Jezebel' and was so distraught that he wished for death. Let us take a closer look at the circumstances surrounding his conversation with the Lord. On Mount Sinai, the Lord speaks to Elijah, not in the sights and sounds of nature but in the silence or soft whisper of a voice;

The angel of the Lord said, 'Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will be passing by.' A strong and heavy wind was rendering the mountains and crushing rocks before the Lord—but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake—but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was fire—but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire there was the soft whisper of a voice. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave. (1 Kings 19: 11-14)<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Shaffii, Mohammad (1985) p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> *The Good News Bible with the Apocrypha*. (1970)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*,

The Sunday Missal describes the ‘soft whisper’ as a ‘sound of sheer silence’.<sup>7</sup> The nature of the ‘sheer silence’ or ‘silent whisper’ out of which the Lord speaks to Elijah is sacred. In my view, Elijah is standing before God the Father—Creator of the world and all things contained in it. God appears to be standing in an unnatural nothing; the same space of silence where Isaac’s life is requested of Abraham. This sacred space appears to express the root of the possibility of the presence or absence of natural sights and sounds.

At first brush, the silence appears to arise from the absence of wind, earthquake, and fire. But the divine space must be something entirely different since the absence of earthly activity, however difficult to imagine, does not provide suitable ground for a meaningful experience. The casual observer might be inclined to look for the Lord in what is no longer there. Surely this is not the meaning of the text. In our own experience, preparation to meet the Lord entails more than the futile attempt to empty mental contents. It seems to be the case that God’s appearance to us is a gift rather than the result of anything we do or fail to do. The problem with locating the Lord in an absence of things, were this approach feasible, is that it leads to the quest for what remains when nothing is left. We need to move beyond our basic epistemology to avoid that absurdity. The presence of God must arise at a place other than the absence of the temporal. But what if the point is made that God’s ubiquity is such that he is everywhere in the temporal order? Still, this cannot be where Elijah meets the Lord because in that event the Lord would and would not be in wind, earthquake, and fire, at the same time. This view violates the principle of non contradiction. We need to move beyond the natural order to explain the place of Elijah’s encounter with the Lord. This is possible because the natural order depends upon God the Father as the necessary and sufficient condition for its existence. This dependence safeguards the possibility of meditation because it provides an indication of where to look to hear the Lord. The Lord speaks to Elijah in an ontological presence rather than in the absence of something material and epistemic activity. It seems possible to characterize the epistemological absence of material things as a necessary and sufficient condition for the metaphysical presence of the divinity. The creation story tells us that God created the world and all things contained in it *out of nothing!* The Lord appears to Elijah out of this same nothing, in fullness made in the likeness of Abraham’s silence. The creative act provides the foundation for the possibility of negation. The Lord is the ontological ground of the possibility of being. In brief, the presence or absence of material things like wind, earthquake, and fire depends on the Lord as the ultimate root of the possibility of being. This aspect of our relationship with God has to be made clear before we can elaborate on the nature of meditation, that is, we need to examine how the recognition of our fundamental insignificance and total dependence on the Creator God (since we

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<sup>7</sup> Sunday Missal: Living with Christ. (2007-2008).

exist contingently) is a condition for an authentic encounter with the Lord. In order to develop the argument that God is standing at the place of the ontological nothing we need to distinguish that sacred place from natural places. This, I think, will prepare us to let go of reason and receive the Lord in that first act of meditative silence. Let me begin with a discussion of the ways in which we frame the nature of silence or 'nothing' in the secular world. The Lord is not talking with Abraham, Moses or the prophet Elijah in any of the customary ways of framing the nothing. What do we mean by the nothing or the absence of things?

The nothing or silence cannot be imagined except as a modifier of something. We cannot think of nothing as such. So the emptying of mind is not fully attainable and cannot be the sort of activity that prepares us for meditation. To explain this view we recall that the phenomenological character of consciousness affirms the relational character of thought; to think is necessarily to think of something. The failed effort of Descartes to successfully cast the existence of all things into doubt while safeguarding the ontological status of truth provides a case in point. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's seminal work *The Phenomenology of Perception* is one of a long list of works to make the point that perception and its object cannot be separated. What Descartes saw when he entered the world of universal doubt is a being of his own making rather than the being of things. The dissolution of the object of knowledge moves away from clear and distinct ideas to spell the end of consciousness. Consciousness and its object form an inseparable unit. For this reason the philosopher Martin Heidegger found it necessary to characterize the 'thing-in-itself' as a dynamic inclusive mix of thought and object. While we can focus on the subjective or objective correlate of that mixture, we do so in the spirit of the unity between consciousness and its object in the act of knowledge. This is not to suggest the interchangeability of these correlates, however. Consciousness and its object are distinct though they are not separate entities. It follows from the nature of perception that Elijah's encounter with the Lord is an encounter with something rather than an encounter with the absence of natural events, including states of mind. Elijah and the Lord each play a role in the communication. The determination of the role Elijah plays in the discourse brings us to a discussion of the Lord as metaphysical root of the possibility of an epistemic encounter with the divine.

The expression 'I see nothing there' suggests that the object that was there or could be there is no longer there. At this point reason uses identities in time to suggest that the missing item is elsewhere. Things do not simply vanish into thin air. If the book is not on the table where I left it, it must be elsewhere. I may have misplaced it, or perhaps someone put it elsewhere without telling me. Even if an overly enthusiastic disciple of David Hume committed my book of metaphysics 'to the flames' the second law of thermodynamics would kick in to assure me that the energy that was the book has been transferred to the foci of interstellar space.

This does not satisfy my appetite for that particular book but it does satisfy the ways of reason and the search for sufficient reasons, and identities. The mind always explains its phenomena by discovering identities between the antecedent and consequent of change. The wind is no longer blowing, the earthquake is no longer rumbling, the fire is no longer crackling ... but reason understands that this matter (and energy) is elsewhere since action and reaction are equal and opposite. The energy of those forces is at work in some other capacity and is absent from this given place to make room for something else. Does this mean that the Lord is creating the illusion of being here rather than from a world beyond the natural order? Manifestly this line of inquiry commits too many fallacies to continue.<sup>8</sup>

A second way of thinking about the nothing arises when the absence of something or someone functions as a backdrop to the understanding. The concept was first introduced by Martin Heidegger in his pioneering work *What is Metaphysics*<sup>9</sup> and followed up by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>10</sup> The section of Sartre's work titled 'Negations' contains his description of the nothingness that arises from 'waiting for Pierre at a café'. Pierre stands as a visual background to generate the intuition of nothingness. This is a negative judgment, that is, Pierre is a missing presence. This absence is at the origin of Sartre's view of nothingness, "negation is a refusal of existence" (BN p. 11) suggesting that nothingness gets added on to being. Being itself exists without sufficient reason; given a godless universe, things could just as easily not exist as exist. According to Sartre we happen into the world of things as such and distance ourselves from that world or constitute our human essence as we act. Consciousness as secretor of negativity suggests that we remove ourselves from things, that is, we come to know ourselves by knowing what we are not. I come to know myself as being other than you or the book on your desk, though I am nothing of this sort before

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, we think of human death as being the irreversible loss of consciousness or of some distinguishing characteristics that make us persons. Unlike the loss of a book which we seek to recover, most of us would not be motivated to uncover the whereabouts of consciousness once it leaves the body, though some philosophers develop a strong case for the existence of an afterlife state where consciousness goes after human death. The search for the ontological status of a 'disembodied consciousness' provides interesting fodder for thanatologists. This inquiry leads to interesting problems like how the deceased function without a body, and problems of personal identity like how that can be me without my body. We wonder how consciousness works in the absence of a brain, though this matter appears to be unrelated to the present inquiry, it suggests that the loss of consciousness gives way to the presence of something else. If death is something to the dead, the absence of things like consciousness in the order of space and time must carry over into the presence of something in the non temporal order. Still, the search for the status of the energy that was the book differs from the search for the ontological character of the dead from point of view that nothing about the physical book is alive. In a sense the loss of this particular book is equally final because lost energy is irreversible, however. It costs energy to do work. Heat death occurs when thermal equilibrium is achieved between the amount of energy available to do work and the amount of energy cost by doing work. The particular wind, earthquake, and fire experienced by Elijah are not annihilated though it will never be heard, felt or seen again as this particular wind, earthquake, or fire. The loss of consciousness raises the more difficult issue of personal survival in an afterlife state.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger (1929) p.84.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre (1964)

this action. The nothing is more than negation since it enables the self's entry into existence. The object of consciousness serves as a frame of reference or background that consciousness uses to tell its stories about the self as subject in the making. Consciousness inserts itself into the world of being to generate a fissure or wedge that divides us from things. Sartre's vision of the self promotes a dualism of self and other, however.

When Heidegger raises the question 'what about this nothing' he also sees more to it than negation since it envelops being. He views the nothing as the horizon that surrounds being. The desk at which I sit, for instance, is limited by the nothing because the desk ends somewhere in my den. The desk would not be a desk if it did not come to an end in the confines of this or that place. The nothing marks the place in my office where the desk ends. It provides a clearing that allows the being of the desk to manifest itself to consciousness as desk. Thus it plays an essential function in the essence of the desk. The nothing is the clearing that sends human understanding on an errand to discover something about the desk. It stands as a background to allow the truth of the desk to emerge in consciousness.

What are we to make of these views of the nothing? Can we apply this existential mindset to suggest that; (In Sartre's sense): the Lord recognizes himself as being other than Elijah; or (in Heidegger's sense): the clearing that surrounds the Lord allows Elijah to enter into dialogue with him? These views are contradicted by the fact that (1) the Lord created us in 'his image and likeness' and that (2) the Lord does not appear in the material world. In the first case the text of Genesis 1:26 contradicts Sartre's view of nothingness because God is present in all persons. In the second case the place where Elijah encounters the Lord is not the natural world that Heidegger describes because it arises out of the absence of that world.

Could the silence of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Job be a place of evil? A case could be made for their silence as being the absence of praises for the Lord. One can understand their anger at the Lord. According to Thomas Aquinas, the nothing as absence or privation has a moral sense if it arises as the absence of perfection normally due to a subject. However, Abraham's silence, Elijah's experience of the nothing, and Job's silence serve as a source of grace rather than an absence of good since in each case the silence fulfills the word of the Lord. The will of the Lord is seen to be carried out through their meditative experience. Thus the divine communication is a presence added on to them rather than an absence or something due to them being removed.

We can use the connection between death and dying as metaphor to illustrate the nature of the divine presence. The concept dying can be used to mark the absence of air, earthquake, and fire, while the concept death can be used to

represent the nature of the ontological nothing (that remains). The metaphor can be used to make sense of the mystical nature of the silence that arises in meditation: While dying involves the gradual loss of consciousness, death must be the reversal in the possibility of being conscious. The distinction between death as the absence of consciousness and death as the removal of ground of the possibility of consciousness is, it seems to me, fully consistent with the significance of creation as the production of being out of nothing. To affirm being's primacy over consciousness is to recognize that being exists before the possibility of consciousness (of being) arises. In that light, I think of dying as a gradual loss of consciousness, but surely the ground of the possibility of dying is rooted in having life? One can hardly imagine a non living thing dying. So, the absence of consciousness must be replaced by the presence of something else. God would not see fit to annihilate a world he freely chose to create! The alternative reduces itself to the absurdity of asking what the dead do now that they no longer do anything. For that reason I view death as a reversal in the ground of the possibility of presence and absence, something and nothing, noise and silence. In order to avoid the absurdities of conducting an inquiry into what remains after everything is gone, or into what the dead do when they no longer do anything, what is said when nothing is said, we need to step beyond consciousness to focus on the ultimate ground of the possibility of consciousness. This brings us to the Lord, creator God. For those who think this stretches the principle of sufficient reason to a breaking point by stepping outside the natural order, let me be quick to point out that the distinction between understanding and explaining things allows us to conduct that sort of inquiry. For instance, the shift from understanding dying to explaining death takes place as a movement out of epistemology into metaphysics, respectively.<sup>11</sup> The etymology of explanation suggests that we can explain what we do not understand by tracing the sufficient and necessary condition of a being to an antecedent condition. Thus I might not understand what something is but I can explain its behavior through the analysis of a necessary and sufficient antecedent condition. Consciousness always arises in relation to being. Given that we cannot understand the nature of death as such (death is not an experience) from the point of view of the absence of consciousness, we can go to being for an explanation of death, however. So we cannot understand silence from the point of view of the absence of natural events but can go to the Lord as source of being for an explanation of how meditation might work. To return to the metaphor, death does not arise because of something we do or fail to do. It arises because the possibility of doing and not doing is removed at death. This view is supported by a belief in the primacy of being. The Lord expresses the ultimate root of the possibility of being rather than non-being through the creative act. To flesh out the metaphor in full light: *Elijah heard the Lord because the possibility of not hearing the Lord was removed from him. The conversation with the Lord is a gift from God*

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<sup>11</sup> Ken Bryson (1999), pp. 169-195.

*rather than the result of something Elijah did or failed to do. It seems possible to suggest that this gift will be given to us in meditation, if we take on the silence of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, or Job.*

The sound of silence does not arise as the absence of noises but as the emergence and unconcealment of presence beyond absence—a divine presence that secures the root of the possibility of our temporal presence and absence. The risk of venturing into meta-rational territory is defused if we let go of reason and adopt the heart of Elijah. The act of standing in the presence of the Lord—a presence that undergirds the possibility of being—takes us to a place where the principles of reason cannot go. It seems possible to suggest that the nature of the divine nothing cannot be framed by us, though we can explain it as being the necessary and sufficient reason of human existence. The ways of explanation have logic of their own, however. Elijah stands humbly, out of a desperation brought out in his desire to die, in fear and trembling of Jezebel, before the Lord. This attitude, it seems to me, provides useful psychological preparation for meeting the Lord in meditation. We do not enter meditation out of a spirit of strength but in recognition of total dependence on the Lord. We invite the Lord into our lives. We are beggars looking for a favor, not logicians looking for justification. Perhaps the Lord will bless us with a tangible sign of his presence, if this attitude frames our meditative practice. Let me explain in more detail.

The Thomistic focus on the primacy of being prepares the attitude of epistemic humility required to meet the Lord. The possibility of attaining objective knowledge is rooted in the primacy of being's unconcealment. The distinction between the concept and the idea confirms my interpretation of silence as an invitation to the Lord to enter our life: The analysis of knowledge suggests that in the primary operation of an epistemic activity the mind knows being rather than thought about being. To confound the idea and the concept is to mistake the idea of being for a first indubitable truth. We need to become the object of knowledge before we can become aware of ourselves as having become that object! So the silence out of which the Lord speaks to us expresses the ultimate metaphysical root of the possibility of standing in the presence of the Lord. The divine gift arises as the ultimate root of the possibility of standing (or not standing) before the Lord. Elijah stands on sacred ground. I imagine that Job recognized the limits of reason when he sought to put the Lord in the docket. He soon realized his insignificance and fell to his knees in the metaphysical presence of the divine; **“I spoke foolishly, Lord, What can I answer? I will not try to say anything else. I have already said more than I should.”**<sup>12</sup> (emphasis mine). Job saw the limits of human reason and the possibility of his non-existence. He experienced himself as being wholly contingent and gave thanks to the Lord for the gift of existence; “In

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<sup>12</sup> Job 40: 3-5.

the past I knew only what others had told me, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. So I am ashamed of all I have said and repent in dust and ashes.”<sup>13</sup> I think he saw what the dead who are saved must see. He stood at a place where dying is at an end (the total absence of consciousness) and death begins (the reversal in being’s unconcealment). This is a metaphysical experience of the possibility of existence. The primacy of being testifies to our absolute dependence on the Lord to maintain consciousness. Once the withdrawal of being is experienced, the intellect can no longer function without its objective correlate. But more than this, the explanation of absence of that correlate opens the door to the Sacred as the ultimate ground of the possibility of being’s unconcealment.

Elijah feared Jezebel and ran from her because she would put him to death, as happened to other prophets from Baal. One can imagine his exhaustion, depression, intolerable anxiety as he readied himself for death. He pleads with the Lord to take him now. It is far better to be taken now than to live in the intolerable anxiety of not knowing the when or how of certain death. Imagine the anxiety Abraham must have felt when the Lord instructed him to slay Isaac. Job does not fare better. His wife implores him to curse the Lord in order to find peace in nonexistence. Job refuses to do so but feels entitled to question God’s motive. How fitting that he should end up full of sores sitting on a dung heap! This serves as a warning to the excesses of reason. Elijah also wished for death. The angel of the Lord came to his rescue insisting he eat and sleep to restore his strength. That set the stage for the Lord’s appearance to Elijah; there at a place bordered by nothingness where his loss of the will to live opens into the presence of the ontological face of the possibility of all life. *I think that the condition of Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Job teaches us an important lesson about suffering, namely, that the Lord uses it as an opportunity to enter into heartfelt dialogue with us.*

Elijah is instructed by the Lord on the importance of keeping the law of God. Those who disobey the law of God are punished. Elijah anoints Hazael, Jehu, and Elisha. Elisha succeeds Elijah as prophet. They would slay those citizens of Damascus that bowed to Baal or kissed his idol. While the focus of the biblical story shifts to war with Syria, it serves to highlight the cultural expectation that a strong and just God would not tolerate individuals that worship false idols. These texts provide insight into the nature of meditation. Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and Job live on to do God’s will, as is well known.

The first point about meditation, then, is to use suffering as an invitation to God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. To meditate is not so much to empty ourselves of thought as it is to recognize the limits of human reason before the presence of the Lord as the ultimate ground of existence. That awareness

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<sup>13</sup> Job 42: 5-6.

promotes a stillness of mind and a dance of the heart. In order to allow the voice of the ultimate root of the possibility of presence and absence to arise in my heart I need to be aware that the voice of the Lord transports me to a place of silence that the ancient Hebrews experienced; a place where logic cannot go. The meditative experience raises us from an attitude of insignificance and hopelessness to one of gratitude and joy.

The second point is the need to focus on how the Lord is present all around us. We learn from the text of Elijah that the Lord did not appear in roaring wind, violent earthquake or scorching fire, but in a synchronous presence beyond these events. In synchronicity, each line of causality expresses a sufficient reason of its own but the intersection of these lines is beyond human logic, though not illogical or reducible to the laws of chance. Surely the Lord was very much at work in Elijah's world, as is evident from what happened at Baal. But this went unnoticed by Elijah until the divine silence revealed itself to him. Meditation teaches me how easy it is to be unaware of the presence of the Lord in my world. We are beings in a hurry; "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;"<sup>14</sup> The silence provides the occasion for the awareness that the Lord is with us; "The Lord will fight for you; you need only be still"<sup>15</sup>. In order to be fed by scripture, then, I need to suspend everything that interferes with the voice of the Lord's gift to me. I need to be open to the love the Lord expresses in scripture. This takes me to a place beyond the questions I bring to scripture to put me in the presence of insights the Lord provides for my spiritual journey. When the Lord 'gives us our daily bread' (bread in Aramaic refers to insight as well as to food) we gain the strength of insight required to raise meaningful questions before the mystery of existence. While the voice of the Lord can be heard in numerous ways, it is clear that the Lord feeds only those who hunger for his word. Hunger for scriptures arises because of an awareness of being hungry.

The third point that can be gleaned from the Hebrew texts is that they remind us to be prepared for battle. The forces of evil will do everything in their power to prevent the Lord from feeding us. My own experience with meditation tells me how easy it is to be distracted by the background noises of negative emotions and faulty logic. We make room for God only with difficulty.<sup>16</sup> The awareness of some obstacles to meditation diminishes the hold they have on us, however.

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<sup>14</sup> NIV Ps 37:7

<sup>15</sup> NIV Exodus 14:14.

<sup>16</sup> While the image of a triune God is difficult if not impossible for us to understand, it seems to make the presence of God more readily available to us. In the New Testament, God manifests in other persons as God the Son, in the human heart as God the Holy Spirit and in creation as God the Father. The NT brings to full term the meaning of 'made in the image and likeness of God' (Genesis 1:26). See Ken Bryson (2005).

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