

meaningless work that we can only feel important if we feel pressured? Do we have to convince ourselves and others of the importance of our work to justify our existence?

Here is where mindfulness comes in. You must pay attention to your speed and consciously slow down. Maybe make that your mantra—slow down—saying it very slowly....of course, in our rushing, we have no time to talk with people, so we get lonelier and lonelier.

In rushing, we have no time for reflection, no time to notice what is going on around us. We can't reflect on warning signals that come to us—warning signals such as early signs that something is wrong with our health. Signs that you are starting to drive too fast. For instance, whenever I have a near miss in my car, I always say to myself, Ahh, a message from the universe, and I slow down and become more careful in my driving.

Once I walked in on a man in the process of robbing my house. On my walk up to the door I had noticed several little things I later realized should have told me what was happening. But I ignored them. I escaped unharmed, but once again I thought to myself, You ignored the signs. You didn't pay attention.

When we rush, we are much more likely to consume because we are ignoring the little voice asking us if we really need this new thing. Impulse buying is what corporations depend on.

I think that little voice is always there speaking to us, telling us the right thing to do, but we ignore it because we are rushing and have no time to listen.

### Gratitude

This is what I would like to feel more than anything. Gratitude. How else can you really enjoy your life? To feel gratitude is to look at everything in your life and appreciate it, be aware of it, pay attention to it. Our lifestyle, of course, engenders discontent and resentment. Because more is always better, you can never be satisfied with what you have. Because commercials are constantly showing us ecstatically happy people with lots of stuff, we always feel that we're just not quite making it. Then, when we see how much money rich people have, we feel envious. All of these feelings make you discontent with your life, causing you to fail to be grateful for what you do have.

So each morning, I consciously think about what I am grateful for and repeat e. e. cummings's words to myself:

*i thank You God for most this amazing  
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes*

Excerpt from "The Spirituality of Everyday Life," as submitted from *The Circle of Simplicity* by Cecile Andrews. Copyright © 1997 by Cecile Andrews. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

## Entering the Emptiness

by Gerald May

Now a grandfather, Gerald May cannot remember a time when relationship with the natural world was not an essential part of his life. During the five years following the completion of his book *The Awakened Heart*, he spent many hours alone in the mountains and forests. The internal changes brought about by those times in solitude helped him face cancer treatment in 1995. Since 1973 he has worked at the Shalem Institute of Spiritual Formation in Washington, D.C., as an Associate Faculty member, Director of Spiritual Guidance and Director for Research and Program Development. He also established and supervised their wilderness retreats. In addition to his work at Shalem, Dr. May has taught and practiced psychiatry, and held numerous adjunct faculty appointments (including Wesley Theological Seminary and Union Graduate School). May currently lives in Columbia, Maryland with his wife. He has four children and four grandchildren.

In this beautifully reflective piece, May writes of the holiness of "spaciousness": spaciousness of form, time, and soul. He gives practical advice on creating spaces of quiet in our lives. He also recognizes the difficulties associated with opening ourselves to such spaciousness: doing so challenges the idols of efficiency and productivity that we discussed in the introduction; doing so sometimes requires us to face those unpleasant things we keep from our awareness. May reveals that in our tendency to fill up any open space in our days we are "addicted to fulfillment." It is his belief, however, that the emptiness we experience when we embrace spaciousness or quiet is actually our never-completely-satisfied "yearning for love." This yearning draws us to God.

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*You have made us to be toward Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.*

—Augustine of Hippo

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Every risk we take for love, each step we take toward greater consecration, leads us deeper into the spaciousness of love. I have described many kinds of spaces and

emphasized the necessity of space for consecration; now we must seek a glimpse of the nature of spaciousness itself. In biblical Hebrew, the letters yodh and shin combine to form a root that connotes "space and the freedom and security which is gained by the removal of constriction." From this YS root come words like *yeshua* and *yeshuah*, referring to salvation. When you think about it, it makes sense that space would be intimately associated with salvation. Space is freedom: freedom from confinement, from preoccupation, from oppression, from drivenness, and from all the other interior and exterior forces that bind and restrict our spirits. We need space in the first place simply to recognize how compelled and bound we are. Then we need space to allow the compulsions to ease and the bonds to loosen. In the Hebrew sense, our passion needs elbowroom. To the extent that space is permitted by grace and our own willingness, we discover expanding emptiness in which consecration can happen, room for love to make its home in us.<sup>14</sup>

It seems to me that spaciousness comes to us in three primary ways. First, it appears as spaciousness of *form*: physical, geographic spaces like the wide openness of fields, water, and sky and the welcoming simplicity of uncluttered rooms. Second, it comes as spaciousness of *time*: pauses in activity when we are freed from tasks, agendas, and other demands. Third, we encounter spaciousness of *soul*. This is inner emptiness, the room inside our hearts, the unfulfilled quality of our consciousness. Depending upon how we meet this soul-space, we may experience it as open possibility or void nothingness, as creative potential or dulling boredom, as quiet, peaceful serenity or as restless yearning for fulfillment.<sup>15</sup>

### The Trouble with Spaciousness

People in our modern developed world are ambivalent about all three kinds of spaciousness. On the one hand, we long for space; in the midst of overactive lives we yearn for peace, stillness, and freedom. We look forward to vacations, and we yearn for our minds to be free of preoccupation. On the other hand, we are liable to become very uncomfortable when such spaces do open up. We do not seem to know what to do with them. We fill up our vacations with activities and compulsions; we fill up our minds with worries and obsessions.

Perhaps I am being romantic, but I think there was a time when we could sit on the front porch and simply enjoy the breeze or watch the sun go down. I remember soft evenings, sitting on my grandmother's lap on the front porch—not a word, barely even a thought. That was simple appreciation. But today many of us have been so conditioned by efficiency that such times feel unproductive, irresponsible, lazy, even selfish. We know we need rest, but we can no longer see the value of rest as an end in itself; it is only worthwhile if it helps us recharge our batteries so we can be even more efficient in the next period of productivity.

Now, on a soft evening, I may retire to my deck (my modern, efficient house does not even have a front porch), and I can just barely recover the old sense of spaciousness and peace I felt with my grandmother. It does not last for long. A few brief blessed moments, and then my mind wants to go back to the work I have yet

to do and the worries I feel I must keep picking at. Then I am likely to pour myself a drink. My grandmother never drank; she thought it was a sin. Also, I think, she did not want to fill up her space.

The ancients knew the value of spaciousness for its own sake. The Hebrews ritualized the Sabbath in keeping with God's rest on the seventh day of creation. God did not take that day of rest simply to recoup energy to begin creating another universe during the next workweek. Resting was valuable in its own right. Spaciousness was holy.

The fourth commandment for Jews and Christians is to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Many other religions and denominations continue to provide for such times of space and rest, but the meaning has often been twisted. Sabbath was meant to be a day of spaciousness in form, time, and soul. It was to be an uncluttered day, a day not filled up, a day of rest and appreciation, a day of freedom just to be. Now, religious Sabbath is apt to feel like restriction rather than freedom, confinement rather than space. Instead of freedom from having to work, Sabbath came to mean not being *allowed* to work.<sup>16</sup>

I grew up with this kind of reversal. There was a long list of things we were not permitted to do on Sunday. A similar thing was true of silence: silence meant you were not allowed to speak. I shall never forget the liberation I felt when I first went on a silent retreat and the leader said, "The real meaning of silence is that you are free from *having* to speak." Many years later, I came across the following insight from a Tibetan Buddhist text: "Freedom is not the opposite of determinism, but of compulsion, of *having* to act."<sup>17</sup>

We have clearly lost something when we are no longer free just to be, when we must always be active, doing some things and refraining from doing others. Something is missing when we have to force our pauses, carve out our spaces, and then feel we have to justify them. As a result, recreation often means engaging in more pleasurable work, not freedom from having to work at all. The pastor of our church took a sabbatical. He sent regular reports to the congregation about what he was learning. Apparently he felt he had to assure people that he was making good use of his time. Something is amiss when wasting time is something we feel ashamed of, when we must ask a quiet person, "What's wrong?" It is as if a piece of the heart has been cut out; our capacity to be easeful with inactivity has been thrown away and forgotten without our even realizing it.

Think about yourself. How are you when there is nothing to do? When you have a moment of freedom, what do you do with it? Try to take such a moment now: no agenda, nothing to accomplish, just be. Stay with it as long as you can. What happens? Does it feel freeing or confining, peaceful or anxious? Was it different when you were a child? Did it come more easily and feel more comfortable then? If so, what do you think accounts for the change?

Most of us, most of the time, just fill our spaces up or dull our awareness of them. We grab a book, run to the television, work on a project, socialize, have a drink. I used to think women were more comfortable with space than men; nowa-

days I am not so sure. Women perhaps feel more guilty about taking time in freedom for themselves, while men feel more anxious. But it is a tiny difference. Either way, real space can be very unpleasant.

We somehow must realign our attitudes toward spaciousness. We must begin to see it as presence rather than absence, friend instead of enemy. This is the most important practical challenge we face in being consciously in love. It will not be easy, because we have come to associate space with fear, emptiness with negativity, lack of fulfillment with dysfunction. The seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza said that nature abhors a vacuum. Modern science has shown he was wrong. There is far more space than stuff in the universe. The atoms that make up all matter, including our own bodies, consist of vast distances of space between tiny subatomic particles. No matter how solid we may feel, we are much more space than substance. If any nature abhors a vacuum, it is human nature—and that only because our nature has been so adulterated by conditioning.

I would ask you again, now, to give yourself a little space. Take a moment and just sit, just be. Waste some time. See and hear what there is around you, and notice what happens within you. Do not expect any particular experience, and do not contrive anything. How does it go?

### Space and Repression

It is an addiction of the first order that we feel we must always be filling up our spaces. It goes along with our addictions to work, to productivity, to efficiency. Sometimes, though, we do not like spaciousness because of what appears to us within it. Ever since Sigmund Freud's work, psychology has understood that human beings try to keep unpleasant things out of awareness. The psychoanalysts called it repression or suppression; a more modern term is selective inattention.

At any given moment, we all have a number of worries, fears, guilt feelings, bad memories, and things we are procrastinating about that we are simply putting out of our minds. The difficulty with space, especially interior spaciousness of soul, is that it allows such repressed and suppressed annoyances back into awareness. When I pause for a moment and let my mind settle down, what comes in? The things I have put off, the worries I have been avoiding, the bad feelings I have stifled. Space is like sunlight and fresh air toward which the buried uglies of our souls crawl in search of healing. It is a very healthy thing. Space is not only potentially restful but also therapeutic. But like many therapeutic processes, it can be painful. And in matters of healing consciousness, as in love, there can be no anesthesia.

I know what it is to try to escape from space. A few springtimes ago, I was feeling very overextended and oppressed by my work. I longed for space. A Saturday morning came when there was no one at home and my desk was momentarily clear. Ah, I thought, now I have a chance to just sit, just be for a while. Although I was alone in the house, I closed the doors to my study. I unplugged the telephone, put my cushion on the floor, and lit a candle. I sat down, took a breath, looked out

the window, and for the first time in days noticed the beauty of the trees and sky. I closed my eyes and noticed a continuing drivenness deep within me, running on its own momentum. I tried to relax, but couldn't. I prayed. I did some stretching and exercise, and then sat down again. But there was no peacefulness. My mind was yammering—no thoughts, just silly, meaningless noise. I tried to let the tension and the noise be. I prayed some more. This is the way it is, I thought, and I just have to sit through it. My eyes opened, again to seek the sky. I noticed that the door-knob was crooked; I could see from where I sat that the screws had come loose. My toolbox was nearby. When I next thought about seeking space, it was an hour later, and I had the entire door dismantled, off its hinges, screws and knobs all over. That afternoon, when my wife came home and asked me how the day was going, I said, "Great. I fixed the door."

It is also possible to create fake space, in which we force our minds into stillness and keep everything repressed. In fact, it is this fake space that most people associate with meditation and concentration—a forceful, effortful attempt to keep the mind silent, focused, and without "distraction." But this is not space at all. It is instead a kind of trance, a deadening of sensitivity, a stifling and restriction of awareness. It is anesthetized; there is no openness in it, no willingness, no participation. True space is encountered only with the willingness and courage to experience things just as they are.

When people tell me they have trouble taking time for prayer or meditation, I often ask them what unpleasant things they might be wanting to avoid. I often ask myself the same question. My answer right now is ironic; the thing I most want to escape from is my longing for love. It hurts too much, more than anything psychological I have ever experienced. There are many times I would escape it or anesthetize it if I could, but it will not go away. Or perhaps I cannot go away.

It is a blessing when love is so relentless, because the more we repress, suppress, procrastinate, or anesthetize, the more resistant we will be toward space. Conversely, the more true space we give ourselves, the less we will repress. And to the extent that we consecrate our spaciousness, intend it for love, point it toward love's source, space will be merciful. The unpleasantness of space will never be more than we can bear. Our increasing availability to the truth happens gradually, gently, with grace. It happens in keeping with our own unique personalities; we are given what we need as we need it. Space becomes brutal only if we try to force it, make it a project, or demand that it meet our expectations.

### The Myth of Fulfillment

I have described two basic difficulties we human beings have with space. In the first, we are addicted to filling up every kind of space we encounter. We are addicted to fulfillment, to the eradication of all emptiness. In the second difficulty, we fear what spaciousness will reveal to us. We would rather have the anesthetized serenity of dullness than the liberating dis-ease of truth. Together, our addiction to

fulfillment and our flight from truth weave a harsh, desperate barrier against participation in love.

Back in the days when I was doing a lot of psychotherapy, a Roman Catholic priest came to me with this concern: "I'm nearly fifty years old, and I still don't have my sexuality resolved."

My response, perhaps a bit too flippant, was, "Join the crowd."

"No," he said, "I mean it. I'm not satisfied with my relationships, and I can't make peace with celibacy. I can't find any serenity with my desires for intimacy."

I still felt it sounded quite normal, but he wanted to work on it. So for several months we explored whether psychological problems were causing his distress. He had not received perfect love and support from his parents when he was a child, but I thought, "Who does?" He had been traumatized in a variety of ways by early sex education and experiences. I wondered, "Aren't we all, to some degree?" I couldn't escape my conviction that he was a very normal example of the male of the human species.

A middle-aged mother told a story not unlike that of the priest. "I should be happy with the way things are. I have a fine marriage, two wonderful kids, a good career. Yet I keep feeling something is missing. I have these dreams about romance. Deep down I am restless; I want something more. I think my sex life is at least as good as the next person's, but there's some kind of intimacy I long for. I think perhaps I am repressing something."

I asked, "Is there any particular reason you feel this is a problem? Could it be that many other people have similar yearnings for something more?" (This was my attempt at a gentler version of "Join the crowd.")

She paused for a long time. "No, I do not believe other people have these feelings. I know a lot of people who are perfectly happy and fulfilled."

"Do you think they really are? Or is it maybe just the way they act and talk? I know I hear this kind of thing from many people."

"Well, you talk to a lot of strange people. I have some close friends who never seem to feel the way I do. If they're kidding themselves, they are doing a good job of it. They really feel contented with their lives."

"Have you talked to them? Have you told any of them how you feel, to see what they'd say?"

"No, I haven't. They wouldn't understand. And I'd feel—I do feel—as though there's something wrong with me. They'd give me advice, and that's the last thing I need. I already feel too incapable."

So we explored her psychology for a while. As with the priest, there were imperfections, but again I kept thinking that all experience is imperfect. And I kept wanting to say, "What's wrong with feeling unfulfilled and restless? Isn't there something basically right about it?"

With both these people, as with so many others who have confided in me, the real problem was believing that their sense of inner restlessness and lack of fulfill-

ment indicated psychological disorder. They had swallowed the cultural myth that says, "If you are well adjusted, and if you are living your life properly, you will feel fulfilled, satisfied, content, and serene." Stated conversely, the myth says, "If you are not satisfied and fulfilled, there is something wrong with you."

The myth is so widespread that the majority of adults in our culture accept it without question. There are three ways we act out this belief: We may try to "fix" ourselves, our life situations and our relationships because we feel there is something wrong with them. Or we may repress our restlessness, trying to appear to ourselves and others as if we had achieved perfection. Failing this, we dull our concern altogether, seeking to lose ourselves in work, food, entertainment, drugs, or some other escape. Ironically, all three ways easily become addictions in themselves; addictions to self-improvement, to perfect adjustment, or to various means of escape.

The myth has pervaded virtually every aspect of our society. Popular religion promises peace of mind if only we will believe correctly. If we are not completely happy, it maintains, it is because we are somehow not right with God. Perhaps we are too sinful, or our faith is insufficient, or we have missed the one true doctrine. Countless people believe the religious myth, even when a cursory reading of the lives of saints reveals great agony, doubt, and struggle within themselves and with their world. A slightly deeper probing of spiritual growth shows that as people deepen in their love for God and others, they become ever more open: not only more appreciative of the beauty and joys of life, but also more vulnerable to its pain and brokenness.

Popular psychology promotes the myth as well. It promises peace of mind for only two categories of people: those who grew up in perfectly functioning families and those who use modern psychology to rise above the scars of their dysfunctional families. Countless people believe this psychological version as well, even when the knotted lives of our most successful citizens are continually displayed in the media for all to examine and when no such thing as a truly functional family can be found.

Although it is very right to treat our real disorders and maximize our health, we make several great mistakes if we think life should or even can be resolved to a point of complete serenity and fulfillment. To believe this is to commit ourselves to a fantasy that does not exist and that, if it were true, would kill our love and end in stagnation, boredom, and death. It is also to remove our concern from the real issues of our life and world, to transfer our energy to a vague, self-serving agenda that must be carried out before we can get on with the business of living, loving, and creating a better world. Further, the myth perpetuates the willful delusion that we human beings are objects, like machines, to be built and repaired, meant for efficiency rather than love. Most importantly, the myth of fulfillment makes us miss the most beautiful aspect of our human souls: our emptiness, our incompleteness, our radical yearning for love. We were never meant to be completely fulfilled; we were meant to taste it, to long for it, and to grow toward it. In this way we participate in love becoming life, life becoming love. To miss our emptiness is, finally, to miss our hope.

### The Secret Hope of Emptiness

Emptiness, yearning, incompleteness: these unpleasant words hold a hope for incomprehensible beauty. It is precisely in these seemingly abhorrent qualities of ourselves—qualities that we spend most of our time trying to fix or deny—that the very thing we most long for can be found: hope for the human spirit, freedom for love.

This is a secret known by those who have had the courage to face their own emptiness. The secret of being in love, of falling in love with life as it is meant to be, is to befriend our yearning instead of avoiding it, to live into our longing rather than trying to resolve it, to *enter the spaciousness of our emptiness* instead of trying to fill it up. *like entering into the pain of childbirth in order to overcome*

It has taken me a long time to learn this secret, and I continue to forget it many times each day. Befriending emptiness is mostly a tender thing, requiring such immediacy and vulnerability that my heart is rendered very delicate. I cannot maintain it, and it is only through the empowerment of grace that it comes to me at all. Yet nowhere else am I more truly myself. In no other way does the woven tapestry of love and addiction spring into vibrant, colorful life.

Some recovering addicts have discovered the secret as they realize that the awesome, terrifying space left by their relinquished addiction is like that of an empty vessel, devoid of substance yet full of possibility. The recovering heroine of Erica Jong's *Any Woman's Blues* finds that "I was not a victim of fate. Yes, God, Goddess, the Higher Power, the Holy Ghost, worked *through* me; I was a human vessel for a divine energy force. But to be a vessel was not the same as to be a victim or a pawn. Life flowed through me, and therefore my body and mind had to be respected."<sup>18</sup>

Some artists have discovered the secret as they endure what Etty Hillesum called the battlefield of our inner space: "To turn one's innermost being into a vast empty plain, so that something of 'God' can enter you, and something of 'Love' too." Etty Hillesum's life came to an end in the concentration camp at Auschwitz, but her hope—and, most amazingly, her joy and gratitude for life—lived on for us through her oppression.<sup>19</sup>

Oppression by other human beings, like the oppression of our own addictions, can teach the secret. But we can learn it only if we have the courage to face our emptiness with undefended clarity. In nineteenth-century Maryland, the young Frederick Douglass was confronted with his own emptiness as he learned to read. "It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out." Douglass was a man of great courage, most obviously in risking his life for freedom for his brothers and sisters. But beneath this, before this, there was a deeper bravery. He was willing to experience the pain of his own longing. He chose not to run away from his truth.<sup>20</sup>

We can perform service to others for a variety of reasons. We can do good deeds because of fear, guilt, or the desire to inflate our egos. But if we really want to be loving, if we truly wish to respond to the call of justice and freedom, we must first have the courage to look into our own emptiness. We must somehow even come to

love it. The poet Rilke, a late contemporary of Douglass, advised a young friend to "be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the *questions themselves*. Live the questions now. Perhaps over all there is a great motherhood, as common longing."<sup>21</sup>

We all have experiences of emptiness. Some of these experiences, like losing love, youth, or health, or feeling compassion for the pains of others, are universal for the human race. They are expressions of what Rilke called the great motherhood of common longing. But some experiences are always uniquely our own, carried in the secret places of our hearts, touched only in solitude. Anyone who faces emptiness becomes contemplative in that very moment, for then the truth is seen—just as it is.

It is the contemplative saints, however, who most know the fear and pain as well as the joy and freedom of entering emptiness; they have chosen to confront that which has to be thrust upon the rest of us. They have stretched and yielded themselves to experience cleanly and clearly the hunger and brokenness of their own hearts and of our world. They have willingly sought to deprive themselves of anesthesia. They have claimed their desire to bear the beams of love, regardless of the cost.

At the turn of the fifteenth century, Julian of Norwich wrote, "I learned to be afraid of my instability. For I do not know in what way I shall fall. I would have liked to have known that—with due fear, of course. But I got no answer." She faced her fear and was able to continue: "Both when we fall and when we get up again we are kept in the same precious love. The love in which God made us never had beginning. In it we have our beginning."<sup>22</sup>

Spaciousness is always a beginning, a possibility, a potential, a capacity for birth. Space exists not in order to be filled but to create. In space, to the extent we can bear the truth of the way things are, we find the ever-beginning presence of love. Take the time, then; make the space. Seek it wherever you can find it, do it however you can. The manner does not matter, and the experience you have there is of secondary importance. Seek the truth, not what is comfortable. Seek the real, not the easy.

Perhaps you already have an intentional rhythm of prayer, meditation, or reflection. If so, the form may not need to change at all. Just review what you do and what seems to happen. Does your practice allow some real space, or has it become completely filled with spiritual activity? Is it a time of immediate presence for you, in which you can just be? Or has it become a routine in which you find more dullness than wakefulness, more focused attention than openness to what is?

In my experience, all routines sooner or later become habits I begin to hide behind. I can take the best of disciplines—those that are most likely to really enable spacious presence—and turn them into doings. Then I go through the motions of the practice and escape the space altogether. For this reason, I find I need to bring a certain freshness to all my spiritual practices. This time of prayer or

meditation may be something I am very used to doing, but why am I doing it now? What is my real hope? Can I reclaim my desire, form my intent afresh, so that I enter each time as if it were the first? Can I claim my hope that it will indeed be a beginning?

If you do not already have such a rhythm, I encourage you to try to establish one. If you are at all like me, this will not be easy. But I am convinced the struggle is worth it; success or failure do not matter—the attempt is worthwhile in and of itself.

The first step is to look for spaces that occur naturally in your life. We all have them, and they can tell us something about what is uniquely right for us. Perhaps you find little natural spaces after you have completed some work, times that you stretch and look around and just be for a moment. Could times like that be expanded? Could you savor them a little longer? Or maybe you sometimes indulge in a long, hot bath, or find yourself in stillness just before you go to sleep or wake up. Possibly you find space in nature or gardening, in music or exercise. Take a while to go over a typical day in your mind—where are the most likely moments of spaciousness? Are there some such moments that you usually immediately fill by watching television, reading, drinking, or some other activity that dulls you even though you call it recreation? Might you be able to just be present a while longer in some of those moments before you move to fill or dull yourself? Might some of them be expanded and made more intentional without causing them to feel too contrived or artificial?

In addition, you should probably at least try to set aside some regular time each day, in the morning or evening or both, that is simply and solely dedicated to just being. In the beginning, these times may be only a few minutes long. (Many of my times are still only a few minutes long, after over twenty years of experience.) A friend of mine began each morning with only the time it took her coffee to percolate. I think there is little value in staying there longer than you can remain fresh and present. When busy-ness and dullness take over, it is probably best to move on and come back again later. On the other hand, don't run away when the first repressed unpleasantness surfaces. Try to let it be; stay a little longer with what is.

A set-aside time in the morning, however brief, can establish a kind of attitudinal posture (*disposition* is the classical word) for beginning the day. It is a time when you can consecrate the day and yourself for the day, offering your prayer for greater presence in love. Likewise, evening times can include a little reflection on the day. Where were the moments of space? What times seemed to contain real presence? What glimpses of being in love were you given? What enterprises or situations kidnapped you and held you hostage to functioning or fear? And where is the spaciousness right now, in this moment at the end of the day? What do you seek there? What is the deepest desire with which you might drift into sleep?

Finally, keep an eye open for longer spaces. Consider extended spiritual retreats, quiet days, or contemplative prayer or meditation groups where you can spend

some dedicated and less distracted time just simply being. Bear in mind that I am not speaking of the talk- and activity-filled conferences that are sometimes called retreats or spiritual groups but of periods in which people truly seek stillness and deepening alone or together. Experiment with whether you find space more easily alone or with other people. Look to your own Sabbath—is it possible to claim some time like that for yourself, when just being is truly an end in itself? What sort of support might you need from other people to help you pursue this?

I have proposed that you seek three kinds of spaces in your life: little moments in the midst of work and play, regular set-aside times each day, and periodic longer times of authentic retreat. In all these, and in the rest of your time as well, I hope you will seek the spaciousness of the immediate moment: the spaciousness of *presence*. In this one single moment, here and now, all three kinds of spaciousness come together: form because it is here, time because it is now, and soul because aliveness is birthed in immediacy.

You will, as I do, find yourself resisting the spaciousness of presence. Sometimes you will know that you simply do not want to face into it; it may seem too painful, or it may require too much letting-go of other investments. That is all right. Do not try to force it. If you fight for presence simply because you think you *should*, you will only stifle yourself. True presence never comes through coercion.

But there will be other times, increasingly frequent, when you know that in spite of your resistance you really do desire presence; you want it deeply regardless of the pain it holds or the relinquishment you must endure. When it happens to me, I pray for help: "God, you are here now; help me be here now." Or I repeat one of the precious phrases: "present moment, wonderful moment," "pure and total presence," "practice the presence," "continually renewed immediacy," "be here now," "be still and know," "come unto me," "bear the beams."

I also try to remind myself of what I know from experience: the two most important facts about the spaciousness of the present moment. No matter how full of wonder or how empty and barren the moment seems, *it is always sufficient*. And no matter how much exquisite joy or pain I may feel in the moment, *it will never be more than I can bear*.

The emptiness of the spaciousness of the present moment is sufficient. It contains everything that is needed for lovingly beginning the next moment; it seeks only our own willing, responsive presence, just here, just now. And we can bear whatever experience we have in the spaciousness of this present moment. If we project it into the future it may seem impossible, but just here, just now, it is not too much. There are no exceptions—not in physical pain, not in psychiatric disorder or emotional agony, not in relational strife, not in war, not in oppression, not in loss, not in spiritual aching, not in dying. Love is too much with us for there to be any exceptions.