

Reflections – January 2012

How appropriate it seems that the first month of each new calendar year is named after the Roman god Janus, depicted in human form but with two faces: one looking forward, one looking back. Mentally, I find myself taking this stance as I stand at the entrance to another year, reflecting back over the year gone by, pondering with anticipation the year ahead. We do it together in our naming of the most influential people or events that shape the tides of history; we encourage each other to do it in the naming of New Year resolutions.



Yet the actual experience of life, and certainly any hoped for experience of the Divine within and among us, is found not in the past nor in the future but in the living of the present moment. With January 1st announcing the beginning of 2012, we have in fact the same invitation as we had yesterday and will have tomorrow, to open our hearts to God waiting in the grace of the here and now for us to give our attention and cooperation. Thus the practice of contemplative prayer invites us neither to look back nor to look forward, but to ground and center ourselves in the NOW. Using either our breath or our heartbeat to guide us in this focus, we reign in our wandering attention to the simple invitation to be fully present and supple to God's design.

Jesus, in his role of spiritual teacher, speaks often of breath as the link of connection between ourselves and God. Harkening back to the creation story – where God breathes into human form and it becomes a living being, shaped in God's image – Jesus invites us to intimacy with God thru the simple, always present act of breathing, knowing breath/spirit as our deep sharing in the life of God. While we sometimes have become confused, attempting to separate Divine spirit as occupying a separate realm from our human experience, Jesus remains centered and simple in his teaching. It is the same word – *ruha* in Aramaic – used for breath, for spirit, for air, for the wind that swirls throughout the planet. God is never far from us; returning to God can be as simple as returning our attention to our breathing. So, in this experience of January, I find myself reminded again of the first beatitude (Matthew 5:3): Blessed are the poor in Spirit ... Blessed are those who find their home in the breathing ... those who devotedly hold fast to the Spirit of life ... centering their attention on their here-and-now connection to the Divine ... knowing this as their one and only source of wealth. For Jesus reminds us, such persons will find that their power – their "I can" in response to the challenges of life – will be rooted in the "I can" of God, aligned to the spiritual power which births and guides the evolving life of the universe. Such persons are already living the reality of the kingdom ... God's outpouring and inter-related life which Jesus names as the goal of human history.

So may our light shine through this January and every present moment still to come. Happy New Year!

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