

~~Jerusalem our narrow, and turns the desert itself into a paradise - but always a paradise~~

~~that is dry and sterile.~~

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Contemplative prayer is, in a way simply the preference for the desert, for emptiness, for poverty. One has begun to know the meaning of contemplation when he intuitively and spontaneously seeks the dark and unknown path of aridity in preference to every other way. The contemplative is one who would rather not know than know. Rather not enjoy than enjoy. Rather not have proof that God loves him. He accepts the love of God on faith, in defiance of all apparent evidence. This is the necessary condition, and a very paradoxical condition, for the mystical experience of the reality of God's presence and of His love for us. Only when we are able to "let go" of everything within us, all desire to see, to know, to taste and to experience the presence of God, do we truly become able to experience that presence with the overwhelming conviction and reality that revolutionize our entire inner life.

The 11th century English^{ish} Mystic Walter Hilton says in his Scale of Perfection:

"It is much better to be cut off from the view of the world in this dark night, however painful this may be, than to dwell outside occupied by the world's false pleasures... For when you are in this darkness you are much closer to Jerusalem than when you are in the false light. Open your heart then to the movement of grace and accustom yourself to dwell in this darkness, strive to become familiar with it and you will quickly find peace, and the true light of spiritual understanding will flood your soul...."

(Scale of Perfection, II, 25. p.209. London, 1953)

Contemplation is essentially a listening in silence, an expectancy. And yet in a certain sense, we must truly begin to hear God when we have ceased to listen. What is the explanation of this paradox? Perhaps only that there is a higher kind of listening, which is not an attentiveness to some special wavelength, a receptivity to a certain kind of message, but a ~~gner~~ general emptiness that waits to realize the fulness of the message of God within its own apparent void. In other words, the true contemplative is not the one who prepares his mind for a particular message that he wants or expects to hear, but who remains empty because he knows that he can never expect or anticipate the word that will transform his darkness into light. He does not even anticipate a special kind of transformation. He does not demand light instead of darkness. He waits on the word of God in silence, and when he is "answered", it is not so much by a word that bursts into his silence. It is by his silence itself suddenly, inexplicably revealing itself to him as a word of great power, full of the voice of God.