

Windows on God

A shelter for the soul: *The diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-1943*

In the past I too, used to be one of those who occasionally exclaimed, 'I really am religious you know.' ...But now I sometimes actually drop to my knees beside my bed, even on a cold winter night. And I listen in to myself, allow myself to be led; not by anything on the outside, but by what wells up from deep within. It's still no more than a beginning, I know. But it is no longer a shaky beginning; it has already taken root.

Adopting a discipline of spiritual practice

Etty Hillesum realised she had to do something to bring about the integration she sought and to find freedom from being pushed and pulled around by the confusion of her thoughts and feelings. She chose to pay attention to her experience through keeping a diary / spiritual journal, and to open herself to deeper movements of her spirit and God's spirit through meditation. She knew she needed the external support of a mentor.

What is it you seek?

Stay with this question. Like Etty, listen to your longing and your restlessness and dissatisfaction. Often our restlessness and sense of incompleteness help us understand what it is we are missing. Invite God into your contemplation of this question. It helps to name what you seek, in so far as you can identify this.

What will you do?

Rather than try and change all your life at once [it rarely works!], see if you can identify one practice you will adopt as positive expression of your seeking. Again, invite God to guide your reflection.

Once you decide on a practical step, commit yourself to carry it through for a week. At the end of the week review how it went. If you realise that you were trying to achieve an impossible amount too quickly, adjust your chosen practice – and then renew your commitment to it. Don't give up if it proves difficult – new habits take a while to bed in.

What support will you need?

While we may have the resources to begin moving in the direction we desire, support can sometimes be helpful

- Spiritual direction / spiritual accompaniment: a one to one guide for the spiritual journey. For more information go to [Spiritual Direction explained | The Retreat Association \(retreats.org.uk\)](https://www.retreats.org.uk)



- Group practice of a way of prayer – for example centering prayer, Christian meditation or lectio divina. Explore face to face and online opportunities.

A shelter for sorrow

Give your sorrow all the space and shelter in yourself that it is due, for if everyone bears his grief honestly and courageously, the sorrow that now fills the world will abate. But if you do not clear a decent shelter for your sorrow, and instead reserve most of the space inside you for hatred and thoughts of revenge – from which new sorrows will be born for others – then sorrow will never cease in this world and will multiply. And if you have given sorrow the space its gentle origins demand, then you may truly say: life is beautiful and so rich. So beautiful and so rich that it makes you want to believe in God.

You can't think your way out of emotional difficulties. That takes something altogether different. You have to make yourself entirely passive then, and just listen. Re-establish contact with a slice of eternity...

It may help to imagine your place of shelter, picturing it in your mind. It will be a place that feels safe and restorative – like the still waters and green pastures of psalm 23 or even the table the shepherd spreads in the midst of enemies. Perhaps it will be a physical place you have been to or one that exists within your imagination. Settle into your shelter and into God present for you there – with you...loving you...there for you.



As you begin to be at rest, allow the fear, hurt or sorrow that has been with you, to also be there in this shelter. Maybe it has a name and it might help to speak it. Don't try to wrestle with it or work it out. Simply let it be – let it rest here. Return to that awareness of being in your safe shelter with God who is with you...loving you...there for you.

Taking the outside in...God turning the inside out

All the strength and love and faith in God that one possesses, and which have grown so miraculously in me of late, must be there for everyone who chances to cross one's path and who needs it...We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds.

Perhaps this has been your journey in these last months: - going within, listening, opening yourself to God...And now God is turning you inside out... Is there a work for you to do...a life for you to live...a love for you to share?



Quotes from: *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries and Letters of Etty Hillesum 1941 -43*. Persephone Books, London 1999