

Message – Cincinnati Friends Meeting
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Hitting “Pause” for Our Soul’s Sake

By Donne Hayden

I subscribe to *Funny Times* which periodically sends me a cartoon by email. The week of Thanksgiving the cartoon showed a family with seven or eight people sitting around the table, Mom about to place on the table a large turkey on a platter, Dad hovering beside her. Everyone at the table leans forward, engaged and expectant.

Looking more closely, however, you see that each person is “engaged” with some sort

of device; what at first appear to be dishes on the table are

instead a cell phone with “apps,” an I-Pod, a Kindle, an I-

Pad. Even Dad is texting someone and Mom sports a Blue-

Tooth hooked over her ear. A little extreme, perhaps, but



too close to reality to be very funny. A couple of weeks ago, when we sat down at the

dinner table with company (not a daily event at our house, by the way), my twelve-

year-old grandson continued texting his friend. My daughter, his mother, who texts

almost constantly herself, didn’t seem inclined to ask him to stop and finally told him to

do it so they wouldn’t have to listen to me complain. Has anyone besides me had the

experience of talking with someone and suddenly noticing that the person is also

carrying on a texting conversation with someone else? Am I here, I wonder?

I am grateful this Thanksgiving for many things, among them, oddly enough, my age. I am thankful to be old enough to have experienced a different way of thinking and being, to have known the joy of real-time conversation with real people, often even one person at a time. I am grateful to have experienced at least occasionally, as Ram Das would have it, *being here now*.

Operating at normal human speed frustrates us these days—we have become accustomed to everything happening quicker, faster, in shorter bursts of time. Our need for change now seems constant. In contrast, I have noted that my six-month-old grandson Silas is transfixed for long periods of time by simple things—a slowly turning, tinkling merry-go-round suspended above his crib; a plastic lid; his own toes. When he was about three months old, I bought him a new toy. The first time we plonked it down beside him and set going its flashing lights, hyper-happy music and frenetic animal sounds, Silas cried. He is no longer afraid of the toy, but still regards it with some suspicion and reserve. Silas is more entranced by his brother strumming the strings of his cello than he is by a full orchestra playing on the classical music station. He doesn't respond well to things that go fast or that are layered with levels of complexity. At six months, Silas still operates at the speed Creation calibrated for human beings. Ah, those were the good old days

I've spoken before on the effects the use of technology may have on our spiritual lives, especially on our ability for deep contemplation. A few of you may have enough

discipline to sit alone and meditate, or you may have a lifestyle conducive to quiet contemplation. For most of us, however, this brief 35-40 minutes of relative silence on Sundays is unusual—an island of peace and quiet—the rest of our week swirls with constant activity, ubiquitous sound, and mind-bending speed.

Having realized how much I miss my own mind's ability to be still and deep, I was refreshed this past week by reading *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*, by Macrina Wiederkehr, a Benedictine nun who lives in a monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas. This short book is based on the practice of "praying the hours," a tradition begun by Benedict, founder of several monasteries in the Middle Ages. Eventually, monasteries following the "Rule of St. Benedict" led to the formation of the Benedictine Order of monks and nuns. The custom of Benedictines "Praying the hours" was inspired in part by passages of scripture, such as the admonition to "Pray without ceasing" from 1st Thessalonians (5:17), and Psalm 119 (Verse 164) which says: "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws." Through the centuries, Benedictine monks and nuns rose to pray at *matins* (originally the middle of the night, but now in the pre-dawn hours); again at *lauds* (which is "ideally at sunrise"); then again at mid-morning (9:00-ish), noon and afternoon (3:00-ish); then *vespers* at twilight (6:00-ish), and finally *compline* or the night prayer around 9:00 p.m.

In her introductory chapter, “Living Mindfully,” Wiederkehr tells the story of several Bushmen hired by a western explorer to guide him through the great Kalahari Desert. After traveling a while at the pace set by the American, the Bushmen “suddenly sat down to rest,” ignoring his urging to get up and keep walking. Finally, through the interpreter, the Bushmen explained that they had walked too fast; they had to wait for their souls to catch up with them. “Praying the hours,” pausing through the day to contemplate the fact that—despite the wonders of technology—we are surrounded by mystery, allows our souls to catch up; at the same time, it slows us down, requiring us to be more aware of what we’re doing or saying or thinking or being.

In each section of her book, Wiederkehr explains the significance of a particular hour of the liturgy and includes “Prayers, Poetry, and Antiphons to Help You Celebrate . . . “the Night Watch” (or “the Awakening Hour,” or “the Blessing Hour,” etc.)

Because we are close to noon, I will read from the section for what she calls “The Hour of Illumination.” “During the noon hour,” she writes, “all things are illuminated as the sun reaches its peak. It is the hour of no shadows. The brightness of this hour can serve as a significant metaphor for our spiritual lives.” To lead us into the silence, a

“Contemporary Psalm” from Wiederkehr’s book:

Antiphon: When the power of love overcomes the love of power, there will be true peace in the world. (Sufi wisdom)

Take heart.
 In this hour of opposites
 Between the waxing and the waning

We pause to remember who we are:
Birth givers, peace keepers,
Joy bringers, light bearers.

Take heart.
We are the light of the world.
In this hour of illumination
Let us shine into the broken places
With our very own Christ-light.

Take heart.
We can be the peace,
We can be the healing,
We can be the Christ.
Trailing clouds of glory, we have come
From the brightness of God.

Take heart.
Our power to love will
Overshadow our love of power.
In this luminous hour we will see
What we must see, and we will shine
Because of what we have seen.