

# Our spirit of reverence

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**An excerpt from Laurence Freeman OSB, *Reverence*, LIGHT WITHIN (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 92, 94-95.**

Religious people tend to be more self-consciousness than others. And if we are honest about our self-consciousness we should see its connection with a certain lack of reverence in our religious life. We may indeed be surprised that at the most sacred moments in our religious life our spirit of reverence is shamefully hollow. A busy, noisy irreverence in our churches is certainly something that non-Christians often remark upon. They remark for example on the lack of silence or of physical stillness. They often remark too about the amount of time spent in asking God for things we want.

This does not mean that we should never move in our seats, or that words are not an enriching part of religious worship. But. . . meditation changes our attitude to worship because it teaches from within our own experience that the God we worship is present and that it is his presence that we are worshipping. Meditation makes our religious life more reverential because it teaches us, through experience of his indwelling Presence, that it is in his Presence that we worship his Presence. We are no less in him that he is in us. In the interpenetration of his consciousness with ours we know because we are known. The most natural response to any experience in which we know and are known is reverential silence. Silence leads deeper into mutual knowledge. [. . .]

We use so many words. We hear the same words, the same ideas, so many times a day that they become blunted for us. But many people will remember how they could hear the words of St Paul read by Father John as if they were hearing them for the first time. That was wonder. Without wonder we forget that the reality we are talking of and worshipping is real, is present. Reverence and wonder can grow only out of a direct contact with real Presence. Otherwise, we remain locked at the level of indirect contact, talking about, thinking about. We then inevitably become self-consciously concerned with the way we talk, the way we express it, the way we come across; and so develop religious self-importance. The next step is to become argumentative or condemnatory. This is the great curse and tendency of religious people, the consequence of losing reverence.

Yet the way from self-importance to reverence is so simple. We don't have to try to engineer direct contact with God because it has already been made. That is the incarnation, the Word made flesh. We don't have to try to argue our way into that greater Consciousness because it has already taken up its dwelling within us, not by argument but by love. Meditation is simply knowing that.

**After meditation: Two Kinds of Intelligence The Essential Rumi, tr. Coleman Barks (Edison, NJ: Castle Books, 1997) p. 178.**

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,  
as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts  
from books and from what the teacher says,  
collecting information from the traditional sciences  
as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world.

You get ranked ahead or behind others  
in regard to your competence in retaining  
information. You stroll with this intelligence  
in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more  
marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one  
already completed and preserved inside you,  
a spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness  
in the center of the chest. This other intelligence

does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid,  
and it doesn't move from outside to inside  
through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead  
from within you, moving out.

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