

The ground of my being

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From “The Silence of the Soul,” by Laurence Freeman OSB in THE TABLET 10 May 1997.

Our thoughts, fears, fantasies, hopes, angers and attractions are all rising and falling moment by moment. We automatically identify ourselves with these fleeting or compulsively recurring states without thinking what we are thinking. When silence teaches us how unreliaibly transient these states really are, we confront the terrible questions of who we are. In silence we wrestle with the terrible possibility of our own non-reality. Buddhist thought makes this experience—what it calls anatman or “no self”—one of the central wisdom-pillars of its path of liberation from suffering and one of its essential means to enlightenment Understandably, anatman is the Buddhist idea that others generally have most trouble with. How absurd, how terrible, how sacrilegious to say that I don’t exist. In fact most Christian antagonism to anatman is unfounded or founded on misinterpretation. It does not mean that we do not exist but that we do not exist in autonomous independence, the kind of existence the ego likes to imagine it has.

I do not exist by myself because God is the ground of my being. In the light of this insight we read the words of Jesus with deeper perception. “If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind; day after day he must take up his cross and come with me; but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). If through silence we can embrace this truth of anatman, we make important discoveries about the nature of consciousness. We discover that consciousness, the soul, is more than the amazing computing and calculating and judging system of the brain. We are more than what we think. Meditation is not what we think.

After meditation: Gary Snyder, from “Finding the Space in the Heart” in MOUNTAINS AND RIVERS WITHOUT END (Washington: Counterpoint, 1996), p. 149, 150.

Stomp out greed.

The best things in life are not things.
words placed by an old desert sage.

O, ah! The
awareness of emptiness
brings forth a heart of compassion!

Fifteen years passed. In the eighties
with my lover I went where the roads end.
Walked the hills for a day,
looked out where it all drops away,
discovered a path
of carved stone inscriptions tucked into the sagebrush