



Seeking Silence

Timothy Hursley

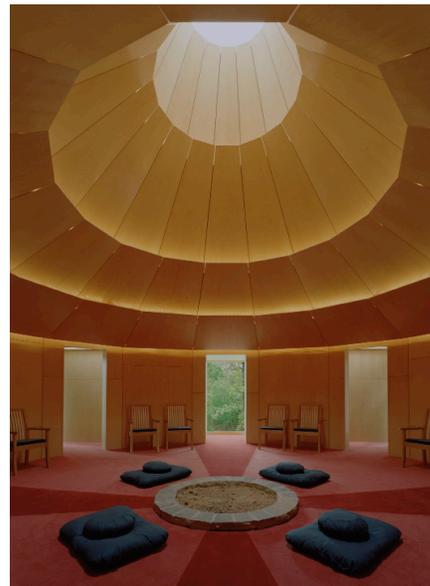
Intermediary
of the Divine



When I walk up the path to the House of Prayer, the air seems richer and thicker, as if its molecular density has been altered by spiritual presence. In the fall, the sun seems not so much to beam down, but to flow, like the sap in the maple trees that frame the walkway. And in the spring, the daffodils suddenly reappear from the scattered profusion of leaves, limbs and shrubs, which have been left to their natural devices, unattended.

Not that this place needed any more sanctification than it already bears, but the earthly remains of my beloved middle son lie in the adjacent columbarium. The memory of his departure from us in sadness and tragedy, when I am there, puts me in what must be one of the most receptive frames of mind for prayer that there is ... being the possessor of a broken heart. I feel him in the House of Prayer more than anywhere else.

I have said that I come to the House of Prayer for the solace I find in prayer and meditation when I can't take another step in the world. That's true. But I also come in those moments when I feel grateful. As a sinner and a fallible human being, those moments are, I confess, too rare for the blessings I've had—but I'm working on that. And the House of Prayer



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seems to me to be the right place to come and lay that gratitude down.

Within, you are bathed in the language of the ineffable ... silence. A quiet mind is a receptive mind. I've actually practiced meditation and contemplative prayer for some time now.

There are many things I have left to learn about those processes, but I know this ... on rare occasions I have experienced maybe one or two seconds of what I would call total peace while in deep silence. Those very, very brief but awesome moments have made me yearn for more. It is really no mystery to me that what that yearning is really for is the peace of God.

Must it not be true that, in composing the Ninth Symphony, Beethoven was but an intermediary of the Divine? The House of Prayer intermediates the Divine just the same ... giving us the silence that courses through the universe like a symphony.

Let those who have ears listen.

Curt Bradbury
Former Board Member
Member of the Founding Steering Committee

A Sacred Nest

When we opened our doors in 2007 we had no idea that nine years later we would have welcomed more than 12,000 visitors into this sacred space. Nor did we know that the House of Prayer would function much like a nest for the Divine.



A nest is carefully built, practical, and beautiful. In a nest, new life is placed in the form of precious eggs. The eggs are protected, kept warm, and sheltered. When the baby birds are born, again the nest is where they are kept safe and fed as they grow. It is from

the nest that they gradually venture out into the world.

Our House of Prayer serves much the same purpose. For each of us the Divine is offering to give us new life. The Divine is trying to birth within us more love, wisdom, and peace.

In order for new life to be born in us, we need silence so God's work can be done in us. Through silence we find protection as we go on our journey, a connection to the Divine, and we find a place where we are nourished and guided.

Through silence we find wisdom and a calm center. Please come and enjoy the beauty and the stillness in this sacred nest. Bring a friend and introduce them to the mystery that greets one in this holy place.

*The Rev. Susan Sims Smith
Founder and Lifetime Board Member
Arkansas House of Prayer*

Moments of Silence

As a physician and mother of three, I must savor the rare moments of silence sprinkled throughout my day. On a deliberate search for silence, I recently traveled alone to Peru. Far from computers, televisions, wifi, and even cellular service, I found myself floating on a three hour boat ride down the Amazon River to a small resort recognized for its seclusion and abundant wildlife. Nestled in my mosquito net hut over the water, I settled in to meditate and journal with the sounds of the jungle in the background.



Dixie Knight

The next day I was seated at a community table in the dining room with a Dutch family. As we discussed parenthood and careers, the conversation drifted to the topic of seeking silence, and I began to speak about the Arkansas House of Prayer.

While I often share with people about how blessed we are to have this resource in our own backyard here in Little Rock, I must admit I sensed the paradox in the fact that I had traveled three thousand miles to find the same silence that is available every day in my hometown!

Wherever your travels take you this summer, I encourage you to take a "homecation" any time, day or night, to the silence that awaits at the Arkansas House of Prayer—no passport or vaccinations required.

Dr. Christie Beck
Board President, Arkansas House of Prayer

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How Does the Light Bill Get Paid?

The Arkansas House of Prayer (AHOP) is an interfaith ministry of St. Margaret's Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas; however, it is financially independent and its Board is responsible for raising the funds to pay for the light bill and all other costs of operation including maintenance, other utilities, and staff salaries.

The AHOP has a very modest annual operating budget of \$60,000, augmented by generous volunteer efforts. Part of the budget is covered by an endowment given by several generous people over the years. The remainder of the operating budget comes from people like you and me who give to the AHOP, hopefully year after year.

So, you and I pay the AHOP light bill and for everything else. Please give to the operating budget or to the endowment to keep this sacred not-for-profit ministry going. To do so, please use the enclosed envelope or the website arkansashouseofprayer.org. If you are interested in supporting the endowment, please contact the Rev. Susan Sims Smith at arkansashouseofprayer@gmail.com Blessings to you.

Dr. G. Richard Smith, Board Member, Arkansas House of Prayer

The Soul - Trait of Silence

A troubling tale opens Leviticus 10: Two of Aaron's sons, priests of Israel, are killed by God for offering "alien fire," whatever that is. Immediately, and arguably inscrutably, Moses says to his brother Aaron, "This is what the Eternal meant when saying: 'Through those near to Me I show Myself holy, and gain glory before the people'."

Aaron responds with silence.

Medieval bible commentators are divided about that silence, with one (*Abravanel*) understanding Aaron to be "stunned into silence, . . . inconsolable;" while another (*Sforno*) suggests that Aaron is "consoled by God's



showing the Divine holiness through their deaths." While both opposite theories are plausible, neither satisfies me. I suspect that Aaron is silent because no immediate response would be appropriate.

How often have we regretted lashing out when we felt insulted? Wished we hadn't hit "send" on that "nastygram" response to an irritating email? We have all heard, but

Dixie Knight failed to heed, the sage advice: Write the pointed reproach if you must, and then delete it. Count to ten before saying a word. "Be of the disciples of Aaron, seeking peace and pursuing it." (*Talmud, Ethics of the Sages, 1:4*)

I contemplate silence as part of practicing *mussar*, Jewish spiritual discipline.

The modern *mussar* master Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe wrote, "Silence needs to be learned" (*Alei Shur*). In our busy worlds, with high powered computers in our pockets and constant activity all around us, silence does not come naturally. We must work hard to quiet not only our mouths but also the thumbs that tap out the emails. And we must silence our minds, so that we may hear God speak through us, rather than voicing whatever urge prevails.

How do we learn a silence which does not come naturally to us moderns? We adopt a discipline. One *mussar* student eats lunch alone. He stopped reading emails during meals, taking that time for contemplation. Another adopted silence when driving the car alone: no radio and no phone. Others fix times for daily meditation or a weekly visit to the Arkansas House of Prayer. We will not learn silence, any more than we would acquire a second language or excel at tennis, without practice.

My *mussar* teacher, Alan Morinis writes, "Silence is a pregnant state out of which can emerge worlds of possibility we have no hope of knowing so long as our lives are overfilled with words and noise" (*Everyday Holiness, p. 144*).

We do not know what Aaron says when he emerges from that silence of Lev. 10:3. Perhaps he keeps his peace. Maybe he conveys a lesson to his surviving sons about avoiding their brothers' fate. In private, he might rebuke Moses, letting his brother know that his words hurt. In public, he might instruct Israel about accepting an unacceptable loss. Indeed, silence is so "pregnant" that it could produce a multiple birth, and many of those possibilities could be "born."

Silence has much to teach us, if we will only learn it.

Rabbi Barry Block
Congregation B'nai Israel

Everything I know about mussar must be attributed to my teacher, Alan Morinis, and particularly to his book Everyday Holiness.

Dhikr

(Remembrance) is a devotional prayer in Islam in which the worshiper engages in rhythmic repetition of holy words or phrases from scripture with the goal of obtaining a feeling of peace, spiritual enlightenment, and separation from worldly values.

Sophia Said
Islamic Center of Little Rock
Arkansas House of Prayer Board
Program Director,
Interfaith Center at St. Margaret's

Keep an eye out for our fall newsletter, which will feature a deeper look at the practice of Dhikr.



Spring
2016

Arkansas House of Prayer
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We are grateful to this issue's writers for their contributions, and to Katherine Whitworth Stewart, Marti Morrison, the Rev. Cindy Fribourgh, and John Willis for their help with production of this first issue.

Arkansas House of Prayer is an interfaith haven, set apart in nature, dedicated to contemplative prayer, meditation, and quiet where all are welcome.

arkansashouseofprayer.org

Hours

Monday-Thursday 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Friday 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Saturday-Sunday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Monday through Friday, please visit the office at St. Margaret's (across the parking lot) to obtain a visitor's pass.

From The Director's Office

Arkansas House of Prayer is a place that supports growth and transformation for every person who visits. As of this writing, we are in a season of growth and transformation in Arkansas as a long, rainy spring gives way to the full fruition of summertime.



Each spring, I walk the path to the House of Prayer with a mixture of care and delight to see which plants have come back to life, what needs a little extra watering, and how our building has weathered another year. The beautiful gardens and the building they surround are tangible symbols of the spiritual growth and transformation that are available to us on the inside. Just as seeing the flowers and trees revive and the fountain gurgle back to life

each spring brings its own joys, watching people come down the path the first time then return again to pray, to contemplate, to serve, to give, and to grow is one of the greatest rewards of this job.

My own journey at Arkansas House of Prayer has been one of a gradual, yet continual transformation. I began as a volunteer, was later hired on as Administrator, and on June 1, 2016, I began serving as Executive Director. As the organization has grown, I have grown up with it. I look forward to serving in this new role and to supporting all of the new growth here in this beautiful, transformative space, the haven that is Arkansas House of Prayer.

John Willis, Executive Director, Arkansas House of Prayer

Upcoming Events

Love Thy Neighbor: Moving from Darkness to Light

Thursday, September 8 at 6 p.m.

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Little Rock

*Sponsored by Arkansas House of Prayer
and the Interfaith Center*

*Fifth annual interfaith event originally
held on the tenth anniversary of 9/11,
promoting understanding and peace
among the world's religions.*

Interfaith Food Festival to follow the program.

Fall Centering Prayer Retreat

Saturday, November 12, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Arkansas House of Prayer &
St. Margaret's Episcopal Church

Co-facilitated by

Dr. Nicholas Cole and the Rev. Lowell Grisham

Cost: \$75, includes materials and food

*To register, contact John Willis at 501.821.7773
or email arkansashouseofprayer@gmail.com*