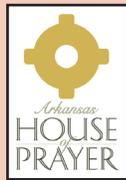




Timothy Hurstley

## Mauna and Meaning



Mauna is a broad word for a kind of silence that pervades everyday life, stays with one long after meditation, and becomes the ground of being for the practitioner. Our leader for the intensive experience was revered Hindu spiritual teacher Sri Ganapathi Swamiji of Mysore, India. Swamiji of Mysore believes that people of all religions can come closer to God as they understand God through Mauna, or radical silence. He asked us to observe silence from sunrise to sunset, to eat very light vegetarian food, to avoid all electronics during these hours, and to gather with our group of 200 people for three hours of shared silence in both morning and afternoon. During those six hours, he was in the room with the group. He did some teaching about ways to be silent, reasons to be silent, and blessings from being silent. He taught that most people eat too much, talk too much, and worry too much. He did various spiritual teachings to anchor us in God's love. His physical presence in the room was profound: As he went deeply into his own meditation, his energy pulled us into and held us in a silence that



Tunga

most of us could have never imagined. Swamiji invited us into a silence that walked us near God's presence; his vibration held us in that zone of love for extended periods.

What were some of the blessings of this extended prayer practice?

There was a release of worrying into God's love. There was a deeper trust in God's plan for all of our lives. There was a connection to what Christians would call the Christ within or our true nature. Hindus and Buddhists might call this one's "atman."

From a place of being closer to God's presence and closer to our own inner soul, a happiness, a joy, a lightness, and a peace flowed through us, near us, and around us.

Lest we make it all seem too spiritual, each night when the sun set and the curfew of silence was lifted, the three of us eagerly huddled together to process the day, to laugh together, and to be amazed at what God can do with this silence. As three Arkansas women who are each connected to the House of Prayer, and now connected more to each other, we wondered how we might bring even more opportunities to the House of Prayer for this Mauna. Let's see what evolves and how our community here in Arkansas might deepen our spiritual practice together with radical silence as our bond. It could bring more laughter, more joy, more peace, and more service to humanity. Let's daydream together about radical silence.

*The Rev. Susan Sims Smith*



Fall  
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**Issue #8**

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

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**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.

# Stillness and Knowing

Mauna.

An inherent silence.

A word I had never heard before Reverend Susan Sims Smith invited me to join her in Davos. People would be coming from all over the world and from all religious traditions to listen to and be near this holy man. I had no idea what



to expect but my heart and mind told me I needed to go. Nothing I could have imagined would prepare me for what I was about to experience and the change it would make in my life.

Sr. Deborah and I traveled together and after several delays, finally arrived in the beautiful city of Davos. Surrounded by the Alps and the “purest” air in the

world, we were off to a good start. After the first day I knew something was happening in the room of two hundred people. The energy was strong and maintaining silence and focus seemed easy....and I wanted more. I had never centered for this long. Twenty minutes had, in the past, seemed like an eternity. How to explain?

I looked around the room and felt a heightened energy level. Was it the community of silence seekers? Was it this holy man? I settled on both but watched Swamiji as he slowly perused the room and blessed each person. He then randomly went back to others for a more intense blessing. This included Susan, Sister Deborah, and me. I believe this was a transfer of the spiritual energy that characterizes Mauna. It was freely transferred to all participants. And as I watched and listened to Swamiji talk about finding God within ourselves through the practice of silence, I could feel an incredible joy swelling up inside me. I knew why I had come on this journey.

This experience made these words from Psalms 46:10 come alive to me: “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalms 46:10).

*Chucki Bradbury*

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## Editor's Note

In July, our Founder, Rev. Susan Sims Smith; Executive Director, Sr. Deborah Troillett; and Board President, Chucki Bradbury, traveled together to Davos, Switzerland, joining a group of 200 people to experience a radical form of silence called Mauna with the spiritual leader Sri Ganapathi Swamiji. Their experience was one, but it came in many colors. We found the shades so interesting that we invited them all to share their journey in the hopes that you will be inspired by one and all.

# Homecoming into Silence

“I am going home to the home I have never been in this body!” – Thomas Merton

In 1984, I learned Christian Meditation at a silent retreat based on a book by John Main called *Word into Silence*. During that retreat, “Maranatha—Come Lord Jesus” became the mantra I would practice for many years to follow. In 1985, I visited India as part of an 8-week pilgrimage to study major world religions then returned five years later as a participant in a 7-week Fulbright Seminar: “India Dynamics of Change.” There we encountered Hindu spiritual teachers who offered us their wisdom—both fresh and ancient. As a result, my newfound commitment to meditative practice was strengthened and enriched. In 2003, Fr. Keating helped me embrace a deeper understanding of my mantra. It became my “sacred word,” symbolizing my intention “to consent to God’s presence and action within.” It was Thomas Keating who introduced me to the idea that not only is silence God’s first language, it is how God speaks best. Susan’s generous invitation to join her in Davos opened this storehouse within me, revealing a striking pattern of graced experiences that had transformed my silent prayer and thus, my relationship to God. This was an offer I could not refuse.

While it is easy to describe the simple structure of the three-day Mauna conference, it is not easy to articulate the experience. Hearing it, my friends and family, mostly expressed disbelief that anyone could “sit that long.” Yet in sharing this experience with my two companions, we were quite clear that we were not “doing” silence for three hours at a time, but we seemed to be opening to it more deeply each hour. We were clear that in silence, we were being held and touched in a way that was supportive, healing, and freeing. My faith tradition and personal relationship with Jesus tells me that this was an experience of the all-merciful compassionate Christ who transcends time and who always longs to touch us with what is true, good, beautiful, universal.

## *Harvesting Blessings*

In this season of the harvest, many of us move our thoughts to thanksgivings for all of our blessings. During this time of gratitude, please remember the blessings that come from silence. As you remember that, please consider sending a gift to the House of Prayer so we can continue to offer this place of sacred silence for each person to find a place of gratitude and peace within their hearts.

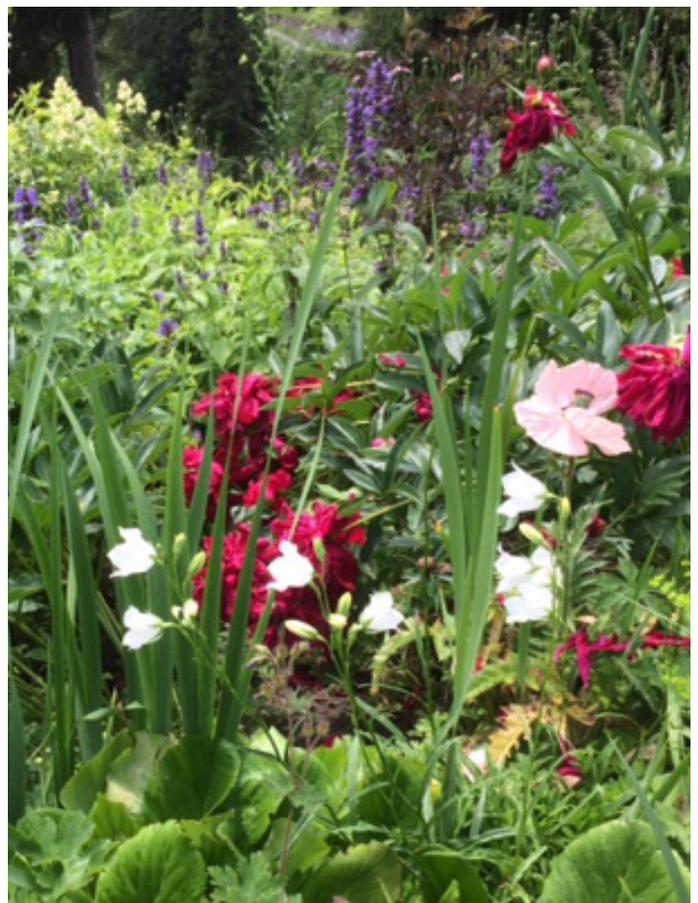
*Dr. G. Richard Smith*

My faith also tells me that such experiences are total gift; never merited, but with the potential to be transformative for the individual, for the group that intentionally shares silence, and for this suffering world. Thomas Merton once described his first experience in Asia as “going home to the home I have never been in this body!”

The conference in Davos was an experience of going home to my roots—to a place that literally I had never been before. To my great delight, I discovered radical silence as the “root” of what has always been at home in me. I am now more at home in silence and silence is now more at home in me. “Deep calls unto deep” (Ps. 42:7)—and deep silence unto deep silence. For all seekers of silence, may the fruit of such “homecoming” continue to unfold gently and authentically in our shared spiritual journey. May the Divine life grow through silence and manifest simply and beautifully as greater Divine light and love present in this world.

*Sister Deborah Troillett*

*The next Mauna Conference will be held Aug. 11-16, 2020 in Düsseldorf, Germany. Information about accommodations and registration procedure will be available at a later date.*





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## *Meditation Tips*

1. First thing in the morning is a good time to meditate, before the mind is too involved in daily activities. However, whenever you can find the time is also a great time.
2. Consider taking a bath or shower before you meditate.
3. Find a quiet spot which, over time, you make your sacred space.
4. Sit comfortably with back straight but not rigid.
5. Choose a focal point. Common ones are: your breath, an icon, a sentence of sacred scripture, a phrase, a mantra, or a candle.
6. When the mind wanders, every so gently return your attention to your focal point. Accept that the nature of the mind is to wander, worry, problem solve, and defend its plans.
7. Between mind wanderings, simply sit in the stillness, when the mind wanders, gently return to your focal point.
8. Allot a long enough period of time to deepen your practice.
9. Find a spiritual director or a soul companion with whom to share your journey.
10. Find another meditation practitioner with whom to discuss the deepening of your silence.

## Ways to Connect

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