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Closing to a Bud Again

Lilian Staveley

As the loving creature progresses, he will find himself ceasing to live in things, or thoughts of things or of persons, but his whole mind and heart will be concentrated upon the thought of God alone. Now Jesus, now the High Christ, now the Father, but never away from one of the aspects or personalities of God, though his conditions of nearness will vary. For at times he will be in a condition of great nearness, at times in a condition of some farness, or, more properly speaking, of obscurity. He will be in a condition of waiting—this exceedingly frequent, the most frequent of all; a condition of amazing happiness; a condition of pain, of desolation at being still upon the earth instead of with God. He will be in a condition of giving love to God, or a condition of receiving love, of remembrance and attention. He will be in a condition of immeasurable glamour, an extraordinary illumination of every faculty, not by any act of his own, but poured through him until he is filled with the elixir of some new form of life, and feels himself before these experiences never to have lived; he but existed as a part of Nature. But now, although he has become more united to Nature than ever before, he also is mysteriously drawn apart from her; without being in any way presumptuous,

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Lilian Staveley (1878-1928) was an Anglican laywoman whose inward spiritual life remained hidden even from her closest friends and family members until after her death, when it was discovered that she was the author of three anonymous works concerning the mystical journey, including an autobiography, *The Prodigal Returns*, and *The Golden Fountain*, the source of this selection.

he feels himself to be above her, not by any merits, but by intention of Another. He has become lifted up into the spirit and essence of Nature, and the heavy and more obvious parts of her bind him no more. He is in a condition of freedom; he is frequently in a condition of great splendor, and is wrapped perpetually round about with that most glorious mantle: the consciousness of God.

These are man's right and proper conditions. These are the lovely will of God for us. And too many of us have the will to go contrary to Him. Oh, the tragedy of it! If only the whole world of men and women could be gathered and lifted into this garden of love, persuaded to rise from lesser loves into the bosom of His mighty Love. For the truly loving soul here on earth there are no longer heavens, nor conditions of heavens, nor grades, nor crowns, nor angels, nor archangels, nor saints, nor holy spirits; but, going out and up and on, we reach at last the One, and for unspeakably glorious moments we know Him. This is life: to be in Him, and He in us, and know it.

These beautiful flights of the soul cannot be taken through idleness, though they are taken in what would outwardly appear to be a great stillness. This stillness is but the necessary abstraction from physical activity, even from physical consciousness; but inwardly the spirit is in a great activity, a very ferment of secret work. This is frequently produced by the beautiful in Nature, the spirit involuntarily passing at the sight of beauty into a passionate admiration for the Maker of it. This high, pure emotion, which is also an intense activity of the spirit, would seem so to etherealize the creature that instantly the delicate soul is able to escape her loosened bonds and flies towards her home, filled with ineffable, incomparable delight, praising, singing, and joying in her Lord and God until the body can endure no more, and swiftly she must return to bondage in it. But the most wonderful flights of the soul are made during a high adoring contemplation of God. We are in high contemplation when the heart, mind, and soul, having dropped consciousness of all earthly matters, have been brought to a full concentration upon God—God totally invisible, totally unimaged, and yet focused to a center point by the great power of

love. The soul, while she is able to maintain this most difficult height of contemplation, may be visited by an intensely vivid perception, inward vision, and knowledge of God's attributes or perfections, very brief; and this as a gift, for she is not able to will such a felicity to herself, but being given such she is instantly consumed with adoration, and enters ecstasy.

Having achieved these degrees of progress, the heart and mind will say: "Now I may surely repose, for I have attained!" And so we may repose, but not in idleness, which is to say, not without abundance of prayer. For only by prayer is our condition maintained and renewed; but without prayer, by which I mean an incessant inward communion, quickly our condition changes and wears away. No matter to what degree of love we have attained, we need to pray for more; without persistent but short prayer for faith and love, we might fall back into strange woeful periods of cold obscurity. To the accomplished lover, great and wonderful is prayer; the more completely the mind and heart are lifted up in it, the slower the wording. The greater the prayer, the shorter in words, though the longer the saying of it, for each syllable needs to be held up upon the soul before God, slowly and, as it were, in a casket of fire, and with marvelous joy. And there are prayers without words, and others without even thoughts, in which the soul in a great stillness passes up like an incense to the Most High. This is very pure, great love; wonderful, high bliss.

The mode of entrance into active contemplation I would try to convey in this way. The body must be placed either sitting or kneeling, and supported, or flat on the back as though dead. Now the mind must commence to fold itself, closing forwards as an open rose might close her petals to a bud again, for every thought and image must be laid away and nothing left but a great forward-moving intention of love. Out glides the mind all smooth and swift, and plunges deep, then takes an upward curve, and up and on till willingly it faints, the creature dies, and consciousness is taken over by the soul, which, quickly coming to the trysting place, spreads herself, and there awaits the revelations of her God. To my feeling this final complete passing over of consciousness from the mind to the soul is by act and will of

God alone, and cannot be performed by will of the creature, and is the fundamental difference between the contemplation of Nature and the contemplation of God. The creature worships, but the soul alone knows contact. And yet the mode of contemplation is a far simpler thing than all these words; it is the very essence of simplicity itself; and in this sublime adventure, we are really conscious of no mode nor plan nor flight—nothing but the mighty need of spirit for Spirit and love for Love.

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