

Eco Contemplative Liturgy: wind and breath

Sunday 23 March 9:45 am in the Southwood Garden and on Zoom



Gathering

We begin by settling ourselves on the seats, slowly stilling our bodies. We hear the sound of traffic, whose polluting fumes, heavier than air, are sinking into low places. Now we centre our attention here, at this moment in St. James's garden. We feel the air on our faces, perhaps a movement of wind. We focus on our breathing, in and out, noting how our nostrils and mouths give form to the air, making a tiny wind in and out, in and out. We breathe with the grasses. We in-spire and ex-pire with the trees.

As we breathe in and out with plants and trees and other beings, we co-inspire each other. We are inhaling and exhaling the breath with which God quickened life in a formless void.

Readings

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.

Genesis 1 v 1-3

Nothing is more common to the diverse indigenous cultures of the earth than a recognition of the air, the wind, and the breath, as aspects of a singularly sacred power... many indigenous peoples construe awareness, or 'mind' not as a power that resides inside their heads, but rather as a quality they themselves are inside of.

David Abram: The Spell of the Sensuous

I am the fiery life of the essence of God; I am the flame above the beauty in the fields; I shine in the waters; I burn in the sun, the moon, and the stars. And with the airy wind, I quicken all things vitally by an unseen, all-sustaining life.

Hildegarde of Bingen

The winds are burdened by the utterly awful stink of evil, selfish goings-on... The air belches out the filthy uncleanness of the peoples.

Hildegarde of Bingen

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear! ..

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.

Percy Bysshe Shelley: Ode to the West Wind

Meditation (15 minutes)

We take the rhythms of our breathing, with the tiny winds it sucks into our bodies and exhales into the air, into the garden or our chosen place. If there is any wind, we note how it moves other beings in the garden such as leaves. We note the sounds they make, the brief interaction of energy. If the air is still, we note how active it is in encircling and defining other beings, in carrying waves of sound.

We might focus on one more-than-human being and co-inspire.

Re-gathering

If you would like to, please share any response you have had.

This house has been far out at sea all night,
The woods crashing through darkness, the booming hills,
Winds stampeding the fields under the window
Floundering black astride and blinding wet

continued...

Till day rose; then under an orange sky
The hills had new places, and wind wielded
Blade-light, luminous black and emerald,
Flexing like the lens of a mad eye....

Ted Hughes: Wind

It is as if human language and the world's air exist in a delicate exchange. For the air's gentle collective unconscious glints with meaning, glistens a moment in the psyche and is exhaled through voiced air, back into the listening air, a reciprocal inspiration. Before written language, words were expressed only through expiration – in air mind was made manifest. Bright, electric and wild, air - wide as sky in waiting potential – was the medium of mind, and this must have been the most rapturous delight our species has ever known, as we leapt into language and realised we could make the outer air ring with the sound of our inner minds, psyche and world mutually (and literally) coinspired. The soul, distilled to its most potent, is embodied in speech and song.

Jay Griffiths: from the chapter Wild Air in Wild

Prayer

Spirit who appeared as a rushing wind, breathe your power into us.

Catch us up in the cosmic dance of creation. As we inspire and breathe out with other beings, help us to play our part in the cosmic act of co-creation.

As our mouths shape your air into sounds, words and music, help us create connexion and harmony, not to be instruments of discord.

Help us to honour winds in all their manifestations: gentle breezes, seed-scattering gusts, even gales of terrifying power. May we recognise that God is power beyond our imagining and control. May we never accept or live a tamed version of ourselves.

Breathe life into us, so we may live in the freedom and energy of the Spirit