

PORTAL INTO SILENCE ON BREATHING

New Year's day can be an opportune time to reflect on the passing of time and one's own place in it. Reading a fantasy series lately grounded in an alternate reality with eight-day weeks and eleven-month years reminded me of how artificial is our own calibration of time. Our own world's new year properly begins with the winter solstice on December 21, as the so-called pagan ancients knew very well. For a while now, I've been contemplating my own life-time calibrated in breaths. My resting breathing rate is approximately twenty breaths per minute. Knowing full well the arithmetic vagaries involved, this nevertheless informs me that I've been blessed with something like 760,000,000 breaths in my lifetime – the overwhelming majority of them entirely sub-conscious – constant gifts of sustained life – neither acknowledged nor thanked for.

The biblical creation story asserts that humanity's first breath was in-spired by the breath of God, leaving aside, as it does, the mystery of our fellow earthly creatures and their breath. Still, for Jews and Christians, humanity's first breath is a gift of God enlivening all humankind with the Creator's "Yes!" everywhere and always, past and present, until the last.

first breath ... this breath ... last breath...

Three breaths, encompassing my living presence here and now. I don't remember my first breath, of course, but I wish I could. I know where and when it occurred – approximately. Sitting here at the keyboard, I am distracted, this breath demanding my attention – now this *next* breath – now the breath *thereafter* until... when? – until Last Breath! Inevitably, one of these breaths *will* be The Last Breath. There have been moments when I have longed desperately for The Last Breath – wrestling with the temptation, the compulsion, to reach forward, violently, seizing that last gift, demanding in the face of God that it occur now, imagining how I could accomplish it, withdrawing my assent to God's gift – making *this next* breath my *last* breath. But love constrained me, and responsibilities, and painful consequences, not for me but for those I love – and I continue to breathe by the grace of God, now more easily and also more deeply aware....

first breath ... this breath ... last breath still to come ...

And so, you will understand how breathing has become an important, vital even, contemplative practice: to stop! and, suspending as much as possible all other distractions, to centre awareness and existence on the continuous "Yes!" God speaks to my being, to *our* being also, to be sure, but in the moment, to *my* being *here* and *now*.

first breath, YES! ... this breath, YES! ... someday, last breath, NOW! ...

This breathing practice resounds with Silence. Receiving and holding God's "Yes!" again and again and again, brings one to the only appropriate response in return – "Yes!"

Gerry Ediger, January 1, 2019

There are no other thoughts needed in that exchange of “Yes!” And the “Yes” is offered and returned in Silence – silent as our restful breathing, soundless but none-the-less deeply infilling to the core of ones being – voluntary but ultimately involuntary, a Gift received and returned. Whatever else God works in our secret heart amid this silence is grounded in the assent we offer to God’s continuous “Yes” to us.