

SPIRITUALITY OF THE DESERT

Desert: Uninhabited, desolate; uncultivated, barren. Waterless and treeless region....

It is difficult to conceive of either Judaism or Christianity without the desert. The austerity and relentless simplicity of the desert- and its potential to strip us down to essentials - was also the place of formation for Jesus of Nazareth. The desert is a metaphor – a visceral experience nevertheless- for the laboratory of the Spirit, a place of encounter with absolutes, a searching outer-inner landscape forging (potentially) a new way of being human. The desert was part of Jesus’ experience, and what happened to him there happens to us – more often than not, in the ordinariness of our everyday life: “we see in his life the meaning of our own”.

**“Most people’s wilderness is inside them...an inner isolation.
It’s an absence of contact. It’s a sense of being alone –
boringly alone, or suddenly alone, or terrifyingly alone”.**

H. A. Williams

A contemporary monk of the desert says that “The desert is pitiless; it infallibly rejects all self-seekers”. The desert is a metaphor for the courageous attempt to live a free and truthful life, without illusion or nostalgia. It’s inner meaning is the search for God in the dryness and tediousness of ordinary life and routine.

**And the Spirit immediately drove him [Jesus] out into the wilderness.
He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan;
and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.**

Mark 1:12

Try to imagine Jesus' desert- physical, emotional, spiritual?

Now get in touch with a "desert" experience of your own – past or present, an experience of loss or conflict, confusion or doubt....

If it is a past experience, ask yourself what got you through it?

Where did you find help or encouragement/ And if is a present reality: where do look to for help and support?

Think about the connection between the Spirit and the desert.

You don't have to see a causal relation – but a "connection" may give you new insights into the nightmare of your desert experience.

What are your wild beasts?

Inner beasts of mind and heart: fear, anxiety, lust, anger etc.

How do you experience the angelic?

Who/what are your angels?

***Before the soul comes to perfection, it dwells in the desert,
where it can be exercised in the commandments of the Lord,
and where its faith may be tried by temptation.***

Origen (c185-c254)