

SPIRITUALITY OF THE DESERT

The transforming desert

**The hunter said, “Father, if I keep my bow always stretched it will break”.
So it is with the monk; if we push ourselves beyond measure we will break:
it is right for us from time to time to relax our efforts”.**

Abba Anthony

Have you a sense of your inner rhythm? Do you notice what it's like when you are out of balance?

How do you care for yourself? Can you hear voices which make you feel bad, guilty or selfish when you take time for yourself? Can you recognize them as deceitful voices coming from a false desert which does not lead to life? God does not make us feel bad in order to make us good. God is good, and wants our good.

Can you distinguish between being driven and being drawn? Can you discern the difference in the effect (or fruit) either brings

The desert shall rejoice and blossom.

Isaiah 35:1

In the middle of the fire we are healed and restored- though never taken out of it.

Rowan Williams

Desert wisdom's most famous and distilled aphorism is “sit in your cell and your cell will teach you everything”. As you sit still – noticing your inner compulsions, anxieties and fears, your tendency to move away from this painful place of self-awareness and poverty- can you imagine a life free of illusions, compulsions and addictions? What if you are being called into the attractive freedom of Jesus of Nazareth? Can you hear your deepest, truest self being invited out of that illusory place (which does not deliver what it promises) into a new creation, not an achievement or a possession but pure gift, real, and full of promise?

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Abba Joseph came to Abba Lot and said: “Father, according to my strength I keep a moderate rule...what more must I do?” And the old man rose and held his hands towards the sky so that his fingers became like flowers of fire and said: “If you will, you shall become all flame”.

Abba Joseph

It is the desert – predominantly Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries – where monasticism in its Christian expression came to birth. The desert fathers and mothers withdrew from ordinary society and sought God in the solitude and silence of the desert. To our mind fiercely rigorous, these solitaries placed themselves under spiritual guides. Marked by a disciplined asceticism, they were renowned for their charity and hospitality. They were radically simple, and at their best, full of common sense and integrity. If their lives were focussed in prayer and contemplation, they did not talk much about it. Rather their whole life was fearful struggle with everything that took them away from God.