



# Exhaustion

Why am I so tired?

After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." Matthew 2



Rest on the flight to Egypt, Gentileschi

## Gladly received

This clumsy living that moves lumbering  
as if in ropes through what is not done,  
reminds us of the awkward way the swan walks.  
And to die, which is the letting go  
of the ground we stand on and cling to every day,  
is like the swan, when he nervously lets himself down  
into the water, which receives him gaily  
and which flows joyfully under  
and after him, wave after wave,  
while the swan, unmoving and marvelously calm,  
is pleased to be carried, each moment more fully grown,  
more like a king, further and further on.

*The swan, Rainer Maria Rilke translated by Robert Bly*

## Journeys that exhaust us:

Mary and Joseph's journey was from their home town of Nazareth, to a temporary home in Bethlehem, and now a further stepping stone into exile, to a foreign land. Their departure was triggered by a surprising dream. I wonder what my motivation is for the journey I choose to take. I ponder whether I feel that it was my choosing. Why am I so tired? And I wonder what the notion of 'Sabbath', and the coming to rest mean to me (Hebrews 4:9)?

- What journey into the unknown does this story or image conjure up for me in my life?
- What prompts my journeying?
- How do I feel the journey is going?

## What do I cling to?

We listen in on poet and business consultant David Whyte. Slumped in his chair he asks his visitor, priest David Stendl-Rastl, 'Tell me about exhaustion'.

"You are like Rilke's Swan in his awkward waddling across the ground; the swan doesn't cure his awkwardness by beating himself on the back, by moving faster, or by trying to organize himself better. He does it by moving toward the elemental water where he belongs. It is the simple contact with the water that gives him grace and presence. You only have to touch the elemental waters in your own life, and it will transform everything. But you have to let yourself down into those waters from the ground on which you stand, and that can be hard. Particularly if you think you might drown." He looked down and read again.

And to die, which is the letting go  
Of the ground we stand on and cling to every day

In short the reply is surprising. Torn between the solid ground which marks the territory 'we cling to' and the water 'which flows joyfully under' us Whyte is asked where for you is graceful living as opposed to 'lumbering' living? Is there some movement towards the former albeit a recognition for a time for the latter?

For Whyte this was a journey of discovery, eventually admitting that full time poetry writing was his water.

## Wholeheartedness and rest

This priest then cites wholeheartedness, not merely rest, as an antidote. Being in two places at once exhausts us mentally and physically. Are we present to the now moment? To the person or to this particular task in front of me? Are we present to the now or in two camps simultaneously, also glancing back to retrace our steps, Did I say the right thing? Am I choosing the right path? Or looking ahead to predict and prepare for all possible eventualities, to visualize and so be ahead? Is this a curse as well as reasonable and responsible living?

## Reading material:

[www.gratefulness.org/resource/crossing-unknown-sea/](http://www.gratefulness.org/resource/crossing-unknown-sea/)  
[www.gratefulness.org/readings/whyte\\_dsr.htm](http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/whyte_dsr.htm).  
Midlife and the great unknown, Audio CD. David Whyte

The Coracle Trust - Helping transition in faith through the life stages

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