

AN HERB THAT NOURISHES AND REFRESHES THE SPIRIT

Time has been called an herb that heals all diseases. Like sleep to the body, another herb nourishes and refreshes the spirit--and brings rest to the mind. Its acute absence in our society might explain why hurried, harried lifestyles choke us with grips of iron. But search for this herb, and you'll likely be frustrated.

I recently stumbled upon it quite unexpectedly. Perhaps the residual pain from my knee surgery had sensitized me to my surroundings. For when I awoke in the wee hours, the herb was there, performing its healing work.

My normal nocturnal world is usually punctuated with sounds from dogs, night birds, cats and traffic. But they were all strangely quiet, even for that hour. Total solitude enveloped me.

How important is solitude? It was vital to Jesus, who would often draw aside to a lonely place to pray. And God felt that a day of quietness and rest was so important that one of the Ten Commandments addresses it: "Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." But for the majority of people and businesses, Sunday is like any other day. Those who seek solitude--even on a Sunday--are hard pressed to find it.

There must be something to Emerson's thought that while conversation enriches the understanding, solitude is the school of genius. Poet Carl Sandburg gives examples: "Shakespeare, Leonardo Da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, and Lincoln never saw a movie, heard a radio, or looked at a TV. They were not afraid of being lonely because they knew that was when the creative mood in them would mark."

Of himself, Sandburg also observed, "Only those who learn how to live with solitude can come to know themselves and life. I go out there and walk and look at the trees and the sky. I listen. I sit on a rock or stump and say to myself, 'Who are you Sandburg? Where have you been, and where are you going?'"

Restaurants and stores compel patrons to submit to their loud "music." Commuters assault fellow captives with endless blather. Doctors' offices and hospitals, supposedly places of healing, bristle with noisome televisions you can't turn off. There is no escape.

Former Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis made this observation: "The right to be alone--the most comprehensive of rights, and the right most valued by civilized man." But being alone is nigh impossible these days. Closing the doors in windows is doesn't shut out the wall-jarring racket from vehicles whose occupants have the same disturbing unrest in their own spirits. The grating howls of power equipment violate the rights of others to have some peace and quiet on Sunday.

So it should be no surprise that the increasing incivility of our world finds its expression in noise. What that says about us is not good.