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The Voice Behind All Things

We have all heard a voice. It offers us guidance and direction, and sometimes even warns us. It is so ubiquitous that, when we know where we are going, it just fades quietly into the background and we cease to notice it at all.

We hear it in hospitals, subway systems and 250 airports around the world. It may be one of the most frequently heard voices in all history. Although you may have doubted whether this public address system voice belongs to a real person, it does.

Her name is Carolyn Hopkins. She lives in Northern Maine. She makes the recordings in her own house and emails them to the public address company. When asked about what makes people around the world prefer her voice she guesses that they might hear the smile behind it.

In the 1980's Wim Wenders film *Der Himmel Über Berlin (The Wings of Desire)* invisible angels can hear the thoughts of people as they go past. In one scene the angel walks through a library hearing what is in every person's heart.

In our heads we all carry voices that we recognize. Some of these may be disapproving voices that point out our failures and our limitations. They say things like "You can't do this!" or, "they never loved you," or, "you're just like your father" or, "your brother was always better than you."

Sometimes I think those voices of our thoughts become so dominant, so loud or constant, that we cannot really hear what is happening. This cathedral has different sounds. The woosh of the cable cars, the rain against the stained glass windows, the wind blowing over Nob Hill. One of the most beautiful sounds to me is that of preparation as people get ready for Yoga. A kind of spirit speaks to us in these moments that we often don't recognize.

Ekhnath Easwaran started an ashram in Petaluma and was the one who taught me to meditate. He introduced me to the idea that if we can learn to lay our busy thoughts to the side, we might experience more moments of divinity, the holy.

He taught a form of passage meditation. I want to share one of my favorite passages with you tonight. It comes from St. Augustine's autobiography *Confessions*.¹

"Imagine if all the tumult of the body were to quiet down, along with our busy thoughts about earth, sea and air; if the very world should stop, and the mind cease thinking about itself, go beyond itself, and be quite still; if all the fantasies that appear in dreams and imagination should cease, and there be no speech, no sign:"

"Imagine if all things that are perishable grew still – for if we listen they are saying, *We did not make ourselves; he made us who abides forever* – imagine, then, that they should say this and fall silent, listening to the very voice of him who made them and not to that of his creation;"

"So that we should hear not his word through the tongues of [people], nor the voice of angels, nor the cloud's thunder, nor any symbol, but the very Self which in these things we love, and go beyond ourselves to attain a flash of that eternal wisdom which abides above all things."

"And imagine if that moment were to go on and on, leaving behind all other sights and sounds but this one vision which ravishes and absorbs and fixes the beholder in joy; so that the rest of eternal life were like that moment of illumination which leaves us breathless:"

"Would this not be what is bidden in scripture, *Enter thou into the joy of the Lord?*"

When I am with you on Tuesday nights I hear this voice. When we are together I can hear the smile behind all creation.

Darren's theme – The Earth as a Temple

¹ Translation of Augustine's *Confessions* by Michael N. Nagler in Eknath Easwaran, *God Makes the Rivers to Flow* (Petaluma, CA: Nilgiri Press, 1991) 171.