

Eric
Butterworth
Speaks

Essay #6
A PILLAR OF FIRE

Thomas Carlyle once said, "Every day that is born into the world comes like a burst of music and rings all the day through; and thou shalt make of it a dance, a dirge, or a life march, as thou wilt." This is a fantastic concept--that you can choose the kind of day you will have...in this lesson we are going to consider ways in which all of us actually can select experiences by what we do at night. Tomorrow we will examine how to accept guidance during the day.

In the story of the Israelites' flight from Egypt and their journey to their Promised Land much of interest is revealed from a purely metaphysical point of view. One of them is found in the thirteenth chapter of Exodus, "And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light that they might go by day and by night." From a purely metaphysical point of view, the pillar of cloud represents the mind of God in spiritual visibility and intuitive guidance of phenomenal proportions; and the pillar of fire by night represents the purifying process of spirit cleansing away all error and leaving a positive, affirmative mind.

It is generally accepted that our day commences when we rise up in the morning, but this is not really true. Does the ripened wheat begin at the harvest? Indeed not, it begins when planted as a seed. The day begins for us the night before, just as certainly as it begins technically at midnight. What kind of seeds do we plant? How do we prepare the mind for the important sleep period of purification? How many take as seriously as they should the matter of preparing for sleep?

It is usual to drop into bed when one can't keep awake any longer. The evening news as broadcast on radio and television gives all the bad news. While preparing for bed we rehearse our intentions for the following day so that we can sleep on them; also we habitually go over our list of grudges, worries, enmities one by one like a string of rosary beads, before dropping into a fitful sleep. More often than not, we find that sleep does not come easily, no matter how tired we feel.

It is revealing to recognize that much attention is given to analysing our work and our leisure time, but seldom do we hear about the nearly one-third of our day spent in bed, except in complaining about sleeplessness and the pills we may resort to to overcome it. Here are a few don'ts for bedtime. Don't listen to the news. You can hear it in the morning...it won't go away. Remember the pillar of fire and permit it to guide you through the night. Don't plan your work for the following day, for this can turn into worry and anticipation. Don't read yourself to sleep with stimulating material, scary mysteries or anything politically or intellectually provocative. The need at bedtime is to condition the mind to relaxation and peace rather than to involvement.

Think of your night's sleep as a figuratively fertile field in which to plant the seeds of the morrow's harvest. Realize that the need for preparation is as important as the farmer tilling and readying the soil for planting. Most of us finish the day all wound up; we need to unwind. This takes careful thought. As you finally get into bed, remember that it is a place for sleeping, not worrying, reasoning, planning or projecting. Instead, take something of an inspirational nature, spiritual pillow thoughts, and read quietly for a few moments to get yourself relaxed and receptive, something like The Daily Word, or perhaps selections from the Bible, or Gibran's The Prophet.

David in the midst of fear and uncertainty for his own life said, "I laid me down and slept for the Lord sustained me." This refers to the pillar of fire. In the 127th Psalm, it says, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to take rest late, to eat the bread of toil, for so He giveth unto His beloved sleep." When we are not working, God is working; when we stop thinking about a problem, the Father knows our needs, and it is His pleasure to give us the kingdom.

If a man is a spiritual being, then there must be a transcendent mind that works even when we are asleep, which knows our needs and will perfect them in ways that exceed our own desires. Man is not an automaton; his life is lived from within out. He is not a human computer to be programmed; rather he is a dynamic God-activity to be released. So, we need to base our efforts upon the conviction of the kingdom within, aware that we can release our intuitive forces to work for us.

We might want to take a drill for relaxation, perhaps speaking the word to all of the body center to relax and let go. With practice the cells of the body will obey, and we can find a tremendous release as we do down through the functions and organs of the body just saying, quietly, "Relax, and let go." Then, as you get yourself in tune, as you become centered, in this moment of peace you might want to speak prayerful thoughts of truth; perhaps the Lord's prayer, the Prayer of Protection, or any favorite affirmation or Psalm or treatment through which you become established in the realization of God first and God only. You will probably drop off to sleep in the midst of your prayer time, and this is just as it should be. You will have a sleep of relaxation and peace, and you will awaken ready to meet the new day with courage and confidence.

Many persons have the problem of waking up during the night and passing the time away fighting frantically sleep. I say, "Stop fighting." Sleep is not to be fought, or even fought for. So you are awake--don't worry about it, for you are resting. It has been proven that your exhaustion the next day comes not from the lack of sleep but from your struggle over the sleeplessness. If you are awake during the night, it is a marvelous time to send out thoughts of peace to the world, to tune in on similar thoughts of others; you might even keep a notebook by your bed, and sit up and write your thoughts, with the understanding that you will only write plus, or positive, thoughts. A wise man once observed, "He who would be rich in the morning must kneel like a camel at bedtime to have his burdens lifted by the Master; for to the unburdened the night will be filled by pleasant dreams, tender, refreshing, healing dreams, bright as stardust. For, sleep is a gently maid, beautiful as an angel, bringing her lovely wares for the one who rests without fear or anxiety, safe and secure, in His everlasting arms."

This gives rise to the question, "What about dreams? Are they important and should they be interpreted to guide me through my days?" Many feel that the pillar of fire is actually at work through dreams and that through their interpretation we find the guidance of the spirit. There are certainly many sources to consult for the interpretation of dreams, but I believe that a dream is not a pillar of fire, but rather simply the shadow of its activity. It is an evidence that something is working, but the mind that produced the dream can also produce conscious understanding. I prefer to have faith that the activity of God has worked through the night to fill the empty vessels of my need, and that I will be guided through the coming day by this pillar of fire that has come by night. Mind you, I am not discounting the importance of dream interpretation in certain forms of psychotherapy, but I am saying to leave this in the hands of the analysts, only to be employed as a therapeutic device. Have faith that the pillar of fire by night will turn into the pillar of cloud by day, and that the dreams will indicate an infilling taking place.

Give thanks and expect the awareness to come. Remember, there is a law of consciousness and that your life is going to reflect the kind of thoughts you are thinking and the kind of causes that you set in motion. Be peaceful, and rest in peace.