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Sleeping

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Sleeping

One of my favorite phrases in Scripture is this: “. . . for He gives to His beloved in sleep.” (Ps. 127:2) We are so accustomed to results based on our efforts, that I take delight in the thought that God loves us while we are awake as well as when we are asleep, and does not require our conscious participation for him to give us gifts that affect our well-being and that of others.

Many of us, when we were children, awoke on Christmas morning, on a birthday, or some special occasion such as having lost a “baby tooth,” to find a gift that was left for us while we were sleeping. As adults, we have probably awakened in the morning with an answer to a problem or situation that we had not been able to resolve during many waking hours of concentrated thought. I find it both reasonable and consoling to believe that by whatever process the solution or the gift arrives, God’s love is at the source.

Sleeping itself is a rather amazing gift that differs widely in duration, quality, and consequences from person to person, and also for us as individuals. Some of us can fall asleep easily in a car, bus, or plane; others are able to sleep fully only when in their own beds. Some need eight hours, others only five. But sleep of any kind or amount restores us in mind, body, and spirit. The Creator has arranged that, unlike the sun, the seas, and the winds, we regularly cease activity in order to sustain active lives.

God’s personal love for us is shown in the process of, and in our need for, sleep. We lose consciousness, yet continue to be who we are. The necessity of sleep is a reminder that we are much more than our thoughts and thinking; our total value is not comprised by consciousness, since God loves us even when we are unaware and not making decisions. God continues to move within us while we sleep, sometimes planting helpful images in our dreams, sometimes giving us the ability to look at challenges from a fresh perspective. We usually awaken not only with restored energy, but often with some degree of healing having taken place.

In our efforts to engage the mystery of God, we might meditate, ponder Scripture passages, observe nature or art, recite familiar prayers, do breathing exercises, or repeat mantras. But while we sleep, we do not make requests, consider options, or choose anything in our relationship with God. Yet we might awaken with a sense that

we have been touched by God's Spirit. God does indeed give to his beloved in sleep.

Many of us also have experiences of God when our sleep is interrupted. Sometimes we are awakened from sound sleep, with no identifiable external stimulus such as a noise or bright light. We might notice a great stillness in the environment, but also a deeper than usual quiet in our spirit. At such times we might find it both natural and easy to pray for a time, and then fall peacefully asleep. When we wake up we are fully rested, even though we did not have our accustomed full time of uninterrupted sleep.

At other times, we are so intensely occupied with concerns, that after falling asleep for a short time, we awaken to a continuation of all the internal commotion that had been strongly affecting our thoughts and emotions. We cannot get back to sleep. Externally, the environment might be quiet, but our interior dispositions are the opposite. If we choose to pray at such a time, we might or might not resolve the issue that disturbs us, but we will almost certainly be graced to leave the matter in God's hands for the present, and fall peacefully asleep.

If we act on the belief that "God gives to his beloved in sleep," we will find confirmation in our experience.