

The Cell: Inner Transformation

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Study

THE CELL. THE MONK'S CELL IS HISTORICALLY A PLACE OF ENCLOSURE; but also it is a metaphor for inner transformation. Thus, a vital aspect of a monk's life is self-transformation in order to aspire toward mystical depth. It is daily confrontation with a person's façade of personality—the illusions, desires, and attachments of the false self—to discover the divine within. The monk stakes his or her life on the capacity to be transformed, to be divine-like, enlightened, or free.

Monks throughout history advocate the value of retreating into one's cell as the practical means of self-purification. Monastic elders understand that the cell is the locus of transformation, initiating a potentially life-altering catalytic process. Numerous monastic stories recount some version of this advice: You don't know what to do? Sit in your cell. You have inordinate passions? Sit in your cell until you break through.

Why is the cell efficacious? Because alone in one's cell, the Divine concentrates the monk's being, revealing what has been concealed, and purifying the soul, which guides it to freedom. The cell, however, is not a prison of asceticism. Rather, the monk finds that enclosure is celebration, found by passing through the narrow gate, into intimacy with life itself.

Excerpt, "My Soul a Feast of Prayers," Forthcoming, © Beverly Lanzetta 2017



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