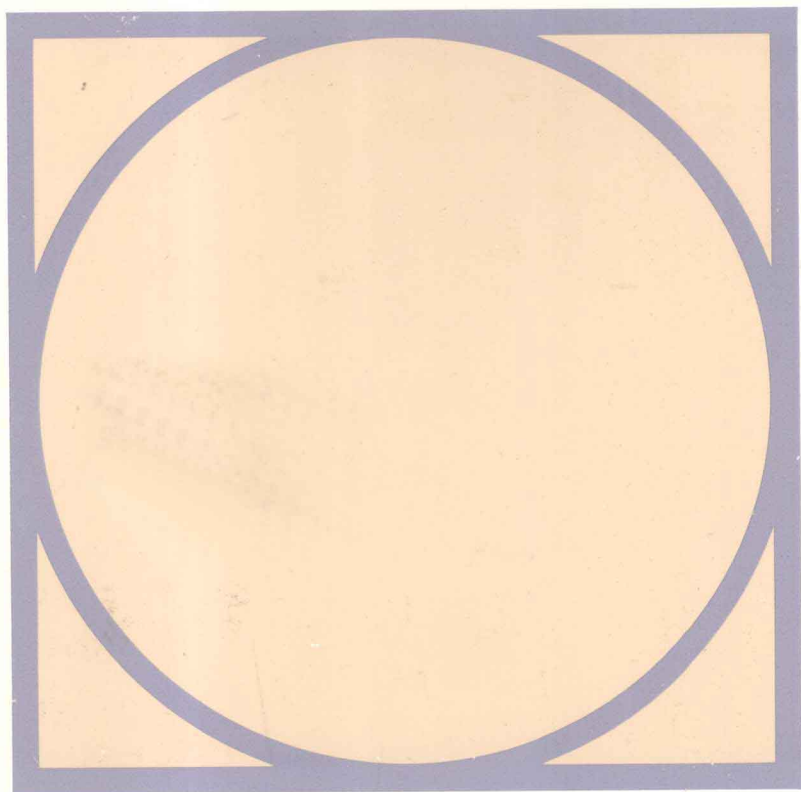


# Living Simply Through the Day

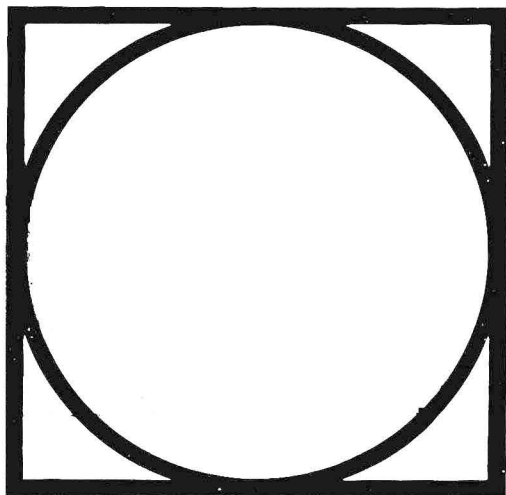
Spiritual Survival in a Complex Age



by  
Tilden Edwards

# Living Simply Through the Day

Spiritual Survival in a Complex Age



by  
Tilden Edwards



PAULIST PRESS  
New York, N.Y./Ramsey, N.J.

Copyright © 1977 by  
The Missionary Society  
of St. Paul the Apostle  
in the State of New York

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Library of Congress  
Catalog Card Number: 77-14855

ISBN: 0-8091-2045-3

Published by Paulist Press  
*Editorial Office:* 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023  
*Business Office:* 545 Island Road, Ramsey, N.J. 07446

Printed and bound in the  
United States of America

**LIVING SIMPLY THROUGH THE DAY**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Science, theology, art, and personal experience all make clear our utter interdependence with all that is. Thus the thoughts of this book belong to me only as a personal screen for the countless people and forces that have poured through my life. A few of those people have been in the foreground of influence and helpfulness, and I want to recognize them here with my deep gratitude:

- My wife Ann for her soft, steady support and hard, discerning eye.
- Cecelia Braveboy and Devera Ehrenberg for their generous time in typing and critiquing the manuscript.
- Gerald May and Henry Atkins for their helpful suggestions.
- Lama Tarthang Tulku Rinpoché and Cistercian Abbot Thomas Keating for the fresh wisdom that led me deeper into Reality.
- The Steering Committee and people of the METC Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation for their encouragement and many insights through the years.
- The Board of the Metropolitan Ecumenical Training Center for allowing me the time to write.
- El Retiro Jesuit Retreat House for the generous use of its facilities and fellowship for the most intensive period of writing.

- My two young children, Jeremy and Jennifer, for patiently leaving me alone to write in our basement for long hours.

- And, of course, my thanks at bottom to the Holy One, whose simple, subtle power and compassion always is being manifest among us.

I acknowledge with appreciation the permission of the National Council of Churches for the Biblical quotations from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyrighted 1946, 1952, ©1971, 1973.

TO THE SIMPLE, HOLY HEART HIDDEN IN ALL OF US

## **Contents**

**Introduction 1**

**PART ONE: Seeing Through Complexity 5**

**Chapter One: A Personal Story 7**

**PART TWO: Simple Presence Through the Day 45**

**Chapter Two: Grounding 46**

**Chapter Three: The Simple Day 51**

**Chapter Four: Waking 56**

**Opening the Day 56**

**Breathing 58**

**Physical Posture 62**

**Movement 73**

**Chapter Five: Praying 75**

**What Is Prayer? 75**

**When To Pray 78**

**Where To Pray 82**

**How To Pray 89**

**Prayer of Solidarity 90**

**Praying Alone 91**

**Praying Together 99**

**Prayer of Quiet 118**

**Putting It All Together 135**



Chapter Six: <b>Relating</b>	<b>137</b>
Chapter Seven: <b>Serving</b>	<b>158</b>
Chapter Eight: <b>Eating</b>	<b>172</b>
Chapter Nine: <b>Playing</b>	<b>184</b>
Chapter Ten: <b>Aching</b>	<b>201</b>
Chapter Eleven: <b>Sleeping</b>	<b>210</b>
POSTSCRIPT: How Far In Do You Want To Go?	<b>211</b>

## Introduction

For my last birthday my wife gave me a ceramic sea otter to place on my desk. The otter is floating on its back, eating an abalone from a cracked shell: an alluring scene I have witnessed many times along the California coast.

To the casual eye that was a casual present. But it was far more. That otter is a reminder of much that I have come to appreciate about life in these last few years: the way we are held up when we attentively relax into it; the buoyancy this experience and trust gives us; the great energy available then to put into work and caring, yet work and caring that has a playful simple edge.

This sense of life is far from the heavy, grasping, tight, fearful orientation to life that dominated my earlier years—the churning attitude that muddies the water and sinks me into a murkiness of my own creation. Such heaviness, like a dark, obscuring rain cloud, can reappear out of the blue at any time and trap me. The otter sits on my desk as a reminder of the spacious, bright, confident, upholding, simple Presence that always is there, however obscured by passing clouds.

A cross sits on my desk, too. That sign has been near me all my life in this heavily churched land. Slowly, erratically, its significance has shifted from an opaque mass evoking a dull, listless response, to an oppressive sign of incomprehensible

heaviness and torture, to an abstract symbol of abstract intellectual truths, to an open window into the way life is: broken and clouded, yet on its far side, whole and radiant.

Placing a cross and otter side by side as revealers of truth may seem absurd to some. But not to anyone who has experienced the cross as a sacrament, an opening into Reality's Heart. When we begin to see through the words and events of Jesus' life to their intimate yet infinitely vast Ground, then we begin to see through everything to that same Ground—even through otters! That Ground, which has a myriad of divine names born of human experience, unites and simplifies the day.

How I have begun to realize this truth in my own recent pilgrimage I would like to share with you first in this book. Then I will take you through certain basic windows of the day: waking, praying, relating, serving, eating, playing, aching, and sleeping. Each window is but a different facet of the same diamond through which we can see and participate in the uniting Ground, in the Holy One who shines through all.

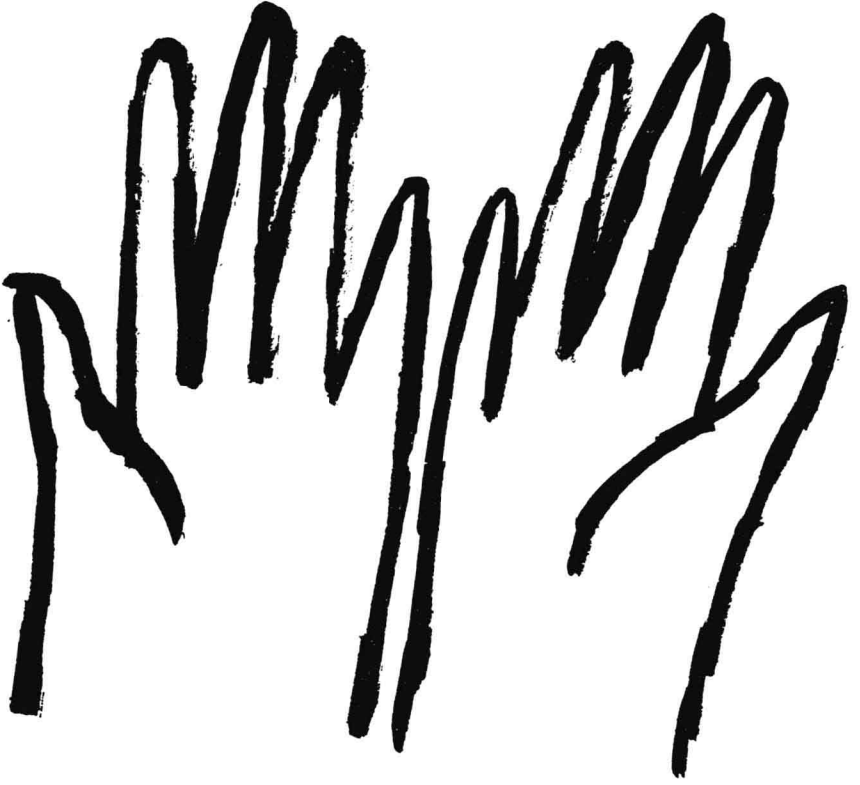
We cannot control this "shining through" in us. That is a matter of grace, of gift. But we can learn to pay simple attention to what is happening; to be "recollected" in our deeper identity, rather than lost and scattered on the complex surface of the day. I have included many practical suggestions for cultivating this attentiveness in each daily activity.

Your participation in the simple, attentive way may be far more full than my own. I make no claim to spiritual maturity. The words I write are spoken at least as much to me as to you. Though these words will speak more often in trust and hope than personal realization, they are words that echo the experience of persons far more holy than I ever expect to be in this life. So perhaps the thoughts can be trusted beyond their speaker.

If I knew you personally, and you had come to me concerned with the simple way, I would choose some things for emphasis and demote, delete, or add others, according to your situation. Each of us is very unique, even though we share the same Ground. We each manifest that Ground differently. All of us need a very personal word: for us in this moment of our lives. I can only hope that somewhere in the chapters ahead the Spirit will rise, your situation and mine will touch, and the spark struck there will lighten your heart, clear your mind, and leave you a little more opened into the Holy One, in whom we live and move and have our being.



## **PART ONE: *Seeing Through Complexity***



## Chapter One: A Personal Story

### The Hands

An old German story<sup>1</sup> tells about the hands of God. God had never really finished making man, and thus had never seen a finished man. He determined to send His right hand into the world to take human form. That hand held all truth. But He was not fully satisfied with what He learned from this one hand. So He continues to send His left hand into the world. That hand is empty; it holds the space for search, for pilgrimage. Since man still is unfinished, goes the story, he must begin with the left hand. One cannot receive the fullness of the right hand except through the pilgrimage of the left.

As human beings our search is for the full truth of the right hand of God, which already is present. But our way to that fullness must be through a more and more empty left hand. A full left hand has no room to receive anything. It is cluttered and satiated and densely complex. As that hand empties, though, it becomes more and more simple and clear. The left hand then slowly unites with the right. We come ever closer to heeding Jesus' prescription for life: "Be perfect (allow your fulfillment) as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Fulfillment, perfection, is union of openness and fullness, two sides of one coin, one reality.

<sup>1</sup>Actually this is a composite of two German stories from Rilke and Lessing by the theologian John S. Dunne in *The Way of All the Earth* (Macmillan, 1972), pp. 93-95.



## **The Brain**

A certain parallel to this story appears in modern brain research. The left side of our brain is the searching side: it grasps, manipulates, categorizes, makes time sequences. The right side of our brain, on the other hand, sees life whole. Everything is together, present, here now, intuitively known. There is no sense of linear time; no analysis. All is just given, full, complete. This right side seems to function best when the left side is quiet, open.

## **Recent Years**

Only in the last few years have I begun to realize the great truth of this process of emptying to find, of simplifying in order to know what is most important. Most of my left hand pilgrimage has been made with the opposite assumption: fill yourself with everything possible; grasp for all you can; stuff your life with every thought, feeling, and experience available. The Kingdom will come at the top of that heap, when it is high and full enough.

But it does not come that way. What comes instead is a thicker pile of "stuff." As this clutter grows, the more fuel there is for the creation of yet more "stuff." And so the accumulation feeds upon itself. We find ourselves ever deeper into illusion, confusion, complexity. "And there is no health in us" (as the General Confession in the 1928 Book of Common Prayer acutely sums it up).