

We gather at the Harcourt flame Wednesday, April 8, 2020



Etty Hillesum was a woman living in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation. Here is something she wrote in her 1942 diary, as the oppression of Jews in the Netherlands and their transshipment to death camps proceeded (a fate she eventually chose for herself in order to stay with 'her people').

„Dear God, these are anxious times. Tonight for the first time I lay in the dark with burning eyes as scene after scene of human suffering passed before me. I shall promise You one thing, God, just one very small thing: I shall never burden my today with cares about my tomorrow, although that takes some practice. Each day is sufficient unto itself. I shall try to help You, God, to stop my strength ebbing away, though I cannot vouch for it in advance. But one thing is becoming increasingly clear to me: that You cannot help us, that we must help You to help ourselves. And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters: that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves. And perhaps in others as well. Alas, there doesn't seem to be much You Yourself can do about our circumstances, about our lives. Neither do I hold You responsible. You cannot help us, but we must help You and defend Your dwelling place inside us to the last.“

(Etty Hillesum, *A Life Transformed*, Patrick Woodhouse, Bloomsbury Academic 2013 page 51)

Etty's conception of God as Vulnerable Presence is consistent with and a development from the first mention of God in her diary a few months earlier: "I regained contact with myself, with the deepest and best in me, which I call God." (Woodhouse page 39).

In what ways do you find it helpful to include 'God as the deepest and best in me' and 'God as vulnerable presence' as some of your images of God?

How might you protect, nourish and help this God?