

16th January 2023

Somewhere

“It concentrates mind wonderfully ...”

Dr Samuel Johnson, *writing on the execution of one, Dr Dodd, for forgery, in 1777*

I'm afraid that today I'm not operating at the deep philosophical level of Dr Samuel Johnson. For him, the wonder of concentration was when an individual – for forgery or anything else – was awaiting execution. For me, my reflection on concentration yesterday took me to a *very* different place – the proliferation of earpieces: Bluetooth “ear buds”; skinny black or white earphones; chunky headphones; *anything*, that allows people hands-free concentration on music or podcasts while going about their daily business.

You come across it all the time: people using them while standing in a bus-queue, out jogging, in a café with a lap-top, on a train. Everywhere it seems it's the same: people being taken to another place; focussing on an interest that shuts out what's going on around them; eyes glazed over, oblivious to the here-and-now; total concentration on something else. And, I have to confess, that there are times when I do it too.

A friend tried to get the attention of her partner when I was with her recently. She had to raise her voice to a *very* loud level to get his attention. “He's gone!” she remarked to me. “Gone, gone, and never called me mother.” And, turning to her partner she shouted, “HEY, YOU. I'M TRYING TO GET YOUR ATTENTION!” Eventually, she “got through”, and her partner looked up and said, “I'm sorry. I was somewhere else.” Indeed ...

Such is modern life. Good or bad? Neither, I suspect. Just normal these days, the desire and ability to shut out everything else and concentrate on what matters at the time.

And prayer? How hard it is to concentrate on spiritual things, to shut out the clamour of all that's around us. Maybe we feel it isn't completely possible. But if Bluetooth earbuds and chunky “cans” are able to do it for us with music and podcasts, might we be able to find appropriate methodologies in our life of prayer, contemplation, mindfulness, reflections, contemplation, or however we describe this facet of our lives?

Can we not find ways of being “somewhere else” *in the midst of* our daily living? After all, imagine what we might find if we concentrated on that other place, if only we gave ourselves more opportunities to go there.

A prayer for today

For a moment, this moment, I concentrate on being with The Other. Amen

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