

I World Fly Away!



How I love the feeling when the door of the airplane is shut tight, signaling the end of the rush to the airport, the hustle through the check in, and the waiting in line for boarding. There will be no more phone calls to answer, no more appointments to keep, no more interruptions of thought. For the next hours I will be relaxing in my seat, enjoying the serenity of being alone among strangers. This is the wonder of escape.

In our day to day lives, so many things keep popping up to bring distraction. They keep rolling in like raging waves on the beach. If we slack up for awhile, things pile sky high. Sooner or later these things get out of hand and we feel overwhelmed, our focus becomes blurred, and our physiological alarm triggers our panic button; we sweat, we are anxious, and fear sets in. As situations in our life push us into the corner, we begin to look for a route of escape.

Sometimes, just dreaming of "running away from it all" can give our hearts enough consolation. If you could escape from the daily grind, where would you go? If you could afford it, you might pack your bags and go for a cruise. Or you might choose a vacation

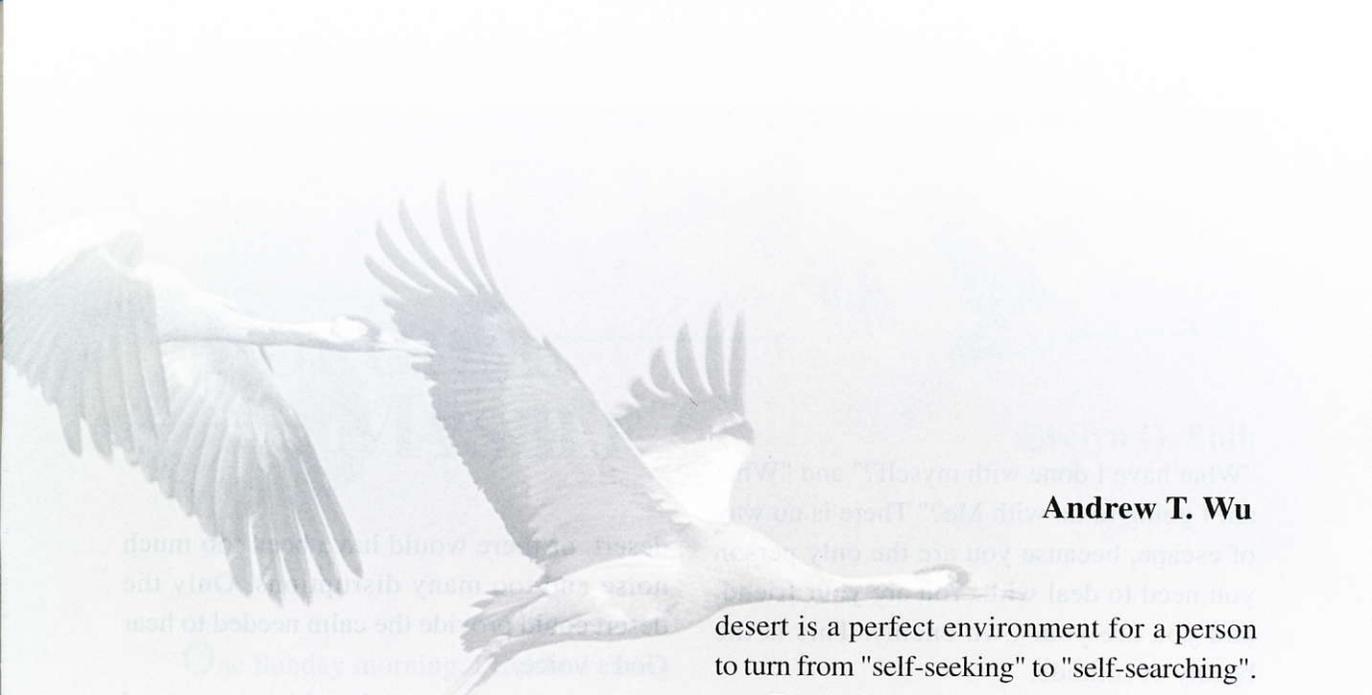
on a sunny beach or in a quiet park. If you do not have funds to spend freely, you might settle for a few hours inside a movie theater or bury yourself in a novel. Most of us would choose a place where we could pamper ourselves and heal our hurts; we would like to spend a period of time seeking after pleasure and self-gratifying activities so that we can forget about all the pain and frustration. But would you jump at the chance to escape to a barren desert?

King David, the ruler of Israel, could have asked for any form of escape, but instead he chose to go to the desert when he was in trouble. He cried out to God, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest - I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, Far from the tempest and the storm." (Psalm 55:6-8) So, what is so appealing about the desert?

1. The desert is a place of solitude.

We might be surprised at King David's choice of retreat because the desert is an inhospitable place; it is not suitable for living. Who would want to go there? The land is not arable, the climate is extreme, and it is the perfect habitat for dangerous animals.

It is also difficult to find a companion to travel there. It is a place where one is by



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oneself. It symbolizes aloneness. Those who live in the desert are known as outcasts. Moses lived there after he committed murder. The Israelites wandered in it because of their disobedience. David lived there when he tried to run away from Saul. Jesus went there to face his temptation. They were not looking for good time in the desert; rather, they were all facing a major crisis in their lives.

No one goes out of their way to meet trouble. If our lives take a down turn, we are considered unlucky, and many of our friends quickly keep a distance from us. They now call themselves "acquaintances", for they would rather avoid us than stand alongside us in adversity. In the same way, when we enter into the desert of our lives, we often will have to stand alone. For the desert is a solitary place.

2. The desert is a place of depravation

We often use the words "wilderness" and "wasteland" to describe the desert. This brings to our mind pictures of infertility, fruitlessness and unproductiveness. Because it is a place of minimal vegetation and water supply, no metropolis is found in the middle of the barren sands, let alone facilities for hedonistic pleasure and heathen entertainment. The

desert is a perfect environment for a person to turn from "self-seeking" to "self-searching".

Everyday, we live a self-seeking lifestyle. Take eating as a fine example: in order to satisfy the pleasure of our stomach, we drive miles to find a restaurant which is rumored to have great food. When our taste buds get tired of all the best, we turn our attention to the restaurants that provide the best atmosphere, newest and most elegant renovations, or have the finest view. After awhile, when all the restaurants look pretty much the same, we ask for places with waiters that give us the finest service. This cycle continues, and soon we are going after rare food served with better dinnerware on the table of restaurants at exotic locations.

But in a desert, everything returns to the basics. The best provisions are the simplest: water. The only way to get ahead is by putting one foot in front of the other. The luxury in life is cool shade in an oasis. It doesn't matter where you dine, the view is always the same, the atmosphere is exactly the same, the sustenance is basically the same. Instead of asking, "what am I going to have for supper" one asks, "will I be supper?" the concerns quickly switch from myself to my being. Inevitably, one has to face oneself. Self-searching questions are asked: "Who am I?"



"What have I done with myself?" and "What am I going to do with Me?" There is no way of escape, because you are the only person you need to deal with. You are your friend, and you are your own enemy. This is the beauty of solitude.

3. The desert is a place of renewal

It is in this dry and dusty environment where one's values are challenged, ideas reassessed, views broadened, focus renewed, and one's life changed. The things we thought of as essential in life, and hung on to as most valuable, are still exceedingly important, but there are other things that are much more significant in comparison. All of a sudden, it seems like a much brighter light has lit up the dark background, and a new scene with God as the main focus is illuminated. As a result, all the precious possessions in the foreground become dull and dim.

This is a common experience for the desert dweller. Moses was there, and learned this lesson. At that place where no one wants to tread, God reveals Himself. On the far side of the desert, Moses found himself standing on holy ground. God appeared to him in burning flames on a bush. Moses conversed and received the calling from the Most High.

Elijah met God in the same desolated region of the Sinai. In this quiet undisturbed area, God spoke to the great prophet in a still, small voice. This moving event could not have taken place anywhere except in the

desert, or there would have been too much noise and too many disruptions. Only the desert could provide the calm needed to hear God's voice.

Even Jesus retreated to this most sacred place on earth, the wilderness, to meet the Father face to face. For forty days, He drew strength from the Father, so that He could meet the Evil One head on. It is in the tranquil desert where God the Son spent hours in heart to heart communion with God the Father. In these surroundings, His spirit was renewed, His body rejuvenated, and His soul refreshed.

God leads His children to the desert, so that He can shake us out of our childish independence to embrace him. Our heavenly Father wants us to trade our self-sufficiency for total reliance on Him. In the quiet desert of our life, we will refrain from all our busy seeking, and focus on the only One that matters.

If you are presently walking through this dry crusty land, don't murmur; count it all joy and treasure every moment. Drop all things at hand and focus on God's Word and His Work. Then you will also experience the delight of the desert dweller: "water will gush out forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, and thirsty ground bubbling springs. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness." (Isaiah 35: 6-8)

