

African American Spirituality: Music and Contemplative Practice

February 12, 2023

“How Good to Center Down!”

How good it is to center down!
To sit quietly and see one’s self pass by!
The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic;
Our spirits resound with clashings, with noisy silences,
While something deep within hungers and thirsts for the still moment
and the resting lull.
With full intensity we seek, ere the quiet passes, a fresh sense
of order in our living;
A direction, a strong sure purpose that will structure our confusion
and bring meaning in our chaos.
We look at ourselves in this waiting moment –
the kinds of people we are.
The questions persist: what are we doing with our lives? –
what are the motives that order our days?
What is the end of our doings?
Where are we trying to go?
Where do we put the emphasis and where are our values focused?
For what end do we make sacrifices?
Where is my treasure and what do I love most in life?
What do I hate most in life and to what am I true?
Over and over the questions beat in upon the waiting moment.
As we listen, floating up through all the jangling echoes of our turbulence,
there is a sound of another kind –
A deeper note which only the stillness of the heart makes clear.
It moves directly to the core of our being.
Our questions are answered,
Our spirits refreshed, and we move back into the traffic of our daily round
With the peace of the Eternal in our step.
How good it is to center down!¹

¹ Thurman, Howard, “The Inward Journey (1); Jacob Boehme: The Mystic Will (2), 1961 Oct 1, 8,” *The Howard Thurman Digital Archive*, accessed February 6, 2023, <https://thurman.pitts.emory.edu/items/show/1069>.

Breakout

Reflect on these questions.

What am I doing with my life?

Where is my treasure?

And to what am I true in life?

“I Got Shoes” // “Heaven, Heaven”

The Charioteers, 1939

I got a robe, you got a robe all God's children got a robe
When I get to Heaven gonna put on my robe
I'm gonna shout all over God's Heaven

(Refrain)

Everybody talkin' 'bout Heaven...
Ain't flyin' there Heaven...
Gonna shout all over God's Heaven

I got shoes, you got shoes, all God's children got shoes
When I get to Heaven gonna put on my shoes
I'm gonna walk all over God's Heaven

Refrain

I got a crown, you got a crown, all God's children got a crown
When I get to Heaven gonna put on my crown
I'm gonna shout all over God's Heaven

Refrain

I got a harp, you got a harp, all of God's children got a harp
when I get to Heaven gonna play on my harp
I'm gonna play all over God's Heaven

Refrain

I got a song, you got a song, all of God's children got a song
when I get to Heaven gonna sing em' a song
I'm gonna sing all over God's Heaven

Refrain

Breakout

Are there parts of the song that inspire you... or challenge you?

Are there phrases that resonate with you?

What is the mood of the song?