

Reaching the thin place

Kate Childs Graham | Dec. 15, 2011

"On this arid summit, where the winds blow hard, where no root takes hold, where distance seems infinite and heaven close, the spirit is tested and replenished, for the pilgrim had reached a thin place, where one steps into the highest dimension of one's existence."

--[Michael Mullen, "Croagh Patrick, A Perspective"](#)[1]

According to Celtic spirituality, a thin place is one where the human and the divine seem closer together, where matter melds, where God's presence is strongly felt, where the veil between Heaven and Earth is lifted. People have found thin places at holy sites -- St. Brigid's Kildare for example. People have found thin places in nature, where jagged cliffs meet crashing water, where rolling meadows go on forever. People have found thin places in every day locations -- their favorite chair, their walking path. But thin places occur not only physically, they can occur spiritually, temporally as well.

I have often described the weeks, the months when I first met my spouse, Ariana, as a thin place. It was something more than that rush of excitement, of attraction I had felt in previous relationships. My soul was doing the beautiful and oftentimes challenging work of intertwining with hers. I could feel God in every breath taken, every word spoken.

Seven months ago, I experienced for the second time a thin place.

It was 6 a.m. Ariana had woken up early, unable to sleep, perhaps in anticipation of the day about to unfold. I felt a pang in my stomach. About 10 minutes later, I felt another one. Another 10 minutes, another one. I called down to Ariana. "I think today's the day," I said. I was in labor.

We laughed nervously. Then cried. Then we were interrupted by another contraction, growing stronger by the minute. We called our offices, our families, our friends. Knowing we still had a while to wait, we went outside. It was a stunning spring day. I was floating. I could feel the divine in me, around me.

Until Earth pulled me back down. The pains of labor became worse, the contractions closer together. My water broke, and we hurried to the hospital -- a car ride neither of us will soon forget. I tried to grasp for God, for respite, praying Hail Mary after Hail Mary, repeating the mantra, "When I breathe in, I breathe in peace. When I breathe out, I breathe out love."

From there, the details are fuzzy for me, though Ariana can recall my screams, my quiet cries for help. A mixture of exhaustion and determination took over, and it wasn't long before my doctor was telling me to push.

At 5:56 p.m., our son was born, singing from the start. We held him, held each other. The tears flowed easily for all of us. The machines, the doctors, midwives and nurses, the bleachy smell that bothered me when we first arrived, all of that faded. All I could see, all I could feel was God's light surrounding the three of us, embracing my family.

In the days that followed, my thin place remained. Every time I looked at the sleeping face of our beautiful

child, listened as Ariana sang to him, I could feel the distance between Heaven and Earth shrinking. Although there were challenges in those first days and weeks, none seemed insurmountable, not with the divine seeping through my pores. Looking back on that time, the memories seem to all have the faintest glow, resembling a Renaissance painting of the Holy Family.

Like staring into the sun for too long, to exist constantly in a thin place would be impossible. Eventually earthly matters grab hold. Diapers. Chores. Work. But there are moments -- in the smiles, the laughter, the tears -- that I feel as if I could reach out and touch God. In those moments I live again, if ever fleetingly, in a thin place.

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