

Are You awake, God?

By Dean Merrill

No one thought it odd but me — the tall American waiting in the gathering dusk outside the railway station in Trivandrum, South India. Others went about their business as the open-air Hindu shrine a few meters away launched its worship service, with the priest and his aides vigorously striking bells and cymbals with long poles.

To me, it was a jolt, like a toddler with a tablespoon clanging away on the pots and pans in the cabinet. I thought about a large cowbell that a work colleague kept in his office to surprise us all at those moments when he wanted to call an impromptu party. Only this was 10 times as loud.

Alongside the thoroughfare, the brightly lit idols glowed. Smoke from the incense began to waft upward, and people pressed in from the shadows with hands in the position of prayer, palms together. The clatter of sound went on for seven or eight minutes.

"What are they doing?" I asked my Indian colleague.

He paused and then calmly explained, "They are trying to awaken their lord."

Ah, yes. Why would you begin your supplications unless you were sure your deity was alert and paying attention?

"Which lord?"

I asked. "Lord Krishna?"

He only shook his head and waved his hand. He had no idea, given the 330 million Hindu gods from which to select.

My thoughts turned to Elijah on Mount Carmel, taunting the prophets of Baal: " 'Shout louder!' he said. 'Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping ... ' " (1 Kings 18:27, NIV).

I never thought about having to clamor for God's interest, since I had been schooled in what the Bible teaches about "the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip — he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you" (Psalm 121:2-5). Our God is never off duty. He is never inattentive or preoccupied.

How comforting to know that, as David said in his prayer, "In the day of my trouble I will call to you, for you will answer me. Among the gods there is none like you, O Lord; no deeds can compare with yours" (Psalm 86:7,8).

But, a follow-up question floats to the surface. How awake are we? When God wants to speak with us, can He get our attention?

In our churches, we have tended in recent years to launch our worship services at a lively pace, with up-tempo music and even light repartee by a loquacious emcee type. The point is not to awaken Jehovah God — we know our theology too well for that — but instead to wake up ourselves. Most of us have arrived at church all too sleep deprived and distracted with

the details of life to be much good for anything in the first few minutes.

Our personal devotions and prayers are often the same. We open our Bibles or bow our heads ... and then have trouble focusing on the Person we are supposedly meeting.

Is this the best way to achieve intimacy with the Lord of heaven?

Robert Boyd Munger, who passed away a few months ago, wrote a classic little analogy in the early 1950s called *My Heart, Christ's Home*. Jesus is portrayed as a

houseguest, stopping by to visit with us. In one section Munger writes, "I remember one morning when I was in a hurry, rushing down the steps, eager to be on my way. As I passed the [side] room, the door was ajar. Looking in I saw a fire in the fireplace and the Lord sitting there. ... I turned and went in. With downcast glance I said, 'Blessed Master, forgive me. Have You been here all these mornings?'"

" 'Yes,' He said. 'I told you I would be here every morning to meet with you.' "

In the midst of our busy schedules, it is needful for us to hear again the words of the apostle Paul: "And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Romans 13:11,12).

Are you awake?

God is. ■

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