

Turning down the volume

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The

urge for Lent started for me several weeks ago. I was out on a cross-country ski with a friend when a small herd of elk ran in front of our path, kicking up a cloud of snow. They were so close that we could see their breath as they passed. When they reached the crest of a small hill, they turned collectively toward us and paused for a moment before running on.

The

moment was extraordinary, but what stayed with me was how noisy I was. When we saw the elk, instead of standing in struck silence, I started babbling, "Oh wow. Oh wow. This never happens here. Wow." Finally, my friend--she says she doesn't remember doing this--said, "Shhh...."

I

returned home with that "Shhh" heavy in my consciousness. It was clear that I need more of it. My Lenten project is to offer it to myself in various forms.

For

one, I am turning off the radio--not permanently, and not because the radio is a bad thing. But during Lent, I want to connect myself to that greater quiet that surrounds me all the time, and this is one obvious place where I can find a little pocket of silence in my day. More subtle, but still important, is the "noise" of the Internet. It isn't an audible sound, and I do use the Internet for work. But I also use it to turn up the volume in my life, to introduce noise and clutter where they needn't be any.

What

will I hear when I turn down the volume on my life? I don't know, and pretty often during these first few days, I find myself not really wanting to find out. But I have six weeks to practice what Richard Rohr calls living myself into a new way of thinking. "Let's allow ourselves this Lent," Rohr says, "to

seek new life settings for ourselves, much more than new ideas to discuss and shelve." What I hope is to find a new life setting that will allow me to appreciate an encounter with elk in their great silence, even as I connect to my own deepest, quietest place.