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Like most children born of immigrants, I did not realize that I spoke two languages. But a child adapts. Her spirit often zigzags like a running back and eventually — perfect communication with the rest of her team, touchdown!

The languages we are taught, verbal and nonverbal, as we mature offer avenues of interaction, security and — amazingly enough — imagination. Being multilingual, I have learned to read between the lines, connecting the relationship between what was articulated and what was intended.

There are many parallels to our spiritual life. How do I hear God's voice in the Babel of this world? Where do I belong? Who are my people? Can anyone understand the language that animates my soul? Does God? It is no wonder that I have often felt like a stranger in a strange land and kept this inner perspective under wraps.

The story of the prophet Elijah's experience at the mouth of a cave strikes me as a model against which to understand how God communicates personally with our distracted, yearning spirit:

There Elijah went into a cave and stayed all night.

Then the Lord spoke his word to him: "Elijah! Why are you here?"

He answered, "Lord God All-Powerful, I have always served you as well as I could. But the people of Israel have broken their agreement with you, destroyed your altars, and killed your prophets with swords. I am the only prophet left, and now they are trying to kill me, too."

Then the Lord said to Elijah, "Go, stand in front of me on the mountain, and I will pass by you."

[\(1 Kings 19: 9-11\)](#)

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As Elijah waited, "a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks" ([1 Kings 9:11](#)).

How I often wished for that in my prayers! After 20 faithful years in religious life, I went through a painful, lonely time when discerning my departure from that vocation. I needed God to speak to me as a powerful, howling wind. I yearned for God to tear at the mountains of my credulity and fear. But there was no wind for me.

"After the wind, there was an earthquake" ([1 Kings 9:11](#)).

Sometimes, my heartfelt prayers have been that my doubts would just leave me alone, that I would no longer feel harassed and antagonized by my own uncertainty. My prayer was that doubt and indecision would be shaken loose and torn asunder from me as if by the rolling waves of an earthquake. But there has never been such an earthquake for me.

Can anyone understand the language that animates my soul? Does God?

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Then, "after the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper" ([1 Kings 9:11-12](#)).

It was a fire that left nothing but ash in its wake. A scorching beast that blackened the mountain upon which Elijah stood as it raced across the tinder-dry brush. Have you ever felt so abandoned that your heart prayed for such a ravaging fire? I must say, I am glad that such a once-in-a-lifetime fire did not come for me. I am not a once-in-a-lifetime prophet like Elijah. I am grateful for even a whisper!

How many times has my spirit been at the mouth of a dark cave, hoping for the murmur, the nudge, the presence of God to protect me, save me, speak to me, make everything alright? It took me a long time to realize that the wind, earthquake and fire that I sometimes wished for are nothing when compared to the whisper. For me, God's whisper cuts through everything else.

The psalmist writes for us: "Be still, and know that I am God" ([Psalm 46:10](#)). And that is more than enough, isn't it? God's whisper encompasses every need, every unarticulated desire, every eternal longing. It doesn't happen often, but when it does, love's whisper takes my breath away.