

Quiet & Retreat - Knowing God and Knowing Self

This next paper in the series of "Transformation to New Life, Now and Beyond" follow these prior papers:

- Change - the Essence of Life
- Don't Conform - Be Transformed
- Community - Resource for Transformation

They focus on our need to recognize that change is constant and is the essence of all life. We need to look toward being transformed because if we try to conform to who we are now we go against the flow of the new life that change brings to us. Community is a primary resource for interdependence and interaction with our whole world; Creation, living persons, and living organisms. Life is the one thing that you live in which you have dreams and plan for the future.

We now move to thinking about ourselves and the way we come to recognize who we are as a part of our world. Since the universe is constantly changing we realize that we too must change and evolve with the whole of creation. Fortunately we are not alone in having to do this because we are in company with others who are equal partners of this majestic process. It is important to realize how we fit in to this mystery of life by way of quietness and retreat as others did who have gone before us to a life beyond. There are many varieties of community and individual traditions for retreat that can be helpful. Just like our educational opportunities help us learn about moving forward there are a variety of methods to help us find our own uniqueness to share in interdependence and interaction in community.

As a Christian I am familiar with the annual season of Lent along with other opportunities for community and individual meditation of quiet introspection. Like Christians, who have their roots in the Hebrew tradition, Jews also worship regularly each week with special seasons and holidays to reflect individually and in community to strengthen who they are as individuals. When I looked up online how many other religious and other organizations also promote some form of customs that encourage quiet times and retreat; Baha'i Faith, Buddhist, Christianity, Daoism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, New Age, Pagan and Occult Religions, Sikhism, Prayer beads, even secular meditations in the West like Sound-based meditation, Mindfulness, Physical Postures, etc. When so many over centuries of human history have recognized these important habits for individuals and groups this must be evidence for consideration.

Just maybe, if we really think about it, Lent, or something like it, is the very tradition we need more than anything else if we are to survive in this 21st Century. Often I have heard leaders tell us, "If you do not come apart – you will come apart". Everyone is familiar with "R & R" (Rest and Relaxation). It seems that most people work more than one job and take very little, if any, time for themselves. With the present economy we hear that many individuals and families, especially those who are out of work, do not have enough money to take a vacation. Is it surprising that people's worlds are falling apart? Many people may have to start over or to at least renew whom they are in order to continue and move forward.

Since we are presently in the season of Lent, here are some basic thoughts for those who are Learning To Live Well:

Profound and Simple

These two words, I believe, are a good summary of life in general. The best expression of what I am talking about is probably the Serenity Prayer that has been adopted by most Twelve Step Groups.

*God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change;
The courage to change the things that I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serenity_Prayer]

Things that are profound are most often the things that we cannot change and are often the ones we wish we could. The dictionary defines the meaning as: "1 a: having intellectual depth and insight b: difficult to fathom

or understand." [<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/profound>] A lot of people do not have intellectual depth and insight and so a lot of life may be difficult to fathom or understand. Even those with great intellect cannot understand everything and are usually conscious of how much they do not fathom or understand. I am sure that you have heard the saying, "The more you know, and the more you know you don't know". You may have also heard that we only use about ten percent of our brain, but it is not really true. *"It turns out though, that we use virtually every part of the brain, and that [most of] the brain is active almost all the time,"* according to neurologist Barry Gordon at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore. "Let's put it this way: the brain represents three percent of the body's weight and uses 20 percent of the body's energy." [<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=people-only-use-10-percent-of-brain>] The point is that much of life to all of us is often rather profound.

This is especially true today because of the amount of information that increases every day. The term Information Explosion seems to have begun in the Nineteen Sixties as referenced in the Online Oxford Dictionary as well as in articles appearing in the New York Times. As of 2005 it was noted that there were about Seventy Million Web Servers and by 2007 there were about One Hundred and Thirty-five Million. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_explosion] This shows an increase of almost twice the amount of Web Servers in just two years. When you realize that this increase will continue year after year there is hardly a way that any individual will be able to keep up with this rapid influx of information. Hopefully we will not be overwhelmed by these facts and learn to accept that we will not be able to change nor even acquire or understand either.

The next aspect to consider is **the courage to change the things we can**. Because most people are comfortable with the way things are it is hard to think of change in addition to obtaining the courage that may be necessary to do so. In fact, trying to keep things as they are may more often be the cause of much of our troubles. Change is inevitable because nothing stays the same! It is absolutely true. The earth and sky are always changing along with everything around us; including ourselves. I always remember the milk commercial, *"There's a new you coming every day"*. If it were not true you would really be in trouble. Because change is inevitable the only part we need is courage! We need courage to accept changes as they come and to be in control of the changes that we need to make. Courage comes through being ALIVE! [Always Learning Inspired Vital Engaged]
We need to always learn to be inspired and remain vital and engaged in living into our potential.

Serenity comes every time we simply have the wisdom to know the difference. How do we acquire this wisdom? PRAYER: [Perusing, Reasonable, Alternatives, Yet, Expecting, Resolve]

Practice makes Perfect

I am sure you are familiar with this saying, but I believe it is one of the most reasonable pithy statements for Learning to Live Well. Just think about it, would you like to have an operation if your doctor had never done one before or only just a few once in a while? I think you can see my point that practice is essential to almost everything we wish to do well. Another question, that I am sure you have heard as well, How do you get to Carnegie Hall? The proverbial answer is, Practice, Practice, Practice. But think about this a little more and you may discover something else about practice that is extremely essential. **Practice only makes one perfect if one practices correctly!**

Practice that makes you perfect is not just simply doing the same thing over and over again. Practice must first be informed and be done correctly before it really helps. *"You have heard it said that practice makes perfect. However, that is not necessarily true. Practice makes permanent, so you have to make sure you are rehearsing the right things."* [<http://www.bookmarketingworks.com/MediaTraining.htm>] You would not go to someone who claimed to be a doctor without the required education to earn that title. It is also important that this doctor keeps up to date through continuing education and training. It is the specialist who has repeatedly done the procedure you may need along with continuing education that leads to a more successful outcome for wellness.

Planning

Regular
Activity
Causing
Total
Internal
Change
Effectively

This concept is vital to almost everything in ordinary day-to-day living. Living well is not necessarily automatic. Doing what comes naturally may not always be healthy or productive. Planning is an important requirement if you want to take a trip unless you just want to wander around for a while to pass some time. It is customary to use a map to locate your destination and then plan the route you will take to go directly or to plan stops along the way. This process is both an inward and outward consideration. Most changes in life's activities involve the engagement of our mind and heart. This enables the possibility of a complete and effective adventure. Additional planning and investigation may also be necessary if we want the experience to be inclusive and enjoyable. To make sure of your intentions you may wish to practice the activity in your imagination and then express it in writing. A good trip is usually noted on a map for details unless you are using the automated details of GPS.

Perfect - "1 a: being entirely without fault or defect: flawless <a perfect diamond> b: satisfying all requirements: accurate c: corresponding to an ideal standard or abstract concept <a perfect gentleman> d: faithfully reproducing the original; specifically: letter-perfect e: legally valid" [<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/perfect>]

Perfect is rather impossible for a normal human being and more like a goal in life. As I look at the definition of the word perfect above there may only be a few, if any, times in life that anyone might claim perfection. When you realize how many flawless diamonds there are you may begin to see that there is not much perfection in nature either. Before I share another point of view on perfection with you from the Scriptures, perhaps it would be good to say that none of our goals need to be flawless. We do, however, need goals in life even if we never actually attain them at all. Goals are like an "end point" in a map as we plan for a trip. Without an "end point" we are simply wandering about as in a Sunday afternoon drive.

In the Gospel of St. Matthew we are told, "*Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect*".[Matthew 5:8] Again, in chapter 19, Jesus is speaking with a young man who is very wealthy; "*Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, 'Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?' 'Why do you ask me about what is good?' Jesus replied. 'There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.' 'Which ones?' the man inquired. Jesus replied, 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.' 'All these I have kept,' the young man said. 'What do I still lack?' Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.' 'When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.'*" [Matthew 19:16-22]

The word "perfect" in St. Matthew comes from the root word *Te'leios* [Teleio] in Greek that basically means: "*having attained the end or purpose, complete, perfect*". [A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature, by Arndt & Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL, pg. 816] I think these scriptures give us a better sense of how we might understand the use of the word perfect for the practical value in life we wish to claim. Our goals that we wish to attain require an end or purpose. We need to be attentive in an active way if we expect to attain any goal that we have set. We may then arrive even though the process and the attainment of the goal were not flawless. This is the way our Universe functions, this is the "spirit" of our religious hope described in the Scriptures, it is the process of every human development and the way we should expect life to be.

So learn how to practice well and be an active practitioner throughout life. Make and pursue all the goals that are necessary for the life you believe is yours to live. Move forward with confidence and never torment yourself with an unrealistic definition of perfection.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen

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