



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

30: Dismantling the Emotional Programs, Part 1-Continued



Image: courtesy of Diane Walker

*He began to teach them,
"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."
- Matthew 5:2-3*

"Our emotions are really great friends and most reliable witnesses to what our true values really are. And this is an important observation to make: that when we hear the Gospel call to repentance, which means change the direction in which you are looking for happiness, and take it to heart and decide to do it, what happens? ... You begin to become aware that it isn't enough to renounce consciously, on the conscious level, these false values, but that they are thoroughly entrenched in the unconscious and there they continue to survive and act out while you are making efforts to dismantle the false-self system. And why that is so important to keep in mind is that even when we decide what to do, the real work of the spiritual journey consists of patiently, calmly, and humbly acknowledging that the values are still thoroughly alive in the unconscious. And every time that you are upset is the infallible proof that they are still there. So, the emotions faithfully record what your real value system is, even if you think you've changed it.

"Now what is destructive about the energy centers is that they hinder the free flow of grace. They are like blocks in the nervous system and in the musculature in the body and in the psyche. And they prevent us from living in the here and now and they also prevent us from loving other people unconditionally. Notice the wisdom of Jesus' recommendation: 'love one another as I have loved you' -- which is unconditionally...

"All [Jesus] says is change the programs for happiness that can't possibly work. Is that so hard? ... There are many methods of doing so. I've already suggested what seems to be Jesus' shortcut to freedom which is: accept unconditionally everyone in your life, no matter what they do to you, which doesn't mean, of course, to be subservient to everyone or to let everyone walk all over you. It means to accept them as they are and still love them...

"The next thing is to ask yourself this question, ... 'Am I willing to give up my desire to control this person...or, to give up my desire for the approval, esteem, or affection? ... It has to be a choice.'
- Thomas Keating, excerpt from Session 29 video

A Meditation

"Each of us carries the burden, sometimes very heavy of our ancestry, our social milieu, and their influences on us from the time of our conception. God knows exactly what these are. He loves us just as we are, and because of his infinite compassion, our weakness seems to be especially attractive to [God]. ... The most basic human double-bind consists of having the transcendent destiny of boundless happiness as a sharer in God's divine life, and at the same time, the awareness of the impossibility of reaching it under our own strength. The good news is that there is a way to deal with this dilemma. ... Basically, it consists of being content for love of God to live with external difficulties, endless faults, and overwhelming weaknesses that constitute our particular slice of the human condition. ... We are thus completely dependent on God's mercy.

"Is this a disaster? This actually is the first Beatitude in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:3). ... The beauty of this first Beatitude is its sense of complete dependence on God. It is a growing awareness of our personal spiritual destitution, without being upset by it or disturbed: it is contentment to be powerless and, at the same time, totally dependent on God to prepare us for participating in the divine life. ...

"*Kenosis* is the Greek word for *emptying*. In applying it to ourselves, it means the emptying of our ... selves so that the divine activity may enter into us just as we are."
- Thomas Keating, *Consenting To God As God Is*

To Practice

- An Invitation: Fr. Thomas says in Session 29 video: "You can treat [others] as God has treated you, which is with unconditional love. That's freedom! And that's what delivers us from this stuff [our emotional programs and demands for happiness, often at the exclusion of others' real needs]. If [you] practiced that for a few months, I think you'd almost be a saint. Just try it! For three months unconditionally accept everyone, every event with love. And just see what you're like in three months."

You might choose to do this as an experiment, picking just one person on whom to practice unconditional love. And failing, we can start again. And failing yet again, we can start again. The Welcoming Prayer practice is useful with this experiment.

Resources for Further Study:

You may wish to read Chapter 24 "Spirituality in Everyday Life" from *Invitation to Love* (20th anniversary edition), Chapter 22 in older editions.

Notes and Reflections: