

THE ABUNDANCE OF HAVING ENOUGH

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There is a story of a young man wanting to be a monk in the monastery on Mount Serat in Spain. It takes a great deal of spiritual discipline. One of the fundamental requirements of this religious order is that the young men must maintain silence. Opportunities to speak are scheduled once every two years, at which time they are allowed to speak only two words.

This initiate, who had completed his first two years of training, was invited by his superior to make his first two-word presentation. "Food terrible," he said. Two years later the invitation was once again extended. The young man used this forum to exclaim, "Bed lumpy." Arriving at his superior's office two years later he proclaimed, "I quit." The superior looked at this young monk and said, "You know, it doesn't surprise me a bit. All you've done since you arrived is complain, complain, complain.¹

"Expect nothing," writes Alice Walker, "Live frugally on surprise. Become a stranger to need of pity."

When we expect something, when we enter our days with expectation, we are setting ourselves up to miss the fullness of life. When we impose our own karmic logic – "since I did this, I should get that", or "since I am this, I deserve that" –we are navigating our lives through the fog of judgment. We fancy ourselves carving out a life that we can control when, in fact, we are limiting our vision to what is within our view. We are less open to what may occur while we tether ourselves to what we presume and expect. From this we here the echoes of "I warrant", or "I'm entitled", or "I have earned".....Really? Have you really earned this precious gift of life? Do you really deserve the rising of the sun without which you would not survive? Are we really, in any way, shape or form, in charge?

¹ <http://www.liraz.com/Anecdote.htm>

This illusion of “entitlement” -- the subtle and not so subtle journey of “me!” and “mine!” -- disables our access to joy and wellness. We cannot feel whole when we feel separate from one another.

In these high tech, 24-7 days, we have fostered the assumption that in order to “get ahead” or “maximize our potential” we must forage our lives alone...that we have to earn or even fight for “our share” of what might be available to us...that others, in general, are our competitors for that “share”, and everyone is really out for themselves, so no one is truly safe.

We spend too much time and energy on supposing what we don’t have, assuming “others” have what we should have. And if we have the advantage, we must keep it, else our power will be diminished, because there is not enough to go around.

We have entangled ourselves in the grip of scarcity. If I share a bit of my world, then, it will diminish “my share”. If I’m generous or wish for another’s success, I only have myself to blame when I come up short. “Fair share” is a concept that has little power when “what’s in it for me” feeds our scramble for security...financial, emotional, even spiritual security.

In this fear-based scramble, we lose sense of our natural wisdom which knows we gain energy, we gain sustenance, we gain strength of being, by sharing with one another. We forget this, and we fear it, because true sharing means being vulnerable. True sharing means trust in the abundance of our lives.

There is a song sung by our Jewish brothers and sisters during the Seder meal entitled “Dayenu”, which translates roughly, “it would have been sufficient”, or “that would have been enough”. This is sung after the story of the Exodus is told, when the Hebrew people

were freed from slavery in Egypt and led by Moses into a forty year journey of forming a faith community. This ritual song speaks of the abundance given to Jews by their God, each blessing of life or nurturance of soul alone would have been enough to praise their state of being and relationship to the Cosmos.

A discipline of gratitude and awe, such as the repeated refrain of Dayenu, is the stuff that brings us into wholeness. It is summoning the power of life within us that dwells in the wisdom of abundance, energizes our being and does not harm.

Victor Frankl wrote, in his book Man's Search for Meaning, "We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number," he remembers, "but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken away from a (man) person but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way."²

So often we think our lack of well being has to do with all the obstacles in our lives, when, in fact, the obstacle to our well being is the way we see our lives. We determine the quality of our being on earth. And when we find the earth abundant, our lives will demonstrate that truth.

I've been thinking about some conditioning that I and my peers received as children. When, at supper, we wouldn't eat our vegetables, the mantra of the time was "remember all the starving children in China". Now on the surface, this is a good exercise, to give some global awareness and know that not everyone's situation is the same as ours. However, it seems odd to me now that a way to coerce us into cleaning our plate is to say

²How We Choose To Be Happy, p.23

– “you have more than others, so take it all”. How about, “remember there are starving children, so take what you need and give the rest away.”

****Describe Chinese parable of heaven and hell (ad lib)****

In Amritsar, India, there is a Sikh temple, named the Golden Temple, that serves lunch to anyone who may come to eat, regardless of faith, heritage or status. Twelve tons of whole wheat flour, three and a third tons of lentils and other ingredients are used daily to feed some 80,000 people a day. Thousands of volunteers make the daily lunch happen. The hospitality is pure: all who enter are welcome. Volunteerism and community support are religious values of the Sikh. This lunch provides a palpable example of sharing the abundance of the world, not only of the riches of the earth, but of the presence of shared being. All castes disappear, all distinctions disappear, people come and break bread together. “It is more than food”, one volunteer comments, “Once you eat it, you forget who is cooking, who is serving it, who is sitting next to you.”³ What is ironic about wanting what we have, is that when we are truly centered in the abundance of our connection to all being, we can be generous with ourselves.

What gets us there is gratitude. It is a choice of seeing. As Brother David Stendl-Rast reminds us, people are not grateful because they are happy, they are happy because they are grateful. And happiness is not some state of being that arrives when we have it all together. Happiness is an embrace of the life we have beyond our material circumstances and our self-absorbed presumptions. Even in adversity, a person can relate to the world from a place of gratitude, knowing that the gift of being is precious beyond imagining.

³ Polgreen, Lydia, “A Sikh Temple Where All Are Welcome To Eat, and to Pitch In”, New York times, Monday, August 30, 2010, p. A7

Right now, in this room, there are energies of loss, anger, joy, confusion, sadness, loneliness, appreciation, resistance, hope ...many ways of being and believing, right now.

And, right now, wherever we are on our journey, we each are capable of being grateful for something about our life. This gratitude, no matter how small, is what makes you stronger – more able to cope – more grounded in humility – more open to resources that will get you through.

Much of church, in fact, is an exercise in gratitude, a discipline of gathering to remember the sources of strength and joy that can be known in our lives. It is also a place where we can join our energies for expressions of love and justice that cannot be accomplished on our own. We need one another to create a community that thrives and empowers healthy, joyful, justice-filled choices in the world.

Each one of us can do this. Each one of us has the courage, the heart to find our way within. Each one of us can claim the deep and abiding peace which binds creation. Each one of us has a way to gentle our lives into places of appreciation and growth.

** Remember the two words that the aspiring monk was given leave to utter after two years of meditation? I ask you to take a moment right now and think of two words that speak of your gratitude today. This is for you and you only. Whatever comes to your mind, an image of gratitude. **

Krishnamurti, Indian philosopher of the 20th century, offers this advice:

“Put away the book, the description, the tradition, the authority, and take the journey of self-discovery. Love, and don’t be caught in opinions and ideas about what love is or should be. When you love, everything will come right. Love has its own action. Love, and you will know the blessings of it. Keep away from the authority who tells you what

love is and what it is not. No authority knows and the one who knows cannot tell. Love, and there is understanding.”⁴

It is guaranteed that if we sincerely enter into the attitude of gratitude, it will increase over time. We will get better at it. When we are willing to see the abundance of blessings in and of our lives, we will begin to see evidence of it every day. And even on those wilderness days, when we can't see clear to true affirmation, we can trust that it is there, beyond our distracted thoughts, feeding what we know to be good in our lives. There are times when we may feel so betrayed by circumstances that the heaviness of life overwhelms us. I could easily say that I have no right to be grateful while millions of people are out of work, or global warming is increasing, or the political climate is scary, or that war seems never to be over.All these things will be true with or without my gratitude. Why increase the negativity? Why not, in fact, start a ripple effect of gratitude, which will spread, in a small way, the goodness of life. This does not mean I will ignore what needs attention, but it does mean, that while doing that, my attitude will keep me humble toward all that is before me and within me. Which is an abundance beyond my own making.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, beloved teacher of Buddhism to Westerners in the 20th century was reported to have said: “If you can hold the pain of the world in your heart, but never forget the vastness of the great Eastern sun, then you can prepare a proper cup of tea.” It's enough. It's all enough. If we can remember all that is given us in order to simply be here, then we will know the abundance in a simple cup of tea and so much of what we have can suddenly be something we can share with others. So may it be. Amen.

⁴ Krishnamurti, as rendered in [The Spirit of Loving](#), edited by Emily Hilburn Sell, p.73