

Week beginning 2nd August – Embrace your shadow

It is not yet one o'clock. Let me briefly review some of the golden opportunities that already have gifted one of my ordinary days . . . I woke up early today, delighted at the prospect of a free morning. Suddenly I remembered that I had a nine o'clock appointment. Immediately I felt frustration, self-pity and resentment at both myself for agreeing to, and at the other person, for asking for, the appointment. Equally quickly I became aware of what was going on inside me – the energy wasted in blaming, in resisting the reality of the situation, in missing the moment. And simply because of that awareness, in a moment, truly, it was over. The instant we detach ourselves from the emotion, we are free of its power. We are no longer victimised by any negative feeling once we become aware that we are feeling it. The awareness brings us back to our centre, grounded and secure. . .

In this context, I need to mention one more, recent discovery that has brought much delight, even though 'living the discovery' will take, at least, a life-time. As I became more clearly aware, especially since I came here to this Mid-West Centre, of my mental and emotional responses and reactions across a wide range of encounters, discussions and challenges, I notice surprisingly strong tendencies arising within me – a haste to defend myself unnecessarily, to react in a touchy and prickly manner, to be too easily 'hurt' by mistakenly taking things personally, to be silently resentful, to blame and criticise more often than I would like to admit. These are all negative and damaging. They are blockages to the flow of divine light and energy through my body and soul . . .

Like the doctor who finds the point of death-dealing blockage in one of the patient's veins or arteries, or like the engineer who traces the obstruction to the life-giving water supply to a wasting community, I too was delighted to become aware of these obstacles to grace, deep within my being . . . The cause of my joy is this: if the destination of my hero's journey is beginning to clarify itself, if my reasons for the spiritual quest are simplifying themselves at last, then I am encouraged to trust, to let go and live in the present moment even further. Put another way, if it is being revealed to me that the essence of my life is love, that I'm called and drawn to a challenging and demanding commitment to serve and to be in the holy presence of the anawim (the poor, the marginalised, the lonely, the homeless,) then, through God's unconditional graciousness, I find a peace in the way my life is unfolding, and a new heart for exploring what lies beyond the immediate horizon. (Travelling Light pp 148 -151)

Follow-up - If you would like to explore mindful meditation, try this simple daily praxis:

Settle yourself down – it is another new day. When you are ready, reflect on the way you would handle one or other of the situations such as I recalled above. If none of them would extend your patience, common sense or wisdom, think of an event that would. Have you noticed any positive change in how you respond, for instance, to the sudden challenge. To notice and to distance oneself from the rushing, sometimes overwhelming emotions that seem to come from nowhere, that take patience and determination. It takes much trial and error to be attentive to what all our lives we have not explored before, examined or noticed. Just for today, try again to cultivate a mindfulness about your moment-to-moment feelings. What is important is to dismantle their power over you, to see them as separate from your own essence. First you become aware of your agitation, anxiety, frustration, impatience, exasperation. Then you use the breathing space to establish the more appropriate response of your own choice. The mature response, I am suggesting, will begin with holding the emotion without judgement or expectation. Today's reflection is about reminding ourselves to develop a stillness within us – at all times if possible – so as to notice, without straining, all that is going on in our minds, hearts and bodies. (Travelling Light p152)