



THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Formation in the Christian Contemplative Life

"Dismantling the Emotional Programs, Part 2" Excerpted from *The Spiritual Journey Part 2, The Human Condition*

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LETTING GO

Here's a poor soul, like that dear little monkey being roasted by the afflictive emotions of apathy, vanity (which is, you know, the desire for esteem of others and so on). And Jesus says, "Oh, you poor soul!" He sympathizes with us so much: "You could be so happy! Why do you torture yourself? Why do you torment yourself? Life is open to you – unbounded life." All you have to do is to learn to let go of the false-self system as it manifests itself in a particular attraction which is a manifestation of the false self, motivated from that source. Notice again, how our Centering Prayer practice reinforces that capacity of letting go. If you learn to let go of all thoughts in contemplative [Centering] prayer, returning to the sacred word when you notice you're thinking some particular thought or have some particular impression or feeling, then in daily life it is going to become easier when you have some particular distressing or afflictive thought or feeling that is emerging from frustration of one of the energy centers, to let it go. And the energy centers, just like weeds in the desert, if you can keep them dried out by not reinforcing them or watering them with your imagination or by giving into them, very quickly they wither up and die. There's no substance to them. They're just childhood habits that we never got around to changing when we became an adult. A habit can be changed by another habit. This is the invitation, then, to respond to the Gospel.

In case you're not impressed by the Gospel, let me give you just an ordinary secular image along the same lines – another story. Here's a businessman who goes to his business every day and he uses a certain subway station, and on the way to the station there's a newsstand where he gets the *New York Times* because he likes to read it on the subway going to work downtown. One day he has a friend accompany him, a business associate, and so they come to the newsstand on their way to the subway, and he says to the attendant, "Will you please give me my copy of the New York Times?" And the attendant takes a copy and throws it at him. And our friend says, "Oh, thank you very much, and here's your money." The attendant grabs the money out of his hand and throws it into the cash register, with a grunt, "Harrumph!" And our friend says,

"Thank you very much, and I wish you a good day." And the attendant says, "I hope you have the worst day of your life!" And with that he spat right in his direction, barely missing his fedora. And our friend said, "Good day, thank you," and peacefully walked off towards the subway. The other friend, getting more and more excited and heated up said, "How can you put up with such treatment? I wouldn't stand it for a minute. I would go to the other side of town rather than be treated in such a terrible way. You're a disgrace to the human race to put up with such a thing." He was beginning to get so outraged, he was talking nonsense. So, his friend said, "Well now, just calm down, my friend, just calm down a minute. Look, I go to the subway every day. That newsstand is very convenient for me. They carry the newspaper I want. Why should I inconvenience myself just because this guy has a problem with me? Why should I change my life because of the way other people treat me?"

LOVE TRIUMPHS OVER ALL

Good question! It's just common sense. There is no commandment that says you have to be upset by the way people treat you. That's one you've invented and I've invented. There's no reason on earth why any kind of treatment should upset us. The only reason we are upset is because we have a program which says, "If someone does that, I'll be unhappy." That's all. It's an imaginary program. It's true that there's physical pain and psychological pain involved in not being treated properly as a human being. And some situations are absolutely horrendous. We have a complete right to be outraged and indignant. But the problem is, if you are, it won't do you a bit of good. You won't change the scene. You just upset yourself. So, the best solution, then, at least, is to try to bring divine love into every situation. So that instead of compulsively reacting and being upset ourselves and making the world worse by retaliating, continuing the vicious circle of violence, more violence, more violence, why not act in a human way, which is to try to cooperate, to negotiate, to wait it out, to show love no matter what happens? Because if you keep it up, love always triumphs – maybe not in this life, given the human condition, but it's certain to win because it's God. God lives, and when he shares his love with us, it's not going to disappear. It always achieves its effect, but maybe not with this particular person. But maybe it will, after a while. According to one of the great sayings: "Love triumphs over all" in the long run. It's the greatest energy there is. It's the energy that created the universe. Even the New Physicists are now saying that. Love is the ultimate consciousness out of which the whole universe exists. How mystical can you get? I only wish that all the religions were as mystical as some of these New Physics physicists are getting to be, at least to judge by their language. They even recommend meditation and the study of our own subjectivity in order to be able to be a true scientist and observer of reality.

Let's turn our minds, then, having suggested this possible remedy or possible practice for daily life, of gradually dismantling our programs by the patient letting go or releasing of the energy arising from frustrated value systems in the unconscious. Let's take a look at this part of our diagram. These are ways of reacting according to our temperament. In other words, when we are frustrated, we don't always have exactly the same emotional reactions. They tend to break down according to our particular temperament. This was one of the great insights of Karen Horney, a really great psychotherapist of a generation ago. And her book, *The Neurosis in Human Growth*, is, it seems to me, one of the best examinations of conscience ever written, in that she shows how the false-self system develops into a program for personal glory that is

fantastic unless it's brought into some control by therapy, or by something, or if nothing else works, by an early death! She says that we react in three ways to frustration: one is withdrawal, another is aggression, another is dependency on the bigger and stronger people in the environment.

Here's a parable, again, that might serve as an example: Let's imagine a family in which there is an older brother, and, for lack of a better name, let's call him Butch. Butch is one of those disagreeable characters, no doubt due to parental mistakes [or other negative influences] in early childhood. So, we won't blame anybody here. No judging. We now know how fragile human nature is and it's a wonder there's enough normal people in the world to keep it running when you realize how many things can go wrong. Well anyway, here is this child who likes to torment his three little siblings, his three little brothers of various ages – six, seven, eight. At Christmas, the doting parents had given each child a T. Bear. You know what that is, "T" stands for Teddy, right? And so, if you have any children, you know that no child can go to bed without its animal, its T. Bear, or whatever. Well, the T. Bear is the symbol of possessiveness, the symbol of security, or the symbol of power. Of course, the T. Bear always loves you and there's no effort. You don't have to prove yourself – he snuggles so close – and you just can be you and the T. Bear goes on loving you; whereas, the other siblings you have to go through all kinds of gyrations to get them to put up with you. So here are these three children hugging their T. Bears. Along comes Butch, the wretch, and he takes the first child's T. Bear and marches off with it. This is the child who has a withdrawn response to frustration. So, with a great bellow of agony, the poor child rushes upstairs, hides in the closet, and pours out its tears for hours and won't come downstairs, and so on. He responds to frustration by withdrawal. Butch thought he did well on that one; so now he approaches the next child who, let us say, is passively dependent. And he swipes his T. bear and marches off with it. Well, that child lets out another bellow, but he rushes into mummy's arms and says, "Oh, make Butch give me back my T. Bear. He's taken it and I can't sleep. I can't be happy. He always does what you say." Or, if that doesn't work, he goes to Daddy and says, "Oh Daddy, beat up my brother, won't you? And force him to give me back T. Bear." Now the third one is the aggressive type, and so when Butch takes his T. Bear, he punches him right in the nose. So, at least there's some room for dialogue, negotiation. Butch goes off with a bloody nose, as well as the T. Bear. So, this is the happy home that we are describing.

Let's imagine that fifty years have passed and by divine providence, each one of the three younger siblings is president of a multi-national. And by divine providence also, on the same day the board of directors fires each one of them – terrible family tragedy. What does the first one do? Withdrawal. He climbs into his Lear Jet, flies to the Bahamas, sits on the beach staring at the Caribbean, while he mentally cuts up in little pieces the members of the board. So, his life is ruined; he's full of self-pity. That's the end of it, and simply his only "happiness" in life is in thinking about how he's been done in and how happy he would be if only he could throttle each one of those directors. The passive-dependent – I wonder what he would do? He would call up the President of the United States and say, "Hello. Hello. I voted for you in the last election. You have power and influence with all these businesses. Make the board of directors put me back as president." And the one who was the aggressive personality – what would he do? Well, he would get on the phone, of course, and call his lawyers in

New York or Houston and say, "Look! Cite these people, even if we go up to the Supreme Court." So, he spends the rest of his life in lawsuits.

What has happened to the careers of these brilliant people? I don't know. All I can say is: They haven't changed a bit. They're still the same childish, infantile people on the emotional level. Nothing has changed! They're simply responding now instead of to T. Bear, to the possession of their position as the head of a multi-national. Their life is a complete waste. What good is it? They haven't grown, and when tragedy strikes again, they can't handle it at all. This is the tragedy of everyone who does not take seriously the emotional program and – with God's help – tries to change it. Here again is why some of these harsh sayings of Jesus come across not as harsh, but as wisdom sayings trying to impress upon us the seriousness of the limitations which these things are causing us. We cannot live in the present moment and enjoy it; we cannot relate to other people easily and lovingly; we can't relate to ourselves or God, as long as we have an addiction to our emotional program for happiness which is childish, because the emotional programs of happiness belong to a two-year old, or maybe three or four, but that's as far as it goes. If we're under the domination of the emotions -- "domination," I say – which is quite different from feeling them ... The emotions are wonderful! There is no negative emotion really. They're all simply spontaneous witnesses to what we perceive at the deep level as good or not good. Hence, it's our *value system* that is the problem, if it's a false value, not the emotions. All the emotions are good – are faithful reporters of what our secret motivation really is. And where our heart is, as Jesus says in the Gospel, that's where your treasure is. That's where all your resources and creativity are functioning. And so, if your value system is restricted, as all of these [energy centers] are, then you're using the immense energy of the new brain, instead of running cities, to run an electric train around the parlor. It's simply a complete waste of human energy.

It's the invitation to change the direction in which we're looking for happiness from selfishness to divine love, so that divine love will be the motivation of our response to life at each moment. This means constant growth, because you cannot exercise love without growing in love each time, each moment that you renew it. Thus, growth becomes natural, spontaneous, expanding, self-surrendering, delightful, joyful, and starts overflowing on everybody else in our environment. And, as far as we know, it can reach to the ends of the universe, because once again, as the New Physics says, you can't even have a thought without affecting the whole physical universe instantly. Suppose you make an act of love? This has immense power everywhere and especially in the human family. It's basically the source of the monastic intuition into the value of prayer and transforming the false self into the true Self, because when that process has begun, every step into God is a step away from the false self and is freeing the energies of divine life within us to flood the universe and change the negativity that's in the biosphere [noosphere], to use the term of Teilhard de Chardin, and to fill it with the love of God with its accompaniment of service. That is to say, the love of God is not just a feeling or a sentiment. It does something for you; that is, it wants to serve. It cares. It's concerned, and it wants to serve the needy and to change injustice into peace and justice. This, then, is what happens when the emotions express themselves in these various temperaments.

There's one other [way of reacting to frustration while still under the influence of the emotional programs for happiness] that I recently added called "capitulation," which is somewhat like dependency. When we are co-operating with others, we want to do what we're doing. Capitulation takes place when we don't want to do what we are doing and act as if we were doing it freely. It's really a destructive disposition. It's a kind of pretense: "I really don't want to help you, but I guess I have to." So, I act as if I want to, when in actual fact, I'm withdrawing. And since you're putting forth there a double message, it comes across to other people as artificial, superficial, negative, or something else. Once again that disposition of phony co-operation. It looks like you're co-operating, but you really aren't. You're withholding your will and moral support. This also is very destructive of the process of bonding, of harmony, of "oneing," of cooperation, of belonging that is so essential in the building up of a genuine community. Honesty is a pretty important part of human relationships.

Let us take, finally, one other aspect of the emotional centers and that is that they can express themselves in a variety of milieus and on a variety of levels of human functioning. Obviously, the power, sensation and security centers all express themselves in materialistic values such as power, wealth, prestige, money, property, how many houses you have, how many cars you have, what kind of car you have, and all the symbols of material success in a particular culture.

The emotional level is when our value system calls for emotional exchange – having everybody approve of me, love me, whatever, and to have lots of friends, or relationships, and to have everybody say how friendly we are, and so on.

The intellectual level can also express our security, power needs; so, I go for a certain number of degrees in the hope that this will build up my sense of power or to win the esteem of others. Now remember we're not saying this is the primary motive; all I'm saying is unless one has confronted the motivation, the motivation can secretly – without our even being aware of it – be due to our desire for esteem and affection, or maybe because we failed in other levels of human success in the culture, we hope to be a brain, as they say, a straight-A student. But as we've seen in the case of these great businessmen who became the presidents of multi-nationals while retaining the emotional life of a child, so also you can have three or four Ph.D.'s and continue to function on the Typhonic level, as far as one's inmost motivation is concerned.

Finally, we come to something a little closer to home for those of you who are on the spiritual journey. Now we get into the real stuff! Can these energy centers, express themselves in a religious context with a religious front and apparently a religious motivation? Emphatically, yes!

Let me give you one example again: Here is a young man with a big ego who experiences the joys of power and control in the form of drinking his friends under the table. And so, as they slither under the barroom table and he staggers out of the tavern, he feels this immense surge of ego, power and satisfaction. He's a real macho and he says, "Ah!" For him to drink the guys under the table means he's really somebody!

By divine providence, he's converted, he hears a sermon and he decides to enter the Trappists. Okay. So now he'll never touch alcohol in any form, beer or in any other way. Not only that, he's going to give up ice cream cones. He's going to give up everything. He's going to rush into this life and embrace all the austerities. Everybody recognizes an outstanding candidate, so he's welcomed with open arms into the community as a postulant. Now it gets to be Lent, and everybody, of course, is fasting and he notices as the season goes on that the older monks are gradually withdrawing from the refectory because the simple fare of bread and water is not enough, and they're getting the flu, and they're getting weak, and so they're getting dispensed, and they have to go to the infirmary for an indulgence, that is, a little meat or eggs to bolster up their resources that have been drained by this severe fast. This encourages him to hang in there some more because the reputation of the monastery depends upon keeping up the observance, so he's determined to stick it out. One by one, all the community peeled out. So, by Holy Week, he alone is left in the refectory with his bread and water. And on Easter, as the great Alleluia! is sung, he staggers out of the church. He has succeeded in fasting to the bitter end. Indeed, he has succeeded in fasting all the other monks under the table. He hasn't changed a bit. The same motivation for drinking your friends under the table can be the motivation for fasting them under the table. This false self couldn't care less what your milieu or environment is. It subtly adjusts to the environment and simply makes use of the new value system or what is valued in the environment to express its worldliness.

So, in the Gospel of John, it's not the world that we know which is desperately in need of our help that is to be rejected, but it's worldliness! And the worldliness is this stuff which wants to get out of the world bigger and better things for one's own self-aggrandizement. And so, the religious life, or any place on earth, is not a place where you can escape from the worldliness that is inside of us, because it follows us wherever we go. Finally, the spiritual level is a bigger subject, for which I think we should wait till next time. Thank you.