

Healing and Spirituality

The Revd Dr Martin Israel, edited by the Revd Neil Broadbent

I am come that they may have life in all its abundance. John 10:10

Man knows so many things; he does not know himself. Go into your own ground and learn to know yourself there. Meister Eckhart

Life is God living and working in the soul. William Law

Growth

Humanity's natural state is one of sin, which is incompleteness; its predominant attitude is self-centredness, individualism. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15) is the classic example of humanity's eternal quest for that healing which is God. Like the prodigal we are bound to make mistakes and harm others and ourselves. When we remember that we add to the sorrows and suffering in the world by our attitudes, thoughts and actions, it is only right and proper that we should share in the world's suffering. It is through such trials and errors that we may learn spiritual understanding. Suffering should not be thought of as a divine punishment, rather it is partly our souls moving into new experiences and partly the result of going against the laws of the universe. It teaches us of our imperfect alignment with the will of God. It is our own self-centredness which separates us from the knowledge of God within.

Healing begins when we become aware of our inadequacy. Actual healing leads to self-actualization - the development of the personality to its highest potentiality. The goal is a fully integrated life as shown by the presence of love, joy, peace, gentleness, self-control, patience and humility. A necessary first step is self-acceptance. Healing is the redemption, that is the salvaging and reforming, of all that is awry and disordered within us, and outside us, so that it may be claimed for the universal body of Christ. Successful healing is permanent; medical treatments and complementary medicines tend only to partial or temporary cures.

Desire, in this case for healing, is the stimulus that awakens the will, the action of the soul. The soul is the directing principle of the personality and our personality is both how God made us and also wounded from past experiences. Our imperfections need to be assimilated with gentleness and courage so that they may be brought to the redeeming, i.e. atoning light of Christ. Long-suffering, an ingredient of spiritual growth, may teach us courage, fortitude and compassion.

The power that impels us on to self-realization is the Holy Spirit of God. Opening oneself to the inflow of Divine Grace is the mechanism of healing. The abundant life that Jesus taught is the measure of real health and is a spiritual state of being.

Awareness

Spirituality is an outcome of healing. The essential feature of spirituality is awareness. Awareness of others, ourselves and the world around us. Man starts his spiritual life when he lives in full awareness of the world around him. Usually we are barely aware; we sleep-walk through life.

Pain and suffering may induce compassion so that one looks with the eyes of one's heart, learning to discriminate without judging. Being with a person in need, offering silent gratitude for their very being, is the best way to help. Paying attention to another is offering a great gift to him. Our attitude to life itself, shown

in the manner we respond to life's events, determines the quality of healing we are open to receive. All giving of the self in the world is an encounter with God.

Faith

Healing is a gradual process that needs faith in the ever-present love of God and forgiveness of ourselves and of others for what we are now. Faith is based on a higher intuition firmly founded in the soul, but not yet properly brought down to the mind. It is our innate knowledge of God which is our saving faith. The faith of one who is growing spiritually is not blind trust in printed words; rather saving faith is in the fundamental goodness of life itself. True faith, a gift from God, is a state of openness to new possibilities. Faith, hope and love lead us to God.

The effects of the Holy Spirit include an increase in awareness, sharing, communication, loving, gratitude, endurance, wonder and increased union with all life. Willed awareness of oneself is the precursor of confession, petition and contemplation. Willed awareness of other people is the precursor of intercession.

Prayer

Prayer is an inner humbling of oneself so that consciousness can rise to soul level. Prayer is a spiritual act of loving and contemplating. The essence of prayer is silent communion with God. The value of prayer is the experience of unity with God. The primary object of prayer is to become more integrated, more spiritually aware: a better person. As one draws closer to God, so one is closer to all He created. Intercession flows from mystical oneness, in God, with the one prayed for. One is not trying to directly influence another in intercession; the afflicted one should come to terms with their trouble. We can never presume to know what is best for someone else: only God knows this.

The act of self-disclosure, of offering oneself as a living sacrifice, is the heart of spirituality in life. Christ's unresentful taking our sins upon himself on the cross shows the presence of God in daily life. The spiritual life is one of growing awareness of our own and other people's inter-mixed dereliction and grandeur. God is seen as outflowing, purposeful love.

Love

Love, caring in action, persists, come what may and transcends death. As love grows so it includes more and more people, not with entangled emotions but with a deep clarity originating in the peace that passes understanding - the presence of the Holy Spirit. This love does not demand; it seeks only to pour out itself in service on a universal scale and in tranquillity. Such love gives out hope, truth, faith and thanksgiving. In complete self-giving one receives an inner realization of God's prevenient love. Love is the Christ that leads us to God.

The spiritual life means desiring to draw closer to God in both prayer and service, it means tackling today's tasks with faith and courage, using every faculty, intellectual and intuitive to inform our decisions and actions, including prayer. With St Augustine, we "pray and leave the results to God." Desire for recompense, despair and spiritual pride are three temptations which divert the spiritual aspirant from the Way.

Spirituality

Spirituality is the over-arching, informing drive to union, at-onement with God. True spirituality is a catalyst, a consistent attitude, which penetrates, illumines, integrates, unifies and directs every moment of living. It is an attribute within man which enables him to move beyond self-interest to an involvement with all life. The spiritual path is one that leads to ever greater understanding, knowledge, compassion and self-sacrificing

love. Spirituality brings with it humility, gentleness, joy and patience. There is no need to criticise others, as one does not know all their circumstances.

One day acceptable religion will be a mystical one, mystical in terms of experiential wisdom. Then, and now, the Church's first duty is to teach and practise spirituality.

Helpful Resources

An Approach to Spirituality, Martin Israel, CFPSS, 1971

Healing and the Spirit, Martin Israel, CFPSS, 1972