

## INNER VIEWS

We are literally more than we think.

Go with your bliss.

Do your own thing.

Love yourself.

Listen to your heart.

Good advice, but how do I do these things? What is my bliss if I've never felt blissful? I've tried lots of things to make me happy and they are nice but temporary. How do I do my own thing? Do I even own a thing? Is there something that is uniquely mine to do? I've done so many things, I've worked hard so what more can I do? How do I love myself? By trying harder to be good? And how do I hear my heart when all this chatter is going on all around me and in my head?

What all these have in common is that they cannot be pursued in themselves. There is no way to accomplish them. They involve a shift in every aspect of our being. This shift begins deep within, below the surface of our awareness, out of reach of our choices, and when it does happen it's a grace, a gift that we cannot bestow on our self. We become our self more through the way we relate to our life than through what we do to our self.

Following the Way of Jesus involves us in a relationship to all of our self as being loved into existence by Trinity. It is the Way of Unconditional Love. It is an apprenticeship in the wisdom that comes from being present to our whole self. This is not something we can force to happen. Force returns us to our ego and our ego limits us to thoughts about our self. Our ego only deals with our partial self. Healing comes with wholeness. And wholeness is more than we can carry in our head. We are literally more than we think.

We have learned to derive our sense of self from the workings of our mind. We see ourselves basically as a mind-made narrative - a collection of memories, stories, opinion, expectations and viewpoints. This form of self knowledge focuses on our limitations, what more we must become. It tells us about the ways we fail and fall short of ideals. This is helpful in defining goals but harmful in defining our self. It pits us against our self, trying to overcome our self in order to feel better about our self. As Jesus said, "A house divided against itself crumbles."

Almost all the advice we get about becoming a better person is based on approaching ourselves from our ego. This will always leave us short and lacking the energy and motivation to continue. And in most cases it sets up an opposite (shadow) part of our self that fights against our highest goals. The old saying, "The way to hell is paved with good intentions," is so true. But the way back is paved with humility.

Humility learns from Trinity's love to deal with our whole self, without judgment or recrimination. And humility teaches us to rely on Trinity's Spirit as our guide towards development.

The beginning of waking up to Trinity loving us into existence is experiencing our self as more than our parts.

This experience of our self does not come from new ideas about our self. Thoughts return us to our mind and separate us from the loving energy that is truly our self. But we can move beyond our thoughts by letting go of these thoughts and paying attention to who is thinking. We can pay attention to ourselves as being aware of these thoughts..

Try this out. Who is here? Right now, sitting where you are, reading these words, take a few moments to settle yourself, relax, and sense yourself looking at this page. Can you see the print on this page? It is seen, right? But seen by whom? In this very moment, beyond concepts or images who is seeing? Shift your attention for just a moment from the words on the page back to yourself. You might become aware of thoughts and feelings going through you. You are aware of them just like you are aware of the words on the page. You are not them you are awareness of them.

Who is aware? You might be aware of your body, your thoughts or your feelings at this moment but you are always more than these, you are the awareness. Who am I really? Notice this: am I my thoughts, the thoughts that I am thinking? No, thoughts come and go: I am aware of my thoughts, so I must be more than my thoughts. "I" remain even as they change. "I" remain because I am an expression of Trinity loving me.

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I don't know if there is a "right thing" to do in many cases. There is certainly no "perfect" answer. The Way of Jesus points us to doing the wise thing.

The wise thing is possible because we are loved and loving.

Loved and loving are one reality: ours. Although they seem to be split when we think about them they actually describe the flow that is us being loved into existence at every moment. Wise action comes from being in tune with this flow. We are being loved into existence and our existence is to be loving. We are most fully alive when we receiving and giving love.

When Jesus urges us to act from compassion, as he does in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), he points us to the flow of the Father's mercy as the source of our compassion. Mercy means we need the gift of the Father's love to act. Compassion means we recognize our shared need for this mercy in our living together.

Acting from our ego/mind on the other hand leads to lots of changes but few improvements. Our ego/mind works by defining reality, breaking it into pairs of opposites that exist only in the abstract. When we act from these abstract ideas and expectations we leave out and often deny much of our reality and the reality in which we are acting. As the saying goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Good intentions are not enough for wise actions.

And the road back from hell is paved with humility. Humility allows us to be present to our self and our situation in a way that is open, respectful to all of it (warts and all), curious and welcoming. This allows us the wisdom of receiving the gift of openness to all that is involved.

We mend and renew the world through attitudes that allow us to relate to the unity beyond the divisions in our mind. We are because we belong to the great wholeness in diversity, to Trinity. Our mind works by demanding outcomes and trying to force them into existence. Wisdom works with the reality of what is by working from the openness of our soul.

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To act with wisdom we begin by approaching ourselves gently without force or judgment. At this time humble silence is often the best action. In our humility we recognize the ambiguity of the situation. We admit that there is far more going on here than we can know and that our imaginings are mostly a projection of our worldview. We open our soul to receive Trinity's gift and offer it the concrete reality of our lives.

When we let go of our story, opinions and expectations enough to empty our soul we open ourselves to the gift of compassionate action. This lets us allow the free flow of Trinity's energy move us out of our comfort zone enough to run us up against our fears and resistances. Giving up our good intentions and humbly being left with our need for Trinity's gentle wisdom. In this moment of received mercy we let compassion reunite us to our shared wholeness in Trinity.

Wised action begins with Trinity's gift and then learning that even the ability to receive the gift is itself a gift. And when gratitude begins to percolate action within us we begin to know our shared wholeness.

\*\*\* The contemplative dimension of life is the heart of the world. There the human family is already one. If one goes to one's own heart, one will find oneself in the heart of everyone else, and everyone else, as well as one's self, in the heart of Ultimate Mystery.

Seekers of the Ultimate Mystery - Thomas Keating - Contemplative Outreach Newsletter Vol. 25, No. 2 June 2010

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#### *Our Ego flies on the wings of our Soul*

I recently survived another of my innumerable birthdays. A friend asked me what wisdom I have after "all" these years. Well, here it is, "Everything I've said and believed is at best half true." My intentions are good and I've tried to be honest with myself and my beliefs along the way, but every belief and every insight is at best partial.

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I hadn't planned on that statement but it struck me as an important lead as I continue my spiritual quest. One of the first things I noticed as I began to look for the other side of my beliefs is my understanding of what our ego means.

The word "ego" is often used in a disparaging way - as in "He's got a big ego" or "She's on an ego trip." Spiritual writers often talk about the true self (soul) and false self (ego), which again puts our ego in a negative light. Ego is taken to imply selfishness, self-importance, rigidity, vanity and conceit. In the gospels it is often connected to self-righteousness which Jesus sees as a form of deafness and blindness which must be healed.

If we approach our ego by letting go of these judgments which oversimplify it we can understand its rightful and necessary place in our lives. Our ego is our normal conscious self or personality. It's the way we experience our self and the world around us. It's a normal and essential feature of being human, a necessary element in the larger reality of our full personality. Having an ego with a conscious self (an awareness of how to get along in our culture and focus our energy on necessary tasks) is the way we survive. Our ego is the way we learn to function socially and culturally. This is how we learn to fit into our family and community, to gather food (cultivating, hunting or shopping for it) prepare meals, make a living, raise and educate children, provide shelter, begin relationships, take part in politics and civic society. A healthy ego is skilled in imagination, feelings, intuition and sensing, as well as thinking. However, when our ego gets stalled, lost or fixated, when it resists change because loss, grief or deep inner transformation seems overwhelming, it then becomes a barrier to developing our inner self or soul.

Unfortunately our culture, both religious and civil, tends to fixate us in our ego because the culture has become egocentric. Our cultural and religious beliefs support a dysfunctional notion of what it means to be our self. We are taught to see ourselves as isolated, competitive individuals who can only rely on our self and need to aggressively overcome any obstacle (human or otherwise) in our way. This self centered or egocentric ego believes it represents only itself and is responsible only to itself. The primary values of this culture are safety, comfort, personal pleasure, and enhancement of status. Safety is insured through fitting in and belonging. There is nothing wrong with any of these, but we are made for so much more and when these become all that we seek we end up anxious, bored or depressed.

Soul is our self being loved into existence as an expression of Trinity. It is that place where we are most truly, freely our unique self as an expression of Trinity and as a contribution to the good of our community and Trinity's Universe. You can tell when writing and preaching is working from an ego point of view because it leaves you with this message; "Here's the right thing to do (because Jesus or some

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authority says so) and now you should choose it and act upon it." You can tell when writing or preaching is working from a soul perspective because it speaks to a deep and true reality within you that inspires you to respond in the unique circumstances of your personality and life situation.

The first step in connecting to our soul often happens because of a feeling of loss. Our life has lost its savor; all the things we've relied on for a sense of meaning or happiness no longer seem to work. We may simply feel bored with our life or our self. We feel on some vague level that we are not being our self, we are missing something but we're not sure what. All we know is that we want something more. We might begin to feel that we are not about "life after death" but about life before death. Becoming aware of this and committing our self to finding a way to feed our soul is often the first step in integrating our ego into the greater reality of our full self.

A second and more concrete step in integrating our ego and soul is to make friends with people who are also awakening to their soul reality. Our soul is relational in its essence. As one writer puts it, "Nothing is itself without everything else." I've been fortunate to find discussion groups and now a meditation group to wander with as we discover our soul depths. A good sign that the group is soul centered is that it leaves you free to do your own exploring while energizing your exploration. A group that is fixed on ego values makes demands and lays out a rigid set of expectations.

A third step is to pay attention to what you enjoy and are good at. Our soul is an inner resource but it always expresses itself in our concrete living. It enlivens the way we live. This is not the same as self-indulgence, even though we'll probably have to indulge our self and find out what truly fits our deepest longings. There are all kinds of quick fixes and spiritual contraptions to entice us but we'll soon tire of their shallowness. Our soul is the way Trinity leads us to receive unconditional love and act on that love.

The marriage of our ego and soul is our truest, most benign, and beautiful human self. Our ego does not disappear when it is healed but takes its rightful place within the body, mind, and soul of our humanness. The unhealed ego -self centered, anxious, alone and afraid- is the consequence of trying to heal our self on our ego's terms. We are made for so much more. Trinity wants us to experience being loved and our soul is the wineskin that is made to receive the overflowing abundance of Trinity's love.

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*We are Soul, a Vessel of God's Love*

Student: "Where did the universe come from?"

Teacher: "Where does your question come from?"

Our questions are created by the same loving energy that is creating the universe. This creative energy, loving us into existence, is the well spring of our meaning and our will to live, the source of our deepest desires, values and dreams. We all thrill at the sight of beauty because this loving and creative energy entices us with the promise of an intense involvement in the mystery of the loving Presence who is the Source of our life.

The word "soul" refers to our life-force, the basic energy of our being. This life force is really, guilelessly us with no pretensions, as we truly are in all of our limited and divine beauty. In the very first book of the Bible (Genesis) our Creator molds the clay of the earth into a human shape and then breaths divine breath into that clay so that it becomes a living human being, living with God's breath. This is not a historical fact, it's the meaning of all facts.

We live because the very life force of God is breathing us. This life force expresses itself in our desire to be loved and to be loving. This life force is personal, God loving us, choosing to create us and offering us the opportunity to respond freely and creatively as partners in Trinity's creation. Our purpose is to participate in the love that creates us at every moment. Because this is our nature everyone has a "spiritual" life, a soul life.

Where there is emptiness, there is room for God. We are able to receive God as our life force because our soul receptive by its nature. Its made to receive God as the source of our living and loving.

We are a vessel of consciousness and love. Like all vessels our purpose is in our emptiness, our ability to receive, contain and pour out. Our basic nature the essence of our soul is to be open, curios, sensitive and connect to reality as it is. In this way we are receptive to the love that creates and expresses itself in us as we give it form in our personality.

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It is natural for us to want to take an active part in shaping the vessel that is our self. We choose qualities, personal traits and values, with which we decorate our selves. Our instinct is to pay attention to the decorations and forget that the empty space is our meaning.

\*\* Why settle for a thimble when the ocean awaits you?

We are emptiness receiving creative love. This is the human nature we share with Jesus. His life is the story of our divine possibilities. Like Jesus we are emptiness filled with love so that we can be love for others.

\*\* I came not to be served but to serve - John

As you explore the way your life matures and develops you will be reformed over and over, stretched to receive the abundance of God's generous love.

It is not what you do for Trinity but what you are willing to let Trinity do within you,

where you are willing to let Trinity's Spirit guide you, and most of all, how you are willing to let Trinity teach you along the Way of Jesus..

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