

Inner Views

“Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart.”

When you have chosen to turn your gaze inward you taken a basic step toward what the Gospels call conversion, repentance, seeing, hearing, being healed from the infirmities which cripple your spirit. You have begun a spiritual path that guides you with our Father’s unconditional love. However when you begin to focus on your inner life you usually don’t encounter warmth, gentleness and compassion. Instead you are met by a harsh critic.

As you pay attention to your inner experience you will see that the focus of your attention is generally on judgments and fears about what you are encountering, upset or disturbance over what may have caused it, and a desire to change it.

What we’re seeing here is the activity of the superego. The superego is a specialized part of our ego structure that has the job of making sure we live up to the standards we learned as children so that we could get along with our families and communities. It does this by various means, including judging, criticizing, advising, and warning, encouraging, threatening, and punishing ourselves in reaction to our thoughts, feelings, and actions.

We have internalized what we’ve learned from others as a way of forcing our self into compliance with the values and rules of the people with whom we live

Most often we project these onto other people. In this way we avoid facing this inner reality as something we are inflicting upon ourselves. Our focus is outward on them instead of inward on what we’re doing to ourselves. So we are inhabited by all these judgments, and we feel humiliated, ashamed, embarrassed, guilty, worthless, and deficient. But all of these feelings stem from our own aggression toward ourselves.

Because the attacks of the superego are so debilitating we need to know how to effectively counter them. We need to cultivate gentleness because we have been trained to beat ourselves into shape. This is something we need to “learn” from Jesus because it is not a simple matter of choice and good intention. It is about learning a new attitude toward our self that is gentle and humble.

This takes time. We can’t impose it on our self because imposing just continues the harsh attacks on our self. So we have to learn from someone who is gentle and humble – from Jesus who learned from our Father. We have to learn to directly defend ourselves, to own up to our aggression and use its strength and energy to set the superego aside, to create space to be where we are. At this time on our spiritual path we need to constantly recognize the superego and its ploys and learn how to defend against them

Basically we have to ask Jesus to help us cast them aside. This is a way of disengaging, but with strength, with energy, with awareness. The superego wants to fence us in, and we need to expand outward to the freedom of the children of God.

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In time, instead of the superego's harsh criticism, we experience more compassion and warmth, the attunement and empathy of a kind heart. Our inner awareness begins to assume more gentleness in the way we perceive and recognize ourselves.

This inner awareness could shift from "I'm always feeling ashamed; I wish I felt different," to "I'm feeling ashamed and it's really painful!" There's a slight shift, you see? Instead of harshness, there's a gentleness and an implicit compassion that makes us more able to see how Jesus is teaching and healing us.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

BEATITUDES

Beatitudes act like instant parables. They help us experience our relationship to God with the clarity of Jesus' consciousness. Parables are meant to soften the defenses of our thoughts and ideas so that we can experience the immediacy and intimacy of God's love. They do this by describing common, ordinary events as revelations of extraordinary love.

Jesus taught in parables. The newness of his message called for a new form of communication. Jesus' parables loosen the grip of the assumptions by which we habitually live, the unnoticed framework of our thinking within which we interpret our life. Parables interpret us and expose the gaps in our logic toward divine reality. They start with ordinary life and then shock our imagination into seeing our life as it has been revolutionized by unconditional Love. They are trying to bring us into the inner reality of our relationship with God. Jesus is teaching us to live with his consciousness.

For instance, Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven, God's unconditional love breaking into our lives, is like a merchant in search of a fine pearl. When he finds one of great value he sells all that he has so that he can purchase the pearl. So far this makes sense – until we realize that we are the pearl. And God is the merchant. Now we are faced with the incredible reality of God's love for us. Who would have guessed?

The Beatitudes are mini parables. To be "blessed is something we would willingly accept. But who wants to be "poor in spirit," or "mourning," or "persecuted"? What sense does being "gentle," "merciful," and a "peacemaker" make in a society that glorifies aggression, vengeance, and "looking out for number one?"

The Beatitudes question our way of getting along in this world. They mean to trip us and slow us down so that we begin to look deep inside. They are doorways to our spirit. As long as we stay in the external world, outside the door, we will be searching for God, trying to get God's attention. But when the Beatitudes lead us to the inner door we'll find that God has been inside all along. This is the way Jesus experiences reality.

For Jesus Spiritual living does not bring about improvement or perfection. It brings about a maturity, a humanity, and a wisdom, a unconditional wholeness in the sense of being able to be aware of the whole and love the whole as God does. When the Beatitudes describe us as "Blessed" this is what they are talking about. Notice "Blessed" is our present description, not something we will become by doing the right thing. You can see how the Beatitudes are already changing the way we perceive ourselves in relationship to God.

To be "Blessed" means that in knowing ourselves we simultaneously know God. When we see the truth about ourselves, we see that we are God's children: "To all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Wisdom lies in knowing God and knowing oneself. From self knowledge we rise to knowledge of God.

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We begin to know ourselves by going within. We pay attention to the activity of our mind-body organism. In this way we become intimate with ourselves and understand our bodily messages, our personality, our motivation, and the many “tapes” our mind plays over and over.

We grow in intimacy with our inner self. We begin to see how our mind and our memories shape our view of the world and the way we get along in it. As we do this we can gradually shift awareness from what we see about ourselves to ourselves as the one who is seeing. We realize that we are more than the thoughts, emotions and memories coursing through our awareness. This is a parabolic shift in consciousness.

We also realize we are capable of this transcendence because we are rooted in a larger transcendence. We are grounded in God. We come to know that who we are is who God is creating us to be. Our lives are held in existence by God. This is what Jesus means when he says, “God is Love.”

Inner Views: Beatitudes continued

Waking up, seeing, hearing, living, and finding our true self entrails more than self-knowledge and knowledge of God. St. John begins his Gospel by connecting the Word with God, with creation, and with the spiritual illumination of people. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....All things came into being through (the Word)... what has come into being in the Word was life, and the life was the light of all people.” (John 1:1-4) In other words all things are sustained by divine life. When the divine lives in the human world, it becomes a light for the mind, a way of seeing with new clarity. The light in the human mind allows people to see that Divine life is everywhere. When we wake up to the fact that we are children of God, always sustained by divine life, we also notice that everything else is also sustained by divine life. We are not separate, isolated individuals (what Jesus called living in “Gehenna” or hell) but brothers and sisters of Divine Love. In particular, we are brothers and sisters of one another, the embodiment of Jesus’ commandment to love God and our brothers and sisters as we love our own true self. If we love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, we will discover ourselves as God’s love for one another. This is the meaning of Jesus’ message and his life, death and resurrection.

The Beatitudes point inward to the intimacy of God here and now. However most of our beliefs about what will allow us to survive, or what can help us solve our problems or what will make us happy, or even what will fulfill our desire to make a difference in the world all seem to point us away from here. We are always going somewhere, internally or externally – to the store, the movies, the park, the office, the restaurant, the television, the Internet, the newspaper, the latest spiritual teacher to be featured on TV, to our partners, our children, our friends, our parents, our worries, our concerns, our fears, our hopes. And on and on. We are in motion, going after, seeking out, restless, never satisfied, never at peace.

This seems to be the central dilemma of the spiritual life – that it is easier to desire what is over there than to appreciate what is right here. In fact, what is here seems to be so fundamentally inferior, less than, or inadequate compared to what is apparently over there, that it hardly seems worth the effort to look here. Why not just go over there!

Why, indeed! But Jesus tells us “Blessed are you.” When he says you are “blessed” he doesn’t mean you will be blessed. Or that you will be blessed if you do this or that. No. you are Blessed, right here, right now! You are a divine child of God. Jesus wants to awaken us to our spiritual reality. All true spirituality begins here. The Beatitudes are doorways that open us to the reality of being blessed. We have find our spirit by looking within, right here, right now. And through our spirit we find the God who is the source of our existence and our continued development. This is all happening right here and now. We don’t have to go anywhere, or get anything else to be blessed. Many consider this the essential realization in spiritual development, the key to becoming awake, seeing, hearing, living, and being found. It is not something that we choose to do but something we learn by paying attention to what is here right now.

But Jesus is not content to leave us with merely knowing that we are blessed. As we grow in awareness of the immediacy and intimacy of Gods’ love we will increasingly come to know ourselves as “Beloved.” Beloved are the poor in spirit. Beloved are those who mourn. Beloved are we.

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Blessedness is our given state. Belovedness is our awakening to God's love throbbing within every stratum of our spirit. We can either approach ourselves with love, kindness, and compassion, or rejection, separation, fear or control. We can criticize ourselves, judge, reject, attack ourselves, push, pull, and do violence to our self. Or we can let go and trust the power of God's love.

The point of being blessed is that our true spiritual nature is full of love, peace, strength, beauty, joy, compassion, wisdom and intelligence. These are not something we need to work at, learn, imitate or seek. They arise spontaneously as expressions of our spirit. They are God's love being lived in our life.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. - PATHWAYS

Inner Views: Beatitudes: Part 3

Blessedness does not require you to change yourself in any way in order to find yourself! Blessedness says "stop comparing yourself to something or someone that you imagine to be better or truer or more spiritual." The transformation from blessed to beloved is a natural, spontaneous process that occurs only when you stop being so busy trying to change yourself. This transformation happens because God is loving you into existence. God's love grows you.

This makes sense when we pay attention to the process of growth. Everything in you is connected to everything else in you and this is why trying to change some part of your personality falls short. You are trying to change part of your self but that part is a facet of your whole being. Opening the door of blessedness does not bring about improvement or perfection. It brings about maturity, humanity, and wisdom. - wholeness in the sense of being able to be aware of the whole and love the whole which is already here, already now. After all when we say God loves us unconditionally we are talking about wholeness. Since our love is an expression of God's love we need to let go of our conditions to let God's love flow freely.

If this "letting go" was as easy as it sounds we would have let go by now. We have a list of traditional words that point to this reality: detachment, mortification, repentance, surrender, as well as the twelve step metaphor of hitting bottom. Jesus tells us "You have to give up your self to save your self."

The basic attitude here is the willingness to let go of what we believe will make us become whatever it is we think we should be. We have all kinds of ideas about who we are, how things should be, and what will make our life happy, peaceful and satisfying. If we want to grow in our ability to love and relate with God's unconditional love we have to allow our ideas, beliefs and hopes to die. Transformation means we will no longer be the person we think we are. Our hopes about the person we can become are just recycled versions of who we think we are.

A butterfly larva can only imagine itself being a bigger larva. Transformation into a butterfly is beyond the possibilities of its imagination. Improvement for a larva means working at crawling faster. It could never imagine itself flying.

We approach ourselves with fixed ideas of who we can be. We will direct our change only according to the way we are. We look to our future as improvements on the blueprint we already use. The only way we allow God to transform us is to be open and allow things to happen, allow the butterfly of our spirit to emerge out of the larva of our ego.

So we need an attitude of allowing things to emerge, to change, to transform without anticipating how this should happen. We need to be open so that we can let something that we are neither directing, nor controlling emerge out of the larva of our present self. This is the beginning of being taught to be unconditional in our lives. In this sense we are imitating God's unconditional love so that God's loving can emerge through our lives. This is Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God.

This is why the Beatitudes, at first glance, don't easily fit into the way we want to think about ourselves. They develop us according to the logic of our spirit, which never follows a straight line. Our mind wants a clear and straight path. It wants to set goals, strategize ways of reaching those goals, and then set off in pursuit of a better self.

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But our spirit is more like a maze. It has dead end alleys, traffic circles that seem to route us past the same destinations over and over. Our inner path is like a supermarket when they change all the aisles. You thought you knew where to go and now you have to walk around the whole store to find what you're looking for. However, in doing this you become familiar with those parts of yourself that you've never valued and often rejected. We are being taught to trust and love, to find joy in the life being given us. This is the way Jesus came to know the Father. This is how we come to know we are Beloved.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS

"Blessed are you pure of heart for you shall see God"

Our soul is our unique, personal presence and openness to divine Essence, to God as the Source of our existence. As Jesus said, "Blessed are you pure of heart for you shall see God" (Mt. 5:8)

In our openness to the divine Essence (God) as our Source, our soul develops through a series of transitions. In the first months of our life we are so completely open to God that we have no sense of our unique and personal self. We live in a blissful state of openness and receptivity to divine energy as it creates us at every moment. We experience this as a unity and bonding with our mother.

However, this divine energy also triggers the development of our unique sense of self. This development means that we begin to identify our self as separate from our divine Source. At first we identify with our body and begin to recognize a sense of separation from our mother. We realize that when she is gone from us we remain, she is more than an extension of our self. And with this comes the first hint of separation anxiety which creates a struggle without our self. We want to remain in the blissful state of unbounded connection through her but we also want to be our separate self. We experience this separation most fully as we develop the use of words and images of our body as separate. We begin to say "no" and "mine." We live with the soul's elation of becoming our unique self and at the same time with the loss of paradise. This is the beginning of one of the great dilemmas of our existence. We are caught between two seemingly different worlds.

However, this is also the beginning of the soul's development into her true nature. At this moment the soul begins to express and develop herself through identifying with the thoughts, ideas, memories and expectations she has about herself. This is the beginning of ego development. It is a necessary step in recognizing our uniqueness. And if we continue on the path, without becoming fixated on our ego, this will lead us letting go of our identity with our ego (mind and memories) and reconnecting to our soul's openness and receptivity to divine essence. But this time we will no longer be absorbed into divine Essence. Instead we will be able to relate to it, we will bring our unique self with its ability to incarnate divine Love in our concrete living.

To do this the soul must engage in a two fold process. After we develop our sense of self through identity with our ego we must begin to free our self from the rigidity and fixations of our ego's structures in a way that retains the skills and insights we've learned but also leaves us open to the greater reality in which we exist. This is a reality that cannot be adequately contained in words

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and ideas. We are by the essence of our soul a basic creative openness to reality in all of its breadth and complexity as an expression of divine Essence. This involves freeing the soul from the constricting fixations and rigidities of her issues, conflicts, conditioning, and ego structures.

The other side of the soul's becoming involves identifying with her essential development. This is a reconnection with our essential ground (God) in a way that uses our cognitive achievements to recognize the ground (divine loving) which is our true nature. In this part of our spiritual awakening we consciously (now that we have developed our consciousness) realize that our true nature is a non-conceptual awareness. We are an expression of the divine Presence and creative dynamism of creation. As Anthony DeMello says, we reach God by understanding that there is no distance between our self and God. We develop the nondual quality of our soul's basic openness.

Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. PATHWAYS / STILLPOINT

INNER VIEWS: Beatitudes - Poor in Spirit part 1

BLESSED ARE YOU POOR IN SPIRIT, THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS YOURS

We are created to be loved and loving. We exist only in relationship. We are loved into existence or we would not exist. And we all want to be acknowledged for the beauty of who we are. We want somebody to "get us" for who we are, to delight in the beauty of our spirit

The word "spirit" refers to our life-force, the basic energy of our being. In the very first book of the Bible (Genesis) God molds the clay of the earth into a human shape and then breaths God's breath into that clay so that it becomes a living human being, alive with God's breath. We live because the very life force of God is coursing through our bodies. This life force is manifested in our desire to be loved and to be loving. Our purpose is to participate in the love that creates us at every moment.

Because of our divine origin we all have a "spiritual" life. This life force is the well spring of our meaning and of our will to live, the source of our deepest desires, value and dreams. We all crave a profound and intense involvement with life, and thrill at the sight of beauty, grace, and the rapture of being alive. And since we exist in relationship to God and one another we become conscious of our beauty only when it is acknowledged.

All too often we look for the things we most genuinely need outside of ourselves. We live in a consumer culture that teaches us that "spirit" is just another commodity, something we can help our self to by buying the right book or inhaling a "spiritual" fragrance. Our beautiful self lies veiled by all the words and concepts that our mind uses to create our ego. Our ego is merely us thinking about who we are, and then identifying with our ideas. This makes us an object in our own mind and separates us from the beauty of who we are.

We get distracted by externals and we look to being talented and successful, loved and admired, or powerful and in control, but these disguise the beauty of who we truly are. Jesus, however, clearly tells us that we must look within. He calls the inner realm of spiritual aliveness "the Kingdom of heaven ." For Jesus spirituality is not something special or extraordinary. It is a supernatural energy source that is natural to us. Spiritual energy is the intimate presence of God loving us unconditionally. Our beauty is our unique expression of this reality.

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We know this intuitively. Although we find it almost impossible to put into words, we know that being loved for our gifts and talents, for what we do, or what pleases others, isn't enough. Compliments create a quick flash of warmth; praise fills us for a moment but evaporates in the heat of criticism. Affirmations lift us up but quickly lose their buoyancy. We want somebody to see through all this, to see our beauty.

We want somebody to see that part of us that cannot be put into words, reduced to a description, or defined by any mixture of qualities. Our beauty is far more than any of these, far more than anything our ego can mimic. And when somebody responds to our beauty we are reconnected to our real self.

Now here's the paradox of our spiritual path. The spiritual life is about learning to see the beauty that is both personal to us and shared with all of creation. The spiritual path leads us beyond our ego to the beauty of spirit, our whole self. And it is fraught with unexpected twists. It leads to our beauty through the eye opening wisdom of humility. And who would ever think that the first step toward humility is accepting the "poverty of our spirit." Ken Sedlak C.Ss.R. – PATHWAYS

INNER VIEWS: Beatitudes - Poor in Spirit part 2

The "blessedness" of this Beatitude is the fullness of life that is found in humility. Blessed are those who acknowledge the poverty of their spirit, who know that all the things we strive for don't satisfy a hunger for something we can't grasp for our self. We are poor in spirit when we know that our only true richness / satisfaction is God and the Kingdom of God's.

To be humble has nothing to do with disparagement. And self-loathing is just a form of ego inflation. We are good because God created us, not because of something we did for God. Jesus gives us "poor in spirit" as a doorway to our spirit because it keeps us alert to our need for and connection with God.

The Aramaic word used for "poor" creates an image of God as the foundation that we devoutly clutch, as if losing it would leave us impoverished. Blessedness is the simple yet profound joy of being that fills our consciousness when we make room by letting go of everything else. When it comes to our relationship to God love is not something we do but something to which we surrender.

Since the love to which we surrender is unconditional blessedness includes all aspects of our body, mind, and spirit. Blessedness is about being completely human, not arriving at some transcendent state in which the difficulties of being human are not present. All spiritual work is giving up the idealized self and arriving where you already are: not some place special or new, but here, where you already are. Blessedness transforms into Belovedness not when we conquer our humanness in all its complexity and suffering, but when we learn to inhabit the basic imperfection of our human condition as the place where God is most intimately present.

Because we are humans and not ideal beings, we often lose our way in the maze of our inner world. When we take our life as it is, not as some idealized version of who we are or where we should be in our development, God enters. Being in the here and now, our poverty leaves room to receive our Beloved connection to the Divine.

Our ego longs for the simplicity of a black and white world and for the absence of everything that makes up our humanity. Our ego wants no fear of death. It wants to be clear and composed all the time. To be incredibly kind; to be wise in every situation; to be honored but never to get a swelled head; to be unconditionally loving.

Our blessed self also longs for ease. However, it knows we can experience freedom from the fear of death only by accepting the fear of death. It knows we cannot always be composed and clear, and it does not demand that of us: it knows that our beauty includes the flaws in our humanness. And pride? And the desire to be adored? These too must be held up to the light of consciousness; otherwise they will go on their merry way, underground, causing quiet but persistent mayhem! Humility is simply accepting ourselves for who we are and being willing to see ourselves for all of who we are. It is a respect for ourselves as we are, and a reluctance to force ourselves into the** abstract expectations of our ego. Humility is the never-ending adventure of coming to know all the facets of our self, seeing ourselves clearly, and learning to be at home with all of this. It is able to do this because we are Blessed.

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When we pay attention to our whole self we know ourselves as limited, flawed, paradoxical and imperfect as well as gifted with divinity. We are uncertain, yet long for certainty, limited and wounded yet we crave wholeness. The paradox created by our human and divine nature is what drives us to seek salvation because it leaves us with a haunting sense of incompleteness, of being somehow unfinished. Our only hope is to resist rejecting our self by attempting to deny this paradox. To be complete we need to be humble. To be humble we need to know ourselves as Blessed.

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