

Giving Over - Opening to Transformation

In the well-known quote by Isaac Pennington, we celebrate his urging us to sink down to the Seed, but pay scant advice to his declaration of how exactly to do that, by giving over our own willing, giving over our own running, giving over our own desiring to know or be anything. It is pretty clear what he is talking about here as the way to enter into this life of the Seed that God has planted in our hearts. Yet I have found modern Friends highly resistant to the level of letting go of self in order to encounter Self that Pennington is pointing to. And yet, it is the doorway to the transformation that we yearn for.

Know what it is to walk in the path of life, and indeed is alone capable of walking therein. It is that which groans, and which mourns; That which is begotten of God in thee. The path of life is for the seed of life. The true knowledge of the way with the walking in the way, is reserved for God's child, for God's traveler. Therefore keep in the regeneration, keep in the birth; be no more than God hath made thee. Give over thine own willing, give over thine own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything, and sink down to the seed which God sews in thy heart and let that be in thee, and grow in thee, and breathe in thee, and act in thee, and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of life, which is his portion. And as thou takest up the cross to thyself and sufferest that to overspread and to become a yoke over thee, thou shalt become renewed, and enjoy life, and the everlasting inheritance in that.

Isaac Pennington

Everyone wanted to change the world. No one wants to change themselves.

Leo Tolstoy

Awhile, as wont may be,
Self I did claim;
True Self I did not see,
But heard its name.
I, being self-confined,
Self did not merit,
Till, leaving self behind
Did Self inherit.

Jalal al Din Rumi

[The heart] ... perceives only in the modality of surrender (which means, literally, to "hand oneself over," to entrust oneself entirely). In other words, the heart can fulfill its Function as an organ of spiritual perception only to the degree that it is able to bring itself into moral alignment with "the infinity of love" (in Kabir Helminski's words): to the extent that it is willing and able to coincide with love, to become love itself.

Cynthia Bourgeault, The Heart of Centering Prayer

Meister Eckhart wrote, "There are plenty to follow our Lord halfway, but not the other half. They will give up possessions, friends and honors, but it touches them too closely to disown themselves." It is just this astonishing life that is willing to follow Him the other half, sincerely to disown itself, this life that intends complete obedience, without any reservations, that I would propose to you in all humility, in all boldness, in all seriousness.

Thomas Kelly, Testament of Devotion

Six in the third place means:

He dissolves his self. No remorse.

Under certain circumstances, a man's work may become so difficult that he can no longer think of himself. He must set aside all personal desires and disperse whatever the self gathers about it to serve as a barrier against others. Only on the basis of a great renunciation can he obtain the strength for great achievements. Only by setting his goal in a great task outside himself, can he attain this standpoint.

The I Ching, Hexagram 59, Dispersion

Poem for Flight

There will come a day-
it is not far off now-
when you will wake in the morning and know
you were meant to be happy
and that you want it
more than you want
things or memories
any concrete place called home
all the strings of the past that fasten you,
more than you want
justice or pride:
your old clay image of yourself
or the faint chance
that all that has gone wrong
may still change.

It is you who hold
the power to change.
And whatever it is that holds you
whatever it is you think you cannot live without
the time has come to open your hands and
let it go.

Run
flee
disappear
break loose
take wing
fly by night
move like a meteor
be gone.

If you think it will never be possible
think of Harriet
who traveled alone
the first time
who finally freed three hundred people
but first
had to free
herself.

Becky Birtha, The Forbidden Poems

But as I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those esteemed the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. When all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition"; and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.

George Fox, The Journal, Nigel Smith, ed.

King buried his face in his hands at the kitchen table. He admitted to himself that he was afraid, that he had nothing left, that the people would falter if they looked to him for strength. Then he said as much out loud. He spoke the name of no deity, but his doubts spilled out as a prayer, ending, "I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." As he spoke these words, the fears suddenly began to melt away. He became intensely aware of what he called an "inner voice" telling him to do what he thought was right. Such simplicity worked miracles, bringing a shudder of relief and the courage to face anything. It was for King the first transcendent religious experience of his life. . . . For King, the moment awakened and confirmed his belief that the essence of religion was not a grand metaphysical idea but something personal, grounded in experience-something that opened up mysteriously beyond the predicaments of human beings in their frailest and noblest moments.

~Taylor Branch, America in the King Years: Parting the Waters

Avowal

As swimmers dare
to lie face to the sky
and water bears them,
as hawks rest upon air
and air sustains them,
so would I learn to attain
freefall, and float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns
that all-surrounding grace.

~ Denise Levertov

Worship as a Transformative Crucible:

. . . a young woman, named Anne Wilson, was there and preached; she was very zealous, and fixing my eye upon her, she with a great zeal pointed her finger at me, uttering these words with much power: 'a traditional Quaker, thou comest to meeting as thou went from it (the last time) and goes from it as thou came to it, but art no better for thy coming; what wilt thou do in the end?' This was so put to my then condition, that, like Saul, I was smitten to the ground, as it might be said, but turning my thoughts inward, in secret I cried, 'Lord what shall I do to help it?' and a voice as it were spoke in my heart saying, 'Look unto me, and I will help thee;" and I found much comfort, that made me shed abundance of tears."

Samuel Bownas

A Still Cup

For
God
To make love,
For the divine alchemy to work,
The Pitcher needs a still cup.
Why
Ask Hafiz to say
Anything more about
Your most
Vital
Requirement?

Hafiz, Daniel Ladinsky, tr.

To penetrate to the essence of all being and significance, and to release the fragrance of that inner attainment for the guidance and benefit of others, by expressing in the world of forms, truth, love, purity, and beauty- this is the sole game which has any intrinsic and absolute worth. All other happenings, incidents and attainments can, in themselves, have no lasting importance.

Meher Baba

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen, "Anthem"