

BELIEF IN PROGRESS

When Eternity Enters Time

Have our culture and society progressed through time towards a hoped for objective or do we judge there is little or no advancement in the human race? To describe an answer to this question a distinction must be noted between a philosophy of history and a theology of history. From the viewpoint of a philosophy of history any goals in history are a matter of process. History is an evolution and can have meaning only in relation to the facts of past events.

A theology of history, however, looks at history as a process in time moving always toward a definite goal. The whole process is applicable to a wider plan that is a real part of history.

In the Bible our world is described in visible and invisible terms, neither separate from the other, but included in the whole of reality. The word "eternity" means the dimension of reality that is outside time, yet a part of life, begging our attention and energy. Though beyond time, the eternal is with us in the here and now, a knowledge of an idealized world metaphorically identical with the spiritual meaning of the Garden of Eden. (See, "The Great Code", by Northrop Frye, Penguin Books, 1990, pgs 72 and 124).

Theology as a God-centred philosophy speaks of God as a thought, a name, an idea, a reality basic to our being. The early Hebrews insightfully expressed God as, "I will be what I will be." (Exodus 3:14). To quote Northrop Frye (above, p. 17) "we might come closer to what is meant in the Bible by the word 'God' if we understood it as a verb, and not a verb of simple asserted existence but a verb implying a process

accomplishing itself."

Some religions conceive time as cyclical, repeating itself, and human life as a changeless recurrence, like a wheel turning on its axis, repeating itself endlessly. The Greeks thought this way in their concept of the "logos", the cycle of earth, air, fire and water as the basic elements of the physical world. This philosophy is reflected in the prologue of the Gospel of St. John: "In the beginning was the Word (logos), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Hebrews preferred to think of time linearly, purposeful rather than repetitious, with a beginning and an end, serving to join the temporal and the eternal.

The Hebrews lived on hope, and the whole orientation of their thought was towards the future. They saw

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history as a significant process. They recorded and interpreted the events of their lives in their sacred writings. They were more theologians than historians. They interpreted events in their understanding of the sacred and holy meanings in life.

For us, too, life is full of "happenings" as the Hebrews observed. Time and chance are taken by the wise and the imaginative and turned into spiritual experiences that not only strengthen and enlighten them for the present but instruct them for building the future.

A couple of years ago when camping on the shore of the Atlantic Ocean at the beautiful Islands Provincial Park, Shelbourne, Nova Scotia, I watched a stormy off-shore wind beat the waves into whitecaps and appearing to make the waters move away from the shore. But, observation of the shoreline showed the tide to be in flow and coming in. Despite the optical illusion, the water was steadily rising on the beach against the storming wind pushing it out. The tide unobtrusively and inexorably reached its destination.

I see the realm of God like this. Appearances may lead one to believe the world and society are worsening, perceptual observation indicates progress. Greater attention to individual rights is given today than ever before. War is generally condemned and now leaders of warring countries can face the world court for war crimes. Few countries continue the subhuman practice of capital punishment. Though churches are declining, Christianity is reviving. These and other signs indicate the progress of the realm of God in history.

JOINING A CHURCH

The biggest reason people seek a church is to find a sense of community, says the moderator of the United Church. "They're looking for people who will be understanding, accepting, open and loving," Marion Best recently declared.

Studies show about half of new church members are seeking community, just as much as those seeking to know Christ, she said. "They need meaning in their lives. There are lots of people who have material goods, but they find their lives are still empty," Best said.

CROSSING THE BAR

*We found the blind oracular fog
and thought it was molecular physics
We found the peachleaf willows so
heavy with ladybugs
drooping right to the sand
we thought they were cherry trees
We found Cartesian dualism
and thought it was a man and his
shadow
We found a woman shaving in a shower
and thought she was a question
Now we have found the light sitting in
a robin's nest
in a cherry tree
eyeing the cat in the grass below
which is also the light!
Daring him!*

(This poem take from "Iodine," published by Wolsak And Wynn. The author is Harold Rhenisch, a B.C. writer and rancher).

-----"I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving."

- Goethe

When we begin to lead a spiritual life we soon realize we've embarked on a journey without end.

SPIRITUALITY AND THE INNER SELF

From the Viewpoint of Arthur J. Deikman

by Anne Readhead

Spirituality is concerned with understanding ones inner self to the point of achieving an innermost sense of balance and harmony. Some persons describe this as the process where you bring the soul to a state of peacefulness and possess "absolute knowledge." Within the eastern culture of Buddhism the ultimate existence of true "being" is hoped to be gained through the practice of meditation. The technique of blending bodily sensations with emotional and intellectual awareness aims at a higher level of consciousness and promotes a deeper sense of the inner self. Within Western culture the exploration and development of ones inner self is attempted through the practice of psychotherapy. However, neither practice alone has been found with aggregation.

Recently psychologists and mystical scientists have been investigating the idea of combining the Eastern practice of meditation with the Western practice of psychotherapy. The belief is that when relieving ones subconscious problems by healing negative childhood experiences, one is free then to move on to heightening their awareness and knowledge. The theory claims that this approach will inevitably lead to a conscious level of genuine quality and spirituality. Both practices use the technique of mediation and both complement each other with the aim of unfolding a psychologically healthier and more balanced person. It is believed both practices need the

other to attain the goal of whole spirituality for the fundamental reason one cannot reach a higher level of mystical consciousness only by seeking externally, or only by looking internally. Perfect spirituality stems from awareness of both mental realms. This develops from from our inner and outer worlds into a sense of wholeness and completeness.

Arthur J. Deikman, M.D., describes this process as growing from "the object self", which constitutes ones thoughts, feelings, memories, perceptions, and any other content of consciousness which has a psychic location, to "the observing self", which is a deeper self of heightened conscious awareness.

Deikman believes that the observing self can be known but cannot be located or visualized in the way that thoughts, feelings and individual being can. Awareness produced from the development of the observing self manifests a different type of knowing - an intuitive or direct knowing.

Deikman states that the object self (local) motivations and their corresponding form of consciousness can subside and cease to dominate perception. Then the person becomes aware of the subtler, deeper channels that reflect and permeate actuality. When this takes place people experience their continuity and identity with that larger activity which is given various names: self,

(Inner Self, cont'd)

Tao, truth, Brahman, or God (page 104).

For many years it has been believed that human beings have untapped mental abilities that could be made conscious under the proper conditions. To perceive oneself as more than an object of this world calls for a radically different form of perception. According to Deikman psychopathology must be dealt with first as anxiety, fantasy and neurotic tendencies with which psychotherapy deals, preventing an individual from absorbing the mystical experience. Once the inner self is healed of unhealthy psychological characteristics one can progress to the development of the observing self which will allow the person to experience a larger reality; a larger self. "The observing self can be a bridge between the object world and the transcendent realm," declares Deikman (page 176). He claims that aggregation of Western psychology with Eastern mysticism will give rise to a deeper knowledge of human life and promote its evolution.

In conclusion, let me sum up my interpretation of Deikman's ideas. Instead of looking solely for some external and supernatural power to heal our world let us look at ourselves, thoroughly! Spirituality starts with ones self. Heal yourself. Give freedom to yourself to develop your fullest potential. If one concentrates on the process one can find the rest of the world and life around us will fit together as a meaningful whole. Let us resolve inner conflict(s) of our "self", awaken the mind, and advance towards the evolution of higher consciousness.

(The previous article refers to the book, "The Observing Self", By Arthur J. Deikman, Beacon Press, 1982.

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BOOK REVIEW

("The Unconscious Civilization", by John Ralston Saul, House of Anansi Press, 1995).

Our society, John Ralston Saul argues in the 1995 Massey Lectures, is only superficially based on the individual and democracy. Increasingly it is conformist and corporatist, a society in which legitimacy lies with specialist or interest groups and decisions are made through constant negotiations between these groups.

The paradox of our situation is that knowledge has not made us conscious. Instead, we have sought refuge in a world of illusion where language is cut off from reality.

Reconnecting language to reality, clarifying what we mean by individualism and democracy, making these realities central to the citizen's life, identifying ideologies in order to control them, these are among the first elements of equilibrium which Saul proposes in these lectures.

We live in ways that allow us to escape reality. Plato said we can forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when adults are afraid of the light.

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