

(November 2, 1986)

I have been reading about surrender to God. The devotional exercise of surrender to God is esteemed in the spiritual traditions of both the East and the West. The practitioner cultivates a state which is without personal desire, which is satisfied with whatever God provides and allows to happen. The practitioner of surrender also releases all sense of "doership," acknowledging that one's wishes for accomplishments is rooted in egotistical desires. To "be still and know that I am God" is to find a stillness which is total surrender, which is devoid of any vestige of individuality or personality, and which is completely free of stubborn grasping or mental agitation of any kind.

Ultimately, the one who practices surrender comes to understand that surrender itself is a mirage. For in offering our bodies, souls and possessions to God we are offering that which is already God's, and not ours to give at all. We realize that at best we can only say, "I falsely imagined until now that all of these things which are God's were mine. Now I realize that they are God's and I shall no more act as if they are mine." In effect, this is a recognition that there is nothing but God, that I and mine do not exist; only God exists.

Devotees of this spiritual path, in surrendering to God, abide by the divine will whether God seems to appear or to vanish. They await God's pleasure. They do not even pray for things, a way of seeming to ask God to do as they please. For you cannot ask God for things and imagine that you have surrendered your will to God. Rather, one lets go and lets be, leaving everything entirely to God.

But even as one senses the power and the truth of this path one is left with a question, a question about the ultimately quietist implications of the approach, a quietism not unknown in the experience of the Religious Society of Friends. Indeed, not only are there questions about social or political activism. What about our families and other dependents? Can we live with no thought for their tomorrows? Can we all be like the early Franciscan or Buddhist monks, awaiting only that food which comes to us without striving? Do we take medicine if we are sick? Inhale after exhaling? Groan when in pain?

Yesterday when in the Philadelphia office of the AFSC a poster interrupted this line of questioning thought. "Inactive virtue," the poster declared, "is no match for wickedness on the move." Here in one pithy phrase was a clarion call to another point of view, also a view with power, and also vulnerable, in its extreme manifestation, to all the maladies of superactivism which have become so familiar to us, to all the distortions inherent in the idea that it is somehow up to us alone to outdo and outmaneuver evil.

The good words we heard earlier\*\* about the love between a man and a woman, and about a gardener's devotion to his garden, help sort this out. Indeed, love always has

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\*\* See footnote on page 2.

a way of sorting things out.

For when we are truly in love is it not so that we find a way of doing things which is without grasping and striving, which is as automatic as breathing in and out? I am not talking of the kind of contemporary romance which breeds schemes of seduction, but the sort of pure and noble love which is in no way self serving, and which inspires in one an ability to act and to serve the interest and well being of the loved one without any apparent effort. Indeed, in this sort of love the good ordering of family life, or the loving process which takes place between the gardener and his garden, can be seen to be an aspect of that very same Creative Principle which sustains the universe itself, and not as something separate and distinct.

With the love and surrender of which the sages speak we become, not the devotee of a particular person or of a special garden or other project, but of life itself. We do not love this or that, but we swim in a medium composed of love, which medium which is divinity itself. As such we do not vegetate, but find that right action comes easily and automatically, as if mind, speech and body were merged with God. This ocean of love in which we swim is infinite in extent. If we only seem to get a little bit of it we should look to the incompleteness of our surrender. For if we come to the water's edge with a tiny cup, we should not blame the stinginess of the ocean.

Footnote: An earlier message had focussed on the speaker's thankfulness to God for having found, upon coming to New York, a good place to live, an opportunity to do fulfilling work, and most especially the love of a young woman. While life has often seemed perplexing to the speaker, he finds that love has a way of making things make sense. Later, a Friend from Glasgow Monthly Meeting told of his forty-four year long marriage with its ups and downs, and of his present lack of a job. He told the old story of the parson who passes a gardener at work in his garden and comments upon what the gardener and the good Lord have accomplished, whereupon the gardener responds that the parson should have seen the place when God had it all to himself. The point of the message seemed to be that significant enterprises, like love and marriage, or a special garden, require striving and effort, and not only the grace of God.