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## Quest (Five)

### *Personal religious thought.*

**D**uring the fifteen or twenty years that I was involved with organizing work in the field of community relations I had to attend many committee meetings of one kind and another. I met the leaders of active groups, local as well as national. Among them were government officials, teachers, lawyers, ministers, social workers, business men and individuals who became the moving spirits in grass roots movements for social change. In working with such people, I became aware of varying qualities of leadership. I met the dictator, the conciliator, the compromiser, the intriguer and the obstructionist. It has been said that power corrupts those who possess it. This tendency can be observed in lowly situations as well as in national or international crises. The original motive may have been completely altruistic, but when it meets with a certain measure of success, the ego is flattered and the pure thrust of the original purpose becomes

tinged with self-satisfaction. Carlyle called it "the sixth insatiable sense." Some of the ablest people I knew seemed to run off the track somewhere along the way. What started out as unifying procedure resulted in divisiveness. Persuasion turned into coercion. And often very questionable means were utilized to obtain desirable ends. I think I was bothered most by the subtle manipulation of people who were unaware of what was going on. Perhaps this troubled me particularly because I was tempted to use this technique myself when it represented a short cut to a desired end.

Wondering about the causes of conflict that sometimes arose within groups dedicated to the same objective, I came to perceive what a very important part motivation plays in corporate effort. The role of the expert is dangerous, and the organizer must be constantly aware of the why and how of his recommendations. He must guard against the vainglorious urge to dominate and the treacherous trap of infallibility. Truly to retain a moral frame of reference while wholeheartedly espousing a great cause, requires

an abnegation of self and an unfailing loyalty to the inner vision that very few people attain. In our time I think that Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez are the shining examples of this kind of constancy.

It was concern for motivation that made me prefer to work with Quakers on social problems. The concept of "that of God in every man" is a very revolutionary idea. If accepted as a basic belief it involves a new apprehension of deity and an exacting approach to man. I found that Friends were very sensitive to the basis for action and that the requirement for arriving at decisions by agreement from all members of the group reduced the danger of domination by any one person. There was no question of majority or minority vote. The necessity to think through a proposition with those in disagreement was an excellent discipline for me. I used to get pretty impatient with the time it took to arrive at decisions, but in the end I had to admit that the final result was better than what I had hoped for in the first place. The practice of opening every meeting with a "few moments of silence" quieted the mind and focused the sincerity

of intention. Closing with a similar period served to establish direction. I found it easier to reconcile my inner awareness with outer performance when I worked through Friends. I took an active part in the Friends Service Committee and also in the Palo Alto Meeting for Worship where I was often moved to speak from urgent inner compulsion. Some of these messages were very surprising to me. I don't know where the words came from. I seemed to be only an agent through whom an idea was articulated.

One of the signs of spiritual growth is the simplification of life. This does not mean that daily routines cease, although inconsequential items do become less insistent. What counts is not so much concerned with outer complexities as with the inner conglomeration of desires, thoughts and aspirations that confuse and irritate the mind. When the center of consciousness becomes well established, this welter of mental distraction diminishes. The wayward themes seem to become harmonized; impulses relate themselves to a total pattern. It was very easy to open the self to meditation at the beginning of the day and

at the end (if one could stay awake) but there are many hours between, when recollection needs to be sustained. "That which I will not that I do." It is like learning to drive a car. You have to *remember* to do certain things at first, but gradually your reactions become automatic and you don't need to think about it any more. Just enjoy the scenery. Coinciding with this, when the Inner Light shines brightly nothing can intercept that steady beam. It is not necessary to adjust the vision. It just happens.

But to establish the practice of the presence of God so that it becomes as natural as breathing—that requires a rigorous apprenticeship. When I think about it now it sounds silly, but I resorted to some trivial and seemingly ridiculous ways of keeping myself reminded. For instance, I fastened a large safety pin to the front of my dress and I carried a button in my pocket that I felt every time I reached in to find a pencil or a handkerchief. These objects were preferable to Moslem prayer beads which, although they serve the same purpose, called for questioning, whereas no one suspected a safety pin or a button. I also kept in



my purse a small notebook in which I wrote short quotations from many sources. I still have the little blue book although I no longer carry it with me (it is somewhat battered). The sources of sayings range from the *Bhagavad Gita* to the Bible, St. Augustine, The Catholic Missal, Marcus Aurelius, Baha Ullah, and others, and are short little sentences that could be read at a glance. St. Francis' prayer is there:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled, as to console  
To be understood, as to understand  
To be loved as to love, for  
It is in giving that we receive—*

One line, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace" came to be a recurrent refrain in my mind. Many religious disciplines recommend this type of expedient. Sometimes it is called a *mantra*, sometimes an individual *secret phrase*. I believe the recent popular movement known as "Transcendental Meditation" has adopted this approach and found it to be

psychologically effective. At any rate St. Francis served me well—"Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace." How does one nourish the subconscious response of love to all human beings so it becomes a positive attitude? It is not enough to feel "I don't like you" and then simply to think "but I have to be tolerant." The mere suppression of a negative attitude is not the same as opening oneself to "That of God in every man." The achievement of a positive attitude requires deeper intuition, not just intellectual or critical judgment.

Before entering anyone's doorway, I made a practice of inaudibly invoking a blessing on the house. This was an old Hebrew custom and interestingly enough, I found it still carried on among the simple folk of Ireland. When joining a group or meeting an individual, I thought "May God accompany me." At the beginning of a committee meeting and during the course of discussion I tried to imagine God was there among us as an invisible, but somehow participating extra entity, not an embodiment but an essence—an unsubstantiated presence that could ease tensions and

flow into decisions, and assure the moral justification of compromises; and above all, hopefully, never weary from the tediousness of irrelevant details. At first this seemed a bothersome, idiotic obligation but gradually the effort subsided into habit. My patience expanded with practice. In all of life, the processes of growth are gradual, unhurried and related. "He who opens the rose, does it so simply," wrote Tagore. In all the natural world this principle is demonstrated. Only human beings get so mixed up because they fail to divest themselves of encumbrances and never discover the simplifying axiom that underlies all existence in this "little gleam of time between two eternities."

It was interesting to me, in making contact with American Indians for the survey for the Service Committee, to observe that the open attitude on my part made communication much easier. In most occasions in white society one feels embarrassed by silence, if it occurs. One has to think quickly to say something to fill the gap. When you confer with an Indian, however, it is not unusual to sit quietly for several minutes after the initial introduction before he will

venture a remark. But during that time you are aware that communication is taking place. You feel that mutual understanding is on the way. No pretense avails against such careful inner scrutiny. If you pass this test, confidence is established and a relationship can proceed from there on.

During this period of the Quest my diary was, as usual, written in very intermittently. Reading those entries now, I realize they represent not so much an analysis of my state of mind then as what might be termed letters addressed to the deity, using a variety of terms of address. They indicate the nature of this pilgrim's progress at that point of the journey better than I can remember it now, so I end this phase of the "deeper level" with a few of those letters.

I.

*Lord, I thank Thee for the alterations between night and day, for night which gives rest to tired limbs and covers with forgetfulness the foolish and irrelevant anxieties of a burdened mind and for each new day that brings me back to consciousness. One emerges from oblivion and finds Thee waiting like a dear friend*

*from whom we have been separated. Each day is an adventure in companionship ever new, unexpected, full of surprises and challenge. Grant me to walk sensitively this day with faith and steadfastness.*

*II.*

*Holy Spirit, purify my mind and heart that I may be able to speak of holy things without contaminating them.*

*Vouchsafe to grant me the Angel of Thy Presence to protect me from self-seeking and irreverence. Impart to me the sense of things eternal, imperishable and prophetic.*

*III.*

*Lord, Thou art very great and my vessel of comprehension is so very small.*

*IV.*

*Dear God, How little I know of the true nature of life. All so close around me and yet my eyes do not see, nor my ears hear. Blindly I plunge forward and act without thought, speak hastily without knowledge and so disregard the holy laws of charity that I turn*

*away from the Kingdom of Heaven and lose myself in confusion. Clear away the mist, pierce through the layers of callousness. Blind me, if need be, with the searing light of reality that all lesser manifestations may dwindle and drop from sight. So may I serve only the Inner Light and fill myself utterly from its source.*

V.

*We cannot know the end of Thy mysteries, Lord. We sense a purpose but our finite minds are not able to comprehend the goal. I can only lay my work with relinquishing hands on the altar of Thy Omnipotence.*

*But as Thou art present in the infinitely Great, so must Thou also be present in the infinitely Small. In microcosm as in macrocosm.*

*As the water drop holds within it the secret of the mighty ocean, so does every moment of time articulate the whole mystery of eternity. Not by spreading out wide to the far reaches of the Universe but by drawing in to penetrate more profoundly the depths of consciousness in the fleeting instant, is The Eternal Verity to be found. In the realization of Immanence the*

*purpose is implicit and the essential unity of the spirit is fulfilled.*

*In the lesser as in the greater.*

VI.

*Heavenly Father, in the midst of the conflict of the world let me work only for love. Help me to strip off every irrelevant concern and simplify my desires so that my purpose will be one-pointed and undeviating. Against the immensity of the present world chaos one cannot struggle. But within the radius of an individual existence one does have choice whether it shall be greed and fear or goodwill and courage. Oh Lord, I will put my heart in Thy keeping forever and ever.*

VII.

*O God, I bow before Thee  
Light of all knowledge  
Support of all worlds  
Lead me from darkness into light  
From the Unreal to the real  
From death to immortality  
Reach me through and through myself*

*And evermore protect me from ignorance and malice  
So that I may know the Truth and the Truth will make  
me free*

VIII.

*O ineffable Creator, Thou who art the true fountain of wisdom and light, vouchsafe to pour upon the darkness of my understanding the double beam of Thy Radiance removing all ignorance and selfishness. Instruct my tongue and pour into my lips the grace of speech. Give me quickness of understanding, capacity to retain subtlety of interpretation and sweetness of persuasion. Guide Thou my going out and my coming in.*

IX.

*Dear Lord, Thou has been with me all the days and all the nights and in Thee do I find my comfort and my strength. I cannot go anywhere beyond Thy love. That is my rest and my peace and my cup of fulfillment running over. Having Thee, I have all.*



### *About the Author*

Josephine Whitney Duveneck's autobiography, *Life on Two Levels*, is a delightful and wise account of the search for wholeness by an extraordinarily gifted and generous and loving woman. Born in Boston in 1891, the youngest member of a wealthy and socially prominent family, lonely as a child, educated primarily by governesses, she kept notebooks in her late teens in which she wrote of her search for God, her desire for independence, her urge to write, and the need to love and be loved. During her life these desires were richly realized. Along the way she and her husband, Frank Duveneck, shared their wealth and their lives with other men, women and children, and tried in countless ways to combat the social ills of their times. Her search led Josephine Duveneck to become a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

Toward the end of her life (and of her autobiography) Josephine Duveneck wrote:

*A few pages back I used the word Immanence to describe a state of mind—I cannot account for the*

*sharpened awareness which has come to clarify my perceptions. The episodes of every day life have a sacred quality. Sleep, dreams, waking in the morning, the breaking of bread, sunlight and shadow, meeting with friends or strangers, children, dogs, music and fragrances, my beloved hills and the sky, mid-day weariness, even petty annoyances, bring dual impressions—a tangible reality and an intangible aura—which is still more real. Once in a public meeting Jung was asked, "Do you believe in God?" He answered, "I do not believe—" He paused and then he added, "I know."*

*I, too, know.*

*There are no words to express this inner certainty, But it is based on the evidence of unity within all things, on the creative power of love and the pervasive energy of the Spirit flowing through and transcending human endeavors.*

*This is what I mean by Immanence—a merging of the outer and the inner. No longer two levels of life, but a reconciliation of opposites—a conclusion of my quest.*



