

Journey of a Wounded Healer

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12. Selling the Future Short

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I am amused, but also saddened, by those who think they will not grow old or die. They are denizens of a youthful ghetto who do not know their grandparents, and who find even their parents outmoded and incomprehensible. Their attitude suggests that aging is an unnatural process that can be avoided through diet, cosmetics, and will-power, as though it were merely an infirmity of mind or inattention to taking care of oneself that leads to sickness and death. People grow old who allow themselves to grow old. They believe that they will not. They, like the clothing store whose name brings me much mirth, will be “Forever 21.”

Their struggle to retain their youthful vigor and figure is, of course, doomed to failure, which will likely make them terribly depressed. I feel sorry for them. Their attitude is as parochial and narrow as the two young women whose conversation I overheard near Washington Square in Manhattan. “Oh, I never go above 14th Street. There’s nothing there.” Imagine how much of life we’d miss if we never wanted to go above age thirty.

To my way of thinking, the best is always yet to come and experience has borne this out, even though I don’t always want to believe it. The future, predictably, is never what I imagined, but is not just different; it is better. I am continually selling the future short. I have never been happier than I am at this moment, even when I was hale and thirty.

My circumstances in life make me neither happy nor sad. That comes from within, not without, and it is a matter of choice. It’s an inside job. Others can help you only to the extent that they can teach you beauty and a right way of living. I never got any of this knowledge in church. There I learned only how inadequate I was, how my very nature and being was fallen from a higher state even at birth. I was fallen even before I learned to walk.

The good teacher brings one to new ways of looking at the world and better ways of wending one’s way among its many pitfalls. A good teacher fosters not fact gathering, but rather the value of knowledge, not in terms of anything else, but for its own sake. She teaches compassion and generosity of spirit as the true application of all knowledge. A good education brings clarity of thought through an ongoing questioning of ALL things, not through the codification and ossification of someone else’s opinions or wishful thinking. God is not the goal of our searching, but its beginning. Change is neither to be avoided at all costs nor embraced for its own sake. Change is, simply, a fact of life and in the nature of all living things. It is the engine of evolution. Lack of change signifies death, whether of the body, mind, or spirit.

I shudder when I see children marched off to Sunday school or the *shul* or the Islamic *madrasa* before they have learned of any alternatives. It endorses a murder of the mind and spirit, and succeeds only in perpetuating what is worst in previous generations. It is decidedly devolutionary. Growth is not promoted through blindly following one's elders. If what one's elders teach is good and valuable to life, wouldn't one be expected to come to such conclusions *naturally* on one's own?

It is clear to me that the education of our children is a failure because no one teaches *how* to think, only *what* to think. For each such opinion there is often an equally valid opposite opinion. Each of us must come to the truth on his own after a long process of learning how to think about and evaluate evidence. Everything else is merely rote or mimicry. It is why the same mistakes continue to be made by successive generations, why hatreds and warfare go on for millennia without any victors and entire peoples of the vanquished, downtrodden, displaced, and starving.

Peace will be obtained only when the young may safely ask, "Why is our enemy bad?" and be able to follow their own path in investigating the validity of the answer they receive.