

Teaching on Text from the Tradition: by Christine Luna Munger

This session begins with teaching and explanation of the text from the tradition.

Practitioners consistently emphasize the connection between action and contemplation along the committed spiritual journey. A sign that one is maturing along the journey, through their commitments to spiritual disciplines, is that the fruits of that dedicated and consistent work will begin to overflow into the life and character of the person who is intentionally practicing. We might name this overflow as “the practical fruits” of our contemplative work. The fullness of these practical fruits is an expression of the full realization of what human beings are called to become as they seek to imitate the Holy One.

Wayne Teasdale suggests that teachers and masters along the journey exhibit wisdom, sensitivity, other-centeredness, and acceptance of others as they are. He further suggests that signs of maturity in the contemplative spiritual life are openness, presence, listening, being, seeing, spontaneity, joy and profound peace. Implicit in this teaching is the recognition that the seeds of these qualities are already at work in each of us. The work of contemplative practice prompts the seeds toward fullness and fruition in our lives.

As we engage the short descriptions of each of these fruits of contemplative work, I invite you to listen for your own awareness of resonance or attraction. You might notice that certain people come to your heart or mind. These folks might be teachers and masters of the contemplative way. You might also notice internal resonance. You, too, might well be on your way along the path of contemplation.

Text from the Tradition: The Mystic Heart by Wayne Teasdale (text drawn from pp. 119-123; 164-8)

Practical Fruits of Contemplative Work

Each of us is called to be a mystic. Spiritual masters were once like us; they started out earnestly seeking the realization of the inner life; they are really no different from us, just further along on the journey.

[The mystic] is animated by wisdom; the mystic understands life, its pitfalls, its heights, and its great potential. [The mystic] is usually extremely gentle, always patient and kind. Never in a hurry but moves with deliberateness.

[The mystic] expresses an almost infinite sensitivity to all beings, human and otherwise. Sensitivity is a state of being completely awake to all the important opportunities that present themselves to us every day; it is an attribute of presence to others. It never imposes, but patiently waits until an opening occurs.

Mature contemplatives are profoundly other-centered. Other-centeredness has its roots in the realization that what matters is the interconnected whole, not just the happiness of one individual. Other-centeredness is facing reality.

[The mystic] accepts others as they are and does not attempt to change them against their will. People tend to be very judgmental...to judge is to project. Instead of attending to their own inner work, judgmental people are actually doing another's work, projecting outside of themselves. The mature contemplative is beyond this practice of rejection. He or she is too busy accepting and loving others to judge them.

Mature spirituality awakens and develops a number of significant gifts.

Openness is a receptivity to everything and everybody. When we are open, we become naturally willing to serve those who need us. It can be said that the divine itself is openness.

Presence is the ability to meet [others] in the eternal now, where everything is continually arising. Through the incomparable gift of presence, we fashion and shape ourselves as a home for the divine within us, a place for ultimate realization of creation and all others.

Listening is a complete inner attention, a devout hearing with one's whole heart. Ultimate reality expresses itself and speaks through all things in each moment. All we have to do is listen.

Being is actually the method of contemplation itself. Individuals who are mystically awake also have the ability to just be; to just be who they are in the deepest sense of our nature, our contemplative, mystical being.

Seeing is the capacity to reality as it is, to see ourselves as we are without pretense. It is a knowing from the heart. Mystical seeing depends on self-knowledge and is the gift of perspective, of being able to see everything in its proper place. It means being able to rise above the pettiness of life and see the larger picture.

Spontaneity [informs] our actions and responses to others; it inspires us to kindness, mercy, compassion, love, charity, patience and gentleness; it is a significant part of the social dimension of spirituality.

Joy is the crown of these capacities, an unmistakable sign of the deeper life. Joy is the presence of God in us...the inner bliss that saturates our being, life, thoughts, and relationships; it is an expression of spiritual plentitude, the fullness of the inner journey.

Profound peace is the culmination of all these fruits. It is the peace that is the possession of the divine, the peace that rests in the absolute.

Questions for Reflection:

- What qualities do you admire or feel attracted to in others?
- What qualities do you recognize as already at work in your life?
- In what ways might you be intentional about noticing the links between your practice as a discipline and your practice as a way of life?