

**Text from the Tradition: A Testament of Devotion by Thomas R. Kelly** (text drawn from pp. 3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11-13)

*The Light Within—Beginnings with Alternation*

Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a divine center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home into Itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves and body and soul, utterly and completely, to the Light Within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic center, a creative life that presses to birth within us...The basic response of the soul to the Light is eternal adoration and joy, thanksgiving and worship, self-surrender and listening.

What is here urged are internal practices and habits of the mind. What is here urged are secret habits of unceasing orientation of the depths of our being about the Inward Light, ways of conducting our inward life so that we are perpetually bowed in worship, while we are also very busy in the world of daily affairs...There is a way of ordering our mental life on more than one level at once. On one level we may be thinking, discussing, seeing, calculating, meeting all the demands of external affairs. But deep within, behind the scenes, at a profounder level, we may also be in prayer and adoration, song and worship in a gentle receptiveness to divine breathings... Between the two levels is fruitful interplay, but ever the accent must be on the deeper level, where the soul ever dwells in the presence of the Holy One...Mental habits of inward orientation must be established. Begin now...to offer your whole selves, utterly and in joyful abandon, in quiet, glad surrender to [the One] who is within. In secret ejaculations of praise, turn in humble wonder to the Light, faint though it may be. Keep contact with the outer world of sense and meanings. Here is no discipline in absent mindedness. Walk and talk and work and laugh with your friends. But behind the scenes, keep up the life of simple prayer and inward worship. Keep it up throughout the day. Let inward prayer be your last act before you fall asleep and the first act when you wake. The first days and weeks and months are awkward and painful, but enormously rewarding. Awkward, because it takes constant vigilance and effort and reassertions of the will, at the first level. Painful, because our lapses are so frequent, the intervals when we forget [the One] so long. Rewarding, because we have begun to live.

Lapses in forgettings are so frequent. Our surroundings grow so exciting. Our occupations are so exacting. But when you catch yourself again, lose no time and self-recriminations, but breathe a silent prayer for forgiveness and begin again, just where you are...Admit no discouragement, but ever return quietly to [the One] and wait in Presence. At first the practice of inward prayer is a process of alternation of attention between outer things and the Inner Light. Preoccupation with either brings the loss of the other. Yet what is sought is not alternation but simultaneity, worship undergirding every moment, living prayer, the continuous current and background of all moments of life. Long practice indeed is needed before alternation yields to concurrent immersion in both levels at once. The "plateaus in the learning curve" are so long, and many falter and give up, assenting to alternation as the best that they can do...But the hunger of the committed one is for unbroken communion and adoration...

## **Teaching on Text from the Tradition:** by Christine Luna Munger

A long line of spiritual teachers assert that reality is layered, consisting of the layers that we easily see and recognize on the surface and other layers that lie deeper and are often hidden to the hurried heart. Often, they present this layering of reality as simply split into two, or sometimes three, basic categories, with the assumption that many nuances and subtleties lie within each layer. Evelyn Underhill refers to it as two-ness; Richard Rohr describes it as non-duality. Thomas Kelly cites the inner and the outer layers. Most contemplative teachers assert that reality is already whole, though our human experience of it is fragmented. We tend to feel torn. We get caught up in divisions. We are overwhelmed by the abysmal feeling of the seeming gaps between ourselves and others, between us and the Holy One.

Among that same lineage of spiritual teachers, lies the repeated assertion that human beings, all beings, have the inherent ability to see the many layers as part of the Whole, to attune to the reality of Oneness, despite the deceptive feelings and perceptions of two-ness. The inherent contemplative capacity is sometimes called the center, the spark, the grounding moment, the contemplative dimension, the soul, the light within. Despite assertions that this contemplative capacity is universal, that we all have access to it, surprisingly few folks are told about or trained in how to use it. A large percentage of fellow human beings experience the world primarily, or only, through the lens of fragmentation. Fear, anxiety, worry, helplessness, and loneliness pervade the perception of human experience, even among religiously affiliated groups.

My personal sense is that, at this time in the long expanse of human history, human beings are facing, collectively, an invitation to do the work that Thomas Kelly identifies as the shift from alternation to simultaneity. The United States political environment over the last 10 years is a clear expression of this dynamic; As the nation pivots from leadership under the first black man to leadership under the current white man there could scarcely be a more dramatic clashing of opposites, and alternation from one side of a spectrum to the very other side, in a relatively short time. No wonder we feel wearied and disillusioned at times! Our national politics reflect the heavy, collective work we are called to face. If we hold on long enough and draw from the gifts of our practices of inner Presence, if we draw upon the Inner Lights within, can we imagine what simultaneity might look like, collectively, for our human race? How might we hold together the surface and the depths? What might it feel like to accept the tension between suffering and joy, despair and peace? Kelly suggests that the shift from alternation to simultaneity might take days, weeks, or years, which seems like a lot of effort. Yet, it also consumes a lot of energy every time we shift from one pole to another, from one up to the next down. Are we ready for the necessary output to face alternation and claim simultaneity?

### **Questions for Reflection:**

- In times when you forgotten or relapsed in spiritual practice, which triggered your memory or return?
- How do you experience alternation? How do you recognize it in your daily life experience?