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The Contemplative Life by David M. Valadez

Training is living life under evaluation. It is living life in a state of constant reflection. In addition, we can say that training is a matter of living the contemplative life – granted we understand contemplation to be a very proactive and action-based practice. Training thus brings added meaning and depth to our existence. We should all have such meaning and depth to our existence. A deep and meaningful life is a significant aspect of living well and being healthy. Such a life completes us by providing us with a tone spirit. This tone spirit goes on to nourish us emotionally, mentally, and physically. Training then is more than just a matter of “Know thy Self,” training is also a matter of “Care for thy Self.”

However, and though our human history has placed numerous spiritual avenues before us, there are relatively few who practice such lives and/or that practice such lives for long. “Why?” is a question that almost intuitively comes to mind. When we reach a particular state in our lives, a state where “Care for thy Self” is charged not just with egocentric concerns, various forms of this “why” come to take on an inwardly direction. We may then ask the following of ourselves: What interferes with us living a life of self-evaluation, reflection, and contemplation? How has such a life, one so elemental to Man’s very being, become something essentially strange to us – something esoteric and/or reserved for small class eccentric beings? How does a world in so much need come to be populated by an “us” that has no interest in increasing understanding, broadening wisdom, or perfecting love? How have our greatest spiritual traditions become for most of us more an excuse than a model?

Such questions, once pointed inwardly, are undoubtedly part of living the contemplative life. As we come to a position where we can be proactive in answering them, or at least in reconciling them, we will discover that we are not the first ones to have asked them. We will discover that these kinds of questions have been asked from the beginning of human history by all kinds of people and that nearly every viable spiritual tradition provides a similar answer. We will see, whatever the tradition, or whatever the history, that there is a common outlook to living a life that is supported by meaning and depth. The common answer - which I have written upon elsewhere - is: The meaningful and deep life is lived by those who have elected to question the value of an existence submitted entirely to secular presuppositions, who question the value of a life dictated by material convention, and who question the value of a life dedicated to the pursuit of temporal satisfactions.

The doubting of such things, which is not identical with denouncing, outright rejecting, or any other form of self-serving aggression toward such things, marks a spiritual body/mind that has us at our most human

state – the state we are most well at. Such a state of humanity, everywhere in the world, and every time in the world, works to support in us a certain taste for simplicity, for humility and for servitude, and for silence. These things should therefore mark our practice in great doses. Such a state of being also supports in us a general refusal to take seriously the aggressivity, the ambition, the push and shove, and the self-importance which one must display in order to get along in modern material culture.

Through the practice of such a life, in time, our premonition that we can have a life of meaning and depth will come to be supported by actual insight. We will begin to see that there is a type of affirmation in our material culture that brings nothing but ruin and loss. We begin to see that from a contemplative view, the usual affirmations of modern life are rarely positive in nature. From such insights, and in sort of a reversal of our lives lived up until this point, we come to realize that to lose one's life is to save it. We come to realize that from within a material paradigm to seek to save our lives is to lose it. Herein lies the heart of a kind of renunciation that will lead us further along the scale of meaning and depth – to a point where we are most human. It is not a mysterious point; it is not something that marks the rarity of our lives. It is the point in our spiritual maturity where we are in fact the most common, the most like our fellow human being. This point is the beginning of the Way. As a continuation of the deconstruction of our material lives, we enter upon this way when we leave all ways and, in some sense, get lost.