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WOMEN'S SEMINAR – OUR DAILY BREAD

On Saturday, April 22, 1978, an all-day seminar for women was held at the Laguna Hotel in Laguna Beach, Ca. Led by Ann Linthorst, the workshop was entitled, "Our Daily Bread: Knowing the Truth in the Nitty-Gritty of Daily Life." Thirty-five women, some students of Metapsychiatry and some new to the perspective, participated.

The morning began with a sharing of the concerns which ordinarily preoccupy our thoughts. The leader then elucidated the underlying themes, the basic ideas common to the various concerns. It was seen that all the concerns expressed had to do with the management of one's own business or other people's business; self or others showed up clearly as the basic context of our everyday thoughts. The word "cope" was mentioned a number of times. These concerns revealed the basic underlying belief that we are "all alone inside our skins, having to cope with everything outside of us."

Moreover, particularly since the advent of psychological thinking, we are preoccupied with managing what lies "within" as well: our feelings, being too aggressive, or not aggressive enough, etc.

Mrs. Linthorst then introduced the concept of "the sea of mental garbage," Dr. Hora's term for the mental climate in which we live which is dominated by ideas which arise from the ego's misperception of reality. It was seen that our ordinary thought processes take place entirely within the sea of mental garbage. The question was then asked, "What, then, do we ordinarily ask God for? What do we consider our daily bread to be?"

It was suggested that our usual prayers amount to asking God to rearrange or manage the garbage for us, which continue to presuppose the very context of thought that gives rise to the problems in the first place. Our daily bread – what we really need in our daily lives – is Reality. We need to see through the sea of mental garbage to God's perfect spiritual reality. This perception brings about changes in our awareness of our situation and of other people that allow the problems to dissolve.

In the second morning session, Mrs. Linthorst presented tools that can help us let Reality feed us daily. Dr. Hora's six invalid questions were presented. The two valid questions were discussed at length in terms of the two processes of mind-fasting and spirit-feasting.*

Mind-fasting was described as a process of unhooking our identification with garbage thoughts: "You do not need to believe your feelings, for they are not your feelings; they are

an idea's feelings. And you do not need to believe your thoughts, for they are not your thoughts; they are the sea of mental garbage's thoughts. When caught up in an emotional and/or mental hassle, you can simply ask: "What is the idea that is showing itself here?" (This is a way of asking the first valid question: What is the meaning of what seems to be?)

When the idea has been identified, then you can say: "This is not my idea, it is just an idea, floating around in the sea of mental garbage. It has nothing to do with me or with my life."

One can then turn to spirit-feasting, which is the purpose of the 2nd question: What is what really is? Spirit-feasting may be seen as a kind of preliminary to the prayer of beholding. It is a turning of attention to spiritual values, a choosing to think about God's beautiful reality, even if you cannot behold it. It is a loving of loveliness and beauty and goodness, and you can ask yourself: "Do I really love my turmoil and upset more than I love goodness and beauty?" And you can know that your true being as a spiritual consciousness is not hooked on garbage but longs for "the courts of the Lord" and has an appetite only for pure spiritual reality.

The first hour of the afternoon session was spent in discussion, followed by some readings, which offered examples of spirit-feasting by sharing in others' beholding. A quiet time followed, with participants feasting on the beauty of their surroundings or using additional printed materials to guide their thinking. After a final break, the concerns of the morning were considered again, this time in the light of the two valid questions and the processes of mind-fasting and spirit-feasting.

* The term "spirit-feasting" comes from the book, *Christotherapy*, by Bernard Tyrrell, S.J.

THE MEANING OF THE PROBLEM

In order to understand the meaning of the problem, let us describe first the problem. What is the matter with the use of drugs? If it helps us to function better is it not a good thing? Sometimes it may help to function better for a short while, but not for long, and the after-effects are devastating.

The problem is that the individual loses contact with reality and lives increasingly in an excited state of fantasy. His actions reflect less and less intelligence and gradually he withdraws from any creative participation in the life process. The meaning of the desire for drugs, for a chemically induced feeling of happiness, is that feeling good is over-emphasized in our culture as a desirable value. It is widely taken for granted that one has the right to seek to feel good when one feels bad. Moreover, it is believed that the solution to feeling bad is to make yourself feel good. Yet this is a mistake. Not only does any attempt to make yourself feel good fail in the long run, but it makes things worse. It leads to further disintegration, and illnesses of all sorts.

The drug culture among adolescents reflects yet another value of our culture, namely, that it is important to be in with the crowd. Very few dare to go it alone, even if they know that they have a better idea. Among adults as well, there is a great sense of insecurity, from

which relief is sought in being accepted by other people, being with it, following the fads and latest fashions of the times. Drug taking is also a sign of being with it, of belonging to the “now generation.” This provides insecure adolescents with a sense of belonging somewhere.

THE SOLUTION

The above-mentioned values are existentially invalid values, in that they are disintegrative and illness-producing. The students themselves have a sense of right values. When asked what they want most from life, they volunteer such ideas as “help out,” “caring for others.” There is a great idealism among them, which is expressed in jobs they hold after school and careers they want to pursue.

Asking them the meaning of this idealism, it is clear that they want to make the best of their lives, that they want to fulfill their deepest potential. They also have a sense that following this desire constitutes their integrity. This integrity speaks within them as a voice and this voice speaks to them and guides them to go it alone when others try to persuade them to take drugs and have a good time. Deep inside they know that having a good time is not the most important thing in life, that it is more important to make a constructive contribution and be useful in this world.

The Principle of Love-Intelligence is present as a deep longing towards wholeness and integration and it is no less sensed by young people in their desire to find fulfillment of what constitutes the best in them. “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness (right usefulness): for they shall be fulfilled.” (Matthew 5:6)

CHILDREN AND PRAYER

Excerpt of a lecture by Polly Berrien Berends * to the Sunday School staff of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, NYC.

Most of us – especially children – rely on material or sensory perception to tell us who we are and to guide us in life. But the senses also misguide. They give us the impression that we are isolated and they cannot help us to discern the love and peace and harmony and assurance that we yearn for and need.

These are spiritual qualities that can only be spiritually discerned. That’s what prayer is all about. In the perception of the presence of God as Love-Intelligence, our sense of separation, loneliness, and precariousness in life is overcome. Through spiritual perceptivity we come to see that we and our children are, in fact, one with infinite Love-Intelligence.

Jesus said, “I and my Father are one.” Realizing this oneness is the value of prayer. Through effective prayer, the fears and doubts and just plain stupidities that go along with judgment by appearances dissolve. In their place come inspiration, spontaneous love and understanding, assurance, peace, and joy.

All this applies primarily to the adult. Prayer has little value to the child without a prayerful adult. The first value of parental prayer is the setting free of parent and child from each other. Dr. Hora speaks of “the Prayer of Beholding.” In this type of prayer we endeavor to regard ourselves and our children in our true spiritual context – “living and moving and having our being” in God. Made a frequent and regular part of every day, this type of *preprayeration* lifts us out of the confusing and troublesome context of interpersonal relationships and into the harmonious realm of Love-Intelligence.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was especially enlightened as to the prayer of beholding. We know she viewed her son as God’s spiritual child. And we know that Jesus very early understood that the central issue in life was to be about his father’s business – the seeking of spiritual discernment.

This brings us to the second value of parental prayer. Children value what their parents value. If the parent customarily prays first and reacts second, the child will come to think of prayer as first rather than as a last resort and of Divine Mind rather than personal mind (his own or his parents) as his greatest resource.

Last and, in a way, least, is the question of how to teach our children to pray. I once asked a lovely Quaker college student how her parents first introduced her to meditation. She said, “It was a habit from the beginning. Whenever I came in crying about something, before talking it over, my parents would recommend that I sit still for a minute and listen to what God had to say.”

When our children are upset I usually take a moment to listen and comfort them first while I secretly pray. Then I say, “Now shall we be still for a minute? Shall we pray?” And when they pray, I do too. The same goes for what is usually called discipline. If things get out of hand and it seems necessary to send someone to his room, I always go to my room too – my secret closet, that is.

It is never regarded as punishment, but is understood by the children as a needed quiet time. Mostly when we speak of prayer we use phrases like, “getting still and waiting for a good idea,” or “getting back on the right track.” Our children speak of prayer as “asking God for a good idea.”

Many people think of prayer as talking to God – really telling him what he should do. But real prayer is listening to God and its objective is to become aware, as Dr. Hora recommends, of the spiritual “good that already is.”

But if prayer is not talking to God, is there any value to reciting verbal prayers? Of course. Actually we are praying all the time, murmuring to ourselves about what should and should not be. At such times we are unable to hear what God is already saying because we are not listening. And we are not listening because we are not interested. In true prayer we try to stop talking long enough so that we can hear what God has in mind.

In verbal prayer, we are still talking to ourselves, but in spiritually valid terms. We may go slowly through a specific prayer, considering its meaning and paying close attention until finally some divine idea captures our attention. The murmuring mind falls quiet.

We have momentarily changed the subject of our lives from “I” and “Me” and “My” to God. We become still, and into that stillness God pours himself as love and intelligence and peace and assurance and often the most precisely, perfect, badly needed idea for that particular moment of our lives. In this way, instead of our telling God what to do, we become accessible to what God is telling us. In fact, we become ourselves the loving, beneficial, and intelligent words that God utters. And as we proceed with our daily affairs we find that we are inspired and that all things are working together for good.

Children will readily learn such a lovely prayer as the Lord’s Prayer. Over the years this can be prayed and explored and gradually understood together. But nothing is so helpful as prayerful parents. Such parents will receive the daily bread of inspiration, finding many ways to alert their children to the spiritual dimensions of life and to ready them for the discovery of their own spiritual identity.

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