

Searching the Ground of My Intention

Reading from Martin Buber "The Way of Response"

"In the unconditionality of his deed, man experiences his communion with God. God is an unknown Being beyond this world only for the indolent, the decisionless, the lethargic, the person enmeshed in his own desires; for the one who decides, who is aflame with his goal, who is unconditioned, God is the closest, the most familiar Being that man, through his own action, realizes ever anew, experiencing thereby the mystery of mysteries. Whether God is "transcendent" or "immanent" does not depend on Him; it depends on us. . . . Not the matter of the deed determines its truth, but the manner in which it is carried out: in human conditionality, or in divine unconditionality. Whether a deed will peter out in the outer courtyard, in the realm of things, or whether it will penetrate into the Holy of Holies is determined not by its content but by the power of decision which brought it about, and by the sanctity of intent which dwells in it."

Sermon:

"By the power of the decision which brought it about and the sanctity of the intent which dwells in it." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength." That is the Great Commandment. And when you hear the Great Commandment, and when you sit and look at your own life, with your own name on it, you know the Great Commandment has never been attempted by you.

Suppose you would love the Lord God with all your mind, heart, soul and strength. What would you look like? What would your next day be like? What would this afternoon be like? The problem of religion is the problem that is engaged in the answering of these questions. We can have church for a million years, but there is the problem.

Suppose you started to love the Lord God a little bit this afternoon – not totally, just a little. On your way to expanding the totality of your involvement in your worship of God, in fellowship with three or four such people, we could have a time. How can we live so that the Commandment grabs our existence in fuller ways? There is no other reason for us to be sitting around here. Love the Lord thy God with everything. Be utterly open, without designs, with an unconditional love of Life. Whenever that happens, people stand and wonder and they talk of saviors and seers and prophets. Why should I use up the energy of the body in this pursuit? Because I know somewhere in my soul what awaits a society is a person who would love God with everything.

You have been in churches many years and you still haven't even made the first step of that total love, the love that owes everything – energy, body, mind, strength, the whole thing. Sometimes when you contemplate the Great Commandment, you know that if that happened to you, nothing else would matter. Everything would make sense.

Love the Lord Thy God without conditions. Oh yeah, you have got a little love. Everybody sitting here has a little love, a little bit, just my little bit. That is what is wrong. How could it be, if you were utterly open, nothing extenuating, nothing spurious, open to Life, to be and do what Life intended? Nothing else could answer what you are looking for, nothing else.

The Great Commandment presupposes something that we don't take seriously anymore. A person can clarify the presence of Light at their center, and that perfection at their core can become the defining reality of their day. If the image of God is in you, if as Jesus said, the Kingdom resides in you, then in you there is a point of perfection you don't have to wander aimlessly to find. It is locked in your system.

The Great Commandment asserts that point of perfection. That reality of the perfect at the center of your spirit can become the defining substance of what you are and what you do. How can you settle for anything else?

I want to tell you a story. This scene takes place someplace in Heaven. Jesus, after being crucified, had gone to God to report, and God said to him, "You failed to let them know about my ways." Jesus said, "No, Father, they know." "But you failed to make them want it." He said, "No, they wanted it, but they were fearful of wanting it so much lest that wanting should destroy them, so they crucified me." "But you failed to teach them that they could contain it, that they could live it, and you failed to teach them that my perfection was livable." "Yes, Father, in the moment they crucified me, I did fail; but the manner, the manner of my Life, will haunt them until they come to Thee."

Wanting is nothing in this business that we are talking about today – nothing. I want to be holy. I want to be a Christian. Wanting is just the starting point, if even that. Doing is the next step, and that is not even enough.

We are talking now about the essence, not the appearances. It is very difficult to move from the way religion is defined in our community to what we're presently talking about. Religion as we experience it is right desire and right action. And we feel good about that. I have the right kind of wants and I do good things. Religion, so defined, becomes, as our religion has become, habitual activity, force of habit. It is nice to do this so we get in the habit of doing it.

And you also know that people do good things for the wrong reasons all the time. And a lot of people are doing good things for no reason. So that is not an adequate assessment of what we are about. Some people do good things because it is popular, and they look good. Good looks good. It eases guilt. There are all kinds of spurious reasons that we do good so religion can't be a question of doing good.

When religion becomes only doing good, then the good world

becomes a world of mixed motives – frustrated and fractured – a world cut short of deep agonies and deep joys, cut short of its force and potency. It robs goodness of its power in the conditionality of the good doer. Goodness with a capital “G” is unconditional. When you condition it – do it only on certain terms – you rob the world of its witness, because you surround it with your conditional schemes.

We experience it every day – built-in places of reservation. Have you ever run into someone like that? They sound very good but are ready for nothing. Their reservations are built in. They are not going to surrender or embrace life or God. That is the reason they love creeds so, and dogmas, because creeds and dogmas always condition. They say exactly what they mean and you don’t have to embrace any more than is listed in the words. When you get hold of the spirit of God, you may not be able to tie it down with language. So you leave that alone. You say, take me to a church where they can tell me what I am to believe, so I can say I believe.

Now we have to go a step further. We have to know something about the content of your involvement. The content of your deed. Not only that you are doing, but we need to know why. But that is not even enough. We need to know something else about a doer for God. What is the core out of which this action comes? What is the heart? Jesus talked about that. He said, “Blessed are those whose cores are pure. Blessed are the pure in heart.” Is there purity of center? The willing place – the intentional ground – is it pure?

Why do we want to know about that? Because the power of the belief to herald to the God in history is related to the purity of the ground out of which it is sprung. If the motives are not pure, and a lot of ulterior things are going on, you can act all you want to act, but Truth will have no hearing because you will have robbed the deed of the secret stuff that it would have, had it sprung from a pure heart. As a matter of fact, Jesus said, if a heart be pure, you sure will see God. If

that be true, then a deed springs from conversation with God, from face-to-face involvement.

The writer this morning says more. He says, we must know a little more. We must know the “how” of the deed. After we discover the content, then we go to the “how” of the matter. And that doesn’t mean how you do it. What he is saying is, we must know something about the burden that was the motivational stuff that added the force and the power to the decision. We must get behind the decision and find out what kind of driving power led the person to the decision. And then we will know the manner in which they acted.

We need to know the power of the decision that brought the individual to act. The individual may have a pure heart now, but how much power and agony, how much of the deep places of existence were called upon in the decision to make this action? We must know the sanctity of intent – the sanctity of intent in which the action was formed. Was the intent to act formed out of a sense of the agony of God, or did you just decide to do it because you thought it was timely and nice at this juncture in politics?

I had the vision, sometime this week, about a laser beam. I was talking about utter sincerity – utter openness to God. Utter openness to doing the bidding, to singleness of focus. I am told that when the light gets so focused it cuts through steel. Whether what we do will fizzle out in the outer courtyard or will get into the tabernacle, to the altar of Life, will be determined by the sanctity of our intention.

We are talking now about the motive power, the transforming power, in deeds. So many deeds are done that do not bring with them any arresting quality. They don’t stop anything. How many of us are involved in community activities, doing a lot of nice deeds, and they don’t really seem to affect the consciousness of anything. When will the word be spoken that breaks through

the conditionality and allows you to sit and wonder in awe, arrested for the moment by the efficacy of the Mystery of mysteries that surrounds the deed?

In the Book of Hebrews, we are told that God is not content with your wanting and with your doing – not even with the content of the deed. But God is deeply concerned with the intention, with the power and the sanctity of the intention. And it says that God searches the roots of the deed. It says, the Word of God is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword – piercing the division of soul and spirit, of marrow, bone and joint, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart of which the deed comes.

The job is more complicated than you thought, isn't it? It is not enough to desire God, it is not enough to do Godly things, it is not enough even to have a pure heart. But the experience that comes from the purity of heart, the experience of communion with God – that experience of seeing God must become the driving force behind the deed that is done in God's behalf. And then what you do in the world has the shock-value of the deed done by one who has been in the company of Eternity.

Oh God, as I go on doing, check out the power behind my decision. Whatever I know of You, let it be the caldron out of which my intention is formed. Search me, O God; know my thoughts. Search me and know the ground of my intention. Crush all the lingering conditions I have put on my service to You. See if there is any remaining evil, and then lead me in the Way of the Everlasting.