

Daily Meditation 10/25/2021

Why Bare the Mind? Eckhart and Mindfulness, continued

Good morning.

In yesterday's meditation, and today's, Meister Eckhart is talking about baring one's mind. A bare mind is not busy worrying, he tells us. It's not busy living in the past, playing over old tapes, and it's not busy living in the future, which is where fear resides...and despair and regret.

The bare mind dwells in the now. The bared mind dwells in the present, is fully present to the now. And that's really what Thich Nhat Hanh is talking about when he talks about mindfulness--being fully present to what's going on, even the drinking of water. And Eckhart says that great things happen when we bare the mind.

When he tells us in today's meditation: "Here God's ground is my ground, and my ground is God's ground. Here I live from my own as God lives from God's own....Out of this inmost ground, all your works should be wrought without a Why."

See, without purpose...without goals, as such, we work for the sake of working. We do justice for the sake of justice. We do love for the sake of love, he says.

Then he tells us the practical implications of this, that some people think you can do more of God by meditation, or devotion, or ecstasies, or special infusion of grace, than by being at the fireside, or working in the stable. So he's saying that when you've learned to let go and let be, you're fully present everywhere. You don't have to be at church to pray. You can be praying at work, that is to say working in a stable. And you can be in a deep place, spiritual place, when you have the fireside--in other words, in a domestic setting, a place of contemplation and presence with your loved ones and the rest.

So he's giving us some very practical advice about meditation.

Another analog he uses for emptying is that of, well, an empty page, or we'd say an empty page on the screen, I guess, today. But he says the tablet is never so suitable for me to write on as when there's nothing on it.

So in this way, too, God works in our hearts. When our hearts are empty and bare, then Divinity moves in and makes His imprint, just as you do on painting a picture on a blank page, or writing on a blank page or a blank screen. And this is one reason he talks about "I pray God to rid me of God." Because for Divinity to show up, we shouldn't be in some kind of frozen place about what Divinity is. Divinity may want to show up as a surprise, and in different forms and different expressions of communication one day than another.

So he's dealing with this dialectic of familiarity on one hand, and a breakthrough spontaneity on the other. Again it's a dialectic. He's not saying there's no place for what's happened in the past, but he's inviting us into being open to the future, to let go of one God so the new God can show up. As he says in one place, "God's exit is Her entrance."

So when something beautiful leaves our life, and we go through grief for that loss and so forth, nevertheless, very often that is an opener. It frees one for another experience of beauty, another experience of the Divine.

"God's exit is Her entrance." Again, very practical advice.

Let me share just one poem from Thomas Merton, a Catholic monk who is very, very indebted to Meister Eckhart the last ten years of his life.

He talks about a house of nothing. "Fire, turn inward to your weak fort, to a burly infant spot, a house of nothing."

The house of nothing is inward; it's a weak fort and a burly infant spot.

"O peace, bless this mad place. Silence, love this growth. O silence, golden zero. Unsetting sun, love winter when the plant says nothing."

Love winter, when the plant says nothing.

Notice winter, picture of bare trees. The plants are saying very little; their green leaves are gone. And yet there's something very profound to learn in the winter. And it is a time of the Via Negativa, of letting go, of bareness, bare trees. "Love winter when the plant says nothing."

So he's encouraging us to love the darkness, to love the silence, to love the peace, this house of nothing, the emptiness. "O peace, bless this mad place."

Sometimes we need peace to balance the madness of our places. That one line is especially rich: "O silence, golden zero."

Golden zero. We often return to zero in our lives. It may be a tragedy. It may be a surprise. We may lose something very important to us. But Merton dares to say it might be a golden zero. There might be something golden about it, doxa, glory. There might be something glorious about coming to that place of nothingness, that place of emptying and being emptied.

All this is an affirmation, a celebration, a poem to the Via Negativa, to the experience of emptying and nothingness.

We thank Thomas Merton for his poetry and his deep soul. But also his mentor, Meister Eckhart, who helped him to name this deep place, this house of nothing that is another source of wisdom.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.