

Daily Meditation 04/25/2022

Rachel Carson and Thomas Merton on the Sense of Wonder

Good morning.

Today we continue our meditation with Rachel Carson and Thomas Merton. But especially with Rachel Carson, around her book about wonder, *The Sense of Wonder*,

which she wrote, you might say, with the help of her grandnephew as a baby, but also as a three- and four-year-old child journeying with her through the woods that she loves so much in Maine, and also at the ocean in Maine.

There is a beautiful passage in her book:

"A child's world is fresh and new and beautiful, full of wonder and excitement. It is our misfortune that, for most of us, that clear-eyed vision, that true instinct for what is beautiful and awe-inspiring is dimmed, and even lost, before we reach adulthood.

"If I had influence over the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years--the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength."

This is Rachele Carson's deepest prayer.

"Adults should be rediscovering, with children, the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in. Parents often have a sense of inadequacy when confronted, on the one hand with the eager, sensitive mind of a child, and the other with the world of complex physical nature inhabited by life so various and unfamiliar that it seems hopeless to reduce it to order and knowledge. In the mood of self-defeat, they exclaim, 'How can I possibly teach my child about nature? Why I don't even know one bird from another.' "

But she responds to this question from parents by saying that "It's not half so important to know as to feel. To feel the joy and the beauty and the wonder and excitement of nature, of being--this is what you communicate.

“The facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, but the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil.

“Once the emotions have been aroused--a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love--then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found, it has lasting meaning.

“It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put them on a diet of facts that he is not ready to assimilate.”

So, you arouse that interest in learning. And it's not the facts that the child remembers, it is the deep feelings, and sharing excitement, enthusiasm, the joy, wonder with children that plants the seeds. And they're perfectly capable of finding the facts as they grow older and older.

And of course, as she points out, to keep alive in the adult the same sense of wonder and joy and gratitude, that's part of the big picture also.

I think all this parallels very nicely the Creation Spirituality of Thomas Merton. Gratitude for life, for awareness, and for being is the very meaning of contemplation.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.