

Daily Meditation 03/14/2023

Adam Bucko & Fox on Spiritual Experience, Concepts, & Contemplation

Good morning.

I'm sharing with you today some dialogue between myself and Adam Bucko, who ran the Reciprocity Foundation for 16 years, co director of it, from the streets of New York, working with young adults who were living on the streets in New York.

And together, we wrote this book, *Occupy Spirituality, A Radical Vision for a New Generation*.

And I offer a few excerpts from the book in today's meditation around the topic of concepts and experience, sometimes we want to make a battle between the two, kind of either-or, either we work out of experience, or we work out of concepts.

But I think ideally, you want to have both. And it's true that concepts tend to be more abstract, unless they really do connect with experience. And of course, it's experience that's the essence of spirituality, it's what distinguishes spirituality from religion, if you will.

Religion is more about structure. And spirituality is more about what's working from the inside out as Eckhart puts it: truth comes from inside out, not from the outside in.

But as Thomas Aquinas says, you can't teach spirituality without concepts, because you can't talk about it without concepts.

So concepts are important. But we do have to begin with experience. And Adam Bucko and I were talking about that. And he says this -- this is not in today's essay, this is on page 25 of our book:

I feel that experience without concepts could be almost dangerous. You can have many experiences yet not be changed by them because you don't have a framework that can connect the dots, connect these experiences. I've observed people have had many experiences, but each time, because they don't have useful concepts, they have to go back and start from scratch.

And so concepts are important, they allow us to move on and to connect the dots, as he says, to make connections, to understand more deeply what it is we've undergone.

My response to his comment is this.

That's a very important point. Also, you can become addicted to these experiences. It's experience for experience sake, exclusively. And you're not growing from it, you're not serving others through these experiences.

But then I make this observation, which I think is equally important.

Of course, the opposite is also dangerous, and in fact, is probably far more of a disease than the first. And that is to live in just a conceptual world with no experience. And that I think is at the essence of defunct religion. Because it leads to fundamentalism, and that leads to ideology: all the juice of faith is put into defending your ideology. Anyone who's not in it is out and is lost. Then faith becomes a fortress, it becomes a system that beats up on others. But it's also beating up on those inside it, because their souls are shrinking. They're not growing.

So I think a lot of the religious and political fundamentalism of our time -- and we have both going on, and they often link up -- I think a lot of this due to the fact that we do not have the healthy understanding of what healthy religion is really about, and how it's meant to journey this path of the love of life (via positiva); silence and letting go and undergoing suffering and loss and grief (the via negativa); and coming out of that darkness with passion to give birth and to be creative, to tap into our creativity, that image of God in us (the via creativa); in order to give birth to a better world, to relieve one another's suffering, to serve therefore (the via transformativa).

So it really helps to be able to name all these elements of the journey, because any one is so deep that we can get stuck there.

As I point out in the essay today, even the via transformativa does not stand alone; it is part of a journey that is both deep and supportive and nourishing.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.