

Daily Meditation 07-17-23

M. C. on “Moral Imagination,” a Pathway to Justice & Compassion

Good morning.

I'm very pleased to share with you this morning, this meditation on imagination, "moral imagination," a phrase that I first read in M.C. Richards' work, "Centering." many years ago.

Back in the 1970s, I was creating a spirituality program, a master's degree in spirituality. And I came up with the idea of art as meditation, as a practice to bring in the intuitive brain to balance the rational and intellectual brain, both of them necessary for spirituality.

So no room for anti-intellectualism on the one hand, nor is there room for anti-intuition on the other hand. After all, our intuitive brain is our mystical brain. The whole point of the spiritual education is to turn out mystics and prophets.

But it was in M.C. that I found this wonderful phrase about moral imagination. As she says, "the development of imagination is among the primary goals of education. Imagination is the ability to picture in the mind, what's not present in the sense."

So, if you're surrounded by injustice, you have to imagine justice, to work for justice. You have to imagine a better world.

And, as she says, "The future is not always clear. Five year plans are not part of the imagination," part of the rational brain which has its place, but as she says,

In the very process of doing justice or doing beauty, creating form, things happen, things come together, and new things, surprises, are awakened. We are not always able to feel the love we would like to feel, but we may behave imaginatively, envisioning, and eventually creating what is not present. This is what I call moral imagination.

So she defines moral imagination, very directly there, for us.

The child's ability to imagine grows as well, the adult's capacity for compassion, the ability to picture the sufferings of others, to identify. Whether you want citizenship, or the art of politics, it is part of one's skill to imagine other ways of living, than one's own.

I'm going share with you one of her poems, a short one, which she wrote on the occasion of her 80th birthday. She had a big birthday party and I was honored to be part of it, I flew out to the East Coast to be there. And she handed out these, the poem, framed too — she had them all framed -- and gave them to many of us who were present.

So it says at the bottom, "In celebration of the poet's 80th Year, 100 copies printed July 20, 1996." The poem is called "They Are Sleeping," and it's based on a painting that she painted.

*They are sleeping.
I have painted the female hills,
Stretched and piled against the sky. They are sleeping.
I've given them golden halos. They are saints. They are sleeping.
I have painted the gold in clouds and crevices as well,
Meaning to say how they too are saints,
How the world sleeps, how womanly is the landscape,
How a whiskered angel also sleeps in a field of grain.*

I love that poem. And of course all that talk about gold is talk about Doxa. Glory. Doxa. That numinosity, that shine and glistening that is in all things. You can call it the Cosmic Christ. You can call it the Buddha Nature. You can call it Salam, the image of God, call it what you will.

But this poet calls it gold. Gold in the hills.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.