Message
Poplar Ridge Friends Meeting
November 10, 2019

REASONING WITH THE HEART

The three readings today are all taken from the writings of Plato, the principal founder of the Western Philosophical tradition.

1. "This world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence . . . A single living entity containing all other living entities which by their nature are related.

2. Human nature was originally one and we were whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love. The sexes were not two, as they are now, but originally three in number. There was man, woman, and the union of the two.

The ancient desire for another that is implanted in us reunites our original nature. It makes one of the two, and heals the state of man.

3. Every heart whispers a song, incomplete until another heart whispers back.

Message

Reasoning with the Heart

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By the time I was 36 worship in the orthodox Roman Catholic religion of my Norman peasant ancestors had become largely dead for me. I began wandering from church to church on Sundays, looking for

a community with a vibrant spiritual life. One Sunday I wandered into San Francisco's Quaker Meeting. Mid-way through the silent meeting for worship a woman named Madge Seaver rose up and gave a message. Her message completely blew my mind. "That woman is in touch with God" I said. "Whatever it is she's got, I want." I started attending Quaker Meeting every first day, and never returned to Catholic worship. After a while, though, I had to serious ask myself if I should become a Quaker. I still had an enormous emotional and spiritual attachments to a religious tradition that had my sustained my Norman peasant ancestors through centuries of harsh living. It was a difficult, if not anguishing, dilemma. In the midst of all this inner searching I had the following archetypal dream.

I am in an orthodox church attending a funeral mass. Although the priest should be wearing white vestments (symbols of hope) when celebrating a funeral mass, this priest is wearing old-style black vestments, and the church is draped in black.

At the moment of consecration in the mass the priest, who normally holds up the wafer that has become the sacramental body of the Risen Christ for all to see and worship, instead goes down to the casket and raises up the corpse of the dead man. I see that the dead man is me; I am attending my own funeral.

I leave the church and, walking across a large, barren parking lot, enter a huge warehouse that has recently been refurbished and whitewashed. Although the building is mostly empty, I spot chairs arranged in a circle at one end. Approaching, I see that they form a circle around a large, life-size mosaic of a figure in white standing on a cross of light. The figure is an image or icon of a Resurrected Jesus who, like a Christian-Jewish Buddha, embraces all humanity in his look of tender and infinite compassion. I know that I am in a Quaker meeting house and that every piece in the mosaic has been set in place by a different person coming from a different part of the world, and that together they represent all the different faiths on earth. Tears fill my eyes, and I say, "At last, somebody sees what needs to be done and is doing something about it."

I woke up to find real tears in my eyes and was deeply moved, soon thereafter applying for membership in the San Francisco Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

A couple of years later, while on a visit to Paris, I paused at the display window of a religious-articles store and found myself looking at a reproduction of the extraordinarily compassionate face of the risen Christ that I had seen in my dream. I went into the store and bought the icon; the inscription on the back stated that it is a detail of a larger 16th-century icon. Much later, when Google searches came on line, I tracked down the full image in the Icon Museum in Recklinghausen, Germany. The icon was an exact reproduction of my archetypal dream, except that this icon had numerous other people in it, while in my vision the only figure was Christ's. Although we lived 400 years apart, the artist who painted that icon and I, it seems, had both tapped into the same mystical archetypal source, lodged deep in the collective human psyche.

Immediately upon becoming a Quaker I bought a copy of George Fox's Journal, and plunged into it. I soon discovered that Fox's own spiritual journey, like mine, had begun with a four-year period of intense depression, and that early Friends had all begun their journeys in their new religion with an intense period of inner scrutiny and self-transformation, well described by Quaker author Hugh Barbour in a book chapter entitled "The Power and Terror of the Light." It read:

"The Lamb's War began for most early Friends with a hard, slow, inner conflict; only afterwards could they call themselves Children of the Light. This opening struggle shaped the meaning of their new lives and gave color to all they thought or felt about the inward Light and the Spirit of God. The serenity and trust and the sense of daily direction from the Spirit finally became the most characteristic part of the Quaker way of life."

Inspired by Barbour's words, I resolved to confront my inner demons as early Quakers had done, wanting to transform the darkness and death within me and come into a sense of the serenity, peace, and guidance Barbour speaks of in his article. I set about creating a meditation practice inspired by Quaker teaching, turning to Fox's Journal for guidance in doing so. On page 11 in his Journal Fox describes the mystical experience

that had brought his own dark night of the soul to an end and launched the Quaker movement:

> "When all my hopes in outward teachers and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said: 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,' and when I hear it my heart did leap for joy.'"

Fox's words had the same effect on me that they had had on him three hundred years earlier. It took Jesus off the cross that hangs over the altar in every Catholic church, and it made the printed words on the pages of the Gospel come alive, turning those words into a living presence which I could feel inwardly in my own heart.

Fox had also famously said:

> "What had any to do with the Scripture, but as they came to the Spirit that gave them forth. You will say, "Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what cans't thou say? Art thou a Child of Light and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God.?"[1]

I had always loved words of the Sermon on the Mount more than any other teachings in the Gospels, and so I built a daily meditation practice based on a selection of 18 to 20 passages from it that, to me, constituted the heart of Jesus' teachings. About the time I became a Quaker I had also stumbled across the Gospel of Mary Magdalene in a Paris bookstore, and I added the words of her Gospel to my meditation practice. And so I began a daily meditation practice of my own, wanting to transform myself in the way early Friends had. I began every morning by turning toward the Inward Light. After 20 minutes or so the feelings of depression and agitation with which I awoke most mornings would begin to lift. Slowly but surely, I began to experience greater and greater measures of inner peace, as though I was being resurrected day by day from the caskets and graves of my archetypal dreams by the light and life within me. In time depression became part of my past.

I also made a practice of observing each shift in my consciousness as I walked the path of the inward light and began to think of my life as a longitudinal study of my own

1 *Chrisian faith and practice in the experience of the Society of Friends,* London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1960 Chapter 1, #20.

states of awareness. Barbour's article had encouraged me to believe that early Quakers crossed this threshold after five or six years of inward struggle. I anticipated the same thing for myself. In point of fact, I would not fully cross it for 40 years.

My dream had further taught me that the icon of the Resurrected Christ was made up of individual mosaic pieces drawn from all the religions of the world. While the Journal of George Fox remained my principal road map as I walked this path over the years, in addition to the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene I eventually incorporated teachings taken from the following great souls to my constantly growing and evolving world view: Socrates, Moses, Mohammed, the Buddha, Lao Tzu, in the *Tao Te Ching,* and the prayer of the Oglala Sioux shaman Black Elk in *Black Elk Speaks.*

As I progressed along this path I soon realized that Fox has fallen on hard times among contemporary Friends, and that I was travelling a path followed by relatively few contemporary liberal Friends. There are a number of reasons for this. The first of these is Fox's 17h century English idiom, which we find challenging. The second his constant reference to Biblical passages with which we modern readers are largely unfamiliar. Third, and most troubling, is that he constantly violates the laws of Western logic invented by Aristotle, the most prominently of which is the law of non-contradiction. In one place Fox will state unequivocally that Christ *is* the Light, and in others times, just as unequivocally, speak of it in universal terms, as in "the Inward Light." Get with the program Fox, we moderns want to say. Make up your mind one way or the other.

I personally had become obsessed with the problem of reconciling Fox's way thinking with modern thought because I was passionately taken with Fox, and wanted to make the Quaker movement which he founded more intelligible to others. More specifically, I wanted to reconcile Fox's way of thinking with the great currents of Western thought, so that we could all understand exactly where to situate him in the two-thousand-five hundred year old adventure of Western philosophy. Twenty-two years after becoming a Quaker though I was still mired in this apparently irresolvable conundrum. Annie and I were on our honeymoon in Switzerland, staying at the Chalet Beauregard in Saint Veran, the highest village in Western Europe, when I woke up around two o'clock in the morning, obsessed with the problem of solving this dilemma. I got up and walked

down to the Chalet's common room, which was empty, pacing back and forth. Quite suddenly the full meaning of a saying with which I had long been familiar hit me with the force of an express train. It comes from the French mathematician, philosopher, and mystic Blaise Pascal:

"Le Coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point."

"The heart has its reasons that reason cannot know."

In that moment the Chalet Beauregard I saw that Pascal wasn't simply referring to certain heartfelt experiences or expressions that are beyond words, but rather he means a whole universe of thought, understanding, and wisdom centered in the heart that lies outside the scope of the reasoning powers of the mind. Pascal goes on to make one additional, profoundly revolutionary, statement. The foundation of all meaningful propositions or systems of thought, whether mystical, spiritual, or rational – Pascal calls them "First Principles" – are rooted in the heart, and not in the mind. The certainties of the heart, moreover, though different in form, are no less certain than the certainties of philosophers and the learned, including the demonstrations of physical science.

Pascal's insight into the dual functional capacities of the human mind would not find scientific confirmation until 1981, three centuries after Pascal's death, when Roger Sperry won the Nobel Prize for science for his discovery of the bicameral nature of the human mind. What Sperry calls the Right and Left hemispheres of the human brain correspond to Pascal's "heart" on the one hand, and his "la raison," or reason, on the other.

We can begin to make sense of the apparent conflict between the heart and the mind once we realize that the heart is the source of the unifying, reconciling, harmonizing energies of the universe, whereas the mind differentiates, separating things into categories or definitions that can be treated logically. For Pascal the two halves of the mind have to function in harmony, unless his "reasons of the heart" take precedence over his "reasons of the mind" our thinking rests on a sandy foundation.

We owe the word "Philosophy" to the ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras, which means literally "Love of Sophia," the feminine principle of divine harmony.

Pythagoras teaches that the universe is a profoundly harmonious place.. The fellowship, or community, which he founded, which included both men and women, gathered at night to meditate at on the movement of the stars through the night-time sky, meditating with open hearts to hear what Pythagoras called "the harmony of the spheres."

When Plato in particular states that: "This world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence . . . a single living entity containing all other living entities which by their nature are related" he is building on the foundation laid by Pythagoras. The force that holds the universe together, for Plato, is thus Philosophy -- the Love of Sophia, the union of the two halves of the divine nature.

What is true of the harmony of the spheres for Pythagoras, Plato goes on to tell us, is true for us here below on earth.

> "Human nature was originally one and we were whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love. The sexes were not two, as they are now, but originally three in number. There was man, woman, and the union of the two.
>
> The ancient desire for another that is implanted in us reunites our original nature. It makes two of the one, and heals the state of man.

When George Fox, who lived 2,000 years after Plato, describes the culminating vision on his own Path of a Child of the Light, he writes:

> "As people grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being."

When Fox speaks of "Word of Wisdom" through which we come to know "the hidden unity in the Eternal Being" he's speaking the language of Pythagoras and Plato. I've sometimes thought that if I could squeeze this particular statement of Fox's into one of Plato's dialogues people who weren't Plato scholars probably wouldn't know the difference. In a word, Fox's mystical idiom, rooted in the Wisdom of the heart and not the reasons of the mind, finds a home in the foundational thinkers of the Western Philosophical tradition, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato.

George Fox's mystical-prophetic consciousness, I came to see, is rooted in the deep certainties of Pascal's heart, and not in the structured thinking of philosophers and the learned.

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I had always thought that when I finally crossed over the threshold into the consciousness of a Child of the Light, it would come in a flash of illumination or deep insight. It wasn't that way at all. Indeed, on my 75th birthday, I was surprised to discover that I had crossed over this threshold some time before without actually knowing it.

Annie had organized a birthday party with a dozen of our dear friends. She always makes up funny songs for celebrations like this, using elements of my life as fodder for her lyrics. I have always been a very guarded person, keeping the most vulnerable part of me safe under the protective presence of the litigator's side of my mind, and finding ways to discount or divert other people's expressions of love or care for me. That day, though, as I looked into my friends' eyes as they sang Annie's song, I could see their love and affection for me flowing out of their hearts, and for the first time ever I let it penetrate all the way into the very core of my being.

Enlightenment turned out not to be a big deal at all; it was the smallest of deals. St. Paul had written: "When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child but when I became a man, I put away childish things." I reversed Paul's formula, healing myself instead from the disease of thinking like a man. It was as though I stood once again at the gate of a Swiss boarding school named the Chalet de Caux when I was a little boy of five and my father had dropped me off there. My mother was in a Swiss tuberculosis sanitarium and Dad had gone off to explore for oil in the Egyptian desert. And so, suddenly left alone, I turned to find refuge in the miracle of the incomparable beauty of the Swiss countryside, the glorious profusion of small mountain flowers growing in the fields, the tall evergreens and towering mountains behind them, a pretty little girl who had special eyes for me, "Grande Marie" who took us all into her protective 8- or 9-year-old arms, the girls' club, the older children—big, fine, beautiful,

kindly, and protective of the small fry we then were, and the promise of what we might grow up to be.

It was as though love had taken me by the hand and guided me through the darkness to a bright land. Once again, as when I was a small child, I saw that all of life is sacred and eternal. To see and touch it, though, we must first learn to look out on reality with our hearts, and see it anew through the eyes of a small child. The universe is a benevolent and good-hearted place, and all living things, trees, birds, plants, flowers, animals, are all good-hearted too. We, the children of Sophia, are capable of great things. When the Spirit moves us, there is nothing we cannot do.

"Every heart sings a song," Plato writes, "incomplete until another heart sings back."

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I'm now going to close with a different perspective on what has been called the Adventure of the Western mind. It comes to us from Ochwiay Biano, which means Mountain Lake, a shaman or wise man of the Taos Indians, who spoke the following words to the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung.

"See how cruel the whites look. Their lips are thin, their noses sharp, their faces furrowed and distorted by folds. Their eyes have a staring expression; they are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something; they are uneasy and restless. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think that they are mad."

Jung asked Ochwiay Biano why he thought the whites were all mad.

"They say they think with their heads," he replied.

"Why of course," Jung said with some surprise. "What do you think with?"

"We think here," Ochwiay Biano replied, putting his hand on his heart.