

OUR GIFTS

An innocent question often opens the door to fresh answers.

Such a question was raised in a retreat recently. The question was: You talk about mind, thought and consciousness as “gifts” and you say they “allow us to see creation” but you do not acknowledge the giver of the gifts or the source of the creation we see. Are you missing something important?

That question revealed with utmost clarity the confusion and frustration many people express about where the principles and innate health fit in the realms of spirituality and people’s faith. For me, hearing that question was an “Aha!” moment.

Perhaps from the clarity of that question may come more clarity in an answer.

If we did not have the ability to think, the free and limitless imagination to come up with all kinds of thoughts, and the capacity to bring those thoughts to life, how could we express gratitude, reverence, awe, or faith? How could we “know” we were alive at all, in this wondrous universe of creation, if we could not have the thought of it and experience it? How could we worship? How could we sing? How could we chant? How could we pray? How could we share our joys or express our hopes or speak our beliefs? And how could we, also, express negativity, or fear, or doubt or despair?

The principles explain how our minds work and why the workings of our minds free us to experience living fully. The principles are *Mind*, the energy flowing through formlessness and forms, *Thought*, the constant expression of formless energy into form, and *Consciousness*, our awareness of that expression. They explain the psychological tools each of us has to know and understand what we are doing as we go through life, and – most importantly -- to change the direction of our lives in the flash of a thought.

The principles describe the power to live. Because principles are energetic, dynamic, they allow for infinite possibilities. The moment-to-moment experiences we express with that power represent our individual use of that power. A metaphor would be electricity. Electricity is a power. When it is available to us, we can plug in a toaster, or we can plug in an electric chair. The electricity flows the same way through either choice, but produces different results with every choice we make.

The power of the principles is always available to us and we are always using it. We can use our power to live wisely, gratefully, respectfully, reverently, to express the glory of

creation and experience life in ease and joy. Or we can use our power without recognition or understanding that we have such power and are using it freely. Without such recognition, we risk being plagued by random ideas that frighten us or worry us or disturb us or distress us, not knowing that we are the thinkers of those thoughts and if we leave them alone rather than holding them in place, the power will continue to flow and we are bound to think other thoughts.

Without understanding the principles at work behind our psychological experience, it can appear that the content of any upsetting thought is much stronger than our ability to continue to think. Then we might inadvertently and innocently use our ability to continue to think against ourselves, by generating thoughts about how upsetting that first thought was, and coming up with related upsetting thoughts, and then worrying about why we have so many upsetting thoughts on our minds.

The principles are the spiritual gifts that provide us with the wherewithal to have a personal psychological experience, any personal psychological experience. The very fact that we can know that our psychological experience is *coming from* spiritual gifts provides the hope for change. This knowledge harmonizes our spirituality with our everyday life, and deepens our capacity to glimpse the nature of the spiritual and find peace beyond any particular thoughts within the intermittent turmoil of our personal thinking.

Part of our personal life is the formation and expression of ideas that describe, define or express the way we conceive of the nature of the spiritual in terms we can use with each other. Those are our faith beliefs. What we all have in common is the ability to find and express faith beliefs when we reflect on our spiritual origins. *What* we point to when we come to those beliefs is universal and feels equally true to all people who recognize their gifts and know creation – that there is a giver of gifts and a creator of creation. *How* we point to it is a matter of our own freedom to think. *Whether* we point to it is a matter of our own free will. The chances that the spiritual will have profound meaning to us are improved when we “open” the gifts we have received to make it possible for us to realize spiritual truths.

When we talk about the principles, and link knowledge of the principles to a healthy, wise and resilient perspective, the assumption is that all people are able, via their own freedom to think in their own way, to acknowledge and express what the giver of these gifts and the source of creation means to them. Implicit in the statement that we are born with certain gifts is the realization that we have common abilities that transcend our individuality and connect us to the universal and divine.

The metaphor that came to me is this. Coming to this life is like walking into our birthday party. We see gifts, not knowing what they contain or how they work, arrayed before us. If we never open those gifts, we would always know that we had been given gifts, but we

would be hard-pressed to know how to write the thank you letters, or to know what we might be able to do with those gifts. Once we open the gifts, we know what gifts we have received and how to use and enjoy them, and thus we understand more fully how to express our appreciation for them.

The exploration of the principles is a way of opening our gifts. When we see how our thinking is working, we can see how we fit into life itself and understand why and how we are free to express ourselves.

The principles also explain the quest of mankind to explore and understand life beyond our own personal experience. If we could not think, we could not wonder. We could not pursue anthropological means to study the beginnings of life on earth, or astronomical devices to study the origins of our universe, or quantum theories to define forces we can neither see nor touch but can nonetheless observe at work across time and space. Without the energy to think, the ability to think beyond our “knowledge” and the capacity to bring our thoughts to life, we could not be curious. Curiosity, too, is an acknowledgement and an appreciation that we are part of something larger than ourselves, beyond our knowledge and yet accessible to our minds. Scientific inquiry is the marriage of curiosity and observation, the use of our gift of thought to wonder beyond the visible and tangible and explore all the gifts in creation, not just our own.

Understanding the principles of mind, consciousness and thought opens the door to deeper reverence, just as understanding the gravitational pull of the moon on the ebb and flow of the tides, or understanding the cellular structure of the retina, or understanding the tectonic movement of the plates that form the earth’s surface, or understanding the birth of a new star distant light years away, or understanding the variable electrochemistry of the brain, or understanding the formation of a tree from a tiny seed, or understanding the migration of birds, or understanding the forces of a cyclone, or understanding the teeming microscopic life in a speck of water open the door to reverence. We humans could not have created any of this, and yet we can think it all and learn from our thinking about it, and find awe and gratitude in the beautiful mystery of it.

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