

SPIRITUAL AMNESIA

“One who seeks his real Self will not be afraid of any obstacle.”
Ramana Maharshi

A VERY WISE OLD man with a glint in his eyes once explained to me the difference between a spinster and an old maid. He said, “A spinster is a woman who never got married. And an old maid is a woman who never got married or anything.” That is a very important distinction. In Ireland, when I was young, there were lots of spinsters and old maids because of a huge male migration from Ireland. The first born son would remain to inherit the farm and all of the other boys would go. There were lots of girls left behind who became spinsters and old maids.

The O’Sullivan sisters, Annie, Barbara and Catherine, all in their 70s, lived together in my village a few doors away from my family. When I knew them they seemed very “bothered.” Bothered is an Irish euphemism for senile. In other words, they were becoming very senile. Instead of using the word, senile, we tended to use softer words like bothered.

On one occasion, Annie decided to have her annual bath. She was in the upstairs bathroom and had one foot inside the tub when she stopped and said to herself, “Was I getting into the tub or getting out?” She called down to her sister, “Barbara, come up here and help me. I can’t remember whether I’m getting out of the tub or into the tub.” Barbara, sitting downstairs, took off her glasses with a sigh and got up and hobbled up the stairs, stopping to catch her breath

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at the first landing. A few moments later she sighed, "Oh my God, was I going up the stairs or down the stairs? She called to her sister, Catherine, "Come upstairs and help me a moment. Annie is in the bathroom and doesn't know whether she's getting in or out of the tub and I'm on the stairs and I don't know whether I'm going up the stairs or down the stairs." Catherine put down her knitting and looking to heaven said, "Thanks be to God I'm not as crazy as those two sisters of mine," and she carefully knocked on wood. Startled, she looked around and said, "Oh dear, was that the front door or the back door?"

There is not one of us who does not suffer from being very bothered. Life on Earth makes us very bothered. We don't know whether we are getting in or out, going up or down and where the knock is coming from.

There is a big difference between seeing and looking. In many languages they are distinguished. Because most of us grew up speaking English, we don't quite appreciate the distinction. When you have the privilege of learning another language then you begin to notice the distinction. In John's gospel, Jesus said to Andrew, "I want you to really look. I'm not just saying to glance around, really look!"

The entire function of spirituality is to make us look. Unfortunately, spirituality is too often reduced to merely having us believe stuff. The church does the looking for us and then they tell us what is there. We are supposed to sign off and say, I believe. That is not spirituality that is merely religion. Religion is telling us to believe what other people allegedly have seen and spirituality is the injunction to go see for your Self. The Buddha said again and again, "Be a lamp unto your self." Go out and light your own light and look. Don't believe anything anyone tells you.

John the Baptist's injunction to his disciples was, "I want you to really, really look." The disciples followed Jesus; they had no idea what they were going to say as they walked behind him. Jesus realizing that they were following him said, "What are you looking for?" One of them said, "Where is your pad? Where do you hang out?"

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And Jesus said, "Come and see." They spent the whole day with him and they were totally transformed. That was the beginning of the Jesus movement. It is all about seeing and looking, but there are many different forms of it.

There are basically three kinds of people on planet Earth. There are those who are born and they hit the ground running. They are already on the spiritual quest from the time they are little children. They are looking because they already know; part of them never forgot. They remember who they are and where they have come from and what they are here to do.

Then there are a lot of people who at some stage in their adult life accidentally encounter a person, teacher, book, lecture and something wakes them up and then they begin their spiritual quest. Most of us spend our entire lives not questing at all: asleep, totally asleep. We are totally engaged in the pursuit of illusion. That is where most of us are. The lucky ones hit the ground running, a few more accidentally discover and the rest of us are fast asleep. Jesus told parables to illustrate all of these types of people. He told the parable about the merchant who was in search of fine pearls. He went from town to town and village to village and from country to country in search of a really great pearl. One day he found it in a little market place in a little corner of the Middle East and he said, "My God, this is what I have been looking for all my life." He told the shop keeper, "Hold it for me. I'll go home and sell all I have and I'm going to come back and buy that pearl." He went home, sold all his possessions and came back and bought the pearl. That is the person who has hit the ground running; a person, who from the time of his childhood, had been on some kind of a spiritual safari.

We don't just happen upon a great teacher or book or just happen to remember a fabulous dream that suddenly changes the course of our lives. We build these reminders into our lives long before we incarnate.

As we were planning our incarnation, we thought, "Is there some clue that I can build into my life to help me remember? All of the other times, I have forgotten. I came back here kicking myself

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that I couldn't see the sign. I'll build some subtle thing into the next lifetime to wake me up." We build these things in and sometimes we think that they are just déjà vu experiences. They are clues I have built into my next lifetime to remind me of why I am here. These great people that we encounter or the fabulous books we read or the great lectures we hear or interesting dreams we remember have been prebuilt by us into our system.

When I was in the seminary I was never interested in scripture and I had no interest in theology whatsoever. I was interested in drama and athletics and sports. I have a good memory and so on the night before any test, I would read the entire course and for each item I would make little mnemonics for myself. I would pick out ten main points for the topic, the key word from each phrase and then take the first letter of each of these words and create some kind of an anagram for myself and then remember the anagram. When I went into the test the next day and the question came up, I would write down the anagram and reconstruct it and within 15 minutes I would have the whole thing on paper.

Perhaps that is what we have done. We have created little cheat sheets for ourselves and we have built them into our lives and then we happen upon them, we are totally surprised and they begin the waking up process. There is nothing accidental about it. Because we know that we have a penchant for forgetting, we put these little reminders into ourselves.

There is a great tradition in the Jewish Talmud about the angel of night who is called Aiyella. In this tradition, just before a little infant is born, Aiyella comes into the womb and makes an indentation on the upper lip and the two sides of its nose to cause amnesia in the baby for where they have just come from. Most of us suffer from that amnesia for our whole lifetime. But the ones who have been back here often enough perhaps have remembered when they were "up there" how much they had forgotten when they were "down here." So we put these clues or we imbed these fossils into the fabric of our life next time. These are the little things that wake us up. For

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the rest of us, the sleepy ones, we are too lazy even when we are up there to fossilize the fabric of the next lifetime and so we meander through the entire lifetime just buying into the illusion.

When the disciples asked Jesus the question, "Where is your pad?," and Jesus answered, "Come and see." He meant, I want you to really look. I'm not just going to show you a little cabin. I'm going to show you the house of God. I'm going to show you where you are from and where you are destined to return.

There is a beautiful phrase that we have heard for thousands of years that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Isn't that lovely! When we think of cuddly little creatures; puppies, kittens and lambs all fall into the same category. Little wooly lambs go baaa, and we love to cuddle them. There is a huge difference between lambs, puppies and kittens because puppies grow up to be man's best friend. Kittens grow up to be independent as they walk around the house and they couldn't care less about their human servants who are just there to look after them. Lambs grow up to become mutton stew.

When Saint John said, "There is the lamb of God." He was not saying; look at the cuddly little creature. Go give him a hug. He was saying, this is about sacrifice and slaughter and mutton stew except we make a mistake and we Mel Gibsonize it. The sacrifice and the crucifixion of Jesus had nothing to do with the death of Jesus. It had to do with his conception and incarnation. Moreover, it was not just about the conception and the incarnation of Jesus, it is about the conception and incarnation of every one of us. Crucifixion is about deciding to be conceived. Slaughter is about deciding to be born. The coming in is much more difficult than the exit. The decision to incarnate is an extraordinarily difficult decision. Again, there are three kinds of souls in heaven. There are those who don't want to incarnate any more anywhere and are happy where they are. Then there are the ones who incarnate on lesser planets where the negativity level is somewhere between five and ten percent and a real easy ride. Then there are those who decide to incarnate on planet Earth where the negativity is somewhere between 45 and 50 percent. It is a

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real tough project. Only the courageous get to come to planet Earth. It is a really difficult place to come. But sometimes on our way we suddenly realize what we are signing up for and we say, "Know what, I've changed my mind, I can't go through with it." Over 30 percent of pregnancies end in miscarriages. Why does this happen? I'll give you a good esoteric reason for it. After a few weeks in this tiny, cluttered, dense little spacesuit where they are trying to learn how to manipulate not just the physiology of the thing but the emotionality of it and the intellectuality of it they say, "You know, I can't handle this." This is spiritual claustrophobia and they go back. The mother's body decides after a few months that there is no point in carrying an empty spacesuit and sheds it. Miscarriage is largely because the soul has changed its mind and doesn't want to go through with incarnation. One of the reasons a baby dies in the first two years of life may be that its mission is complete. Whatever this little child came to do and whatever this family signed up to do has been accomplished. But sometimes it may be that after two years in this crippling experience of this tiny little spacesuit, the soul decides that the only thing to do is to go back.

But you didn't do that. None of you decoded to make an exit by a miscarriage. We all decided to stick it out and here we are years later and we are still here. Isn't it a terrible waste of effort to have decided not to take an exit by a miscarriage but to stick it out and after all that trouble, after signing up for the toughest planet in the Cosmos and deciding to go through with the conception process and the birth process and to still be here years later, isn't it a terrible pity that we couldn't just go the extra step and wake up. We wouldn't have to come back anymore. We would have to do it only once unless we were total masochists and we signed on for the Bodhisattva vow, in which case you have to parachute back here again and again.

Someone was telling me recently about a video of a new "industry" that they had heard of where a person commits a murder while cameras record the event and they sell the video so other sick people can watch the agony of the victim. Is there anything sicker than that?

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There is! There is a being who has done that billions of times over billions of years. We call him God. He orchestrated the bloody death of millions of victims over millions of lifetimes. If anyone needed the twelve step program, it is he. I just invented a twelve step program called, SKA (serial killers anonymous). I can imagine God attending his first meeting and standing up and saying, "Hi, my name is God and I'm a serial killer," and everyone says, "Hi God." Is this the kind of God that we believe in? Do we really think that that is what the sin of the world is about? Is there some kind of sick divinity who needs blood sacrifice in order to feel good or in order to entertain itself? It has nothing to do with that.

The sin of the world is not about murder or rape; these are only symptoms of the sins of the world. The sin of the world is that the world is asleep. The sin of you and me is the fact that we are still asleep and we are still engaged in the illusion. We are still stuck in the illusion that we are different from God and separate from God. We are still stuck in the illusion that we are separate from other human beings and we are still stuck in the illusion that we are separate from all sentient creatures. That is sin. When we break through that sin, all of the symptoms clear up. There will be no murder, rape, lies or stealing possible when enough people have awakened. The sin of the world is that we are all fast asleep.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we started to wake up because that is the gift of this extraordinary planet. Planet Earth is not just this molten mass of sun that was catapulted off 4.5 billion years ago that subsequently developed a kind of crush of Teutonic plates the movement and clashing of which has created mountains, valleys and oceans. It is not that at all. The real function of planet Earth is that it is a great soul meant to be the staging place for the evolution of the species which will wake up its own divinity. That is what the great soul, Gaia, signed up to do, and that is what the planet is attempting to do right now. It has created a species that is on the verge of that process, but only very few people have broken through. Only the Christ figures and the Buddha figures and a few more have managed

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to take the final step into Buddhahood or Christ consciousness and become truly awake. That is our function, our mission and that is why we are here. That is why we have embedded the fabric of this incarnation with déjà vu experiences, great teachers, fabulous lectures, good books or great dreams in order to try to make ourselves become awake.

Planet Earth is groaning with labor pains trying to give birth to Christ consciousness. One of the most mystical passages in all of Saint Paul's writing, is in his letter to the Romans where he says, "Nature itself is groaning as it awaits the revelation of the children of God." It is waiting for people to wake up. This is nature's gift. It wants to birth the Christ child. But not just in Jesus of Nazareth who lived and died two thousand years ago, but in every one of us. Do you and do I have the courage to climb onto the labor table and put our feet in the stirrups and attend to the contractions and push like bloody hell until we give birth to Christ consciousness? Is this the year that you could grow up and become the Mother of God?