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Presents

The Roots of Ethical Behavior

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The Roots of Ethical Behavior

Ethical capacities are rooted in spiritual development. Theologies are not the issue here for those are systems of ideas about rather than the experience of the spirit. We can all agree upon common experiences while disagreeing on the interpretation of them. Keep in mind that there are events and interpretations of events and the two are often so divergent as to bear no resemblance to one another. But I digress ... already! My apologies.

There are three common spiritual experiences in which everyone can participate ... conscience, inspiration and the opening of the heart. Though ideas are valuable for interpretation of or providing direction toward those experiences, no specific theology is necessary. Conscience is that internal voice of right and wrong. If you listen it becomes clearer. This is the most obvious root of ethical behavior, which always defines how we deal with one another. The “Love thy Neighbor” essential theology applied to this experience is to ask oneself, when considering how your actions are affecting others, “If someone were to do this to me, would I wish it?” If the answer is “No!” don’t do it. Simple, isn’t it?

While we’re on conscience, take a look at the word itself. Now we could go back to the Latin etymological root and pretend great erudition but I’ll just point out that conscience itself contains both con and science. That’s pure drivel, of course. Linguistic parsing for emotionally laden meaning is akin to numerology. Remember, attempting to gain spiritual insight through the emotions is mysticism.

Let’s leave the third of our common spiritual experiences, the open heart, for the future. It’s a lifetime goal. So we’ll deal with inspiration. You already know it. Cartoonists for the last century have been depicting this event as a light bulb going off in the top of the head. All inspiration transforms the individual who experiences it and subsequently modifies the world around that person. As with conscience and the open heart, inspiration becomes more functional with practice. A good starting point is learning to achieve inner quiet. Can you shut off the running dialog in your forebrain? Heh heh ... that’s revolutionary stuff.

Now there’s one huge consideration to add into the mix of ethical awareness. Unforeseen consequences should always be expected. While an action’s origin may be inspiration and even pass the test of conscience, it is always interpreted through a human. No one’s perfect. Even the best efforts will always require modification to adjust for the unexpected issues that inevitably arise in any undertaking. These can be avoided to some degree by paying attention to the ethical issues in advance. Other than that, the course of any creative action must be adjusted during the process to ensure the best possible outcome. If you accept that responsibility there will always be additional unanticipated and remarkably positive results that could not possibly have been predicted.

The sum total of this is personal integrity without which life is devoid of meaning.