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**For the Week of February 18 – 24: Story and Imagination**



Artist Nicholas Roerich (1943)

*I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart*…. Deuteronomy 29:19

Before we jump into this discussion, I want to introduce the Ox Herding pictures created in the 12th century. This one is a painting done in 1943. They represent many things, but for tonight, I’d like to use them to remind us of our journey from ‘story and imagination’ to consciousness. If you are not familiar with them I encourage you to look on YouTube to see a video of Fr. William Menninger’s presentation. Now, let’s define our terms so that we understand the impact Story and Imagination have. Story is also called ‘the song we sing’ in The Work. Your song is entirely made up of internal considering and based upon negative emotions. Internal Considering is self- justification, wondering what others think of you, and were you treated as you thought you should be. It springs from Self-Love and is a form of identification. Imagination, in the Work sense, is the false notion of myself, what I think I ideally am.

How we really are is how we feel when we are not distracted by the external environment. We hide who we really are. We create an internal duality between the way we wish to appear and the way we really are, and we create this duality with negative emotions –mostly fear, shame, anxiety, judgement. Our imaginary “I” depends upon the external world for its validation. Like our homework exercise a few weeks ago, to observe when and how often we say, ‘me’ or ‘mine’, our imaginary “I” uses everything around us to create our pictures of ourselves. We hide our true self, the one we think no one will accept, behind the images we project. We started all this when we were young – like trying on different clothes. As an adolescent we are all insecure. Eventually we grow into our imaginary identity, and layer by layer we ‘built’ who we wanted others to see. This is part of the first half of life as we go to school, develop work skills for our career, travel. And these skills work for us in life. But they do not reveal who we are. Behind our pictures is a nagging emptiness. In the second half of life, we being to ask center of gravity (glossary) questions: who am I, what is my purpose in life? Eventually we ask, “Is that all there is?” That is when we are ready to begin self-examination with self-observation, non-identification and self-remembering.

Our pictures and our story exist and have power over us because we are not properly conscious of them. To bring a thing to the light of Consciousness is to rob it of its power. We talked about this last week in the idea of developing our underdeveloped centers. We just have to observe, but we don’t fully, we notice – objective observation takes years, perhaps a lifetime, and patience. In the Work it is necessary to make right connections, to fight imagination, to struggle with lies and separate from negative states. The statement “I can Work” is a powerful tool because it supplies a little shock and can scatter those negative “I” that tend to come in when we are not Working. Dr. Dispenza says (Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself, pg 43) that “(y)our identity becomes identified by everything outside of you, because you identify with all elements that make up your external world. … your reality … reflect(s) the mind you use to experience your life. You create more of the same.”

We are all under the influence of our imagination of ourselves, that false notion of myself that I take as Real “I”. I give credence to everything, creating my reality the same over and over – all my beliefs, interest, tastes, pretentions. This imagined “I” wants to be recognized, admired and respected. The first step in our journey of self-knowledge is the wish to liberate ourselves – to know This is Not “I”. But if I just try to change, I can’t (think of your New Year’s resolutions), and I will be disappointed. It is necessary to live with my thoughts, feelings, and actions, to suffer them, every moment, to unpack the ‘issues in our tissues’ as Fr Carl likes to remind us. Blinded by imagination, we are actually liars and we lie to ourselves all the time. I know that is strong language, but if we can observe our lying without preconception or judgment, perhaps we would see that we are not what we think we are. We can ask ourselves, “is this true?”

Peter gave us Matthew 5:8, “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*.” as a path for our transformation. As we purify our Emotional Center, become ‘pure in heart’, we begin to see patterns, identify our pictures, and we begin to see with the Eye of the Heart. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (AMPC), “*For now in this time of imperfection we see in a mirror only a blurred reflection, but when the time of perfection comes we will see reality. Now I know just in fragments, but then I will know and understand fully, just as I have been fully known and understood by God.”*

The pictures you have of yourself are fragments that give us a blurred reflection. They act as a veil over your inner vision, they put us in prison. In order to escape from prison of our imagination, first we must awaken to the fact we are in prison. This is difficult because we have buffers –prevent contradictory sides from coming together, like 2 sides of a coin – heads OR tails. In order to break up a buffer it is necessary to see the contradictory sides of ourselves, heads AND tails. There may be a visceral feeling as the buffer drops. I experienced that in a meeting with Donald years ago – it was almost dizzying.

Don’t get me wrong, you can use your imagination rightly. Nicoll gives an example of building a bridge: You can imagine the design, what it will look like when completed, and how it may be used. It’s just that most of us are unaware of our pictures of ourselves that we carry around and feel are important to maintain.

This Work is to make us think, through scathingly honest self-observation, so that we begin to see what and where we are in ourselves. This is what I think it means when the Bible talks of casting out demons – demons are our imaginary pictures of ourselves. In our multiplicity we are said to have 987 “I’s”, so we have at least that many pictures. We cast our demons, our pictures out of the darkness of our imagination into the light of our consciousness. Our pictures are formed by our Vanity and defended by our Pride. Pride and Vanity are known in the Work as two giants that go before us in life at all times. Vanity is a terrific force in us, and imagination is the powerful builder in support of vanity. I bet you think you are not vain. Observe your reactions when we are insulted or feel we are taken for granted. The action of the Work makes us become aware of the contradiction of what we actually are and what we imagine ourselves to be. Then we begin to have traces of real suffering – though we will experience all sorts of attempts at self-justifying and excuses, and reactions. That is the hallmark of ‘story’ – the ‘song we sing’. Our reactions remind us to take a closer look to see what lies behind our song. Songs are dangerous, because we believe them to be true, they are so sweet, like the Siren Song in the Odyssey – they will wreak your Work upon the rocks.

We each have 2 or 3 typical songs we sing, but do not know it. The Work says, “try to observe your songs.” – listen, hear what you are saying and how you are saying it. Sometimes songs are long with many verses and sometimes they are nothing more than a grunt or a sigh. They are always negative, always sad and spring from the negative part of the Emotional Center. A classic one is “Poor, Little Me” with variations “Why me?” and “It’s not fair”. One of my songs is “But I’m the nice one”. Songs can be tricky – there may be an element of truth – I was given that song by my parents as a comparison with my rambunctious brothers, but it is the identification with the negative state that we need to see. In singing, “I’m nice”, I’m saying ‘you don’t appreciate me; you are wrong because I am nice.’ We constantly indulge self-pity, complaining, disliking, and the love of being unhappy. Dr Nicoll said, Self-pity is a kind of relationship you have with yourself. “When you are alone, you may be the worst company you could keep!” Beverly Lanzetta put it concisely, we must live without ‘why’.

Feeling you are owed stops everything. Unless you cancel debts, nothing can grow. In the Lord’s Prayer we say ‘forgive me as I forgive others’. As long as we hold accounts against others, we feel owed, we cannot transform. We can only grow by forgiving others, dropping all accounts, and Externally Considering. Then we can begin to realize the truth that when we hold back others, we are also holding back ourselves. In Matthew (5:25), Christ says,” *Make friends quickly with your accuser*…” If we do not, we will begin singing our song, making accounts, and feeling we are owed (by another or God). While I appreciate Bev telling me I am a good singer, to be a good singer in the Work is not a compliment because a good singer cannot get beyond themselves. As soon as an obstacle is met, the song begins at once.

How might we begin to work on hearing our Stories or Songs and seeing our Pictures of ourselves? We must struggle with negative emotions especially when our expectations are not met. There is a saying from AA – expectations are resentments in the making. Expectations will start our ‘song’. Our songs, our story, are held in place by memory and desire. This is wrong use of our Intellectual Center and it will engage our Emotional Center to keep the song or story and our imagination going.

We must observe the mechanical connection within ourselves of these two centers. Then we will begin to observe our story and transform it into our point in the Work – establish our connection with the Work where we can start to work on ourselves.

Observe yourself as you share with your Journey Group, your Work Partner, or in TJS. Here are some of the guidelines we were all given for our Journey Groups.

Some background information is necessary to convey context but observe when it becomes more important than the experience you wish to share. There is a fine line difference between ‘this is what I felt’ as you share and wallowing in the mechanical emotion of the event. See your attachment to the negative emotion, it is your fear of losing your picture.

Mme de Salzmann says (Reality of Being pg. 160-161), “We need to see that there is no thinker, that this imagined “I” which thinks “me” and “mine” is simply an illusion. … Only then can we see the real nature of our ambitions, struggles and sufferings. Only then can we see through them and come to a state free of contradiction, a state of emptiness, in which we can experience love. Then … we can see the insignificance of “me” dissolve in an immensity beyond all measure.”

I am. I wish. I can Work.

HOMEWORK

* Read Maurice Nicoll's *Commentaries* on "Stages of Awakening in The Work" and "Pictures and Imagination," beginning June 10, 1944 through June 24, 1944, Vol. 2, pp. 454-464.

* • Turn your gaze inward in small ways and choose something to take photographs of during the week – like your voice -- when answering the phone to a telemarketer vs. the voice you use with your children, with your supervisor in your workplace, in your Journey Group, or on Thursday nights. Self-observe the thoughts (thoughts first because they are the slowest center and, just perhaps, we have the time to note them); then the sensations in the body (they register immediately); and then, the feelings (the hardest to put into words). Name the "I" of this voice. Non-identify. Self-remember in Christ. By the end of the week, you may have a picture album of voices.

* • Be watchful for recurring songs, for example: "It's not fair." "Poor me." "I am very busy." "Do you know who I am?"

* • Work with delight.

REFERENCES

Jeanne de Salzman, *The Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*, pg. 155, 160-161, 264

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Eye of The Heart – A Spiritual Journey into the Imaginal Realm*, pg 121

Rebecca Nottingham, *The Work - Esotericism and Christian Psychology*, p126, 228-229

Beverly Lanzetta, *The Monk Within – Embracing a Sacred Way* of Life, p 69

Joe Dispenza, *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself – How to Lose Your Mind and Create a New One,* pg 43

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, “Commentary on Pride and Vanity” November 27, 1943, Vol 1, p 357

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, “Internal and External Considering” February 22, 1943, Vol 1, pg 253

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, “Pictures and Imagination” June 24, 1944, Vol 2, pg. 458

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, “Stages of Awakening in the Work” June 10, 1944, Vol 2, pg. 454

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, “Notes on Self-Observation” January 10, 1948, Vol 3, pg 1106

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, “On Observing Internal Considering” October 8, 1949, Vol 4, pg. 1328

Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries,* “The Necessity of Having a Point in the Work” April 13, 1951, Vol 4, pg 1466

Cynthia Bourgeault says that when “something is received, … the mind gets playing with it and starts to fill in details, so that before long … it has run off its own rails.”

“One’s personal life story ceases to be a treasure house to be mined and is seen for what it is: simply a fractal of the one great heart of our Common Father.” (Cynthia Bourgeault*, Eye of the Heart*, pg. 102)

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…memory, imagination, and intellect - you will be called to go beyond them. They will play a different part in your life as you grow spiritually. You will always have a use for them, but you will have .. The very source of life itself...(William Menninger. The Loving Search for God, p 13)

We cannot change if our pictures of ourselves dominate us. We have pictures of ourselves, but also of other people. This all belongs to the state of Waking Sleep – that mechanicality we talked about last week – Man 1, 2, and 3. Pictures of ourselves are formed from imagination and keep us asleep.