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# The Struggle with Preferences

June 13, 2024

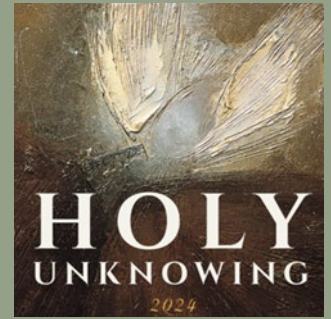


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# The Struggle with Preferences

1. Understanding preferences
2. The Work teachings on preferences
3. Lab work – self observation & sharing
4. Tools to help us Work with preferences

# So, why are preferences an issue on the spiritual journey?



“You are born,  
you find some things  
you like,  
some things you  
dislike,  
and then you die...”

Tim Cook  
Co-founder CCH  
Describing mechanical life

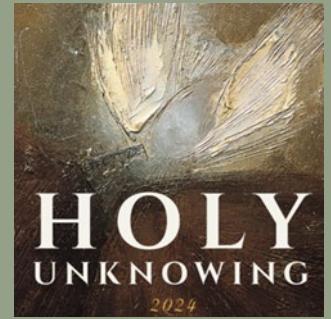
“The Great Way is not difficult for those  
that have no preferences.  
If you wish to see the truth, then hold no  
opinions for, or against, anything.”

Sengstan  
Buddhist poem *Song of the Trusting Mind*

“Freedom from like  
and dislike is  
necessary. So long as  
we are slaves to our  
likes and dislikes, we  
cannot get any  
further.”

JG Bennett  
Sherborne Talks

# What are preferences?



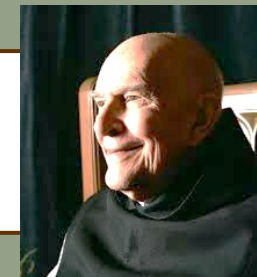
Inclusive of all manner of preferring:

- Likes
- Dislikes
- Opinions
- Desires
- Objecting
- Avoidance

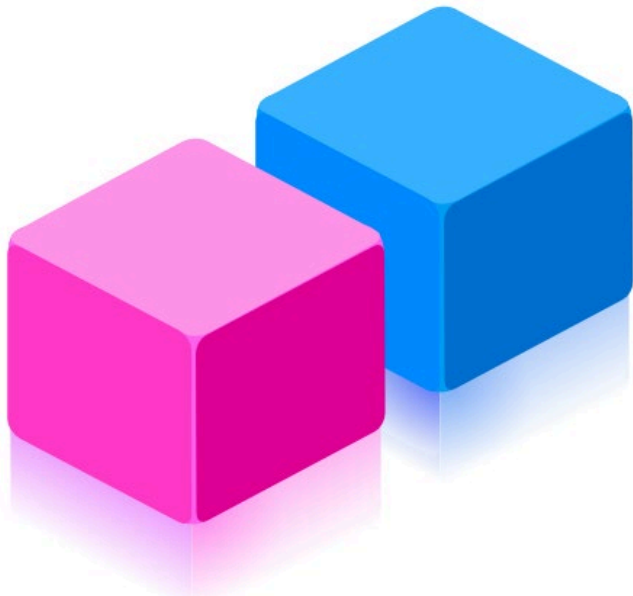
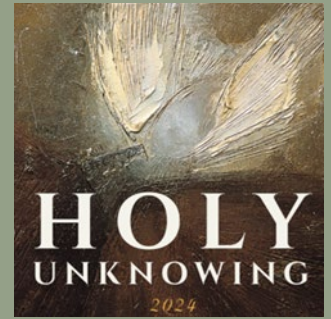


Nicoll: preferences are akin to “choices” or “decisions” and heavily influenced by desires

Keating: Unconsciously our desires generally align to our programs for happiness



# Neuro & Social Mechanisms



- We are **prewired to have preferences**. Studies of infants/young children show that even if the child did not have an initial preference, the chosen option by default becomes the preferred option, barring an unpleasant experience.
- **“We choose things because we have chosen them”**
- **Environmental** factors – upbringing, geographic location, cultural background, religious beliefs, and education
- **Peer group** a major factor: **“You’re the average of the five people you spend the most time with”** Jim Rohn

# Work Teaching: Liking & Disliking

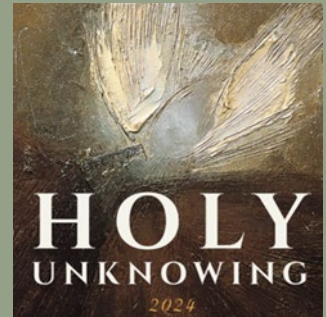
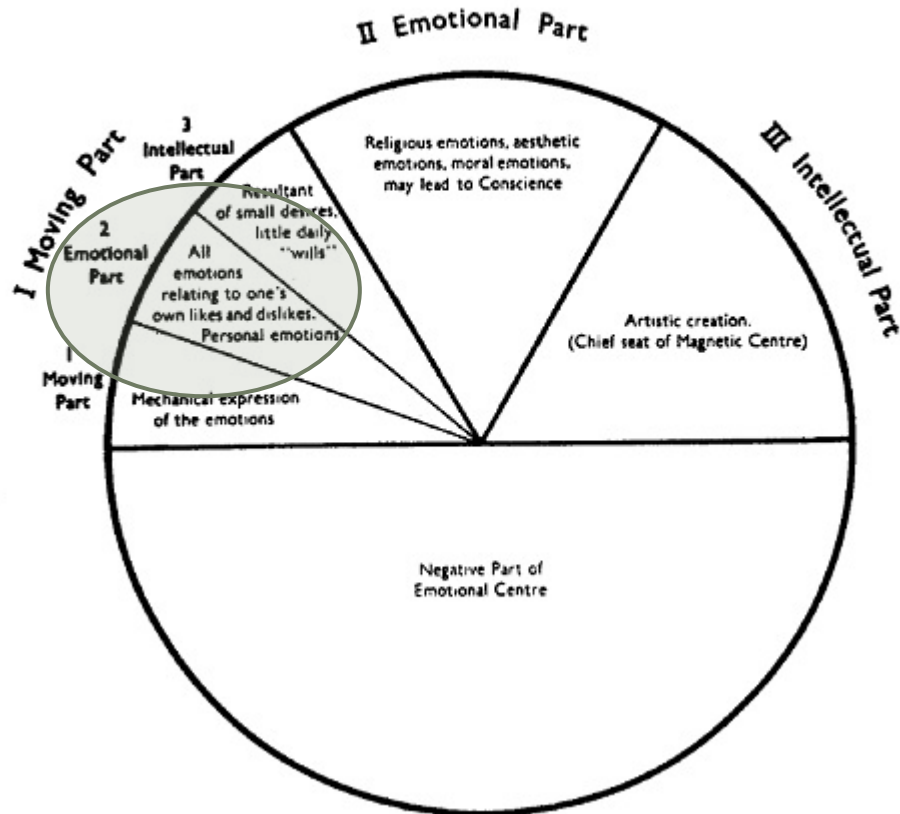


Figure II — Emotional Centre



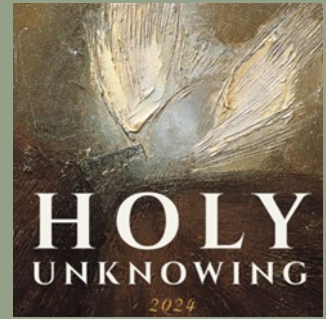
- Likes & Dislikes live in the emotional part of the moving part of emotional center
- All activities in the moving parts of centers are mechanical, effortless, unconscious
- Likes & Dislikes create **rigidity**
- Results in **non-acceptance** of others

**However,**

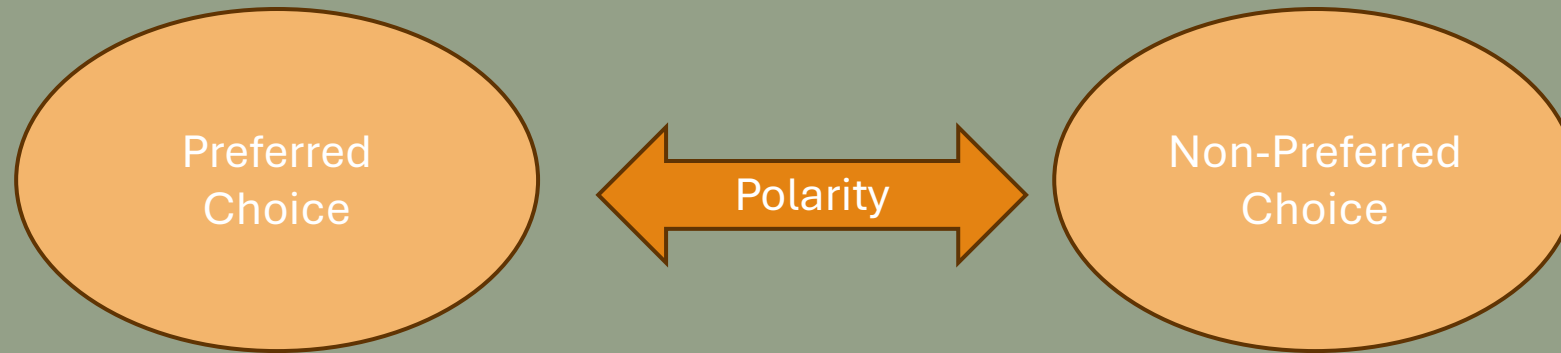
Mechanical liking & disliking is a necessary mechanism

- Bennett “it is **part of our automatism with which we could not exist**. It is impossible to live. In fact, literally it can be said to be impossible, because it would not be possible to concentrate enough energy to do everything [choose everything] consciously.”
- Confirmed by modern research – average adult makes 33,000 – 35,000 decisions each day

# Which likes & dislikes should we struggle with?

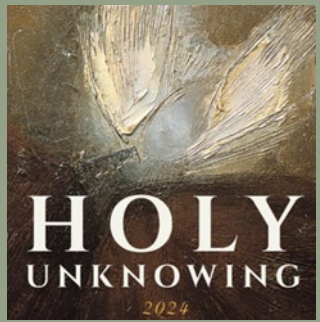


In the Sherborne talks, Mr. Bennett urges that we can work with any likes or dislikes arising when we anticipate or experience an **energetic polarity** set up in our being between a more preferred and less preferred choice.



JGB: “The transition to this polar state occurs when something **attacks our attention**, stimulates us, or we dislike something, or we have a feeling of pain or pleasure, or our curiosity or intellectual activity is stimulated. **This mechanism is really provided for the purpose of generating force. When these poles meet this force is dissipated.**”

# Work Teaching: Avoidance



## **Avoidance**

when a non-preferred choice is so strong we are completely closed to it all together and avoid at all costs.

“....some people who say ‘Ah, I don’t like so and so and I keep out of his way’.

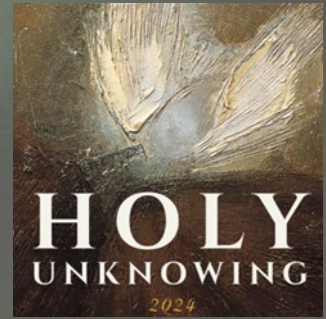
...If I really do not like him, if I really cannot stand the sight of him, what more valuable person is there for me to expose myself to in order to gain my freedom?”

*Bennett, Sherborne Talks*





# Work Teaching: Objecting



While liking and disliking are a necessity, Dr. Nicoll urges us to make efforts around all forms of objecting

“If you do a task that you do not like but you stop objecting to it, you will gain force. I remember being made to clean out a 6-year-old pig-stye and certainly I did not like it. The stench was awful. I noticed one interesting thing, that provided that I did not object to my task I did not feel inclined to vomit. I dislike the task but did not object to it.”

Commentaries, pg 734-736

Objecting creates second force in ourselves and is a form of internal considering, making accounts



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# Lab Work





**Checking Account****\$100.00**

Groceries

-\$70.00

Gym Membership Monthly Payment

-\$50.00

Gas

-\$25.00

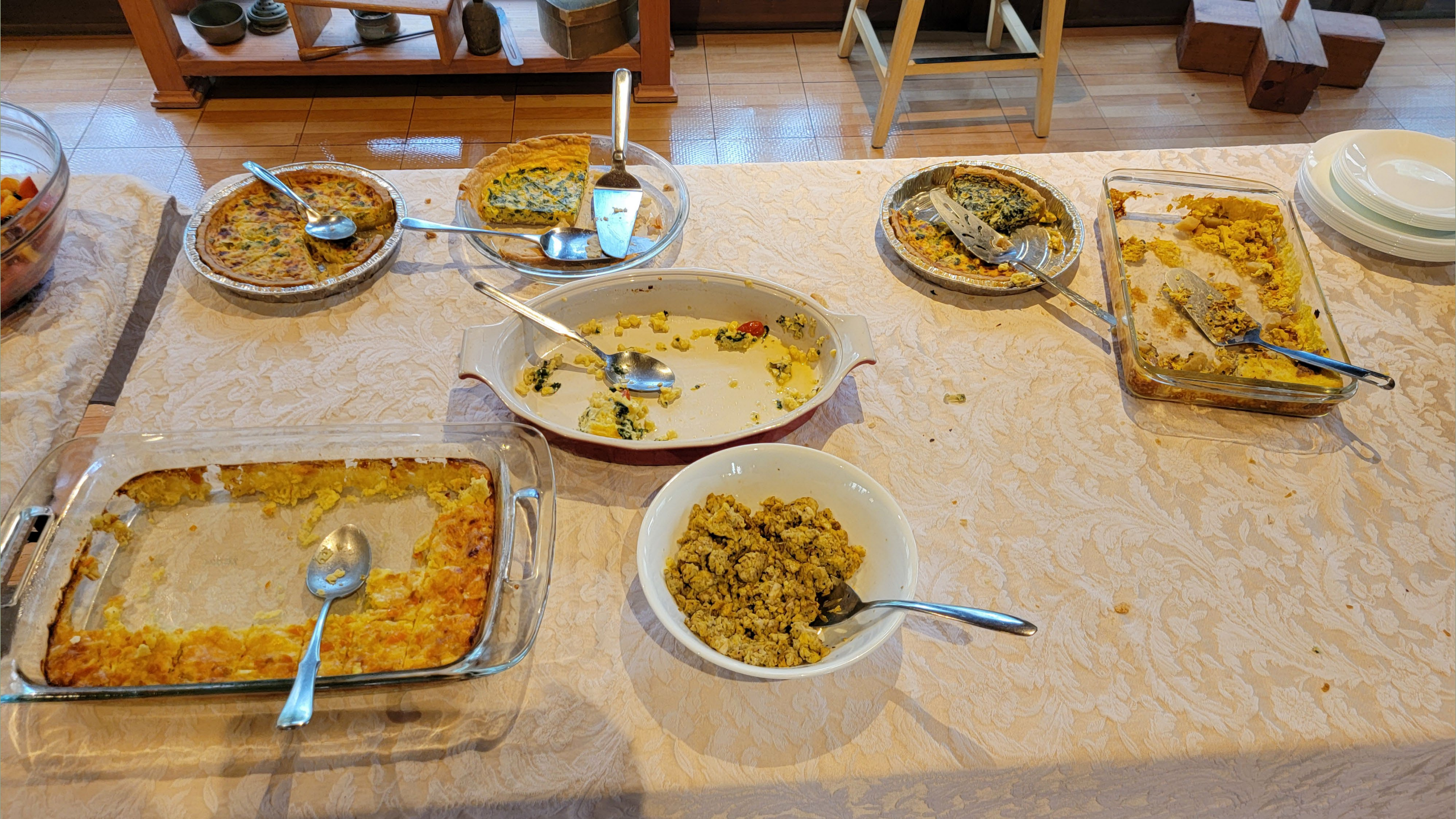
Morning Latte

-\$5.00

**OVERDRAFT FEE****\$105.00**












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# Lab Work: Sharing

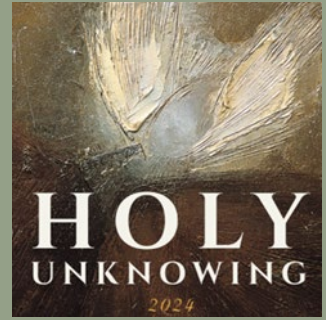


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# Tools to Support Working with Preferences



# Some Suggested Exercises



Work with the aphorism “like what it dislikes”

- Start small
- Anticipate opportunities to select against your preference – future memory

When in front of compulsive, addictive behaviors take 3 deep breaths and work toward inner separation

Service can be an antidote for being preoccupied with our preferences and desires



Tools of Devotional Sincerity from the  
Contemplative Monastic Tradition

## **The Three Vows**

Commentary from Meditations on  
the Terot

The Pope, The Lover



**Obedience**

**Poverty**

**Chastity**

# Summary

- **Preferences are necessary**, a practical mechanism for how we navigate life as householders
- **Overidentification with preferences can cause a loss of force** when our preferences are thwarted, or we miss an opportunity to hold tension in a “polar” state
- **Absolute adherence to preferences costs us our freedom**, limits possibilities and can be a form of violence we can inflict on ourselves and others
- In particular, the Work commends us to **keep watch against avoidance and objecting**
- There are many tools for working with preferences. Choose an approach and **start small**
- The **3 Vows of Western Monasticism** is a way to cultivate our willingness to surrender our preferences out of the love of God.



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