

Finding the Way to Walk

Often I find it useful to print out a spiritual sentence or phrase and post it somewhere on the wall where I can easily, and causally, see it. That helps to remind me of the message it conveys, but I also find that letting my eyes roll over the words, letting them float around in my mind in a non-intellectual manner, enables me to see something new in them that I don't see when reading the words in their full text. This has been true for a verse of Psalm 143 that I posted on the wall last week.

While the ideas in the verse immediately appealed to me, the more I've looked at it the more I've wanted to reverse the order of the second and fourth phrase. Somehow when I do that, it has much more significance for me. But I worry that by imposing my own conception I may be missing something important in the way the author worded it. My version is this:

Cause me to hear thy loving-kindness in the morning;
for I lift up my soul unto thee:
cause me to know the way wherein
I should walk;
for in thee do I trust.

—KJV Psalm 143.8

I'll have to confess I don't think much about my soul; the concept of a soul doesn't seem to be part of my spiritual beliefs. So when I come to

that line, the phrase that comes to me that seems to convey the same idea is "open my heart to thee." During this time of self-isolation, the spiritual practice I've been trying to improve is that of meditation. I've tried it before, but I've never been able to sustain it—either for a long enough time in an individual sitting or over time. However, rather than trying to empty my mind of all thoughts as I've done before, I have taken a different approach. Using the words of the psalm, I have been trying to hear God's loving-kindness by opening my heart to God and trying to feel God's presence—feel it within me and also feel that I am being held in its loving embrace.

God's loving-kindness is always present, of course. The difficulty is getting rid of all the distractions in my mind that prevent me from actually feeling it, from allowing it to permeate my being and transform my life. But consciously trying to open my heart to that presence each morning has enabled me to meditate longer and with a more positive attitude about what I'm doing.

The fact that I trust that God always leads me on the right path is why I feel more comfortable with that phrase being last. But the word that grabs my attention most is "way." "Way" can have several different meanings. It can mean path or route—which is how I take it in this context—or it can mean how to do something, a form of behavior. I've spent a good deal of my life

looking for a spiritual path to follow that will lead me into greater harmony with God. I've at least discovered that I don't want something as definitively defined as a paved sidewalk with clear directional signs. What I want is something more like a dirt path meandering through the woods with occasional side trails to lead me down paths I haven't explored before that open up new experiences and unexpected discoveries. Quakerism is as close as I've come to that, but even its loose structure is often a bit more guidance than I want.

However, as I've been contemplating this verse, it is the second meaning of "way" that has intrigued me. Maybe it's not as important which path you walk, as the way (the manner) in which you walk it. After all, there is no real destination, just a journey to be lived, and who knows? Perhaps to walk that journey with love, trust, and an open heart is itself the path, the way, to God.

John Andrew Gallery
Philadelphia, Pa.

After worshiping alone on Sunday mornings during most of 2020, the author wrote short essays to share with Friends. A collection of nine of the twenty-two reflections he wrote after these solitary meetings for worship will be published as a Pendle Hill pamphlet in June 2021.