

Day 1



Surrender - The Open Heart

Howard Thurman (1899-1981), an esteemed theologian and spiritual director to Martin Luther King, Jr. reached the point of single-hearted focus. The following excerpt from his book *Meditations of the Heart* reveals how Thurman prayed that God's will might be done in and through him: *The central element in communion with God is the act of self-surrender. The symbol of my prayer is the open heart. It is most natural for me to think of prayer in terms of the open hand. My needs are so great and often so desperate that there seems to be naught besides my own urgency. I must open my heart to God. Somehow I must make God central to me and in me, over and above the use to which I wish or need to put His energy and His power. I surrender myself to God without any conditions or reservations. I shall not bargain with God. I shall not make my surrender piecemeal but I shall lay bare the very center of me, that all of my very being shall be charged with the creative energy of God. Little by little, or vast area by vast area, my life must be transmuted in the life of God. As this happens, I come into the meaning of true freedom and the burdens that I seemed unable to bear are floated in the current of the life and love of God.*

Day 2

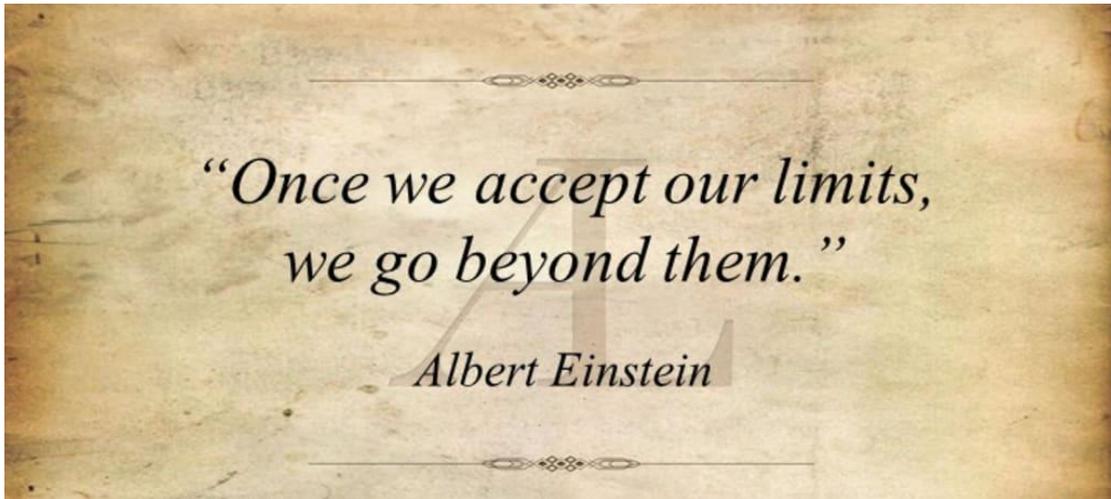


Don't Change

One of the most popular retreat masters and writers of the last century was the Indian Jesuit priest Anthony DeMello. After a lifetime of encouraging people to bring about change in their lives almost his last piece of writing seemed to contradict everything he had been saying up to then. This was what he wrote and notice how you react as you read it and the questions it awakens:

Don't change. Trying to change is the enemy of love. Don't change yourself. Accept yourself as you are. Don't change others. Accept them as they are. Don't change the world, it's in God's hands. And if you do that then change will occur, marvellously, miraculously in its own way and in its own time. Just yield to the current of life unencumbered by baggage.

Day 3



Acceptance – The key to change

Yesterday we had a quote from Anthony de Mello entitled, *Don't Change*. It's a piece of writing that expresses a profound truth while it also seems to contradict everything we have ever been taught. Surely to change ourselves, others and the world is what we are here for? Is it not our mission to make our world a better place, so how can he say, don't change?

Notice that that he uses the word 'accept' and then change will occur as part of a natural process. Acceptance rather than struggle is the key that unlocks the power to change. The more we struggle and fight with something negative the more we empower it. For example many have found that a sure way of putting on weight is to go on a diet! A diet places our focus firmly on food and so not only increases our appetite but sends a message to our body to retain what we do eat because a shortage is imminent.

Day 4



Struggle

The idea of struggle being the key to bringing about change is so deeply enshrined in our consciousness that it is difficult to consider that there may even be another way. The reality is that if my struggle to be a better person actually succeeds, then only I can take the credit. Even if I could surrender my life to God it would be I who takes the credit. The ego that seeks its own glory, and needs to ensure its survival, is never far away.

A useful analogy for struggle is of a fly that gets stuck in a spider's web. While it is caught initially by just a few threads its frantic attempts to extricate itself only results in further entanglement and eventually it becomes dinner for the spider. Raw will-power can be very egocentric whereas will-power having first surrendered to the power of the Spirit can bring us to places where will-power can never reach.

Day 5



Paradoxical Intention

Victor Frankl was a psychiatrist who survived Auschwitz and the one who first coined the phrase *paradoxical intention*. He is best known for his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. As an astute observer of human behavior he noticed that in trying to change something deemed unacceptable about ourselves, we activate an opposing energy to the extent that we end up doing the opposite of what we intend. To attempt to give up something serves to increase our desire and with increased desire we indulge even more. This principle he found useful in therapy. A child presents with a stammer difficulty; the more he tries to stop stammering, he will do so all the more. On the other hand if he or she is encouraged to stammer as much as they can the result is a lessening of anxiety and an ability to speak freely.

Day 6



Treasure in the Field

The enormity of what is happening in the world at this time is just impossible for our minds to comprehend. Even to think that one in every 100 Americans are now affected with the Corona virus is staggering. It's an event of such magnitude that it forces us to look deep within to where Jesus says we find the Kingdom of Heaven. It's the treasure that is hidden in the field of our own hearts that we are being forced to search after.

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a treasure hidden in a field that someone finds. He hides it again. Goes off happy, sees it more valuable than everything else he owns, so he sells what he has and buys the field. What is the treasure and where is the field?

The treasure is a symbol of our true selves that always lie hidden in the field of our lives behind so many layers of falsehood. The kingdom is definitely not about when we die and go to heaven. It's much more about the here and now and how to find happiness, peace and contentment in the present. Jesus and the Buddha were very similar in their teachings about this. The Buddha spoke about all suffering and unhappiness being caused by attachment to external things and that such attachments divorce us from the reality of our true selves. Jesus spoke of the man selling what he owned which is much the same thing – he let go of what he had out there in order to come into full possession of what he could only have on the inside. It boils down to the fact that happiness is an inside job and so, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven being in our hearts and never out there.

Day 7



DIET – Did I Eat That?

The principle of paradoxical intention expounded by the psychiatrist Victor Frankl forms the basis of Logo Therapy. While this has hundreds of applications one relates to attempts at losing weight and how dieting can actually serve to increase it. Many report that every time they go on a diet they end up gaining weight. With the focus fixed on food and trying to avoid it, the result is a much greater craving and the body holding onto what it does eat. This is why so many diets fail or can't be sustained long-term.

With weight issues very often there's a vulnerable part of us, perhaps from childhood, that we are trying to protect by putting on layers of fat. If we were to identify that wounded part, perhaps abused, bereaved or rejected, and accept it back into our lives we might find that the body's own metabolism and self-regulatory system does its own work to keep our weight at an acceptable level.