

Personal Integration and Integrity: A Spiritual Matter

by Jane Keiller



Jane Keiller

This talk followed on from Richard Higginson's contribution to the Wholeness at Work conference on Friday 11 April 2008.

As I read what Richard has written in his article on Integrity (page xx), I was struck by the sense that both integrity and integration require 'looking after'. Listen again to that quote from Peter Legge: 'Make sure you guard your reputation and focus on your integrity. Everything else comes out of integrity; it is the key to making your life a masterpiece.' It reminds me of a verse from Proverbs, 'Keep your heart with all vigilance for from it flow the springs of life.'¹ Guard your reputation. Keep your heart.

But how do we begin to do such a thing? How do we deal with Richard's 'saboteurs' - those things deep within all of us that would subvert or frustrate the fulfilment of our best ideals?

I heard a story this week that I think points us in the right direction. A Cherokee leader was out in the forest initiating the young members of the tribe into adulthood. In the course of the rites he told them the story of the two wolves that are always fighting in every human soul - the good wolf of peace and joy and the greedy malevolent wolf which is forever on the prowl. 'And which wolf wins?' asked one of the youngsters. The reply? 'The one you feed.'

I am going to suggest some spiritual practices through which we can seek God's help to care for that within us from

which integrity and integration flow, ways to feed the good wolf if you like. There are three sections, reflecting, praying and confessing.

1. Reflecting

It was Socrates who said that an unreflected life is not worth living. Reflecting as a way of prayer has a long history and many names e.g. the Examen or the Daily Awareness Exercise. I shall call it the Review of the Day. It is very simple and may only take a few minutes. I think it is easiest last thing at night but you can do it in the morning for the previous day if you prefer. You can if you wish do it on a weekly basis or even annually. At its simplest it involves asking two questions:

- For what moment today am I most grateful?
- For what moment today am I least grateful?

It can be supplemented with a few questions to help you focus on



Good Wolf, Bad Wolf

where there has been joy or love, hope or faith, or moments of sadness, bitterness or fear, with the invitation to give thanks or seek healing.

I suggest that the Review of the Day fosters integrity in a number of ways:

(i) At the very least it enables self-awareness.

If I stop and reflect on my day and notice the effect that different things have had on me, I will learn to recognise what upsets me; what causes frustration and anger; what I am afraid of. I will also notice what gives me life; what I am good at; what and whom I love; what has made me happy. We read frequently in



■ Examen Review of the day time to reflect ■

scripture that self-knowledge is a pre-requisite for wisdom and the one who is wise is the one who seeks righteousness – the man or woman of integrity.

(ii) It leads us to see God's presence in the day

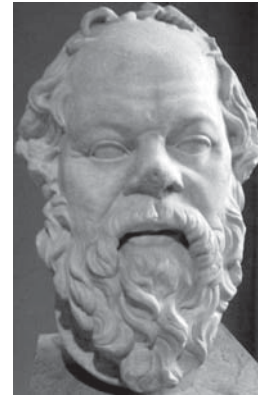
I wonder if you have ever had the experience of telling someone

what a terrible day you have had, but actually when you have stopped to think about it carefully you realise it has been a good day, marred by one unfortunate happening: a difficult conversation, losing something, a thoughtless remark. It doesn't need to be some major disaster that ruins a day. The value of taking time to reflect reminds us to look for signs of God's presence – the meeting that has gone well, the provision of food, the helpful conversation, an answer to prayer. These things may be very ordinary, but they help to set in perspective the negatives that so quickly drag us down, spoil the day and blind us to God's loving care.

(iii) But most significantly, it helps me to become more fully the person I was created to be. That seems to be particularly important in the search for integrity and an integrated life. You may say. 'Self-knowledge is all very well, but what do I

do to move from knowing I am naturally lustful or angry or whatever and becoming the faithful, peaceful person I long to be?'

It seems to me that a vital part of this is the way that the combination of knowing oneself and knowing that one is loved by God opens up the possibility of



■ Socrates ■
■ "An unreflected life is ■
■ not worth living" ■

making choices. In Deuteronomy,² just as the Israelites are poised to enter the Promised Land, God says 'I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death...Choose life.' The more I understand my own weaknesses, the more I know what brings me life, the more hope I have of choosing life on a daily basis, of feeding the good wolf.

Forgive me for being personal but perhaps a recent example of where a time of prayerful review took me may help to explain what I mean. I was reflecting on a conversation with colleagues (not here at Ridley, I hasten to add!) where I had been particularly bad-tempered. This led to a sense of the burden I was feeling about a load of administration I am carrying at the moment. But this is something I have chosen to do. Why?

Because my proneness to insecurity leads me to offer to do things that other people don't want to do. They feel grateful and I feel good! Administrative tasks also give me a sense of being in control that I find comforting.

However, when they dominate my time they sap me of life. Will I choose life or death? I am pleased to say I talked with my colleagues and together we have agreed changes that will spread the load. The jobs will still be done and I can live more fully out of the things that are life-enhancing for me.

2. Praying

So let's move on to ways in which we might open up the possibility of paying conscious attention to God in the context of the working day. There are a number of websites that offer a daily

opportunity to pray. The one that has been going longest is called *Sacred Space* and it was set up in Lent 1999 by Irish Jesuits. It is a hugely popular site available now in 22 languages. I checked it last night and evidently 624 people used it every hour during March! It gives opportunities to pause and reflect and focus on a short passage of scripture and to pray. The Church of England website offers Morning, Evening and Night Prayer in both *Book of Common Prayer* and *Common Worship* format if you want something a bit more formal (and

Anglican!) A Methodist website called *Upper Room* provides a daily devotional thought with a passage of scripture. I can't say I have much experience of online praying but preparing for this has inspired me and the site I particularly like is *rejesus*. I will definitely try and use this during my working day. All these websites are listed below and all of them could take you anything from one to fifteen minutes.

There is a long history of breaking off from work to turn to God in prayer, building on the different times that a Jew in the time of Jesus would go and pray, St Benedict structured his communities around the balance of work and prayer. We might be overwhelmed at thinking about Benedict's eight times of prayer in a day, but perhaps we could add just

one time in the middle of our work to remember that time is a gift made for work and relationship - relationship with God and others. Perhaps you could set a timer to remind yourself to stop what you are doing. Annie Dillard commenting on how fixed times of prayer shape our days says: 'How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we



Annie Dillard

are doing.²³ Taking a few moments in the middle of work is saying there is more to life than work, tasks and transactions.

Another possible way to do this is to go outside and walk even for a few minutes. Thank God for the air you breathe and the gift of life. You might use a holding cross in your pocket, or you might say the Jesus Prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me.' You might hold up in prayer your family, the people you work with, something that is causing you stress or temptation.

Confessing

Finally, confessing is crucial to enable us to address those saboteurs of the soul. When we reflect on the moment in the day for which we are least grateful, the moment we felt unfree, dishonest or fearful, then we recognise those aspects of disintegration in our life – our blind spots,

our weaknesses, our inconsistencies and downright sinfulness. Five minutes of prayer can do the same. Teresa of Avila said that on a dull day she didn't notice how dirty her windows



St. Teresa of Avila
(Peter Paul Rubens, 1610)

were! When the sun shines through we see what they really look like. If we stop what we are doing and intentionally allow the Holy Spirit into our working day it cannot help but illuminate the decisions we are making, the deals we are doing, the relationships that we have with those around us.

The fact is that we all sin. But Jesus taught that it can be confessed, it can be forgiven and sinful people can be set free. Much of his teaching and about a third of his parables are about forgiveness. Of course we all know this, we know confession is good for the soul, but oh how hard it is - to tell it like it is so that we might know the wonder of being clean. In Dag Hammarskjöld's words:

'Forgiveness is the real answer to a child's dream of a miracle by which what is broken is made whole again, what is soiled is

again made clean.'⁴ It is an invitation to 'hand over the pretence, image management, manipulation, control and self-obsession... We lay down our ability to change by the power of the self. We turn to Jesus and seek forgiveness.'⁵ We may resist but it's really very simple.

How might we go about it?

■ Ask some of your family and close friends to help you see your blind spots. Ask questions like, What do I do that hurts you? What is it like to be with me? Let their answers guide you in a time of confession.

■ Imagine the kind of person you would like to become in your old age. Then look at your life and assess whether or not the way you live now is preparing you to become that person. Confess where you need to change.

■ Use Psalm 32 or 51 as a way to bring your sin before God.



Dag Hammarskjöld

To finish I am going to turn back to Psalm 26.

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me; Test my heart and mind.

...and turn it into a prayer for us all

O Lord have mercy on us for those times where our integrity has been compromised, when distraction and fear has dissipated your peace in us, when we hide from your presence.

Show us even now how much you care for us. May we keep your steadfast love ever before our eyes that we may walk always in faithfulness to you. ■

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Website addresses:

www.sacredspace.ie

www.cofe.anglican.org/worship/dailyprayer

www.upperroom.org/daily/

www.rejesus.co.uk/spirituality/daily_prayer

Notes

¹ Proverbs 4.23

² Deuteronomy 30.19

³ Dillard, A. (1989) *The Writing Life*, Harper & Row, especially chapter 2

⁴ Hammarskjöld, D. (1964) *Markings*, Faber & Faber, p.110.

⁵ Calhoun, A.A. (2005), *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, IVP, p.92.