UPWARD BOUND JOURNAL
SPIRITUAL LESSONS FOR YOUR PERSONAL GROWTH

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Whatever is Sacred

How are you coping with all the chaotic circumstances going on in the world today? Individual ISIS terrorist attacks have sprung up in New York, Paris, London and even right here in Orlando, creating an atmosphere of fear and anger - which is exactly what they want. Our own racial relations, especially between African Americans and our police departments, are exacerbated on both sides by defiance on one and shooting without thinking about the consequences on the other. One shooting after another. The anger and fear grows and the divide is widened.

There also seems to be a very common fear of anything or anyone Muslim. Some people have even suggested internment camps similar to the terrible example we set in World War II with the Japanese. As a nation our consciousness appears to have fallen into a dark pit. Hard line attitudes on illegal immigration have made it nearly impossible to even discuss that problem in a mutually beneficial manner. The political and religious divide shows no signs of coming together, and the Presidential race has become a debacle.

And yet, even with all of this, for the vast majority of us life goes on and is perfectly normal. We go to work, stop for gas, eat out with friends and colleagues, putter around the garden or pursue our hobbies like we always have done and continue to do. We plan vacations and send our children off to college.

Are we coping or have we learned to put the world's problems on ignore?

I suspect it's a lot of both. I, for one, limit the amount of time I spend watching or listening to the news. Enough to keep informed; not so much to get brain-washed into the fear and anger mind-set. Anger and fear have a way of lingering for years in the subconscious, warping the minds of otherwise peace-loving dads, moms and children.

It's too bad we don't have an automatic re-set switch. Push the button and everything goes blank for a second or two; and then smiles, laughter, peace of mind and a fresh batch of cookies for the new neighbor across the street light up our countenance once again.
And it's a beautiful day and everything is right with our world. Maybe we could all just reach back in time and start singing "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah, Zip-A-Dee-Ay,
My, oh my what a wonderful day!
Plenty of sunshine heading my way,
Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay.

Mister Bluebird on my shoulder,
It's the truth, it's actch'll,
Ev'rything is satisfactch'll.
Zip-a-dee-doo-dah, zip-a-dee-ay
Wonderful feeling, feeling this way!"

For anyone born before 1946, slipping back in our memories and singing that song once again could make today a lot more fun. We can't be angry or fearful with those words flowing out of our mouths. For us it's rather like we've gone to a sacred place and found a sacred moment. It is a Wonderful feeling, feeling this way!

And here-in lies something many people consider an absolute necessity. The best way to deal with the issues of anger and fear is to center the mind, through some form of prayer, reconnecting with our Divine source. Giving attention to the qualities of peace and harmony as the foundation of our personal consciousness. One of the best ways we can do that is to turn our attention back to that which is sacred, and maintaining that sacredness for sanity's sake if for nothing else.

In an article written by Patrick O'Neil, he said, "There is something innate to human nature, something basic to our civilized sensibility that recognizes certain distinctions of real value. And the name we have traditionally given to the highest of these is “the holy” or “the sacred.”

The wonderful thing about that which is sacred is that it can be a place, an attitude or even an event. Like this one... #

The families of Jennifer and Terry set their shoes aside and walked barefoot onto the sandy Florida beach shortly before sunset,
to witness and bless their marriage. The ceremony was simple as they exchanged prayers, vows and rings. But before they sealed their vows with a kiss, they added a sand mixing aspect to their ceremony.

A generous hand full of beach sand, with tiny bits of sea shells and grasses all mixed together formed the base in a clear crystal vase. The beach sand represented the sacred ground on which their wedding took place; the junction of earth, sea and sky. The bride and groom had collected their own samplings of sand, rich with colors of mementos from each of their lives, from flower petals to drift wood and twigs and even colorful small rocks. Each of their samples represented not only special memories of their individual lives, each grain also represented one of the generations of family history that had preceded them. It was their sacred past, and together now they began to pour their sand mix on top of the base. As they did, every aspect of their families histories began to blend together.

The words that were spoken, "Now what God has joined together, let no man tear apart," became an obvious metaphor. For the sand they had mixed together could never be separated back to their individual hands full. The two had become one. And with that the sacred service was complete. Picture taking on the edge of the beach as the sun set behind them recorded the event and was the icing on the cake.

The gathered families had all witnessed and taken part in a sacred act of marriage, and left with the strong belief that this one would last forever.

In my years as minister at Unity of Naples, I had the privilege of officiating well over a hundred beach weddings up and down the Florida coast. After a while I began to see all those sandy areas as sacred ground, knowing that all the wedding ceremonies, the engagement proposals, and the joy filled family gatherings up and down those sandy shores retained the sacred energies long after the people had returned to their homes. No wonder it felt so good to walk along the water's edge.

That which is sacred can be an unmarked place just as surely as a monumental edifice like a giant cathedral.

How do you treat that which is sacred?

The beach wedding was a sacred ceremony; the spot where it
took place became a sacred place and the sand mixing was a sacred blending of past, present and future.

But the big question, 'what do you consider to be sacred?' is a bit more complex and requires study and contemplation.

The Bible is often referred to as the Sacred Text, and it is, and there is much within those pages for us to study and understand.

The 5,000 year old story of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation, in the early chapters of Genesis, begins with an event; God speaks to Abraham and tells him that He will make of Abraham and his family a great nation and through him, all the peoples of the world will be blessed.

In those days the concept of God being Omnipresent (everywhere present, all the time) was not likely to be the general understanding. So Abraham took this place in the wilderness where he had his God experience, to be where God lived, and thereupon he built a stone altar.

As Abraham journeyed on, and the family that followed him, more encounters with the presence of God occurred and with them more stone altars and thus more sacred places. Later the Ark of the Covenant, the Holy of Holies, became God's dwelling place according to the Hebrews, and the sacred place traveled with them everywhere they went.

So a sacred place is where God is, or at least where God's presence is experienced. Since there is a presence of God in every ceremony of marriage, Christening, and even burial, that makes every church, synagogue, mosque, temple, and graveyard sacred places as well. Although beliefs vary, all religions consider themselves sacred. There is only one God, but many paths and religious beliefs in the way they follow God.

Jerusalem is the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity and Muslimism making it one of the most sacred places on earth. It's too bad it doesn't get the universal honor, respect, reverence, protection and preservation it so richly deserves. But, they're working on it and hopefully someday all their disagreements will be resolved.

The Presence of God is regarded as Sacred, and an act of God must be sacred as well. The creation of heaven and earth, the sky, the sea, the land and all of life itself are all sacred acts of our creator and
therefore worthy of honor, respect, reverence and preservation.

Jesus, spells it out very simply with His "greatest commandment, that you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind." That's a declaration of what is most sacred. And Jesus continues, "And the second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." By 'neighbor' Jesus is including all of human kind. All of his recorded activities were inclusive of all people, no one was ever excluded.

By His words Jesus is regarding all people as sacred, worthy of honor, respect, reverence and protection. In Luke 7, He says: "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get." Is He not saying that when we judge something as good or bad, we are denying its sacredness?

People are not the only things that are sacred. The woman with years of internal sickness sought healing from Jesus as He passed through her village. Her faith was so strong that she believed Jesus' robe would carry His healing powers, and if she could simply touch the hem of His garment she would be healed.

As strongly as she believed, she was rewarded when her hands touched the fabric. Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (Mark 6:25-34). Not only was His garment regarded as sacred, Jesus' healing was a sacred act as well.

The fact that Jesus repeated his healing activities again and again, makes one stop and wonder if all acts of healing - then as well as now, as well as those who perform healing activities, are to be regarded as sacred acts, and given the respect they deserve.

John Malloy is a man who has become very close to Native Americans and who has been teaching at-risk youth at The Foundry School in California for a number of years. Young men, boys really, who have all been incarcerated for one thing or another, are taught to turn their lives around.

John is both a Buddhist and a Native American worshiper. He says that "between the two I can’t make a bad decision because I have those on either side of me. I can’t go crooked because I have this
belief system that makes it so easy to do the right thing. The right thing is to be inclusive. The right thing is to be of service." He says, "Indigenous people believe that all life is sacred."

Can you imagine how different the world would be today if we all accepted and acted upon this one, simple yet profound truth? All life is Sacred!

So, from a practical perspective what can we do? The simple answer is to live from a place of honor and respect; with reverence, protection and preservation of all life and everything sacred. While we face many fears and frustrations, our challenge is to turn our attention to the myriad of wonderful sacred people, places and events that abound. For it is here that we will be able to lift our consciousness and replace anger with peace of mind.

And taking time apart from the hustle-bustle of life cannot be left out. We must set a time and get in a quiet space where we can sit in the silence, breathing deeply and focusing our attention in prayerful contemplation. Gratitude is what comes to mind, because when we begin to realize all the blessings that come our way, we are at last cradled in the presence of our Creator.

We need to put God first, respect that which is sacred, live honestly and honorably, avoid hurting another person or animal as much as is humanly possible, and pray. Jesus said it best, "Love the Lord your God with all you heart, with all your soul and with all your mind - and love your neighbor as yourself."

That's what honoring whatever is sacred is all about.

And so it is.

Art & Dottie Holt
Matthew 21:22 NRSV
“Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.”

My Sacred Place -

When I go into a place to pray and meditate I create a sacred space. My words become sacred and I affirm,

“The Light of God surrounds me,  
The Love of God enfolds me,  
The Power of God protects me, and  
The Presence of God watches over me.

Wherever I am, God is . . .  
and all is well.”
Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Ephesians 4:29 NLT
Deep in tropical jungles many varieties of orchids grow, some never seen by human eye. To me that indicates that God creates beauty for beauty itself. Luckily this orchid was on display in the Naples Botanical Gardens that we were fortunate enough to visit and photograph earlier this year.

Orchids always inspire me, not only with their remarkable beauty, but in the simple fact that their blooms last for months at a time. And thanks to the science of photography, the image we recorded here will last way beyond my lifetime, allowing me to share my appreciation for these Divinely created blooms with my grandchildren and perhaps even their grandchildren.

But for now this one is just for you to enjoy.
Take a few moments to sit quietly and allow yourself to be in a state of reflection and meditation. Breathe deeply and slowly as you begin to relax. Let the words that follow be your own words. Feel the freedom of Spirit assisting you to release and let go of any tensions, stress, or concerns. Relax and be at peace.

MY LIFE IS A VESSEL FOR GOD'S LIGHT

Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

I turn now to that quiet place within where I am one with God. In this place of stillness, I let go and let God.

I quiet my body...

I still my mind...

I surrender my spirit, soul, and body, Lord, that I may be filled with a growing awareness of Your Presence in my life, this day and every day. There is nothing greater that I can be or do with my life than to know Your Presence.

I release and let go all conscious thought, and enter into the secret place of the most high. My mind is a vessel filled with a multitude of thoughts that distract and so I picture that same vessel in my imagination, filled with thoughts bubbling over, and I simply lift the vessel, tilt it over, and pour the contents harmlessly into space.

As I set the vessel back down, I look inside and see
only one thing. I see a radiant light, without definition or dimension, gently filling the entire surroundings of the vessel with peace and tranquility; an amber light radiating directly from the source, the One Source; and I let that warm and radiant light in-fill me until the light and I are one. My entire consciousness is now centered on the sacred light, and my thoughts, at last, are still. I am calm and serene.

I rest momentarily in the quiet of this still and secret place, my only thought an image of a glowing amber light filling me and bringing me a great sense of peace. In the stillness, for just a moment now, I rest.

I am one with the silence.

# 

As my thoughts begin to stir once again I realize, You are the light, Lord, the light that fills me, lifts me, heals me, and guides me in all that I do.

Thank you for this moment in the silence where I am free from everything but the awareness of your presence deep within. You are the light of the world, both visible and invisible, everywhere present, filling my life with your love.

Thank you, God I am truly filled with joy and thanksgiving.

And, so it is!

Amen.
Our thoughts and words are very important. Our words impact our lives in meaningful ways. This time our word(s) is:

The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments were given to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:2-17). The Commandments are simple enough to understand and following them does not require any superhuman strength, but we have broken every one of them and still break them today.

They are briefly:
1. **No other God's before me.** - Simple: Put God first.
2. **Make no graven images.** - Don't worship anything other than God.
3. **Do not take the Lord's name in vain.** - Leave God out of your cursing; better yet don’t curse.
4. **Remember the Sabbath.** - A day a week is Holy; keep it that way.
5. **Honor your father and mother.** - Get through your teen-age rebellion with respect for your parents.
6. **You shall not kill.** - Ooops! That means nothing, no one and no- exceptions.
7. **Do not commit adultery.** - Marriage is a commitment. Stay true to yours, Stay out of others.
8. **You shall not steal.** - Keep your hands in your own pockets.
9. **You shall not bear false witness.** - Tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
10. **Do not covet your neighbor's house, wife, servant, etc.** - What's theirs is theirs, what's yours is yours. Keep it that way.

Jesus made the Commandments simple: "Love the Lord your God with all you heart, with all your soul and with all your mind - and love your neighbor as yourself."

Loving God, neighbor and self equally sure eliminates swearing, stealing, lying, killing and disrespect in one fell swoop - and, it’s a whole lot easier to remember. And perhaps that just may be the ones we can actually keep.
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