

Week 14 - 4th Quadrant Practice - Bringing Curiosity to our Closed Minds

"To be conscious that you are ignorant is a great step to knowledge." Benjamin Disraeli

Can you hear in this quote what is being said in terms of the witness who knows self to be the whole mountain bringing awareness of ignorance at lower levels of the mountain - being the Sherpa who comes back and encourages the next step of the great adventure?

One of our greatest defenses against feeling the vulnerability of our small and confined minds is to pretend we "know it all." This is particularly dangerous when we have indeed learned a great deal and spent time and effort getting advanced degrees. It is so very convincing to think "we know," something, when the truth is that we know one small aspect and one particular level of knowing. And on deeper and deeper investigation we will find that what we once knew now seems elementary and even "wrong." Being an investigator and scientist of our own consciousness is a very important attitude to have about every word we utter, every thought we have, everything we have ever learned, the meaning of every word we use so automatically.

When we are talking about having an openness to growth, we are talking about adopting an attitude of moving towards greater and greater awareness and self-acceptance of being a small and ignorant creature, who desires to know like God and so works very hard at being a student of everything in the Universe which can only be found within oneself. The actual universe is just a mirror image of the inner Universe. This striving starts with a deep desire and conscious effort to become aware of what one thinks, values, believes, feels and needs as well as the connections between these energies of self.

So, the first thing to be open to noticing is how often we say, "I know," or "I understand," instead of "help me to know," or "I want to understand more deeply." Without shame, judgement and self-recrimination for not knowing something.

We can recognize an openness to growth in the language people use - so start noticing these specifics in yourself. If you do, you will automatically be aware of it in others.

- respond in some depth about the ways in which they have learned from past experience with humility, grace and humor
- genuinely wrestle with problems, issues and feelings until they are understood fully - where they originate, how they are being activated and what the habitual responses have been in the past
- if they have a mountain top experience instead of a dark valley experience, they equally are curious about how this occurred and are willing to examine deeply the inner mechanisms of the psyche
- able to name specifically, not in generalities, what their spiritual practices are and how they have changed over time. They can name emotional, intellectual and behavioral practices and see how it is connected to the larger goal of growth in awareness and spirit
- express commitment to striving towards wholeness, health, wisdom, compassion, creative expression of innate potential rather than toward perfection as measured by wealth, achievement, education, status, physical appearance, etc.

"Happy is the person who finds wisdom, And the person who obtains understanding. For this merchandise is better than silver, and the gain is better than fine gold." Proverbs 3: 13-14

- talk about "being on a journey or path"

- take risks, talk about risks taken that have increased inner qualities of courage and given greater awareness
- ask questions with genuine curiosity, owning if they do not know or do not understand something
- speak about God as deepening relationship and intimacy
- in the same way have a genuine interest in others seeking deepening relationship and intimacy
- help others feel at ease on their journey, welcoming questions and shared exploration of meaning and understanding
- are okay with making mistakes, welcome making mistakes and can get excited about what they can learn from mistakes in relationships
- are okay and accepting of others making mistakes in relationships
- fully participate in the joint process of relationship without hiding and pretending but being vulnerable and real so as to learn
- questions the meaning of the Universe, God, existence, self, life without just accepting the current and commonly understood teachings of the time. Is never satisfied with the answers and always has more questions
- examines every word, meaning of the word, conventional wisdom of the time, habitual usage of language

"The finest quality in a person is that they should be an explorer, a person of questions... Wisdom that is not questioned is like a buried treasure from which nothing can be taken." Solomon ibn Gabirol

On the other hand, what does it look like to be closed to growth and fiercely protective of limited intellectual knowledge and defenses (ego)?

"Those who do not grow, grow smaller." ~Hillel the Elder, Pirke Avot

Being closed to growth and learning refers to an attitude of defensiveness about, rather than openness to, becoming more self-aware. Being closed to growth is an attitude of hiding who one really is, never revealing vulnerability and protecting self against the experience of shame. There is a tendency to minimize or exaggerate failures and accomplishments and hide problems and feelings to create a favorable, but false impression of self to others.

It can be recognized by:

- a lack of awareness and an inability to respond to questions with any depth of self-understanding or emotion. There is a lack of awareness and little clarity about beliefs, feelings, needs, values, likes or wants or experience
- giving pat answers without due reflection or thought
- express irritation, anxiety, argumentativeness and defensiveness to new ideas or ideas different to their own
- use "yes but," a great deal in discourse
- an inability to listen attentively to self or other - interrupting, deflecting, changing the subject...
- body language is incongruent to what is said
- a self-righteous attitude of knowing "better, or more"
- seeing self as unable to change, and others being unable to change. Say things like, "that's just the way I am," or "they didn't have resources to grow back then," or "you can't teach an old dog new tricks," "I don't think I could do that" etc.
- unchanging and rigid ideas about people and relating to people and God
- find feedback, challenge, questions, interpretations or other people's feelings as threatening and to be avoided. Feedback is met with defensiveness
- an inability to understand self-reflection as a function of growth
- an inability to accept where another is on their journey

"If two people discover each other's blindness, it is already growing light". ~Noah be Shea

"People are only wise while they are searching for wisdom; when they feel they have achieved it completely, they are fools." ~ Solomon ibn Gabirol

EXERCISE:

Start observing yourself closely - bring your curiosity to every level of the mountain experience and start adding your own specific observations to the list of self-knowledge. Bring your fully accepting, humble and grace-filled self that is always wanting expansion, to all the ways in which you are still closed to growth and are constricted.