

SPIRITUALITY

III

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A friend asked me if one can attain a sense of serenity through intellectual means alone.

“Yes and no,” I replied.

“What do you mean?”

“It isn’t unusual to experience exhilaration when completing a difficult intellectual task like a successful experiment, finishing a painting, or solving a highly involved mathematical equation. A sense of serenity may indeed accompany such an experience. As a rule, though, it’s transitory.”

“Why? Wouldn’t exhilaration produce an occurrence of transcendence? Didn’t you write in your first blog on spirituality that transcendence induces an awareness that exceeds the limits of knowledge and comprehension. As a consequence, you said, a state of serenity would ensue. Isn’t that, after all, a form of spirituality?”

“Yes, it is. Actually, I think that serenity is a state, a static experience, while spirituality is a process. But because an intellectually induced serenity is devoid of emotion it is short lived, leaving behind only its memory.”

“As opposed to an emotional base?”

“Precisely.”

“But I don’t get it. I have a friend who appears tranquil, almost other-worldly, for long periods, whenever he achieves major breakthroughs in his chemical experiments.”

“No doubt. But generally it doesn’t persist as it’s likely to do in those who possess a deep faith.”

“Does it have to be belief in God?” he asked.

“Not necessarily. In the vast majority it is. Remember, faith, one of our most powerful emotions, is cemented to our core center, hardly ever shaken. It enables the individual to withstand extreme stress, even the threat of death. The sense of equanimity that it engenders is constant, fortifying, permeating the individual’s entire being. Amazingly, one can nearly always discern it in the eyes of the true faithful. Serenity, when it’s the result of intellectual activity alone, in contrast, is

easily upended because it's vulnerable to any perturbation, worry, or distress, disrupted by even a hint of doubt.

“Why is that?”

“I think that spirituality, as well as its product, serenity, is a function of integrated components of intellectual and emotional factors coalesced into a unified conclusion. Although faith is a powerful emotion, rational insights play a significant role in the process of acquiring an enduring belief system. Such a person could no more survive without his faith than without his heart. Irrespective how grievous a situation may arise that person's faith cannot be disrupted.”

“Why is it so powerful?”

“That's a good question. I believe it's the certainty provided by faith that one's existence, both in this world and in the next, will turn out to be exactly as his faith had predicated. And that he had lived a life that was rational and full of meaning.”