

Ambivalence toward God

An angel recently told a person what to pray for me. It scared the blazes right out of her! We often think we would like to hear from God on certain matters. Nevertheless, when we do hear, our reaction is not always what we anticipate. We think we will follow wherever he calls us with great joy. It is not necessarily so. The wandering Jews learned this at Sinai.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." (Exodus 20:18-19)

Just like we can be ambivalent about our earthly parent's wishes for us, we can feel conflict within our souls about the promptings of God. Not only can God tell us things to do that are difficult, we often find that our trusted *modus operandi* protests being disturbed.

Harriet was a woman who grew up in a catholic family and learned from an early age to do for others. She learned it so well, in fact, that she had never learned to say "No!" to a request. As you might imagine, this led her to a place of mental and physical exhaustion. She had so given over her will to the service of the whims of those around her that her body had become quite exhausted. She was unable to do even for herself much of the time. Yet she often tried to push through her fatigue when anyone complained about her not doing something. This was much to her continued detriment.

Through prayer and active imagination we sought to understand the source of this self-destructive pattern. Gradually Harriet began to distinguish the Spirit and Light of God inside herself from the harsh, inner guilt-provoking demands that drove her to compulsively comply with those around her. She began to realize that her guilt-ridden "Yes-saying" was essentially her preferring other peoples' wishes to God's call to time with Him. She exhausted herself with duty-doing and left no time in her schedule for quiet and the Rest of God. It was frightening at first to try to relinquish her old ways of doing things. It felt as if she was giving up being "good" to be "selfish". That is at least what the old guilt-producing part of her said.

Harriet, however, began making more space in her life for God. She realized that she was not doing evil when she refused a request in order to make time for God and rest. She understood instead that it was a giving up the "good" of helping others for the "best" of following the Wisdom and Spirit of the living God. This set her free but required persistent struggle in order to retrain her thoughts to conform to God's higher Wisdom.

What has God asked you to do that has been hard? What have you done with the resulting ambivalence? What have you had to let go of as a result of His call? Have you finished the grieving that is required in such a change? Often we need a spiritual friend to walk with us through this kind of experience. It is nearly impossible to do it alone. This is true even though we know at our better moments that the change God is asking of us is for our own good. I, for one, have found the Christian discipline of confession to be exceedingly helpful when my soul balks at giving up an attachment required for following God.

It is easy to suggest that we Westerners need to adjust our sights on the busyness of our schedules and make time for God. The hard part comes in stopping our ordinary world so we can get off of it. Yet this is just the type of holy silence we are called to. Such a call can stir our ambivalence. Part of us often does not want to stop its attention to everyday affairs. We might even feel odd or guilty doing it like Harriet did. At times we might even find ourselves fearful and wanting to pull away. We say, like the Israelites, "Let the holy men like Moses do the listening to God. Then he can tell what God says. That mysticism stuff and listening to God personally surely couldn't be for the likes of me!"

How are you doing with your seeking God? Are there blocks? A director and the Spirit of the living God, working together, may be able to help.

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