

Most of us hold the idea that our environment has just about everything to do with our life, our attitudes, and our accomplishments. So, our entire interest is often centered in the work of interaction; thus, when we find ourselves feeling upset or depressed, when we experience inharmony of mind or body, when we have difficulty getting along with people or in achieving success in a given field, we unquestioningly assume that the cause most assuredly lies in our environment. We put the blame, for instance, on others who do not like us or who are trying to get the best of us, or on so-called situations beyond our control, or on unlucky breaks, or even on the will of God. We often go off fighting figurative windmills like Don Quixote, leading to a kind of paranoia, a persecution complex.

Life, however, is not a relentless unfoldment of fate or the crossroads of chance; life is lived from within out. Shakespeare said, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in the stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings." It is true that the experience is there, the challenges, the crises, the difficult persons, but though the incident is external, the reaction is our own. As long as the problem is on the outside it can be handled; when it gets under our skin, then it becomes our problem to the extent that we can no longer blame other people or things or changing times for the problem is within us.

One of the great prescriptions for challenge is the Biblical statement, "He that is within me is greater than he that is within the world." Life is change, and changes bring challenges to test your mettle, but a challenge is negative only if you are able to be harassed by it; otherwise, it is but an opportunity to draw upon your resources. If you have a good, full bank account and your credit is good, to meet some financial need is a challenge but not a tragedy. This is an orderly, spiritual universe and each of us is a vital part of it, so we cannot experience any challenge beyond our innate ability to solve it. For every challenge, there is a corresponding means for its solution, and it is right within us.

Now, the important thing is to believe it. You may have to dig deeper. You may have to grow as a person, but this is what life is all about. Life is lived from inside out, and there is always more in us. This is what we must come to realize. Jesus said, "Judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment." How easy it is to proclaim that this or that is terrible, disastrous, the living end, which it very well can be if you take it that way. It might on the other hand be the beginning. The loss of a job can be the open door to new opportunities, to new horizons, to a different career, or it can be tragic and the end of your career. A woman who had been struck by an auto had to spend eleven months in the hospital. During this enforced idleness she wrote a book and thereby launched an entirely new career.

Here is a beneficial affirmation, "I do not resist change, but I adapt myself to the law of good." If man is a spiritual being, living in a spiritual world, governed and sustained by spiritual law, then, as Paul says, "It is not yet manifest what man shall be." It is true for all of us. We are not through yet. We cannot state that this is the end, the summation is all in. We are ever in the process of unfoldment, and so every experience that happens along in actuality challenges us to draw upon our greater resources, which in turn are drawing upon the larger pattern of our lives. Man has the ability to be master of his fate, but he rarely uses it. If you are a spiritual being, this is something to live up to; you must act the part, assert your mastery, stand up to life and its challenges.

Every challenging experience has a prologue, sometimes a merely fleeting instant when it exists in embryo form. At such a time it is possible to affirm; when a symptom first is felt, when fear of failure comes over you, when despair of self-doubt casts its shadow and seems to say "No", you can actually stand in its face and know that you are the master. When facing some challenge in your life, if it is

insurmountable, or perhaps a fear-thought rears its ugly head, you can say "No, I refuse to accept this." This is probably what is indicated in Jesus's wilderness confrontation with his own temptations, when he pointed to the read and said, "Get thee behind me."

We want to remember that experiences of life do not have identity of their own; nothing comes labeled "Good" or "Bad." Shakespeare said, "There is nothing either good or ill, but thinking makes it so." Experiences become to us what we see them as being; we stamp them good or bad. There are those who say that life is made up of the good and the bad, the bitter and the sweet, and "into each life some rain must fall," but this is not the entire picture. You live in a world of your own thinking, and you can make a plus out of every minus and a minus out of very plus.

Here is a simple technique: Draw a black line across the middle of the page on a little pad. Put a little plus sign above the line at the top, and a minus sign below the line at the bottom. Use this form and have it printed on a memo pad for notes and appointments and general reminders. Challenge yourself to form an instant decision, "Do I see this incident, duty, or appointment as a good or a bad thing, as a positive or a negative situation?" Be honest, and put the negative notations below the line and the positive notations above the line. Such a device as this memo pad actually will give you a perspective of your own thinking, if you are candid. Then, when you have examined the negative connotations of the situation you can try to challenge yourself to convert them into something positive. This is the use of the "power of the plus", mentally stamping things with the plus sign. No matter what they are, poor reports, bad news, rumors, newspaper headlines, whatever they are, give things some kind of plus treatment. When faced with things that forbode trouble, make the sign of the plus meaning, "I will see the good in this; I will act from the power within, rather than to react to the situation as it appears."

As Paul says, "Stir up the gifts of God that are within you." Through the day, remember to keep stirring up the God-qualities of love and enthusiasm. This is another fine technique--when you are in the midst of conflicts and when it seems that you are being pushed around, just remember as Jesus said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you." Far from being a platitude, this is an amazingly effective technique. Resisting or resenting another shuts off the flow of the one hope of peace and harmony; you poison your system and blind your vision at the same time. If you keep on and on getting hurt and resenting it, all this bottled up emotion must express itself in some way or other. It has been said that arthritis is simply bottled up hurt.

"Love, that you may be sons of your Father," said Jesus. Love, that you may sustain the flow of infinite power through you. Know that you are a channel for the expression of the infinite love of God. There is always enough to go around. Do not think about your difficulties, keep bringing your thoughts back to your inner power, your God-self. When time hangs heavy on your hands, when your tasks have settled down to dull routine, then this is the time to stir up enthusiasm, to get into the spirit of life. We use this statement, "I am alive, alert, awake, joyous, enthusiastic about the possibilities of this day." This will help ready us for any challenges we may face.