Eric Butterworth Speaks

Essay #23
LIVING WITHOUT STRAIN

There is no such thing as a choiceless life. We always have a choice. We can live and work in strain and anxiety, under pressure and with conflict, or we can live completely without strain, relaxed, loving, non-resistant and free.

Most of life's tensions and pressures are closely related to man's false attitudes about the price of existence. He believes that he must strive and sweat in a struggle to wear himself out in the effort to earn his daily bread. This erroneous concept probably originated in the Old Testament allegory of Adam and Even in the Garden of Eden, sent out into the world and forced to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, so to speak. Life in the Garden of Eden symbolizes the miracle-working activity of Spirit which works for us even when we appear not to be working. It is man working in unity with substance and life and intelligence. It is the consciousness, "The Father worketh until now and I work." I work without stress or strain because I work with God, and I am in tune.

Life outside of the Garden symbolically stands for man out of the realization of the activity of God, making his own way by his own devices. It is life without meaning, work without purpose. When man, using the language of the Edenic story, "eats of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," he makes a duality out of life and living; he sets as his goal in life working for good things and fighting off evil conditions. He struggles and strives for prosperity, and he makes war on poverty. In the end he is trying to regulate the tides by will power, to sweep back the dawn with a broom.

The Knowledge of Truth that is symbolized here is not the freedom to do what you want, but rather the privelege to become what you must. It is not sitting in the lap of luxury but accepting the responsibility to work and grow, and as the poet says, "to open out a way whence the imprisoned splendor may escape." Man has simply misread the Eden tale. He has thought of work as the curse of life. Work is neutral; it is simply an opportunity to grow. While we have been concerned with making a living in our job, we should have been thinking of making a life. The job you hold, whatever it is, is simply a good opportunity to grow.

In our desire to escape from our "sweat of brow" condition of life, we have invented machines to do the work for us, and we have thought that those machines would relieve us of strain. Instead, we find ourselves enslaved to the machines, and thus we continue to experience the strain of success in this and in many other ways. For the strain is not the physical load, but it is rather the mental attitudes, the mental baggage. The strain of life comes not from the work we do but from the feelings we hold about our work while we do it. Strain is not the result of the responsibilities we have shouldered, but of the sense of competition, the feelings of inferiority, the resistance to change and the resentment we feel toward those who have fewer responsibilities and more advantages.

You can live without strain and pressure, and this will not entail moving away from your community or getting out of your duties, changing to another job more conducive as far as you are concerned--it will involve nothing but changing your attitude. In achieving life and success without strain we must streamline ourselves, strip ourselves of the things which, like projections on a speeding vehicle, cause resistance. Get rid of feelings of inferiority or unworthiness; get rid of your attitudes of limitation concerning opportunities you may have missed or the lack of opportunities in your life today. Get rid of the thought that troubles can keep you from your good. Get a new insight about troubles or problems.

The word "problem" has dark meanings; it is defined as "a perplexing question, situation, or person, a matter involving difficulty in solving, settling or handling." When we think of world or personal problems, we identify them with difficulty in solving, settling, or handling. A better word might be "project." Every seeming problem or difficulty is simply an opportunity in which to project or exter-

nalize the spiritual idea. The word "project" connotes a positive endeavor of research or development. We tackle the project of landing a man on the moon with vigor and imagination and with the conviction that it will take place. But, we deal with the problems of war and poverty as if we were going through the motions for situations that are hopeless.

What kind of projects do you have in your life? Get into the consciousness that life is growth. Know that the purpose of all experiences is to aid growth. The purpose of all work is not so much to earn a living as it is to learn a living. Thus, the more and greater the difficulties, the more exciting and rewarding the project. Get rid of the thought of competition, that life is one big battle of the marketplace, running the never ending rat race. Remember that life's greatest treasures are within and not without, that they are to be unfolded and released rather than arduously and furiously fought for and reached for. When we get rid of the feeling of competition, we find a new energy in our life, and we discover that it is not necessary constantly to fight off people, only rather to love people. We find a unity with people and with situations creating a continuity of healthy, fulfilling, and successful experiences devoid of any conscious strain.

How important is a right attitude toward money? We want to view money as an important symbol of lavish substance, a tangible reminder, a currency of an energy that is omnipresent. We want to see money as good and as positive; we want to bless and give thanks for money, both when we receive it and when we expend it. One of our problems is that we get too wrapped up in the pressure to have things. The American Dream has become in large part a nightmare of striving for cars, houses, vacations, electrical appliances, and the advertising that triggers the burning desire to have these things. There is nothing inherently wrong with these things. They are all creative expressions of God-ideas.

However, Jesus says, "Take no thought what ye shall eat and drink and what ye shall wear, but seek first the Kingdom and all these things shall be added to you." This means to get back to the Edenic state where you know your unity with the Infinite, where you know that life is an unfolding experience and that when the consciousness is ready the experience unfolds. Note that Jesus asks us to seek first the Kingdom, not first the store of wealth. Much of the strain that accompanies so-called successful living has to do with the indebtedness that is unwisely incurred. It seems to me that the military principle of keeping units in reserve is a wise one. Not that we should make a fetish of being over-insured or go in for inordinate savings, but that we tone our lives down a bit so that we do not live completely at the circumference. Leave the table a little hungry; stop your recreation before it begins to bore you. Deny yourself some luxury even if you can afford it. Do these things not so much out of a sense of frugality, but simply to free yourself from that strained feeling of not being able to let down for a minute lest the entire house of cards falls down.

In the scriptures we are told, "They that wait for the Lord shall inherit the land; they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Waiting here used does not mean folding your hands and looking for the spirit to move you; this would be procrastination. Rather, it means to integrate yourself with the power and potential of your spiritual nature. The very word "wait" comes from the Hebrew "qavah" which means to "bind together." Actually then, "wait on the lord" refers to a kind of spiritual unity where you realize your relationship with the Infinite.

This is the key to living without strain...wait on the Lord, get yourself spiritually integrated, realize your spiritual oneness with God, with the creative process. Practice God's presence, not His absence. Remember, that you are the self-livingness of God, that His wisdom inspires you, His strength sustains you, His substance prospers you. Get this into your consciousness, and you can choose to live without strain.