

Process and Humanistic Spirituality

by Rev. Arthur W. Chang

The way up and the way down are one and the same - Heraclitus

There is no sin but a mistake, and no punishment but a consequence - Emerson

The wise man does not seek culprits, he seeks solutions - Lao Tzu

Good and evil mutually arise and no one is responsible - the Doctrine of Mutual Arising, Zen Buddhism

Do you remember John Wooden, UCLA's great basketball coach? It is well known that one of the great lessons he taught his amazing college teams was that they were not to get too high when they won nor too low when they lost. In effect, John was teaching his teams the Middle Way that had been taught and practiced by the enlightened Buddha, as well as the Greeks in their ancient myth of Daedalus and Icarus. Equanimity is the antidote for the ups and downs of daily life and it is also the way of Process and Humanistic Spirituality.

If we hold, as the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, that "the way up and the way down are one and the same," we might be surprised that, even in some small way, we are practicing Process and Humanistic Spirituality. Behind the "way up/way down" notion is the implication that even when things appear not to be working out, they are. In this regard, "up and down," "success and failure," or pairs of opposites, are all necessary waves of activities, a stirring of the cauldron of the cosmic soup of energy and intelligence, which is the germinating seed-activity in the process of life's creative enterprise. And life and its creativity are indeed a process.

Despite the tendency we humans have to judge a person's value in a particular situation, or his whole life or character by a single act, can anyone deny, for example, that Thomas Edison was right in thinking that his failed experiments were successes-not failures? Edison justified his conclusions by looking at each failed experiment as confirmation of a method that did not work. This attitude freed him to move on to examine other possibilities until he found what he sought. Like Edison, all people know that the "up/down" phenomenon is part of the process of their ordinary life; it comes with the territory and no one is responsible for it being so. It is simply the way things are.

In Process Spirituality, failure and success is not quite such a black and white affair. If it were, Abraham Lincoln may have seen himself as a miserable failure long before he had the slightest glimmer of success. If he did, he would have quit trying for public office after the first of his many extravagant failed

attempts and, if he did, would not be regarded a folk hero of American history today.

Lincoln, instead, proved himself anything but ordinary, for he was sustained by working at a process and not judging himself by each individual failure as is often the case of those who do not live up to their true potential, or those impatient people who are quick to engage in finger pointing and the blaming of others for their own failings.

Lincoln was saved by his process approach, a lesson that only those who develop a spiritual equanimity can readily appreciate. Good process learners, like Lincoln, learn from their failures but are not labeled by them. Lincoln's deepening wisdom stemmed from not losing sight of the principle back of success, and to the extent that he saw that the "ups and downs" of life were part of his natural process from ignorance and poverty, to education and national success, he journeyed in positive thoughts and activities until he succeeded. And if becoming one of America's great presidents is any measure of success, succeed he did.

As an egg has both yoke and albumen, so it is that the creative sphere of life has sin and redemption, mistake and corrective action, all as part of a single process of creativity. In this regard Emerson and Lao Tzu argue their appreciation of process spirituality in saying, respectively, "There is no sin but a mistake, and no punishment but a consequence," and "The wise man does not seek culprits, he seeks solutions." In other words, they hold everyone blameless. Zen Buddhism teaches the Doctrine of Mutual Arising which says, good and evil mutually arise and no one is responsible. That is the spirit of process spirituality.

It is soul-assuring to realize that in the creative process of living, the baseball batter who fails seven times out of ten is very likely headed for the Hall of Fame, or, if not that, at least a hundred-million-dollar contract: certainly enough consolation to get over not being inducted in the Hall of Fame. Similarly, a fulfilling life does not require more successes than failures, only timely successes. Like Edison, Heraclitus, Lincoln or Lao Tzu, if the mental and spiritual effort with which we engage a process is characterized by Edisonian-optimism, Lincolnian-persistence and Lao Tzuan-patience, then our intuitive nature will soon find a solid footing in consciousness to launch us into a new orbit with one quantum leap, one as great as a frog's leap to become a prince in the children's fairy tale. This is why it is not the number of successes but the kind that we get that makes the difference in achieving our desires. The secret is that process spirituality nudges us into accord with spiritual laws that produce miracles in daily life.

Teachers of spiritual laws remind us that the Law works equally well for all, thus, they echo Jesus' observation that, "He (God) lets his sun to shine upon the

good and the evil and lets His rain to fall upon the just and on the unjust." A closer observation of Jesus' insight is, however, revealing of vastly more than God's mere assurance that His blessings reach all. "Sunshine" and "water" that shines and falls, respectively, upon the good and upon the evil, and upon the just and the unjust, are symbols essential to the spiritual process that makes and sustains life. By using these symbols, Jesus is further revealing that we all have equal access to the Cause back of creation which is the power to bring our desires into being regardless of whether we are considered good people or not.

The key to creation is to use the principles correctly. Combine one atom of oxygen with two atoms of hydrogen and it will become water regardless of whether you are good or bad. If this is true, why, then, should anyone be concerned with being good since you can still get what you want by being otherwise? We should be concerned with goodness because only goodness reveals our true being and puts us in harmony with the universe in which we live. Goodness is the manifestation of holiness, wholeness that makes us experience integration and our sense of at-home-ness in the world. A bad person may demonstrate richness of things but not of being. A good person can demonstrate both. This is why Jesus says, "Store not up treasure on earth that moth will eat and rust corrode, but store instead, treasures in heaven, that moth cannot eat nor will rust corrode." The statement speaks to what our real quest is, not things, but our true inner being that with mindfulness of goodness our striving for things may evoke.

The Book of Genesis, in the creation story tells of God creating systems, which are creative processes, for example, the universe of stars are processes in as much as they are reservoirs and generators of information and energy. Similarly, God creates plant life with fruits bearing seeds. Seeds are, once again systems, or Nature's microchips storing the necessary energy and information to recreate or procreate. Finally, God creates humans with active intelligence and energy. If seeds were God's microchips, humans were more like micro-gods, or to use the language of Genesis, "and God created male and female in his image and likeness." In other cultures, for example the Greeks, we see the image of the gods often in human form. These peoples intuitively grasp the micro-god consciousness imbued in humans.

Process is forever creatively unfolding and humans can appreciate the handiwork of the Cosmic Intelligence at the local level by creating for themselves. The creative Edisons of the world can even create new things by coming to understand the process of how things work. Thus, humans create cars that are faster than horses and cheetahs, and aero planes that are faster and stronger than birds. The process of how things are or work is called spiritual Laws or principles. Process Spirituality is a conscious awareness of how intelligence and energy conspire to move creation forward whether at the local level of each person's problem solving-life or at the level of the grand scheme of things that we call Nature or God.

The way up and the way down are one and the same. Don't be discouraged by hard times or get too hysterical during good times. Process and Humanistic Spirituality is paying attention to inner life even as we are totally engaged in bringing our desires into being in outer life, and is not judging by appearances.