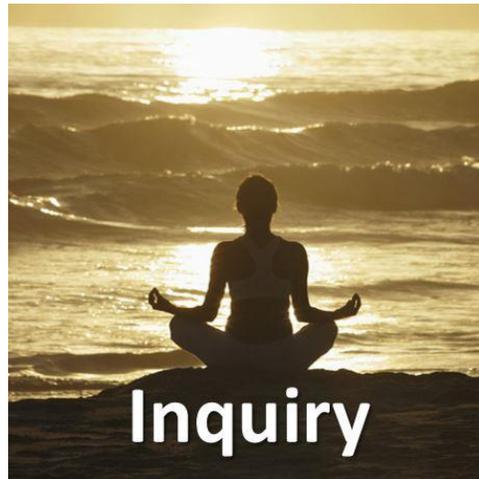


The Traveler Within



Exploring Life Through The Power of Inquiry

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

– T. S. Eliot

To "*know the place for the first time,*" after having already been there may seem a bit confusing, but if we exercise a measure of literary curiosity regarding Eliot's quote, a deeper understanding begins to emerge. Language and the meaning of words is a travel adventure unto itself. Just as exploring new cities, sites and cultures enriches a traveler's life, so too can the exploration of words and their underlying definitions.

Allow me to act as a guide for a moment regarding the word "*know.*" From the Latin root, *gnoscere*, *know* means "*to come to realize.*" This definition offers the first hint regarding the meaning of T. S. Eliot's quote. It's obvious that the notion of "*to come to*" is a traveler's delight. *Coming to* a new destination is one of the greatest joys of travel; that moment of anticipation when we're on the verge of beholding a new and wondrous place for the first time.

What is not so obvious however is the underlying meaning of "*to realize.*" Think of a time you realized something; that "ah ha" moment when the lights suddenly came on. What was actually happening within you as you realized? Were you sifting through past experiences and drawing correlations that suddenly matched up? Or maybe you were making extrapolations based on diverse fragments of recall stored in your memory? Or perhaps a new revelation magically arose within you out of the blue?

When we *realize* something we're actually making real *within us* what exists in reality *outside of us*. It is in this juxtaposition between what exists *within* and what exists *without* that we come to realize an astonishingly paradoxical fact of life. In order to investigate it more closely I want

to introduce the second characteristic of a traveler, that of valuing and engaging in *"inquiry."* (The first characteristic was *"curiosity"* which I introduced in my last post.)

Inquiry isn't merely asking questions about the object of our curiosity, it includes investigating the formulation of and origins of our questions themselves. The reason for this is that asking the wrong question is likely to evoke an incorrect answer. Steven Covey put it this way, *"If the ladder isn't leaning against the right wall, every step just gets us to the wrong place faster."*

So with the spirit of inquiry let's ask this question, "Can a person who was colorblind from birth ever *know* the color "green," or any color for that matter?" The answer is *"No"* because without the reality of colors residing within them there is no way to know what colors are or what they look like.

The next question is, "Then isn't it also true that the reality of what we "come to know" must already exist within us at some level in order for us to know it? In other words, rather than *knowing* being the result of acquiring something foreign to us from the outer world, it's about using facets of the outer world to evoke what is already known within us but is perhaps not yet realized. (Socrates asserted this centuries ago which today is known in the field of education as the "Socratic Method.")

How is it possible that what exists *outside* also exists *inside*? This paradox is difficult to grasp by those who've traveled little in life, but for the seasoned traveler it makes total sense. The more we explore the multitude of facets existing in the world *around us*, the more we discover the myriad of facets residing *within us*. For example, those who've come to know the beauty dwelling within them through their love of nature, art and culture affirm this essential truth.

So in the end, we come back to the beginning and recognize for the first time what we have always known, (which has perhaps taken a lifetime to affirm); that we human beings are as beautiful, unpredictable, remarkable, temperamental and wonderful as the Grace of Spirit which granted us the opportunity to engage in this extraordinary travel adventure we call life.



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