

The Heart of Nursing

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'Grant me the virtues of self-understanding, self-acceptance and self-respect'

"AND what is it to work with love?" asks the Prophet —

"It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.

"It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.

"It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest with joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.

"It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit". (3, p. 34)

Inherent in the answer to the Prophet's question, quoted above, is, I believe, the message of

- work to which I devote myself to the best of my ability
- work through which I am enabled to instil confidence in someone whose needs I know and for whom I care
- work performed with dedication, scrupulousness and solicitude so that nothing will hinder the germination, the development and the fulfilment of growth, nor mar the joy experienced in contemplation of the rewards of labour
- work as the expression of myself, my own creation, the fruition of my talents and abilities
- work done with love, bearing the stamp of the uniqueness of the worker: meaningful work.

It is in her association with people and with the other elements of her world — animals, plants, objects — that the nurse reveals her capacity for love: whether she looks on her work as an opportunity to interpret love as a visible reality. Work performed in love reveals itself

- in the desire to **understand**
- in the sustained effort to create a **climate of trust**
- in the relationships of the nurse with students and colleagues: in her **compassionate leadership** of those in her care — the patient, his family and others who need her guidance.

Joyce Travelbee lays emphasis on the fact that man is only able to love (in the sense of love for one's fellow-man) to the degree to which he loves himself. To love oneself means in this respect

- to accept oneself
- to respect oneself
- to realise one's limitations
- to have confidence in one's own potential. (4, p. 10)

Gerhard Beukes believes that one of life's greatest gifts is self-knowledge — the awareness of the boundaries of one's abilities and one's shortcomings. (1, p. 29)

It is further through the acceptance of his own potential and limitations that man savours the joy of meaningful existence and, conversely, that the inability to do so robs life of enjoyment and spontaneity. (Ibid)

To love oneself demands, in a sense, courage.

Travelbee formulates the problem plainly:

"It is easier to focus on the abilities and limitations of others than honestly to confront one's own" (4, p. 10).

In attempting to solve one's own life-problems it is indeed much easier not to involve oneself. Modern man chooses the easier way out. The Dutch writer, S. W. Couwenberg, speaks of modern man's apparent incapacity for love and self-committal. Highly individualistic, caught up in the feverish life-tempo of a complex world, man allows himself little time in which to find peace within himself.

Time which could be used in coming to terms with oneself is, because the other way is so much easier, spent instead in flight into the world of work and in leisure-time occupations away from home. It seems as though man cannot bear to face himself. He escapes reality in the theatre, the discotheque, the seaside resort, and, in his flight, so often becomes estranged from himself (2).

Travelbee, too, shares this train of thought:

"The escape from self is exemplified by over-involvement in activities and by an inability to be alone. Sensory input is sought . . . Escape from self is also exemplified by the rising rates of alcoholism and drug addiction and, especially in our times, by the growing use of consciousness-expanding (psychedelic) agents." (4, p. 10)

She comes to the conclusion that —

“No one can give to another that which he does not possess. If an individual does not love or respect himself, how can he love or respect others?” (4, p. 10)

To know and to understand oneself demands first and foremost the realisation that being man and being responsible are synonymous. Man's first charge is to learn to live responsibly. True maturity requires of every person willingness to acquire insight into living in conformity with the norms: in other words to gain the freedom of adulthood and thus to discard the ties of childhood.

The marvel of being man lies therein that man possesses the power of going beyond himself in order to —

- approach God in prayer
- learn to know himself as an unique creation.

Part of the task of the school of life is to teach man to make time to learn to know and interpret his potential and to accept the reality of his limitations. The development of these gifts of God is experienced with joy.

As a human being it is incumbent on me to bypass my limitations and to make the evolvment of my potential a **life-task**.

Understanding and acceptance of myself means, thus, understanding and acceptance of myself as **I ought to be** and observation of one's growth in this respect is accompanied by joy and increasing self-respect: self-respect arising not from unhealthy egoism but from gratitude to the Creator who has thereby opened the door to true service.

In this way it becomes possible to recognise the potentialities of others, to experience the uniqueness of one's fellow-man, to learn to understand and to accept him as he **ought** to be and to help him to find release from the bonds of his limitations.

Learning to love myself in the sense of self-understanding, self-acceptance and self-respect gives me the opportunity to learn to love others — to learn to understand, to accept and to respect.

“Love does not ‘just happen’ — it is developed, nurtured and permitted to grow”. (4, p. 10)