

In all the discussions about Spiritual Practice and what it means, this particular story, adapted from the novel, "Round the Bend" by Nevil Shute, informs the one of the main bases of my spiritual practice. I first read it at the age of 15 and many times since then it has stayed with me until I came to live and work at the Findhorn Foundation 17 years ago, when I started to practice meditation and prayer this way. I am not a meditator, nor a "Sanctuary" person: the Park, the Community, the sand dunes and gardens, my work, my relationships, my life – these are all my Sanctuary, my Holy Places, my Work, and walking around here is how I meditate.

There is a legend that the Prophet Mahomet, Blessed-Be-His-Name, having been given the main doctrines of the Moslem faith by Allah (or God) then met Moses. Moses asked how many times God had required the Muslim people to pray to Him daily, and Mahomet said, "Fifty times". Moses told him this was impractical, that he had tried it with the Children of Israel and he had never succeeded in getting anyone to pray fifty times a day. He said that Mahomet should go back to God and humbly beg Him that this number of prayers each day should be reduced. Mahomet did so, and in coming from the Presence he met Moses again, and told him the number was reduced to forty prayers per day. "That is still too much", said Moses. "The people will not pray so many times. You must go back and ask Him to reduce it further." Urged by Moses, it is written that the Prophet went back to God until the number of prayers was reduced to five each day. And still Moses said, "Do you think you can exact five prayers a day with your people? By Heaven, I have been through this with the Children of Israel, and it cannot be done. Go back and ask Him (as I have done) to reduce it yet again." But the Prophet said, "No, I will not go back. I have asked His indulgence already until I am ashamed. My people are not Israelites, and they shall worship Him five times a day." And that is the reason why every Believer (of Islam) has to say his prayers to God five times a day.

However five times a day is the minimum; the number was brought down to be within the power of the ordinary person. But we now are not like that. We are people of understanding and of education, on whom are laid different responsibilities ... and God will demand much more from us than from those of old. From people like us, the full tally of fifty prayers a day will be demanded. Five of them must be made in public or in private, according to the ways that you know in the Muslim faith, but this is the bare minimum.

From people like us, another forty-five prayers are rightfully demanded. And this is how to make them. Forty-five prayers a day may seem a lot to you all. They did to Moses. Yet forty-five more prayers a day was the commandment of God, and God is All-Seeing, and All-Knowing, and All-Merciful. He would not command that you should do more than you can perform. You can pray to God forty-five times a day quite easily, and I will tell you how.

Every time you do something, you can ask the person in charge of you to see if you have done it well, but they can only see what is to be seen. There are many things hidden from them, but nothing is hidden from the All-Seeing Eye of God. God, the All-Knowing, knows whether you have done well or ill; badly or conscientiously. If you ask Him humbly in prayer to tell you, then He will tell you whether you have done well or ill; poorly or carefully with love in your heart. You will know this in your heart after a moment of prayer. In that way you will have a chance to do the job again, if it needs it, and then you can try to do it better. Or you will have the chance to realise that you do not know enough and to ask someone and to learn how to do it better. God is All-Merciful and He will not hold bad work against you if He sees you striving to do it right.

So, with every piece of work you do, pause at every stage and turn to Mecca, and fold your hands, and humbly ask the All-Seeing God to put into your heart the knowledge whether the work that you have done has been good or ill. Then you stand for half a minute with your eyes cast down, thinking of God and of the job, and God will put into your heart the knowledge of good or ill. So if the work is good you can proceed in peace, and if it is ill you may do it over again, or ask for help so that you do well before God.

If you do this, you will soon find that you are praying to God forty-five times a day or more as He directed the Prophet in the first instance. Moses and Mahomet were quite right to get the tally reduced, because the people of those days were nomads and camel drivers. But you are now educated and dedicated to doing skilled work in the world, and so much closer to God. God will require more of you; you are worth more, because people look to you to see how good work can be done. And now I tell you good work can be done only with the help and power of the All-Knowing God, and this is how to do it.

Maybe we can all learn something from this story!

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