

**SOME REFLECTIONS
AT ARRIVING AT THE NOON OF LIFE**

(2/4)

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TOWARDS A SOLUTION

The midlife crisis demonstrates the need for self-knowledge. We should know the depth of our soul where our intimate being is hidden. One has to look inward: it is painful since what must be discovered is done in darkness and evil, cowardice and falsehood. It is an unpleasant sensation since all masks are removed. Some refuse to take this plunge and even revert to what has been already accomplished in the first part of life. It is a difficult journey.

I invite you to reflect on this Psalm (7):

*O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord,
You know it completely.
You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?*

*If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

*For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.*

*I praise you,
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days
that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.*

*How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!*

*try to count them –they are more than the sand–;
I come to the end–I am still with you.*

*O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me
–those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil!
Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Nevertheless it is God who acts by means of his Spirit from whom we can hide nothing...if we let him act.

"Beloved: Go down, descend into the deepest part of you, into your nothingness and let all the levels of the cathedral of self-sufficiency and self-justification fall on you! Let all the demons that there are in hell come to you! Let heaven and earth and all creatures therein serve you wonderfully! Go down to the abyss! That will be best for you".

We should allow ourselves to be shaken by the Spirit of God in order to enter into our own depth, to immerse ourselves in our own truth. We should calmly allow the demolition of our self-satisfaction and self-justification and surrender ourselves to the activity that God is achieving by means of our difficulty. Let even the demons from hell enter our lives if we have the confidence that it is God who leads us through the difficulty. But this is not easy. When one sees many who triumph by not facing the crisis, the question comes up: Is what the psalmist says being fulfilled?

*"Truly God is good to the upright,
to those who are pure in heart."*

Seeing that this is not the case, that others are doing well without making any great effort, doing everything the easy way, the temptation to back down is strong. When it appears that externals, which our society considers as successes in themselves, are being obtained in a way that is contrary to personal asceticism, then ideals begin to tremble and we are tempted to let ourselves be dragged into the social circus. Let us continue our reflection with the words of the psalmist.

*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled;
my steps had nearly slipped.
For I was envious of the arrogant;
I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*

*For they have no pain;
their bodies are sound and sleek.
They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not plagued like other people.
Therefore pride is their necklace;
violence covers them like a garment.
Their eyes swell out with fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.*

*They set their mouths against heaven,
and their tongues range over the earth.
Therefore the people turn and praise them,
and find no fault in them.
And they say, "How can God know?
Is there knowledge in the Most High?"
Such are the wicked; always at ease,
they increase in riches.*

So the question immediately springs up: Has what has already been done worth anything?

*All in vain I have kept my heart clean
and washed my hands in innocence.*

*For all day long I have been plagued,
and am punished every morning.*

Nevertheless, we should not leave everything without hoping for a change. It will now be explained to us:

*If I had said, "I will talk on in this way,"
I would have been untrue to the circle of your children.
But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I perceived their end.*

*Truly you set them in slippery places;
you make them fall to ruin.
How they are destroyed in a moment,
swept away utterly by terrors!*

And we can recover what is essential, ourselves. (8)

*They are like a dream when one awakes;
on awaking you despise their phantoms.
When my soul was embittered,
when I was pricked in heart,
I was stupid and ignorant;
I was like a brute beast toward you.
Nevertheless I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me with honor.*

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Indeed, those who are far from you will perish; you put an end to those who are false to you. But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, to tell of all your works.

This experience of the psalmist, a mystical experience, still leaves us with the question: How should I do it?

One of the ways Tauler suggests is to allow images to come up from the bottom of the subconscious, whatever fantasies are brought to us and to think about them and meditate on them. In this exercise we should try to discover often what the real roots are and the very basics of our thought and action. With this technique we should constantly ask ourselves about the ultimate motives of our work: we either put God in their midst or they put us in our own center. We should submit to the test of knowing if we remain attached to external things, to our own success, to our papers, our office, our worries, our possessions, forma of piety or to our vocation as good Christians. One has to be familiar with what our idols are to that we can get to know them and thus be able to free ourselves from them. One must untie oneself from all those things that are keeping us from surrendering ourselves exclusively to God's will.

Another way suggested by Tauler is that of serenity, understood as the ability to surrender oneself (this is not the type of serenity and peace that we might sometimes imagine). For him this is similar to the Biblical concept of self-denial: surrendering one's own will to God's. One has to surrender many things: evil, stubbornness, arbitrariness. We even have to be willing to deny goodness insofar as it

impedes progress: so many good practices and virtues that need to be overcome and replaced by a new practice that is better or a virtue that is higher.

Those in a midlife crisis feel that the good they have done up until now and which has filled their heart has become something that is dull or tasteless. Again the feelings of the psalmist that deal with insecurity and trust might help us reflect (9):

*"Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can detect their errors?"*

Clear me from hidden faults.
*Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.*

*Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer".*

After filling prayer with long monologues, God invites us to be silent. We are invited to live simply before God, to live in God's presence without speaking much. This is to abandon oneself completely in HIM without constantly asking for such things like peace, happiness, security, religious joy, or that God teach me this or that, etc.

Availability for suffering is also a part of serenity. It has already been said that one's own peace nor happiness are actively sought after: "genuine peace is born out of 'no peace', from purification from difficulty", trusting that after the darkness the light of day will come, the dawn shall shine.

One should not attempt to escape from difficulty but one must have hope. One cannot escape under one's own power but one has to hope that God will lead us through it towards a new spiritual maturity.

We pray with the sentiments of the Bible that the psalmist has already felt (10):

*Answer me when I call, O God of my right!
You gave me room when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.*

*When you are disturbed, do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent.
Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the Lord.*

*There are many who say,
"O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!"
You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine abound.
I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.*

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(7) Psalm 139.

(8) Psalm 73.

(9) Psalm 19:11-14.

(10) Psalm 1: 4-8.