

**SOME REFLECTIONS
AT ARRIVING AT THE NOON OF LIFE
(4/4)**

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One's own perception of life experience.

We should add some personal observation and experience to the reflections of such learned teachers from the spiritual and psychological world.

With the passage of time, arriving at the "noon of life", one realizes that, being the same person, one is really not the same. There is good reason for this apparent dichotomy. It is a fact that when we look at future years it seems as if they are a long way off from today. So when we are 10 years old, becoming 20 seems like a long ways away and 40 seems beyond our horizons. At that time we think that a 40 year old is a very old person.

When we become 20, the age of 40 still seems far away, but looking back we still feel a closeness to the age of 10. The memories of the period of puberty and adolescence were not really so far away. We were able to feel all our energies of childhood flourish in our youth. Our body and spirit responded with the vital force of youth.

We feel that same energy in our thirties and our body is a docile instrument that still expresses those feelings. At arriving at the "noon of life" we continue thinking in the same way as when we were 10 years old. Memories seem recent even though they might refer to things which happened twenty years ago. Nevertheless, there is a caveat: our body no longer responds with the grace that it did before. This is the time of the increased corpulence and stomachs, of worrying about hair falling out, of counting the white hairs that are sprouting (some hide these with hair colorings), of being tired and panting due to exercise that before did not affect us, of wrinkles and creases in what used to be tight skin...Our body is telling us that we are getting old. This is the time when I feel that I am the same mighty 20 year old, my recent memories even suggest this to me...but I no longer have the body of a 20 year old.

Faced with these facts the reaction is inevitable: I should prove, or better yet, prove to myself that I still have the same spiritual and corporal vigor. And this is the crisis that has been popularly termed that of the "dirty old man". This is presented as the "last ditch" crisis since if I do not "shoot" today I will not have many opportunities in the future to do so.

A married man must prove to himself that he is still able to conquer other women, and if they are younger women, so much the better. Many who have been unfaithful during this

period in their life confess if questioned about their love for their wives that they still are in love with them: she is the good companion, the mother of my children - these are some of the things that are said. Nevertheless, they are unfaithful.

For the religious man or woman, the situation is different even though it has been produced from the same type of distress. They have professed their lifelong commitment to the service of God by means of others, their neighbors. For them some important aspects in their lives as humans have been sublimated: becoming a father or mother. These have embraced chastity. They have renounced having personal goods by their poverty and obedience for them has meant renouncing their own freedom. All of this is done in the midst of a community with others of the same sex, being like brothers or sisters.

And then appears the devil of midlife in the form of nagging doubts: Was it worth "giving up" so much? I do not believe that God is doubted but what is doubted is what formerly had been taken for granted and the validity of their own lived experience. Wouldn't it be better to share life in matrimony and see my own offspring? Some feel that this is, perhaps, the ultimate option, that of being a father or a mother, being a couple. And the fear of facing old age alone or another of the elements in this thought. And there are various responses: flee to a new form of life - and I say flee, not take on responsibly; we can shut ourselves up in our securities; we can criticize, control others' lives, live in bitterness. Nevertheless, many have succeeded in fulfilling themselves after the age of 40; they discover new values; they no longer have to prove that they are valuable to anyone; they no longer have to run; this is the tranquil time of reflection and joy filled with peace, of new creativity.

We have reached the end of this rather lengthy reflection and research concerning this important period: the "noon of life". I wrote this for myself and I hope that it might be a help to others. Faced with the symptoms of crises, we do not want to lose ourselves in trying out psychological methods in order to obtain good health. This is a spiritual task. Let us not protect ourselves with all the defense mechanisms that we have learned during our first period of youth. God himself can be our consolation if we let him act as we enter this second period of youth. Let us pray that God completes in us what was announced by the prophet:

"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances" (12).

Thank you, Father, for promising to give us a new and sensitive heart! Even though I have read these lines from Hosea (13) many times, it always has a certain newness for me:

"Yes, their mother has played the whore, she who conceived them has disgraced herself by saying, 'I shall chase after my lovers; they will assure me my keep, my wool, my flax, my oil and my drinks.'

But she never realized that I was the one who was giving her the grain, new wine and oil, giving her more and more

silver and gold which they have spent on Baal. This is why I shall take back my grain when it is due and my new wine, when the season for it comes. I shall withdraw my wool and my flax which were to cover her naked body, and then display her infamy before her lovers' eyes - no one will take her from me then!

This is why I shall block her way with thorns, and wall her in to stop her in her tracks; then if she chases her lovers she will not catch them, if she looks for them she will not find them, and then she will say, 'I shall go back to my first husband, I was better off then than I am now.'

BUT LOOK, I AM GOING TO SEDUCE HER AND LEAD HER INTO THE DESERT AND SPEAK TO HER HEART. There I shall give her back her vineyards, and make the Vale of Achor a gateway of hope. Then she will respond as when she was young, as on the day when she came up from Egypt. When that day comes you will call me 'My husband', no more will you call me, 'My Baal'. I shall banish the names of the Baals from her lips and their name will be mentioned no more.

I shall betroth you to myself forever, I shall betroth you to myself, in faithful love and tenderness. Yes, I shall betroth you to myself in loyalty and in the knowledge of Yahweh".

The desert is a difficult place to leave behind everything that seemed secure, without knowing what will come. The Exodus is difficult but love demands it. In spite of that:

"I had faith, although I said:

How unfortunate am I"

I said in my distress:

"Men are liars".

Now I would like to change my attitude since I recognize a God who acts in me and therefore it is possible to proclaim (14):

"What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord, I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.

O Lord, I am your servant;

I am your servant,

the child of your serving girl.

You have loosed my bonds.

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.

I will pay my vows to the Lord

in the presence of all his people,

in the courts of the house of the Lord,

in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord!"

Accepting the fact that we have left the abyss of "I myself", recognizing the dark night, is the first step that will lead us to full personal realization that finally will allow us to meet the one who completely fills us. •

(12) Ezekiel 36:25-27.

(13) Hosea 2: 7-11; 16-19; 21-22.

(14) Psalm 116.