

No man is an island

"No man is an island, Entire of itself, Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main. If a clot be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less... Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls, It tolls for thee."

John Donne published these words in 1624 as a devotional meditation. Now 392 years later, these words ring through our minds and hearts. These words are important for all of us to meditate upon. John Donne's life reflects both love and tragedy in his poetry handed down to us over the years. Religion was always an important theme in Donne's life and writing. Donne's themes, the love of family and mankind, the stress, turmoil and tragedies in human life as well as religious suffering can still be found in modern day 2016!

This article is not really about John Donne, but I will say a few words about his life and works. At age 4, Donne's father died, his mother remarried and two of his sisters died several years thereafter. The family was a reclusive Roman Catholic family when that religion was illegal in England. Donne did indulge in some of the usual passions of youth, settling down later. During his early years Donne and his family experienced difficulty in their religious faith. Donne's brother was arrested for harboring a Catholic priest. This priest was tortured and killed by the authorities while Donne's brother died in prison. Preparing for a diplomatic career, Donne fell in love and married against the wishes of her family. His wife Ann birthed 12 children in their 16 years of marriage including two stillborn children, dying herself several days after the last baby. Donne mourned her loss deeply, living himself 14 years thereafter, losing another child during that time and suffering health problems. He was honored to be named Dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in the Church of England for his last 10 years of life during which he wrote this poem in a series of meditations and prayers on pain, health and sickness published under the title Devotions upon Emergent Occasions. Religion became increasingly important in his life and literary career, focusing on sermons and religious poems. Donne began to challenge death with his belief in eternal life in heaven.

Donne was a prolific writer with poetry, elegies, verse letters, songs and sonnets and other writings now published in many scholarly books. The memories of Donne's words echo in Ernest Hemingway's "For Whom The Bell Tolls", William Styron's "Set This House on Fire" and Thomas Merton's "No Man is An Island." His influence can be found in popular culture; for example Van Morrison's song "Rave On John Donne." References to Donne's "Death Be Not Proud" and "No Man Is An Island" can be found throughout our culture.

Donne's words are beautiful and inspiring, surviving throughout the ages and as a part of many spiritual and religious practices. We are taught that all people are connected upon this earth and in the heavenly realms. But do you actually know this? Do you ever think about this? Yes, the purpose of this article is for me to impart some information to you about Donne and his work. But, most important, my goal is also to inspire you to think about these issues, take them into your heart, and begin to live as the interconnected beings that you really are. These days especially it seems that people spend a lot of time ostensibly communicating without really communicating. Out to dinner at a beautiful restaurant recently, I observed the people at the next table talking to each other occasionally, but mostly texting separately. Texting, twittering, facebooking; do these activities really serve the purpose of communication or are they mainly self indulgent activities? People these days often act as if they are isolated "islands" lost in a disjointed world. Donne tells us differently. Think about the fact that the world includes more than people in our country, more than people in the world; it also includes all of nature, animals, creatures of the sea, trees and plants, all developed and programmed to live together in the beautiful symphony of life. In the heavens we can find angels, beautiful spirits, a heavenly home for our loved ones, and a positive destination for us when we shed our bodies and follow our hearts back to our eternal lives. But do YOU see this world harmony happening around you or do you live in a boxlike house, drive around in a metal car, spend your life with gadgets and forget about the greater good? Apparently going

Advice Line

By Dr. Betty Phillips



to church is not enough. One morning I turned on the TV to hear a prominent cleric talking to an audience of people clasping Bibles. I was about to change the channel when I heard him negate the idea of "good works." Good works are prosocial behaviors which help people other than yourself. Disparaging the idea of good works, he cited the importance of church attendance and financial support of church activities.

Spiritual and religious people as well as social scientists appear concerned about the lack of real, heartfelt social understanding and communication. Others follow the writings of Ayn Rand. In her novel "Atlas Shrugged", Rand developed a theme that human nature is fundamentally selfish, that "each man exists for his own sake, and the achievement of his own happiness is his highest moral purpose." Admirers of this work include the influential politician, Paul Ryan, who cites the book as one of his main inspirations for entering politics and is known to give copies of this book to interns and admirers. Interestingly enough, before children are old enough to read Ayn Rand, toddlers show frequent examples of helpful behavior toward others and contagion between feelings. I wonder and worry if these children's natural prosocial behaviors will be negatively influenced by the increasing influence of screen time on their lives.

Think deeply about the concept that "No man is an island." Please take these issues into your heart as you consider them in your mind, and then begin to add helpful prosocial altruistic behaviors into your life. You will find an increase in love and happiness in your own life as you open up to the world around you. Consider the Loving Kindness meditation. In this meditation you will bring love and happiness to yourself (as the key person in your world), your loved ones, your acquaintances, individuals who are difficult to deal with, and then a final perspective on the interconnected nature of all mankind. Once you begin this practice, you can fit it into your daily activities without spending a great deal of time on this meditation. The benefits will far outweigh the time you've spent. I am not a great meditator, but I was able to incorporate this beautiful meditation into my daily life for a year and a half with wonderful results. For more information about this meditation, I've included articles in the Reading Room section of my website "Loving Kindness Meditation Update" (<http://www.bettyphillipspsychology.com/id125.html>.)

An important issue in our society concerns money and finances. It is clear that most of us need an adequate amount of money and possessions to live in this society. It is also increasingly clear that wealth is being concentrated into a very small percent of people while increasing numbers of us have to work long hours for inadequate support especially for families, young people and children. Today you see evidence of political revolutions all around us as these issues become increasingly clear and problematic.

Scripture and spiritual contacts provide evidence of the right of all individuals and families to have adequate life support. "Give us this day our daily bread" is promised. "The Lord is our shepherd; we shall not want." Spiritual works and writings assure us that divine intervention intends that all individuals have adequate support for themselves and their families. Increasingly the rich and wealthy are becoming conspicuous consumers as well as misers of their possessions. If you look on the Internet you will find many articles about the fact that the rich are very selfish. According to the author Steve Siebold, "They're selfish and they are okay with it. Rich people think selfishness is a virtue." What happened to altruism and sharing? Psychologists know that hoarders of wealth actually begin to lead lives of negativity and depression, while adequate life support provides joy and happiness to individuals who share their daily bread.

In thinking about this issue, don't forget Donne's words: when "the Bell tolls, it tolls

for thee." We will ALL face a transition from this life into eternal life. Some people may not believe this outcome will apply to them, but eternal laws do apply to all of us. So-called "resting in peace in a grave" does not seem a particularly desirable outcome to me. This life is but a small part of time, and time is eternal. I don't raise this issue to increase anxiety and fear. I raise this issue to stress the importance

of a life well spent sharing happiness and love throughout the world with all beings. It is true that "No Man Is An Island!"

Need Advice? Send Dr. Betty Phillips questions about individual, relationship, marriage or family issues to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. Betty looks forward to hearing from you!

Infinite Sky: (Part 8 of 10)

by Gregory Louie

Dear gentle readers,

Give yourself a treat and take a break from your busy life.

Wherever you are, you can take a short mini-vacation. How? Just take a deep breath in, close your eyes for a moment, relax and then let the air fall out of your mouth. Repeat. Each time you do so let your shoulders go and feel your chest drop. Slow your breath down and take time to stay in the feeling of relaxation. You may find a feeling of well-being, so stay a little longer... A smile may appear on your face and then a sensation may bubble up from within filling you with joy. Do this as long as want your mini-vacation to last.

Life lived this way can be as simple as taking a breath. And in contrast, life can be as complex as only you can really know. As a meditator, it becomes a matter of choice. The more practiced you become, the more it becomes your choice. Even when there seems to be no choice.

This reminds me of a short story. A lone hunter realizes that he is being stalked and starts to run for his life. He comes to a cliff and has to quickly climb down on a vine to avoid being killed by a tiger. Looking up he sees the tiger pacing back and forth licking his chops. Looking below, he sees certain death. A mouse suddenly appears on a ledge above just out of his reach and starts to gnaw on the vine. Out of the corner of his eyes, he sees a ripe wild strawberry. He plucks it, pops it in his mouth and says, "How sweet!"

In our modern lives, sometimes we may feel like that hunter, stuck in an impossible situation. If we can remember to take a deep breath in, closing our eyes and feel the pleasure of well-being, we too, like the hunter can find in each moment, there is the possibility of tasting the sweetness of being alive. So why not close your eyes now and take a deep breath? I wish you all the best in your journey!

Gregory Louie is an experienced meditator and taiji practitioner. He can be reached at gregory.louie@gmail.com



Mark Hewitt



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Summer Kiln Opening

PREVIEW

Saturday, August 27: 8-8:50am

SALE

Saturday, August 27: 9-5pm

Sunday, August 28: noon-5 pm

Saturday, September 3: 9-5pm

Sunday, September 4: noon-5pm

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