

Remove. We are nearing the midway point dancing with the concepts from Dana Hicks' book, *The Quest for Think Places*. So far, we have been invited into the deconstruction process regarding our faith – something that happens naturally in every part of our lives including our faith, yet the threat of condemnation often tempers this pursuit along spiritual lines. Last week we focused on clarifying why we are interested in spirituality in the first place. This week, in light of the previous two chapters, we are invited to remove concepts and practices that are no longer helpful.

Michaelangelo's stone carved masterpiece, *David*, showcases the artist's genius and extraordinary skill. Asked how he was able to craft such a magnificent sculpture, he noted that he simply chipped away all that wasn't David, and this is what remained. What if the same might be true of us in our quest to become more connected with The Divine and ourselves? Brazilian author Paulo Coelho wrote, "Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about unbecoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place" (77).

Dana Hicks offers that "spiritual growth is usually not about learning new information and new techniques but about unlearning lousy thought processes and bad habits. The fourteenth-century German mystic Meister Eckhart said, '[The Divine] is not found in the soul by adding anything but by a process of subtraction.' As Jesus would say, the Kingdom of God is inside of you. It's not that The Divine is trying to hide from us; it's just that, like Michealangelo's *David*, there is so much marble to chip away to get to the beauty inside" (80).

Hicks' encouragement to remove what is no longer necessary or helpful is welcome and refreshing yet also threatening. Of course, while the central issue we are dealing with is faith and spirituality, the principle applies to our entire life. This is part of what maturation is all about. Doing the work of identifying the forces that have formed us and choosing their level of influence going forward is what helps us become our own person instead of an aging marionette. Recognizing our shaping forces is illuminating. Living apart from them can be unnerving and anxiety producing as we leave such formative constructs. Apparently, this isn't a new concept. Many voices from antiquity have noted this reality, including insight on the spiritual dimension. From Rumi: "If you could get rid of yourself just once, the secret of secrets would open to you. The face of the unknown, hidden beyond the universe, would appear on the mirror of your perception" (as quoted in Brian C. Muraresku, *The Immortality Key*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2020, p 10).

Question: If this is a really important step in our growth and maturation in every aspect of our lives, why don't we "just do it" – what forces prevail against us?

Dana Hicks observes: "In a consumeristic world like the one we live in, it is natural to think that if we get more – more learning, more attainment, more achievement, more performance, more success – then we will find the spirituality we seek. While this has a definite appeal to our egos, recognizing the divine and responding to The Divine is, in fact, more about removing the debris we have accumulated to make room for The Divine to take root and blossom" (85-86). Our culturally supported solution to our lacking something is to fill it with something instead of removing something, which often only adds a growing amount of clutter in our headspace, more "somethings" to remove eventually.

Author Tim Kreider reflected that in our world, "Busyness serves as a kind of existential reassurance, a hedge against emptiness; obviously your life cannot possibly be silly or trivial or meaningless if you are so busy, completely booked, in demand every hour of the day" ("The 'Busy' Trap." *The New York Times*, June 30, 2012. <https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/30/the-busy-trap/>, accessed October 17, 2023). Sometimes we busy ourselves so much that there is barely time to breathe. Sometimes we choose to organize our lives in such a way that we're not really all that busy, but our daily design offers no space or time for deeper work. Like the lovable dog in the animated film, *Up*, we are well-meaning yet find ourselves distracted by squirrels all day long. As the sun sets, we discover that we haven't accomplished much because we were continually distracted. We can sometimes feel busy without really having much of an actual agenda.

Question: How have you fallen prey to our consumeristic, achievement-focused, must-be-busy culture?

Dallas Willard was a highly regarded scholar and author known for his deep wisdom. At a conference where he spoke, he was asked by an attendee, "What advice would you give someone who wants to be spiritually healthy?" After a long pause, Dr. Willard said, "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life." The questioner thought for a minute and said, "That is good. Anything else?" Dr. Willard said, "There is nothing else. That is everything" (90). Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology noted: "Hurry is not of the Devil; it is the Devil." American spiritual teacher Ram Daas advised: "Be still. The quieter you become, the more you can hear."

How hurried are you? Dana Hicks developed a quiz to help people determine if they suffer from “Hurry Sickness”. Do you find yourself speeding up in your life because you’re afraid you might miss out on something if you don’t? Are you a chronic multitasker, cramming more in to get more done? Is your desktop (literal or virtual) cluttered with all you need to do? Are you usually exhausted when you finally stop your hurrying at the end of the day? Do you (or others you care about) notice that you are so busy that your most important relationships suffer because you do not have time for them? How “Hurry Sick” are you?

Question: Why do you hurry? Why? Why? Why? Why?

Dana Hicks recounted a conversation he had with a friend. Hicks shared some good news which his friend celebrated, saying “You deserve that!” Hicks twinged as his Calvinist background music was trying to remind him that he was totally depraved and not deserving of anything. He recognized and dismissed it. “Then we both laughed, ordered another round of drinks, and drank a toast to Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the other theo-bros of the Reformation. I told my friend, “Thank you, Reformed doctrine of total depravity, for your service in my life. As a young person, it probably kept my younger self away from self-destructive behaviors and got me thinking about what divine grace looks like. I won’t miss you, total depravity. Goodbye” (83).

**Question: What old ways of thinking are you aware of that are dead to you?
When is the memorial service? How will you mark the moment?**

Franciscan Priest Richard Rohr described it: “We don’t save our soul; we discover it. We don’t go there and try to make ourselves holy; we wake our souls up. We’re already united with [The Divine]; the problem is, we don’t believe it” (Richard Rohr, *Simplicity: The Freedom of Letting Go*, New York: CrossRoad Books, 2015, p 93). Author Cheryl Strayed wrote: “You don’t have a right to the cards you believe you should have been dealt. You have an obligation to play the hell out of the ones you’re holding” (*Tiny Beautiful Things*, New York: Vintage Books, 2012, p 205).

Richard Neibuhr wrote a prayer that has been helpful to millions, especially those seeking recovery from addiction or living with an addict. May his *Serenity Prayer* help you remove some things that have been in the way of your growth:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time, accepting hardships as the pathway to peace. Taking, as Christ did, this wounded world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that [Love] will make things right if I surrender to [Love’s] will, so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy in Love forevermore. Amen. – Richard Neibuhr (Selected Essays and Addresses, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, p 3–4).

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are found in Dana Hicks’ book, *The Quest for Thin Places: How to Find Spirituality after Deconstruction*, SacraSage Press.

Bonus Poem!

For One Who Is Exhausted

By John O’Donohue

You have travelled too fast over false ground;
Now your soul has come to take you back.

Take refuge in your senses, open up
To all the small miracles you rushed through.

Become inclined to watch the way of rain
When it falls slow and free.

Imitate the habit of twilight,
Taking time to open the well of color
That fostered the brightness of day.

Draw alongside the silence of stone
Until its calmness can claim you.
Be excessively gentle with yourself.

Stay clear of those vexed in spirit.
Learn to linger around someone of ease
Who feels they have all the time in the world.

Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart
And the joy that dwells far within slow time.

To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings.
(New York: Doubleday, 2008), 126.