

## Your Spiritual Manners

The thought manifest as the word; the word manifests as the deed; the deed develops into habit; and habit hardens into character. So watch the thought and its ways with care and let it spring from love born out of concern for all beings.--The Buddha.

“Our life is shaped by our mind. We become what we think. Suffering follows an evil thought as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that draw it. Our life is shaped by our mind. We become what we think. Joy follows a pure thought like a shadow that never leaves. He was angry with me, he attacked me, he defeated me, he robbed me—those who dwell on such thoughts will never be free from hatred. Those who do not dwell on such thoughts will surely become free from hatred. For hatred can never put an end to hatred. Only love can do that. This is an unalterable law. For those who remember, quarrels come to an end.”

---The Dhamapada Buddhist Scriptures.

Five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, the Buddha was telling us that thoughts are things. He says that our entire lives are created and influenced by our thought processes. The old aphorism goes, as a person thinks in his or her heart, so he or she is.

Shakespeare wrote in Act 2 Scene 2 puts these words into the mouth of Hamlet, “... for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison. Well, then isn't one to you, since nothing is really good or bad in itself--it's all what a person thinks about it.” Our thoughts at times can appear as a prison. We obsess, ruminate, stew, over things we cannot control. If you don't believe this, have you ever tried to meditate and to still your mind? No so easy is it? Just attempting to meditate can teach you about the power of thought.

Some people may think or say that this is some type of “New Age” mumbo jumbo about the power of positive thinking made popular by The Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, a few decades ago, but The Buddha knew this some 2600 hundred years ago. So you see, there is really nothing “new” about the New Age. What is new is that we as a species are finally beginning to listen.

This perspective may be a bit unnerving to many because it means that on a deep level we are co-creating our lives, our existence by our thoughts and beliefs about life. In other words, it's all about our consciousness, which is just a fancy way of saying our self-awareness, as well as what we do with it that influences our relationships with each other and the planet. The Buddha was once asked if he was a savior and he replied, no. He was asked if he was a healer, and he replied, no. He was asked are you a teacher, and he replied, no. Then what are you? the exasperated student asked. I am awake, Buddha replied. In other words I am aware. I have woken up from my slumber and the problems and challenges of this life which can usually lull us to sleep. Why? Simply because thoughts are things. Quantum physicists are finally catching up with the ancient wisdom of the sages of the ages, and realizing that this is not some “new age” concept but ancient wisdom being rediscovered. This wisdom is very real and appears to be a part of what we would label, Universal Law.

What we say, think, and do, will come back to us if we do it often and long enough. In the East they call it karma, in the West we call it cause and effect. You reap what you sow. Our intelligence agencies label it “blowback” but call it what you will, but this is a

cosmic law, and the more we develop a mature consciousness about how life works, the better we will be at navigating and negotiate the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that life deals to all of us. It's not personal. What we focus on we create, pure and simply.

I like to think of it in another way. We are merely guest on this planet while in this incarnation, and yet if we look closely enough, we have many of the tools that we need to survive. Most of us have our health or have had it. Many but not all of us have had or do now have some sense of stability and support in our lives. With these tools at our disposal, are we minding our manners? I'm talking about our spiritual manners; the manners of our inner lives.

As we go through a typical day, most of us rely on the etiquette training we received earlier in life to make a favorable impression in our interactions with others. Manners are a system of respect. A modern day etiquette expert, Emily post, offers us a view of manners beyond the dining room table with this statement. "Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners no matter what fork you use." I would imagine another way of looking at this would be called "civility." Many people complain of a lack of this thing call civility in our postmodern world.

Pier M. Forni, professor at John Hopkins University and author of *Choosing Civility: The Twenty Five rules of Considerate Conduct*, supports Emily Post's view by writing that, "I am absolutely convinced--- and branches of quantum physics back this up, that everything, including our thoughts, choices, behaviors, and actions, are energy and have a beneficial or harmful impact, depending on what the individual puts forth in every moment of every day."

Another way of putting it is that as a cherished guest here on planet earth, the entire banquet of life has been spread out before us to taste test its rich ingredients. The plate of our lives may be filled with all sorts of appetizers, entrees, and deserts, some of which we will consider delicious and scrumptious, and some we will want to spit out the minute they enter our experience. It takes some experimenting and sampling of our life choices. Oddly enough, many individuals do not have or have not developed a mental, emotional or inner diet, that offers genuine nourishment. It takes some experimenting, some sampling of life choices. Of all of the species on the planet, the human being alone has an inherent taste for becoming more awake and the ability to realize it. With this in mind, let's take a look at what manners, what spiritual manners or civility we may need to develop as we become more mature in our consciousness and self-awareness on our life path.

Gratitude: The birth of Inner or Spiritual Manner and Civility. Gratitude is an expression and the first act of a gracious guest. It is an expression of our appreciation for life with all of its infinite possibilities. We have been given free choice, which places our hands and hearts and minds full responsibility for our lives. Yes, things happen. Loss and tragedy do happen. But we have the choice of how we respond to these circumstances. Do we react or do we respond to the events of our lives? We do not live solely by instinct, as we have the power to exercise conscious choice and to learn to grow from the choices we make.

We are free to follow our dreams, we are free to change our minds and to move in a different direction. As we learn to appreciate this capacity, we deepen our commitment

to live up to our highest potential. We live our UU principles in our daily lives and in this way the word (our principles) become flesh ( the living of these principles).

Are you grateful that your body operates in such a way that every day we don't have to learn all over again how to breath, how to walk, talk, eat, or digest our food. These activities we simply take for granted now. The more we study and learn about the human body, its anatomy, its chemistry and biology, the more amazing and miraculous the body becomes. Science is finally catching up to the mind-body-spirit connection. We begin to mind our Spiritual manners on planet earth when we begin to gift thanks for the gift of this life and this body.

Enthusiasm. This is yet another way to express our good manners. Enthusiasm is derived from the Greek word, *entheos*, which means, "God In Us." Enthusiasm enable us to choose to go with the flow of life, including all of its challenges, joys, concerns, sorrows, blessings, and open opportunities with full confidence that each circumstance is intended to accelerate our evolution and awakening.

In other words, in the situations and experiences of life, don't lose the lesson. Don't miss the forest for the trees. Don't get caught up in the paralysis of analysis. Enthusiasm is not something you create because it lies deep within each and every one of us.

Integrity. Integrity has often been referred to as what you will do when no one is looking. Let's explore this a bit. Character is considered to be the sum total of our traits or manners. Yet character is not merely personality. It is the behavior patterns that we have evolved to; formed by our experiences, understandings, insights, opinions, values, and attitudes.

When all of these are firing on all cylinders so to speak, when all of these are working in harmony, we live in fundamental integrity, in fundamental authenticity; minding our manners by walking our talk, honoring our commitments, and being true to our word. There is a congruency in our lifestyle in what we think, do, and say.

Integrity is not developed through will power or behavior modification. It is a revelation of our essential nature. It is who we really are. It is not a religious or moral code; it is by living the principles ( there's that word again) that govern this universe of which we are all a part. Integrity does not mean the we will not make mistakes of fall short of our intentions; No, not at all.

It does mean that we have the backbone to catch ourselves, to make amends where and when necessary and get back on track. It means that no matter what our mistakes, there is unconditional love, forgiveness, and compassion that either will come our way or we will give it to ourselves as a source of encouragement for us to step back into integrity.

A friend of mine once said that when we fall down in life, ( as we inevitably will) we should try to land on our backs because if you can look up, you can get up.

Now comes Respect. Respect is at the heart of spiritual manners and civility. Now, let's be clear. Respect is not some obligatory obedience to persons who are in positions of authority. When expressed under force conditions that are motivated by fear, respect is not genuine.

Respect is acknowledging the inherent worth and dignity of all sentient and non-sentient beings; two legged, four legged, winged beings, beings that crawl, trees, plants, all of creation. It is really an understanding and embodying the connection of the

interdependent web of which we are all a part. It is acknowledging the universal law of oneness.

I believe it was the 18<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Immanuel Kant who put respect for oneself and others as the core of his moral theory based on the conviction that every individual has an essential dignity. Now he didn't believe this about folk of color, specifically Africans but he was on the right track. The art of respecting others begins with self-respect, and self-respect generates respect for others.

Showing genuine respect to another human beings is a price above rubies. It is one of the highest forms of love that emanates from our hearts.

Generosity is the activity of spiritual manners or civility. We show generosity to our existence by generously giving to all of life through the sharing of our resources, time, energy, gifts, talents, and skills. Generosity is contagious and leaves a profound effect on both the giver and receiver, for you have heard it said that as you give so shall you receive.

The word generous is derived from the Latin word, genus, which means origin or source. This generosity extend to all of life and leads to the expression of compassion, for one of the highest forms of compassion is the understanding of a person's lack of understanding.

Sympathy will ask, how do you feel?-- Empathy says, I will feel for you. I will attempt to resonate with you. Generosity is our simple but powerful manner of saying "Thank You" to and for existence. Last but not least there is Creativity. All of us are consciously or unconsciously creating our lives. The world is begging for more creativity and not imitation. We can only be ourselves in this life because everyone else is taken. The greatest artistic achievement is how we live our lives.

We are meant to live on the creative edge of self-discovery and self-expression. When we refuse to do this or do not live by this mandate, we blaspheme the potential that is within us. Now, I don't want you to do this over your evening meal. I don't want you to lay this on someone while they are have dinner or lunch, if they asked you for some perceived or misperceived breach of etiquette, where are your manners?

They would starve to death while you went down this list. But my hope and prayer is that what you will do is to really go over what I have said if you can recall it and ask yourselves, am I minding my manners?

Do I have any manners? Have I somehow, with all of the outer distractions of my life, somehow lost them. Have I been so caught up in the act of glorifying busyness or who is in the White House, that I have forgotten or neglected how to live.

Am I focusing so much attention on what I don't want to occur that I have forgotten about focusing on what I so want to occur in my life? If so, simply slow down and remember the words of German mystic Meister Eckhart, who said that if the only prayer you said in your entire life was thank you—that would be enough. Hold nothing back from Life and Life will hold nothing back from you. Spiritual manners and civility will put the smile of The Buddha on your face. Evolved awakened people are grateful people. Evolved and awakened people are civil people. Evolved and awakened people have spiritual manners. Don't you have any manners? You bet your sweet \_\_\_ you do!