

## ***Grains of Truth and Pearls Of Wisdom***

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Oysters produce brilliant pearls by their graceful response to the tormenting irritation they experience when a grain of sand so rudely disturbs the cozy comfort of their abode. I have never been inside an oyster, and I don't know how much cussing and *kevetching* (whining and complaining in Yiddish) goes on before the oyster finally figures out that instead of reacting so negatively and trying to expel the bothersome grain of sand, it could form layer upon layer of luminous substance around the irritant, producing a precious pearl as a result. But, apparently, the oyster instinctively figures this thing out.

For us human beings, however, even though we are endowed with a magnificent brain a million times more complex than that of an oyster, it takes us much longer—some say many lifetimes—to figure out that the irritating encounters with foreign ideas that force us to rethink our conventional beliefs, unpleasant life experiences that disturb our cozy routines, and little dark truths that intrude into our habitual mindsets can be utilized creatively to make the most magnificent pearls. Having eaten the forbidden fruit of knowledge of Good and Evil, it seems like we have become too smart for our own good.

Take, for example, the case of a person who has just experienced the break-up of a romantic relationship or the loss of a prestigious job. It is safe to assume that, like all ordinary mortals, this person will be gripped by the pain of loss and rejection. In this case, to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil would mean that the individual is evaluating and judging the event as unacceptable and painful to his ego. Because this person has bought into the mass hypnosis of his or her culture, he or she equates happiness with having a loving mate and a prestigious job, believes that “you are nobody until somebody needs you,” and will therefore feel like a total loser or misfit. This person may then react in a number of ways, such as denial, violence, depression, workaholicism, dropping out of life, striking up meaningless new relationships or resorting to food, alcohol or drugs to numb the pain.

On the other hand, if this broken-hearted individual were to eat of the Tree of Life instead, he or she could gain a deeper understanding of the value inherent in all of life's experiences, good and bad. He or she would then accept both the pleasure that came his way because of the relationship or the job as well as the pain that he or she experienced because of the loss. After the initial ranting and raving and wallowing in self pity, he or she would quickly regain his balance and quietly reflect on the meaning of this painful experience. He or she might then use this undesirable event as an impetus for further growth and maturity. After a short while, the individual would put the experience behind him or her and write it off as the cost of becoming fully human.

The moral of the story is that, while we naturally tend to judge life events as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant (Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), we can go beyond our ego's dualistic judgments and choose to respond wisely to life's challenges instead of reacting mechanically and getting stuck in deadening emotions such as fear, apathy, anger, and self-pity. By *being free to experience*<sup>t</sup> all facets of life, trusting that every event holds something of value for our continual inner growth, we can reconcile and balance the opposites (in this case, pleasure and pain) and become more receptive to the creative flow of life's energies. Agreeing with Carl Rogers that “Openness to

Experience” is one of the three most important inner conditions one needs to cultivate for higher creativity, Christopher Evans writes:

To the extent that the individual is denying to awareness (repressing) large areas of his experience, then his creative formings may be pathological, or socially evil, or both. To the degree that the individual is open to all aspects of his experience, and has available to his awareness all the varied sensings and perceivings which are going on within his organism, then the novel products of his interaction with his environment will tend to be constructive both for himself and others.<sup>ii</sup>

Metaphorically speaking, as we change our mental diet from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to eating the fruit of the Tree of Life, we change our mode of consciousness from a limited “worm’s-eye view,” to that of a panoramic “bird’s-eye view”; from a sequential linear perception to a holistic perception. For example, a bird is capable of seeing and experiencing both the light and the dark side of the mountain simultaneously and does not get stuck on one side as a worm would. This is how Albert Einstein describes the difference between these two modes of perception:

A human being is a part of a whole, called by us “Universe.” A part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires, and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is, in itself, a part of the liberation, and a foundation for inner security.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> This phrase was first coined by my friend and teacher, Dr. Robert Gibson.

<sup>ii</sup> Evans, 1984, p. 26. It is true that when we examine the romantic lives of creative people, we notice that some of these creative geniuses have led highly dramatic emotional lives. For example, there is the famous case of Vincent Van Gogh, who cut off his own ear and presented it to the woman who had rejected his romantic advances. How is it that a highly creative person such as Van Gogh, who, according to our thesis should be connected to the creative prompting of the Tree of Life, would react in such a harmful manner to an episode of romantic rejection? As I will illustrate in another chapter, there is a dark side to creativity and the inner pressures that bear upon unusually gifted geniuses are enormous. There is also the fact that, as I mentioned previously, inner creativity and outer creativity do not always go hand in hand.

<sup>iii</sup> New York Times, March 29, 1972, quoted in *Gowan*, 1975, p. 260.