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Self-Development Through Selflessness: The Paradoxical Process of Growing Wiser

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O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled
As to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

—The Peace Prayer of St. Francis, by an anonymous Norman, c. 1915

If *wisdom* is defined as a combination of cognitive (an understanding of life and the desire to know the truth), reflective (the ability and willingness to look at phenomena and events from different perspectives), and affective (sympathetic and compassionate love for others) personality qualities (Ardelt, 1997, 2003, 2004; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Manheimer, 1992), then truly wise people, such as Jesus Christ or the Buddha, can also be described as the most psychologically developed persons. They are mature; psychologically healthy; autonomous; fully liberated from all outside and inside forces; and are, therefore, the masters of their own fate (Ardelt, 2000; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Kekes, 1983; Levenson & Crumpler, 1996; Pascual-Leone, 1990). Because people who grow in wisdom gradually come to accept reality as it is (and not as they would like it to be), including the negative side of their personalities, they are able to learn from their experiences, which allows them to overcome their negative tendencies and to gain inner peace through the development of equanimity (Hart, 1987). Hence, they tend to be less affected by external events and internal drives than other people, which results in greater autonomy and control (Ardelt, 2005; Kekes, 1983; Levenson & Crumpler, 1996; Pascual-Leone, 1990). Yet wise individuals are also *selfless*; that is, they have transcended the egotistical self and feel more part of the ocean instead of an

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individual wave (Carmody & Carmody, 1994; Levenson, Aldwin, & Cupertino, 2001; Takahashi, 2000). How can we explain the paradox that the highest level of self-development requires a quieting of the ego and the transcendence of the self?

Quests for self-realization, self-actualization, maturity, and autonomy, and even the quest for wisdom might initially be motivated by a desire for a stronger self, yet it is precisely through the process of self-development and self-knowledge that people start to realize the illusory nature of the phenomenal self. The self is not a substance, an unchangeable essence, or an "individual," but a construct (Metzinger, 2003) that is created through social interaction (Cooley, 1922; Mead & Morris, 1934). According to the *liberative model of adult development* (Levenson et al., 2001; Levenson & Crumpler, 1996), the self may be thought of as a construct of attachments and aversions, which need to be transcended. Self-transcendence can be achieved through nonattachment, patience, and in particular self-observation and self-knowledge. A person in search of wisdom will eventually come to the realization that what is conventionally called the "self," the "I," or the "ego" is an illusion that enables one to construct a stable image of oneself (Carmody & Carmody, 1994; Levitt, 1999; Takahashi, 2000). It is the attachment to the self that creates the ego. Through the practice of self-examination, self-reflection, and mindfulness (Baer, Smith, & Allen, 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2003) the ego grows quiet, which allows a glimpse into reality beyond the self and consequently results in greater wisdom (Levenson et al., 2001).

It should be noted that wise people's selflessness is not equivalent to low self-esteem or low self-confidence (Helson & Srivastava, 2002). Maslow (1970) even maintained that "the best way to transcend the ego is via having a strong identity" (p. 200). A dialectical relationship exists between selflessness and self-knowledge insofar that only individuals who know who they are can overcome their self-centeredness (Levenson & Crumpler, 1996; Levitt, 1999).

To illustrate the process of self-development through a quieting of the ego, semistructured interviews with three older adults who scored relatively high on the Cognitive Wisdom Dimension, the Reflective Wisdom Dimension, and especially the Affective Wisdom Dimension of the Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS; Ardel, 2003) were analyzed in depth. Respondents were asked about their current religion and spirituality, how their religion and spirituality had changed over the years, and how they coped with crises and obstacles in life.

The 3D-WS conceptualizes and operationalizes wisdom as a combination of cognitive, reflective, and affective personality characteristics (Ardelt, 2003), based on Clayton and Birren's (1980) pioneering wisdom research. The Cognitive Wisdom Dimension is defined as comprising the search for a deeper truth (Osbeck & Robinson, 2005), which necessitates a comprehension of the significance and deeper meaning of phenomena and events, particularly with regard to intrapersonal and interpersonal matters (Ardelt, 2000; Blanchard-Fields & Norris, 1995; Chandler & Holliday, 1990; Kekes, 1983; Sternberg, 1990). It is measured by the respondent's capability and desire to understand a situation or phenomenon thoroughly, knowledge of the positive and negative aspects of human nature, acknowledgment of ambiguity and uncertainty, and ability to

make important decisions despite life's unpredictability and uncertainties. The Reflective Wisdom Dimension represents mindful reflection; self-examination; self-awareness; and self-insight, which is a prerequisite for a deeper and unbiased view of life. It is assessed by the respondent's capability and willingness to look at phenomena and events from multiple perspectives and an absence of subjectivity and projections. A transcendence of subjectivity and projections is normally accompanied by a decrease in self-centeredness and a quieting of the ego, which makes possible a more thorough and deeper understanding of human nature and reality (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Kekes, 1995; Levitt, 1999; Taranto, 1989). A quieting of the ego and a better understanding of the complexities of human nature, in turn, tend to increase general sentiments of goodwill and sympathetic and compassionate love for others, which describe the Affective Wisdom dimension (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1990; Holliday & Chandler, 1986; Levitt, 1999; Pascual-Leone, 1990). Although the quieting of the ego is achieved primarily through the Reflective Wisdom Dimension and is likely to result in an increase in the Cognitive Wisdom Dimension, it is assumed that one of the major characteristics of a quiet ego is a feeling of sympathetic and compassionate love for others. This characteristic is assessed by the Affective Dimension of the 3D-WS, which measures the presence of positive, caring, and nurturant emotions and behavior and the absence of indifferent or negative emotions and behavior toward others.

Method

In this section, I describe how respondents for a larger quantitative study on Personality and Aging Well were initially recruited, how the three dimensions of Wisdom were measured, how the three respondents with a relatively quiet ego were chosen from the larger pool of study participants, and how the semistructured qualitative interviews with them were analyzed. I also examine how the demographic characteristics and religiosity of the three selected respondents are related to the three dimensions of Wisdom in the larger initial sample.

Procedure

Between December 1997 and June 1998, 180 older adults between age 52 and 87 ($M = 71$ years, $SD = 8.04$) were recruited from 18 civic, community, or church groups in north central Florida to take part in a survey titled Personality and Aging Well, the primary purpose of which was the development and assessment of the 3D-WS (Ardelt, 2003). Approximately 10 months later, 123 of the respondents participated in a follow-up survey. Between September 2000 and February 2001, 16 of those respondents were selected for a qualitative interview study called Aging and Dying Well on the basis of their gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Ten of the 16 participants were women, 10 were White, 6 were African American, 8 had a high socioeconomic status, 15 belonged to a

Christian denomination, and 1 participant was not affiliated with any religion. The respondents' ages ranged between 65 and 87 years ($M = 75$ years, $SD = 7.47$). In semistructured in-depth interviews, which lasted between 40 and 120 minutes ($M = 72.5$ minutes, $SD = 23.09$), participants were asked about their religion and spirituality, attitudes about death and dying, and recent positive and negative events in their life. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

WISDOM MEASURE. The Cognitive Wisdom dimension of the 3D-WS (Ardelt, 2003) is the average of 14 items, all of which measure the absence of this characteristic, such as "Ignorance is bliss" and "People are either good or bad." The Reflective Wisdom dimension is the average of 12 items that assess either the respondent's ability and willingness to look at phenomena and events from different perspectives, such as "I always try to look at all sides of a problem" and "When I'm upset at someone, I usually try to 'put myself in his or her shoes' for awhile," or the absence of self-examination, self-awareness, and self-insight and the presence of subjectivity and projections, represented by items such as "Things often go wrong for me by no fault of my own" and "When I look back on what's happened to me, I can't help feeling resentful." The Affective Wisdom dimension is the average of 13 items that measure positive, caring, and nurturant emotions and behavior toward others, such as "Sometimes I feel a real compassion for everyone" and "If I see people in need, I try to help them one way or another," or indifferent or negative emotions and behavior toward others, such as "I am annoyed by unhappy people who just feel sorry for themselves" and "It's not really my problem if others are in trouble and need help." All items were assessed on one of two scales that ranged from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) and from 1 (*definitely true of myself*) to 5 (*not true of myself*). The scores of items that measure the absence of the Cognitive, Reflective, and Affective Wisdom characteristics were first reversed before the average of the items was computed. The reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha for the Cognitive Dimension, Reflective Dimension, and Affective Wisdom Dimension were .78, .75, and .74, respectively, in the 1997–1998 survey and .85, .71, and .72, respectively, in the 10-month follow-up survey. The three wisdom dimensions were significantly and moderately correlated, ranging from .30 to .50 in the 1997–1998 survey and from .33 to .48 in the 10-month follow-up survey. The lowest correlation was between the Cognitive Wisdom Dimension and the Affective Wisdom Dimension. A detailed account of the development and empirical assessment of the 3D-WS can be found elsewhere (Ardelt, 2003), yet I should mention that the reliability and construct, content, predictive, discriminant, and convergent validity of the 3D-WS were satisfactory.

SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION OF CASES. Participants in the qualitative interview study who received a score of 4 or higher on the Affective Wisdom Dimension of the 3D-WS (Ardelt, 2003) in both surveys and a score of 4 or higher on at least one of the other wisdom dimensions were considered exemplars of a quiet ego and therefore were selected for an in-depth analysis of their interviews.

Only 3 of the 16 cases met this criterion. One of the 3 respondents scored consistently above 4 on all three dimensions of wisdom in both surveys. A

second respondent received a score of 4 or higher on all three wisdom dimensions in the first survey and on the Reflective Wisdom Dimension and Affective Wisdom Dimension in the follow-up survey. A third respondent scored above 4 only on the Affective Wisdom Dimension in the first survey but had scores of above 4 on the Cognitive Wisdom Dimension and Affective Wisdom Dimension in the follow-up survey. All 3 respondents were highly religious African Americans with a graduate degree, and 2 of the 3 were men. Indeed, in the 1997–1998 survey, years of schooling was positively correlated with the Cognitive Wisdom Dimension ($r = .42, p < .001$), Reflective Wisdom Dimension ($r = .16, p = .038$), and Affective Wisdom Dimension ($r = .16, p = .037$), and there was a slight trend for African Americans to have higher average scores on the Affective Wisdom Dimension ($M = 3.71$) than Whites ($M = 3.56$), $t(175) = 1.80, p = .074$. However, women ($M = 3.65$) tended to score significantly higher than men ($M = 3.48$) on the Affective Wisdom Dimension at the trend level, $t(176) = -1.96, p = .052$, whereas men ($M = 3.63$) tended to score significantly higher than women ($M = 3.37$) on the Cognitive Wisdom dimension, $t(176) = 2.76, p = .006$. Similarly, religiosity, which was assessed in the follow-up survey by Allport and Ross's (1967) Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scales, does not appear to be a prerequisite for wisdom, although all 3 of the selected respondents had relatively high scores on intrinsic religiosity. Yet an intrinsic religious orientation, which indicates a strong commitment to God and a religious life, was positively related only to the Affective Wisdom Dimension ($r = .26, p = .004$). It was unrelated to the Reflective Wisdom Dimension ($r = .08, p = .366$) and negatively related to the Cognitive Wisdom dimension ($r = -.23, p = .012$). Hence, wisdom, assessed as the average of the 3 dimensions, was not significantly related to an intrinsic religious orientation ($r = .02, p = .862$). By contrast, an extrinsic religious orientation that characterizes people who use their religion for extrinsic ends, such as companionship, respectability, and relief in times of sorrow, was negatively correlated with the Cognitive Wisdom Dimension ($r = -.35, p < .001$), Reflective Wisdom Dimension ($r = -.33, p < .001$), and Affective Wisdom Dimension ($r = -.17, p = .065$) and wisdom as a combination of the three dimensions ($r = -.36, p < .001$).

The three individuals who were selected for the analysis of their quieter egos were Earl, a single 71-year-old retired schoolteacher and school administrator; James, a married 77-year-old retired school administrator with four children; and Fay, a married 69-year-old retired schoolteacher without any children. To protect the respondents' identities, all of these names are pseudonyms.

Analysis

The three qualitative interviews were analyzed in depth, using the method of analytic induction (Katz, 2001). The analysis of the first person (Earl) served to construct a preliminary theory of characteristics of elders with relatively quiet egos. The analyses of the other two persons helped to refine, expand, and modify the theory so that all three fit the theoretical framework. Although respondents were not asked directly about their quiet egos, because this was

not the purpose of the original qualitative interview study, the analyses made clear that the three elders described the same pathways to a quieter ego and similar expressions of selflessness.

Attainment and Expressions of a Quieter Ego

The in-depth analyses of the qualitative interviews revealed that the three elders who scored relatively high on the three dimensions of the 3D-WS (Ardelt, 2003), particularly the Affective Wisdom dimension, attained a quieter ego through spiritual growth, listening to one's inner voice, and the development of humility. They expressed their quieter egos through a commitment to serve, a commitment to give, and ethical conduct.

Pathways to a Quieter Ego

The analyses of the qualitative interviews showed that the spirituality of the three elders grew deeper over the years, which enabled them to listen to their inner voice and to follow "God's" will. This process resulted in a decrease in self-centeredness and the development of humility and a quieter ego.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH. All three respondents reported that their religious and spiritual beliefs had grown stronger over the years. Earl said,

I've gotten stronger [spiritually]. I've gotten more involved. . . . You learn, just like a baby when you're walking. When you're just coming aboard, you've got to learn. As you're learning, your faith is becoming stronger. Then you become more personal with God, okay?

James explained how his religious spirituality had developed over the years:

It was a matter of progressive growth. When you first convert you're young, just like you're young in chronological age, and you have to grow in strength and faith. Along the way there are certain things that happen in your life, that if you associate with God in your Christian life, it will make you stronger in the faith. You just become stronger and stronger. Some people say, "The weaker the physical, the stronger the spiritual." So you get stronger as you go along. . . . When you're young in life you're a radical. You've got your physical strength, and you depend on that a lot. As you grow older, a heart attack, arthritis, a wreck or something brings you closer to the spiritual. So as the physical gets weaker, the spiritual gets stronger until, I guess, when you're about my age, you're right there.

The loss of physical strength and the loss of overconfidence that are often predominant in youth might paradoxically facilitate the development of an inner spiritual strength that depends not on physical prowess or feelings of superiority but on the confidence that one is a part of something larger than the self.

Fay recounted how her faith in God had changed over the years. When she was young, she liked to party and to have a good time, she said; however, her divorce at age 32 turned her from a party girl into a devout Christian:

I was young and full of life and energy, and my energies were always on the dance floor or parties or whatever. I was having a good time. I thought that that was the good time. I had my cigarettes and my beer or whatever, a cocktail, as they call it. If things happened I'd say "Oh Lord, why did this have to happen to me? Oh Lord, take that and don't let it happen to me." Now I understand. Things happen to everybody. And some things are supposed to happen to you, because if you don't have anything happen, you don't need to pray. You don't know what to pray for. You don't have to pray. So we need to know how to pray. And when God gets ready for you to stop all that foolishness, He'll stop it. So yes, I've learned, and I've learned how to pray. I dropped all that, and He delivered me from all that.

Fay learned from experience that "life is not a rose garden" and that nobody is spared from suffering in this world, which is also the First Noble Truth that the Buddha taught (Ñanamoli, 2001). She credited her suffering for her spiritual awakening. After her divorce, however, she first felt that God had abandoned her. Her spiritual growth was the result of a difficult spiritual struggle that confronted her with her own self-centeredness and eventually led her to dedicate her life to God.

Fay stated that her faith "grows stronger in grace as I grow in age." She worked on becoming more loving and forgiving and on overcoming her negative emotions and feelings, such as anger and resentment. By first realizing and accepting her own faults, she was able to be more tolerant toward the faults of others, which paradoxically made it easier to overcome her negative tendencies:

I'm sure you've heard the statement "I'll forgive it, but I won't forget it." I want to be able to forgive you, and I want to be able to forget it too. Maybe I don't forget it, but I don't want it to be a point of anger. I'll say "Oh, that's all right, you taught me a lesson." . . . I've forgiven you, and I have no malice about what you did to me. That's growing in grace. And I still love you, because I asked God to forgive me, because I'm not perfect. Let grace abound. He gives me grace, so I have to do the same for you.

Fay claimed that her love for others derived from her devotion to God. Because she had experienced God's forgiveness in her own life, she felt she was able to forgive others who might have wronged her. Yet her new life was not restricted to prayerful seriousness, devoid of all kinds of fun. On the contrary, Fay explained that her life was more satisfying now than when she was still a party girl. She said, "At one time, I didn't think you could have a good time being a Christian. . . . [But now] I have fun. I have a whole lot of fun. It's good clean fun. It's just so different. I just wish everybody could do it."

WORLDLY AUTONOMY THROUGH INNER-CENTERED GUIDANCE. By dedicating their lives to God, the three elders appeared to have exchanged self-centered

autonomy with inner-centered guidance. By feeling that they received guidance from a higher power, they had greater freedom to act in socially independent ways based on principles of ethics and morality. Listening to the ocean made them less dependent on the other waves around them (Levenson et al., 2001). James remarked,

I feel that religion and your belief in God controls and guides every possible activity of your life, dealing with people, dealing with employment, dealing with honesty and all of that. You become dedicated and something just guides you into the realm of the Lord God. You don't have to stop to think about it—well, I'm a Christian, am I going to do this in a Christian way or am I going to deal with this in a Christian-like manner. Being a Christian automatically guides you, and I feel that's forever with you once you get into that realm.

Similarly, Fay followed the maxim "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). She said, "I do love the Lord, and I want to do as He would have me to do. I know that His will must be done. If He wills for me to do something, I'll do it." Trusting in God took the form of listening to one's inner voice to do the right thing. Earl said that by doing that he felt that God protected him from harm: "It's like the Holy Spirit guides me. I can sense when there's danger. I can sense really when . . . if I go someplace or something isn't quite right . . . you get a warning, and you move away from that."

DEVELOPMENT OF HUMILITY. The three elders were able to learn from their own experiences, yet this resulted not in pride, arrogance, and a feeling of superiority but in the development of humility. Earl, Fay, and James learned to accept the fact that life consists of unpredictability and uncertainty and that dedicating one's life to God or a higher power allows for an underlying sense of security in a world that is inherently fragile and uncertain. For example, Earl said, "[I pray to God to] give me the strength and assurance that I need. . . . Hey, we are here by the grace of God."

Humility is also necessary to realize that unanswered prayers can be a blessing in disguise. As James explained,

Prayer is powerful and sometimes prayer unanswered is God's best gift to you. . . . Sometimes we pray for things we want and God answers with what you need. And then when you turn around and look after it, you say, well, that is better this way.

James realized that humans are too limited in nature to comprehend the consequences of their prayers. By believing that God always has his best interest in mind, James felt he was able to wait patiently and humbly for God to give him what he needed and not necessarily what he wanted.

A self-centered person typically cannot comprehend that an unanswered prayer or an unfulfilled wish can be a blessing in disguise, because a strong focus on the self with its desires and aversions makes the fulfillment of one's wishes of utmost importance. Only someone who has experienced the truth of "I know that I don't know" can accept the fact that wishes and desires might be

shortsighted and even detrimental to one's own and others' well-being. People who have reduced their self-centeredness (i.e., quieted their egos) are more likely to accept what has been given to them and might even realize that sometimes an unanswered prayer "is God's best gift."

For individuals with quiet egos, the purpose of prayer is foremost not about requests but about praising God and giving thanks (Merton, 1972; Steindl-Rast, 1984). James said, "To me prayer is a way of praising God for being a good God and honoring Him as God and thanking Him." Similarly, Fay stated, "I thank God for life, health, and strength and for the ability to do things. He gives me strength and understanding. I thank Him for that. I thank God for everything." Hence, the development of humility inevitably led to gratitude, because the elders realized that all the positive things in their life were not necessarily deserved. As Earl remarked,

Some of the things I get from God . . . I don't even want and I don't even earn them. We've got to pray and thank Him for them. Whatever I need, I get just about everything I need and more than I need. Hey, my cup runneth over around here.

People who dedicate their lives to God or a higher power and develop humility in the process may be able to control ego-centered emotions and impulses, such as anger, rage, jealousy, envy, and greed, by focusing on the larger picture and on the more important things in life instead of on life's little annoyances (Teresa of Avila, 2000). Those individuals give their problems over to a higher power and allow themselves to be filled with positive emotions, such as love, joy, and patience, that are the result of a decreased self-centeredness and a quieting of the ego, which Earl described as "the fruits of the Holy Spirit." Fay told the interviewer that prayer for her is a "communication with God" that can lift her spirits, and James summed up his life by stating "I've had a happy life."

Expressions of a Quieter Ego

Spiritual growth, inner-centered guidance, and the development of humility resulted in a quieter ego, which Earl, Fay, and James expressed through a commitment to serve, a commitment to give, and ethical conduct in their lives.

COMMITMENT TO SERVE. All three respondents were very involved and served in official positions in their respective churches. James was a president and deacon in his Baptist church and the treasurer for the Gideons, "Christian men who put the Bibles, the word of God, in as many places as possible." Earl was a deacon and the treasurer in his Baptist church and the president of the church choir. Fay was a missionary in her Methodist church, which entailed "going to visit the sick and doing [things] for people that need it, whatever we can do to help people, that's the first part of our mission. Also, to try to bring others to the Lord."

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR: COMMITMENT TO GIVE. The three elders' involvement in their church was manifested by their commitment to give. Earl stated,

You've got to give God some of your time. You've got to become a tither once you become of age. You make your contribution to your church, make your contribution to society, and whatever you do, do those things, and if you want to do something else on the side, you do that, but make sure you make your contributions in those areas.

A commitment to give was not limited to monetary giving; it also extended to helping community members who were in trouble. However, this help was given not out of a feeling of superiority but with compassion, sympathy, and the encouragement to do better in the future. James remarked,

You get that reputation [as an upright person] in the community, and you get a lot of calls, and you can help a lot of people, but who you help, you don't go out calling names and that kind of thing. That's between you and your God and that person. You might tell him, "Listen, Brother or Sister, this is just between you and me what happened. You want to straighten up." By that way, you call the people's conscience, and it can make a difference in their life. Water dropping on a rock will knock a hole in it, you see, so you keep tapping on it. You don't break it all at once.

James emphasized that he would not reprimand or publicly blame others for their failings. Instead, with sympathetic and compassionate love, he appealed to their inner goodness (conscience). By not giving up on others and continually reminding them of their inner goodness, he tried to help others to overcome their problems.

People who have committed their lives to God or a higher power and have quieted their egos in the process are practicing the commandment to "Love thy neighbor" in a very real sense (Ardelt & Koenig, 2007). They strive to love and give to all people depending on need instead of on the personal characteristics of the receiver. Fay explained,

Love is for everybody, because God is love, and so we ought to love one another. If we show love to each other, then in that way they'll see the light in us. . . . God is love, and you don't hold anything in your pocket. You can't do that and be a Christian. No. We look beyond that, because God looks beyond our faults and finds our needs. So He gives us grace, you know. We have to love everybody.

Fay knew that loving everybody was not always easy, especially if people behaved in negative ways. However, even though it was sometimes difficult to realize, Fay felt that the commandment to "Love thy neighbor" should not exclude anyone. She admitted, "It's hard to be patient. And it's hard to love some people too. It's hard, but you have to love them anyway."

ETHICAL CONDUCT. The three elders believed that ethical conduct was most important for a meaningful life. Earl said,

When you live and do the things, which you're supposed to be doing, as is prescribed already by God, this is life. This is living. When you're out there

sinning, it's not really life. What you're doing is committing suicide. You're killing yourself. You're dead, spiritually dead.

For Fay, the meaning of life consisted of being a good role model, sharing what had been given by God and loving others. She explained,

I want to be a light so that [others] can see that the light shines in me and they may want to do the same thing. Because sometimes all people need to do is see what you are doing, and then they can better understand what it's all about.

For James, ethical conduct was important not only for this life but also for the hereafter:

I don't think you can earn your way into Heaven. That comes as a result of how you treat your neighbor, your faith, and your strength in God. Man looks at the outer thing. God looks at the heart, and when your heart is right and you love God, that afterlife will be a place of peace and happiness and the result from this world.

James believed that it was most important to love God and others and to have a pure heart. He felt that living a God-centered rather than a self-centered life was less about outward behavior than about inner beliefs and the motivations behind the behavior.

Conclusion

Levenson et al. (2001) suggested the following six practices for the cultivation of selflessness: (a) practicing generosity to achieve detachment from material possessions, (b) practicing patience as an antidote to anger and hostility, (c) self-discipline, (d) meditation, (e) commitment, and (f) the avoidance or transformation of negative personality tendencies. The three case studies in this chapter can be considered exemplars of those prescriptions. Earl, Fay, and James practiced generosity through their commitment to serve and to give, developed patience through the development of humility, learned self-discipline through spiritual growth and inner-centered guidance, engaged in sincere and personal prayer, and dedicated their lives to God, and in the process they transformed self-centered emotions and impulses into positive emotions, such as love and joy. The analyses showed that through mindful reflection, self-examination, and a willingness to learn from experiences self-development ultimately leads to a quieting of the ego and to self-transcendence manifested in a concern for the well-being of all and an altruistic, all-encompassing love (Achenbaum & Orwoll, 1991; Helson & Srivastava, 2002; Levenson & Crumpler, 1996; Levitt, 1999; Maslow, 1970; Takahashi, 2000). Hence, the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of people who have quieted and transcended their egos are directed toward the benefit of all beings rather than only themselves and their loved ones (Levenson et al., 2001).

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