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Tennis – Br. Dougherty

Meditation

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines meditation as “the ability to use intransitive senses to engage in contemplation or reflection”. Meditation was the central force in the worship practices of the Pennsylvania Quakers during the colonization of America. Meditation continues to serve as a key component of the spiritual development in the lives of young people today.

The Quaker faith is extremely interesting to me because its beliefs and doctrines are so simple and pure. I was fascinated to read the following statement in the American Quakers, “...attention to one’s own Inward Light was sufficient to inspire an ethical, moral, Christian life; attention to this Light in others was sufficient to produce the bond of communal love. The best way to find this Light was to simply sit in silence and wait.” (Coleman, 6) As a Catholic, this type of waiting and reflecting is somewhat foreign to me. I have been an active Catholic from the time I was a child. I have always gone to mass weekly and when I was young, I learned prayers and heard Bible stories each night as my parents put me to sleep. Also, while I was growing up, my babysitter took me to the Church each Wednesday to vacuum, arrange the flowers and dust. Through these various experiences, I began developing my own thoughts on religion and the key components of my faith became active participation, doing service for others and being aware of the foundation of my religion.

An important element in the development of a spiritual person is the ability to let experiences change you. The Friends Meetings of the Quaker religion focus around individuals getting in touch with the Inward Light. Religious experiences cannot be

forced, but a meditative environment helps an individual focus their attention on their inner being. During my senior year of high school, I had my first true religious experience. At my senior retreat, there was a meditation period for an hour in which students were asked to separate and find personal space. I simply assumed that we would sit as a group and eventually sneak in some conversation, but I was surprised to see so many students take this opportunity to be alone with their thoughts. It was during this time that I began to put my life into perspective. I began to realize that religion was more about personal convictions and being true to yourself than following a preset mission statement of a particular religion. I was able to form my own opinions about how self-reflection can help individuals develop both spiritually and emotionally.

As I entered college, I continued to see the importance of personal reflections and a foundation in active participation and doing service for others. An amazing opportunity I had at LaSalle was when I went on the Los Ninos Service Trip to Tijuana, Mexico. It was in Tijuana that I joined with students from various ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. Each night of our trip, we met as a group and had reflections. The types of reflections varied, but the one that helped me to grow most was a guided reflection introducing questions about the differences we see between Tijuana and the United States. During this time, each student sat quietly and began to think about the experience they were having in this poor area of the world. It was amazing for me to compare and contrast the life I lead which, seems average in American society to the life others lead, which is full of uncertainty, poverty and hopelessness. This time of personal reflection allowed me to make helping those less fortunate than me a life long goal. I

hope to take the gifts and resources I have and use them to benefit others. Without my meditative experiences, I would not have been able to reach this point in my life.

After reading about the Quakers, I have come to understand that meditation allows you to develop spiritually. The ability to contemplate your life and faith gives you the opportunity to reflect and take a step back from the pressures of society. The simplistic and peaceful lifestyle of the Quakers is an example of how continuous self-reflection can impact your life in a positive way. Most people do not have this type of environment therefore their religious experiences are limited and their spiritual growth does not expand as much. If young people are exposed to periods of meditation, they will be more likely to have religious experiences, which will help them grow spiritually.

Bibliography

Coleman, Wim, ed. American Quakers. Carlisle: Discovery Enterprises, 1998.

Merriam Webster Dictionary. 2003. <http://www.m-w.com/home.htm>