CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION

ENGAGING THE PROPHETIC EDGE IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION
Contemplation and Action as Cultural Awareness and Engagement

• In contemplation ...
  • we deepen awareness of our own inner life, grounding, and compassion
  • we open to the new, including the stranger within us, and our blindnesses
  • we become aware of both the otherness and the sameness of our neighbors

• In Action ...
  • we put compassion into play in service to the common good
  • we welcome the stranger — including the marginalized — as kin
  • we act prophetically in alignment with the commonwealth of God
Contemplation and Action: The Tension of Opposites

- Contemplation as moving inward
  - A retreat from ordinary life
  - Solitude, silence, rest, non-action
  - Openness and listening, being receptive

- Action as moving outward
  - Engaging with the world
  - A communal movement, with and affecting others
  - Effort to effect change or movement in the world, however small
Contemplation and Action As Complementary Movements

- Contemplation provides the ground from which to act
  - Direction for action comes from contemplation: “right action” flows from contemplation
  - Energy for action is a fruit of contemplation
  - The contemplative stance is the way for action: compassionate, non-judgmental, non-violent

- Action is the grist to be taken back into contemplation
  - The active life shapes our contemplation: “right contemplation flows from action”
  - Richard Rohr: “Life itself is the necessary school for contemplation.”
  - There is a back and forth between action and contemplation
The Woodcarver (The Way of Chluang Tzu)

“When I began to think about the work you commanded
I guarded my spirit, did not expend it
On trifles, that were not to the point.
I fasted in order to set my heart at rest.
After three days of fasting I had forgotten gain and success.
After five days I had forgotten praise or criticism.
After seven days I had forgotten my body with all its limbs.
By this time all thought of your Highness

And of the court had faded away.

All that might distract me from the work had vanished.

I was collected in the single thought of the bell stand.

Then I went to the forest....

When the right tree appeared before my eyes,...

All I had to to was to put forth my hand and begin.”
Contemplation and Action: A Unified Reality

- Aristotle: “Contemplation is the highest form of action.”
- Woven fabric: Contemplation is the warp; action is the weft. Both are needed.
- Engaging all of life from the contemplative stance, whether at prayer or in action
- The deeper meaning of “praying without ceasing”
- Can “listening” and “utterance” coincide?
Implications For Spiritual Direction

• We direct contemplatively, yet direction is also action in the fullest sense
• We listen to our directees for the relationship between contemplation and action
  • Paying equal attention to their prayer life and their active life
  • Allowing them to live in the tension and the complementarity of contemplation and action
  • Helping them discern the ways contemplation and action come together in their lives
• We find ourselves addressed in the session, inviting and eliciting our own active life
  • Both our contemplative life and active life are implicated as we direct