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Essay #2 Thoughts on “Letting Your Life Speak”

Why is it that little red cloth bound books are often dense with the thoughts of seasoned men? I can only draw the names of three, Chairman Mao’s, Palmer’s “Let Your Life Speak,” (Jossey-Bass 2000) and “Tuesdays With Morrie,” but holding Palmer’s as I read it for class, I felt an urgency in the words between those school-house red covers similar to those in the other books I named. Perhaps these preceptors want to make sure their books are not missed in the drab stacks of *Hardy Boys* mysteries and thick compilations of abridged classics (which miss their adjectives and idiomatic dialogue so badly that it’s a shame the boys never picked up *that* case1.) As I’ve mentioned in prior dispatches, I have drummed my own cadence for much of my life. Palmer’s book shone some light on the process.

I had to seek silence before being able to hear my *inner voice*. As is typical of this sort of hero’s journey, that introspective quiet was to come only after an arduous trek in the dark. Palmer draws from the wisdom of good people, yogis even. The Rabbi Zusya: “they will not ask me: ‘Why were you not Moses,’ They will ask me: ‘why were you not Zusya?’” and Rumi, “If you are here unfaithfully with us, you are causing great damage.” These two quotes get to the heart of my certitude that the true self is one’s best guide. Rumi’s quote in particular illustrates the simple truth Palmer expands – By giving what we do not have we harm ourselves at least, and the company we keep at worst.

Palmer also details the Quaker process of Clearness Committees to sort out the complicated things in life. I suppose a solid issue I could lay before the committee would be the matter of how much and what sort of education I should pursue. My dilemma in brief: as a computer wrangler there are many professional pathways. I am not sure which makes the most sense to pursue. Should I finish my degree and seek gold out west in the Rockies? I have never lived in a place longer than 7 years. Should I stay close to my family’s base and work in industry, here in Chicago? Should I delay the money and pursue a graduate degree? Research and collegiality among the like-minded is one of my favorite things.

On my council would sit a mix of five of the smartest, coolest, and most disagreeable2 people I could think of. My Mother’s Father, Jack Churchill would be in the room. His was the most pragmatic voice I can remember hearing in life. A United States Army Colonel on the Joint Chiefs Of Staff, he was an intelligence officer in Vietnam and an artillery officer before that, in Korea. I never saw the man flustered, and if he cared about you, I never saw him accept anything but the truth. His life was service-oriented and complicated, and I feel like his guidance would be clear and valuable. Then would come William Paden, author of *Interpreting the Sacred*. I feel like Paden demonstrated a cool detachment and cutting eye in his inspection of religion, and I would appreciate such a discerning voice at my table, able to find nuance in the issues. After sits Gunner William Ayers, Warrant Officer in the U.S. Navy and leader of my ordnance team during my Global War on Terror deployment in 2006. Gunner Ayers’ language may cause you to question his rectitude, but in a sentence he could distill a thing, and he cared for my well being without restricting my personality. He cared about my life in a way that I’d only felt from my mother before. I would have a therapist named Jesse in the group. Jesse works for the VA and has the most neutral voice on the panel. His questions are always personal yet never so specific that they box my answer. And finally, I would invite Saint Augustine3 in to the room, for his eloquence and his obvious skill in asking questions.

I don’t know what the committee member should ask. That’s the whole reason I invited them and not the people in my life whose sentences need only be started so predictable are their ends. I should hope that my grandfather asks questions that seek to know my true motivators. I would like Paden to help tease out distinctions reasons. If Ayers demonstrated that I could feel right but should still proceed cautiously, it would give me goose bumps. I would expect Jesse to ask the things that seed the conversation with objects to inspect. And I would be disappointed if Augustine did not chime in with a rhetorical question that exposed my humanity and the weakness of the human condition.4

I will never realize this committee. The men who are not dead will not have a chance to gather around me and spur me towards myself. The dead men lead by what they have left behind. My Grandfather would affirm my intelligence and ability. With Augustine, it is harder to tell, but he might celebrate my desire to know more and seek s*alvation*. I think Paden would celebrate my awareness of my lenses and Gunner Ayers my resilience of spirit. Jesse I think would celebrate the work itself.