

Part 5: Freedom

Summary

The chains that keep us from true freedom are bad experiences of the past, good experiences of the past, fears and anxieties about the future, ambitions for the future, clinging to present things, and delusions about our own importance. Many exercises are described to help people become free of these chains.

Freedom Exercise

Meditatively imagine what existed one hundred years ago on the spot where you are now. What existed there three thousand years ago? What will exist there three thousand years from now? You will experience a sense of vastness. You will gain a realization that except in the eyes of God you are not really important. (Allow five to ten minutes for this exercise.)

Discussion Questions

1. Is the topic of freedom important for spiritual growth? Why or why not? What is true freedom? When do you feel the most and the least free?
2. In this program Fr. de Mello said, "The enemies to freedom are not outside of us." What did he mean? What is it inside you that most restricts your freedom?
3. What bad experience in the past restricts your freedom? How does it restrict your freedom? What can you do about it?
4. Do you agree that the good experiences of the past can limit your freedom? Do you agree with Fr. de Mello that nostalgia is a disease? Why or why not? How does nostalgia destroy the present? How nostalgic are you? Do you compare past experiences with the present?
5. The Hindus say, Water remains pure by flowing. The holy person remains pure by going. What application does this have for you? How does this saying relate to the program?
6. Why should Christians not be anxious about the future? What are you most anxious about?
7. What is good about ambition? When does ambition have bad effects? How much is too much ambition? When does ambition come to the point of controlling one's life?
8. Why is the human heart so possessive of persons and things? What are you most possessive of?
9. Do you agree with Fr. de Mello that except in the eyes of God L. you do not really matter? Did this shock you? If so, why? In what ways are you insignificant? In what ways do you think you are most significant?
10. What is "the tyranny of the self" that Fr. de Mello spoke of? How do you experience this?
11. How does a realistic view of your importance free you? How does it give you perspective and vastness?

Exercises for Freedom

Perspective Exercise

Meditatively imagine what existed one hundred years ago on the spot where you are. What existed there three thousand years ago? What will exist there three thousand years from now?

As a result of this exercise, you will begin to experience a sense of vastness. You will gain a realization that except in the eyes of God you are not important.

The Mysterious Exercise

In a meditative environment get in touch with the sensations you experience in your body. After a while, be aware of the one who is observing those sensations and say internally, "I am not those sensations. I am not this body." Be aware of your thinking and then be aware of the one who is observing the thoughts and say, "I am not my thinking, I am not my thoughts." Become aware of your feelings or recall some feelings from the recent past. Turn your attention to the one, who is observing those feelings and say, "I am not these feelings. I am not my feelings." If you are anxious or depressed, do a similar thing by saying, "I am not the anxiety" or "I am not the depression." This exercise will have a great effect on you but you may not notice it immediately.

Remembering Exercise

In a meditative environment realize that you are being influenced by some bad experience from the past. In a few minutes of peace and quiet go back to that experience and speak to the Lord. Imagine the Lord is next to you. Tell the Lord that if he allowed it to happen, you believe it was for your own good. Thank the Lord for this experience. Do not be violent and do not force yourself. Do not allow your-self to become too immersed in the memory. If this does not work, leave it for another day. Ordinarily the benefits of this exercise are not achieved quickly.

Good—Bye Exercise

Think of some people you have loved in the past but who are no longer with you. Talk to these people. Say some-thing like, "How lucky I was that you came into my life. How grateful I am to you. I will love you always. And now goodbye. I must go because if I cling to you I will not learn to love the present or the people I am with, so good—bye." Then move to pleasant experiences you have had and personalize them. Repeat the same sequence as above to them. Think of some of your former personal possessions such as your youth or your strength. Personalize them and then repeat the above sequence to them.

Exercise to Be Free of Fear

Speak to some fear you have about the future of yours. Then speak to the Lord and thank the Lord in advance for the outcome of the thing you fear.

Exercise to Be Free of Ambition

Stand in front of the Lord and make an act of faith to him. Tell him, "Lord, I trust that you are in control of the future. I'm going to do everything in my power to make my dreams come true but I leave the result in your hands." Then imagine that you let go of your ambition. Thank the Lord in advance for the outcome.

Exercise to Be Free of Possessiveness

In a meditative environment think of someone you are possessive of. In your imagination talk to that person. -Talk lovingly. Tell the person what he or she means to you and then add, "How -precious you are to me, how dear and how lovely. But you are not my life. I have a life to live, a destiny to fulfill that is separate from you."

Take things and places that are dear to you and repeat the same thing -to each of them. Repeat the same sequence to the things that are the most intimate to you, such as your reputation, or your health, or your life itself. If this is too painful for you, leave it for another time.