

Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

Smoke on the Mountains

I was driving to work in the rain one day last week. Southwest Virginia really doesn't have a lot of traffic, and I was traveling along at a comfortable speed with another car behind me. After 15 minutes or so, a group of cars came speeding up behind us. They were each weaving from lane to lane, jockeying for position, like they were in some kind of race. Upon seeing them, the guy in the car behind me decided he now wanted to go faster and joined the menagerie, weaving in and out, jockeying for position, like the others. After much maneuvering, the whole pack finally passed me, and I was left driving alone. I took pause, looked around, and was struck by the eerie beauty of the mountains on that dark morning in the rain. Mist just hung on the ridges, like smoke on the mountains.

I began to think that the whole experience was a nice metaphor for some of the most important ideas in spirituality. We need to slow down and not just blindly follow others. *Dare to be different.* Believe in yourself. *And always be an optimist.* We *can* often find a better way than what everyone else seems to be doing. Inspiration and innovation have been the cornerstones of American economic and technological success. We need to realize that they are also key in spirituality. We also must not become jaded, thinking that because we find some flaw in a given spiritual system, that the whole should be distrusted and discarded. *Don't throw the baby out with*

the bath water. No one has all the right answers. Nor is anyone likely to have all the wrong answers. We must look around, collect pieces of truth from wherever they may be found, and put together the puzzle for ourselves. The cynical and the arrogant are truly the most ignorant among us. We must shift our gaze around and upwards, to the mountains and the sky. I suspect that my myopic fellow travelers on that rainy morning saw only wet pavement and the bumper of the car in front of them. I saw the beauty of the smoke on the mountains, but I think that I was not the only one.

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