

Spiritual Soup

Kurt Venables

The Four Horsemen and Angels in the Dishwashing Liquid

The kids like to play a game in the kitchen while Tammy and I are washing dishes. If you squeeze the plastic bottle of dishwashing liquid while it is upright, loads of tiny bubbles come shooting out. I tell the kids that the bubbles are little angels, and the kids like to try to catch them. They're tough to catch; the faster you try to grab one, the faster it will move around your hand. To catch one, you have to move slowly and deliberately. Spirituality is kind of like that.

I believe that mental wellness, true happiness, only comes from spiritual fulfillment and that spiritual wholeness only comes from opening one's heart to the Light. I perceive four principal limitations that one need overcome to allow the love of the Light to completely fill the heart. These limitations, which I call the Four Horsemen, are: Close-mindedness and Misplaced Values, Selfishness, Arrogance, and Negativity and Stress. These modern scourges are interrelated and feed one another. The first horseman, "know it all" Close-mindedness, is like a gate through which one must pass in order to make any spiritual progress. One cannot progress if one refuses to learn. Close-mindedness is subsumed within the more general problem of self-deception. The worst lies we tell are the ones we tell ourselves. Some refuse to admit their limitations for fear of feeling bad. In truth, they will feel better in the long run, as they identify and begin to overcome their limitations and the Light begins to shine within their hearts. Again, however, one cannot expect to progress if one cannot



face truth. A related problem, also involving truth (or lack thereof), is that our culture places undue emphasis on relatively unimportant values to the detriment of those that truly merit focus; this includes materialism. The second horseman, Selfishness, is marked by the almost exclusive concern for oneself at the expense of others, which leads to alienation of others. This problem includes a general sense of alienation in our society. The third horseman, Arrogance, is an obsessive desire to be "better" than others, a desire to think of oneself as of a higher status than others. A form of self-deception, it functions as a perverse justification for selfishness, thereby aggravating that problem. Finally, the fourth horseman, Negativity, is a problem of poor mental outlook, unrealistic expectations, and inadequate coping with adversity in life. Negativity leads to stress, which also arises from unnecessarily adversarial interactions with others and inadequate coping with the demands of daily life in our fast paced world.

The antithesis, the antidote, to the Four Horsemen is what I call the Quartet of Angels: Truth, Love, Humility, and Optimism. Truth refers to a commitment to seeking spiritual truth. As referred to previously, many construct elaborate mental artifices to delude themselves. Such mental

gymnastics only obscure the true path to the Light. Spiritual progress can only come from an open-minded search for truth. A commitment to truth also includes understanding and focusing on values that truly bring happiness. The second angel, Love, refers to loving all others without the usual boundaries, such as loving only one's self, family, friends, etc. Love is the key to spirituality; the Light is pure love. True love brings true happiness. The third angel, Humility, means understanding that we are all morally equal, or equally worthy of love, and that no one stands above or apart from others. Finally, the fourth angel, Optimism, refers to a positive outlook on life and understanding that over-reacting to adversity in life is counterproductive to the primary goal of achieving happiness. As the Light fills the heart, it sanctifies the ordinary, and one more easily sees the beauty and wonder in oneself and the world.

By working within to overcome limitations and cultivate the right kind of feelings, we can become spiritually healthy as individuals. By working without, in our world, we can help to bring spiritual progress to our collective culture. I do

believe that we are entering a new Age of Light in which genuine spiritual progress is being made. Disconcertingly, however, I also see the four principal maladies discussed becoming increasingly manifest in our society. Those contracting these modern plagues are marked by hollowness, a lack of true joy. If a person is unhappy at best, it is not difficult for adversity to push him or her into periods of depression. While I do accept that genuine hormonal and neurochemical imbalances do exist, I truly believe that a large portion of the mental health problems in our society are the result of spiritual discord. If humanity cannot overcome the problems represented by the Four Horsemen, rather than entering a new Age of Light, we run the risk of entering a new Age of Spiritual Apocalypse. I do, however, see strong forces for good in this world, and we must work diligently to strengthen these forces. Cultivating a spirit defined by the Quartet of Angels is difficult. Spirituality is a lifelong process, both for individuals and the human race. Grasping angels is a tricky business, one achieved only by slow, deliberate progress.

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