

Week Five – Non-coveting

Years ago, when I first came across this week's theme, **non-coveting** (non-avarice, absence of greed), my mind brought me back to memories of Bible Study at Sunday school. Growing up, I had the experience of being involved with various Christian ideologies. The desire to understand the larger, deeper connection with life has been an interest for a long time. My father and grandparents are Catholic; my stepfather Methodist; mother was Protestant; and when I was a young teenager, attended a few modern evangelical movements with rock bands and video games at youth group. All of these ideologies, while speaking through different voices and perspectives, had something in common: the core biblical lessons are taught to all. If you share memories from Christian church or Bible study you may remember this passage:

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:17)

Usually, a commentary by the priest or church administrator would follow that offered attempts as to why we should not “covet” what others have, that we should not be desirous of other people's things; that wanting, longing or desiring are evil things that defile and corrupt men. We probably are then told that to give into these “sins” will lead us to an afterlife confined to a fiery inferno.

This is all well and good if we are children and need stories to keep watchful of our actions. But as we grow and mature, our faculty of mind becomes more discerning and stories of an eternity of hell-like conditions loses its potency or, still holding on to those stories, we operate with constant fear and deep shame if we should look upon something, like a fancy dress, car or house, and be desirous of them. At least, that is what happened with me and what is commonly called “Catholic guilt.”

NO SHAME IN MY GAME

If you have not experienced the shame or guilt that is commonly associated within Christian ideologies, then you are fortunate. Many Christians can talk to you about how their thoughts and actions weigh on their conscious when they left to contemplation about their arrival to heaven or not on the Day of Judgment. There are other religious sects, not just Christians, who warn their adherents of an eternity of doom should they not follow the various paths laid by their institutions. So, beyond just Christians, many people may experience this shame or guilt in their subconscious.

Fortunately for us in the Building Personal Power series, we do not attempt to shame or limit one another. Rather, we are here to learn through our own experience.

JOURNAL DAY 1: Think about a time during your childhood when another childhood friend received a gift that was something you longed for. Write about how you felt. If memories are hard, think more recently of someone who has something you don't that you would like. What is your perspective of them?

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WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Perhaps when we take the word greed and think more basically about it, we observe that greed is really just a strong desire. Imagine a homeless person who has not enjoyed a proper meal in many, many months. This person, being invited to a dinner with hors d'oeuvres and appetizers might seem like he or she greedily fills their plates. But, as we know a bit of the back story, we understand that it is not greed this homeless person exhibits, but rather a deep longing or desire to enjoy, finally, some tasty treats that garbage roughage cannot provide.

However, greed or coveting, rather, is something more profound than a mere longing for, or deep desire. To be greedy or coveting represents in us a sense of lack or being somehow unfulfilled. And why do we experience this void or deficiency within ourselves? Personally, I had the mindset that everything was owed to me. That, somehow, the turbulent life I experienced warranted a future life of ease and fulfillment. When others were exhibiting bliss or enjoyment, I silently scoffed at them – thinking that they were undeserved of their gains; that they had not suffered enough to *really* enjoy or appreciate. Also laying hidden behind my envy, at times, was the brutal truth I knew myself to be lazy. I wanted what they had without the willingness to put forth the effort.

But that was not really the case. They did what was necessary, or happened to be the right person/place, to receive their gains, their gifts. I was simply bitter at my seeming lack of capacity to receive similar gifts or make similar gains through honest work. I was not at the center of enjoyment and each thought of envied greed or contempt for others drew me down deeper into the hells of self-loathing, hate and disdain for the world.

EMPATHY'S ENEMY

When we see others during moments of bliss or enjoyment we naturally experience an empathetic response. We, in our minds, silently imagine and share that bliss with them. Perhaps externally we share a smile. This natural empathetic response has the potential to illicit a negative aspect, unfortunately. Remember during Week One – Harmlessness, how we watched our internal dialogue? How we created endless streams of thought that was full of self-criticism? How we criticized others? These are the moments in which we find ourselves brooding over self-worth and making biased comparisons between others. When we lack self-worth, we are more prone to exhibit greedy thoughts or deeply critical judgments of others.

PRACTICING WHOLENESS

The aspect of greed that I reference here is not the blatant greed we might attribute to, say, Scrooge McDuck, or the miserly scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*. The type of greed, or coveting, that is sought to be uncovered here is the subtle form of greed that creates in us a divide between the wholeness and abundance of the universe and our individuality. When we do not feel whole within ourselves we will seek to remedy this by consuming or acquiring what we think we need. To counter this, we must practice cultivating a sense of personal satisfaction and contentment with our possessions and ourselves.

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JOURNAL DAY 2: Thinking of a time of personal failure, analyze how expectations (for you or others) caused your sense of self-worth to feel low, or not enough.

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CULTIVATING SATISFACTION

In order to cultivate satisfaction we first need to drop pretenses and expectations from ourselves and, similarly, we need to remove expectations from others. When performing our duties in daily life, we should do them wholeheartedly with all the available tools and skills available to us. Why? So that if we were to look back at what we've accomplished, we will know that we did all that could be done at the time, thus completely satisfied. Now, consider this: a carpenter is to build a house yet only has half the materials. Going about his business he builds half a house. But how can anyone be satisfied with that? The roof doesn't exist; there are only two windows and no bathroom. Yet, the builder at the time used all that was available to him. If we step back we can certainly see and admire the craftsmanship that went into his work; all the joints are well affixed, all cuts perfect. Should the carpenter be upset? No, because he used his skills despite the lack of appropriate materials. Perhaps the contractor and homeowner thought they would get a full house but how could they make unreal expectations of the carpenter when the contractor did not order enough lumber in the first place?

JOURNAL DAY 3: Think of a time when, despite all odds, you felt proud of an accomplishment – a good exam score on a hard test, or unexpected job promotion/recognition. What was it like? How did you feel?

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HONESTY, INTEGRITY & PERSEVERANCE

Once I was a part of a karate dojo in northern New Jersey. My mom wanted me to learn self-defense, discipline, and mainly to help get my rambunctious energies exercised. During the first part of our classes we warmed up the body by doing various calisthenics like running in place, jumping Jacks, pushups and so on. While we went through our repetitious warm ups, we recited the moral codes and key concepts of our art. I didn't really have a good sense of them then but, now, as I contemplate the ones I remember, I relate honesty, integrity, and perseverance as wondrous concepts to help us with feeling personal contentment and satisfaction (in the coming weeks we will also uncover additional tools).

Being more self-reliant by means of honest, committed work will result in a lesser likelihood of experiencing greed. So when we do our work, act and participate in our relationships, we are to honor ourselves by doing the best we can with the skills and knowledge we have and without unrealistic expectations. If at any point we are feeling lack, doubt, fear, then we must step away, regain and center ourselves. That might mean learning a new skill, trying different methods, or waiting for a better time.

When looking at others we also must remember that everyone has put forth their own level of efforts, that they may have cheated, lied or stole to arrive at or have such things. Others may have worked hard. This is not for us to judge because we do not know the absolute truth as to how others are or what they have in life. It is said that we should congratulate and share in the happiness of those who perform good deeds; ignore and avoid those who perform wrongs; and show compassion to those who are struggling.

JOURNAL DAY 4: Think of a project or task you have done that could have done better. Instead of creating criticisms or stories, list out what could have been done better. Did you need knowledge? Different tools, or resources? Now, write out a new plan as to how you would improve upon future, similar projects or tasks.

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RELEASE TENSION

Over the past several weeks now we have peered deep into our being and discovered more about who we are in relation to the moral and ethical powers of Harmlessness, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Conservation, and Non-coveting. We have also learned to listen to our inner speak, the inner dialogue, to better understand biases and filters that may skew our perception of truth, life “as it is” in the moment. Additionally we understand that all people have been like we were: struggling to find peace and happiness in an ever-changing world of varying perspectives and opinions.

The journey of self-discovery is one that can seem juxtaposed between its burdensome start to the liberating effects experienced down the road. For some of us, we are still feeling the effects of unresolved inner conflicts, while others have cast aside some limiting qualities and are feeling a bit freer and fresher. No matter where we are, we are where we should be. Here and Now. By accepting this we can allow tension to release. The more we focus on learning and applying our knowledge, the more we grow. The more we can be discerning and unbiased, the more we open up to see the whole picture. By understanding our tensions, we can invite relaxation.

JOURNAL DAY 5 – 7: Put to use all of the qualities we have learned so far. Intentionally set out each day to be compassionate and non-violent to yourself and others; speak and live the deepest truth you can understand in each moment; honor yourself and other’s time and energy as to not steal away from valuable relationships; be mindful of your attention and focus energies on endeavors you know will be of lasting value and not for momentary pleasure; and, equally, be happy each day with yourself – everything that makes you who you are. Appreciate the lessons, relationships and personal history that are unique to only you. No two people are the same. Write how you feel each day, how each quality was expressed or honored.

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Congratulations! We have finished Week Five – Non-coveting in the Building Personal Power series. While five weeks is a long time it may have seemed like a blur. That is one amazing aspect of life: the constant flux and flow to time and events. Knowing that we are living in a state of constant change, we are better able to be open and receptive to new ways of thinking and living. I encourage all of you to continue with your daily journals, meditations and contemplation over Harmlessness, Truthfulness, Non-stealing, Conservation and Non-coveting. These five ethical and moral principles will constantly shine bright for you on your path to righteous living – their only fuel is your continued awareness of them. It is important to remain vigilant, as our habits are strong and will come back as soon as our guard is down. The vibrant light of these truth principles can help you in the dark fog of ignorance.