

Thomas Kelly: A Quaker Luminary

Monday, September 18, 2017 8:30 AM



Thomas Kelly 1893 - 1941

Born in a Quaker family, he was a scholar and teacher.

Inner Sanctuary of the Soul

"Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely, to the Light Within, is the beginning of true life. It is a dynamic center, a creative Life that presses to birth within us. It is a Light Within which illuminates the face of God and casts new shadows and new glories upon the face of men. It is seed stirring to life if we do not choke it. It is the Shekinah of the soul, the Presence in the midst. Here is the Slumbering Christ, stirring to be awakened, to become the soul we clothe in earthly form and action. And He is within us all."

The Light Within, Part I, A Testament of Devotion

Shekinah:
the glory of the
divine
presence,
conventionally
represented as
light or
interpreted
symbolically

A Life of Prayer Without Ceasing

"How, then, shall we lay hold of that Life and Power, and live the life of prayer without ceasing? By quiet, persistent practice in turning of all our being, day and night, in prayer and inward worship and surrender, toward him who calls in the depths of our souls. Mental habits of inward orientation must be established. An inner, secret turning to God can be made fairly steady, after weeks and months of practice and lapses and failures and returns. It is as simple an art as Brother Lawrence found it, but it may be long before we achieve any steadiness in the process. Begin now, as you read these words, as you sit in your chair, to offer your whole selves, utterly and in joyful abandon, in quiet, glad surrender to Him who is within. In secret ejaculations of praise, turn in humble wonder to the Light, faint thought it may be. Keep contact with the outer world of sense and meanings. Here is no discipline in absentmindedness. Walk and talk and work and laugh with your friends. But behind the scenes, keep up the life of simple prayer and inward worship. Keep it up throughout the day. Let inward prayer be your last act before you fall asleep and the first act when you wake. And in time you will find, as did Brother Lawrence, that "those who have the gale of the Holy Spirit go forward even in sleep.

"The first days and weeks and months are awkward and painful, but enormously rewarding. Awkward, because it takes constant vigilance and effort and reassertions of the will, at the first level. Painful, because our lapses are so frequent, the intervals when we forget Him so long. Rewarding, because we have begun to live. But these weeks and months and perhaps even years must be passed through before He gives us greater and easier stayedness upon Himself."

The Light Within, Part I, A Testament of Devotion

An Integrated Life

"We are not integrated. We are distraught. We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to fulfill them all. And we are unhappy, uneasy, strained, oppressed, and fearful we shall be shallow. For

over the margins of life comes a whisper, a faint call, a premonition of richer living which we know we are passing by. Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens we are further strained by an inward uneasiness, because we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power. If only we could slip over into that center! If only we could find the Silence which is the source of sound! We have seen and known some people who seem to have found this deep Center of living, where the fretful calls of life are integrated, where No as well as Yes can be said with confidence. We've seen such lives, integrated unworried by the tangles of close decisions, unhurried, cheery, positive. These are not people of dallying idleness nor of obviously mooning meditation; they are busy carrying their full load as well as we, but without any chafing of the shoulders with the burden, with quiet joy and springing step. Surrounding the trifles of their daily life is an aura of infinite peace and power and joy. We are so strained and tense, with our burdened lives; they are so poised and at peace.

"If the Society of Friends has anything to say, it lies in this region primarily. Life is meant to be lived from the Center. Each one of us can live such an amazing life of power and peace and serenity, of integration and confidence and simplified multiplicity, on one condition - that is, *if we really want to*. There is a divine Abyss within us all, a holy Infinite Center, a Heart, a Life who speaks in use and through us to the world. We have all heard this holy Whisper at times. At times we have followed the Whisper, and amazing equilibrium of life, amazing effectiveness of living set in. But too many of us have heeded the Voice only at times. Only at times have we submitted to His holy guidance. We have not counted this Holy Thing within us to be the most precious thing in the world. We have not surrendered *all else*, to attend to it alone.

The Simplification of Life, A Testament of Devotion

Holy Obedience:

"There are plenty to follow our Lord half-way, but not the other half. They will give up possessions, friends and honors, but it touches them too closely to disown themselves. It is just this astonishing life which is willing to follow Him the other half, sincerely to disown itself, this life which intends complete obedience, without any reservations, that I would propose to you in all humility, in all boldness, in all seriousness"

"If you don't realize the revolutionary explosiveness of this proposal you don't understand what I mean. Only now and then comes a man and a woman who, like John Woolman or Francis of Assisi, is willing to be utterly obedient, to go the other half, to follow God's faintest whisper. But when such a commitment comes in human life, God breaks through, miracles are wrought, world-renewing divine forces are released, history changes. There is nothing more important now than to have the human race endowed with just such committed lives"

"There is a degree of holy and complete obedience and joyful self-renunciation and of sensitive listening that is breath-taking. Difference of degree passes over into utter difference of kind, when one tries to follow him the second half. Jesus put this pointedly when he said 'Ye must be born again.' (John 3:3), and Paul knew it: 'If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature'

"The life that intends to be wholly obedient, wholly submissive, wholly listening, is astonishing in its completeness. Its joy is ravishing, its love enveloping, its simplicity that of a trusting child. It is the life and power in which the prophets and apostles lived. It is the life and power of Jesus of Nazareth, who knew that 'when thine eye is single thy whole body is full of light' (Luke 11-34)... It is the life and power of the myriads of unknown saints through the ages. It is the life and power of some people now in this room who smile knowingly as a speak. And it is a life and power that can break forth in this tottering western culture and return the Church to its rightful life as a fellowship of creative heaven-led souls."

Holy Obedience, A Testament of Devotion

Fruits of Holy Obedience: Humility, Holiness, Entrance into Suffering, Simplicity, and Joy

Humility:

"The God blinded soul see naught of self, naught of personal degradation or personal eminence but only the Holy Will working."

Holiness:

God inflames the soul with a burning craving for absolute purity. One burns for complete innocency and holiness of personal life. No man can look on God and live, live in his own faults, live in the shadow of the least self-deceit, life in harm towards his least creatures, whether man or bird or beast or creeping thing."

Entrance into Suffering:

"For if you will accept as normal life only what you can understand, then you will try only to expel the dull, dead weight of Destiny, of inevitable suffering which is a part of normal life, and never come to terms with it or fit your soul to the collar and bear the burden of *your* suffering which must be borne by you, or enter into the divine education and drastic discipline of sorrow, or rise radiant in the sacrament of pain ...

"... The heart is stretched through suffering, and enlarged. But O the agony of this enlarging of the heart that one may be prepared to enter into the anguish of others! Yet the way of holy obedience leads out from the heat of God and extends through the Valley of Shadow.

"But there is also removable suffering, yet such as yields only to years of toil and fatigue and unconquerable faith and perchance only to death itself. The Cross as dogma is painless speculation; the Cross as lived suffering is anguish and glory. Yet God, out of the pattern of His own heart, had planted the Cross along the road of holy obedience. And He enacts in the hearts of those He loves the miracle of willingness to welcome suffering and to know it for what it is - the final seal of His gracious love. I dare not urge you to your Cross. But He, more powerfully, speaks within you and me, to our truest selves, in our truest moments, and disquiets us with the world's needs. By inner persuasions He draws us to a few very definite tasks, *our* tasks, God's burdened heart particularizing His burdens in us. And He gives us the royal blindness of faith, and the seeing eye of the sensitized soul, and the grace of unflinching obedience. Then we see that nothing matters, and that everything matters, and that this my task matters for me and for my fellow men for Eternity. And if we be utterly humble we may be given strength to be obedient even unto death, yea the death of the Cross."

Holy Obedience, A Testament of Devotion

Simplicity

"...there is a deeper, an internal simplification of the whole of one's personality, stilled, tranquil, in childlike trust listening ever to Eternity's whisper, walking with a smile in the dark.

"This amazing simplification comes when we "center down," when life is lived with singleness of eye, from a Holy Center where the breath and stillness of Eternity are heavy upon us and we are wholly yielded to Him. Some of you know this holy, recreating Center of eternal peace and joy and live in it day and night. Some of you may see it over the margin and wistfully long to slip into that amazing Center where the soul is at home with God. Be very faithful to that wistful longing. It is the Eternal Goodness calling you to return Home, to feed upon green pastures and walk besides still waters and live in the peace of the Shepard's presence. It is the life *beyond* fevered strain. We are called beyond strain, to peace and power and joy and love and thorough abandonment of self. We are called to put our hands trustingly in His hand and walk the holy way, in no anxiety assuredly resting in him."

Holy Obedience, A Testament of Devotion

Relationship with God

"Let me talk very intimately and very earnestly with you about Him who is dearer than life. Do you really want to live your lives, every moment of your lives, in His Presence? Do you long for him, crave Him? Do you love His Presence? Does every drop of blood in your body love Him? Does every breath you draw breath a prayer, a praise to Him? Do you sing and dance within yourselves, as you glory in His love? Have you set yourselves to be His, and *only* His, walking every moment in holy obedience? I know I'm talking

like an old-time evangelist. But I can't help that, nor dare I restrain myself and get prim and conventional. We have too long been prim and restrained. The fires of the love of God, of our love toward God, and of His love toward us, are very hot. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength.' Do we really do it? Is love steadfastly directed toward God, in our minds, all day long? Do we intersperse our work with gentle prayers and praises to Him? Do we live in the steady peace of God, a peace down at the very depths of our souls, where all strain is gone and God is already victor over the world, already victor over our weaknesses? This life, this abiding, enduring peace that never fails, this serene power and unhurried conquests, inward conquest over ourselves, outward conquest over the world, is meant to be ours. It is a life that is freed from stain and anxiety and hurry, for something of the Cosmic Patience of God becomes ours. Are our lives *unshakeable*, because we are clear down on bed rock, rooted and grounded in the love of God? This is the first and greatest commandment.

"Do you *want* to live in such an amazing divine Presence that life is transformed and transfigured and transmuted into peace and power and glory and miracle? If you do, then you can. But if you say you haven't the time to go down into the recreating silences, I can only say to you, 'Then you don't *really* want to, you don't yet love God above all else in the world, with all your heart and soul and mind and strength.' "

The Simplification of Life, The Testament of Devotion

Discover the Flaming Center of Religion

"The blazing discovery which Quakers made, long ago, is rediscovered again and again by individuals, and sometimes by groups. The embers flare up, the light becomes glorious. There is no reason why it cannot break out again, today, with blazing power. The world needs it desperately. It is in the hope that *you and I*, today, may rediscover this flaming center of religion that those words are written -- not in an historical interest in a charming past. All that I would say to you about the past is directed to you in the present. As yourself: Am *I* down in the flaming center of God? Have *I* come into the deeps, where the soul meets with God and knows His Love and power? Have *I* discovered God as a living Immediacy, a sweet Presence and a stirring, life-renovating Power within me? Do I walk by His guidance, feeding every day, like knights of the Grail, on the body and blood of Christ, knowing every day and every act to be a sacrament?

The Quaker Discovery, The Eternal Promise

"Let us be clear that mystical exaltation is not essential to religious dedication and to every occurrence of religious worship. Many a man professes to be without a shred of mystical elevation, yet is fundamentally a heaven-dedicated soul. It would be a tragic mistake to suppose that religion is only for a small group, who have certain vivid experiences, and to preach those experiences so that those who are relatively insensitive to them should feel excluded, denied access to the Eternal Love, deprived of a basic necessity for religious living. The crux of religious living lies in the *will*, not in transient and variable states. Utter dedication of the will to God is open to all, for every man can will, and can will his will into the will of God. Where the will to will God's will is present, there is a child of God."

The Gathered Meeting, The Eternal Promise

"I have tried to emphasize the Inner Teacher. In us all is a Life upspringing. It is the Holy Spirit. He speaks within. He teaches us things we can never learn from books. He makes vivid and dynamic what were formerly dead phrases. He integrates us and leads us to new truths. He lays on us new burdens. He sensitizes us in new areas, toward God and toward men.

The Reality of the Spiritual World, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 21

The Reality of the Spiritual World is a writing I did not incorporate much into today's handout. This is because this writing is different in many respects and all revolves around the question, Does God Exist? I highly recommend the pamphlet. It also lays

out four types of prayer: prayer of oblation, prayer of inner song, prayer of inward listening, and prayer of carrying. Topics I could not hope to cover in a noon session along with everything else.