



Inner & Outer Worlds - the role of Light.

Please read this short autobiographical story and be prepared for discussion.

Cultural idioms such as "Shine Your light", take on added meaning when reflect on the words of Jacques Lusseyran, a blind Frenchman who also a prisoner of the first world war and a hero of his time.

In his book And There was Light Jacques Lusseyran writes:

After losing my sight (at the age of eight), I "looked in the direction where I was in the habit of seeing before the accident, and there was a void, a lack, something like a void which filled me with a what grownups call despair. Finally, one day, I realized that I was looking in the wrong way.

I was making something very like the mistake people make who change their glasses without adjusting themselves. I was looking too far off, and too much on the surface of things. At this point some instinct, made me change course. I began to look more closely, not at things but at a world closer to myself, looking from an inner place to one further within, instead of clinging to the movement of sight toward the world outside.

Immediately, the substance of the universe drew together redefined. I was aware of a radiance emanating from a place I knew nothing about. A place which might as well have been outside me as within. But radiance was there, or to put it more precisely, light.

I felt indescribable happiness. Confidence and gratitude came as if a prayer had been answered. I found light and joy at the same moment, and I can say without hesitation that from that time on light and joy have never been separated in my experience. I have had them or lost them together.(p. 17)

Without my eyes, light was much more stable than it had been with them. A light so continuous and intense was so far beyond my comprehension. ...

Still there were times when the light faded, almost to the point of disappearing. It happened every time I was afraid. If instead of letting myself be carried along by confidence throwing myself into things, I hesitated, calculated thought about the wall the half-open door the key in the lock; if I said to myself that all that these things were hostile and about to strike or scratch, then without exception I hit or wounded myself. The only easy way to move around the house, the garden or the beach was by not thinking about it at all, or thinking as little as possible. What the loss of my eyes had not accomplished was bought about by fear. It made me blind. Anger and impatience had the same effect, throwing everything into confusion. When I was playing with my small companions, if I suddenly grew anxious to win, to be first at all costs, then all at once I could see nothing. Literally I went in to fog or smoke. But when I was happy and serene approached people with confidence and thought well of them I was rewarded with light. (p. 20)

For blind people, there is such a thing as moral odour, and I think that was the case at my school. A group of human beings who stay in one room by compulsion- or because of social obligation which comes to the same thing – begins to smell. That is literally the case, and with children it happens even faster. Just think how much suppressed anger, humiliated independence, frustrated vagrancy and impotent curiosity can be accumulated by forty boys between the ages of ten and fourteen!

So that was the source of the unpleasant odour and the smoke which, for me was like a physical presence in class. What I saw there was confusion, colours were faded and even dirty. The blackboard was black, the floor was black, the tables were black and so were the books. Even the teacher, in terms of light was no more than gray.

Boredom bound and gagged all my senses. ... Every bit of my passion for living was needed to stand the test ... I couldn't understand why the teachers never talked about the life going on inside them or inside us. They talked in great detail about the origin of mountains, Julius Caesar, history and math, but there was never any talk of real people like the teacher or ourselves. As for the subject of all subjects, the fact that the world is not just outside us but also within was entirely lacking. I understood that the teacher did not wish to talk about what was going on inside him. That was his affair, and after all, I was not anxious myself to talk about what went on in me.

But the inner life was so much more than a personal thing. There were a thousand desires and goals my companions shared with me, and I knew it. To accumulate knowledge was good and beautiful, but the reason for men to acquire it would have been more meaningful, and no one spoke of that. ... This interior world of mine was so important to me that I was determined to protect it from shipwreck and to rescue it. (p.67)

When speaking of how he taught his friend Jean about the interior world, Jacques had this to say. "He was continually diving down in to his inner world. He believed me when I told him that this world, if not richer than the other, was certainly as rich, and almost completely unexplored. ... Still though he had learned to go down into himself, he was clumsy when it came to climbing up again. The ascent is always the most difficult part of this journey. I had been making the return trip regularly for five or six years, and for me it was routine. I explained to Jean that it was a preconceived idea which made the process hard for him- an idea, by the way, which almost everyone shares – that there are two worlds, one without, the other within. ...

The reality – the oneness of the world – left me in the lurch, incapable of explaining it because it seemed obvious. I could only repeat: "There is only one world. Things outside only exist if you go to meet them with everything you carry in yourself. As to the things inside, you will never see them well unless you allow those outside to enter in". (p.88)

