Rest for the soul: the sack of stones and the branch over the fence

We wait for the weekend to relax, for the holiday to switch off and for the evening to recover after a hard day. All of this is good and necessary, but it solves only part of the problem. We need not only rest for the body, but rest for the soul as well: to be free of inner conflict, of guilt, of fear and of the feeling that something essential is missing.

Rest for the soul does not come by itself, and it cannot be bought. Just as thirst is not quenched by looking at water but by drinking it, rest does not come only from knowing what is good, but from living it. This rest has several springs. The first is a clear conscience: a person who lives honestly has nothing to hide and nothing to fear. As the old saying goes, "A clear conscience is a soft pillow." The other three springs are forgiveness, peace with those around us and contentment.

Forgiveness

Two brothers quarrelled over a piece of land their parents had left them. Ten years have passed since then, and they have not spoken a word. They pass each other in the village street without a greeting and avoid each other at the holidays. Almost every day each of them thinks about the injustice he believes he has suffered, goes over the harsh words in his mind and is upset just hearing the other's name. That land has brought them far more bitterness than profit.

Unforgiveness is like a sack of stones a man carries on his back day after day. Every insult kept in the heart adds another stone, and the burden grows, even though the other person does not feel it at all. When a man forgives, he puts down a weight that has been pressing on him for a long time.

Imagine that one day one of the brothers takes the first step: he knocks at the other's gate and holds out his hand. Perhaps the land will never come back to him, but he gains something far more precious: he gets his brother back. The two sit at the same table again, their children play together once more, and the holidays find their joy again. No boundary line is worth as much as a brother, and the peace that follows cannot be bought with all the land in the world.

Peace instead of war

Two neighbours have been quarrelling for years over small things: a branch hanging over the fence, a car parked too close to the gate, water running from one yard into the other. Every quarrel ends with a new grudge and the wish to have the last word next time. Each one watches the other, each one seeks his rights, and the search for his rights has turned into a war without end. Neither of them steps into the yard in peace any more. The home, which should be a place of rest, has become a battlefield.

Everything changes on the day one of them decides to stop paying back in the same coin. He no longer gets angry at the branch over his fence; he enjoys its shade. He parks his car a little further away, and the next time the other raises his voice, he answers calmly. At first the neighbour does not know what to make of it. But little by little the quarrel dies out, because there is no one left to keep it going. After a while the two greet each other over the fence, lend each other tools and help each other when there is need.

The one who gave up having the last word lost nothing. He won the peace of his own home – and a neighbour.

Contentment

An old woman has a small house, a garden and a few hens. In the morning she drinks her coffee on the doorstep and watches the sun rise. She enjoys its light and the fresh morning air. She does not compare herself with anyone. She has less than many others, but she is far more at peace than they are. Happiness does not lie in having everything you want, but in enjoying what you have.

A peace that does not depend on circumstances

Many believe that peace comes from money, health and success. But a peace built on such things vanishes as soon as circumstances change. The springs we have spoken about – a clear conscience, forgiveness, peace with those around us and contentment – are of a different kind. They do not depend on what happens to us, but on how we choose to live. A person who lives in the truth has nothing to fear. A person who has learned to forgive is no longer ruled by resentment. A person who does not repay evil with evil no longer lives in conflict. And a person content with what he has is no longer eaten up by envy. Such a person does not need favourable circumstances to be at peace, because his peace comes from within. That is why no one and nothing can take it from him.

Yet rest for the soul is not only about this present life. It is not a pleasant extra added to eternal life, but its very condition. Many picture eternal life only as a life without end. But if every day were a burden, what would an endless number of days mean? Without rest, eternity would be torment. With it, it becomes a joy without end.

From the free brochure "The Purpose of Life". You will find the brochure under Resources.

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