

# A First Step in Healing

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*The greatest of all faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none.*  
(Heroes and Hero-Worship, Carlyle.)

An important passage in Scripture is Jeremiah 31:31-34 wherein the prophet speaks of the New Covenant (eventually established by Jesus, Luke 22:20). Part of this passage says,

*I, (the Lord) will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the Lord.*

To the Israelites the "heart" was considered the essence of one's being. The "law" is to be written upon hearts of flesh in contrast with it being written on stone tablets. Ezekiel notes how the people are prepared for this when he prophesies: *I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts.* (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

In the New Testament Jesus says, *It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.'* *Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.* (John 6:45). It is this deep-down knowing of the Lord and his way that sensitizes our consciences to recognizing what is right and what is wrong. Many people suffer needlessly because they carry with them the guilt of their wrongdoings, and the effects can be spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical. They know something is disordered and yet are unable to understand their own sadness and suffering which can often be alleviated with a simple approach. James gives us insight into this point when he notes, *Declare your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may find healing.* (James 5:16). He is saying that confession and prayer are prerequisites to healing.

Many anonymous programs such as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and Al-Anon (for families of alcoholics) have a foundation based on 12 spiritually-oriented steps and the 5th one is:

*Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

This maxim suggests that people admit their shortcomings, first to God, and to themselves, in a kind of personal and private confession. Afterwards they need to find the courage to complete the step by confiding their faults to another trusted human being, and this calls for humility as well as honesty.

Self-searching is a long-term undertaking and as long as we are having difficulties and pain, there is the possibility that we are blind to certain flaws, and the need for self-examination remains a top priority. In such a frame of mind constructive ideas for self-improvement will follow and help us change the things we may not like about ourselves. In fact this will give us glimpses of the wonderful people we can be and give us a taste of what true joy is all about.

*Those who err in spirit shall acquire understanding,  
those who find fault shall receive instruction.  
(Isaiah 29:24)*

*Confession of Sin* is an ancient Aztec poem (The Sacred Path edited by John Bierhorst, William Morrow & Co.), which also exemplifies this theme. To begin the poem an intercessor speaks on behalf of the sinner and then the sinner speaks with sadness and guilt:

*Lord, ever Present, Ever Near,  
Take it from me, hear my stench, my corruption.  
I undress to your face, I show my nakedness.  
The act was mine, I did it.  
Can what I have done in your presence be secret?  
Can it be in darkness?  
No, it is mirrored in light.*

When the penitent finishes his prayer, he lists his wrongdoings and the intercessor prescribes a fitting punishment such as fasting.

The Aztec formula resonates with Confession (the Sacrament of Reconciliation) as practiced in the Catholic Church. The priest as intercessor: he absolves the sins by the power of Jesus left to the Church (John 21:22-23), and then he prescribes penance, usually prayer. There is a growing concern in the Church that this sacrament is not being used enough by the people. How much pain and suffering would its regular practice alleviate?

*But to the penitent he provides a way back  
and encourages those who are losing hope!  
(Sirach 17:24)*

In the Old Testament, Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143 are known as the Penitential Psalms and meditating on them is a wonderful way to prepare for confession according to our beliefs. Some excerpts are:

*Have pity on me, LORD, for I am weak;  
heal me, LORD, for my bones are shuddering.  
(Psalm 6:3)*

*Then I declared my sin to you;  
my guilt I did not hide.  
I said, "I confess my transgression to the LORD,"  
and you took away the guilt of my sin.  
(Psalm 32:5)*

*There is no wholesomeness in my flesh because of your anger;  
there is no health in my bones because of my sin.  
My iniquities overwhelm me,  
a burden too heavy for me.  
(Psalm 38:4-5)*

*Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love;  
in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions.  
(Psalm 51:3)*

*(The Lord is ) Heeding the plea of the lowly,  
not scorning their prayer.  
(Psalm 102:18)*

*If you, LORD, keep account of sins,  
Lord, who can stand?  
But with you is forgiveness  
and so you are revered.  
(Psalm 130:3-4)*

*Teach me to do your will,  
for you are my God.  
May your kind spirit guide me  
on ground that is level.  
(Psalm 143:10)*

The message is clear and simple - a heart free from wrongdoings and guilt put us in closer touch with the healing power of the Almighty Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

*Come now, let us set things right,  
says the LORD:*

*Though your sins be like scarlet,  
they may become white as snow;  
Though they be red like crimson,  
they may become white as wool.*

*If you are willing, and obey,  
you shall eat the good things of the land;  
(Isaiah 1:18-19)*



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