



Piero Ferrucci. **Inevitable Grace**. Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1990.

EXCERPTS

Since this book studies the peaks of human consciousness, it is not uncommon to find words like God or divine used by those who described these experiences. For us this means they were a climax in the lives of those who had them. We will not be led to any metaphysical or theological statements here: whether or not God exists, and what his nature may be, are not subjects we will tackle.

We will study human experiences as such, just as we study any other phenomenon in the universe: the vortices in a river, the roots of a tree, the flight of an eagle, or the structure of a comet.



Memory may surface when a present sensation evokes a similar one we had in the past, and from the coincidence of the two an aesthetic emotion is born. For instance, the French novelist Marcel Proust had only to place his foot on uneven polished pavement and was instantly taken back to a similar polished pavement he had walked on years before in Venice. The gondola waiting for him on the canal, the precious hours spent there, the happiness of those days – these recollections he relived all at once. This type of memory made him feel as if he were “free from the order of time”:

We have only to re-experience in the present a sound once heard or a smell once sensed, and immediately our “I” , which may have seemed dead for a time, but was not completely dead, comes back to life as it takes in the celestial nourishment offered to it.



One sunny afternoon, the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, convalescing from a long illness, was sitting on a bench at Piazza Santa Croce in Florence. He looked around – Dante’s statue, the church facade, the marble of the buildings and fountains: “I had

the impression that I was seeing those things for the first time, and the composition of the painting revealed itself to my mind's eye". Thus was born *The Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon*, a wonderful metaphysical painting full of magic and ageless nostalgia.



More than a trend in art, innocence is an intrinsic aspect of inspiration. We also find it in certain sculptors. Henry Moore, for instance, liked to contemplate objects stripped of their familiar connotations:

Suddenly the most commonplace objects came to have for me such significance that they no longer existed as just objects, but as a shape and form in space. It has been the same with nature and the human figure, both sources of unending interest for me.



During the Crimean War, Florence Nightingale brought about a revolution in health care and created the nursing profession. By treating the wounded she reduced the death rate from 42 percent to 2 percent.

Despite the prejudiced attitude held by the military hierarchy, who feared she would invade their territory, Nightingale worked

without respite, bringing to thousands of wounded men her friendliness and competent medical care. The picture of this woman holding a lamp in her hand, moving through dark hospital corridors, became a legend. Some soldiers would kiss her shadow as she passed, so grateful were they for her care.

In these miserable soldiers Nightingale saw beauty and dignity:

The tears come into my eyes as I think how, amidst the scenes of loathsome disease and death, there rose above it all the innate dignity, gentleness and chivalry of men ... shining in the midst of what must be considered the lowest sinks of human misery.



The Zen monk Kyogen took copious notes on the teaching of his masters. Then, one day, he realized that all his enormous material was completely useless. Discouraged, Kyogen burned his notes, turned his back on everything, and went to live in the country as a cemetery attendant. As he was sweeping the ground one day, his broom hit a small stone that struck a nearby bamboo cane. The sound it made brought him instant enlightenment. Where years of study had failed, one ordinary moment succeeded.



At about age fifteen young Prince Siddharta, the future Buddha, was sitting by a river one day observing. The current was carrying small and large pebbles along with it. Some insects sought to make their way upstream on the surface of the water, but, after a while, they too had to yield. Only a few large, majestic boulders remained still, unmoved by the vehemence of the stream.

This, thought Siddharta, is a metaphor for human existence. The great mass of people allow themselves to be swept along, like pebbles, by the current of life, tossed here and there by circumstances and chance. Others, like the insects of the river, attempt to escape but end up being carried along like the rest. Is it possible to be like those immovable rocks, standing out from the flow of unconsciousness and death?

Human beings, thought Buddha, are blind and powerless, condemned to a life full of errors and suffering, which stretches out into an endless series of further errors and suffering. What can we do to escape from this nightmare? Young Prince Siddharta did not yet know. It was to take him many years of searching to find out. The answer, as is true of all creative answers, was simple:

Attention is the path of immortality, lack of attention is the path to death. Those who are attentive do not die, those who are not attentive are as if already dead.



When ready, the body becomes an instrument of inspiration, without which dance is a little more than gymnastics. According to Isidora Duncan, there are three types of dancers: those for whom dancing is physical exercise, those who dance to express emotions, and those who hand over their bodies to the inspiration of the "soul":

This sort of dancer understands that the body, by force of the soul, can be in fact converted to a luminous fluid. The flesh becomes light and transparent, as shown through the X-ray – but with the difference that the human soul is lighter than these rays. When, in its divine power, it completely possesses the body, it converts that into a luminous moving cloud and thus can manifest itself in the whole of its divinity.



The French historian Jacques Bossuet said that the greatest perversion of the human spirit was to believe in something because one wanted it to be so. Louis Pasteur, who loved to quote these words, would always act as his own devil's advocate whenever he thought he had made a discovery. He became the most critical and astute enemy of his own findings. For days, sometimes for years, Pasteur would try his hardest to demolish his won discoveries. When he had exhausted all possible opposing hypotheses, he would attain certainty and would experience "one of the greatest joys known to the human soul".



According to the British mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, we must try to come up with the maximum number of ideas:

We need to entertain every prospect of novelty, every chance that could result in new combinations, and subject them to the most impartial scrutiny. For the probability is that nine hundred and ninety-nine of them will come to nothing, either because they are worthless in themselves or because we shall not know how to elicit their value; but we had better entertain them all however skeptically, for the thousandth idea may be the one that will change the world.



Inner listening, like inner seeing or visualization, is a function one can call upon for guidance and inspiration. Many creative people on all the ways have availed themselves of it. Brahms wrote in a letter to Marie Schumann:

Deep in the human heart, in a rather unconscious way perhaps, something often whispers and moves, which with time can resonate in the form of poetry or music.

A musician, quite obviously, listens to his inner sounds. But how about a painter? According to Kandinsky, the voice can guide to new and unexplored territories. Here obedience to one's inner voice is synonymous with spontaneity:

Often while working one hears a voice which "dictates within"; in this case nothing is left but to obey carefully. This voice lead us on a different road, a hard one to figure out at first: the results ends up being different from one's "intention".

