

THE MONASTIC PERSONALITY

by Dr. Beverly Lanzetta

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Session 4: The Truth of Being

THE MONASTIC PERSONALITY is very sensitive, not very good at maintaining boundaries, and therefore has to flee from the world in order to find space. People who have this kind of personality, may find it difficult, partially because they know this interior place where we don't need to have boundaries, and they wonder why we can't just have that openness with everyone. I had that experience as a child, very strongly. I wanted to pour myself out to people but soon learned that this was a mistake. For people of this contemplative type, one of their big lessons is seeing what is really happening. We have a tendency to see the Divine or the holy in people, but we don't normally see what's really going on with them. We misread the world in the light of this higher insight. We don't often see the limits of a person's current understanding. We think they get who we are and then we're disappointed.

I always think of Buddha's story of the two truths, which is that we relate to people where they are, and then there's the deeper esoteric truth that you only speak to your disciples or apostles or friends who understand. And it's not a sense of lying or denying or withholding, but it's a sense of respecting where the other person is. If you try to tell everybody everything, they're not going to get it. But our type of personality wants to do that - we want to be out there sharing. But that can cause problems.

Another thing about the monastic personality is that this person thrives on reflective work, and is sustained and healed when truth is experienced, acknowledged, or heard. For most of you, when you hear the truth about something in your being, you most likely feel better. Whereas for a lot of people when they hear the truth, it is scary. It causes reactions or rejection. But for a person who has a contemplative personality, they need to hear the truth. It is like a food. It's necessary for their wellbeing.

A person of this type can feel very alienated in conventional culture where platitudes are bandied about, and also in relationships where people don't really want to share their own version of the truth. We're not talking about truth as absolute, but the truth of their own being—what resonates in their own beings. This is very necessary for this type of person.

Of course, there are many people in the world who are just fine with that, and probably more successful than many of us. But the people who have this type of personality thrive on the truth. They need to hear meaningful things, not superficial “cocktail party” conversation where people are just chatting about nothing. For this type of personality type, this drives you crazy. Most people of this type can’t take it. Its wearying and wearing and drains your energy. It’s not just that you’re being antisocial. It’s actually that the soul, the deep self, can’t take this. For example, if you read the life of Thomas Merton—Trappist monk and spiritual author—he discovered early in his life that he needed something more meaningful. Even in the monastery, after a number of years he needed to move into a hermitage outside the monastery because he couldn’t handle the sign language of the monks who didn’t even talk!

This need for deeper reflective engagement has probably been with you from the beginning. It has probably set you apart, made you feel different, and pained you because you never felt you belonged anywhere. But really, where you belong is in the center, in that place of silence with the Divine. It really is a failure, in a sense. of our educational systems and our religions to not teach us these things when we’re very young. We would eliminate a lot of pain in our lives. We would have been helped in the kinds of choices we made when we were very young. What kind of choices would we have made? What kinds of people would we have gotten involved with if we had had a chance to evaluate our lives from this perspective?



REFLECTION

Think about an experience that felt healing to you; a time that made your heart feel fuller, your body feel more at ease and more vital. Was it a time of quiet, of rest? An experience of connecting in truth with another? Try to identify which situations allow you to thrive and to experience yourself more in deep fullness.

What way are you most comfortable, most engaged and fulfilled in your relations with others? Reflect on how these special experiences may help reveal to you more about your deeper needs, your deeper identity.



PRACTICE

Create healing, revealing, nourishing time in your life. It could be a time of meditation, or of simple quiet, or listening to music that inspires you. It could be a conversation with someone, an exploration of truth with that person, a way to open your heart more with them. Find what it is for you and try to create that time for yourself this week. Write about it in your journal.



PRAYER

Oh Holy, Merciful One, please show us the depth of our hearts. Give us the courage to stand before the suffering and to bear the suffering and to transform the suffering into a light and healing for our planet. Please show us the force of compassion. Please open our hearts to the depth of meaning and the depth of truth in which You love us and in which we love each other. May our hearts be worthy of the comprehensiveness of Your life. Amen

—Beverly Lanzetta



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