

VERY YOUNG, MIDDLE, OLDER; THE GROWTH OF NOT KNOWING

Armin Klein

"It can't be true! It is impossible that I am becoming seventy!
I see my life racing madly to its end.
"I need to know more," says a very old part of me.
That part of me collected knowledge so that I could control my life.

For a handful of years, I lived and grew, unaware of knowing.
A family crisis awakened me from my childhood innocence.
Then, I felt painful feelings: sad, forlorn, and lonely,
Terrified of the violent feelings that I heard erupting around me.
Frightened of my own feelings and the hostile furor which greeted
My expressions of them,
Frightened by the withdrawal of my father.

Now, I realize that all of us in the family were handicapped
In resolving conflicts creatively and growing with them.

Afterwards, I felt on the outside of my family, alone and scared,
The youngest, and the most naïve.
The other family members looked very much in control of themselves,
As if they knew something I did not, as if they knew how to be.
They seemed to know everything, and I knew nothing.
I certainly did not know how to be.
They looked so wise and confident,
I thought I could never catch up, and I began to think about myself.
I began to evaluate myself.
I thought I must be greatly inferior, powerless and shameful--
A new way of thinking, thinking "facts" about myself that I hoped
Would avoid conflict, would control and bury my feelings,
My feelings of pain, terror, and protest.
I had, in my fear, suppressed my childhood love of
The beauty of not knowing.

As a teenager, I prepared to leave home and be alone in the world,
Tightening even more my mythical controls of self-rejection,
Tighter than even my imagined survival in the family had demanded.
Now I was to live on the outside of a larger group,
A college community, like the frightened playgrounds of my childhood.

I was surprised and encouraged. I found in that college community
Some people with whom I felt less frightened and who seemed
Like my withdrawn, friendly father who had stayed
On the periphery of the family.

A tiny piece of that naïve part of me began to grow again.

I went on later, to learn to be a psychotherapist
With Carl and his very special community.
Gentle persons exploring respect for others and the value of
Not knowing what was good for others.

My open, naïve part grew even more in that community, all of us finding
Ever more usefulness in giving up more knowing.
Yet the intrinsic beauty of giving up knowing eluded me.
I thought it was a practical beauty of usefulness,
Co-existing with my growing respect for more openness.
I must have thought it only a more gentle search for knowing.

Giving up knowing did help me make more loving friendships.
It helped my process of learning intimacy.
Many loving friends have helped me, in turn, to give up more knowing,
Especially my children who challenged me to revisit childhood,
Now, even grandchildhood.

Most helpful is my wife who dares to take the plunge with me
Into the chasm of intimacy,
With its conflicts demanding creative and growthful solutions,
Constantly demanding our honesty.

Now, to be honest-- I do not know! My knowings don't work for loving!

But the would-be knower inside of me has a lifetime,
Large collection of imagined knowings,
Always looking for more.

Now, he and I are running out of time.
I am still partly the young collector.
That part has been slowly fading, but he is still there,
Wanting to learn how to be,

And, now, that part of me especially wants to know how to die.

Many of my fears of death have come from imagined knowing,
And, now, from the still imagined need to know.

The seventieth year appears as an enormous challenge to me.

Yet, I reject even more strongly all the knowing explanations offered me.

The beauty of not knowing is growing in me.

Not knowing, in itself, and my childhood innocence

Are re-emerging as a way of being,

A vast, beautiful openness,

With a wondrous, overwhelming loving.

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