

“Inner Freedom”

Take nothing for the journey except a staff—
no bread, no bag, no money in your belt.

(Mark 6:8)

The quote of the founding fathers and mothers of our country that claimed my attention first was the one by Phyllis Wheatley: *In every human breast, God has implanted a principle, which we call love of freedom; it is impatient of oppression and pants for deliverance.* Her thoughts brought me back to my teenage years when I was listening to a conversation in a Polish Catholic family about a practice in a nearby Catholic hospital. Anger immediately arose within me when someone in the group outlined the policy: **In the case of having to choose who will live or die during a delivery---mother or baby---the doctors get to decide . . . and they are directed to choose the baby.** How unfair! That’s not right! Deep down fear came over me even with the thought of losing the freedom to choose.

Recently I read a spiritual writing by David Griebnerin about the principle of freedom being impatient of oppression and panting for deliverance. The short story is entitled, **Shadowbound** and goes like this: *Once upon a time there was a man who lived in the middle of a desert. Yet, that was not quite true. It would be better to say that he was a prisoner of the desert. You see, somehow and sometime in the past our friend had acquired the habit of following his shadow, and only his shadow. It was a relentless and unbending compass which he obeyed completely and followed without question. Every morning when the sun came up he began walking in the direction his shadow pointed. As the sun traced its slow crescent across the sky he followed the subtle bending of his shadow. By the end of the day he had traced a rough oval and was nearly back to where he had started in the morning. While his course varied a little with the seasons of the year and the speed he walked, it wasn’t much and it was never enough to allow him to leave the desert. This had been going on for as long as he could remember. It was familiar and comfortable, the only way he knew. Yet he also had to admit that it often left him feeling trapped and alone. Sometimes he wondered what it would be like to face the sun instead of always turning his back to it and walking the other way.*

And he longed to see if there might not be something more to the world than the desert, but he never seemed to have enough resolve to do anything different. Then one morning, while it was still dark, as he was preparing to set out again, something came and spoke to him. It was a voice. At least it was more like a voice than anything else. It said, “JUST STOP IT.” That’s all, “JUST STOP IT.” JUST STOP IT? He didn’t know how he knew but he knew without a doubt that what was meant by this was following his shadow. Just stop it. Could it be that simple? What a lovely thought. Yet it was a foreboding thought as well. Certainly there was joy and hope in what the voice suggested, but there was also fear and dread because following his shadow was the only way he knew to get around---such as it was! About this time the sun came up, and with it the powerful tug of his growing shadow. He tried to resist it but could not. Yet all that day, even as he obediently followed his shadow, the memory of the Voice and the experience of the morning stayed with him. It stayed with him through the night, too. And while he made no significant changes over the next few days, it was enough just to have some hope. Then one morning, just a moment before dawn, he suddenly turned his back to the dark, western horizon and faced the glow in the east. It was done almost before he realized what he was doing. The freedom to do it happened in a moment. And he recognized in his new freedom the presence again of the Voice, which lovingly offered him what he could not offer himself. The rising sun in front of him was brighter and more wonderful than he had imagined anything could ever be. As the sun cut across the sky that first day it was all he could do just to stand there and face the light, turning slowly now to keep his shadow in back of him! There was no question about going anywhere. Yet, as the day passed, his shadow became less and less intimidating and his new freedom more and more familiar, even if it was just to stand still. Finally, one morning, the Voice came again. As with the other times, he could not fully describe what happened, only that the Voice brought him another gift. The gift this time was a sense of direction. Slowly, he put one foot in front of the other, fixed his gaze on some distant mountains, and set out. He wasn’t sure where he was going, but at least he wasn’t still going around in circles. And he certainly didn’t feel alone anymore ((Weavings, p. 30 XXIV:3 from “We Shall All Be Changed” (March/April 1991), vol. VI, No. 2.)

Shadowbound invites us to look down at our own feet to see the things that

keep us walking in the shadows of selfishness and fear. What mantras do we recite in our heads that we unquestioningly follow? Do they sound anything like these? **If only I were more beautiful, gifted, or rich; avoid conflict at all costs—don't upset the apple cart; can't let my spouse get mad at me; winning is everything; if only it would stop raining everything would be O.K.; as long as I do what I'm told; I want to be I famous, popular, and number one with everyone; I made an unforgivable mistake; never forgive; vengeance is mine—I'll get back at her for doing that to me; I'm committed to my commitment; I'm a mess up; I'm no good; I won't go because I don't have anything to wear; I'm a failure; I'm not complete without him; I've never done it that way before. . .**

In our Biblical story Jesus told his disciples to: **Take nothing for the journey, except a staff, no bread, no money in your belt** (Mark 6:8). With his **JUST STOP IT** voice Jesus told his disciples that they couldn't carry this kind of baggage around with them when they went out healing the sick, standing up against evil, and telling others about how the Power of God has set them free to choose Love and Divine Life. Jesus' **JUST STOP IT** command of non-attachment to worldly things helped the disciples stand still and stop their unquestioning step into their shadow. It raised the morning light of hope within their soul. Jesus' **JUST STOP IT** command also kept his disciples humble and allowed them to receive good gifts from others. **Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.** The practice of acceptance expanded the horizon of love's generosity in their soul. In addition, Jesus' **JUST STOP IT** command challenged the disciple's faith in God's providential love for them. Jesus said to them: **And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you; shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.** His instruction taught them to accept suffering and to grow in their trust that God's love would sustain them when the world rejected them. Every time they shook the dust off their feet they increased their reliance on God. **JUST STOP IT** helped them to accept God's mercy and to trust in forgiveness. It encouraged them to live into God's promise to smile upon them as a parent smiles loving upon her child.

But most of all, Jesus' command to **JUST STOP IT** set his disciples free to grow into the beautiful, loving human beings that God intended them be. In the introduction to his book, *Interior Freedom*, Jacques Philippe wrote: *This book is about a basic theme of Christian life: interior freedom. Its purpose is simple. Every Christian needs to discover that even in the most unfavorable outward circumstances we possess within ourselves a space of freedom that nobody can take away, because God is its source and guarantee. Without this discovery we will always be restricted in some way, and will never taste true happiness. But if we have learned to let this inner space of freedom unfold, then, even though many things may well cause us to suffer, nothing will really be able to oppress or crush us. . . We gain possession of our interior freedom in exact proportion to our growth in* (the theological virtues of) *faith, hope, and love* (p. 9-10).

JUST STOP IT! How is this Inner Voice of Freedom speaking to you?
Mark 6:1-13

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. **Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you; shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them.**" They went out

and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

If men through fear, fraud or mistake should in terms renounce and give up any essential natural right, the eternal law of reason and the great end of society, would absolutely vacate such renunciation; the right to freedom being the gift of God Almighty, it is not in the power of man to alienate this gift, and voluntarily become a slave.

John Adams (1735-1826) Rights of the Colonists 1772

Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) The Social Contract 1762

In every human breast, God has implanted a principle, which we call love of freedom; it is impatient of oppression and pants for deliverance.

Phyllis Wheatley (c. 1753-1784) The Boston Post-Boy

Our unalterable resolution should be to be free. Samuel Adams 1776

Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigues of supporting it. Thomas Paine The Crisis 1776

Let freedom be the mistress of thy heart. Mercy Otis Warren 1790

The human mind will some day get back to the freedom it enjoyed 2,000 years ago. This country, which has given to the world the example of physical liberty, owes to it that of moral emancipation also. For, as yet, it is but nominal with us. The inquisition of public opinion overwhelms in practice the freedom asserted by the laws in theory.

Thomas Jefferson to John Adams (1743-1826)

Let the human mind loose. It must be loose. It will be loose. Superstition and dogmatism cannot confine it.

John Adams to John Quincy Adams, Nov. 13, 1816

Freedom and not servitude is the cure of anarchy; as religion, and not atheism, is the true remedy for superstition.

Edmund Burke (1729-1797) Second Speech on Conciliation with America, The Thirteen Resolutions, March 22, 1775