

Traditions

A Sorely Needed Grounding

We live in a culture that's on a seemingly crazed mission to embrace whatever the newest thing is. We're diligent about looking out for everything from the latest fad, to the most current style, to the latest political agenda, to whatever the newest thing is that generates the biggest hype in the freshest way. We want to know about the newest book or computer game or cell phone application or travel destination or lingo. We want to know the latest philosophy about the latest philosophy. We want to know all of the trends, as well as the trends of all of the trends. We're all over what's in and what's out.

What's additionally interesting is that we spend tons of time watching what's coming in and what's going out so that whenever something finally gets here or gets gone we're already ahead of it. We've determined that it's simply not enough just to keep up with the trends. We have this thing about staying trendy to the point that we need to predict the trends in order to be ahead of the trends. The airwaves are full of this stuff, keeping us up-to-date about being up-to-date so that we're not caught not being up-to-date. It's running forward at a million miles an hour and in doing so ripping up, tearing out and throwing away everything that's not part of whatever it is that's come or is coming.

The Past as Irrelevant

It's odd, but with this kind of radical fast-forward mentality the past is only good to the degree that it helped us get to the present and assists us in getting to the next place, whatever that's going to be. The past is something like a step on a really long staircase that we're only using to go up, with no intention of ever coming down. Because that's the case, the last step has value in that it got us to the step that we're on now. However, once the previous step has served its purpose in getting us to the place we're now at, it's irrelevant and so it's discarded. The past has no lasting value, so it's forsaken, irreverently cast aside, blithely abandoned and summarily forgotten.

With this pithy mentality, the present is presumed as being enough. We don't need to live in the past or ponder it; in fact we often view that as a worthless expenditure of energy. We certainly shouldn't carry any of it into the present. In fact, the past is often viewed as burdensome, unnecessary baggage and bereft of anything of value. It's worth and whatever resource that it possessed was completely used up in getting us here, so why carry it if there's nothing left of it? It becomes an unnecessary liability, something like dead weight and nothing more than a hindrance to everything that lies ahead of us. And so, we unceremoniously dump it; casting it aside in favor of something new, fresh and better.

The Future as Impossible Without the Past

Yet is the future possible without the past? The future is constructed upon the building blocks of the past. To assume that the future is entirely fresh and new is to miss that the future is simply the past being replayed in different ways, unique ways and possibly more creative ways. The future is human beings playing out their desires, their fantasies, their hopes, their dreams, their aspirations, their self-centered agendas, their selfish appetites in the same way that they've played them out throughout the span of history. It just looks a bit different given the advances in technology, science, social advances or reversals and the like, but it's the same. As a wise man said "there is nothing new under the sun."

Jack Kerouac wrote that "Great things are not accomplished by those who yield to trends and fads and popular opinion." If we are based solely in the lessons and realities of the

2 - Craig D. Lounsbrough, LPC

present, we live in a singularly single dimension. We focus on nothing more than the present which is a terribly thin slice of time. The overwhelming majority of existence isn't lived in the presence. Existence itself is massively expansive. The "now" is a whisper thin slice of the entirety of existence. With that being the case, it would appear logical that most of life isn't lived in the now. The vast array of experiences, events, lessons, accomplishments, advances, gains, losses, storehouses of wisdom and warehouses of knowledge are someplace else. Indeed, they reside in what transpired before the "now." Trends, fads and popular opinion are most often the step-children of the present and the estranged family members of the rich and deep family of the past. When we yield to them, we yield to their shallowness and their fragility. We yield to a single dimension of living.

Traditions

Susan Lieberman landed on the idea of traditions when she wrote that "Family traditions counter alienation and confusion. They help us define who we are; they provide something steady, reliable and safe in a confusing world." Traditions are a grounding that we don't have to create in order to be grounded. They are the compilation of lives lived before us and the experiences that they experienced. The lessons learned, the losses experienced, and the things that are worthy of investment as well as those that are not worthy of anything are packed into the ornate package of traditions. Landfalls and pitfalls, the wealth of glorious advances and the humiliating lessons of retreats, the gleaning of the golden threads of life amidst soiled fabric of time, and the sweet nectars excruciatingly extracted from experiences both sweet and less than sweet are packaged in traditions.

The wonder of traditions is that these priceless treasures are handed to us by others who obtained them. They are a gift, handed to us in the package of tradition without our having to have sacrificed to mine and refine them. Traditions hold within them generations of experience and wealth that this thin slice of time within which we live could never, and will never be able to replicate. Traditions are wildly expansive, importing into our lives the lives of those who lived before us. They permit us to experience a part of their journey, a piece of their hearts, a handful of their lessons and a heart full of their hearts. Traditions make life three-dimensional; allowing us to live both now and then; an opportunity which coalesces into a life expansive beyond a life that might live in just one or the other.

Traditions provide that guiding function where the advances of the present are steered by the steady hand of the past. They ground us when constant innovation is always changing the ground beneath our feet. Traditions bind us to each other, throwing across the chasms of our individual lives steel cables that allow us to cross over to one another in the communion of one human being with another. They give us a common heritage, a point of steady reference in a world that's always rising and falling on the tides of change. They enrich, enliven and recharge. They are priceless. They are unquestionably essential to living life with a fullness that's beyond ourselves and our time. You may wish to re-evaluate and reclaim and restore traditions to your life. It will revolutionize your life.