



The World Feeling And The Soul Feeling, by Anthony de Mello

“For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” Matthew 16:26

Recall the kind of feeling you have when someone praises you, when you are approved, accepted, applauded. And contrast that with the kind of feeling that arises within you when you look at the sun-set or the sunrise or Nature in general, or when you read a book or watch a movie that you thoroughly enjoy. Get the taste of this feeling and contrast it with the first, namely, the one that was generated within you when you were praised. Understand that the first type of feeling comes from self-glorification, self-promotion. It is a worldly feeling. The second comes from self-fulfillment, a soul feeling.

Here is another contrast: Recall the kind of feeling you have when you succeed, when you have made it, when you get to the top, when you win a game or a bet or an argument. And contrast it with the kind of feeling you get when you really enjoy the job you are doing, you are absorbed in, the action that you are currently engaged in. And once again notice the qualitative difference between the worldly feeling and the soul feeling.

Yet another contrast: Remember what you felt like when you had power, you were the boss, people looked up to you, took orders from you; or when you were popular. And contrast that worldly feeling with the feeling of intimacy, companionship—the times you thoroughly enjoyed yourself in the company of a friend or with a group in which there was fun and laughter.

Having done this, attempt to understand the true nature of worldly feelings, namely, the feelings of self-promotion, self-glorification. They are not natural, they were invented by your society and your culture to make you productive and to make you controllable. These feelings do not produce the nourishment and happiness that is produced when one contemplates Nature or enjoys the company of friends or one's work. They were meant to produce thrills, excitement—and emptiness.

Then observe yourself in the course of a day or a week and think how many actions of yours are performed, how many activities engaged in that are uncontaminated by the desire for these thrills, these excitements that only produce emptiness, the desire for attention, approval, fame, popularity, success or power.

And take a look at the people around you. Is there a single one of them who has not become addicted to these worldly feelings? A single one who is not controlled by them, hungers for them, spends every minute of his/her waking life consciously or unconsciously seeking them? When you see this you will understand how people attempt to gain the world and, in the process, lose their soul. For they live empty, soulless lives.

And here is a parable of life for you to ponder on: A group of tourists sits in a bus that is passing through gorgeously beautiful country; lakes and mountains and green fields and rivers. But the shades of the bus are pulled down. They do not have the slightest idea of what lies beyond the windows of the bus. And all the time of their journey is spent in squabbling over who will have the seat of honor in the bus, who will be applauded, who will be well considered. And so they remain till the journey's end.