

Who was it who first said, "There but for the grace of God go I"? Perhaps it doesn't matter who said this, if we can just grasp the truth of these words--that with a different set of circumstances and life-experiences, any one of us could have been either the person shot at close range or the person pulling the trigger. In less physical ways, I strongly suspect that we have all pulled the trigger on another person at some point in time or other.

What happened at Columbine High School was tragic. The scapegoating, blaming, and ignorant comments that have followed, however, I find to be equally as tragic. Greater surveillance, restrictiveness, parental discipline, or required social involvement only change the expressions without addressing the causes.

If I want to remove a particular dandelion from the lawn in front of the house (though personally I'm actually fond of the durable golden flowers), and if I also wish to avoid toxic chemicals that may poison my living space as well, I must get down on my knees and press my fingers deeply into the dirt. I must carefully dig around the tap root all the way to its tip and not leave even the tiniest piece behind, since even this could grow to replace everything that I removed.

I must be willing to be personally and directly involved in ways that require humility, persistence, careful inspection without any preconceived notions about how deeply such roots do or do not grow, and I must be willing to accept that the original seed of this plant may have been unwittingly carried to this very spot by none other than myself.

I must be willing to "own" my involvement in life, with all the good and bad influences I unavoidably bring with me. I believe that only by accepting the truth of such interconnectedness is a truly beautiful garden even possible. Only by understanding that "weeds" and "flowers" are simply names we use to distinguish those plants we favor from those we do not, will we begin to understand that "victim" and "murderer" are simply words we use to distinguish those who do things of which we

approve, from those who do things of which we do not approve.

Consequently, until we are willing to honestly embrace equally the times in which we have each been murderers, victims, students, teachers, abusers, healers, children, and parents, and in that embrace to find forgiveness of ourselves for all of our failures, we shall not find the truest experience of divine love that is the real definition of heaven.

Ultimately, though individual distinctions remain for purposes of specific identification, the notion that we are in any way disconnected from each other may be the greatest illusion over which humanity still needs to triumph.

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Life is a collaborative effort, encompassing more than we know. In a time of abundant "information overload," news, communication, and travel across great distances, we often talk at each other without listening, communicating, or understanding.

Humanity needs its icons, but also its iconoclasts to grow beyond the good and bad qualities that now limit and describe us. The essences of both God and us remain, in the midst of questions, to be discovered, experienced, and expressed.

Please share in this ongoing dialogue, remembering to indicate whether and how you wish to be identified.

Blessings, love, and peace to you.

Recommended Reading:

The Velveteen Rabbit by Margery Williams. No matter how many times I read this classic story, first published over seventy years ago, I am still inspired by its timeless message of the magic of love. Love--that mysterious wonderful divine energy that often comes to us dressed in rags, brokenness, and seemingly endless times of waiting, that comes so quietly and indirectly that we often fail to notice its arrival.

Yet for all its lack of fanfare, love continues to accomplish the miraculous in everyone who dares to enter its sometimes embrace. The words of the skin horse to the velveteen rabbit are certainly among the most profound, the most accessible, and the most accurate for which anyone could wish, in describing what makes life (with all of its extreme ups and downs) worth living. Please, read this story again and again and again--and remember that in some way or other, everything is alive and waits to be made real. Any one of us may be the child

Recommended Movie:

"Auntie Mame," starring Lucille Ball. This one may take a bit of searching, but I found it to be much better than other presentations of this wonderful story. In my own struggles, I have been often encouraged during the last few weeks by remembering one of the early songs within the movie, "Open a New Window." Indeed, with each new window and door that is opened, with each new highway that is traveled, new opportunities appear. When circumstances become oppressive, new opportunities become even more essential and each new person, social circle, or unfamiliar environment is filled with opportunities. Some will "taste good" and some won't, but like any good banquet table, there will be something for everyone.

What draws me to watch this movie again and again, is (among other things) a hunger to understand how to maintain an attitude that is both positive and honest, in the face of all the greatest difficulties life can throw at us. I am not content to explain this away as simply normal for people of such unusual strength. Such an explanation would make such accomplishments inaccessible to me, since I do not consider myself to be a person of unusually great courage or strength.

I want to find those things within the example of Auntie Mame that are equally accessible to all people, things like a different way of understanding that is both honest and dependably empowering. Perhaps another answer is to cultivate a certain response to difficulty or to unfamiliar surroundings. What sort of habits can I build into myself that will cause me to react differently when trouble comes along? Repression or censoring my thoughts is not something I will ever consider, because I know that the subconscious mind will never allow such things to be truly

censored. Something demanding expression will either come out in a positive way or in a negative way--I do have the ability to encourage the expression to be positive.

There are a number of places within the movie, however, in which Auntie Mame's response to life was anything except positive. Yet that is also one of life's challenges, to allow for the inclusion of moments of fear, discouragement, depression, and anger so that these emotions may "run their course" in positive rather than negative ways. Perhaps even more than just being expressed, we may even find that emotions which are frequently described as negative, actually have a positive contribution to make.

Instead of seeing the pregnancy of unmarried Agnes as a mistake or a problem, Auntie Mame chose to provide a place in which the unintended new life could nevertheless be given a good start. When what was needed was the celebration and music of Christmas, she wasted no time being concerned over the fact that the calendar wasn't in synch with the moment of gift-giving and merriment. When confronted with bigotry, rather than lament as I've heard so many others that "you can't change people," she took steps to establish something lasting, unprejudiced, and positively supportive of life.

And still I struggle with the never-ending question of how such things might be possible in my own life, with whatever limitations might describe my own personal resources at present. What can I do, today, right now, without requiring any other emotion, belief, or skill than I presently have? What requires only my willing and complete participation?

These are, after all the numerous times I've watched this movie, the only qualities that I can name, in trying to describe the essential qualities of character that Auntie Mame radiated from the first moment of the movie to its triumphant conclusion--willing and complete participation in whatever opportunities life offers.

Please note the word choice,

however, because it describes an essential element of Auntie Mame's perspective. The word is "opportunities" and not "obligations." Being a responsible person may still be a sign of being a person of good character, but being responsible does not mean the same thing as fulfilling one's obligations. Being responsible and taking advantage of opportunities are things that start within. Obligations come from the outside, from the expectations of others who wish to force a pattern of behavior that may not be appropriate for you.

Metaphorically put, if someone gives you his or her shoes to wear, firmly give them back with the explanation that the shoes do not fit you properly. Only your own shoes will truly fit and only your own shoes can take you where you truly need to go. Trust only your own God-given shoes and allow others to trust theirs also, but as you journey along your own life's path remember to also allow your shoes to grow and change in whatever ways are needed.

Blessings, love, and peace to you, in every moment of your life's journey.

**"You're preaching
to the choir."
---a friend.**

**"If anyone else
leads the church,
they won't know
how to sing
in harmony."
---Sister Who**

A Tragedy of Humanity-- Symbolized by the Deaths of Fifteen Young People

The violent events that occurred on the birthday of Adolf Hitler at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, recently, are but faces of the unresolved subconscious mind of the human race.

Until we "own" each event, until we are willing to ask how each of us contributed to a world in which violent action is still possible, healing will not come. As long as we insist that the enemy is someone else and not ourselves, healing will not come. As long as we follow in the footsteps of Adolf Hitler and negate rather than nurture diversity, healing and lasting peace will not come.

A local newspaper told of a carpenter traveling many miles to erect fifteen wooden crosses in memory of the fifteen teenagers who died--described by some as thirteen victims and two murderers. The father of one of the "victims" angrily tore down two of the crosses, insisting that the "murderers" should not be remembered along with the "victims." (The quotations marks do not indicate the father's actual words; they indicate that I question the categorization of humanity that such words imply.) I think his action was very wrong, but I also think that many emotions are still far too wounded to be able to listen to encouragements toward greater wisdom, greater truth, and greater compassion.

We are all victims, murderers, wounded ones, and healers. We all share something with each and every young person who died. When any of us disown wounded examples of humanity, we bury within ourselves the seed of the very thing we wish to eradicate. If we cannot reach through the pain to decisions and actions of healing, the brokenness will continue to be passed from one person to the next. Sometimes someone will recognize that this is happening and sometimes no one will see the evil plant until it flowers again--often even bigger than before.

In one young person is the experience of being violently confronted both with

someone else's brokenness and also with the mortality of one's physical body. In another young person is the desperation of unmet emotional and psychological needs that have been ignored for far too long. When in some way or other, the unmet needs are all one knows--even if this knowledge is purely subconscious--perception and judgement are radically altered.

Having been "created in the image of God," (I can think of a number of ways of interpreting this phrase, but all are equally applicable to what I'm about to say), one of the needs of the human spirit is justice. In many ways we are still learning, individually and collectively, just what the true definition of justice is. More often, life experience is filled with what justice is not. One example drawn from my own high school experiences was the grossly unequal distribution of funds. The athletic department--with which I was as uninvolved as possible--received abundant financial support. The art, music, and foreign language departments, on the other hand (with which I was much more involved), were reduced a little more as each year passed. Justice requires that we go beyond tolerance of diversity to being mutually supportive of each individual's full involvement in whatever aspects of life make the specific person's heart sing. Justice requires that we do not assume adversarial postures or relationships toward one another.

The potential for that which is truly insanity that lies (usually) hidden within each and every one of us, is yet another part of ourselves that we must accept in order to become truly whole and complete. As long as we insist that someone else is more evil than we ourselves are, we disown the full spectrum of ourselves, we negate the multi-dimensional reality of the other person, and we remain in dysfunction and disharmony--however obvious or subtle the expressions of this may be.