

Part 4: *Hearing the Cry of the Soul: A Closer Look at the Treasure*
Module 14: Becoming *Extraordinary* – Three Stories

“If not now, when?”

“If not me, who?”

The Talmud

Each of us is *extraordinary*. We are both ordinary in our human frailties and truly *extraordinary* in our innate divinity. Most of us have no trouble identifying with our ordinary humanity. Identifying with our *extraordinary* Self may be more difficult. We may feel that such an experience is only for the spiritually advanced or only for those with special qualities or abilities.

Yet, as we look at the lives of many of the saints and spiritual leaders from various traditions, we don't find perfection. In fact, many saints of the Christian tradition, in particular, endured great challenge and suffering. And as we look more closely, we find that many we may have thought were tapped by God for greatness were, in fact, quite ordinary. This gives us hope as we make our way realizing we are truly no different.

Let's look at three such people, one from each of the Abrahamic traditions: Moses, Mother Teresa and Muhammad.

A Story of Moses

One of the many memorable stories about Moses that show his deep humanity was when God told him to go before the Pharaoh to argue the case for freeing the Israelites from Egypt. In Exodus 3:10, the Lord tells him, “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” But, Moses says to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11) *Who am I?* Is this not a question we too ask when confronted with some task we know is going to challenge us or stretch us beyond our comfort zone?

The Lord goes on to instruct Moses in spite of questions and protests. But, finally, Moses is able to speak his fear in Exodus 4:10. “Oh Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.” Though Biblical scholars do not agree on exactly what it is, it is clear that Moses has some kind of speech impediment. He was likely afraid he would embarrass both himself and God.

How often in life's circumstances do we not feel this way? You want me to do *what?* *What if I look totally inadequate?* *What if I fail?* On the spiritual journey, we will naturally attract what we need to grow to the next level and such attractions will naturally require us to transform some self-imposed belief. This is why the Lord asks of Moses exactly what Moses believes and feels is the most difficult. It is how much we are loved – by our Self. It's the impulse toward wholeness that won't let us rest for long. We want to be whole.

So, in answer to Moses' concerns, the Lord responds with a reminder in Exodus 4:11-12, “And the Lord said to him, ‘Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.’”

He is asking Moses to surrender his deeply held beliefs about what he perceives is a limitation and to trust that all will be well. The Lord reminds him that he is not alone and that he will be guided in how and what to say. Still, Moses cannot overcome his deep feelings of inadequacy, and pleads with the Lord, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it." Finally, the Lord agrees to allow Moses' brother Aaron to go though he tells Moses in Exodus 4:15-16, "You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth. I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him." No, the Lord is not going to let Moses completely off the hook!

How wonderful to know that we do not have to be perfect to be called upon to be worthy instruments! In fact, the very parts of us we may feel most concerned about, or even ashamed of, can be used to do something beautiful for God.

God does not call the equipped. He equips the called.

A Story of Mother Teresa

Mother Teresa received her "call within a call" in 1946 while on a train going to her annual retreat in Darjeeling. She was not in the best of health at the time and in need of rest. This reminds me that God sometimes does things in God's time – not ours. She didn't hesitate. She asked to leave her congregation to establish a new order of sisters to work in the slums with the poorest of the poor.

However, it would take two long years of corresponding with her superiors to get approval, as not everyone thought she was capable. One Arch Bishop said in the video, *Mother Teresa*, "I knew Mother Teresa when she was a novitiate and she couldn't even light the candles. And you want to make her head of a congregation? She's not able to do that." And her Mother Superior for twenty years said, also from *Mother Teresa*, "Every day we met with Mother Teresa. We met for prayers, for meals, for recreation. I saw nothing special about her. She was just like the rest of us. We all thought she was a bit on the delicate side." How often are we too confronted with the opinions of those around us and how challenging it can be when those opinions do not support our deepest callings? Still, she persevered. Finally, approval granted, on December 21, 1948, the 38 year old Mother Teresa stepped into the slums of Calcutta to begin the work of her new order, the Missionaries of Charity.

Since Mother Teresa had been a teacher during her time with her original congregation, the Loreto sisters, it was reasonable she would start there. As Susan Van Houte recounts in the *Special Commemorative Edition of Time: Mother Teresa at 100: The Life and Works of a Modern Saint*,

"On that first day of ministry Teresa's wanderings took her back to a slum called Moti Jihl. At Moti Jihl she gathered a group of children around her, picked up a stick, and began drawing the characters of the Bengali alphabet in the mud. The first day there were 21 children; the next morning 40 were waiting at the bridge...when the school reached 100 pupils, the government was legally obligated to provide it with a building which was followed by classes and buildings in other slums."

I love this story because it reminds me that, while a plan can be helpful, Mother Teresa did not wait for a plan. She said simply, "We couldn't wait for money. Life and poverty were

everywhere.” What she did require was “loving trust” and “total surrender” and she was said to demand cheerfulness. She half jokingly told her novices, “Anybody who doesn’t smile, make them smile.”

Yet, how often do we become overwhelmed with the perceived realities we feel stand between us and our deepest desire? It is easy to chase the fears and then to simply retreat into the safety of the known. Yet, inevitably, we do not rest easily when turning away from our heart’s longing. And, sadly, our inner treasure waits.

How wonderful to know we don’t have to have it all together or figured out! We don’t even, necessarily, have to have achieved a particular level of readiness.

It is our job to concentrate on the *what* and let God take care of the *how*.

A Story of Muhammad

Muhammad called himself “God’s Standing Miracle” because he had no explanation as to why God would choose him, someone unschooled who could barely write his name, through whom to bring forth the Koran which is said to be “grammatically perfect and without poetic peer” as writes Houston Smith in *World Religions*. Very much like Moses, he greatly resisted God’s calling because he was full of doubt that he was ready or qualified to do what God was asking of him.

Smith continues in *World Religions*, “In his mid-life, Mohammad would often frequent a cave in a nearby mountain for solitude and reflection. One night as he was laying on the floor of the cave an angel came in the form of a man.” Listen to the following exchange as it will give you an idea of the level of resistance Mohammad was experiencing.

“Proclaim!” said the angel.

“I’m not a proclaimer”, answered Mohammad.

Then, Mohammad reports, “The angel took me and whelmed me in his embrace until he had reached the limit of my endurance. Then he released me and said again,

“Proclaim!”

“Again, I said, ‘I am not a proclaimer’, and again he whelmed me in his embrace. When again he had reached the limit of my endurance, he said, ‘Proclaim’, and when I again protested he whelmed for a third time – this time saying, ‘Proclaim in the name of your Lord who created man from a clot of blood. Proclaim: your Lord is the Most Generous who teaches by the pen – teaches man what he knew not.’”

For the next 23 years, Mohammad would receive revelations which would “descend upon him independent of his will.” Smith recounts, “Once they descended while he was riding a camel. By the time the revelation ceased, its belly was pressed against the earth and its legs were splayed out. During these times, both his appearance and the sound of his voice would change. He reported that the words assaulted him as if they were solid and heavy. The words that Mohammad exclaimed in these often trance-like states were memorized by his followers and recorded on bones, bark, leaves, and scraps of parchment preserving their accuracy throughout.”

Perhaps we have not experienced the Holy Spirit in such a dramatic manner, yet most of us have had dreams, strong premonitions, intuitive insights, or unexpected, miracle-like answers to

prayers or particular life situations. What if all our life situations were divinely orchestrated in order that we might cultivate exactly what was needed to best bring forth our inner gift or treasure? And, what if that treasure was not what *we may have envisioned* at all?

How wonderful to know that Divine Providence can use us in ways we may least expect! Let's prepare for the possible unexpected with our spiritual practice.

We like to think we're in control. Thank God we're not!

What we are is Lover, the Love and the Beloved.