

Emotions in the Spiritual Life

Objectives

- ❖ Worship God in Spirit and truth with repentance and perseverance without counting much on the emotions and feelings.

References

- ❖ Tears in the Spiritual Life by HH Pope Shenouda III

Scriptural Verses

- ❖ “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:1-2)
- ❖ “How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:1-2)

Lesson Outline

How should we worship God?

- With our entire being, and not keep anything back from Him: So he answered and said, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27).
- With Spirit (the knowledge of God) and Truth (What draws us near to God), “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

Spirit without Truth: 1 Corinthians 14:13-19

“Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. Otherwise, if you bless with the spirit, how will he who occupies the place of the uninformed say “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not understand what you say? For you indeed give thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God I speak with tongues more than you all; yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue.”

Truth without Spirit: Following the law to the letter without following the intent of the law (Pharisees) and trying to understand and obey God in our own power. “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39-40).

Spirit OF Truth: The Holy Spirit is what enables us to worship God correctly. Our worship is incomplete without Him: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come“ (John 16:13).

What place does emotion have in worship?

Definitions:

- ❖ Emotion is an affective state of consciousness in which joy, sorrow, fear, hate, or the like, is experienced, as distinguished from cognitive and volitional states of consciousness. (Volition: the act of willing, choosing, or resolving; exercise of will)
- ❖ Emotion is a non chosen state of consciousness: We cannot choose to feel a certain emotion, but we can attempt to engineer our surroundings so that we experience that emotion. Examples: Listen to or singing music, lighting a candle to set the mood, etc.

Are emotions and spirit the same thing?

NO. Emotions are random, unpredictable, and unreliable feelings. Do you think that a monk or bishop always feel like praying? If they don’t, does that mean they are not spiritual?

Feeling an emotion is like riding an elevator
While worshipping in spirit is like climbing a mountain.

<u>Riding an Elevator</u>	<u>Climbing a Mountain</u>
Very easy to go up (45 sec. to go up 160 floor – 2,700 feet “tallest building”)	Very hard to climb (4 days to climb Mt Everest. 1 st climber took 7 weeks)
Very easy to go down (45 sec. to go down 160 floor – 2,700 feet “tallest building”)	Climbing down is easier than climbing up but still takes time. 8 hours to climb down Everest – 29,000 feet)
Reaching the top is expected and Routine	Reaching the top is a monumental task that is acknowledge by the world
Requires pressing a button	Requires years of difficult training

How effective are emotions?

- ❖ The Jews welcomed the Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem with great fanfare shouting “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” but 5 days later they crucified Him. There outward emotional expressions only masked their true nature.

- ❖ We do the same when we try and make our worship artificially charged with emotion. If we feel nothing when we pray, then we should persevere to pray so that God will grant us the joy of prayer.
- ❖ The devil describes our love for God as mere emotions [and] no more! In fact, our love for God, in its proper concept, is practical love, "Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Whoever loves God does not disobey Him nor do what provokes His anger. So, our love for God depends on our obedience to Him and keeping His commandments as the Lord has said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love" (John 15:10); and, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word." (John 14:23). Saint John the beloved also said, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). To love God means that we do not love the world and all its lusts for the Bible states, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15), and, "The friendship with the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4) - HH Pope Shenouda.

Emotions should not be the goal

- ❖ There is nothing wrong with being moved to tears during prayer, but the goal is not to cry. We cannot measure our spiritual life by our emotions. Otherwise we will seek to build an emotional experience only and forget the true nature of worship.
- ❖ An emotionally charged sermon might inspire us temporarily, but we can only bear fruits in our spiritual lives through perseverance. Attending a prayer meeting might be very emotional the first time we go, but the test is that we continue to go even after the initial emotions have faded. Community service might make us feel good, but that's not the reason we do it. When it stops feeling good, do we stop?
- ❖ We can feel emotions from many things; we can feel positive emotions from a secular song or even a cute animal; and negative emotions at the length of a liturgy. Does that mean that the animal is good, and the length of the liturgy is bad? Or instead does it reflect a set of priorities in my heart?
- ❖ If I am not moved with emotion to God when I pray, maybe instead of trying to "set the mood" I need to examine what about my life is distancing me from God "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).
- ❖ When we do have an emotional experience during worship, we should not think and contemplate on it like we have reached some high level of spirituality. Spirituality is built by denying the body and exalting the spirit. "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin" (Hebrews 12:4) and instead "You might follow the correct spiritual path, the life of repentance, humbleness, contrition and all the reasons for tears; if tears come to you, the devil fights you with them and makes you fall into vain glory. If you are happy with tears or proud of them or reveal them intentionally, then tears might prohibit themselves from you and cease. That is why the saints said: 'Whenever tears come to

you, do not be preoccupied with them, but think of the reasons that brought about these tears.” - HH Pope Shenouda

- ❖ “When the Word is faithfully preached, there should be a range of emotions in the hearts of faithfully listeners (remorse, assurance, joy, the satisfaction of knowledge gained). In partaking of the Lord's Supper, remembering His death, the emotions of both sorrow and gratitude should combine in our reflection.

Conclusion

- ❖ Emotion is a gift that God gives to those that persevere in His way. It is not the goal, and should not be expected or copied.
- ❖ There is nothing wrong with setting the mood during prayer or worship, but let's not become preoccupied with our feelings and forget the reason for our worship.
- ❖ If we do feel strong emotions, then thank God and do not fall into pride because of them, If we do not, then continue with perseverance until such time that God grants us our desire.

Activities / Discussion Points

- ❖ Discuss the effect of emotions in the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and St. Peter and see how much did he suffer with perseverance when he got the Holy Spirit Who gave him spiritual maturity.
- ❖ Discuss the parable of the Sower: “But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles” (Matthew 13: 20-21).