**Remembering and Forgetting: A Polarity in Spiritual Practice**

I thought I would write on play, but as I convalesce from an un-playful accident, another topic is calling to me instead: *Remembering and Forgetting*.

It began when visiting a very senior family member who kept ‘forgetting’ why I was there: “I’m fine; I’m in perfect health; I am independent and don’t need anybody, so you can go home.” I would respond, “Actually you’ve been in the hospital for the last 2 weeks and I’m here to help your transition back home.” “Well,” she’d say, “I choose not to remember that. It makes me feel better when I forget things like that.”

In truth her stance is part of a life-long pattern of ‘forgetting’ whatever is painful or doesn’t fit with perceptions of the way she (or life) is supposed to be. She’s not alone in this – it allows those who live this way to keep on, but at a cost. This particular relative spoke of how she never sleeps well because falling asleep brings instant nightmares. I wonder if those nightmares aren’t the stuff of suppressed memory turned monstrous.

One of the core practices of people of faith across millennia has been REMEMBERING – not in the sense of remembering facts and data but **remembering the places where God has acted for our good**. The Jewish people in Passover re-tell the great story of communal freedom as a PERSONAL story lived anew in each generation – and the Christian community *re-members* and participates inthe self-donating gift of Jesus in the sacrament of Eucharist or communion.

But there are also unhealthy forms of remembering – like “holding or nursing a grudge.” Or the disputes in the public arena about who gets to do the remembering as in Civil war monuments which tell and celebrate a very one-sided perspective of a communal reality.

And in the same way remembering has both positive and negative poles, so does forgetting. Self-forgiveness for a personal lapse, a kind of intentional ‘letting go’ of the killing voices might be one form. Positive forgetting is also a spiritual practice mentioned in *The Cloud of Unknowing* which talks of mystical union with God:

"If you wish to enter into this cloud, to be at home in it, and to take up the contemplative work of love as I urge you to, there is something else you must do.  Just as the *cloud of unknowing* lies above you, between you and your God, **so you must fashion a *cloud of forgetting* beneath you, between you and every created thing**…  You are to concern yourself with no creature whether material or spiritual nor with their situation and doings whether good or ill.  To put it briefly, during this work you must abandon them all beneath the *cloud of forgetting*.”

So, REMEMBERING and FORGETTING each have gifts to bring and distortions to be aware of. We’ll explore what the gifts and distortions of each might be to see if we can broaden our own perspective and awareness on this complex, important reality in life.

In preparation for our time please **think of (yes, remember) a specific experience you’ve had of intentional cultivation of remembering or forgetting as a spiritual practice. What was the result and what have you learned?**

* What do you personally want to remember? To forget?
* Some fruits of deepening spiritual practice are the quality of ‘freedom’ or ‘aliveness’. When does remembering bring such ‘fruits’? How about forgetting?
* From your experience, when is remembering a blessing/ a curse? When is forgetting a blessing or a curse?

Looking forward to this time with you!

Sandra & Tom