

THE JOURNEYS OF WORKS AND OF HARMONY
by Rev. Kit Ketcham, Feb. 13, 2004

Welcome to our third and final discussion of how personality typology can reveal the spiritual journey that is most appropriate and comfortable for each of us.

We started our conversation about this subject in January, beginning with an explanation of the Myers-Briggs personality typologies and how to determine what one's personality type might be. We discussed at that time some of the characteristics of personality typology and how one's personality affects one's spiritual leanings, using Peter Richardson's book, *FOUR SPIRITUALITIES*.

Last time, we explored the Journey of Unity, which attracts seekers with an Intuitive Thinking personality, and the Journey of Devotion, which attracts seekers with a Sensing Feeling personality. We looked at some of the main characteristics of each seeker, compared the differences between these two paths and their components, and learned what each path has contributed to our diverse world.

Today we will address the Journeys of Works and of Harmony. These two journeys differ from each other significantly and from the Journeys of Unity and Devotion, for they attract seekers who have a Sensing Thinking approach to reason and faith or an Intuitive Feeling approach.

Let's think again for a moment about what we know about the categories of Sensing, Intuiting, Thinking, and Feeling.

People who prefer Sensing as their approach to the information they receive base their perceptions on what is present here and now. They are realistic, practical, observing facts directly, step by step, with common sense.

People who prefer Intuition as their approach to information received base their perception on the possibilities in situations, patterns, hunches, imagination, reading between the lines, with expectancy for the future.

A person preferring Sensing and a person preferring Intuition can be standing in exactly the same place, looking at exactly the same scene, at the same time, and perceive two different worlds. Anyone ever have that moment in time?

About 75 percent of the population are Sensing types and 25 percent are Intuitives. The norm in society is therefore a Sensing spirituality. It is so overwhelmingly Sensing that Intuitives often must search to find faith communities in which they find adequate support and encouragement.

This is a way we sometimes exclude people with different ways of perceiving the world.

People who prefer Thinking as their approach to decision-making base their decisions on objective, impersonal, analytical, purposive, principled logic. Discerning cause-and-effect relationships, they aim for clarity, fairness, firmness, and truth.

People who use Feeling as they make decisions base their decisions on subjective, people-centered values. They aim for harmony, mutual appreciation, trust, tact, persuasion, worthwhileness, and humane sympathy.

Humanity seems to be split about fifty-fifty between Thinking and Feeling types, but 61% of men prefer the Thinking function and 68 % of women prefer the Feeling function. The common sex-role stereotypes of society can mean an uphill struggle for Feeling men and Thinking women.

It would be interesting to find out the typologies of every UUCWI member and friend and see what this particular congregation looks like, in terms of spiritual preferences.

Let's begin our reflection today with the Journey of Works. This journey attracts seekers who have an ST, or Sensing Thinking personality. An ST, sensing thinking personality, is a realist, always in touch with the facts, unbiased, accurate, objective, impersonal, giving full attention to all the relevant details. They organize details in a straight linear way, reason from premise to conclusion. They look for clear-cut results from their efforts.

They are skilled administrators, responsible, objective, consistent, efficient, careful, detached, analytical, and following procedures to the letter. They can be direct and even brutal in their frankness. They can be excellent negotiators, unbiased, not swayed by feelings. Balance, prudence, duty, and above all, fairness are their hallmarks.

The Journey of Works is practical and involves a lifetime of effort. Work is important, giving life dignity. STs commit themselves to the building up and maintaining of institutions, reliably and loyally. In this way, their work becomes service, not directly to people so much, but indirectly to organizations that serve people.

There are several important manifestations of the Journey of Works. Since the beginning of recorded history, laws and covenants had to be devised to bring order out of the chaos of social disorder. Regulation of society through wisely administered covenants and ethical understandings, defining how relationships should be mutually rewarding, is the province of the Journey of Works.

For ST seekers, there is a strong sense of right and the importance of righteousness. Good behavior should be rewarded, and evil behavior punished. This precept can be found in many ancient religious traditions, including Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. A strong theme of fairness and reciprocity runs through this type's relationship with the Divine. That may be why the Golden Rule, the Great Commandment, the Shema, and the Lord's Prayer are so popular with STs. They give exact instructions.

According to Huston Smith, in his work "The World's Religions", Confucianism is a code of rules which uses tradition as a hallmark, looking to the past for clues to how the present should be. Confucianism is a religion which passes on the moral lessons of the past in wisdom which emphasizes human responsibility, goodness, and the proper ways to behave--in the family, with friends, and in society.

Its founder, the sage Confucius, is quoted yet today and his maxims exhibit strong Sensing Thinking characteristics.

Responsibility and stewardship are strong themes for the Journey of Works. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna gives instructions for taking up one's role as a citizen of one's nation. Leaders of government must be responsible to their calling. Lucky is the faith community whose board of trustees has a few persons with a Sensing Thinking personality type; their commitment to their task as leaders will undergird the strength of the congregation by keeping it financially solvent and morally upright.

There is a need in ST spirituality for identity and authority, for clear-cut and consistent beliefs. Martin Luther was driven by the disconnect between church theology and church practice to nail his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church. And later he refused to recant his beliefs, saying "my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise, God help me. Amen."

Other Sensing Thinking themes are the idea of work as life's aim, the importance of all work, whether exciting or mundane. The most routine task faithfully and thoughtfully executed can be a holy exercise.

Realism and pragmatism are important. Theology and spiritual philosophy must be practical and verifiable in the here and now. The spiritual life must be conducted in the tangible context of everyday forms, hallowed and elevated through tradition and observance.

Administration is seen as a way to protect the traditions of a people and to thereby protect the world order. Everything is interrelated. Chief Sealth is reputed to have said “This we know: the earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth. All feelings are connected like the blood that unites us all. We did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.”

Other ST seekers might be George Washington, the Hebrew hero Gideon, the Roman emperor and philosopher Marcus Aurelius, and the Greek Stoic Epictetus.

There is a strong tragic sense in ST spirituality, the sense of doom if proper procedures and behavior do not take place. The Hebrew story of Job, a righteous man who has done everything right and now has been struck down with misfortune, exemplifies the deep concern a Sensing Thinking seeker feels for his or her society. But there is a sense of justification as well. The struggle, the challenge, the perseverance have an intrinsic worth and social benefit and are worth the effort in the long run.

Often those on the Journey of Works are the caretakers of our institutions of government and religion. They are the ones who oversee the procedures, the qualifications, the requirements. But they can become entrenched in narrow self-righteousness, for a concern for definition and fidelity can cut either way, for growth or for stagnation.

It is critical for those on the Journey of Works to acknowledge and to honor the reality of the four parallel spiritualities. An ST pilgrim can have a hard time granting to others equal validity and to be open to learning and deepening from the presence of alternative perspectives.

Let us turn now to the Journey of Harmony, the journey of those with an Intuitive Feeling typology. This spirituality may be the most adaptable of the Four Spiritualities, according to author Peter Richardson.

For Intuitive feeling seekers, the sacred space must invite one to engage the search, utilizing stimulation of different and even competing ideals, always in a quest for hidden harmony or mystic reality beneath all struggles or differences. Open symbols. flexibility, warmth of human presence, and an eclectic reservoir of resources are important features of the worship setting for NF spirits.

There is a celebration of life's many wonderful considerations. There is much poetry, metaphor, music, and beautiful words offering many possibilities for good and the evolution of ideals.

We NF seekers, for so I identify myself, are full of visions of possibilities for people to live humanely, with growth and fulfillment always a goal. We are idealists who recognize the good in others, and we can be naive about the unspoken motivations of others. As we mature and age, our need to please others has to take a back seat to our need to be an authentic person, which can be a hard lesson for an NF seeker. But our own expectations of ourselves begin to take precedence over others' expectations of us.

The Journey of Harmony is first and always a spiritual quest, a quest toward self-hood. The poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson describes this quest: "There is throughout nature something mocking, something that leads us on and on, but arrives nowhere."

The NF quest is never satisfied. Something sparks a search and once begun turns the familiar old way into something new and exciting.

Often the road to harmony for Intuitive Feeling seekers resolves in mysticism. There is something larger than our own limited perceptions of spiritual reality. Taoism is a religious path which resonates for many NF seekers.

William Blake, the 19th century poet, wrote “To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wildflower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour”. Through little experiences we see the oneness of all life, of the entire cosmos. In a grain of sand, in a tiny flower, we experience the Divine, life, and all time.

In a complex life, the tangle can be impossible to unravel. Here, NF seekers may take an attitude of spiritual expectancy, that somehow even though the elements of a future harmony are impossible to see now, eventually they will be revealed.

A classic story of this attitude comes from the Hebrew scriptures, in the tale of Joseph and his coat of many colors. Joseph’s relationship with his brothers, who eventually sell him into slavery in Egypt, is symptomatic of the difficulties many Feeling boys, particularly Intuitive Feeling boys, experience in a Sensing Thinking male context. Joseph’s parents have tried to shield him from the harshness of their nomadic existence but this has incurred the jealousy of his brothers.

In Egypt, unknown to his family, Joseph rises high in the royal court. Eventually, his brothers come to the Egyptian court to plead for food during a famine in their own land. They have assumed that their brother, whom they sold to Egyptian slave traders, is dead.

And Joseph says to his brothers, when they appear before him to plead their case, not knowing his identity, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now, do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life...So it was not you who sent me here, but God."

This vision of a larger pattern in the world is intuited, but not proven. Events are "meant to be". No doubt, things are unfolding as they should.

For an NF seeker, the maxim "Heal Thyself" is an important starting place for spiritual growth. The Journey of Harmony seeks the deeper knowing, wholeness and healing, source of joy and wisdom, sometimes whimsical, sometimes mystical.

The Journey of Harmony is enthusiastically idealistic, even to the point of naivete. The goal of idealism, however, is elusive. We are dreamers and aspire after a better world for everyone. But we can be tough as well. Henry David Thoreau wrote: "The better part of the man is soon plowed into the soil for compost. (Men)...lay...up treasures which moth and rust corrupt...The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation."

For Thoreau, the solution was to part company with society and to live in solitude for a time, ministering to the world from the printed page.

The Journey of Harmony focuses intently on the processes of human relationships, social interaction, and communication. The challenge for harmony is to keep the values sponsored by the smaller group as society enlarges in complexity.

Egalitarianism and intimacy are primary for the NF seeker, and this can be hard to achieve in a world that tends toward hierarchy. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” is the beginning and end of the NF quest.

Sometimes NF seekers and ST seekers may clash, as their ways of interacting with the world and with others are so different. A Sensing Thinking seeker’s approach to administration and to righteousness can cause an Intuitive Feeling seeker to feel inadequate and uncomfortable, as though he or she doesn’t measure up.

It is important to see each other as fully contributing and valuable members of the faith community, not criticizing each other as wrong but appreciating the differing gifts of each spirit.

The Journey of Harmony generally requires a structured discipline for advanced progress. Keeping a journal, practicing yoga, tai chi or even Sufi dancing, can help Intuitive Feeling spirits define boundaries, affirm distinctions, and stay the course. My own discipline is a nightly prayer practice.

Intuitive Feeling spirits predominate in the revival of earth-based spiritual movements, such as paganism and Native American practices. An NF seeker needs to be careful about co-opting other cultures' spiritual practices in his or her enthusiasm for new experiences, but generally NFs are peacemakers and bearers of tolerance, effective in interfaith work and acceptance of pluralism.

We have explored each of the Four Spiritualities now. What does it all mean to us? I leave you with some questions: who are we, individually and as a community? how can we value each other's gifts and deal with each other's limitations? how can we live our journeys and grow in our own unique ways? And how can we as a community foster the search for spiritual maturity here on Whidbey Island?

Let's pause for a moment of silent reflection and prayer.

Our closing hymn is #348, Guide My Feet.

BENEDICTION:

Our worship service, our time of shaping worth together, is ended, but our service to the world begins again as we leave this place. Let us go in peace, remembering that each of us is unique, valuable, and a contributor to our life together as a faith community. May we respect and honor each other as we engage the spiritual quest, for there are many paths and the mountain always beckons.

Amen, Shalom, Salaam, and Blessed Be.