

Little by Little - Our Spiritual Growth

By Rev. Erik Buss
September 15, 2019

“I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beasts of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land.”

Exodus 23:29-30

It would have been hard for the Israelites to know that they would conquer Canaan only gradually, just as it's hard for us to know that we'll overcome our spiritual difficulties only gradually over a lifetime. We tend to want to put in some real effort but then to see results, not to wait years to see what we hope for.

This slow process is made doubly confusing by the strong teaching that truth from good has all power and falsity from evil none (AC 9327:2-3). By that way of thinking, we should be able push away evil quickly and easily, though we know from experience that this is not the case. So we can ask why it takes so long, given the power of truth and goodness.

One answer is that if we fully loved the truth falsity would have no power at all. But the reality is that part of us loves the truth and another part is pretty attached to some selfish behaviors. This story explains why it is so hard to remove those bad parts.

The reason the Lord removes falsity and evil slowly has to do with the intentions in us. Here's a key teaching: “There is a deficiency and little spiritual life if falsities and evils are removed hurriedly.... The reason for this is that all the things the person has thought, intended, or done since early childhood have entered into the composition of his life. They have also formed themselves into a network which is such that one cannot be moved without all of them together being moved.... Heaven with a person removes hell. If the removal were done suddenly the person would pass out, for the whole network of things, every single one, would be thrown into confusion and deprive him of his life.” (AC 9334:2) Think about that network of connections in your life. Everything is connected, and to remove one thing suddenly would deprive you of life and make you literally pass out.

This relates to the parable of the wheat and the tares. Someone's enemy planted tares among the wheat. The servants wanted to rip out the tares, but the master - the Lord - said to wait in case the wheat was harmed. Think of the roots of the wheat and the tares growing up in an interconnected way. It would require special care to tease the tares out without hurting the wheat. Consider the love the Lord is showing, then, in going slowly. He's protecting the good in you by NOT removing the evil quickly. That's a turnaround in the way we normally think!

In one way the Lord is saying regeneration is not to be easy. But He is also saying He will be there for the whole journey and that it will be certain. As we've heard, it is long *because* the Lord loves us, and to make it shorter would make us less happy, and in fact would destroy us. So let's revel in the detailed care the Lord gives. Let's resolve to be patient when the waiting seems long.

Lessons: Exodus 23:20-33; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43; *Arcana Coelestia* 9327:2-3