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Small Change

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Small Change

We know what it is like to have a few coins in a pocket or purse: not much purchasing power. "Small change" is commonly used as a metaphor symbolizing a rather insignificant amount of effort or material. But in our lives, a small change might well have major consequences that are out of proportion to the consideration we put into it or the importance we assign to it at the time.

A small change in a physical direction that continues to apply over time or distance has substantial effects, as we have noticed when we might have made a slight deviation with a straight line on a page of paper was hardly noticeable where it began, but on the far end is clearly off our intended destination. The amount of daylight grows shorter or longer each day, as the sun sets just a couple of minutes earlier or later, but over time, entire changes of season take place. Similarly, sometime after having adjusted our attitude towards being even a slight bit more positive, we will find through reflection that the outcomes have become quite beneficial to us and to all those around us.

Just as small acts of kindness can become habitual, resulting in substantial growth of character over time, so the small choices of another kind can lead us from a state of peace to one of considerable uneasiness. For example, a small lie might seem just that: small. But when it is followed by occasions where the untruth has to be expanded to prevent acknowledging the original falsity, it can grow like an untended blister that is going to be notably more painful to deal with later on, than if we had pierced it at its beginning. Many of our habits of thought and action, both those that further our capacity to love and those which diminish it, begin with a small decision whose long-term consequences might not occur to us at the moment of making the specific choice.

We cannot foresee the aftereffects of all of the small changes we make during a day, but we can make one small change deliberately that will impact all the others: a bit of conscious, prayerful reflection. We can begin a regular practice by taking just a short time, in company with the Spirit always present within us, to notice the effects of some of the changes we recently made to our habitual or unexamined opinions or operative thoughts. We are continually receiving ideas and comparing them to our own ways of thinking, and either accepting them or rejecting them. For example, we might read an article about another armed attack by one group upon another, and immediately either pass it off as of no relevance to us or choose to be concerned.

If we reflect on some of these small internal occurrences, we can evaluate them as fitting with our purpose in life or not, and choose to continue them or correct them. The spirituality of ongoing reflection is that of giving some conscious attention to what happens to us as a result of the small changes we make. If we experience benefits, we keep them. If they interfere with the forward, upward, positive direction of our lives, we discontinue them.

A small change to consciously reflect on our experience can lead to a life-enhancing habit.