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2013

## What or Why

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### Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "What or Why" (2013). *Spiritual Essays*. 281.

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## What or Why

"I don't understand, why did this happen?" How often our internal response to hurtful or destructive behavior follows such a line of thinking. At times, we can become frustrated when things do not turn out as we wish, or people speak and act contrary to what we believe is for the common good. We turn to our minds to resolve the difficulties, and find that they are insoluble by such means, because knowledge alone cannot satisfy or heal our minds and hearts when they are disturbed.

The hits and hurts we receive do not occur primarily in our minds. We can easily describe what happened, and we can recall in detail the natural or human-caused events that have caused injury to us or to others. But such knowledge does not by itself bring healing or closure, any more than washing our hands with lots of soap and water can stop a headache or heal a bone-bruise. We need to deal directly with the wound, whether it consists of pain, anger, fear or any combination of such interior and strongly felt experiences.

Asking the right question helps us to obtain the help and healing that we require. A question that begins with the word, "what," is usually much better for us than most internal queries that are initiated with "why." Reasons can satisfy our minds in matters of curiosity and desires for knowledge. But no amount of explanation can bring an end to physical, emotional and spiritual injuries. If we stub our bare toe on a hard surface, we could tell ourselves that we just made a big mistake; we could arrive at an understanding that the human body is not meant to directly impact very hard surfaces. That would address, "Why do I hurt?" But we need first to assess how badly we are hurt, and perhaps soak our injured toe in cold water, or immediately apply some other treatment that might reduce the pain and assist the healing process. We accomplish the most good by responding to the very practical question, "What should I do?"

We give different meanings to the same words according to our varying needs. So we might recover from a painful angry encounter with someone by trying to understand the other person's perspective and how it is that we were so vulnerable to being affected by the interchange. As part of healing, we might well ask ourselves reflectively, "Why has this happened?" But we are also very likely to talk to a friend, or take a few deep breaths, or go outside and walk, implicitly answering the question, "What am I to do to get through this painful moment?" Though we differentiate some of our functions in describing them, in practice, we often combine them in ways that work well for us.

Some of us turn to prayer when we encounter a personal difficulty. And many of us have found that when we pray for understanding of why we suffer, we are not satisfied. We need something more in order to come to a peaceful resolution. By seeking to receive guidance and inspiration about what we are to think, do, or say, we open ourselves to dealing not just with our thoughts but our interior struggles. In so doing, the answers include experiences of our connection with God who loves us, and not just a set of remedies that we are to apply to ourselves or to the situations we face.

When the next disturbance arises, we can observe our interior dialog, and note whether or how we come to peace. Is it only by asking "why," or also, and perhaps primarily, by asking "what?"