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Camels

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Camels

Not many of us have travelled in a caravan along with camels that carry large loads of supplies over great distances. But most of us have acquired burdens of one sort or another that we ourselves have carried for long periods of time. Some of us might feel as though we have been traversing a desert as single individuals, while others might think that we are members of a group who share the load among ourselves. Whether we look primarily at responsibilities as our very own, or as shared, our manner of relating with them makes the difference between camels that have water for a journey and those that do not.

Water is necessary for physical life, so that we will have strength and stamina for suitably engaging in all that life entails, including the responsibilities that we accept. What do we need for our spiritual life, so that we can live in peace within ourselves while carrying the burdens that we take to heart?

Since no planning is involved when we spontaneously take up a worrisome care, as when a family member or friend becomes seriously ill, we might think that we will not manage well. But how do parents really prepare for the process of raising their children, no matter how many birthing classes and child-rearing classes they attend? The "water" that sustains us when we carry our burdens, bear our responsibilities, and care for others has much more to do with who we are and who we are becoming than with the all the information that we can acquire.

Our best preparation for travelling well through the deserts that we must cross in our life-journeys includes "spiritual hydration." If we cannot predict how much baggage we will be carrying at various times in our lives, we will be more ready or less depending upon our maintaining positive attitudes, seeking healing rather than complaining, praying rather than relying solely on ourselves, and reflecting upon experience instead of only thinking about facts.

Unlike camels, we are able to determine, at least in part, how much of a load we will carry, which responsibilities we will accept, and for whom we will give our time and energy. We also have experiences of burdens placed on us without our having much apparent freedom of choice. If we are "well watered" through ongoing reflection, we are more likely than not to recognize our ultimate freedom to accept reality as we experience it rather than to fall into self-pity or denial.

Regular prayer, however we identify the way we relate with God, is wholly beyond any comparison we might make with pack animals that have no means of sharing their loads. Two of us can freely decide to carry something between us and the weight is thereby no longer all borne by one. So too, when we are weighted down with worries and concerns, we are free (and always welcome) to seek God's companionship, and often find that God does "the heavy lifting." When we share our hurts, disappointments, and heaviest burdens with one or more persons, we lose none of our human dignity. We likewise remain who we are no matter how much we rely on God to assist us.

Camels have humps and can store water for long treks. We cannot "store up" spiritual provisions, but through the regular exercise of our spirituality, we can carry our burdens gracefully throughout our lives.