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Memory

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Memory

Newer computers, with large amounts of "Random Access Memory," work faster than older units with less RAM. For us, it also seems that younger people can access memory more quickly than older persons. But we are not machines, and as we grow older, we continually add to the sum of memories we have of thoughts and experiences as well as those contained in our very muscles. As the years pass, we notice, perhaps with a bit of annoyance, that some particular memories take more time to recall than they did formerly. But we might benefit by reflecting with gratitude on memory as a great and powerful gift that serves us very well.

While scientists have learned much about the physical operation of memory, our knowledge about it is not nearly as important as is our experience with memory. For every incident of not being able to consciously recall a piece of information when we wanted to, we have many experiences of that very information coming to mind after we stopped looking for it. We expect a computer to give us exact data when we press the right keys. One of the interesting things about us is the kind of pleasure and wonderment we experience when information we could not obtain "on demand" suddenly appears in our minds when we have mentally turned aside. We are better off having human memory rather than bytes stored on a hard drive.

Memory is physical as well as mental. Muscles become accustomed to our way of walking, our posture, and gestures. We can regularly exercise some muscles so that we stand up straight, so that we can tie a knot behind our backs, or get up at night and write a brief note without turning on a light. Our physical senses retain particular memories, as when, for example, we became sick from eating or drinking something, and for a long time afterwards, the slightest scent of that food or taste of that beverage makes our stomachs turn queasy. Memory is protective of our well-being in many ways.

Remembering is spiritual as well as mental and physical. Some memories of past events come spontaneously to mind when we are not looking for them, but when we are ready to reflect on them, or to interpret them in a new and helpful manner. These memories are not like information stored in an archive that cannot be changed. Rather, the past events that surprisingly come to mind at particular moments in our lives are given meaning, through reflection, that could not have taken place within us at the time of their occurrence. However we choose to explain to ourselves how it is that we sometimes remember significant incidents precisely when we are mentally and spiritually prepared to deal with them in a positive fashion, we have cause to be grateful for such experiences.

We have a capacity to deliberately commit some things to memory, though the practice of memorizing is not as simple and direct as placing a paper copy of a poem or picture into a folder. Though we might have motives for memorizing something, we might also be influenced by scarcely recognized preferences or even distastes that make us scarcely able to keep the related information in memory. More positively, as we grow older and probably lose some facility with memorization, we also gain expertise in either working around our limitations, or peacefully acknowledging them as part of our graced reality.

Memory: a gift deserving of gratitude.