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## Olives and Grapes

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## Olives and Grapes

Though table grapes are popular eating, and olives are included in many recipes, grapes are known more for their crushed form, wine, and olives for their oil. From ancient times to the present, olive oil and wine have been staples in most cultures and countries of the world. Olives and grapes are useful as they are, but become more pleasing to a far larger number of people only after they have been pressed into oil and wine.

We are people, not fruit grown on trees or vines, but many very good aspects of our personalities are directly related to the challenges we confront. Under the press of circumstances over which we often have little control, we manage, gracefully but often painfully, to grow and mature into our unique kinds of oil and wine for others. At times we might knowingly place ourselves in an oil or wine press, believing that we will come out better in the end for our having endured the stressful squeezing process of entering new relationships or changed conditions. At other times we are pushed and pulled by people and situations at work or at home that catch us completely by surprise, but we follow our inspirations rather than spending all our energy on fighting against the perceived injustices confronting us. We grow through our suffering rather than being diminished.

Those who have come through the other side of frustrations, disappointments and unfairness are also the people who are most able to help others deal with their hurts. We do not learn compassion from books or psychology courses, but through reflection upon our experiences, especially those where our hearts are painfully squeezed by conflicting desires and expectations. Physical suffering is another kind of wine press or oil press that we do not welcome, but which provides opportunities for us to develop qualities of patience, understanding, acceptance of realities outside our control and also, very often, reception of help from others. When we are struggling with physical, emotional, or spiritual suffering, we are only aware of our present immersion in the challenges confronting us. Afterwards, we might find cause for gratitude, not for the suffering, but for the type of encounters that make us capable of understanding and appreciating the perspectives of the people we want to assist.

When wine is allowed to sit too long after being opened, it turns sour; when olive oil is exposed overmuch to air, it becomes rancid. But the oil and wine of our lives cannot be spoiled because of outside influences; neither do we need to store it up for future use. Unlike the products of olives and grapes which usually come to us in relatively small containers, the more we share of what we have, the larger the quantity, and also the higher the quality, of the oil and wine that we are able to bring to the table of life.

Olives and grapes: food for life, food for thought.