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## Drips and Drops

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## Drips and Drops

A simple visual image: a bit of water lands on the surface of the kitchen sink or other hard surface, and splatters; a drop of water falls on a wash-rag or other soft surface and is gently absorbed. Ignatius of Loyola, in describing typical spiritual movements, likened the two different modes of water and surface to the actions upon our hearts of negative or positive thoughts.

When our orientation is towards growing in love, becoming more fully human, or fulfilling our purpose in life, thoughts that spontaneously arise in our minds will cause a slight but recognizable disturbance if they do not match our direction, or they will seem natural and hardly noticeable when they are in accord with the path we are taking in life. For example, we might be on our way to a store with the intention of not only shopping for our own needs, but to pick up some groceries for a person who has difficulty leaving home. The thought comes: "Why waste your time and money when this other person has plenty of options?" And we sense an unpleasant "splatter" within us. Or, a thought occurs: "How easy it is to take care of two shopping needs in one trip!" And we continue peacefully on our way.

Thoughts have perceptible consequences within us. We do not have to analyze every thought, nor do we need to become self-consciously introspective in order to grow in awareness of the kinds of thoughts that enter our minds accompanied by a twinge, or a bit of splash, while thoughts of another kind bring a sense of affirmation or contentment as we go about our ordinary activities. Our minds and hearts, our thoughts and feelings, are different interior traits, but they are experienced within us as very closely interrelated.

When we are faced with a challenge, as when someone asks that we perform a task which we have never undertaken before, thoughts will surely arise of reasons for and against, accompanied by feelings of, for example, anxiety or excitement. Neither the thoughts nor the feelings control our decisions, but we can take notice of whether one or other combination of the two, more nearly fits who we are as responsible persons. The thought of "running away" might appear attractive, yet raise a feeling of discomfort at the level where honesty and integrity abide within us. The thought of accepting the challenging work might appear painful, yet resonate graciously with our sense of purpose. Both thoughts, with their partnered feelings, provide us with information helpful to our process of making decisions.

Some thoughts and thought-processes are not related to decision-making, as when we spend a significant amount of time and energy wholly focused on teaching a class, cleaning a room, or providing care for an individual. We

can read an article that holds our interest, watch a program that informs us, or listen to music that entertains us, without a thought coming to us as from some unrelated source. But in almost any situation, especially when our minds are not fully occupied, a thought can occur that is similar to a suggestion that someone – a friend or the opposite - might make to us. And that thought, if we are observant, will enter with the equivalent of a splash of water or a gentle flow.

If we want to steer with ever more clarity on our chosen way of proceeding in life, we will find much support by paying attention to the spiritual drips and drops that occur in our minds and hearts.