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## Pickles

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## Pickles

Some pickles are sour, and some are sweet to the taste. Whatever preference we might have, we usually pick one or the other, for we cannot turn a sour pickle sweet, or a sweet pickle sour. If we like both, we can pick one, and then another, but we cannot change one into the other.

Some events in our lives are sour or bitter, but unlike pickles, they can be changed to sweet, acceptable, or satisfying. How can this happen? As a natural occurrence, it is not the same level of nature as that of pickles. When a difficult and painful incident becomes one that we talk about as a special victory in our lives the change that comes about is in the realm of spirit. The change we make from a negative episode to one that we consider positive is not chemical, biological, or physical, but results directly from choices we make.

We know that some difficulties are resolved without our doing anything: a stubbed toe hurts, and if there is no lasting injury, the pain diminishes and then ceases, without any action on our part other than our first exclamation of "ouch!" But the change from pain to no-pain that someone experiences after completing a marathon, or taking a very difficult employment test is of a different sort. We choose to endure suffering for a time, that we might have not only some benefits of physical health, or a new job, but a gratifying sense of accomplishment. We can change an unpleasant incident into one that we talk about with contentment.

We do not change events themselves, as if exhaustion could at the same time be made restful by anything we might do or say. But we fashion the meaning and purpose of many of our experiences by choosing an outlook, perspective, or way of understanding them. Many tribulations and problems come to us without our seeking them, yet we are able to transform them, too. We can engage our minds and hearts in creative and inspired decisions to adjust not the unchangeable realities, but our own attitudes. How often we take an unlooked-for interruption, and make it into an act of kindness or generosity. We change what could be a loss into a gain, though probably no one around us notices or appreciates the mini-miracle that takes place within us.

We are amazingly fashioned in our capacity to move through and beyond real suffering to conclusions that do not deny the cost, but are gratifying and valuable. According to our nature, negative events are

accompanied by negative feelings. But that is not the end. We can choose to seek advantages for ourselves and others in and through all the events of our lives. When we expect to pass through painful periods to something that is better, grander in scope, and worthy of us as persons, our suffering often seems less intense. We bring some qualities to events that can transform them rather quickly. We do not rationalize – that would be dishonest – but we do bring reason to our experiences, and reflection. We intentionally broaden our understanding, so that we can put events into a larger context where sweet and sour remain different, but we decide how to make them complementary within our lives.

When challenges are particularly daunting, and we at first can scarcely believe that we will be able to find our way through, we can pray for the inspiration that will enable us to retain hope, and to make the decision that provides us with integrity and peace. Each time we succeed, we will more easily trust that we will do so again, and that we can deal with anything in life, including sour or sweet pickles.