

In the Place Where the 'Addict' Stands, the 'Non-Addicted' Cannot Stand

For the past few years I have been giving a spirituality talk to individuals in acute inpatient recovery for addiction. This parable has been shared countless times, put down in writing in response to numerous requests. Addiction is but a metaphor...

An event is announced: "the vase will be on display for a limited time only".

The hall was set up for the showing. Ushers were called in; with partitions set to ensure the requisite distance between human and art (*human beings are extra cautious when it comes to minding the gap between the two*). The vase was placed on a white concrete stand with a glass casing covering over the vase for protection.

Being that the announcement was published in the magazine whose readership made up the who's who of the rich and stable, the hall was packed on opening night. Dressed in their finest, they wandered around the room paying more attention to the expressions on each other's faces than to the vase centered in the middle of the room. A subtle air of boredom suffocated the room.

Suddenly, the back doors of the hall fly open and in stumbles the town addict (alcoholic, user, junky, crackhead, drunk etc. *all dependent on the relative respect with which the rich and stable address the other*). All heads turn towards the back of the hall, mouths gaping, audible shock. Now they have something to look at, something that draws their attention away from their preoccupation with nothing but themselves.

The addict stumbles towards the center of the room. With guests moving quickly out of the way so as not to catch his *illness (but not too far as to miss the excitement of it all)*, the addict quickly arrives at the center of the room. At this point the silence is palpable, what will he do next? Myriad questions (*and assumptions*) run through the minds of all those present, except of course the one question that would be helpful, namely: "can I help you in anyway?"

The addict pushes the ushers out of the way. Knocks down the partitions (*closing in on the distance that separates human frailty from the sublimity of art, albeit through the self-destructive repetition in which the addict loses themselves*). Smudges his hands all over the

glass casing, he casts it to the side. Picks up the vase and holds it for a moment. The crowd at this point is waiting with bated breath to see what happens next.

The anonymous addict lifts the vase, and lets it fall from his hands, shattering into a million little pieces. The crowd goes wild. "It's his parents fault!" yells one person; "it's the schools fault!" yells another. "It's the pharmaceutical companies!" cries the third; "it's *his* own fault!" says the crowd in unison. Of course, nobody approaches the addict to see if they can help pick up the pieces. No one sits with the addict, quietly sharing his pain/shame/guilt/hopelessness about the destruction. The voice of the chorus continues to swell- until suddenly- the crowd gets bored again, slowly exiting the hall, back towards their lives in search of a less *severe*, less *abject* form of entertainment.

Left alone, the addicted individual has two options. He can wander off in search of something else to break; or, he can sit amid the mess, amongst the broken pieces, and slowly try to put the vase back together.

The addict sits, slowly and painstakingly putting the vase back together piece by piece. Making progress, it falls apart again. Cutting himself on the broken glass. Losing hope, finding hope. The addict slowly but surely puts the vase back together. He places the vase back on the concrete stand. Walking over to the glass covering, he cleans the smudges. Puts the partitions back in place, calling the ushers back for a new showing.

A new showing is announced, the rich and stable return to look at the vase. The addicted individual puts on new clothes, vanishing- anonymously- back into the burgeoning crowd. At this point the crowd and the addict are gazing at the same vase. But while the crowd sees the same old vase in all of its boring banality, the addict sees something entirely new. Intimately aware of the delicacy of the vase, he is attentive to each and every detail that makes up the vase. Anxiously aware of the vulnerability that cuts through the heart of what appears stable, the addict enjoys each and every moment of the vase in its stability.

Where the crowd sees the same, the recovering individual sees the perpetually new.

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