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THE SECULAR TRINITY

For those souls driven relentlessly by worldly ambition, the secular trinity of wealth, fame, and power prevails. Yet even among those possessing more modest levels of ambition, who has not at one time or another longed for more money, wider recognition, or a larger sphere of influence? Who has not felt—if only briefly—the desire to propitiate and kneel before these secular gods? Some think being rich would solve all their problems; that being powerful would make life exciting; that being famous would make them happy. But as the Buddha and other spiritual teachers have observed, these worldly prizes are essentially nothing more than ephemera.

Those of us attempting to lead a spiritual life might reflect as to whether our hearts are still capable of being stirred, ever so faintly, by these secular gods. Have we really understood their illusory nature? Have we really become immune to their siren call? Or has our rejection of them been merely a *pro forma* declaration, based perhaps on the fact that we lack the ambition, the assiduity, or the wherewithal to attain them in the first place?

It is fairly easy for some to eschew money and power, but what about recognition and reputation? According to the Roman historian Tacitus, “Love of fame is the last thing to be given up.” Fame can outlast us, while wealth and power are dissipated upon our demise, if not before. Worldly power is subject to the winds of fortune; money and possessions can be lost in a flash; but write a book and there is the chance that I may be remembered a hundred years from now, thus gaining my little whiff of immortality.

In spite of our vigilance to be selfless, the yearning for recognition can subsist as a subtle and persistent psychological force. One effective method of dealing with this is to seek opportunities for helping others, without any thought of personal gain. The paradox is that by focusing on the needs of another, we become more alive and vibrant without thinking about ourselves. This advice is succinctly given in *The Voice of the Silence*: “Give up thy life, if thou wouldst live.”

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