

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Moving beyond possessions toward a life of purpose

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At this time of the year, shopping seems to be our culture's most important pursuit. David Brooks, New York Times columnist, explores the issue in a talk that he gave last summer at the Aspen Institute's Ideas Festival. It is not just the problem of living for pleasure or for possessions. For Brooks, it is the tension between "resume virtues" and "eulogy virtues."

What you put on your resume are your accomplishments, your skills and your honors. The virtues that could be included

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in your eulogy are much deeper: "Who are you in your depth? What is the nature of your relationships? Are you bold, loving, dependable, consistent?" Brooks acknowledges that most of us, himself included, think more about the resume virtues.

Brooks summarizes Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, who said there are two sides of our natures, Adam I and Adam II.

"Adam I wants to build, create, use, start things.... Adam II

wants to embody certain moral qualities, to have a serene inner character, not only to do good but to be good.... Adam I, the resume Adam, wants to conquer the world.... Adam II wants to obey a calling and serve the world. Adam I asks how things work, Adam II asks why things exist and what... we're here for."

Brooks describes five qualities that develop our being. The first is love. It could be love for a cause, a person or love for God. Love reminds us that there is something outside the self; it "de-centers the self." The second quality is suffering. While we plan for things that will make us

happy, suffering forms us.

"Like love, suffering exposes our lack of control over our lives.... It encourages deep introspection and equips us with a moral calling."

The third quality is the internal struggle that occurs when we face our weaknesses, or internal demons, and seek to conquer them. Fourth is obedience to a call or a cause outside oneself. The fifth quality is acceptance that one belongs to a human transcendent community. It is a kind of grace that is unmerited and unearned.

In a recent TED talk at bit.ly/brooks-talk, Brooks made simi-

lar points and concluded with a quote from theologian Reinhold Niebuhr: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love."

As we move through this season of madness, it is my hope that possessions do not consume us. May we seek meaning, purpose and love.

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