

## Pause and Pondering in Life Journey

Material by Koichi Ohtawa, slightly edited by Sabine Kalthoff.

Koichi Ohtawa was the fourth Regional Secretary for IFES East Asia (1982-2000). He introduced the region to spiritual retreats; since then until now, he has been a great retreat director. Ohtawa is from Japan; he is now over 80 years old.

### Using this material

*Reflection on our life journey can be done alone. However, if we can do it together with a few friends or with a group of people, it might be better. In any way, it is important to prepare ourselves for it by finding a quiet place to be still. The ideal way will be to have a silent retreat alone or with those who share the same desire for reflection. It is also important to set aside unhurried time for reflection. As reflection can also be called 'pause and pondering', the first step for reflection is to pause – to stop.*

*The following book may help us find a good way to have fruitful reflections: "Stopping: How to be still when you have to keep going" by David Kundtz.*

### An Introduction

A friend of mine saw this message written on a sign on the motor way in the UK:

**"It is the stop that keeps you going."**

A long distance driver occasionally stops to rest during his journey. In our life journey, we also need to pause occasionally in order to rest in God's grace and ponder; to have our life and ministry motivated and empowered by grace. Without pause and pondering, our journey may become terribly tiring and even boring as Henri Nouwen puts it:

*It is remarkable to see how much of our life is lived without reflection on its meaning. It is not surprising that so many people are busy but bored! They have many things to do and are always running to get them done, but beneath the hectic activity they often wonder if anything is truly happening. A life that is not reflected upon eventually loses its meaning and becomes boring. ...*

*We have to keep asking ourselves: What does it all mean? What is God trying to tell us? How are we called to live in the midst of all this?*

(Nouwen, Here and Now, chapter: In Search of Meaning)

The first step of reflection is to recall the past: yesterday, last week, last month, last six months, last year, last ten years, even the whole life until now. As we revisit our journey, we begin to see that our hearts have been deeply influenced or troubled by various events and experiences. Through prayerfully pondering upon them, we can begin to see their meaning and significance to us. We begin to see things from God's perspective.

### Three Options for 'Pause and Pondering'

Below you will find three different options to reflect on your journey. Have a look at them and choose what seems most helpful to you at this point in time.

As you ask yourself the questions suggested in each option – do so gently and wait for the answers from your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember what is important to you and to help you find its meaning and significance for you. This is an exercise in prayer, not in self-examination. Trust the Holy Spirit to be at work.

Do not try and be complete in your answers; the quantity does not matter – writing down just one answer to a question can be enough.

If you cannot find the meaning of a particular event/experience immediately you can take time to ponder upon it. But don't force an answer; it might come later in time.

## Option 1 - Pause and Pondering Upon Life Journey

Looking back upon the past \_\_\_\_\_

Define what period of time you want to look back on. If you are integrating this into a retreat which also has other elements of prayer and Scripture Engagement, then it is wise to choose a time period of around 3-6 months. Limit the amount of time you spend doing this, so that you don't get lost in details – 2 hours could be a good time frame.

1. What has encouraged, comforted or pleased me and what do I think the core reason or meaning of that event/experience was to me?
2. What has discouraged, disappointed or hurt me and what do I think the core reason or meaning of that event/experience was to me?
3. What trials have I gone through and what do I think the core issue of each trial was?
4. What have I come to see about myself and my faith (relationship with God) through these trials?
5. Have I gained new awareness or deeper realization about myself, my life, the world and God?
6. What challenges am I now facing and what do I think is the core issue of each challenge?
7. The past \_\_\_\_\_ seems to me is a time of \_\_\_\_\_.  
Limit yourself to just one sentence.

Look at all the things you have remembered and discovered and try to find out if there is any new awareness or connections among the things, especially at the level of meaning/significance.

Finally, can you find any promise and warning for the coming months from the above reflection?

**Option 2: Pause and Pondering over the last \_\_\_\_\_ months (Choose a time period.)**

What are the events and experiences which seem to be significant to you?

What may be the meaning of each event/experience for your life and ministry?

Reflecting on your answers to the above questions, can you find any promise and warning for the coming \_\_\_\_\_ months?

### **Option 3: Looking Back On Your Journey Through Three Windows**

This option may be helpful if you want to look back on a longer period of time, maybe even your whole life journey up until now. Looking back through certain “windows” helps to focus and to limit what you look at. (It is much harder to try and look at all aspects of our life at once.)

**Window 1: Meaningful encounters with people, books, events and what developed through them**

**Window 2: Major trials or crises and the outcomes/fruits from them**

**Window 3: Important turning points and changes which they brought about**

Having looked back on your journey through the above three windows, any awareness, impression or discovery?