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Tendency to Fall: First Person Accounts *Sally from Alexandria* July 2010

One thing at a time

Six weeks ago Sally walked into my office and announced with a strong voice and good humor, “I’m a wreck!”

It turns out she had fallen twice in six months. Once headfirst down a set of five stairs and once on another set of stairs, this time while climbing up. By the time one gets to fifty, falling is not a laughing matter. The first time Sally broke her nose and the second she damaged her right shoulder. The nose healed without surgery, but the shoulder needed a big repair and several months of physical therapy.

“How did it happen?” I asked. “Why have you fallen twice?”

Sally hung her head dramatically and with contagious cheerfulness confessed, “I wasn’t paying attention to what I was doing.”

Her specific request for me was to help her regain flow in her movements. I began with a request of my own, “Show me what it is like for you to walk right now.” As Sally walked, she told me an amusing story. It was very funny! And she almost pitched over. A big factor in Sally’s lack of balance is that her knees are in bad shape and, yes, she has scheduled surgery. The knee trouble makes her stiff, and, thus, easy to tip over. But another factor is that Sally likes to do many things at once. Multi-tasking is fun!

Bluntly, I said to Sally, “The price of multi-tasking is falling over.”

She agreed with me. What choice did she have!

So, then, along with working on flow, we worked on strategies for being more focused in daily actions. For instance, we worked on the transitions from standing to sitting and from sitting to standing; how to make those movements more comfortable and secure. In another sequence, much like an acting class, I tried to frazzle Sally on purpose. I said to her, “Come on, Sally, hurry up. The doctor is waiting. You know how expensive his time is.” Her job was to stay centered and yet make me wait: “Just a minute, please. I am getting there, but I need another minute.” With the upcoming surgery and recuperation Sally is going to have a lot of opportunity to ask people to be patient with her.

Over several sessions Sally was making steady progress. And then she had another development to report. Her younger sister Christine, who lives in another state, also has knee problems and also keeps falling. Why? Visualize this: Christine holding the cell phone while she walks the dog, while she drives to the supermarket, while she gets food out of the refrigerator, while she does everything.

So! Sally talked with Christine on the phone and passed on the message: “The price of multi-tasking is falling over.”

When Sally called the next time, Christine answered and straight away asked if she could call back later. Christine said, “I am walking the dog right now, and it is not good for me to be doing two things at once. I will call you later when I can give you my full attention.”

Victory! Cleaning up multi-tasking one person at a time!

On this topic here is something from a wise man, George Gurdjieff. Speaking to one of his students in the 1930’s he said:

“When you do a thing,” he said once, “do it with the whole self. *One thing at a time.* Now I sit here and I eat. For me nothing exists in the world except this food, this table. I eat with the whole attention. So *you* must do—in everything. When you write a letter, do not at the same time think what will be the cost of laundering that shirt; when you compute laundering cost, do not think about the letter you must write. Everything has its time. To be able to do *one* thing at a time ... this is a property of Man, not man in quotation marks.”

(Quoted by Kathryn Hulme in
Undiscovered Country: A Spiritual Adventure, Boston: Little Brown, 1966, p 91.
Also at this link: <http://www.gurdjieff.org/lipsey1.htm>)