

And as we discussed in Chapter 5, give it your energy. Link it with the universal energy that gives things life and health, and which breeds fulfilment and wholeness. Effective, fervent, right-and-wise prayer of this kind does actually produce outcomes, and it is entirely consistent with one of the best known sayings of Jesus: 'Trust that you will receive everything you pray for and that's the way it will turn out.' When you seek something that you really want, something that you can commit your whole being to because you know that it is right for you to be this way, then it will happen to you. The trouble is, most of us have not done the spadework to turn up what our soul's sincere desire really is.

A PROTOCOL FOR WHEN TO SAY 'YES' AND WHEN TO SAY 'NO'

Being too busy is a sin because it affronts those who need our attention, it drains our energy, often unproductively, and kills time for reflection and for the inner life of the spirit. So we need a formula to work out when we should say 'yes' to an assignment and when to say 'no'. For survival, some years ago I developed my own 'ten-point plan' to meet requests for my time. This formula results from long experience in difficult contexts, and has been thoroughly road-tested over many years. Many friends asked me to enunciate it.

1. **The test of Bliss:** Joseph Campbell's research on mythologies found that it is a universal human aim to pursue Bliss. Jesus uses the same term in the Beatitudes, where the Greek *makarios* is rendered as 'blessedness'. 'Blithe' and 'bliss', both from the same root, suggest the fullest, deepest joy we can experience, a lively, sprightly joy more enduring than mere happiness. The dictionary describes bliss as the special happiness of heaven, the quality that makes us feel fulfilled and satisfied. So is this activity something I *really* like doing, deep down? Is it something I really want to do? (If the answer is 'no', don't do it!)
2. **The test of Vocation:** Is this something I am suited to doing, which appropriately makes use of my talents, and which is in keeping with my Christian and professional calling? Is the

assignment also consistent with my spouse's or partner's calling?

3. **The test of Uniqueness:** Why me? Why have I been asked or approached? Is this something only I can do, for which I have unique competence, or is there someone else equally or better qualified than I am for this task? By accepting, will I prevent someone else from being given an assignment that will help them to establish themselves? (If so, why not sponsor that person as your alternate?)
4. **The test of Coherence:** Since it is so easy for one's energies to become dissipated and scattered across a plethora of unrelated activities, does this activity harmonise with my current priorities and centres of interest? (If not, say 'no!') I am sceptical about a one-off exercise that has no longer-term pay-offs. So what further things will flow from this assignment? (If none, say 'no'.)
5. **The test of Networking:** Does (or will) this activity keep me in touch with significant people or activities, and will it do the same for my spouse or partner? What are likely to be the long-term people-connections from this assignment?
6. **The test of the Strategic:** Is the audience or the target group for this exercise important enough to warrant the investment of my time and energy? Is the assignment good for me, my family, my partner, and does it enhance my calling?
7. **The test of the Prophetic:** Does this activity or assignment give me the opportunity to be prophetic (in the biblical sense)? That is, does it allow me to make a break-through, or to develop the field, or to extend not only my own range but those of my colleagues also? Does the undertaking make me bold?
8. **The test of Remuneration:** Who is meeting the costs of this assignment, literally? (There is *always* a cost; as well as a cost to you.) Am I being asked to subsidise someone else's initiative out of my own resources? And what payment will I receive, both real

and metaphorical? Is it enough to warrant my commitment to the exercise? In the end, *who* will gain and precisely *what* will be gained by my participation? And are those gains enough to warrant my involvement?

9. **The test of Opportunities Foregone:** Will this assignment prevent me from doing something else more important, or something which I must do, which I am already committed to do, or which I really want to do? Will it get in the way of, affect, or enhance my spouse's or partner's commitments? To answer this question, of course, you must walk in imagination through the assignment and make a realistic assessment of what is involved in doing it.
10. **Finally, the test of Peace:** This is an old Quaker dictum, assuming an understanding of that magnificent Jewish concept *shalom*, which we loosely translate 'peace'. At the primal level, does this assignment leave me feeling easy in my mind? What is my hunch or intuition about this job? If I feel apprehensive, agitated, a bit troubled by it deep down, it's wise to demur. Essentially, do I feel called to this assignment; does it have a God-feel about it? If it will bring or foster well-being, harmony, prosperity, free growth to my soul, happiness and contentment, strength and security, abundance, fulfilment, and ensure that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven (all those meanings are implied in the word *shalom*), then I have the gift of peace. But don't leave home without it!

One need hardly add that this review takes time; if I am not accorded that time, the answer I give is always 'no'. The review is best done in silence and alone, at least initially, but you may need to check your answers with a trusted friend. I have found that the assessment is rarely adequate unless the answers are written down, usually in my quiet-time journal.

Because such a review combines inner work and prayer, you don't have to justify your decision or make excuses. 'Simply let your "Yes" be "Yes" and your "No", "No", ' Jesus advised (Matthew 5: 37).

THE CAEM, THE POWER CIRCLE

The ancient Celts had a notion called the *caem*, the embracing circle. The sacred circle is one of the most ubiquitous religious symbols on earth. It has given rise to a host of devotional uses from rose windows to mandalas, and occurs in the cultures of the North American Indians, Pacific Islanders, Asians and Hindus, and of course the Celts. When the great religious traditions have things in common, New Testament scholar Marcus Borg observes, it shows that the religious tendency in human beings is universal, authentic and reliable. So we are wise to learn how to use the *caem*.

And here we have the help of Celtic scholar and Lindisfarne vicar David Adam (1987, 1989). Take the example of the Gaelic cross. Even though the Celtic wheel-cross predates the Christian era, it represented a cosmic balance of opposites, the four seasons, the four points of the compass, the 'four corners of the earth', and the four universal elements (fire, air, earth and water). The circle therefore concentrated within its circumference the energy of the universe ('This circle is bound/with power all round'), and the point where all radii cross marked the core sustaining all things, sometimes called the 'fifth element', spirit. The sacred circle was considered a cone of personal power. Over several centuries, Christians replaced the overlay of primitive magic with symbolism about spirituality and the wheel of the Celtic cross became a halo behind the intersection of the arms of the cross-pieces, the central empty point being where the head of Jesus, now resurrected, had been.

The powerful encircling conjures up the protecting wall of a city, the castle-keep at its centre; the interior warmth of the home; the enclosure in which sheep and cattle shelter in winter; and the inner sanctum of the church.

Not surprisingly, the Celtic *caem*, Alexander Carmichael found, 'featured constantly in the Gaelic chants he collected from the Hebridean islanders, particularly as the 'Encircling Three' (Trinity):

The Three be about my head. / The Three be about my breast.

The Three be about my body / Each night and each day.

The encompassment of the Three / Throughout my long life be.