

When We Ignore Our Cracks

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Near Aswan, Egypt, there is a stone quarry that inhabits what is known as the “*Unfinished Obelisk*.”

The obelisk’s construction began during the reign of Queen Hatshepsut during the 18th dynasty (1478-1458 BCE). Work was suspended when the workers noticed cracks in the granite they were using. Had it been completed, it would have been the largest obelisk in Egypt at 42 meters high (137 feet). Because the work was suspended, the largest obelisk stands in Rome at 10 meters shorter than the Unfinished Obelisk would have been.

Obelisks were, to the ancient Egyptians, sacred structures built as monuments to honor the dead – including kings – and to honor the gods. They were built or made from a single piece of stone, a “monolith,” and were extremely difficult to construct. Granite is an extremely hard, igneous rock, and the Egyptians had to use dolerite balls to pound the granite into the desired shape. Each dolerite ball weighed at least 12 pounds and was brought from nearby quarries to the worksite. This was all done by human hands and legs. There were no modern-day methods of transporting the dolerite to the men, and once there, it is unimaginable how the men lifted those stones to use as building tools.

There was great interest and energy in building and completing this particular obelisk. It was an honor to be involved in the construction of what would have been “the largest” in all the world. However, the workers stopped when they saw the cracks in the granite. With cracks, the obelisk would be weak, subject to destruction by any number of things, including weather and hits during wars. To this day, it remains unfinished.

The Egyptians did something that many of us and many governments – including the American government – refuse to do. They recognized the danger of cracks in one’s foundation. While I am not sure at what point of construction they were before noticing the cracks; at whatever point they were in their work, they knew that what they were building was doomed, and that it would never survive the winds and the tests of time. So they stopped. On the other hand, the founders of this country did not stop when they saw that the issue of slavery was a huge crack in the narrative they were creating and writing for perpetuity. They produced a flawed document and behaved like all was well when they knew that the contradiction between who they said the United States was and what “the crack” actually revealed about who the United States was, would possibly cause problems down the road. They ignored the crack. They neither tried to fill it with words that would ensure fairness and liberty for all people nor trash it and start the construction of the Constitution all over again... creating a document, and therefore a country, without cracks.

Cracked foundations do not permit institutions or relationships to stand the tests of time. A marriage built on a false foundation will crumble just as a Christianity based and built on political ideology will inevitably fail and cannot lead to the practice of a faith built on the teachings of Jesus the Christ. Cracked foundations cause institutions and human beings to fall apart. They cannot hold up under the normal stresses of life.

In 1902, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner criticized the truth of what America was in opposition to what she professed to be. He said that “*the United States has the highest form of civilized institutions of any country, and enough Bibles to build a pyramid that would reach almost to heaven,*” but added, “*...no one can say, who has any respect for truth, that the United States is a civilized nation.*”

The crack or cracks in this country’s foundation will not allow said civilization, and we are seeing now how those cracks are getting wider and wider, leading the country not toward ultimate greatness but toward a certain fall. The American empire is on a course of self-destruction that few want to admit.

But, in the midst of our national political turmoil, perhaps what we should be led to think about is how we, as individuals, are ignoring our own cracks. Are we our best selves, or are we something far less because we refuse to see our cracks and attend to them? Are there some of us who will remain, in essence, “unfinished,” because the cracks will prevent the building that we need done throughout our lives to go forward? Will some of us – maybe too many of us – continue to live lives of “quiet desperation” as Henry David Thoreau wrote in *Walden*?

Ironically, the tallest obelisk in the world now is the Washington Monument. Not surprisingly, it was not built from one stone; 36,000 stones were used to build it and construction was begun in 1848 using enslaved Africans as laborers. Slavery did not end until 1865.

The Washington Monument is but one source of evidence of this country’s cracked foundation. As we think about that, may we think about ourselves and the cracks in our own soul foundations, and work to correct and fill the cracks so that we are able to stand the winds and storms of life.

Amen and amen.

*Image: Unfinished Obelisk, Aswan, Egypt
Photographer: Aline Fortuna*