

Growth That Starts from Thinking

Eleanor Roosevelt - New York, New York

It seems to me a very difficult thing to put into words the beliefs we hold and what they make you do in your life. I think I was fortunate because I grew up in a family where there was a very deep religious feeling. I don't think it was spoken of a great deal. It was more or less taken for granted that everybody held certain beliefs and needed certain reinforcements of their own strength and that that came through your belief in God and your knowledge of prayer.

But as I grew older I questioned a great many of the things that I knew very well my grandmother who had brought me up had taken for granted. And I think I might have been a quite difficult person to live with if it hadn't been for the fact that my husband once said it didn't do you any harm to learn those things, so why not let your children learn them? When they grow up they'll think things out for themselves.

And that gave me a feeling that perhaps that's what we all must do—think out for ourselves what we could believe and how we could live by it. And so I came to the conclusion that you had to use this life to develop the very best that you could develop.

I don't know whether I believe in a future life. I believe that all that you go through here must have some value, therefore there must be some reason. And there must be some "going on." How exactly that happens I've never been able to decide. There is a future—that I'm sure of. But how, that I don't know. And I came to feel that it didn't really matter very much because whatever the future held you'd have to face it when you came to it, just as whatever life holds you have to face it exactly the same way. And the important thing was that you never let down doing the best that you were able to do—it might be poor because you might not have very much within you to give, or to help other people with, or to live your life with. But as long as you did the very best that you were able to do, then that was what you were put here to do and that was what you were accomplishing by being here.

And so I have tried to follow that out—and not to worry about the future or what was going to happen. I think I am pretty much of a fatalist. You have to accept whatever comes and the only important thing is that you meet it with courage and with the best that you have to give.

Eleanor Roosevelt, wife of Franklin D. Roosevelt, was active in Democratic politics and helped shape her husband's New Deal programs while he was president. Considered one of the most active and influential First Ladies in U.S. history, she advocated racial equality, women's rights and world peace.