

There was always something magic about chemistry class. The subject dealt with *transformation*, for you mixed certain things with certain other things and produced something that was totally different from what you started with. Interesting side effects were sometimes revealed as well: smells, smoke, fire, and colors.

One of the colorful things demonstrated during the course was the litmus test, where treated paper was used to determine whether a liquid was an acid or a base. Blue litmus paper would turn red under acidic conditions and red litmus paper would turn blue under basic (alkaline) conditions. It struck me how that the nature of the substance being tested was *revealed* by this color change. You could also *titrate* to perform more quantitative chemical analysis, because a single drop could cause an indicator to change color.

Having such an indicator is very useful if you want to know the real nature of something. We need something just as analytical sometimes when we are dealing with people.

Usually we find out what we want to know (or don't want to know) about people when they are under some kind of stress. They *reveal* themselves to be something different than what we had previously thought. This can especially happen if things do not go their way.

This situation has occurred in my life on several occasions, with various people. I remember one time I was called by someone who felt that I had thwarted their great plan, and I was subjected to a pretty aggressive tirade. I remember hanging up the phone in disbelief, throwing it on the bed in my disgust. The conversation had stunned me and I was emotionally shaken. It was so unexpected from someone I thought of as family.

Later, the person called and left a message of apology. But I really didn't care to talk to them anymore. Their true nature had been *revealed* to me. I could forgive them, but there was no desire to have more contact with them. I don't think that not wanting to be with someone (or talk to them), or not respecting them, is a lack of forgiveness. I am not judging their character or moral value – I just don't want to be anywhere near it. When Jesus said to turn the other cheek<sup>1</sup>, that seems to be a more or less a spontaneous thing. I don't think that it means we hang around them until they finally slap us again!

I can imagine the possibility of a heavenly "chem" lab where angels determine the true spiritual nature of human subjects. Perhaps a special "litmus paper" would be used that would turn red or green depending on what was revealed in our hearts. The research angel would dip the paper into our soul and examine it to determine our spiritual "pH". The test might have to be performed on a regular basis, for it would probably change from day to day (or even faster). This would not be an indicator of actions, but of feelings at the core of our being.

The Bible has a lot to say about those of us who are not what we portray ourselves to be: false prophets<sup>2</sup>, hypocrites<sup>3</sup>, and even Satan who acts like one of God's angels<sup>4</sup>. Jesus likens these people to a whitewashed grave that in reality has rotten bones within it<sup>5</sup>. C.S. Lewis writes of the act of "revealing" as similar to opening the basement door quickly to reveal the rats<sup>6</sup>.

I realize that we all reveal ourselves in small (and large) ways every day of our lives. Sometimes it is like the phone call I received, but on the other hand, sometimes it is seeing people that are "quietly" nice to people who most people aren't nice to (janitors and other service people, for instance). Some people actually do reveal a good side that may seem uncharacteristic or unexpected.

The thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians and Matthew 25 are all about revealing what a person is really like. These passages talk about actions that stem from God-like feelings, and point me in the direction I need to go.

I'll get back to the point where I can talk again to my friend. But I realize that I need to regularly check myself, to see what is revealed about myself to those around me. I wish my "checker angel" would just let me know each time the indicator turns red ...

1. Luke 6:29
2. Jeremiah 14:14
3. Matthew 6:2ff
4. 2 Corinthians 11:14
5. Matthew 23:27
6. Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis

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