

THE PATH OF TRANSFORMATION

May the peace of God be with you, now and always. What is transformation, what is transformed, who are we, what do we need to know about ourself? Saintly beings have told us that to know our Lord we must know ourself. This means we must go through the process of learning who we are. No one else can do it for us, no one else can explain to us who we are, we must go through the process ourself, find out for ourself who we are.

Scripture tells us there is no compulsion in religion, and part of what this means is that we cannot force religion on each other. Now take marriage, it is supposed to be a loving union of two people. We can force people to marry, but we cannot force them to be loving. When parents force their children to marry, they cannot force them into a loving union. That union happens when two individuals open their hearts to each other, when they love each other.

It is the same with religion, only certain things can be forced. Society or the religious hierarchy controlling society can force attendance, force the performance of rituals, yet they cannot force the opening of the heart, they cannot force devotion to God or voluntary obedience to God's law. All they can force is an outer obedience by punishing those who do not conform, and with the fear of punishment they create apparent obedience.

A key to understanding ourself is the knowledge that we have two souls, one is the undifferentiated soul, the light of God in each of us, the aspect of God in each of us, the spark of God which animates us, and the other is the differentiated soul, the animal soul, the egocentric self.

The animal soul centered on the self is egocentric, it acts to sustain the elemental self. Its purpose and inclination are to give sustenance to that self and fulfill its desires, as an animal does. A bear finds its own food, finds its own shelter, it breeds and raises its cubs, maintaining and sustaining itself and its young. We maintain and sustain ourself in the same way.

We can identify certain levels of consciousness, the first three are feeling, awareness and intellect. We perceive something, we become aware of it, then intellect devises a process to deal with the information. A bear feels hunger, it becomes aware of its hunger and finds a way to satisfy that need. It kills a salmon, it eats berries, it invades a honey pot, but it satisfies its hunger. This is an intellectual process, the bear does not merely stand there waiting for food to fall into its mouth, it does something.

We do something about our hunger in the same way, and we do something about our need for shelter, devising situations to satisfy these needs, all this is accomplished at the level of intellect. People can spend their life feeling desire, becoming aware of it, defining it and going through the intellectual process of satisfying it. This becomes their life, a self-centered life, a life so involved with the desires of the individual being it does not go far beyond that.

These base desires are our animal qualities. Our lower self establishes a committee, a zoo of various animal qualities to satisfy our needs and desires. What does this menagerie of animal qualities do? If we are big enough it protects us as a bear protects itself, if we are not so big we might learn how to run as a deer runs, we become a runner to protect ourself. We use this menagerie in our interactions with the world, sly as a fox, fierce as a tiger, camouflaged as a chameleon, haughty as a cat, ingratiating as a puppy, relentless as a hyena, scavenging as a vulture, proud as a peacock, and so on.

We use these qualities to create favorable situations for ourself, but since we have no respect, no desire and no inclination for God, we have no binding rules guiding the way we do what we do. And so we might become as dishonest and crafty as a fox; whatever works, works. We might become con men or thieves. The inclination which provides for the self allows no restraining regulations, and without regulations we are no different from the animals whose only rule is survival—still, the lower self can make progress. Just as an animal can be tamed, this lower self can be brought under control. The first thing we have to do is provide discipline for that animal which is without regulation.

Where does the need for discipline come from, where does the recognition of this need come from, where does this dissatisfaction with the raw way our animal soul behaves come from? It comes from another level of consciousness, the fourth level of consciousness, judgment, where we ask is this all there is, and begin to question our existence. This can happen when we notice we are doing the same things again and again, finally realizing we are going around in a circle. What we do is a repetition of wanting something, getting it, forgetting the thing we wanted when we have it, then wanting something else. We have done this over and over again, but now we are a little older, we recognize there must be something else.

With this recognition that there must be something else, we begin to acquire discipline, learning what is correct and what is not correct, the discipline of right and wrong. The knowledge of right and wrong has been given to us by the prophets who brought God's words, who told us what is appropriate and what is not. We still have that egocentric inclination, that part of us which does not want to listen to this because that part of us is not interested in God, we still have the animal which is only interested in the self.

We learn now there is more to us than the interests of the self, we begin to find out what else there is, and slowly start to walk the path of discipline. We are taught what to say and not say, what to eat and not eat, we are taught how to act with others and how not to act with others. Love and wisdom are explained, wisdom and the quality of love are explained to us. We begin to understand the power of love and the grace of wisdom. Slowly we change, slowly we tame these animals inside us, slowly we do away with many of the animal qualities we have acquired over the years to accommodate our needs.

Nevertheless each of these animal qualities keeps demanding something for itself. Each one tries to occupy the forefront of our consciousness, and once it is in charge it works very hard to stay there, to be in control, it fights to maintain control as if it were fighting for its life. Whenever the higher self emerges at the front of our consciousness, the animal qualities fight to retake their position. As long as we think these animal qualities will not hurt us we let them back in, succumbing to the seductions they present, most commonly, power, fame, sex, money and property.

Some of us are fortunate enough to realize that life means more than just fulfilling our desires, there is more to life than merely wanting and getting. Change is difficult however, the animals inside us are wild beasts which must be tamed. How do we do that? With love, immense love. We cannot beat them into submission because that will never make them truly tame; they can only be loved into submission. As the conflicting qualities within us are all vying for control, we have to move into a state where control is not an issue, a state where there is only love. This love will soothe everything, even the beasts within us.

With this state of love we begin to develop the understanding that there is more to us than the endless need for things, this desire for things, this need to gratify our appetites. If we look

closely we see our appetites are without limit, they run in every direction and we need to pull them in, to restrain them. Some of the things we have used in the world which have taken us in all the wrong directions can be used to take us in the right direction, we can change our appetites into a yearning for God, we can change our desires into a desire for God.

Now we begin to use the tools we accepted in our animal life as tools for our life as a human being. The first thing we have to do in becoming human is to learn the difference between right and wrong. We need to take that first step forward, then the base desires begin to retreat because now there is a set of rules, now we are no longer just an animal, we are a being with guidance, we are changing. The transformation which is going on did not happen because of a beating, it happened with the recognition of love.

Once we have access to guidance, have learned how to act appropriately with each other and with ourself, and once we have learned about love, the benefits of love, we learn about giving and the benefits of giving. We begin to understand the qualities of God. Think about the qualities of God, what does He do? He gives, He maintains us, He sustains us, He nourishes us, but not just for a little while, this is His unceasing endeavor. As we try to become part of His endeavor certain feelings overtake us, a certain state overtakes us, a cleansing which makes us understand what is worthwhile and what is not. We understand the difference between the path which is wisdom and love and the state of an animal, we know why we want this path because God grants us knowledge of compassion, knowledge of mercy. He allows us to experience an aspect of His qualities which overwhelms us with the beauty of that state, reinforcing our intention.

The next step is surrender, to be totally at peace. At peace with what? We are at peace with the undifferentiated soul within us, at peace with the soul. The lower self surrenders to the

soul, and we are left with the undifferentiated soul. Now there is no difference between us, between you and me, your hunger is my hunger, your pain is my pain, my love unites with your love. Then we truly enter the state of doing unto others as we would have them do unto us. What does this mean, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us? Who are we? If we are the undifferentiated soul, who is everyone else? They are also the undifferentiated soul. Before we can enter the state of the golden rule we have to understand the nature of God in ourself, and just as important, we have to understand the nature of God in everyone else. If we cannot understand the nature of God in everyone else we remain egocentric, we see this glory working only on our behalf. But this glory is not for us, it is His, it is shared by all beings.

On this path, sometimes one of our own animal qualities puts on the garb of a religious leader who tells us what we do is right, what others do is wrong. That leader can behave like a minister or a priest, our own personal preacher who sanctifies what we say and disputes what others say, who tells us how correct we are, how incorrect everyone else is. We have to be careful, the animal soul can masquerade as the undifferentiated soul, leading us wildly astray.

We need to undertake this process of transformation and know how difficult it can be. There is a reason why prayer is a place of struggle, an actual war. Prayer is a battlefield where we can win, die or surrender. Here our victory lies in surrender, contrary to the rules of the world. These new rules are the ones taking us towards the reality we need to believe in, the reality we need to accept in place of the lies of illusion, instead of what the world keeps telling us, the things we read in newspapers, the things which belong to popular culture. All that is a lie, reality is hidden in the ruins of that lie, the ruins discarded by the world.

The great teachers are often discarded by the world, yet they have the hidden gems of truth within them. They are not hidden because someone is trying to hide the treasure, they are

hidden by mankind's inability to see. God has put everything right out there in plain sight, but we are so blind we walk past without recognizing the truth even when it jumps out at us.

We need to wake up; waking up means becoming aware of the state we are in, being conscious of it, being aware of it and doing something about it. If we are not in that wide awake state we are still hypnotized and attracted by the world, we are asleep. In that sleep there is no difference between our waking state and our dreaming state, it is all a dream, it is all illusory.

We need to walk this path, take on these obligations, become people who are knowledgeable about God's law, who understand it, incorporate and practice it in a way embraced with love. If we leave love out of the equation all the animal qualities come back no matter what disguise they wear, no matter if they wear the clothing of a beggar, a prince or a minister. If love and wisdom are not part of the equation, only our animal qualities will emerge. We need to recognize love, recognize wisdom and be drawn to them.