



Excerpt

The Pilgrim Soul

A Path to the Sacred Transcending World Religions

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Taken from Chapter 1: HAVE YOU A PILGRIM SOUL?

We can see why the spiritual traditions, which are naturally concerned with wisdom, place so much emphasis on paying attention to the present moment, on being here and now. Now is the point of intersection of time and eternity. "If we take eternity to mean not infinite temporal duration but timelessness, then eternal life belongs to those who live in the present" (Wittgenstein, 6.4311). In practice, one sees the difficulty of staying in the present, the eternal now, in the face of the strong momentum of time. The greatest weapon Mara (the deadly tempter and obstructor) has, in his war against anyone wishing to wake up from the hypnotic sleep of fear and craving in which we all live, is time and temporal power. The enchanting imaginings which transport us away from the now and the real consist of dreams of the future and revisions of the past.

Cultural styles come and go; we accumulate more or less knowledge about this or that; we live a little longer or a little shorter. All this does not matter very much. The depth is in altogether a different dimension. To be sure, there are cultural styles, institutional forms, or varieties of education that can be more conducive to certain depths, whereas others are less conducive. But the quality of this depth, or the lack of comprehension about it, or the general societal conspiracy of evading it, are not essentially different today than they were in the days of the Buddha or the Christ, nor are they any different in America than in China. This fact is intimately connected with the well-nigh universal human condition: our occupation with the superficial aspects of ourselves and of our surroundings. By confining ourselves to this limited aspect of the whole, we acquire the impression that we are in control. This results in the assumption that we are the central agent in our lives. This soon leads to a self-occupation, which is really ego-occupation,

which is the chief characteristic of the persistent dream about ourselves and about others. This is true for cultures as well as for individuals.

All social reforms seem to be essentially attempts to rearrange the contents of our dream by altering the social institutions that maintain a particular set of the conditions which shape larger or smaller cultural units. Different cultural units have different conditions, some more pleasant than others, but they remain at the same level. What is needed is a questioning of the notions which hold us, a questioning of the very state of dreaming, a questioning of ourselves in our entirety. We need to undertake a thorough investigation of ourselves, from the most superficial level, where each one of us is completely separate and distinct from the other, to the profoundest level in which we participate in the mystery that "all there is is Krishna" (Bhagavad Gita 7:18).

Such questioning is too radical for us to bear for any length of time--radical in the literal meaning of the word, namely what concerns the very roots: the roots of our existence, the roots of our being, and the roots of our possibilities. It is because we wish to escape the radical depths that we engage in arranging and rearranging the surfaces. Lest it should become clear to us how hollow we are, we undertake to reform others according to some ideology, or to convert them to some belief system or a new paradigm. It is much easier to begin to teach others than to realize in one's core that at a very fundamental level one does not know and cannot know, as long as one is what one is.

The primary question is one of being rather than of knowing, of transformation rather than information, of freedom from oneself--from that part of oneself that is a participant in the social dream and therefore lives basically by the operating principles of society, namely reward and punishment, craving and fear.

The world and the times will sometimes be better and sometimes worse, but there is always change. Whether the time is short or long is not the important factor. What matters is how we are and from what depth we engage with the world. We need materials and we need ideas, but we need constantly to be on guard that these possessions and ideas do not imprison us. Wisdom consists, in part, in not building a psychological prison while building a physical house to live in, for "every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God" (Hebrews 3:4). Real freedom and right internal order have to be continually regained, from now to now. They do not persist merely by a mechanical

momentum from the past to the future, but they can be discovered again and again within the realm of time.

Those who seek the dimension not opposed to but different from that of time and achievement have a pilgrim soul. They seek to enter the dimension of eternity and being. Eternal life is not a life of endless duration, a time that lasts forever; it is a state of being in time, accompanied by the qualities of clear perception and love. The everlasting is not timeless. Anything that is everlasting is still in the dimension of time, whereas timelessness transcends this, for the category of time does not apply to it.

To be a pilgrim is to be a searcher, a searcher for entry to the dimension of eternity. This cannot be known in the ways in which we know, it cannot be reached by the ways we have already understood. To set out on this journey, it is necessary to know that we do not know. This is not a celebration of ignorance, but of innocence, an openness to what is, a freedom from all that is known. This freedom is also a freedom from fear, for the simple reason that what is truly unknown can never be a source of fear. Fear is created by an imagined or expected loss of what we know. The unknown is a source of Mystery; the only feeling it can create is that of wonder. And fear and wonder cannot co-exist.

But this state of wonder is less frequently available than we wish; innocence is far too often, and far too much, sullied by cleverness and control-driven knowledge. It seems that we need to work at unknowing, to pay for owning nothing, and to make efforts to reach a state of effortlessness.

Make no mistake about this, if there is anyone among you who fancies himself wise--wise, I mean, by the standards of the passing age--he must become a fool to gain true wisdom. For the wisdom of this world is folly in God's sight (1 Corinthians 3:18-19).