

My Cells Sang

You separate this from that,
qualify high from low,
choose close from far
Where were you when you gazed
at the ripened moon tonight?
Tell me about that.

I have bent so low to the ground
my cells sang with the dirt
that they are.

Heavenly tabernacle.
Blessed bread.
O holy ripened grain!

Listen to the bee.
It hums on each flower of joy and suffering.
I hear it and I know who I really am.

-voice of Francis of Assisi in *Holy Madness*

THE GIFT

Mullah Nasrudin's wife became suspicious of his ecstatic ways and constant laughter. Lately his eyes were soft, he seemed lost in some recollection like a man in love. Having decided that the source of this joy needed to be found out, she followed him, spying on him in the marketplace.

It was just as she suspected. As he was walking a woman approached him and he greeted her with a wide smile. She could not see the woman's face but she saw the woman give him a gift that he readily accepted. She returned home angry and hurt, feeling a certainty that her husband was having an affair.

The Mullah, himself, strolling the market was surprised by a woman who gave him a gift wrapped in a cloth, thanking the merciful and compassionate One for sending him to the world as a supreme teacher. He received the gift, and pondered as he made his way home how Allah could manifest even in him.

Wondering what she had given he stopped by the side of the road and opened the package. In it was a mirror, but the Mullah had never seen a mirror before. Seeing his own reflection he saw an old man and assumed the gift was a picture of the woman's father or grandfather. He brought the gift home and put it away.

His grieving wife saw this, and when he was out she went to his hiding place to see this secret lover's gift he had put away. She found the picture. Looking in the mirror her worst suspicions were confirmed. "It's true. He is cheating on me and to make it even worse, she is such an old hag."

HUMILITY

Once there was a man who spent his days crying out, "I am a worm. I am a worm." He wandered from this place to that. He eventually came to a field where he lay down weeping against the ground, sobbing, carrying on, hitting himself in the head and crying out, "I am a worm. I am a worm."

It happened that a worm resting in the grass near him heard his cries. The worm raced as fast as a worm can into a tunnel of earth, through roots, seeds and the like until he came to the gathering place of worms. He was ranting by the time he got there and the other worms assembled before him to see what could be the matter.

"One of those huge beasts that steps on us all the time without even a notice is up there shouting, 'I am a worm. I am a worm.' Who the hell does he think he is, pretending to be one of us, that arrogant so and so!"

We live much our lives in false identities. A humble person does not have to diminish himself or puff himself up. Humble people are like rivers that bend and flow and transform themselves all the while

remaining who they are. Humility is acceptance of who we really are. A worm is a worm, each one a tiller of the soil. We are individual human beings and we do what we do. Humility is acceptance of our humanity and of the human condition. Both the worm and the man in this story do have a similar more deeply authentic identity. They are both children of God.

We would like to experience integrity of heart and mind; however in the human condition this is rare. Humans frequently experience violent emotions, conflicted states, erratic or unaware behaviors. We fool ourselves all the time. We can easily use our politics, beliefs, tribes, even our spiritual lives to prop up our petty egos. It is a circus in which humility and humor are the best solutions. Humor is the opposite of perfectionism which drives us away from ourselves. Perfectionism is a stumbling block to transformation. Humor is a path on the transforming journey.

What if a fellow companion is of a nationality, race or sect that has harmed your people? You may try to be present, but you repress your natural instincts to go for his throat, knowing this is not a "spiritual" attitude. You suffer with this, and so does everyone else around you, with your brooding or sarcastic comments. In this situation neither blaming others nor shaming ourselves is profitable or realistic. It is simply a very big cauldron to be cooked in until the greater transformation is complete.

If a companion of the fourth order has a bipolar condition we know we can expect several different behaviors from him. But what of the war veteran who alternates between chauvinistic patriotism and distrust of his government that may have treated soldiers badly, even intentionally harmed them in radiation or chemical experiments, LSD interrogations or with depleted uranium. Or the feminist who has begun to experience tantric love. Or someone who has fallen in love with a married person. These oppositions, conflicts, inconsistencies, or morally suspect things that we live with are our teachers.

What this implies about the nature of the divine in whose image we are made, or from whose stuff we are formed, or who occupies every cell of our being, or dwells in us as us; we can only ponder.

COMING INTO SILENCE

Holding paradox allows for humility, then there is no separation, only union. I am This and That. We withdraw all the projections on others and the introjections on ourselves. The door is open for humus, earthiness, humor and compassion for self and others. Read the following story and enter the silence as you do through humming, swaying, breathing, through light, whatever is best for you. If you are in a group stand closely, swaying with shoulders touching, chanting internally until you come into the silence, "Dust and Glory, This and That." Feel yourself upheld by dust and glory, this and that.

Dust and Glory

If you reach in your pocket with one hand you can pull out this truth: I am nothing – a piece of dust – here today and gone. I am frail- full of faults, pain and hidden crimes. Is it the truth? Yes, it is the truth but not The Truth.

If you reach in your other pocket with your other hand you can pull out this truth: I am the glory of God. No one has ever been like me or will be again. I have a voice and something to give that no one else can give. My being is the perfect mystery of God. Is it the truth? Yes, it is the truth but not The Truth.

The Truth happens only when I reach in both pockets and pull out both truths and hold them outstretched in my hands. When I can hold them both without denial –hold the paradox- I am a person of The Truth – a blessed being.ⁱ

SOUND

Throughout your day when you find yourself in judgment about situations or people, make those judgments a bell of mindfulness. Smile, turn your palms upward and move them up and down just a bit. Let out a little hum.

CONTEMPLATION

A quote by Laurence J. Peter: "There are two kinds of egotists: Those who admit it, and the rest of us. ~Laurence J. Peter". The quote is presented in white italicized text on a black rectangular background.

Contradictions

The very contradictions in my life are in some ways signs of God's mercy to me. A humble man can do great things with an uncommon perfection because he is no longer concerned about incidentals, like his own interests and his own reputation, and therefore he no longer needs to waste his efforts in defending them.

For a humble man is not afraid of failure. In fact, he is not afraid of anything, even of himself, since perfect humility implies perfect confidence in the power of God before whom no other power has any meaning and for whom there is no such thing as an obstacle.ⁱⁱ - Thomas Merton

Freedom

Humility does not mean thinking less of yourself than of other people, nor does it mean having a low opinion of your own gifts. It means freedom from thinking about yourself at all. - Sir William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury

Blind in One Eye

We must learn to accept the human - divine mystery. We are part of that mystery. God has kept me blind in one eye all my life. Humility comes – it's the one hand clapping. If this were not so we'd be power brokers. - Richard Blanchfield

God's Economy

In God's economy, nothing is wasted. Through failure, we learn a lesson in humility which is probably needed, painful though it is.ⁱⁱⁱ - Bill Wilson

When Things Are Too Confusing

If you just take a pee, you probably won't wet your pants. - Richard Blanchfield

The Surest Sign of Strength

It is almost impossible to overestimate the value of true humility and its power in the spiritual life. For the beginning of humility is the beginning of blessedness and the consummation of humility is the perfection of all joy. Humility contains in itself the answer to all the great problems of the life of the soul. It is the only key to faith, with which the spiritual life begins: for faith and humility are inseparable. In perfect humility all selfishness disappears and your soul no longer lives for itself or in itself for God: and it is lost and submerged in Him and transformed into Him.^{iv} – Thomas Merton

Through Anyone

If God can work through me, he can work through anyone. - Brother Francis

STORY: Integrity

Tell a story about a time your behavior was in conflict with your beliefs, and values, or the beliefs and values of your family, employer, partner.

- What happened, how did you feel?
- Was it in outside social or conditioned legalism?
- Was it wild and untamed and foolish?
- Did it violate one of your "isms"?
- What were your control issues?
- What was the divine will for you?
- Did it resolve? Did "you" resolve it?
- Did a new attitude arise in you as a result? Was it bigger, smaller? Are you different? How did humility come to you, or did it?

BLESSING

Hail, Wisdom Queen, may the Lord protect thee,
With thy sister, pure and holy Simplicity.
Holy Lady Poverty, may the Lord protect thee,
With thy sister, holy Humility.
Lady, Holy Charity, may the Lord protect thee,
With thy Sister, holy Obedience.
O most holy Virtues, may the Lord protect thee all,
from Whom you come and proceed. - Brother Francis

i Sufi story as told to the author by Robert Frager.

ii Merton, Thomas, *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, Revised edition. New York 1972.

iii AA Services, *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.; 4 edition. New York 2002.

iv Merton, Thomas, *New Seeds of Contemplation*. New Directions Publishing Corporation; Revised edition. New York 1972.