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CHAPTER 16: CLOWNS, TROUBADOURS, MADMEN, FOOLS AND WANDERING  
MYSTICS

***The Soul, Like the Moon***

*The soul, like the moon,  
is new, and always new again.*

*And I have seen the ocean  
continuously creating.*

*Since I scoured my mind  
and my body, I too, Lalla  
am new, each moment new.*

*My teacher told me one thing,  
Live in the soul.*

*When that was so,  
I began to go naked,  
and dance. <sup>i</sup> - Lal Ded*

## ENTERING ROME

Brother Juniper had a compassion for the poor that outstripped anyone and frequently denuded him. Whenever he encountered someone poor or naked he gave to that one whatever he had which wasn't much. So off would go the hood of his cloak, or even his own tunic.

After Francis died only a few understood Juniper, and the guardian of the friars was appalled and embarrassed by Juniper's frequent nakedness. He put Juniper under an obedience not to give away his tunic or any part of his habit. Shortly after this, Juniper encountered a poor half-naked man asking an alms for the love of God.

"I have nothing, but what's on my back, and I can't give it to you under order of my superior." But, continued a smiling Juniper, "If you should take it off my back, I will not resist you."

Juniper was not speaking to a deaf man. The beggar smiled back and stripped him of his tunic immediately. Upon returning home, he was asked about his missing tunic. He smiled explaining how "a good man took it off me, and just went away with it."

The virtue of compassion so increased in him, he began to give away to the poor not only his own tunic but whatever he could lay his hands on. For this reason some companions took care not to leave a thing in the open, because this madman was giving everything away for the love and glory of God, even his own reputation.

Although many thought him mad, there were those who thought him a saint. Juniper did little to aid his own cause. The fame of his sanctity was a plague to him.

Upon entering Rome one day, the devout ran out to meet him. When he saw how many there were, he was appalled. Seeing two children on a see-saw, he moved both to one side and mounted other side of the plank as if it were a noble horse. Up and down, up and down he began to see-saw.

Dumbfounded the devout waved and waited patiently for him to be done with this play. They wanted to accompany him in honor into Rome. Brother Juniper took little heed of their salutation, reverence, or patient waiting, but gave his whole attention to the see-saw, laughing and crying out for joy.

The devout waited for a long time, growing tired. They began to grumble, "What folly is this? The man is out of his mind." One by one they left, disgusted, full of contempt. A few of his companions were heartily laughing, though not all of them.

It is said that thus a madman entered Rome.<sup>ii</sup>

## **CLOWNS, TROUBADOURS, MADMEN, FOOLS AND WANDERING MYSTICS**

What would the story be without the storyteller? What would the dance be without the dancer? Praising, playing, singing, unpredictable and spontaneous the troubadour is faithful to the presence of God in all beings.

Private or public; free or imprisoned; possessor of worldly power or disenfranchised, the troubadour is an artist of praise, an ambassador of peace, a pilgrim wayfarer crossing borders of mind, heart, wealth, disability, culture and belief.

The role of the holy fool is to reorient us to truth, to restore the truth, and to do it in such a way that draws attention to what is repressed, what is amiss, what is out of balance. We may laugh as in the stories of Mulla Nasruddin or the films of Robin Williams; we may weep or be inspired by the fool heartiness of Dorothy Day, or be appalled or horrified by what we are shown about our circumstances, but we are made to see ourselves. Using right action, symbol, parody, backwardness, the holy fool through his/her many guises confronts, strengthens and restores.

Troubadours seduce our cold hearts inviting us to love and joy, to serve life openly with all its beauty and terror, struggles, and triumphs of grace. Inspiring us with song and poetry they stir the heart's fires and reveal the love that courses in our veins, love of the divine and human beloved, love of the other, love of life and its nobility.

Clowns, jesters, tricksters playfully help us laugh at ourselves both communally and personally, make us see our shadows, not take the ego self and its agendas so seriously. The Talmud speaks to the value of this role.

'Rabbi Baruqa of Huza often went to the marketplace at Lapet. One day, the prophet Elijah appeared to him there, and Rabbi Baruqa asked him, "Is there anyone among all these people who will have a share in the World to Come?" Elijah answered, "There is none." Later, two men came to the marketplace, and Elijah said to Rabbi Baruqa, "Those two will have a share in the World to Come!" Rabbi Baruqa asked the newcomers, "What is your occupation?" They replied, "We are merry-makers, jesters, clowns. When we see someone who is sad, we cheer him up. When we see two people quarreling, we try to make peace between them.'" (from the Talmud, Ta'anit 22a)

Such as these open our eyes to beauty; make us weep or laugh, restore our souls. They can also assault our pride and arrogance. Many a court jester has had to run for his life for speaking truth to power. Yet, power needs desperately this kind of truth.

Holy fools live outside the box of social and religious convention. With their antics and bizarre behaviors these teach by turning the conditioned mind upside down. These God intoxicated mystics shun outside forms and religious perfectionism. Like St. Symeon leaving his desert cave lovingly throwing nuts at the pious worshippers in church, they delight in backwards talk and action, finding God in all the wrong places and in all the wrong ways. They may sit on dung heaps and do their mantras. They may sing of God not in temples, mosques or cathedrals but in the tavern of ruin, or in the arms of their lover. Like the Buddhist saint, Drukpa Kunley, they turn the righteous in on themselves. "When Drukpa Kunley turned up in town he would stand in the village square and say something along like this: *'I have come without prejudice to help you, where can I find the best booze and most beautiful women.'*"<sup>iii</sup> (Hollington, 2012)

Breaking conditioning's hold, the straight jacket of social convention and false righteousness, these scandalous lovers of God, these wild flowers, bring us back to the whole. They break open the mysteries of God in our very being.

A Troubadour of the Great Mystery is a holy fool. He or she has no game plan. If I am a fool for God the "isms" of the world do not control me, do not own me. The projections fall away. I breathe the same breath that Jesus breathed on the day he was born and the day he died.

Holy fools speak truth to the powers of politics and social and religious convention. A holy fool is not an activist with an agenda, with an ism or ology, but one who acts from the wisdom of the great silence, speaks from the heart of a spiritual tradition, not its periphery. Such was the Rev. Martin Luther King when he proclaimed to a violent and racist world, "I have a dream," and "I have been to the mountaintop." There is risk in godly folly. Such was Dietrich Bonhoeffer writing from his jail cell in Nazi Germany, or Nelson Mandela in his cell in apartheid South Africa, Ghandi weaving cotton. Rosa Parks, Dorothy Day, Mother Teresa, Oscar Romero, Dom Helder Camara,. It goes on.

A holy fool is humble without false righteousness, arrogance or pride. The fool knows he is but dust, knows he is a part of it all, and must understand his states of being and stay very close to the heart of the wisdom teachings. This is the fool's discipline. We feel the presence of the holy fool in this Samurai story of integrity and honor.

A Samurai sought to avenge the death of his master. For years he sought the killer out, finally finding and confronting him in a vicious fight. The Samurai gained the advantage and it was clear to all he would prevail, when the murderer spit in his face. Immediately the Samurai sheathed his sword and walked away. Astonished his disciples asked, "Why did you walk away?" The warrior looked at them squarely, "I became angered and

enraged. My action then lacked honor, becoming a personal matter. I am a Samurai. We live by our code which says, "Who is strong? He who restrains his urge."

A holy fool says, "I am one with no title. I am one with no name." A holy fool says, "I am one with ten thousand names." The holy fool is neither innocent nor naive, for such a one has been given a share of suffering. Out of a single point of nothing, the fool arises out of the nakedness of God. A fool cannot hide anything. Naked with God the divine image is complete.

When we live humbly as clowns of God a miracle happens. Our lives comfort, confound, confront. We sing in union with those who cannot sing and in the rests between the notes the silence sings.

## **COMING INTO SILENCE**

In this chapter it is only appropriate we salute a true madman, Osho, a master of chaotic meditation. Put on some wild music, Cajun, rock and roll, tribal drumming. Dance for one half hour, then sit in the silence. You may be surprised at the depth at which the silence greets you.

## **SOUND**

There are many kinds of laughter, a turned up lip, an easy smile, a small ha ha, a belly laugh, a full bodied stomach grasping, side splitting throw yourself on the floor nonstop roar. Find those sounds in your life.

## **CONTEMPLATIONS**

### **Holy Fools**

It is the special vocation of holy fools to live out in a rough, literal, breath-taking way the "hard sayings" of Jesus. Like the Son of Man, they have no place to lay their heads, and live without money in their pockets. While never harming anyone, they raise their voices against those who lie and cheat and do violence to others, but at the same time they are always ready to embrace them. For them, no one, absolutely no one, is unimportant. Their dramatic gestures, however shocking, always have to do with revealing the person of Christ and his mercy....

Holy fools pose the question: are we keeping heaven at a distance by clinging to the good regard of others, prudence, and what those around us regard as "sanity"? The holy fools shout out with their mad words and deeds that to seek God is not necessarily the same thing as to seek sanity. We need to think long and hard about sanity, a word most of us cling to with a steel grip. Does fear of being regarded by others as insane confine me in a cage of "responsible" behavior that limits my freedom and cripples my ability to

love? And is it in fact such a wonderful thing to be regarded as sane? Adolph Eichmann, the chief administrator of the Holocaust, was declared "quite sane" by the psychiatrists who examined him before his trial.<sup>iv</sup> - Jim Forest

### **Restoring the Full Picture**

True creativity can only come from silence, from not knowing. If we meet our fears as they are and don't try to change the outside situation or want something different, then there is the potential for transformation. In that attitude we come to essence by simply engaging from a true emotional response to what is there. We discover the ability to play with everything, sadness, joy, depression, wanting to hide in a corner. The clown is about restoring the full picture. It is expressing opposite energies. It is the ability to touch on what is not expressed, on the repressed, to bring back to life and to mirror the society that has been forgotten. We are touching innocence, which means spontaneous, unprepared actions. If we can just really enjoy a flower or the movement of dust through the air. We are free to perceive the hidden magic in the smallest of things. Developing mindfulness into an art form is a wonderful gift.<sup>v</sup> - Didier Danthois

### **Non-Sense**

"Don't make sense. Make non-sense." - Richard Blanchfield

### **St Basil**

Basil was one of the few who dared warn Ivan the Terrible that his violent deeds were dooming him to hell. According to one story, during the Great Fast, Basil presented the tsar with a slab of beef, telling him that there was no reason in his case not to eat meat. "Why abstain from meat when you murder men?" Basil asked. Ivan, whose irritated glance was a death sentence to others, is said to have lived in dread of Basil and would allow no harm to be done to him.<sup>vi</sup> - Jim Forest

### **An Agenda Beyond**

Holy fools are happily, but not naively, innocent of everything that the rest of us take as self-evident. It is the last stage of the wisdom journey: Jesus in his parables, Francis in his patches, and Dorothy Day obedient to petty churchmen for paramount reasons. Reasonable people will always be able to criticize such fools, but they bring to every exile a whole new way of imagining—and thereby usher in the new age.

The holy fool has lived long and deep enough to know that there is nothing new under the sun as far as the soul is concerned. When the new zealot asks why we can't just throw the whole thing out and start again with gospel purity, the holy fools merely

smile. They know it has been done many times before—and needs to be done again—but will not necessarily resolve the problem.

Was Jesus playing the holy fool or just being a curmudgeon when he quoted Hosea to well-informed and well-intentioned believers: "What I want is mercy and not your heroic sacrifices!" (Matthew 9:13, 12:7, 23:23)? The holy fool knows that there is an agenda that is beyond efficiency, rightness, and being in control of outcomes. The mystics call it "union with God." Meister Eckhart put it best of all: "If the soul could have known God without the world, the world would never have been created."<sup>vii</sup> - Richard Rohr, OFM

### **Heyoka – Sacred Clowns**

I will say something about *heyokas* and the *heyoka* ceremony, which seems to be very foolish, but is not so. Only those who have had visions of the thunder beings of the west can act as *heyokas*. They have sacred power and they share some of this with all the people, but they do it through funny actions. When a vision comes from the thunder beings of the west, it comes with terror like a thunder storm; but when the storm of vision has passed, the world is greener and happier; for wherever the truth of vision comes upon the world, it is like a rain. The world, you see, is happier after the terror of the storm.

But in the *heyoka* ceremony, everything is backwards, and it is planned that the people shall be made to feel jolly and happy first, so that it may be easier for the power to come to them. You have noticed that the truth comes into this world with two faces. One is sad with suffering, and the other laughs; but it is the same face, laughing or weeping. When people are already in despair, maybe the laughing face is better for them; and when they feel too good and are too sure of being safe, maybe the weeping face is better for them to see.<sup>viii</sup> - Black Elk

### **HOLLOW BONES**

When we become hollow bones there is no limit to what the Higher Powers can do in and through us in spiritual things. - Frank Fools Crow, Lakota

### **TIMING AND PLACE**

I never threw an illegal pitch. The trouble is, once in a while I would toss one that ain't never been seen by this generation. - Satchel Paige

## MEDITATION AND STORY

Sit quietly until you are following the waves of your breath. Breathe in the infinite cosmos, receive its breath. Breathe out into the infinite cosmos, give of your breath to all that is. Repeat this over and over until before your mind's eye you see the holy fool in you. Perhaps that fool is present in the work place, the family, among friends. Perhaps that fool has something to give the cosmos like the breath you gave. Let your fool show you its dance. Bless that dance.

## STORY

-Tell a story about time you or someone you know consciously did something utterly foolish to confront, confound, restore.

-What does it mean to be "a man with no name and a man with ten thousand names"? Who or what do you think of when you hear that phrase?

## BLESSING

O my God, make them to be songsters that carol in fair gardens, make them lions that couch in the thickets, whales that plunge in the vasty deep. - Abdu'l-Bahá

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<sup>i</sup> Lal Ded, Translated by Coleman Barks. *Naked Songs*. Maypop Books Athens, GA 1992

<sup>ii</sup> Flaherty, Barbara. Contemporary adaptation from *The Little Flowers of Francis* by Fra Ugolino da Santa Maria, 14<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>iii</sup> Hollington, Simon. *The Flaming Thunderbolt of Wisdom: A Penis Over Every Doorway*. Elephant Journal. Mar 14, 2012.

<sup>iv</sup> Forest, Jim. *Praying With Icons*. Orbis Books. New York 1997.

<sup>v</sup> Danthois, Didier. *In Living Lightly on the Earth. Issue 25, Autumn 2003*.

<sup>vi</sup> Forest, Jim. *Praying With Icons*, Orbis Books. New York 1997.

<sup>vii</sup> Rohr, Richard, OFM. *Holy Fools*. Sojourners Magazine (Vol. 23, No. 6, pp. 18-21), July 1994.

<sup>viii</sup> Black Elk, Nicholas and John Gneisenau Neihardt, Alexis N. Petri, Lori Utecht. *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux*. University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE 2004.