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The Divine Pedagogy of Formation – XIII An Eccentric Formee

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Abstract

The call and the response of Jonah stand out on account of its abruptness and unexpected twists. The trainee tries to evade his Guru by running away from him. The divine Pedagogue knew the obstinate and insolent nature of his trainee and prepared the belly of a whale to form and transform him. However, the self-righteous formee tries to indict his format or by finding fault with his works and belittles Yahweh by enumerating his crimes. He never cared about anybody else other than himself. The Book of Jonah ends with a question addressed to the representatives of God in every age. Whether to imbibe the divine perspective and become a true disciple is a choice left to us.

An Unexpected Command

A Strange Beginning

Usually, the books of the prophets begin with giving details of the author and the context. Strangely the book of Jonah does not bear a superscription. All on a sudden the prophet is given a commission. We do not know the earlier period of his formation, and how he responded to it. The opening of the Book is abrupt: "And the word of Yahweh 'was to' Jonah son of Amittai saying..." This statement is usually translated as "the Word of the Lord came to..." The verb *hyh* means "to be, happen". It refers to the abiding nature of the divine Word, which is living, active,

sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating, even dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow (Heb.4:12); nobody can destroy this powerful and ever effective Word of God; it stands forever (Is.40:8). In our story, the formee tries to evade the Word of God by running away from it. But the Word of God peruses the fugitive and overpowers him.

Reflection I

The words of Jesus, the guru is relevant here: “You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last” (Jn.15:16). In the modern world, the candidates to the religious and priestly life usually think that they have chosen the consecrated life. This is totally wrong. It is because of this mentality that they think that they can leave their vocation whenever they like. The story of Jonah provides a salutary lesson for them.

The Man

Jonah, the son of Amittai is well known as a prophet in the time of King Jeroboam, son of Joash of the northern kingdom of Israel. In 2Kg.14:25 he predicted the king’s great success in restoring the borders of Israel from Aram in the north to the sea of Arabah in the south. It is said in 2Kg.14:25 that Jonah was from Gateh-Hapher, a small walled town in Galilee. The Hebrew name Jonah means ‘dove,’ a term used elsewhere as a metaphor for Israel’s senselessness and fickleness in flitting back and forth between Assyria and Egypt (Hos. 7:11-12), and for its ultimate return to Yahweh (Hos.11:11). This name is very appropriate in the story. Jonah lacked direction; although he was a prophet of Yahweh, he flees from his divine Formator and takes the opposite direction. In the belly of the whale, the formee seems to understand the folly of his action (ch.12) and obeys the command of the Master (3:1-4).

Commission

“Arise, go to the great city of Nineveh and cry out against it because its wickedness has come up before me.” (1:2)

“Arise”

This command is a *sine qua non* element in the formation process of the called ones. Elijah was asked by the divine Formator to arise, go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there (1 Kg.17:9). The divine Master said to Moses: “Arise, lead their people on the way...” (Dt.10:11). Joshua the formee was instructed to arise from the state of prostration (Jos.7:10). Balaam got the command to arise and go with the people of Balak (Num.22:20). The divine *Guru* gave twice this order to Jeremiah, his

formee: “Arise, go to the Euphrates...” (Jer.13:4, 6). All these directives indicate that the formee has to leave his present static situation and to become active in fulfilling the will of the Master. He has to arouse himself from his egocentric mentality and get totally involved in the prophetic task.

Reflection II

The human formators should be always engaged to awaken the spirit of the formees, and provoke them by injecting into them new and new challenges and chances. This will stimulate the dynamism in the youth, providing them with occasions to unearth their capabilities and natural gifts.

“Go”

Next the formator commanded Jonah: “Go”. Usually the order to “arise” is followed by “go” as in the case of Elijah, Balaam, and Jeremiah. All these called ones promptly obeyed the divine Pedagogue.

Reflection III

The trait of a true disciple is manifested in his/her instantaneous positive response. A formee should be all eyes and ears to listen to every word uttered by the master. He/she has to cultivate an intuitive sense to know every desire of the formator, even if it is not explicitly expressed in words. There is a tendency in many of the present candidates to shut their inner ears, in order to escape the voice of the whispering Spirit. When they are constrained to obey, perhaps being motivated by the unpleasant aftermath of stubbornness, they do it without putting their heart and soul in fulfilling the task. This is a sad situation. Weak formators, who do not have guts to challenge, but peevishly yield to the excuses and objections of the formees, are doing a great harm to the Religious Congregations and dioceses, and finally to the candidates themselves.

“Cry Out”

The Hebrew term *qara* denotes proclamation by loud voice or lamentation. In both senses, one has to raise the voice so that everyone could hear and understand the message. The way of *qara* is also important. One can express the message through the variation of the voice, through eyes, face, gestures and postures, and through the whole body. The very person should become a living *qara*.

Reflection IV

Is not the lack of success to imprint in the minds of these who have not heard about Christ's gospel of love, due to our defective method of proclamation? Do the disciples of the divine *Guruji*, make their whole person a *qara*? Do the formators teach the formees the art of converting the whole person a living, loving and moving message?

The Content of Proclamation

"Cry against Nineveh, the great city for their wickedness has come up before me"

Nineveh was the administrative capital of the neo-Assyrian empire, and it is well-known for its sordid wicked deeds. The omnipresent and righteous God will not tolerate the triumph of iniquity among humans, whom He had created in his own image and likeness. The phrase "cry against" implies the announcement of punishment. Nothing is said about repentance, but it is implied. After the conversion of Jonah we see him crying out: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (3:4). The announcement of the threat of destruction may induce the inhabitants of Nineveh to do penance by putting on sackcloths, sitting down in the dust, fasting and crying mightily to God for mercy. In the words of the divine Formator, we could find a psychological approach which is very effective. If the modern masters make use of such a method, it will yield thirty, sixty and hundred fold fruits (Mt. 13:8).

Response of the Formee

"He Rose up"

"Jonah rose up..." (1:3)

The initial verb may give an impression that the formee instantaneously obeyed the command of the divine Formator, as the prophet Elijah, Jeremiah and Balaam have done. Unfortunately what he did was something entirely unexpected from a called one. Jonah got up to "flee to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh and went down to Joppa". The narrator explicitly mentions that the prophet was running away "from the face (*lipne*) of Yahweh" – something which the formees should never do. This disobedience indicated not merely breaking the divine command; something that may happen to everyone during the formation period. However, it will be an occasional default. The aspirants will afterwards repent and come back to the right track with the help of the Formator. Now Jonah flees from the face of the divine Master! During the formation period the called ones are supposed to sit

in the presence of *guru*, fixing their eyes on his face and keenly listening to what is uttered by him, as the disciples of Elisha did (2 Kgs. 4:38). Never one would ever dare to flee from the face of the Master, an act that amounted to a renunciation of vocation. Jonah was practically rejecting his call. Tarshish is situated in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Jonah was trying to flee as far as possible from the Master, thinking that Yahweh will not get him!

"Acts of Going Down"

Jonah *went down* to Joppa... he *went down* into the ship. The word *yrđ* (go down) appears twice in v.3. Further, while the storm was raging the formee has *gone* below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep (1:5). All these *yrđ* acts have not simply a topographical meaning, but a spiritual significance. Every member of the covenant community is bound to *go up* to Jerusalem, in order to visit the Almighty and pay respects to Him (Is.2:3; Mic.4:2; Jer.31:6; Ezra.1:3; 7:7). Now the called one goes down and down from the divine presence. He wanted a complete break of the relationship with the Lord. A total degradation in the spiritual life!

Two of his other actions deepen the dimensions of such a collapse: Jonah lay down and was fast asleep. These expressions also occur in the story of Elijah (1 Kgs.19:5). That prophet was very dejected at the apparent failure of his mission and the obvious threat to his life. But in the case of Jonah these acts refer to the further deterioration of the relationship. He wanted to forget his past life as the called one, and to say *adieu* to it.

In Pursuit of Renegade

The divine Formator cannot sit idle at this sad situation. He loves his trainees, and their every act of infidelity will break his paternal heart. Like the loving shepherd in Lk.15:3-5, He goes after the lost sheep until He finds it. St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara in his work *Colloquies* vividly and touchingly gives articulation to Jesus' arduous and exhausting acts of searching the strayed sheep. "Seeking you I travelled brawling rain and hot sun, among hills and dales, because I loved you."

A Stronger 'yrđ'

The *yrđ* of Jonah was met with Yahweh's *yrđ* acts. He hurled a violent and turbulent storm upon the sea (1: 11, 13). The agitation of the sea is expressed twice as 'going'. This 'going' of the sea brought out another 'going'. The sailors tried their best to save the ship and their lives. Each cried out to his own God. When the captain saw Jonah fast asleep, his scolded him and asked him: "Arise cry aloud (*qara*) to your God" (1:6).

By these words, the divine Pedagogue was reminding the disobedient formee of the task entrusted to him ('arise', 'cry aloud'). The *Guruji* through the mouth of the captain was instigating Jonah to retract his faulty steps and undertake the assigned task. But the naughty formee does not seem to read between the lines. The heart and soul prayer of the sailors was of no avail. Then they said to each other: "Come (in Hebrew language 'go'), let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity" (1:7). This 'going' led to Jonah's 'going' to the sea and the story of the whale.

Reflection V

The counter movement of the divine Pedagogue provides formation artistry to the human formators. He makes the recalcitrant candidate drink a bitter medicine, the ultimate purpose of which was to correct him and teach him a salutary lesson. This was only the fruitful method to conscientize the fromee of his faulty steps.

An Adamant and Desperate Formee

When the lot fell on Jonah, the sailors questioned him about his identity and about the nature of his crime (1:8-10). They had expected that he will confess his sin and repent about it. Nothing of that sort came from the mouth of the formee. He boldly said: "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." It seems that the prophet wanted to set himself as the man of the true God and deride the gods of the infidels. Here we can find an irony. Jonah claims that he worships the Lord who made the sea and the land. What was he doing now? He was trying to flee from the face of God through the sea that the divine Formator has made!

When the attempt to flee from the face of the Formator did not succeed, and the sailors understood the wickedness of his apostasy, he saw himself in an awkward predicament. He had lost credibility both before his Master and the foreign sailors. What is the use of living as a disgraced person? Jonah decided to put an end to his life. Even then the formee was not willing to repent and to beseech Yahweh for forgiveness and mercy. Rather, he asked the sailors to throw him into the sea (1:12). The sailors did not want to do it, but as the sea grew even wilder than before, they cried to the Lord not to hold them accountable for their act (vv.13-16). Then they threw the prophet overboard, and the raging sea grew calm.

The Helping Hand of the Formator

It was the divine Pedagogue who was behind the scene of all the

happenings. The Lord of heaven, who made the sea and the land (v.9), was arranging everything according to his pre-meditated plan. He knew very well the character of the stubborn and unyielding formee. All on a sudden Jonah cannot be transformed into an ideal disciple. Such an expectation will be foolish. Hence, the wise Formator was taking further steps. He did not allow the formee to commit suicide and escape forever from the divine presence – which will be taken as a credit by the rebellious formee. He may think that his attempt to flee from the *Guruji* has finally succeeded, although in a tragic way. The divine Pedagogue had prepared a whale to swallow up Jonah (v.17). If our formators had followed the pedagogy of formation of the divine Master at such challenging and complicated situations!

The Response of the Impotent Formee

The formee had to spend three days and three nights in the belly of the whale. It is said at the beginning of chapter 2: "Jonah prayed to the Lord, his God out of the whale's belly." Usually, his prayer is called as Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving. Such an evaluation does not seem to be correct. The main theme of his words is a complaint, although some of the thanksgiving expressions do occur. Let us analyze the content of that 'prayer'.

The Portrait of a Self-Righteous Man

It thus begins: "I cried out (*qara*) to the Lord because of my affliction". The task assigned to the formee was to cry out (1:2). Now his 'crying out' was not for the sake of fulfilling that mission. The so-called 'prayer', is centred on the first person singular (*I*). Some examples: "I cried..."; "you hurled *me* into the deep... all your billows and waves swirled about *me*"; "I said: I am cast out of your sight, how *I* can look again towards your holy temple"; "the engulfing waters threatened *me*, the deep surrounded *me*; seaweed was wrapped around *my* head"; "I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth beneath barred *me* in forever". *I* will sacrifice to you with the vows of thinking; *I* will pay that *I* have vowed. The ego-centred attitude can be seen even in his response to the sailors: "I am a Hebrew; *I* worship..." (1:9).

In all these words, we find a man who thinks of himself alone, that whatever he does is right, and others' actions wrong. This self-righteous formee finds fault even in the works of his Master and speaks by belittling Him.

One Who Indicts the Formator

The cry of Jonah was not on behalf of Yahweh or of Nineveh. Rather

he raises his finger against the Lord, who, in his thinking, has brought down all the calamities. He submits the following lists of the divine crimes. It is Yahweh who had hurled him into the deep, (v.3a) (although it was the sailors who had thrown him overboard); the divine waves and breakers swept over him, (v.3b). He has been banished from the divine presence, (v.4) (actually it was Jonah who had run away from God's companionship).

We can find a paradox in 4b: "How can I look again towards your holy temple?" Also in v.7 he refers to the holy temple. Now the question arises: Who had obstructed the prophet from visiting the temple and enjoying the divine presence? Was not he himself who had fled from God's face? Thereby he was proclaiming that he was not willing to see anymore the Lord. Now he complains about the inability to see the temple!

A Hypocritical Attitude?

The stay in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights was not at all easy. Jonah was practically buried in that tomb. What he had in his mind was the sudden death by drowning. Now there does not seem that the agony was going to end. Because of this, we can surmise, that the renegade formee was changing his attitude. "When my life was ebbing away, I remembered the Lord, and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple" (2:7). In the first part of the sentence, he does not address the Master in the second person singular (I remembered the Lord"). When he was earlier listing the divine crimes, he had used second person singular. Now no personal relationship is explicitly expressed. Were his words a confession? It seems that he was merely mentioning the facts. Jonah also acknowledges: "Yet you have brought up my life from corruption, O Lord, my God" (v.6). Can this be seen as an act of thanksgiving? Our first impression will be to say 'yes'. However let us not make a hasty judgment. The Lord had saved Jonah from drowning. Now he needs deliverance from the belly of the whale. There is no other way unless Yahweh comes to his rescue. A natural question may come up to our mind. Was the tricky fellow trying to win the divine favour by words of gratitude? Was he using words of praise to bribe the Lord of the sea and the dry land? We do not know with certainty. Let the modern Jonas answer this question!

An Ironic Statement - I

"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace (*hesed*) that could be theirs." (v.8). This is a statement that condemns the idolaters. Of course, the reference is to the sailors. It may also point to the inhabitants of

Nineveh. But actually it turns the tables on him. Both the sailors and the Ninevites have not relinquished the fear of the Lord. Indeed, they have become believers. The sailors confessed their faith in Yahweh, offered sacrifice and made vows to Him (1:16). The Ninevites, as soon as they heard the preaching of the prophet, with heart and soul repented, did penance and turned to God together with the animals (3:5-9). In brief, it was not the foreigners who had abandoned the faith in the Lord, but the very prophet of Yahweh himself who has showed infidelity. Besides, the formee has committed the sin of idol worship, since he was deifying himself and worshipping his ego. Thus, the prophet's claim that he was the worshiper of true God becomes a crude irony.

An Ironic Statement - II

The reference to Yahweh's *hesed* (which can be also translated, 'fidelity') leads us to Jonah's statement in 4:2. There the unfaithful formee cites the text of Ex.34:6, which proclaims the divine *hesed*. That statement is full of irony. Because of Yahweh's *hesed* (which can also indicate His loving mercy) He did not punish the inhabitants of Nineveh. The formee finds fault with the divine *hesed* and judges that as a disgraceful deed. How can the prophet on whom the divine Formator showered his immeasurable *hesed*, dare to depict the divine compassion as a shameful behaviour? Indeed, the called one here appears as a most shameful creature!

Another Instance of Self-Righteousness

In Ch.2 there appears once more a man of self-righteousness: "I, I myself will sacrifice to you with a song of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed" (v.9). Is not this a bragging proclamation? He was boasting that I will do this and that. Let us compare Jonah's act with that of the sacrifice and vows of the sailors. They did not take credit to it and avowed that Yahweh is an awe-inspiring Almighty God (1:14). A sincere and wholehearted act! It is not mentioned afterwards that the formee had offered sacrifice and fulfilled his vow.

A Strange Acclamation

The last declaration of 2:9, "salvation is from the Lord" deserves special attention. Is this a solemn acclamation? These words summarise the message of the book. But an ordinary reader will be astonished at hearing this statement from the lips of the renegade. After Yahweh rescued him from the belly of the whale and reiterated the command to cry out to the Ninevites, the formee proclaimed a message of imminent destruction that consisted of five words in Hebrew: "Only forty days

and Nineveh will be overthrown” (3:4). The Hebrew *hpk* has a double significance, the first being of destruction, the second being conversion. What Yahweh had in his mind was the second meaning. He was giving the Ninevites a chance to repent by taking the message as a warning. The Lord of the Bible is not a punishing deity, but one who disciplines and saves. But Jonah, who was supposed to have the compassionate heart of the Formator, interpreted it in a negative and destructive sense. Was the disciple of the divine Pedagogue trying to disfigure the true face of the Master, presenting him as a malignant God who finds his satisfaction in inflicting violence? What a wicked and malicious act!

Divine Pedagogy of Formation

Although the formee had not fully turned back from his rebellious ways, the Formator comes immediately to rescue Jonah from this ‘tomb’. As the called one proclaimed that salvation is from the Lord, Yahweh subscribed to that definition “by speaking to the whale and it vomited Jonah onto dry land” (2:10). The Creator is willing to obey the subscription attributed to him by a man! But that fellow does not demonstrate by his life that the Lord is the saviour! The irony is implied in the vomiting act of the whale. Vomiting denotes abhorrence and revulsion (Is.19:14; 25:8; Jer.48:26; Job. 20:15; Lev. 18:28). Even the whale considered the prophet as an indigestible thing. It implies that even the beasts hate and abandon the man of self-righteousness! The person, who had left the land in order to escape from the divine hand, is brought back to the land. Thus the words of Jonah, that Yahweh is the Lord of land (1:9) is fulfilled.

“Then the Word of God was to Jonah a second time saying: Arise, go to Nineveh and cry to it...” (2:10-3:2). The divine Formator readily responds even to a slight positive response of the called one. At least Jonah had prayed, even though without forsaking his instinctive habit of complaint and self-righteousness. For the moment the Master was satisfied, and delivered him from the prison, and entrusted him with the mission as if he had full faith in the naughty disciple. The divine Pedagogue is very patient and takes steps to gradually transform Jonah into his mentality. Such an art provides a salutary lesson to human formators.

Different Kinds of Qara

The Formee's Qara

According to his Master's instruction Jonah entered the city and began to *qara*: “Only forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (3:4). We have already discussed Yahweh's intention.

The Leaders' Qara

Although no direct command to repent was made, the Ninevites believed in God, and the leaders proclaimed (*qara*) a fast and put on sackcloths. Their *qara* denotes that they had sent the messengers throughout the city, crying out their decision to do penitential acts.

The King's Qara

Hearing the news, the king also proclaimed an edict that all people, including the living creatures, should join in the acts of reparation, and he set himself a living model. Everyone has to turn away from the evil way and persuasively cry out to God for mercy and pardon (3:5-9). Another word *dsaq*, which means wailing that has the implication of prolonged cry with beating the breast, is used here. He confessed that they do not deserve the divine compassion. Still he put his trust in God's beneficence and forbearance.

An Evaluation

It is interesting to make a comparative study of *qara*. The formee was doing a lip service, without having any concern for the intention of the Formator. The leaders of the city and the king well understood the mind of Yahweh, and believed in Him and with heart and soul asked all to get engaged in severe penitential acts, crying out with all their strength to God. The king included in his edict that all the living creatures have to participate in contrition and atonement. He expressly avowed that Nineveh is not worthy of the divine indulgence.

Reflection V

Here we find what a disciple of the Lord should not do. A truly called one has to participate in the inner attitudes of the Master, hoping even against hope that the sinners repent and turn back to God. His/her way of proclamation should betray the suffering face and voice of God – an expression that will induce the wicked to reject their lifestyle and turn back the loving Lord.

A 'Repenting' Formator

When God saw the penitential acts being accompanied by turning (*shub*) from their evil ways, the paternal Lord also repented (*nham*) about what he had thought to do to them (3:10). The term *nham* has a deeper significance. It expresses the idea of heavy breathing. If a person is subjected to the intense emotion it will spontaneously heighten the breathing. This is attributed to Yahweh as He repented about the thought-out punishment. The Lord was forced to take a disciplinary action in order to bring back

to Him the Ninevites, who were actually very dear to him. Now they had rejected their wickedness. He was relieved, and that relief was manifested in the form of deep breathing. The God of forbearance turns back from his fierce anger. This attitude of the divine Formator needs to be compared to the unrepentant obstinacy of the formee.

The Formee as Adversary:

An Evil and Irate Prophet

The formee thus reacted to the repentance of the Formator: "This was extremely evil to Jonah and he burned (with anger)", 4:1. While the Ninevites turned away from evil, their wickedness caught hold of the called one. Here one may remember the words of the new Jonah: "When an evil spirit comes out of a man ... it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself..." (Lk.11:24-26). In this statement, Jesus was referring to the return of the evil spirit to the same man. But in our story the ejected evil spirit comes to live in the formee. As a result, Jonah was burning with anger. Against whom? Of course against the one who sent him. The term *hara* has the basic meaning 'burn'. This is an intense expression of anger. Jonah was burning hot. He accuses the Formator of self-contradiction, by failing to stick to His earlier word. According to the formee, Nineveh deserved punishment. By the unwillingness to carry out punishment Yahweh disowns the very divine character of the God of justice. What was the nature of the formee's evil? Was he fighting for justice against God's mercy? Was he worried that his reputation will suffer if his prophecy is not fulfilled? Was he angry that the divine compassion which should be exclusively Israel's, has now come to be applied to all nations? It is logical to surmise that the anger of the formee had the traces of all these thoughts.

Let us concentrate on the nature of the 'evil' (Hebrew *ra'a*) that entered in the heart of Jonah. In his own words, the divine Master repents of the *evil* that He had thought-out to bring upon the *evil* Nineveh. The reason of their repenting of the *evil* induced Jonah to become *evil*. While the Lord in the company of heaven rejoices over one evil one who repents (Lk.15:7), God's representative burns hot with anger and accuses his *Guruji* about showing mercy. The term *ra'a* occurs twice in the mouth of the sailors (1:7, 8). They wanted to know the culprit for the raging sea by casting a lot, and found out the offender, and questioned him why he had brought out this *ra'a* upon them. Still the called one was not ready to repent of the evil. What a paradox! In 4:9 Jonah becomes once more angry and he justifies his fury. We shall reflect later upon his reaction.

A Death Wish

The expression 'to die' frequently comes out of the mouth of Jonah (4:3, 8, 9). Once he was ready to die (1:12). The reason for it was not the desire to save the lives of the innocent sailors. His statement was made out of despair. Yahweh had defeated him from his attempt to escape. He may once more compel him to undertake the task of proclamation. The formee thought that death will be a better solution. But the hardship of being 'buried' in the 'tomb' for three days and three nights compelled him to change his mind and forced him to pray to the Formator.

Now he prays to Yahweh who had withdrawn the punishment: "O Lord, take, I beseech you, my life from me, for it is good for me to die than to live" (4:3). When the gourd withered away that Yahweh had made to grow up in order to give shade to his head for the purpose of delivering him from his 'evil', he wished to die and lamented: "It is good for me to die than to live" (4:8). As the divine Formator tried to enter into a dialogue with him, the recalcitrant and adamant disciple asserted: "I do well to be angry, even to death" (v.9).

What would have been the mental status of the prophet who was playing the trump card of death against his Sender? He had already rejected the Master's ideas and the ideals. That behaviour amounted to disowning the Lord and installing his own self in His place. Thus, the formee had been dead in the spirit. Now this dead soul wants to embrace bodily death and harass the Formator. Is not this a paradox?

One question may spontaneously arise in our mind. Was Jonah's death wish sincere? Was he making such statements in order to frighten the divine Pedagogue and go down on the knees and blindly subscribe to the whims and fancies of the disciple? One cannot be certain about it. Drawing such a caricatured figure of the prophet seems to be reading too much between the lines. It is better to find in Jonah the portrait of a naughty boy who gives vocal articulation to whatever comes to his mind.

The Pedagogical Approach of the Formator - I

"The Mother of Dolours"

This negative reaction which explicitly negated the spirit of the divine message, and the words of the formee in which Jonah took the position of an adversary of the Master, would have pierced the heart of Formator. Human formators may encounter such a situation that, however, will not be so critical and desperate. It was similar to the birth pang of a woman who brings into the world a human being. Paul uses this analogy

in Gal.4:19: “My dear children, I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” The divine Formator is the greatest mother of Dolours who suffers, and will suffer till the end of the world, in order to give form to human beings in His own likeness and similarity.

A Forbearing Formator

The Lord, however, did not betray even a trace of his inner agony. He tries to open up a dialogue with His ‘adversary’. With all serenity and tranquillity Yahweh approached the rebellious eccentric and asked him a question, hoping that Jonah will vomit the venom of his heart that will reduce his inner antagonism: “Is it good (*thob*) for you to be angry?” (4:4). The divine Pedagogue wanted to make him conscious that his anger will not do him any good.

A Stony Silence and Slackened Sitting

The adamant formee totally ignored this attempt of the Formator to enter into a dialogue. Thereby he demonstrated the depths of his anger and the sense of betrayal by the Master. He simply left the city and made himself a small booth and sat under it for protection from the sun. It seems that he still maintained some hope that Yahweh will keep his word and destroy Nineveh. If that does not happen, he will have nothing further to do with the Teacher.

It is interesting to compare his sitting (a verb which is repeated twice in v.5) with the sitting of the king of Nineveh (3:6). While the prophet of God goes after self-comfort and cosiness, the king willingly sought hardship and soreness: “He rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth and sat down in the dust”. The monarch began to cry out for pardon and mercy. But the representative of compassionate and forgiving Lord, retaining the thought of an unforgiving God, sits relaxed expecting the punishment and destruction of Nineveh. He was being engaged in increasing the comfort.

The Pedagogical Approach of the Formator - II

An Unexpected Approach

The divine Psychologist had recourse to a method that we, humans, could never imagine. “He prepared a gourd and made it come up over Jonah to give shade for his head, in order to deliver him from the evil” (v.6). At this, the formee became exceedingly glad. Was the divine Formator fanning the flame of the rebellious attitude of his formee? Let us wait for the further action of the Lord.

A Man of Extreme Emotions

Jonah’s reactions were of the superlative degree. He was not a man of ordinary emotions proper to the common people. The prophet always takes his position at the extreme sides. In 4:1 a *very* great evil caught hold of him. He was then *very* angry. Now he was *exceedingly* glad about the gourd. Jonah teaches us a lesson what will happen to persons who are prey to excessive and intense emotions.

A Shock Therapy

But at dawn the next day God organized a worm and it chewed the gourd so that it withered. When the sun rose God prepared a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die and said: “It is good for me to die than to live” (vv.7-8).

Reflection VI

At some critical moments, when the candidates adamantly reject the corrections and ordinary methods do not work at all, the formators should have the courage and foresight to have recourse to shock therapy. The divine Pedagogue provides the best example. The formee had broken the relationship with the Master and was trying to build for himself a comfortable life. Then all on a sudden *Guruji’s* hand fell upon him. He made the castle built on sand fall with a great crash (Mt.7:26-27). The shock therapy will serve as a bombshell that will terribly upset the obstinate formee. Then the human formators, with great tact take profit of that situation to open up a dialogue with the candidates.

Summons to be thob

The divine Formator again asked the same question as that of v.4: “Is it good (*thob*) for you to be angry about the gourd?” And he replied: “It is good (*thob*) for me to be angry unto death” (v.9).

Had Jonah any right to be angry? The gourd was a divine grace, not a reward for his obedient performance. Thus, the prophet could not be angry for being deprived of the shade which the Formator had provided him gratis. In the same way, the Lord is free to grant the grace of pardon and mercy to the Ninevites. Thus, Jonah was supposed to give a negative reply to the question asked by Yahweh. But the self-righteous and ego-centred man angrily blurted out: “It is good for me to be angry unto death.” What a senseless, pointless and foolish assertion!

A Psychological Approach

It is interesting to note that the Lord does not put the question in a

negative way that would have thus read: “It is *not* good for you to be angry.” The implication was that it was bad for the formee to be angry. Yahweh is the source and fullness of *thob*. Whatever He does is *thob*. The called ones are supposed to live as loving reflections of the divine *thob*. Their thoughts, words and actions should originate from *thob* and lead to be *thob*. But the called one rejects to be a living personification of the goodness of his Master.

A Senseless Fellow

Now Jonah has become a paradigm of evil. At the conversion of the Ninevites, that was *thob* in the divine eyes, His messenger, like Him, did not repent of the evil that he had announced in his message. Instead, he allowed himself to be possessed of the wickedness that the inhabitants of the city had wholeheartedly spurned. Again at the withering away of the gourd Jonah becomes wicked. He had not tended it or made it grow. Even then the formee flies into a rage and grows extra wicked.

An Irrational Statement

The long-suffering Formator’s question was not a reprimand. Rather it was gentle and amiable as the sound of sheer silence that Elijah had heard at Mount Horeb (1Kgs.19:12). This is the most wonderful and unimaginable pedagogical approach of the divine Formator, that was most appropriate to that situation. At such a deferential approach, an ordinary human being will become conscious of his/her errant attitude. Not so our prophet. It made him more indignant by shouting: “It is good for me to be angry unto death.”

A Patient and Persevering Formator

The divine Master did not retract his steps. Rather He continued to stick to the dialogical method: “You have had pity (*hus*) on the gourd though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. Should not I show pity on Nineveh...?” (vv.10-11).

Did the formee show ‘pity’ on the gourd? No, he was not concerned about that plant. Rather his was self-pity. Still the Formator presents his argument in a positive way as if Jonah felt compassion about the sad fate of the plant. This was indeed a very positive approach of the divine Pedagogue that the human formators could imitate.

Using the verb ‘pity’, Yahweh expresses His emotions in relation to the Ninevites. Should He show pity for the people and animals of that city? Even though the prophet did no work to create the gourd or raise it, still he took delight in its shadow and became desolate at its

destruction. All the more so for Yahweh, who actually brought into existence some 120,000 people in Nineveh. The Lord, the Creator and Master of the world, loves the people like a Father/Mother. For not punishing the people He brings forward an excuse. The Ninevites, are completely stupid or helpless who according to Him do not know their right from their left. Further, there are animals, and He loves them also since He is their Creator. As a result, Yahweh is more willing to show compassion to His children, especially since they had repented and turned back to Him. The representatives of this loving and merciful Father/Mother should nurture the same kind of compassion for the people and the animals. Otherwise, they do not deserve to be called the disciples of the Teacher.

An End without End

The Book of Jonah ends with the question of the divine Master. The formee’s response is not mentioned. Did he change his unkind and rebellious mentality? Had he embraced the divine perspective, and become a true disciple? We do not know. Nothing is said about it. Why did the author conclude the story of Jonah leaving it open-ended? Perhaps he may be thinking that Jonah’s drama is still played on the world stage. Anyone can take up any role in this drama. Those who take the part of the Old Testament prophet can make it a comedy or tragedy. It totally depends upon the actor. Anyhow, the book draws in vivid colours the portrait of the loving, compassionate, forbearing and forgiving Formator. His pedagogy of formation challenges and reproves the mentality and methodology of the modern persons who think that they are ideal masters.