

The Divine Pedagogy of Formation - IX

A ZEALOUS FORMEE

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Abstract

Unlike other prophets, Elijah suddenly appears on the central stage with a divine message to the erring king and his people. It implies that for quite some time Elijah was under formation and had already acquired a certain amount of maturity to be entrusted with a demanding mission. However, the divine Pedagogue continued His ongoing formation until the apprentice attained full maturity. Overwhelmed and inebriated by his grand success in the execution of his divine mandate the supercilious formee transgressed his limit and went for a mass execution of his opponents. As a result, the compassionate yet infinitely patient divine Formator decided to teach his formee a very painful lesson by allowing him to descent to the Hades of nada (emptiness) to purge him of his inflated ego so that purified, he may ascent to the heavens on wings of fire. Through the mysterious "sound of sheer silence" the divine Guru whispered into the ears of his super-zealous disciple the unheard melodies of divine mercy.

The Formee in Action

While the accounts of the chosen ones in the Bible generally begin with the narrations of their birth and call, the story of Elijah stands out as an exception. At the beginning itself we find him fully occupied with his mission. The unfaithful King Ahab provoked Yahweh to anger by building a temple for the Canaanite deity Baal and making an Asherah (goddess) pole (1Kgs.16:30-33). This brought out the practice of idolatry among the Israelites. It was then that Elijah the prophet suddenly

appeared on the scene with the divine message. "As the Lord, God of Israel lives, before whom I stand; there will be neither dew nor rain in the next years, except at my word" (17:1). In Hebrew the name *Eliyahu* means "my God is Yahweh." This emphatically highlights the significance of the call and task of the prophet. He, by words, actions and life has to testify that Yahweh, whom he represents, should be the only God among Israelites. Ahab was misleading Israel to worship pagan gods. This was deliberate violation of the first commandment given to the covenant people: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods besides me. You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God, am a zealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers..." (Ex.20:2-6). At the expansion of this outrageous situation throughout the country the prophet all on a sudden confronted the king with the above cited announcement of draught.

Reflection I

The words of Elijah implicitly refer to his call and assignment given to him by the divine Formator. It means that he was already called and was undergoing divine formation. Elijah speaks in the name of Yahweh, God of Israel, before whom he stands. The phrase "before whom I stand" indicates that he was always standing by his Master in readiness to hear every word uttered and to execute his will. Elijah repeats the phrase "before whom I stand" in 18:15. The act of standing denotes his physical presence before the divine Pedagogue, whenever he was not actively engaged in a specific mission. Even then the formee was standing before the Lord in the spiritual sense. This should be the proper trait of authentic disciples. Elijah represents them. This claim in 17:1 implies that the chosen one was under formation for quite some time. He had attained certain maturity proper to a disciple, so that the divine Formator could send him with daring mission to confront the political authority and announce a severe draught for years. By this total draught of indefinite length, Yahweh wanted to show his displeasure at the unfaithfulness of the king and the people towards the covenant.

The words of the formee in 17:1 need closer attention. He was not repeating God's message as other prophets used to do, by introducing the divine words with the formula, "thus says Yahweh, the Lord Almighty." Rather Elijah speaks his own words, introducing them with an oath formula, "as the Lord, the God of Israel lives." This oath formula provides authenticity and authority to his proclamation. The formee seems to have attained union with the Master, as to enjoy freedom to

make the divine utterance his own utterance. Also Elijah ended his proclamation that the draught will cease only at his word. This is indeed an example of the fellowship or formee's total identification with the heart and the mind of the Formator.

Adhering to the Master's Word - I

Text I

The divine Formator knew well that the disciple's confrontation with the king will endanger his life. Hence he was given further instruction on the way forward (17:2-9). First the Master asked the formee to leave the place, go eastward and hide in the ravine of Kerith. The Lord made arrangements for his food and drink. The divine instruction is introduced by the formula, "And the word of the Lord came to him" (v.2) – a phrase repeated again in v.8. The response of the disciple is thus formulated "so he went and did according to the word of the Lord" (v.5). Here we find a perfect response, expected from the part of a genuine formee. Elijah did not ask any questions nor demand any clarifications. He simply obeyed the divine instructions, since he had total confidence in his Master.

Text II

When the brook from which he was drinking water dried up "the word of the Lord came to him," instructing him to arise, go to Zarephath of Sidon and dwell there: "Behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain you" (vv.8-9). Accordingly he arose and went to Zarephath. Elijah was a formee of prompt obedience who immediately got up and went to that place. The terms 'get up' and 'go' belong to the vocabulary of discipleship. When he met there a widow, he called to her and asked to bring him a little water and a piece of bread (vv.10-11). As Elijah knew that she had nothing but a handful of flour and a little oil to bake bread for herself and her son for the last time, he assured her in the name of Yahweh: "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: The jar of flour will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth" (v.14). The disciple had full certainty that his divine Master will work wonders on his behalf and the family who feeds him. He could utter the very words of Yahweh in order to give assurance to that gentile widow. Once more we have here the portrait of an ideal formee.

Reflection II

The author of the Books of Kings does not tell us anything how Elijah spent his days in the ravine and at the widow's house. From the words

of Elijah at Mount Horeb (19:10, 14) we can surmise that the prophet was *qunno qinneti lYhwh Elohe Sba'ot* ("I have been zealously zealous for the Lord God of hosts"). Here he has used the intensifying form of the verb together with its infinity absolute form to express his passionate, singular and utter devotion to his Master without qualification. Elijah names Yahweh under the royal militaristic title "God of hosts," that is, God of the heavenly armies. This declaration came as answer to the question of the divine Formator, "what are you doing here, Elijah?" (19:9, 13). The formee seems to have been spending his time in the ravine and in the house of the widow in eager, earnest, fervent and continuous contemplation of the person of his Master. One may say that the prophet was practising the Indian mantra:

*"dhyanamoolam guro murthi
mantramoolam gurovakkyam
pujamoolam guropadam
mokshamoolam guro kripa"*

(the root of meditation the image of guru; the root of mantra the word of guru; the root of worship the feet of guru; the root of salvation the grace of guru). This assiduous meditation would have helped him to grow into the more sublime heights of discipleship.

Crisis and Response

A Dreadful Situation

While Elijah was living in the house of the widow her son fell ill and died (17:15-18). At the words of accusation of the widow the prophet took her son and laid him on his own bed (vv.19-24).

Allegation and Appeal

Then he cried out to Yahweh: "O Lord my God, have you brought the evils also upon the widow... by slaying her son?" Then the prophet stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him!" Yahweh heard his cry and revived the dead. Elijah took him to the mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!" At this miracle the widow acknowledged him as a man of God and the word of the Lord in his mouth as truth.

Reflection III

The words of the formee resulted from his freedom and trust in the divine Formator.

A Questioning Attitude

Because of his intimacy (see the address “my God”) with Yahweh he could accuse Him of bringing the evils (*ha re'ot*) also upon the family by killing the child. The formee’s words “the evils *also*” imply that the Lord had inflicted the iniquities on His chosen one. Elijah looks at his stay in the ravine and in the house of the Sidonite woman – who did not belong to the community of Israel, as evils. The term *rā'a* denotes disaster and punishment. The Master is accused of having meted out hard blows on His own formee. The disciple was ready, even unwillingly to submit to such severe treatment. Why should the Lord now bring tragedy on the benefactress? An authentic formee should freely give vent to his/her inner feelings before the Formator. The relationship between them must be spontaneous, voluntary and impromptu, without hiding even slightest inner feelings.

Trait of Trust

After questioning the Master Elijah cried out thrice to Yahweh to bring back the life of the boy. This supplication resulted from his utmost trust in the Lord. This should be a basic trait of a true disciple.

The Divine Pedagogy

“The Lord heard the voice of Elijah” (v.22). The phrase denotes that He yielded to the request of the formee and revived the child. Through this miracle Yahweh granted two graces, of accepting Yahweh as true God and Elijah as the divine envoy. The gentile woman could acknowledge the prophet as a man of God who utters the word of the Lord, which will be always true. By bringing the tragedy in the family the divine Pedagogue led an infidel to the faith in the true Lord, as well as provided her the privilege to accept the called one as a man of God.

Adhering to the Master’s Word - II

In the third year of draught the word of the Lord came to Elijah, asking him to go and show himself to Ahab. Immediately the formee complied with that command (18:1-2a). Prompt execution of the will of the Master – this should be the special characteristic of a disciple. On the way the prophet met Obadiah, the comptroller of the royal household, who was a devout worshipper of Yahweh (vv.2b-15). As Obadiah was afraid of intimating the king of the presence of the prophet, Elijah thus assured him: “As the Lord of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I will surely show myself to him today” (v.15). The formee’s words are couched in absolute terms, as an oath formula to which he added, “before whom I stand” (see 17:1), - a claim which enforces his statement. Encountering

the prophet, Ahab addressed him as the “trouble of Israel” (v.17), blaming him as the one who induced the divine wrath upon the people. Elijah retorted that it was the unfaithfulness of the king to Yahweh that had brought the miseries (v.18). Then he asked Ahab to convene all the people of Israel as well as the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel (v.19). Undoubtedly the prophet was acting according to the divine instruction.

The Contest at Carmel

Confrontation and Repudiation

When all assembled there Elijah flung a challenge to the crowd: “How long will you limp between two parties? If Yahweh is God, walk after Him; but if Baal, then walk after him” (v.21). This literal translation seems to refer to hobbling along on two uneven crutches. The prophet insists that two loyalties are mutually exclusive and one cannot have it both ways. He demanded a clear, exclusive choice between Yahweh and Baal. The phrase “walk after” (*hilk'ahr*), which is used in the political treaties, means to commit oneself to the overlord with all heart, soul, strength and mind (Dt.6:5). The people, however, declined to react; their silence indicated the unwillingness to choose. At their reaction the divine formee was aggrieved, and proceeded to set terms for contest (vv.22-24).

A Ribald Mockery

The prophets of Baal failed to bring from their god fire to consume the bull (v.v.25-29). They cried aloud, they cut themselves, they raved, but no response! The passionate appeals were interspersed with Elijah’s dismissive mocking of them. Can a disciple of God have recourse to such a subtle, offensive and cruel sneering? This in itself cannot be justified. But we have to take into account the prevailing situation in Israel. Many held Baal in great esteem and were willing to embrace his cult. Now the prophet wanted to demonstrate before them the impotency and incompetency of the Canaanite deity.

A Prayer and an Acclamation

When the prophets of Baal admitted defeat, Elijah proceeded to prove that Yahweh is the true God who could send fire from the sky and consume the whole offering, the wood, the stones and the earth and lick up the water in the trench (vv.30-38). After asking the people to come near (this verb foreshadowed their ultimate re-turning from Baal to Yahweh) he repaired the torn down altar, and commanded water to be poured over the altar three times, as to fill the trench, in order to show that there was no hoax or deception.

A Supplication

At the hour of the sacrifice the prophet stepped forward and prayed to the Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel to make known that He is the true God and Elijah is His servant and that he has done all these things at the divine bidding. Thus he continued: "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so this people will know that you, Lord, you are God and that you are turning their hearts back again" (v.37).

Reflection IV

The formee addressed the Master as God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Israel – the God who revealed Himself to the Patriarchs as the saving one, who could work wonders and mighty deeds. To bring fire from the sky will be a simple thing for Him. The disciple had utter confidence in the divine Formator. He adduces the following reasons for his request: All, especially the people of Israel could have an experiential knowledge that Yahweh is the true God; Elijah is his servant who had done everything according to divine instruction; Yahweh is capable to turn the unfaithful hearts of Israel back again to Him. Here we have an exemplary prayer of a formee. His/her primary concern in prayer should not be to get personal favours. One is called to represent the people, to mediate before the Lord in their favour and turn the strayed folk back to Him, so that everyone could acknowledge the Lord as the true God. The disciple is merely a servant, who has to act according to the divine instructions.

A Miracle and a Confession

The divine Pedagogue hastened to comply with that appeal. "The fire of the Lord" fell and consumed everything inside the sacred area bounded by the trench. Nothing escaped the divine fire (v.38). At seeing this, the people *fell* prostrate and acclaimed: "The Lord, He is the God; the Lord, He is God!" (v.39). When the divine fire *fell*, the people *fell*. Their acclamation may be interpreted as an oral re-declaration of their covenant allegiance to Yahweh.

A Slaughter

What happened then may make one uneasy. The man of God ordered the people to seize the prophets of Baal and he slaughtered them in the wadi, the gully that was dry, but will soon surge with water (v.40). The Hebrew verb *sahat* is primarily used for the slaughtering the animals for sacrificing. It seems to connote that the victims were depersonalized, reducing them to the same category as animal slaughter. Elijah's massacre of the Baal prophets was the counterblow to queen Jazabel

pogrom. He would have thought that he was wiping out the Baal worship from the country by such a savage bloodshed. Still one cannot justify the action of the chosen one. Can the end justify means? Can we have recourse to violence and butcher the enemies of God? Did the divine Master approve the action of the formee? As we shall see soon, the Lord did not subscribe to the cruel reaction of the prophet.

Invoking the Lord

After extinguishing the anti-Yahwist party the prophet approached Ahab and ordered: "Go up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of rushing rain" (v.41). The formee had no doubt that the Formator was sending rain, although there was no sign of it. A true disciple will have blind trust in the divine power. The verb "go up" occurs seven times in four verses

- V.41: Elijah asks Ahab to go up
- V.42a: Ahab went up
- V.42b: Elijah went up
- V.43a: Elijah asks the servant to go up
- V.43b: The servant went up
- V.44a: A cloud goes up
- V.44b: Elijah ask the servant to go up

While the prophet went up to await his Master's promised rain by crouching on the ground with his face between his knees - a posture of extreme concentration and intense prayer, Ahab according to his instruction went up in order to eat and drink; Elijah asks his servant to go up to look for Yahweh's manifestation in the clouds, and he goes up; the cloud goes up from the sea; finally the servant is asked to go up to tell Ahab to harness his chariot and go down. Only the formee's going up had a supernatural intention, to commune with his Master. The divine Pedagogue finally rewarded the insistent and expectant supplication of the disciple. Heavy rain poured down, while Ahab was riding off to the city of Jezreel (about 17 miles from Mount Carmel). Now "the hand of the Lord was on Elijah" (v.46) so that he tucked up his robe and ran before Ahab all the way to Jezreel. Thereby he became Yahweh's herald bearing the news of the divine grace of rain.

Dark Night of the Soul

After the days of triumph the divine Formator wanted to totally purify his formee so that He could take him to the heights of union.

A Dismayed Fugitive

Queen Jezebel swore a solemn oath in the name of her gods that she will take the life of the prophet the next day itself (19:1-2). The hunted man was panic stricken, which is thus expressed in v.3: He feared, he arose, and he fled for his life. Elijah fled the entire length of the divided kingdoms from the heart of the north, the Jezreel Valley in Israel, to the extreme southern boundary of the southern kingdom, Judah. There leaving his servant he went a day's journey into the wilderness. Then he sat down under a solitary broom tree and asked that he might die, saying, "enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers before me". Then he lay down and slept (vv.4-5).

Journey to Nada (Nothingness)

We can note down in this headlong flight a series of deprivations: Elijah was 'forced' to remove himself from his own kingdom, Israel to enter Judah, then from settled land to go into the wilderness, and finally from all human companionship; these withdrawals culminate in a wish to die. This man of self-pity, who was formerly standing in the divine presence (17:1; 18:15), now sits down, and finally lays down and sleeps. The act of sitting down indicates his succumbing to discouragement and inactivity; the Hebrew verb *shkb* denotes not simply the physical act of laying down; it symbolized some kind of spiritual death on account of extreme grief; sleep adds intensity to this profound inner mental state. It is said that he sat under a *solitary* broom tree, which was but a shrub. The *solitary* prophet sits and lies down under a *solitary* shrub. He asks Yahweh to take his life by emphatic monosyllable *rab* (enough); to it he adds '*atta* (now), points to his insistent concentration on himself and on the present moment; he uses imperative verb, "take my life" the motivation clause was concerned not with God's glory or Israel's future but himself (contrast his prayer in 18:36-37). Elijah wants the Formator to act here and now, not for God's own sake, or for the people's, but simply for himself: "I had enough; I want it to end, now!"

Here we find the depth of Elijah's despondence, his sense of hopelessness, disillusion, despair, and of the futility of any further effort, when we compare to his triumph on Mount Carmel. To the height of the prophet's exaltation (measured by his miraculous run in 18:46) corresponds his fall, so to say, into 'nothingness' (*nada*).

Reflection V

It may not be too daring if we compare this situation of Elijah to the description of St. John of the Cross in his work *Ascent of Mount Carmel*. The author says: "The perfect union in this life through grace and love demands that they (the disciples) live in darkness to all the objects of sight, hearing and imagination and to everything comprehensible to the heart, which signifies the soul" (*Ascent of Mount Carmel* Book II, 4, 4) Having been cut off from the familiar, the known and the cherished, and not yet absorbed into the realm of the unfamiliar *nada* one experiences fear and uncertainty (*Dark Night of the Soul*, Book II, 9, 7). One has to enter a total *kenosis* (self-emptying) in order to arrive at *el todo* (the all, God). "*Nada* is a passage from self-centeredness to God-centeredness" (Alex Kurian, *Ascent to Nothingness*, St. Pauls, London, pp.199-200). The divine Master was leading Elijah through the bitter experience of *nada* from his micro world to the macro world of the Divine, so that the formee could say with the bride of *the Spiritual Canticle*, "I lost myself, and was found" (*Spiritual Canticle*, 29, 10).

The Divine Nourishment

The Formator does not leave the formee to himself. He sent his angel to the sleeping one with nourishment (19:5-9), like He had done so through the instruments of the ravens and the widow in chapter 17. The divine messenger touched Elijah and said, "Arise, eat". When the prophet looked, there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones and a pitcher of water. His actions are described in one-word sentences in v.6: He looked, he ate, he drank, he returned (the Hebrew verb *wayesheb* is not translated in many English versions), he lay down. The verb *wayesheb* deserves special mention. The food did not change his mind. After taking it he returns to his withdrawal. However the divine Formator, who knew the mental situation of the formee did not withdraw. He made his messenger to 'return' (v.7). While Elijah 'returned' to his inaction, Yahweh's messenger 'returns' again to urge him to action. This time the angel added a motivation clause: "For the journey is more than enough (*rab*) for you." The messenger was repeating the same word *rab*, with which the prophet began his prayer in v.4. To his request for death the Master responds that his mission is not yet over, his life journey has to continue.

To the Mountain of God

This time the formee complied with the command of the Formator. Strengthened by food he travelled for forty days and forty nights, until he reached Horeb, the Mountain of God. He came there to the cave

and spent the night there (vv.8-9a). The phrase “forty days and forty nights” is symbolic. Moses stayed on the Mount for the same period of time in the company of Yahweh (Ex.24:18; Dt.7:4). Jesus the new Moses spent in the wilderness “forty days and forty nights” in conversing with the Father. While Moses passed that length of time on Mount, Elijah journeyed forty days and forty nights to reach the Mountain of God. Horeb and Sinai refer to the same sacred place. The prophet was returning to the original locality where Yahweh had entered into a covenant relationship with Israel and made them His children. Now Elijah was going there to seek the divine answers to his existential plights. Why the divine Formator for whom he had dedicated his whole life, has left him alone to meet the threatening situations? He has done till now only what the Master had asked of him. Why then such defeats and downfalls? Are not these trouncing set-backs for the very cause of Yahweh?

The Divine Tonic: A Theophany

An Affectionate Address

The divine Formator does not leave the formee who was still licking his wounds, to himself. “And look (*hinna*) Yahweh’s word came to him, saying what are you doing *here*, Elijah” (v.9b). The phrase “word of the Lord came to Elijah/him” is used in 17:2, 8; 18:1. It was through vocal presence that the divine Master used to disclose his will to the disciple. On previous occasions no personal questions were asked. Now the Formator calls the disciple by name and inquires about his existential situation. Here we find the tender and affectionate concern of the Master for the formee who was undergoing utter isolation and sheer discouragement. The action of the divine Pedagogue provides an example for the human formators who may encounter such a crisis. These words of intimate approach are repeated again in v.13.

Complaining, an Art of Formation

The divine Formator asked this question twice in order to give the formee a chance to pour out his soul (1Sam.1:16) before his Master. This he did. But first Elijah confessed both times (vv.10, 14) his ardent, fervent, passionate and untiring zeal for the Lord of hosts (see no.3.3. Reflection III). It was this ‘fanatic’ adherence to the *Yhwh Elohe sab'ot*, God of the heavenly armies that brought upon him all the distresses and anguishes. It was as if he had failed in his prophetic mission. The people have forsaken Yahweh’s (*your*) covenant, tore down Yahweh’s (*your*) altar and put Yahweh’s (*your*) prophets to death with the sword; I, I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away (v.10b). The formee

mainly laments on account of what had happened to the cause of his Master (see the thrice repeated *your*). The defeat of the Guruji is taken as the defeat of the disciple. Such a divine perspective should be the motivation for the distress and worry of an authentic formee. What had happened then was the result of the vertical fragmentation of Israel's relationship with their covenant Lord. The human formators need to teach their subjects the art of complaining to God, which will bring relief to their inner tensions and strains. This is indeed truly biblical. The Psalms attest how the people of the covenant used to lament and protest to Yahweh about their existential downfalls, as if he had inflicted such sufferings on them.

The Fortifying Presence

A Double Command

Listening to the complaints, the Master thus responded, "Go out and stand before Yahweh upon the Mount" (v.11a). This double command uses two locational phrases. It seems that the prophet was sitting or lying, signs of passivity and inactivity. Now he has to get himself free from the state of inertia and introversion. A disciple should be an extrovert being of mobility and action.

A Mystical Grace

A Passing-By

What has then taken place was beyond human comprehension and articulation (v.11b): "Behold Yahweh is passing by!" This "passing by" evokes the memory of the divine experience granted to Moses at Mount Sinai/Horeb in Ex.33:21-23. Elijah, like Moses, is at the same Mountain, when Yahweh passed by - the same verb is used in Ex.33:21-23. While Moses received the law, Elijah received a new mandate. While Yahweh shielded Moses from the lethal sight of the divine face, Elijah veils his face in his cloak (v.13). The theophany is first presented in three negative clauses (vv.11c-12); only then a positive expression is used. Davie Napier thus casts the whole scene in terse poetic form:

There was a mighty wind
Not in the wind was Yahweh;
After the wind earthquake
Not in the earthquake was Yahweh;
And after the earthquake fire
Not in the fire was Yahweh'
And after the fire -
A sound of gentle silence

(Word of God, Word of earth, page.62)

Rejection of Conventional Forms

In former times God's coming was marked by cataclysmic disruption of natural phenomena, thereby presenting the sheer power of Yahweh in triad of wind, earthquake and fire as in Ex.19:16-19. The epiphany of Canaanite deity Baal was depicted in such a way in order to show his power and might. The prophet had till now believed that Yahweh was a mighty warrior who could violently exterminate his foes. It was because of such a belief that Elijah seems to have had recourse to violence and slaughter of the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. He thought that there was taking place a full scale battle between Baal and Yahweh for divine kingship in Israel. Now the divine Master wanted to make the formee to get rid off such non-divine misconception to which He was not subscribing. However the forbearing Formator did not then reprimand or condemn the disciple. Such a disciplinary action was not appropriate at that situation. The divine Pedagogue allowed the formee to undergo days of intense suffering and profound isolation. He had to go through the pains of childbirth, until a new man according to the divine dream is being formed in him (cf.Gal.4:19).

"A Sound of Sheer Silence"

The Hebrew phrase *qol dmama daqa* escapes translation. The numinous power of the image lies precisely in human inability to grasp the majesty and mystery of the divine self-revelation. The New Revised Standard Version's rendering "a sound of sheer silence" captures its sense without losing any of its mysterious paradox. God appears as absolute silence, a silence whose sound could be heard. Such a manifestation puts the divine not only beyond all natural phenomena but also beyond all human ability to comprehend it. This mystical grace granted to Elijah may be compared to the vision awarded to the Apostle Paul. He was caught up to the third heaven to paradise - in the body or out of the body he did not know. He heard inexpressible things that humans are not permitted to tell (2 Cor.12:2-4).

Reflection VI

How would have Elijah reacted to this encounter of the sound of sheer silence? Till that time he was accustomed to the traditional features of theophany such as storm that renders mountains and shatters rocks, earthquake and fire, which brought out to the mind the image of a terrible, awful and frightening Lord, who seemed to follow violent and extreme methods. That was why he, Yahweh's disciple followed the means of sheer aggression and uncompromising attitudes towards the followers of Baal religion. Now the Lord has rejected the vehicles

of storm, earthquake and fire. He appears as a silent, pacific, serene and forbearing Deity, who stands against fanatic and fundamentalist ways and means. The Master does not like the disciple who nourishes the ideas of retaliation and retribution. He/she should embrace the tolerant and long-suffering ideology. Elijah needs conversion and should repent on his conduct of the past. Only then he can become a worthy devotee of the Guruji. It is remarkable that the divine Formator did not utter a single reprimanding word; the way of theophany was used to conscientize the formee. Can this subtle formative art be a model for the human formators?

A Fresh Mandate

The God of silence repeated the same question of v.9: “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (v.13b). The prophet also reiterated his earlier words of zeal and of lamentation (v.14). After patiently listening to the voice of his heart the Formator reinstates the formee in his prophetic mission (vv.15-18) by using two imperatives, “Go (literally, walk, *lek*), return (*shub*) to your way”. This command had strong overtones. The disciple has to retract his steps. He should carry on his walking; the present withdrawal status needs to be discontinued; he must ‘repent’ about it. The Lord was asking him to go back to the conflict, go back to the trouble, go back to the risk. Only then Elijah can be the prophet-disciple of the Master. Yahweh ended his instruction with the words of consolation (v.18). “I will provide (*sh'ar*) seven thousand in Israel - all who have not bowed the knee to Baal, whose lips have not kissed him” (v.18). The called one of God does not need to become desperate in apparent tragic situations; nobody can defeat the Lord Almighty. Hence the disciples should try their best to ever remain optimistic even in adverse and unpropitious contexts. Elijah promptly obeyed the command of the Master; he walked from that place (v.19).

Herald of Judgment - I

Though the prophet was asked to portray the divine benignity, the Lord continued to make him His voice of anger and indictment at the crude violation of justice (21:1-29). King Ahab at the instigation of Queen Jezebel grabbed the vineyard of Naboth after causing the death of that innocent person. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah saying, “Arise, go down to meet Ahab” (v.18). These two imperative verbs were used twice by Jezebel to address Ahab when she masterminded the plot to kill Naboth and take possession of his vineyard. Now Yahweh employs the same terms to administer His judgement upon Ahab and Jezebel. The Lord gives precise instruction to Elijah how to say (“thus

says Yahweh" v.19 twice) and what to say. The prophet spoke as ordered by his Sender. When the king repented and did penance the word of the Lord came to Elijah once more mitigating the sentence (vv.27-29).

Herald of Judgment II

When the king Ahaziah was injured in a fall, he wanted to appeal to Baal-zebub the god of Ekron (2Kg. 1:2). At this sacrilegious behaviour the angel of the Lord asked Elijah to arise, go up to meet the royal messengers to remind the king of such a heinous act, and to announce his death (vv.3-4). It is interesting to note that the *messenger* of Yahweh dispatched the prophet to meet the *messengers* of the king. The divine royal power encounters the human royal power! The formee did as he was instructed. When the messengers returned to inform the king what Elijah had said, Ahaziah thrice sent a military unit to seize the prophet (vv.5-14). At the first two instances Elijah called fire from heaven with the introductory words: "If I am a man of God" (vv.10, 12). The captain of the third military company knelt down before the prophet and pleaded for his life (vv.13-14). Then the angel of the Lord asked Elijah to go down with the royal messengers and tell to the face of Ahaziah about his imminent death (vv.15-17).

The 'Ascension'

The divine Formator granted his faithful formee a rarest privilege. He took him up to heaven in a whirlwind (2:1-12). The prophet went up in a storm indicating that the turbulence of his departure was an element in the invasive force of Yahweh. Elijah is in the storm, but between him and Elisha, his successor comes a chariot of fire and horses of fire. This ascent may be compared to what had happened to Enoch, who walked with God: "Then he was no more, because God took him" (Gen.5:24). The account of Enoch, however, provides no image of any ascent. The description in 2:9-12 portrays the movements of an unparalleled prophet-disciple into the realm of his divine Master. At this sight of ascent Elisha addressed his master, "the chariots and horseman of Israel!" (v.12). Chariots were for the people the symbol of overwhelming military force. The address indicates that Elijah has been the powerful guarantor and indomitable protector of Israel.

Elijah in the Company of Jesus

The Gospels portray Christ as the second Elijah. During the transfiguration scene at Mount Tabor Elijah, in the company of Moses, was with him, appearing in glorious splendour and talking with him (Lk.9:28-31). They spoke about his departure, which he

was about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem” (v.31). It refers to the glorious ascension of the Risen Christ to heaven (Lk.24:50-51). The prophet seems to have been sent by the Father to fortify the Son of Man, and to convey the real meaning of suffering as glory. The formee of Yahweh had drunk from the chalice of agony during his earthly life and now is enjoying the blissful ecstasy in heaven.