

Editorial

Pilgrims and Progress

Can spiritual and psychological information lead to transformation? Who has got the right to decide for others what their form and norms should be? After all what is formation? These are certain perennial issues that every generation had to deal with. Answering these questions politicians, philosophers, religious leaders, and sociologists contradicted each other since they had their own private interests to promote and personal convenience to protect. Hitherto there is no agreement on any of the above mentioned issues and it is less likely to arrive at any in future either. Moreover, there are a few fundamental questions to be answered before deciding upon the questions regarding formation. They are: Who has the primacy, individual or society, universe or human beings, God or man, you or me? Answers differ, so do the issues and challenges in the field of formation as well.

Rabbi Zusya said, "In the coming world, God will not ask me: 'Why are you not Moses?' He will only ask me: 'why were you not Zusya?'" The shock of his question was potent enough to shake the foundations of Plato's ideal world. According to Zusya, Moses is not the ideal, just one among many millions. Imitation lacks lustre and duplicate lacks value. Zusya need not imitate Moses, instead he should realize himself, his true self with its full potentials and possibilities. There is a story about a disciple who refused to imitate and follow the ways of his master. When he was confronted he replied, "I am imitating my master who imitated nobody."

A formation that insists on conformity finds fault with the nature and its author. Ideals, identification and compliance flow against the current of evolution, multiplicity, complexity, and diversification. When the Divine Spirit that hovered eternally over chaos got involved, the inert chaos began evolving into cosmos achieving more and more complexity and time began ticking. At every turn of events the Divine Word exclaimed: good, good! Therefore, change, evolution, progression, and advancement, should be treated as signs of God's Spirit in action. Then what could be the source of evil? Evil/sin is nothing but the refusal to cooperate, to evolve, and to realize the possibilities and potentials of each one's vocation.

It was a fateful night. A dark cloud of gloom descended and overshadowed the entire prison. Nobody dared to sleep that night, not even the hardcore criminals. They knew that within a few hours time one of their fellow prisoners; the great son of Greece, Socrates will be executed. One of the prisoners, to prevent his heart from bursting out in grief, began to intone a sad song. Suddenly he felt a soft touch on his shoulders. Startled, he turned and stared at the shadow that appeared behind him. It was Socrates! In his mild and gentle voice he asked, "Who is the author of that song? It is beautiful. Will you please teach me?" "But, my lord, why?" the prisoner in his bewilderment whimpered, "Why do you want to learn it? Don't you know that they have already started preparing hemlock for you? At this time, then why do you want to learn a new song?" Socrates replied calmly, "I will die, but knowing one more song."

In the parable of Jesus the servant who buried his master's talent has not done anything wrong as such. He did not run away with his master's money, spend it in dribs and drabs, or lose it. He carefully covered it in his towel, dug a hole in the ground, and kept it safe until the return of his master and then dutifully gave it back without even claiming any sort of remuneration for the service rendered. Did he deserve the type of harsh punishment he received? Where might have he gone wrong? What could be the crime he committed? He refused to progress. Not only he stopped himself but also blocked the talent from realising its potential. Talents should not be buried. Opportunities should not be turned away and knowledge wasted. Sin is a turning back, a return to the primordial chaos. The chaos is inert while the spirit is in action. God's Spirit was in motion even before the beginning of time. It is still in motion and will continue to do so for ever because *God is pure act*. Spirit gives life. Life is spirit in action. Vocation is a call to

action, to change, to move, to progress, and never to get stuck anywhere on our way. It is an eternal journey, a continuous penetration into God, as Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great Fathers of the Church conceived it. It is a constant progression into 'the Cloud of Unknowing', an eternal pilgrimage. Seeing no furniture in his room a tourist asked rabbi Hafez, "Where is your furniture?" "Where is yours?" asked Hafez. "I'm only a visitor here", replied the tourist. "So am I," said the rabbi.

However, there is a dispiriting attitude that holds people back from undertaking this pilgrimage towards progress and perfection. Some are cock-sure that they are not meant for anything better. There are certain feelings and attitudes that incapacitate human potentials and possibilities such as: fear ("I might go wrong"); inability ("I can't afford it"); uncertainty ("I'm not sure"); procrastination ("I shall wait for the next chance"); and self-doubt ("I don't deserve it"). At the end they give up, being convinced that they are destined to be what they are now. Learning new skills, performing better work, achieving newly set goals, becoming healthier, or even being happier are never even attempted as a result of this pessimistic attitude. However, this negative attitude and discouraging feelings are not insurmountable even though they are part of our human nature.

The appalling truth is that there are a lot of us who are victims of this 'negative mindset' and refuse to advance any further. The fact is that there is no need or way to be static. Either we proceed or recede, progress or regress. To ride on advancing tides, there is something we can do. We must reprogram our 'mental blueprint'. It is possible for us to erase from our minds; feelings of unworthiness, inadequacy and negativity, which will enable us to manage and set our talents, knowledge and opportunities for their optimum performance. There are three easy steps towards that goal:

Step 1. *Eliminate Negative Past Programming.* Right from our childhood we are bombarded with numerous lies, myths and misconceptions about our limits and limitations. Such implanted mental concepts instil in us feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. First of all we must wipe our slate clean before we can install a positive mental blueprint in place of our old negative programming.

Step 2. *Reprogram the Mind.* Once we wipe our mental slate clean, we must rewrite and fill our mind with positive concepts. This means understanding the lies behind all the myths that we were

made to believe. Then we must replace each of them with accurate, empowering truths about our possibilities and potentials.

Step 3. *Develop Progress Enhancing Daily Rituals.* Everyone who excels in something has a daily ritual that keeps them fresh and fit for their trade. The same goes for those who are involved in psycho-spiritual formation as well. We must develop a set of daily habits if we want to maintain our mindset positive and to make it vibrate at the right frequency.

However, there is also a danger of activism, a tendency to measure our worth based on our achievements. To those who are prone to that tendency, the great English poet, John Milton would say "They also serve who only stand and wait." This was the wisdom he acquired as a result of his blindness. Lord Krishna's advice to his disciple Arjuna, that "He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is intelligent among men, he is a Yogi and a doer of all action" (*Gita* 4:18) is also pointing towards this very same truth. In his curiosity Thomas Merton is said to have asked a Zen novice, "What have you studied during your first year as a novice?" "To open and close the door properly as I enter the meditation hall" was the reply.

Achievements and possessions are not of much value; meanwhile they can turn out to be stumbling blocks on our pilgrimage towards perfection. The goal set before us by Jesus is an infinite goal: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). Socrates is said to have led a poor man's life. However, he often used to go to marketplaces and spend time looking at the great variety of things displayed there. A friend asked him the reason. "I am discovering things, he replied, without which I could live perfectly happy". St Paul knew his vocation perfectly well when he said, "I forget what is behind me and push on to what lies ahead" (Phil 3:13). Stagnation or getting caught up in the past hinders the unfolding of the divine plans and programs regarding us. Coming out of the comfort zones, leaving behind the known present, to face the unknown future is what makes both the birth and the death equally dreadful and painful experiences. In a way, every moment we undergo the pangs of the birth and the death. Nevertheless, whoever has faith, hope, and trust, future is an invitation to realize their full potentials and possibilities. For those who are in touch with the 'really real', change is not a threat or a cause of suffering, but a Spirit driven evolution towards perfection.

A disciple complained to his teacher, "Sir, I see the evil pursuing me where ever I go." "Don't worry, the teacher replied, your pursuing of the evil alone counts." The disciple was adamant, "I

want to get rid of even my venial sins”, the teacher rejoined, “Don’t do that, then you would fall into a greater sin - pride.” Formation, as we have seen, is a pilgrimage that we are invited to undertake in hope and humility. A formator used to rebuke and reprimand his formees for their mistakes and then say with great humility that he too is a sinner. Hearing this false pretension of humility his confessor said, “A man who really believes that he is a sinner would never dare to scold a sinner the way you do.” Pretensions and make beliefs will not lead us forward on our path towards perfection. Once upon a time, the disciples found their Guru eating meat on a day of fasting. One among them said, “You may be sick and the doctor might have suggested you to eat meat.” Guru said, “I’m perfectly healthy and no doctor asked me to eat meat.” Then this meat may be sent to you by your mother.” “No”, said Guru. “There must be some excuses behind your eating meat on a day of fasting”, said the disciple. “No excuses, other than my gluttony” replied the Guru.

Awareness of the reality, openness or boldness to accept it and the readiness to get going are essential ingredients of true formation. A man approached a certain rabbi and said, “I’m a fool, what can I do about it?” “If you know that you are a fool”, replied Rabbi, “then surely you are not a fool”. The man continued, “If I’m not a fool why people are calling me a fool?” Rabbi said, “If you yourself do not know that you are a fool but only listen to what people say, then you are surely a fool.” Self awareness is the starting point. But without a strong motivation to transcend our limits and limitations progress is impossible. On the practical side, creating a high performance environment in our seminaries and our houses of formation too is a need of our time. Some of the characteristics of a high performance environment where one can be both productive and comfortable are the following:

1. *Cleanliness*: Dirt and filth are sources of negative energy. Negative energy is distracting and it interferes with one’s ability to feel comfortable and motivated.
2. *Order*: When we are organized we can find what we want, when we want it, keep track of what we need to do, and work efficiently. Being organized also helps us feel more in control and empowered.
3. *Simplicity*: Clutter distracts, irritates and attracts more confusion. Simplicity should be regarded as the hallmark of any houses of formation.
4. *Colourfulness*: Colours speak volumes. Dim, colourless

environment will have a detrimental impact on formation and formees. Cheerful colours will have a telling effect on one's performance and attitudes.

5. *Natural lighting*: Rooms with light that is not too bright and not too dim is conducive for optimal performance.

6. *Comfortable Furniture*: Always choose comfortable furniture that facilitates serious work and support wellbeing of formees.

7. *Presence of Plants*: Creating a natural habitat is helpful for us to feel at home. Plants make spaces feel comfortable because they bring the outdoors inside. Live plants also remove pollutants from the air. Their green colour nurtures you and can transform a sterile environment into a comfortable space.

8. *Art works*: Works of arts feed a space with colour and scenes that can lift our spirits and your energy.

9. *Mementos that matter*: Mementos hold the energy of the memory associated with them. When that association is positive and we bring them into our space, we anchor positive pieces of our history. When surrounded by things that remind us of some of the best performances, experiences, accomplishments and people in our life, their positive energy can help us keep on track, focused on our abilities and blessings.

By way of conclusion I feel bound, to express my sincere thanks to all of you who welcomed *Vinayasadhana* with open hands expressing your eagerness, enthusiasm and admiration. In fact, we were overwhelmed by the extraordinary reception it received worldwide. It reaffirmed our conviction that a journal of psycho-spiritual formation of this genre and calibre was a need of the time. Opening new vistas of formation on the basis of advancements and breakthroughs in various fields of human knowledge we want to facilitate the emergence of mature and integrated priests and religious, fully human and fully alive capable of living the kingdom values giving glory of God.

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