

Formee a Swindler: The Divine Pedagogy of Formation

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The vocation and response of Jacob and the divine pedagogy of formation employed to form and transform the cunning and calculating 'Israel' is one of the most intriguing events in the entire Bible. The Formator did not let Jacob come out of his crooked acts unhurt. The guileful one, who acquired by device the right of the first-born and the divine blessings, could not enjoy them in security and safety. The divine pedagogue uses the tactics of conciliation (samam), presentation of gifts (danam) and coercion (bhedam). All these methods apparently did not help the formee to grow into a mature person. Therefore, the divine Pedagogue applies the disciplinary art of 'punishment' (dandam). The Formator was purifying the formee in the furnace of suffering, in order to make him a most fine metal of gold. Everything which is non-divine in him must be burnt out. Only then humans can become the authentic children of God.

Introducion

We have seen the formation dynamics by which God made Abraham, the father of salvation history, his own image and likeness. Its main trait was making the formee to undergo crises and challenges, through which he can grow into the maturity of the *Sadguru*. The divine Formator adopts different methods and pedagogies according to the demand of the character and the circumstances of the individual. He is an expert in adapting himself to the needs and opportunities. The human formator has to learn from this divine pedagogy. The focus of this study is on the person of Jacob, whom God had chosen to become 'Israel' and the type of the blessed and blessing humans.

The Three Traditions

In the Bible the story of Jacob is presented in Gen 25:19-36:43 by mixing three traditions, namely Yahwistic, Elohist and Priestly. In these three traditions the figure of Jacob is depicted according to the historical situations and the needs of the people of the covenant. The Yahwist was speaking during the prosperous period of the united monarchy, and his message to the people was, "You are Jacob." The bulk of Genesis story comes from this tradition. The Elohist was addressing the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom, asking them to imitate their forefather ("Be like Jacob"). The contribution of the Priestly author is very sketchy. He was encouraging the exiles in Babylon by adapting the story of Jacob with the motto "You will be Jacob." The redactor of Genesis has built up the narrative of Jacob basing it mainly on the Yahwistic account. We follow that version in studying God's pedagogy of formation of 'Israel.'

An unscrupulous cheat

In the first period of the story of Jacob, the Formator does not seem to be directly involved. He allows the one whom he has called, to freely follow his whims and fancies. The candidate was not by nature a good and devout person. In the first scenes he tried to control the whole show by having recourse to his tricks and wiles.

Act I

The curtain unfolds with the scene of the struggling twins in the womb of mother Rebekah (25:21-29). Jacob tried his best to come out first from the womb, so that he can get the rights of the first-born. He was born grasping with his hand Esau's heel. Hence he was given the name Jacob which meant "he grasps the heel" (figuratively "he deceives").

The Silent Formator

As the child grew the inborn immoral traits also shot up. Why the divine Formator did not endeavor to prevent it? Objectively speaking, the elder son was more worthy to become the third Patriarch of salvation history. Why God did then select the arrogant and crooked fellow? Human instinct and logic cannot comprehend this kind of God's behavior. We will be tempted to question the divine norm in selecting the candidates. But The Most Wise One challenges the human logic and our defective methods of evaluation. In Ex. 33:19 Yahweh declares: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I

will have compassion." God is free to do whatever he likes. It is not taking into consideration the worthiness or virtues that he calls and bestows his blessings on humans. Paul illustrates this divine ideology through the example of Jacob (Rom 9:10-23). The apostle then asks us: "Who can resist his will? Who are you, O man to talk back to God?" The divine potter has complete freedom to give the clay whatever form he wants. God has chosen the foolish, the despised and lowly persons, in order to shame the wise and the strong so that no one may boast before him (I Cor 1:26-29).

Act II

In Act II there are two scenes, in which Jacob tries to snatch away the right of the first-born. First he exploited the situation when Esau returned hungry and thirsty (25:27-33). He got it in exchange for some lentil stew. Next, without the prick of conscience he played the part of Esau, and the poor Isaac gave him the blessing which was due to the eldest son (27:1-45). In both scenes the Formator does not utter a single word against the swindler. Was he approving these immoral acts by remaining silent? In Mal. 1:2-3 we read: "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated." Citing this text Paul gives the following interpretation. The divine election does not depend on human desire or effort or works. God wants that his purpose in election might stand (Rom 9:12-13). The Lord had informed Rebekah, "the older will serve the younger" (Gen 25:23).

The Disciplinary Art: Part I

An Implicit Intervention

The Formator did not let Jacob to come out of his crooked acts unhurt. The guileful one, who acquired by device the right of the first-born and the divine blessings, could not enjoy them in security and safety. He had to flee from home and country (27:41-45). Thus he lost the covenant blessing of land; another blessing of numerous progeny became very uncertain. Jacob lost the certainty of the blessing of the divine presence. Thus the Formator made the candidate a non-having and non-being creature. Jacob had to become a refugee. In the flight to save his life we can see the hand of Formator who was till then keeping a low profile. By remaining in the background he wanted to teach the candidate what would happen if he depends upon his own ingenuity, without casting himself up to the hands of the Master. The result will be a series of misfortunes. He will lose whatever he had earned by crookedness.

The Intention of the Formator

The *Sadguru* wants that the ones he had chosen should become non-having and non-being creatures (in the Indian terminology *agathi*). For survival (*gathi*) they should cling to the Lord, who alone can provide them *gathi*. The formee should get a deep and unshaking conviction that God alone can give them real salvation. They have to grow deeper and deeper into this fundamental truth. Only then humans can be liberated from the tentacles of egotism. This will make the Formator to freely fill the formees with the divine blessings.

The Direct Involvement of the Formator

Although the candidate was made an *agathi*, he did not cling to God for *gathi*. There was not even an attempt to approach God in prayer. The breakdown of the fortresses, which he had built upon, drove the candidate to desperation. He had only one desire, to save his life. During the journey Jacob stopped for the night at Bethel. The one, who was tired physically and spiritually lay down and fell into a deep sleep. At this sad plight of the formee, who was not positively responding to the formation dynamics, the Formator did not get discouraged. With his shrewd insight the Master discerned that the formee needed his direct presence, encouragement and promises of blessing. He approaches the candidate in a dream (28:10-15), and introduces himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac. Then the Formator promises the formee the blessings of progeny and land, and the gift of making others blessed. Further, the divine trainer said: "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land" (v. 15). These promises surpassed the expectations and calculated moves of the candidate.

The Bargaining Formee

Thus the divine Pedagogue came to the life of the formee with promises of blessing, in order to draw him out of the abyss of despair. This changed Jacob into a man of hope. But he did not cling to the Master and entrusted himself to Him. Rather, that crafty one used that occasion to extract from the Formator the blessings. Jacob makes a vow to the Lord in a conditional form (28:20-23): "If God will be with me, and will watch over me on this journey I am taking, and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear, so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be my God." The candidate will accept Yahweh as his God only if the Formator submitted himself to his dictations. Further, he promises to render the Master a tenth of his future possessions.

One may justly suspect that this promise was a subtle way of bribing the Master. By presenting his consent in a conditional manner, the cunning fellow was compelling the Lord to keep his word.

The Self-Centred Candidate

By the divine protection Jacob reached the house of Laban (29:1-14). Even after the theophany and the blessing of divine presence, he was not willing to change his old lifestyle. The Formator was expecting that the heavenly saving experience would bring a transformation in the life of the candidate. But the crooked fellow thwarted the divine plan. Shrewdly he played his old tricks on Laban, cheated him and took away his possessions (29:1-35; 30:4-5; 31:1, 3, 17, 19a, 20-23, 25b, 27, 30a, 36a, 38-40, 46-49, 51-53a). Jacob was convinced that it was his techniques that made him a wealthy person!

The Disciplinary Art: Part II

The Formator as Blessing One

Still the Master's hand was with Jacob. He blessed Leah the unloved wife of Jacob, with children (29:31; 33; 30:17-18, 20). He listened to the lament of the barren Rachel (30:22). Even Laban acknowledged that Jacob was the blessed one of the Lord (30:27). But the candidate boasts that he has brought the blessings on Laban (30:30). There was a hint that, if possible, he would have prevented it. The candidate conveniently forgets that he was called to be blessed by the Lord, and to bestow on others whatever blessings he had received.

The Undisheartened Formator

The attitude of the Formator at this turn of events deserves special mention. He knows that the candidate does not try to grow into maturity according to his expectations. Rather, the one whom he has selected takes a downward turn. Still the divine Pedagogue is not discouraged or becoming pessimistic. He showers on the candidate blessings after blessings, as if he were not aware of the reality. Here we find the unique trait of God's formative method.

The Formee, A Fraud

The First Scene

Next we find Jacob, by deceiving Laban, takes away his properties and possessions and runs away (31:1; 3, 17, 19, 20-23, 25, 27, 30, 38-40, 46-49, 51-53). He does not even consult his Master. Thus he

realizes the meaning of his name, a cheat. Laban pursued him and caught up with him. But it was a vain attempt. The poor man had to be satisfied with a promise of non-aggression. Even at such a crude deception, the Formator did not utter a single word; he maintained a stony silence. We may find fault with this 'strange' pedagogy of God's formation. But He was patiently waiting for the most proper opportunity to use his 'aggressive' treatment.

The Final Scene

Now the candidate was enjoying the divine blessings of progeny and property. He did not bother to think about the divine presence, which irradiated through these two gifts. The candidate does not seem to attribute to it any significance. He wanted at any cost to get the third blessing of land. Jacob was fully engaging himself to draw up stratagems to outwit Esau.

A Dexterous Move

First Jacob sent messengers (32:1-7) ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir (32:1-7). In the message he addresses his brother 'master', and calls himself his servant. He has become rich, and now wants to find favour in the eyes of Esau. This was an attempt to appease his brother by words of flattery. Later the shrewd one divided the people, the flocks, herds and camels into two groups. If eventually Esau attacks one group, the other party could well escape.

Prayer as a Stratagem

Next he makes use of the farce of prayer (32:9-12). He was having recourse to whatever method which may serve his purpose. God is addressed as "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper." The titles attributed to God point to the craftiness of the supplicant. In the history of Abraham and Isaac, their God always protected, helped and saved them. Now Jacob was reminding the Lord to do the same thing to him, since He is the God of "my father" (repeated twice). Further he hints at the divine obligation to come to his help, as He had asked him to return to the original country, and had promised him prosperity.

After the invocation Jacob confesses his unworthiness for all the divine kindness and faithfulness the Lord has shown. Because of God's grace he has grown in number and become wealthy. This was indeed a faked up humility, in order to win the divine favour. Then the crafty one beseeches the Lord to save him from the hands

of Esau. He concludes his prayer by reminding God of his promise to make him prosperous and a great nation. The so-called prayer smacked of hypocrisy. He corners God to fulfil his obligation. Thus the shrewd one through the stratagem of prayer was compelling God to deliver up the goods.

The Disciplinary Art: Part III

The Moment of Discipline

Until now the Formator was patiently observing the tricks and tactics of this self-centred candidate. The audacious one tries to cheat even the Master, and unashamedly was boasting of winning the divine favours by his own intelligence and dexterity. How long can the divine Pedagogue connive at and tolerate such evil acts? He had up to now used the tactics of conciliation (*samam*), presentation of gifts (*danam*) and coercion (*bhedam*). All these methods apparently did not help the formee to grow into a mature person. Now the divine Pedagogue is ready to apply the disciplinary art of 'punishment' (*dandam*).

The Formator as a Wrestler

That night the candidate was occupied in giving the final touches to his stratagems. All on a sudden the Master in the disguise of a stranger pounced upon him (32:22-32). Although the formee did not recognize the Formator, he was not willing to surrender to that wrestler. He defended himself and even tried to defeat him. The Master at times pretended to get overpowered by the candidate. Here we find the subtle art of divine formation. The divine Pedagogue likes to fight with persons who are equal in strength and courage. Jacob held out against the attacker till day break. At his departure the divine wrestler touched the socket of the formee's hip so that his hip was wrenched. The candidate became lame.

An Incapacitated Person

One who was still then robust and strong suddenly became an invalid. He cannot run or even walk fast if Esau comes to attack him. All his dreams for the future were shattered. He became a totally helpless and defenceless person, an *agathi*, a non-having and non-being creature. The formee was conscious of this state. At this he, for the first time, clings to the Formator for survival. He said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (v. 26). The swindler was indeed indirectly taking by force the divine blessings (to get filled with the divine wellbeing).

The Pedagogy of Formation - An Analysis

Let us ponder on the unique traits of the formative art of the divine Pedagogue. At the beginning stage he does not use the disciplinary method. The Formator leaves the candidate to live according to his whims and fancies. Of course now and then the Master gives implicit warnings (see No. 4. The Disciplinary Art: Part I). But the candidate did not pay attention to them and refused to entrust himself into the hands of the Master. Even when his crooked tactics had brought downfall, the self-centred candidate did not bother to turn to the Formator. Rather, he let himself fall into despair. Even then the divine Pedagogue hastened to the side of the unfaithful and ungrateful formee and lifted him up from the abysses of despondency, and showered upon him his choicest blessings (see No. 7 The Disciplinary Art: Part II). Still there was no change in the base attitude of the candidate. He tried to deceive the Formator by wearing the mask of hypocrisy. The supreme Master of the art of formation was waiting for such an occasion. He made use of the disciple of *dandam* (punishment) and liberated the called one from the prison of ego-centeredness. Even in this art of forcefully smashing act one can notice an interesting phenomenon. The Formator deals with the formee as if he were an equal partner. He seems to find satisfaction in wrestling with Jacob, and even pretends as if he were going to be defeated. Only at the last moment he applies the most suitable method, making the formee a totally helpless person (*agathi*). This was the climax of the formative process. The one who had become an *agathi* was forced to cling to the Master for his survival (*gathi*). Then the divine Pedagogue blessed the disciple, filling him with the well-being. He transformed him into a new man, one who is blessed and blessing others.

A New Being in Christ

Bearer of a New Name

As the sign of new existence in Yahweh, the formee got a new name. It is the Formator who changed his name into Israel (Gen 32:28). This signified that the Master was taking complete possession of the person of the formee. In the Biblical thought name has a great significance. When human name is joined to the divine name, it gets total fulfilment and complete bliss. Human being achieves God-realization (*Iswara sakshatkara*) and self-realization (*atma sakshatkara*). Henceforth it is not he who lives, but the one who has given him name lives in him (Phil 1:21; Gal 2:20). As the formee attains the divine insight that all he has is God's and all God has is his (Jn 17:10), he is transformed into *jeevatmav* and *Buddha*.

The Name Israel

The divine Pedagogue changed the name of the formee into Israel, which meant one who fights God. This designation encapsulates the whole purpose of formation. The consecrated ones receive the special call to fight with God and humans. This activity has its roots in the freedom of the children of God. Martha of Bethany provides the best illustration. She loved and lived for the Master. It made her a liberated being. Thus she could freely scold or fight with her *Guruji*. Similarly the Master enjoyed the freedom to respond in a tit for tat style (Lk 10:38-42; Jn 11:21, 39). The formative process should lead one to this kind of wrestling, which results from love. Only when the formees become daring persons to fight with God and humans for the noble causes, their biblical formation will be completed.

One Who Blesses

We find a totally different person in the next scenes (Gen 33:1-15). The blessed one blesses Esau, the unblessed one. The chosen one behaves as a slave. He bows down to the ground seven times, and addresses Esau "my lord," calling himself "your servant." The formee does not try to keep for himself the blessings; instead he generously wanted to pour them out in favour of others. Thus Jacob literally lives out the call of Abraham to be blessed and to bless. A disciple of Christ will never want to become master, but the servant of others.

A Peaceful One

Though Gen 34 does not form part of Yahwistic narrative, it deserves special mention. At the news of the rape of Dinah, his daughter by the prince Shechem, the formed one behaved in a dignified way. He kept quiet till the return of his sons (v. 5). When they violently reacted, Jacob reproached them, and warned them about the aftermath of aggressive methods (v. 30). This peaceful one was not ready even to take vengeance against the enemies. Was not such an attitude, the trait of his formation?

A Baktayogi

According to the instruction of the Master, the formed one returned to Bethel (Gen 35:1-15). He demanded all those who were with him to get rid of idolatrous practices and purify themselves. As a sign of becoming new beings they should put off the old clothes. Next, he built an altar, set up a pillar and poured out a drink offering. Thus the formed one rendered thanks to the Master for

all his graces and blessings. Here we find the portrait of a Baktayogi who, like the Psalmist, lifted up the chalice of salvation and invoked the divine name (Ps 116:13).

The Chalice of Suffering

The time of formation endures throughout the life. Jacob had to carry his cross and undergo 'crucifixions'. His beloved wife Rachel died. His favourite son Joseph was sold by his brothers to the Egyptians, and informed the father that he was devoured by some ferocious animals (Gen 37). Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sack cloth and mourned for Joseph, saying, "In mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." The Master was more and more purifying his disciple, so that he can be transformed into a divine person.

An Unending Pain

The hour of suffering continued. At the time of famine Jacob was forced to send his ten sons to Egypt in order to buy corn (Gen 42). The governor of Egypt made Simeon a prisoner, and asked others to bring the youngest brother Benjamin. At this news Jacob shed bitter tears, saying, "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me." (v. 8). To Ruben who insisted on sending Benjamin, he wailed and said: "If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my grey head down to the grave in sorrow." (v. 38). Later when because of famine he was forced to send his children to Egypt. The formed one was resigned to the divine will: "May God Almighty grant you mercy before governor so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved." (Gen43:11-14). Here we find a pre-echo of the agonizing words of Christ, the Son of Abraham (Lk 22:42).

A Fiat Being

The divine Master was purifying the disciple in the furnace of suffering, in order to make him a most fine metal of gold. One can call it the dark night of the soul. Everything which is non-divine in him must be burnt out. Only then humans can become the authentic children of God. At the beginning of the hour of passion, we find the called one lamenting about himself and the losses that he had to endure. At the last scene he becomes *hinneni* ("here I am") like Abraham (Gen 22:1). Till then the formee was caught in the Gordian knot of the human attachment and affection for his children. The Formator forced him to drink from the pungent

chalice of suffering. He became a bitter man, weeping day and night at the sad fate. In the ocean of tears his last bond of attachment was dissolved. He could then repeat "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved." Not only the formee said Amen (*fiat*, let it be), but also depended upon the divine mercy.

The Event of Resurrection

The divine Pedagogue became satisfied at the success of his formation method. He rewarded Jacob by giving back his beloved ones, Joseph and Benjamin (Gen 46:1-47-12). Nobody can forget the scene of the blessed one blessing the king of Egypt (47:19). Jacob spent his last days on earth by enjoying the blessings of progeny, possessions and the divine presence. At the moment of death the blessed one fulfilled his call by blessing his sons and grandsons (48:15-16, 20; 49:2-27). He invoked the divine blessings according to the needs of each individual (49:28). After that the one who had been transformed into the image of the Son of God, breathed his last (49:33).

Final Reflections

In the life of Jacob there shine out the peculiar traits of God's pedagogy of formation. The Formator accepts the candidate with all his faults and defects. He does not call the noble and virtuous persons to discipleship. In the language of I Cor 1:26-28 The Most Wise One has chosen the weak, the lowly, the despised and the have-nots of this world. At the initial stage itself the Master does not begin to scold or punish the candidates for their mischievous and vicious deeds. Compulsion does not belong to the divine pedagogy of formation. The *Sadguru* provides the candidate full freedom. Still he promptly will warn them in an indirect way about the consequences of their self-centred actions. He hastens to help them when they become discouraged and despondent, and injects hope and dynamism in them. Even when they decline to co-operate with heart and soul in the formation process, the divine pedagogue does not become disheartened. He patiently waits for the proper opportunity. When the methods of *samam*, *danam* and *bhedam* fail to produce the expected fruits, he applies the art of *dandam* and makes the formee an *agathi*. Thereby he teaches him to find *gathi* in his Master by clinging to him. This made the called one a new person. Even here the formative art does not come to an end. The Lord lets him fall into the fathom depth of the ocean of sufferings. This painful process slowly washed away every trace of attachment and egoistic thinking from the heart of the disciple. He became a living *hinneri* like Abraham the father of salvation history. Next formative step was to shower upon Jacob gifts and graces, and to make him a blessing being.