

Paulo Coelho



The Warrior of the Light

Volume 2

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2008

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ISBN

Published by Lulu

Conversations with the Master

The journey

During the recent move to my new apartment, I found a series of notes of my conversations with J., who belongs to the R.A.M. order, a small brotherhood devoted to the study of oral traditions and the world's symbolic language. These notes cover our meetings from February 1982 through to 1990.

I recently asked him whether I might share parts of these texts; he agreed, I have transformed the texts into dialogue for better reading, and the words are not exactly those used by J., although the content is absolutely faithful to that which I

heard.

These texts are not in exact chronological order. I decided to begin with some of our conversations from 1986, which was when he insisted I go on the Road to Santiago.

- You said that going on the Road to Santiago is important. For it, one must give up everything for some time: family, work, projects. And I don't know whether I'll find everything the same when I return.

- Indeed I hope you won't.

- So should I take the risk of losing everything I have conquered up to now?

- Lose what? A man only has a soul to be won or lost; apart from his life, he has nothing. Past or future lives do not matter - at the moment you are living this one, and you should do so with

silent comprehension, joy and enthusiasm. What you must not lose is your enthusiasm.

- I have a wife, whom I love.

- (laughing) That is the most common excuse, and the most foolish of all. Love has never prevented a man from following his dreams. If she truly loves you, she will want the best for you. And anyway, you do not have a woman whom you love; the woman is not yours. What is yours is the energy of love, which you aim at her. You can do that from anywhere.

- And what if I had no money for the pilgrimage?

- Traveling is not always a question of money, but of courage. You spent a great part of your life going around the world like a hippie: what money did you have then? None. You could hardly afford the tickets, and nevertheless I

believe they were some of the best years of your life - eating badly, sleeping at railway stations, unable to communicate because of the language, being forced to depend on others just in order to find some shelter to spend the night.

“Traveling is sacred; mankind has traveled ever since the dawn of time, in search of hunting and grazing ground, or milder climates. Very few men manage to understand the world without leaving their home towns. When you travel - and I am not speaking of tourism, but of the solitary experience of a journey - four important things occur in your life:

a] One is in a different place, so the protective barriers no longer exist. To begin with this can be alarming, but soon one gets used to it and starts understanding how many interesting things there are beyond the walls of one's garden.

b] Since solitude can be great and oppres-

sive, one is more open to people one would not normally exchange a single word with, back home - waiters, other travelers, hotel staff, the passenger in the next seat in the bus.

c] One starts depending on others for everything: finding a hotel, buying something, knowing how to catch the next train. One begins to realize that there is nothing wrong with depending on others - on the contrary, it is a blessing.

d] One speaks in a language one doesn't understand, uses money whose worth one does not know, and wanders down streets for the very first time. One knows the old I, with all it learned, is completely useless in the face of these new challenges - and begins discovering that, buried deep down in one's unconscious, there is something far more interesting, adventurous, open to the world and to new experiences.

“To travel is the experience of ceasing to be the person you are trying to be, and becoming the person you really are.”

Sex

- Why has sex become a taboo?

- Because it is a process of alchemy: it transforms a vast manifestation of spiritual energy, which is love, into a physical gesture.

“It is impossible to understand sex as we see it nowadays - a mere response to a few physical stimuli. In reality, it is far more than that, and carries with it man’s and humanity’s entire cultural burden. Each time we face a new experience, we bring with us all past experiences - both good and bad - as well as those concepts which civilization has made into rules.

“This is not right, and we must recondition

the brain so that each sexual experience is unique, just as each loving experience is unique.”

- Very difficult.

- Very. But one must try, because almost all human beings need to keep this energy in movement. So, the first thing one must understand is that it is made up of two extremes, which walk side-by-side during the entire act: relaxation and tension.

“How can one set these opposite states in harmony? There is only one way: through giving oneself completely. How does one give oneself? By forgetting the traumas of the past, and by not forming expectations about the future - in other words, the orgasm. How can one do this? Very simply: by not being afraid to err.

“In reality, what usually happens is that we begin a sexual relationship thinking that every-

thing might go wrong. But even if it did, what importance would that have? One must merely be conscious of the fact that one must give one's best, and any wrongs immediately are put right.

“Once the search for pleasure is being carried out by giving oneself, with sincerity, one senses the body becoming tense, like the string of an archer's bow, while the mind becomes more and more relaxed, like the arrow being made ready to be fired. The brain no longer governs the process, which begins to be guided by the heart. And the heart uses the five senses to show itself to the other.

- The five senses?

- Touch, smell, sight, hearing, taste, all of them are involved. Oddly enough, in most sexual relations, people try using only touch and sight: acting thus, they diminish the fullness of the experience.

- Do both partners need to know all this?

- If one partner gives himself completely, he breaks down the barriers of the other, however strong they may be. Because the act of giving means: "I trust you". The other, who to begin with may feel rather intimidated, wanting to prove things which aren't even under discussion, is unarmed by the spontaneity of such an attitude, and relaxes. At that moment, true sexual energy comes into play.

"And this energy is not only present in those parts we call "erotic". It spreads throughout the entire body, into each strand of hair and expanse of skin. Each millimeter is now shining a different light, which is recognized by the other body, and which combines with the other.

"When this happens, we enter a sort of ancestral ritual, which is an opportunity for transformation. All rituals, in whatever form, demand

that one be ready to allow oneself to be led to another perception of the world. It is this will which lends the ritual meaning.”

- Isn't all this rather complicated?

- It is far more complicated to have the sex one sees being carried out nowadays, a mere mechanical act, causing tension during the act, and emptiness afterwards.

Everything spiritual manifests itself visually, everything which is visual turns into spiritual energy, I don't think this is so difficult to grasp. After all, we are born knowing we have a body and a soul: why not understand that sex also has them?”

- Given that we must change our attitude toward sex, what is the first step?

- As I said: giving oneself up. People think

that, before allowing themselves any pleasure, they must first solve all their problems, which is not the case. People can only solve their problems if they allow them to be themselves. “However, there is a very curious thing: during the sexual act we are extremely generous, and one’s greater concern is for the partner. We think we will not be able to give the pleasure he or she deserves - and because of this, our pleasure also diminishes, or disappears completely.”

- Is that not an act of love, like you said?

- That depends. It is really an act of guilt, to believe one is beneath the expectations of another. In a situation such as this, the word “expectation” must be completely banished. If we are giving our best, there is no reason for concern.

“One must be aware that when two bodies meet, they are together entering an unknown ter-

ritory. To transform this into an everyday experience is to lose the wonder of adventure.

“If, however, one allows oneself to be led on this journey, we will discover horizons we never imagined existed.”

- Is there a key?

- The first is: you are not alone. If the other person loves you, he or she is having the same doubts, however secure you may seem. “The second is: open the secret box of your fantasies, and do not be afraid to accept them. There are no sexual standards, and you must find your own, respecting only one restriction: never do anything without the other person’s consent.

“The third: give that which is sacred a sense of sanctity. For this one must be as innocent as a child, and learn to accept miracles as blessings. Be creative; purify your soul through rituals you

invent yourself - such as creating a sacred space, making offerings, learning to laugh together, in order to break down the barriers of inhibition. Understand that what you are doing is a manifestation of God's energy.

“The fourth: explore your opposite side. If you are a man, seek at times to think and act like a woman - and vice versa.

“The fifth: understand that the physical orgasm is not exactly the only objective of the sexual act, but a consequence, which may or may not occur. Pleasure has nothing to do with the orgasm, but with the encounter.

“The sixth: be like a river, flowing between opposite banks, such as a mountain and sand. On one side, natural tension, on the other, total relaxation.

“The seventh: identify your fears, and share

them with your partner.

“And, finally, the eighth: allow yourself to have pleasure. Just as you are anxious to give, the other person wants to do exactly the same. If, when two bodies meet, both want to give and receive, any problems vanish.

“Alexander Lowen said that man’s natural behavior is open to life and to love. However, our culture has led us to believe that this is not so, that we must be closed and mistrustful. We think that by acting in this way, we will not be hurt by life’s surprises - but in fact what happens is, we are not taking advantage of our lives.”

Tedium

We are sitting in a garden in a French town.

- Deep down, people complain, but they

love routines - I said.

- Of course, and the reason is very simple: routines give them the false sensation of being safe. Thus, today will be exactly like yesterday, and tomorrow will bring no surprises. When night falls, part of the soul complains that nothing different was experienced, but another part is content - paradoxically, it is for the same reason.

“Evidently this safety is completely false; no one can control anything, and a change always appears at the moment one least expects it, taking us surprise and with no chance to react or fight.

- If we are free to decide that we want a uniform life, why does God force us to change it?

- What is reality? It is that which we imagine it to be. If many people “think” that the world is

like this or like that, everything around us crystallizes, and nothing changes for some time. However, life is a constant evolution - social, political, spiritual, on whatever level it may be. In order for things to evolve, it is necessary for people to change. As we are all interlinked, sometimes destiny gives those hindering evolution a push.

- Generally in a tragic way...

- Tragedy depends on the way you see it. If you chose to be a victim of the world, anything which happens to you will feed that dark side of your soul, where you consider yourself wronged, suffering, guilty and deserving punishment. If you choose to be an adventurer, the changes - even the inevitable losses, since everything in this world changes - can cause some pain, but will soon thrust you forward, forcing you to react.

“In many oral traditions, wisdom is represented by a temple, with two columns at its en-

trance: these two columns always have names of opposite things, but in order to illustrate what I mean, we will call one Fear and the other Desire. When a man stands at this entrance, he looks at the column of Fear and thinks: “my God, what will I find further ahead?” Then he looks at the column of Desire and thinks: “my God, I’m so accustomed to that which I have, I wish to continue living as I have always lived.” And he remains still; this is what we call tedium.

- Tedium is...

- Movement which ceases. Instinctively, we know we are wrong, and we revolt. We complain to our husbands, wives, children, neighbors. But, on the other hand, we know that tedium and routine are safe havens.

- Can a person remain his whole life in this situation?

- He can be pushed by life, but resist and remain there, always complaining - and his suffering will be useless, will teach him nothing.

“Yes, a person can stand for the rest of his days facing one of the many doors he should go through, but he must understand that he has only truly lived up to that point. He may continue to breathe, walk, sleep and eat - but with less and less pleasure, because he is already spiritually dead and does not know it.

“Until one day when, as well as his spiritual death, physical death appears; at that moment God will ask: “what did you do with your life?” We must all answer this question, and woe betides those who answer: “I remained standing at the door.”

The mystery

- What are we doing on Earth?

- Truly? I don't know. I have looked in many corners, in light and dark places; today, I am convinced that no one knows - Only God.

- That is not a good answer, for a master.

- It is an honest answer. I know many people who will explain to you in great detail, the meaning of our existence. Don't believe them, these people are tied to an ancient language, and only believe in things which have an explanation.

- Does that mean there is no reason to live?

- You do not understand what I am saying. I said I don't know the reason. But of course there is a reason we are here, and God knows it.

- Why doesn't he reveal it to us?

- He reveals it to each of us, but in a lan-

guage we often do not accept, because it has no logic - and we are too accustomed to directions and formulas.

“Our heart knows why we are here. Whoever listens to his heart, follows the signs, and lives his Personal Legend, will understand that he is taking part in something, even if he doesn’t comprehend it rationally. There is a tradition which says that, the second before our death, we realize the true reason for our existence. And at that moment, Hell and Heaven are born.

- I don’t understand.

- During this split second, Hell is to look back and know that we wasted an opportunity to honor God and dignify the miracle of life. Heaven, at that moment, is to be able to say: “I made some mistakes, but I was not a coward: I lived my life, and did what I had to do.” Both Hell and Heaven will accompany us for a long time, but

not forever.

- How can I know that I am living my life?

- Because, instead of bitterness, you feel enthusiasm. That is the only difference. Apart from that, one must respect the Mystery, and humbly accept that God has a plan for us. A generous plan, which leads us towards His presence, and which justifies these millions of stars, planets, black holes, etc. which we see tonight, here in Oslo (we were in Norway) .

- It is very difficult to live without an explanation.

- Can you explain why man needs to give and receive love? No. And you live with that, don't you? Not only do you live with it, but it is the most important thing in your life: love. And there is no explanation.

“In the same way, there is no explanation of life. But there is a reason we are here, and you must be humble enough to accept that. Trust what I say; the life of each human being has a meaning, although he commits the error of spending the greater part of his time on earth seeking an answer, and meanwhile forgets to live.

“I can give you an example from a time when I came close to understanding all this. I had arrived at a party to commemorate 50 years since my graduation from high school. There, at the school where I studied as a teenager, I found many friends. We drank, told the same jokes as half a century ago.

“At a certain moment, I looked out onto the schoolyard. There, I saw myself as a child, playing, looking at life with amazement and intensity. Suddenly, the child that I saw began to take form and came over to me.

“He looked at me and smiled. Then I understood that I hadn’t betrayed my youthful dreams. That the child I had once been was still proud of me. That the reason to live that I had as a child, was still alive in my heart.

“Try to live with the same intensity as a child. He doesn’t ask for explanations; he dives into each day as if it were a new adventure and, at night, sleeps tired and happy.”

The personal legend

- What is the Personal Legend?

- It is your blessing, the path God has chosen for you here on Earth. Whenever a man does that which gives him enthusiasm, he is following his Legend. However, not everyone has the courage to face up to his own dreams.

- Why is that?

- There are four obstacles. The first: he has heard, right from childhood, that everything he wishes to live is impossible. He grows up with this idea, and as he acquires age, he also accumulates layers of prejudices, fears, guilt. There comes a time when his Personal Legend is so deeply buried within his soul, he can no longer see it. But it is still there.

“If he has the courage to unearth his dreams, he then faces a second obstacle: love. He now knows what he desires to do, but he thinks he will harm those around him, if he gives everything up to follow his dreams. He does not understand that love is an additional impulse, not something which hinders one from going forward. He does not understand that those who truly wish him well are longing for his happiness, and are ready to accompany him on this adventure.

“After accepting love as a stimulus, a man faces the third obstacle: the fear of the defeats he will encounter along the way. A man who fights for his dream suffers far more when something doesn’t go well, because he cannot use the famous excuse: “oh, well in fact that wasn’t exactly what I wanted anyway..” He does want it, and knows he is putting everything into it, and also that the Personal Legend is just as difficult as any other path - the difference being that your heart is present on this journey. So, a warrior of the light must be prepared to be patient at difficult times, and know that the Universe is conspiring in his favor, even if he does not understand how.

- Are the defeats necessary?

- Whether necessary or not, they occur. When he begins fighting for his dreams, man has no experience, and makes many mistakes. But the secret in life is to fall seven times, and rise up eight times.

- Why is it important to live the Personal Legend, if we are to suffer just as much as others?

- Because after having overcome the defeats - and we always overcome them - we feel much more euphoria and confidence. In the silence of our hearts, we know we are worthy of the miracle of life. Each day, each hour, is part of the Good Combat. We begin to live with enthusiasm and pleasure. Very intense and unexpected suffering begins passing faster than apparently tolerable suffering: that drags on for years, eroding our soul without us noticing what is happening - until one day we can no longer free ourselves of the bitterness, and it accompanies us for the rest of our lives.

- And what is the fourth obstacle?

- After unearthing your dream, using the power of love for support, spending many years

with the scars, a man realizes - from one day to the next - that everything he always wanted is right there, waiting for him, perhaps the very next day. Then comes the fourth obstacle: the fear of realizing the dream he has fought for all his life.

- That makes no sense.

- Oscar Wilde said that we always destroy the thing we love the most. And it is true. The simple possibility of achieving that which we desire causes the soul of the common man to be filled with guilt. He looks around, and sees many others who have not succeeded, and so he thinks he does not deserve it. He forgets everything he overcame, all he suffered, everything he had to renounce in order to come this far. I know many people who, when they are within reach of their Personal Legend, make a series of silly mistakes and do not attain their objective - when it was just one step away.

“This is the most dangerous of the obstacles, because it has a certain aura of sanctity about it: to renounce to joy and the conquest. But if the man is worthy of that which he has fought so hard for, he then becomes an instrument of God, aids the Soul of the World, and understands why he is there”.

The strategy

- Bernard Shaw was right - said J. - He wrote that people take morbid pleasure in complaining all day long about the conditions in which they live. I agree with him: true men and women are those who seek out ideal conditions, and - if they are unable to find them - end up creating them.

- How does one create the conditions needed?

- A Chinese man wrote about this, thousands of years ago: by respecting the five funda-

mental points. However, before speaking of the five points, it must be said that the starting point is respect for oneself. One can achieve anything, but not everything; so one must know what it is one desires.

- How can we know what we desire?

- When we feel well after carrying out a certain task. Consequently, everything which causes us to lose our enthusiasm and self respect, is harmful; even if it means power, money or success. I have seen so many people suffocated by success, making mistakes which ended up destroying years of work, yielding to heavy drinking, becoming aggressive, tough, bitter. These people are distant from themselves, and distant from others.

- Tell me about the Chinaman.

- He wrote a book about war, but the five

points he mentions in it apply to any task carried out by mankind.

“Item one: the law of the will. We just talked about this: one should only do that which truly fills our hearts with enthusiasm. If we brush this aside, if we put off the moment to live that which we dream of, we lose the energy necessary for any important transformation in our lives. Someone once put this most succinctly: “I don’t know the secret of success - but the secret of failure is to always try to follow the will of others.”

“Item two: the law of the seasons. Just as a war fought in winter demands different behavior and equipment from a war in the summer, human beings must learn to respect their own seasons, and not try to act when it is time to wait, not try to wait at a time of action. However, in order to make progress in anything, we must make the first move - from then on, our personal rhythm

and intuition will show us how to conserve his energy.

“Item three: the law of geography. A battle in a ravine is different from one fought in a field: in the same way, one can only achieve favorable conditions by paying attention to what is going on around, to the space one is occupying, what must be done to increase it, where there may be an ambush waiting, how to escape if a momentary retreat is necessary.

“Item four: the law of the allies. No one can fight alone; friends are necessary to give us strength when we need it, people who can advise us without being afraid of what we will think. As a poet once said: “no bird can fly high, if it only uses its own wings.”

“Finally, the fifth item: the law of creativity. There is only one way of understanding things - when we try to change them. We do not al-

ways succeed, but we do learn, for we seek a path no one has been down - and the world is full of such paths. The problem is, everyone is afraid of virgin forests, uncharted seas. As one enters the unknown, one fears that one may lose oneself.

“But no one gets lost - the hand of the merciful God always lies on the heads of courageous men and women, those who dare to be different because they believe in their dreams.

Work

- You have tried to make me understand that one must pay attention to life, people, and everything around us. I have the impression that all you ever do is work (at that time, J. was an executive at a Dutch multinational company).

- Instead of answering your question directly I shall quote from the Indian poet Tagore: “I slept and dreamt that life was joy/ I awoke

and saw that life was service/I acted and behold, service was joy.” In fact, through my work I discover life, people, and everything which happens around us.

“The only trap I must beware not to fall into, is to think that each day is the same as the next. In fact, each morning brings with it a hidden miracle, and we must pay attention to this miracle.”

- What is duty?

- A mysterious word which can have two opposite meanings: the absence of enthusiasm, or the understanding that we must share our love with more than one person. In the first case, we are always making excuses for not accepting our responsibilities; in the second case, duty becomes a form of devotion, of unrestricted love for the human condition, and we begin to fight for that which we want to happen.

“I seek to do this through my work: to share my love. Love is also a mysterious thing: the more we share it, the more it multiplies.”

- But in the Bible, work is considered a type of curse which God has forced on men. When Adam commits the original sin, he hears the Almighty say: “in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.”

- At that moment, God is putting the Universe into motion. Up until that time, all is beautiful, idyllic - but nothing has evolved and, as we mentioned, Adam starts thinking that each day is like another. From then on, he loses the sense of the miracle of his own existence; then the Lord, seeing His creation, understands that he must help him again conquer this sense.

“This sentence must be read in a positive way: weariness will turn into nourishment, sweat

will be the bread's seasoning. In this way, everything will converge perfectly, but first, Adam and all human beings must go down the path of mutual understanding.”

- Why is it that one of man's great dreams is to one day stop having to work?

- Because he does not know what it is to spend months and years doing nothing. Either because he does not love what he does; no one wishes to be separated from the woman he loves, no one wants to stop doing that which he loves. Or it is because there is no dignity in his going about his work - he has forgotten that work was created to help man, not humiliate him.

“There is an interesting story about this in “The Thousand and One Nights”: caliph Alrum Al-Rachid decided to build a palace in order to demonstrate the greatness of his kingdom. He gathered together the greatest works of art, de-

signed gardens, personally selected the marbles and carpets.

Beside the grounds which had been chosen, was a dwelling. Al-Rachid asked his minister to convince the owner - an old weaver - to sell it so that it might be demolished.

The minister tried in vain; the old man said he did not wish to part with it.

Upon hearing of the old man's decision, the Court Council suggested he be simply thrown out.

- No - responded Al-Rachid. - He will become part of my legacy to my people. When they come to the palace, they will say: he was a man who worked in order to show the beauty of our culture.

“And when they see the dwelling, they will

say: he was just, for he respected the work of other men.”

“The world seems threatening to cowards. They seek the false security of a life void of great challenges, and arm themselves heavily in order to defend that which they think they possess. Cowards are victims of their own egos, and in the end erect the bars of their own prison.”

The language of the signs

- What is the language of the signs?

- Every man has his own personal way of communicating with God and with his own soul.

- So man doesn't need religion?

- The religions are very important, because they allow us to adore collectively, and to share

the same mysteries. But the spiritual search is the responsibility of each of us: if you stray from your path, it is no use blaming the priest, the minister, the rabbi, the pastor - the responsibility is yours alone. That is why an alphabet exists which your soul understands, and which will show you the better decisions along your path.

- How to learn this language?

- Like you would any other. First, with the discipline to educate oneself to notice the signs. Then, with the courage to practice the language. Thirdly, never be afraid to make mistakes while practicing.

- What is it makes us so often follow the wrong sign?

- But of course, how else to learn the right signs?

- Could you give me an example of a sign?

- No. As I said, the language is individual. If we begin to generalize the signs, they turn into superstition.

“Many masters have made the mistake of using their signs in order to guide their disciples. What happens is that when people begin the spiritual search, they enter unknown waters, and feel insecure. So they try grabbing hold of the first thing held out to them - and in doing this, they abandon the aspect of adventure, only to become slaves to the hand guiding them. “

- How can I be sure of recognizing a sign as a true one?

- You never can. But, generally, if you begin seeing this world beyond convictions, you will see that your intuition will start to lead you towards the better choice - however absurd it may seem.

Gradually, this language becomes incorporated within you, and although you will continue to make the odd mistake, you are already at peace with your soul, and make the right decisions.

“Often the sign is more practical than we imagined, and I’ll tell you a story about this.

“A man once dreamt about an angel, who said to him: tomorrow it will start to rain, your village will be flooded, but you will be saved.

“And sure enough, the next day it started to rain. An emergency team went from house to house, evacuating the inhabitants, since there was a danger of flooding. All left, except that man, who said: “I had a dream about an angel, who said I’d be saved.”

“The next day, the water rose to the first floor of the houses. A second emergency team came to try and save the man, who again refused

to leave, claiming to have received a sign from an angel, and that he had to show the world his faith.

“By the third day, the situation had become critical, and the man was alone, perched on the roof of his house - as the waters continued to rise nonstop. Making an enormous effort, a rescue team again tried to remove him, but again he refused, calling them the devil, shouting that they were trying to force him to deny the angel’s sign.

“A short while later, the water covered the house and the man was drowned. Since he was a good Christian, he went to heaven and met St. Peter, who invited him to enter. The man refused, saying that God had tricked him; He had sent an angel who told him he would be saved, when in fact he was the only villager who had died.

“St. Peter told him that God never lied, and

promised to return with an explanation. He entered Paradise and returned half an hour later, saying:

“It is true, God did indeed send you an angel to tell you that you would be saved. But He said you refused, three times, the salvation He sent you in the form of rescue teams!”

The tragedy

- Why is there so much tragedy and misery in the world?

- Tragedy and misery are different things, and very lengthy subjects. Which would you like to talk about first?

- At the moment, about tragedy. Why does man suffer?

- Read the Bible and you will find the fol-

lowing: “that which is good, comes from You, my Lord. That which is evil, also comes from You, my Lord. Therefore what is there to fear?”

- Nevertheless, we do suffer.

- Certainly. But take this into consideration: of every ten problems we have, nine are created by our own selves - through guilt, self-punishment, self-pity. However, from time to time a great obstacle appears in our path, which was put there by God, and which is there for a reason. The reason is: to give us the opportunity to change everything, to move forwards.

“What is tragedy? A radical change in our lives, always linked to the same principle: loss. Suffering is always the result of a loss, either someone or something - such as health, beauty, or one’s financial conditions.

“When faced with a loss, it is no use trying

to recover what has gone. On the other hand, a great space has been opened up in your life - there it lies, empty, waiting to be filled with something new. At the moment of one's loss, contradictory as this might seem, one is being given a large slice of freedom.

“But most men, when faced with tragedy, fill this space with pain and bitterness. They never think there may be other ways of facing the inevitable.”

- For example?

- Firstly, by learning the great lesson of wise men: patience, the certainty that everything - both good and bad - is provisional in this life. Secondly, using this sudden change of course to risk new things in daily life, to do things you always dreamed of.

- This is clear regarding material things. But

what about someone's death?

- We have spoken much about death, and you know that for the one who passes on, it does not exist - that person is enjoying the delights of a radical transformation. The sensation of death only exists for the one left here. Every dear person, upon departing, becomes our protector - after going through a period of longing, we should be joyful, since we are better protected. In the same way, one day we will be on the other side, protecting the people we love down here.

- And those we hate...

- Exactly as you imagine. They remain tied to us through the feeling of bitterness. That is why Jesus said: "before going to the temple, go back and forgive your brother." One must be forever washing one's soul with the water of forgiveness.

- But going back to tragedy..

- There is something which is impossible to measure: the intensity of pain. We know a person is suffering because they tell us, but we cannot evaluate exactly how much. We often try to compare someone's attitude upon being faced by a tragedy, and we end up judging them to be stronger or weaker than they really are. Do not compare random pain with nothing; only the one suffering can know what he or she is going through.

“Therefore, when inevitable tragedy appears, we must remember these three things: to make the most of the freedom of loss, not to judge the pain, and to learn the art of patience. It will destroy 9/10 of that which you are, but the 1/10 which remains will make you an infinitely stronger person. “

Castaneda and the warrior's spirit

Carlos Castaneda was an author who left his mark on my generation - although in academic circles he was never considered someone worthy of attention. As a tribute to him, I present a summary of his most important writings:

The most difficult thing in this world is to adopt the spirit and attitude of a warrior. It is no use being sad, complaining, feeling unjustly treated, and believing someone is doing something negative. No one is doing anything, and certainly not to a warrior.

It matters not how we were brought up. What determines our way of acting is the manner in which we administrate our will. A man is the sum of all his wishes, which determine his way of living and dying.

The will is a sentiment, a talent, something which lends us enthusiasm. The will is something which is acquired - but it is necessary to fight for it one's whole life.

From the moment we are born, people tell us that the world is like this and like that, this way, that way. It is natural that - for a certain period of time - we end up believing what we are told. But we must soon push these ideas aside and discover our own way of living reality.

The humility of a warrior is not the same humility as that of a servile man. The warrior does not lower his head to anyone, and nor does he allow anyone to bow before him. The servile man, on the other hand, kneels before anyone he believes to be more powerful, and demands that the people under his command behave in a similar fashion before him.

The bad thing about words is that they make us feel as if we were illuminated and understanding everything. But, when we turn and face the world, we see that reality is completely different from that which we discussed or heard. Because of this, a warrior seeks to act, and not waste time in useless conversation. Through action, he discovers the meaning of that which oc-

curs in his day-to-day life, and takes creative and original decisions.

The ordinary man thinks that yielding to doubts and worries is a sign of sensibility, of spirituality. Acting thus, he remains distant from the true meaning of life, for his reduced reasoning turns him into the saint or monster he imagines he is, and before he realizes it, he is caught in the trap he has set himself. This type of person loves being told what he should do, but even more than that, he loves not following sound advice - simply in order to anger the generous soul who, at a certain moment, was concerned about him.

Only a warrior can endure the path of knowledge. A warrior does not complain or lament anything, and sees challenges as neither good nor bad. Challenges are simply challenges.

The world is unfathomable and mysterious, just as we all are. The art of the warrior consists of reconciling the terror of being a man with the wonder of being a man.

Three stories of Iranian mysticism

Nasrudin's turban

Nasrudin appeared at court wearing a magnificent turban and asking for money for charity.

- you come here asking for money, but wear such an expensive ornament upon your head. How much was that extraordinary piece? - asked the sovereign.

- Five hundred gold coins - replied the wise Sufi.

The minister whispered: «That is a lie. No

turban costs such a fortune.»

Nasrudin insisted:

- I have not come here only to ask for money, I am also here to negotiate. I paid that much money for the turban, for I knew that in the whole world only one king would be capable of buying it for six hundred coins, so that I can give the profit to the poor.

This sultan was flattered and paid the sum Nasrudin ask. On his way out, the wise man said to the minister:

- You may know the value of turbans, but I know how far vanity can lead a man.

Just like marriage

Nasrudin spent the entire autumn working his garden. The flowers had blossomed in the

spring - and Nasrudin noticed a few dandelions appearing, which he hadn't planted.

Nasrudin tore them up. But the pollen had already spread and others began to grow. He tried to find a weed killer which only killed dandelions. A specialist told him any type of poison would end up killing all the other flowers. In despair, he went to ask a gardener for help.

- It is like a marriage - said the gardener. - Along with the good things, a few little inconveniences always appear.

- What can I do? - insisted Nasrudin.

- Nothing. Although they are flowers you did not count on, they are still part of the garden.

Accepting compassion

- How do we purify the world?- asked a disciple.

Ibn al-Husayn replied:

- There was once a sheik in Damascus called Abu Musa al-Qumasi. Everyone honored him for his great wisdom, but no one knew whether he was a good man.

«One afternoon, a construction fault caused the house where the sheik lived with his wife, to collapse. The desperate neighbors began to dig the ruins; eventually, they managed to locate the sheik's wife.

«She said: «Don't worry about me. First save my husband, who was sitting somewhere

over there.»

«The neighbors removed the rubble from the area she indicated, and found the sheik. He said: «Don't worry about me. First save my wife, who was lying somewhere over there.»

«When someone acts as this couple did, he is purifying the whole world.»

Three Jewish stories

The shortest constitution in the world

A group of wise Jewish men met up in order to try and create the shortest Constitution in the world. If anyone - in the space of time a man takes to balance on one foot - were capable of defining the laws governing human behavior, he would be considered the greatest of all wise men.

- God punishes criminals - said one.

The others argued that this was not a law, but a threat; the phrase was not accepted.

- God is love - commented another.

Again, the wise men did not accept the phrase, saying that it did not properly explain the duties of humanity.

Just then, Rabbi Hillel came forward. And, standing on one foot, he said:

- Do not do to another that which you would abhor being done to you; that is the law. All the rest is legal commentary.

And Rabbi Hillel was considered the greatest wise man of his time.

Covering the sun with one's hand

A disciple went to Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav:

- I shall not continue with my studies of sacred texts - he said. - I live in a small house with my brothers and parents, and never have the

ideal conditions for concentrating on that which is important.

Nachman pointed to the sun and asked his disciple to place his hand over his face, in order to hide it. The disciple obeyed.

- Your hand is small, yet it can completely cover the power, light and majesty of the great sun. In the same way, the small problems manage to give you the excuse you need in order to hinder your progress along your spiritual journey.

“Just as your hand has the power to hide the sun, mediocrity has the power to hide your inner light. Do not blame others for your own incompetence.”

It seems so obvious

Rabbi Ben Zoma was asked:

- Who is wise?

- He who always finds something to learn from others - said the Rabbi.

- Who is strong?

- The man who is capable of dominating himself.

- Who is wealthy?

- He who knows the treasure he has: his days and hours of life, which can change everything which goes on around him.

- Who deserves respect?

- He who respects himself and his neighbor.

- These things are all so obvious - commen-

ted one of those present.

- That is why they are so difficult to observe - concluded the Rabbi.

The second chance

- I have always been fascinated by the story of the Sibylline Books - I commented to Mônica, my friend and literary agent, as we drove to Portugal. - One must make the most of opportunities, or they are lost forever.

The Sibyls were sorcerers capable of seeing into the future and lived in ancient Rome. One day, one of them went to the Emperor Tiberius's palace with nine books; she said that they contained the future of the Empire, and demanded ten talents of gold in exchange for the texts. Tiberius considered the price exorbitant and refused to buy them.

The Sibyl left, burned three books and re-

turned to Tiberius with the remaining six: “these cost the same ten talents of gold,” she said. Tiberius laughed and sent her away; how could she possibly be so bold as to sell six books for the same price as nine?

The Sibyl burned three more books and returned to Tiberius with the last three volumes: “they cost the same ten talents of gold”. Intrigued, Tiberius ended up buying the three volumes, and could only read a small portion of the future.

Just as I was finishing the story, I realized that we were passing through Ciudad Rodrigo, on the frontier between Spain and Portugal. There, four years earlier, I had been offered a book, but hadn’t bought it.

- Let’s stop. I think the fact that I remembered the Sibylline Books was a sign for me to correct a past mistake.

During my first author tour to promote my books in Europe, I had decided to have lunch in that town. Afterwards, I went to visit the cathedral, where I met a priest. “See how the afternoon sun makes everything more beautiful in here,” he said. I liked this comment, we talked a little, and he showed me around the altars, cloisters, and courtyards of the temple. In the end, he offered me a book he had written about the church; but I did not wish to buy it. After I left, I felt guilty; I am a writer, and was in Europe trying to sell my work - why not buy the priest’s book, out of solidarity? But then I completely forgot the episode. Until now.

I stopped the car; Mônica and I walked to the square facing the church, where a woman was gazing up into the sky.

- Good afternoon. - I’ve come to see a priest who wrote a book about this church.

- The priest, whose name was Stanislau, died a year ago - she answered.

I felt deeply saddened. Why had I not given Father Stanislau the same joy I felt whenever I saw someone with one of my books?

- He was one of the kindest men I have ever met - continued the woman.- He came from a humble family, but became a specialist in archeology; he helped my son obtain a college grant.

I told her what I was doing there.

- There's no need to feel guilty, my son - she said. - Go and visit the cathedral again.

I thought this must be a sign, and did as she said. There was just one priest in the confession booth, awaiting the faithful, although there were none just then. I went over to him; the priest ges-

tured for me to kneel down, but I interrupted him.

- I don't want to make a confession. I just came to buy a book about this church, written by a man named Stanislau.

The priest's eyes glinted. He came out of the confession booth and returned a few minutes later with a copy of the book.

- How marvelous of you to have come especially for that! - he said. - I am Father Stanislau's brother, and this fills me with pride! He must be in heaven, content at seeing his work considered so important!

Among all the priests there, I happened to have run into Stanislau's brother. I paid for the book, thanked him and he embraced me. Just as I was leaving, I heard his voice.

- See how the afternoon sun makes everything more beautiful in here! - he said.

They were the same words Father Stanislaw had spoken to me four years earlier. In life, there is always a second chance.

Reflections on 11th September 2001

On March 2002 I decided to write about this subject. I avoided touching on the matter immediately, so that each of us might reflect, each in his own way, on the consequences of the attacks.

On the day in question, I was in Munich, ready to go to a bookshop for an afternoon signing session, when a member of staff of my publishers knocked on the door of my room:

- Turn on the TV! Quickly!

On all channels, the scene was the same:

one of the towers of the World Trade Center was already in flames, the next plane approaching, with the resulting collapse of both buildings. No one will ever forget the calamity of 11th September 2001, where they were, how they got there and whom they were with, when the terrorist attack occurred.

It is always difficult to accept that a tragedy might somehow bring positive things. As we watched, horrified, scenes which looked more like a science fiction film, the towers collapsing with thousands of people inside, we had several immediate feelings: the first was a sense of helplessness regarding what was going on. The second sensation was that the world would never be the same again.

It was with these two sensations in my soul, that I turned off the television and walked over to the place where - supposedly - the signing session would take place. I was certain that no one

would show up, since the next few hours would be spent in search of reasons, news, details. I crossed the deserted streets of Munich; although it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon, people had gathered in the bars, where radios and TV's were on, everyone trying to convince themselves that all this was just some type of dream from which they would awake, sooner or later, commenting to their friends that at times, the human race is subject to nightmares which are often very similar.

Upon arriving at the bookshop, to my surprise, hundreds of readers were waiting for me. They were not talking, not saying a word - it was a silence which came from the depths of the soul, void of meaning. Gradually, I began to understand what they were doing there: at moments such as this, it is good to be with others, because we do not know what may happen from then on. Little by little, we were beginning to realize that it wasn't a nightmare, but something very real and

palpable, which - from now on - would be part of the history of our civilization.

It is about this which I wish to write, at the end of this very troubled year. The world will never be the same again, that is true - but, almost four months after that afternoon, can there really still be a feeling that all those people died in vain? Or is there something beyond death, beyond all the rubble and twisted steel, which can be found under the ruins of the World Trade Center?

I think that every human being has tragedy cross his life at some point; it might be the destruction of a city, the death of a child, a false accusation without proof, an illness which appears without warning, leaving him an invalid for life. Life is a constant risk, and whoever forgets that will never be prepared for the challenges of destiny. When we come face-to-face with the inevitable pain which crosses our path, we are forced to seek some meaning for that which has come

to pass.

However good we are, however correctly we seek to lead our lives, tragedies do occur. We can blame others, look for justification, imagine how our lives would have been different without them. But none of that matters: they have happened, and that is that. From this point on, it is necessary that we review our own lives, overcome fear, and begin the process of reconstruction.

The first thing we must do, when faced with suffering and insecurity, is accept them as such. We cannot treat them as things which do not concern us, nor see them as punishment which satisfies our eternal sense of guilt. In the ruins of the World Trade Center were people like us, who were insecure or unhappy, well balanced or struggling to grow, some had families at home waiting for them, while others were desperate in the face of the loneliness of the big city. They were Americans, English, Germans, Brazilians,

Japanese, people from all over the world, united by the common - and mysterious - fate of finding themselves in the same place at around 9 in the morning, a morning which was beautiful to some and oppressive to others. When the two towers collapsed, it was not just those people who died: we all died a little, the whole world shrank a little.

Some years ago, in Japan, a group of students of Zen Buddhism were gathered in a house in the country, when the caretaker arrived with news of a nearby tragedy: a house burned down, leaving a mother and daughter homeless. Immediately, one of the students organized a collection in order to help the family rebuild their home.

Among those present, was a poor writer, and the girl decided not to ask him for money. "One moment," said the writer, when realized he was being left out. "I too want to give something."
“

In a moment, he wrote on a piece of paper what had happened, and put it inside the jar which was being used to collect money. “I want to give everyone this tragedy. May it always be remembered when we think about the small incidents in our lives.”

In the case of the incidents of 11th September, I think we received other things apart from this feeling - to accept that, however bad our life is, it still is far better than the majority of human beings. However difficult it may be to accept what happens to us, one must understand that moments such as this give us the possibility for radical change in our behavior.

When faced with a great loss, be it material, spiritual or psychological, it is no use trying to recover that which is gone. Seen from another point of view, a great space has been opened up in our lives, and there it is, empty, waiting to be filled with something. At the moment of loss,

however contradictory it may seem, we are acquiring a large slice of freedom. Instead of filling this empty space with pain and bitterness, there are other ways of facing up to the world.

To begin with, we must recall that great lesson of the wise: patience, the certainty that everything is provisional in this life. We must review our values: if, for many years, the world never goes back to being a safe place, why not use this sudden change and make the most of these days to risk things we always wanted to do, but hadn't the courage, believing that we should follow a "normal rhythm of life", in which everything is under control? How many people, on that morning of September 11th, were in the World Trade Center against their will, trying to follow a career which was not theirs, doing a job they disliked, were only there because it was a safe place, and guaranteed enough money for their pension and old age?

That was the great change in the world, and those who were buried in the rubble of the two buildings did not die in vain. Now, they make us think about our own lives, our values, and they urge us on towards the destiny we dream about for ourselves, although we never had the courage to face up to it. When the towers crashed to earth, they carried with them dreams and hopes, but they also opened up our own horizon, and allowed each one of us to reflect on the meaning of our lives.

So, the time has come not only to rebuild the Towers, but also ourselves; it is precisely here that our attitudes towards that which awaits us, will make all the difference. There is an old story about a man who, following the bombing of Dresden, walked past a piece of land filled with rubble and saw three laborers at work.

- What are you doing? - he asked.

The first laborer turned:

- Can't you see? I'm removing these rocks!

Unsatisfied with the answer, he turned to the second laborer.

- Can't you see? I'm earning my wage! - was the reply.

The passer-by still didn't know what was going on there, and decided to insist one more time. He turned to the third man, and once again repeated his question.

- Can't you see? - said the third laborer. - I'm rebuilding a cathedral!

Although these three people were doing the same thing, only one perceived the true dimensions of his life and his work. We can only hope that, in the world to come after September

11th 2001, each of us is capable of rising up above our own emotional rubble, and reconstructing the cathedral we always dreamed of, but which we never dared create.

Flight from Belgrade to Barcelona

In the newspaper, a text I cut out and place on my briefcase. The author is W. Timothy Galway:

“When we plant a rose seed in the earth, we notice it is small, but we do not criticize it as “rootless and stemless.” We treat it as a seed, giving it the water and nourishment required of a seed.

“When it first shoots up out of the earth, we don’t condemn it as immature and underdeveloped, nor do we criticize the buds for not being open when they appear. We stand in wonder at

the process taking place, and give the plant the care it needs at each stage of its development.

“The rose is a rose from the time it is a seed to the time it dies. Within it, at all times, it contains its whole potential. It seems to be constantly in the process of change: Yet at each state, at each moment, it is perfectly all right as it is.

“A flower is not better when it blooms than when it is merely a bud; at each stage it is the same thing -- a flower in the process of expressing its potential.”

Brissac, France

During my stay at a castle rented by a Brazilian magazine, a local journalist came to interview me. During the conversation, which was being watched by other people, he wanted to know:

- What is the best question a reporter has ever asked you?

The best question? I thought I'd been asked just about EVERY question, except for the one he just put. I asked for a moment to reflect, to study the many things I wanted to say but was never asked. But in the end I had to confess:

- I think it was yours. I've had questions I've refused to answer, others which allowed me

to talk about interesting subjects, but yours was the only one I cannot possibly answer sincerely.

The journalist made a note, then said:

- I'll tell you an interesting story. Once, I went to interview Jean Cocteau. His house was piled high with bibelots, paintings, drawings by famous artists, books, Cocteau kept everything, and felt a deep love for all those things. So anyway, during the interview, I decided to ask him: «if the house caught fire right now, and you could only take one thing with you, what would you choose?»

- And what did Cocteau say? - asked Alvaro Teixeira, who was in charge of the castle, and a great follower of the life of the French artist.

- Cocteau said: «I'd take the fire».

And we sat there in silence, applauding deep down in the most intimate corners of our hearts, the brilliant reply.

The gift of insults

Near Tokyo lived a great Samurai warrior, now old, who decided to teach Zen Buddhism to young people. In spite of his age, the legend was that he could defeat any adversary.

One afternoon, a warrior - known for his complete lack of scruples - arrived there. He was famous for using techniques of provocation: he waited until his adversary made the first move and, being gifted with an enviable intelligence in order to repair any mistakes made, he counterattacked with fulminating speed.

The young and impatient warrior had never lost a fight. Hearing of the Samurai's reputation, he had come to defeat him, and increase his

fame.

All the students were against the idea, but the old man accepted the challenge.

All gathered on the town square, and the young man started insulting the old master. He threw a few rocks in his direction, spat in his face, shouted every insult under the sun - he even insulted his ancestors. For hours, he did everything to provoke him, but the old man remained impassive. At the end of the afternoon, by now feeling exhausted and humiliated, the impetuous warrior left.

Disappointed by the fact that the master had received so many insults and provocations, the students asked:

- How could you bear such indignity? Why didn't you use your sword, even knowing you might lose the fight, instead of displaying your co-

wardice in front of us all?

- If someone comes to you with a gift, and you do not accept it, who does the gift belong to? - asked the Samurai.

- He who tried to deliver it - replied one of his disciples.

- The same goes for envy, anger and insults - said the master. - When they are not accepted, they continue to belong to the one who carried them.

Where is the umbrella?

At the end of ten years of apprenticeship, Zenno thought he should be elevated to the category of Zen master. One rainy day, he went to visit the famous professor Nan-in.

Upon entering Nan-in's house, the host asked him:

- Did you leave your shoes and umbrella outside?

- Of course - replied Zenno. - As good manners demand. I would do the same anywhere.

- Then tell me: did you place your umbrella

to the right or the left of your shoes?

- I've no idea, master.

- Zen Buddhism is the art of total consciousness of what we do - said Nan-in. - The lack of attention to the smallest details can completely destroy a man's life. A father who rushes out of the house, must never forget the dagger within his small son's reach. A Samurai who doesn't take care of his sword every day, will at some point find it is rusty, just when he most needs it. A young man who forgets to give his lover flowers, will end up losing her.

And Zenno understood that, although he knew the Zen techniques of the spiritual world, he had forgotten to apply them to the world of men.

Traveling in a different way

When I was very young I discovered that, for me, a journey is the best way to learn. I still have this pilgrim's soul to this day, and have decided to relate some of the lessons I have learned, in the hopes that they will be useful to other like-minded pilgrims.

1] Avoid museums. This advice may seem absurd, but let us reflect a little together: if you are in a foreign city, isn't it far more interesting to seek out the present, than the past? Usually, people feel obliged to go to museums, because ever since they were small they have been told that traveling is a search for this type of culture.

Of course museums are important, but they require time and objectivity - you need to know what it is you want to see there, otherwise you will come away with the impression that you saw several things which are fundamental to your life, but cannot remember what they were.

2] Frequent bars. Unlike museums, this is where the life of the city can be found. Bars are not discotheques, but places where the people gather to have a drink, pass the time, and are always willing to chat. Buy a newspaper and observe the bustle of people coming and going. If someone speaks to you, strike up a conversation, however banal: one cannot judge the beauty of a path merely by looking at its entrance.

3] Be open and forward. The best tourist guide is someone who lives there, knows everything, but doesn't work at a travel agency. Go out into the street, choose someone you wish to speak to, and ask him or her for directions (where

is such-and-such a cathedral? Where is the post office?) If this bears no fruit, try someone else - I guarantee that in the end you will find excellent company.

4] Try and travel alone, or - if you are married - with your spouse. It will be harder work, no one will be looking after you, but this is the only way of truly leaving your country. Group travel is just a disguised way of pretending to go abroad, where you speak your own language, obey the leader of the pack, and concern yourself more with the internal gossip of the group than with the place you are visiting.

5] Don't compare. Don't compare anything - not prices, nor cleanliness, nor quality of life, nor means of transport, nothing! You are not traveling in order to prove you live better than others - your search, in fact, is to find out how others live, what they have to teach, how they view reality and the extraordinary things in life.

6] Understand that everyone understands you. Even if you don't speak the language, don't be afraid: I have been in many places in which there was no way of communicating with words, and I always found support, guidance, important suggestions, even girlfriends. Some people think that if you travel alone, you will go out into the street and be lost forever. All you need is the hotel card in your pocket, and - should you find yourself in extreme circumstances - take a taxi and show it to the driver.

7] Don't buy much. Spend your money on things which you won't have to carry: good theater, restaurants, walks. Nowadays, with the global market and the Internet, you can have everything you want without having to pay for excess baggage.

8] Don't try and see the world in a month. It is better to stay in one city for four or five days, that visit five cities in a week. A city is like a capri-

cious woman, who needs time to be seduced and reveal herself completely.

9] A journey is an adventure. Henry Miller said that it is far more important to discover a church no one has heard of, than go to Rome and feel obliged to visit the Sistine Chapel, with two hundred thousand tourists shouting all around you. Go to the Sistine Chapel, but also get lost in the streets, wander down alleyways, feel free to look for something, without knowing what it is. I swear you will find it and that it will change your life.

- You have learned far more than was taught you - he said. - You concentrated yourself enough to win, were capable of fighting for that which you desire. Then, you had compassion, and were willing to make a sacrifice in the name of a noble cause. Welcome to the monastery, because you know how to balance discipline with compassion.

Two tales of the future

May we be forgotten

At the Sceta monastery, the abbot Lucas gathered the monks for the sermon.

- May you never be remembered - he said.

- What do you mean? - replied one of the brothers. - May our example not help those who might need it?

- In the days when everything was just, no one paid attention to exemplary people - answered the abbot. - Everyone gave their best, without pretensions, and so fulfilled their duty to their fellow men. They loved their neighbor because they understood that this was part of life,

and they thought nothing of respecting a law of nature. They shared their possessions in order not to accumulate more than they could carry, since journeys last a lifetime. They lived together in freedom, giving and receiving, without demanding or blaming anything on others. That is why their deeds were not handed down, and there is no story known about them.

«I hope we can achieve the same thing in the present: to make goodness such a common thing, that there is no need to exalt those who practice it.»

How to flatten the world

Confucius was traveling with his disciples when he heard that a very intelligent boy lived in a nearby village. Confucius went to talk to him and jokingly asked:

- Why don't you help me get rid of the ine-

qualities?

- Why do away with the inequalities? - said the boy. - If we flatten the mountains, the birds will no longer have shelter. If we put an end to the depths of the rivers and seas, all the fish will die. If the chief of the village has the same authority as the madman, no one will know what to do. The world is vast, let it have its differences.

The disciples left, impressed by the boy's wisdom. As they made their way to another town, one of them commented that all children should be like that.

- I have met many children who, instead of playing and doing the usual things for their age, tried to understand the world - said Confucius. - And none of these precocious children succeeded in doing anything important, later in life, because they never had a taste of innocence and the healthy irresponsibility of childhood

Reflections of the Warrior of the Light

The right measure

The warrior of the light knows how to recognize an enemy who is stronger.

If he decides to confront him, he will immediately be destroyed. If he accepts his provocations, he will fall into the trap.

So he uses diplomacy to overcome the difficult situation in which he finds himself. When the enemy acts like a baby, he does the same. When he calls him to combat, he pretends not to understand.

His friends comment: “he is a coward.”

But the warrior pays no attention to the comment; he knows that all the anger and courage of a bird are of no use in a confrontation with a cat.

In situations such as this, the warrior is patient. He knows the enemy will soon depart and provoke others.

The right time

A warrior of the light is never rushed. Time works in his favor; he learns to dominate impatience, and avoid unplanned actions.

Walking slowly, he notes the firmness of his steps. He knows that he takes part in a decisive moment in the history of humanity, and must change himself before changing the world. This is why he recalls the words of Lanza del

Vasto: “a revolution takes time to take hold”.

A warrior of the light never picks fruit before it is ripe.

The right speed

A warrior of the light needs patience and speed at the same time. The two greatest faults of a strategy are: acting too soon, or allowing an opportunity to slip too far away.

In order to avoid this, the warrior deals with each situation as if it were unique, and does not apply formulas, paradigms or the opinions of others.

Caliph Moauiyat once asked Omr Ben Al-Aas what was the secret of his great political skills:

“I never became involved in anything,

without first studying a retreat; conversely, I have never embarked on something and wanted to abandon it immediately,” was his reply.

The right tolerance

A warrior of the light always keeps his heart clean of feelings of hatred. When he goes to fight, he always remembers Christ’s words: “love your enemies”.

And the warrior obeys.

But he knows that the act of forgiving foes does not force him to accept everything. A warrior cannot lower his head - otherwise he loses sight of the horizon of his dreams.

The warrior notes that the adversaries are there to test his strength, his persistence, his ability to make decisions. They are a blessing - because it is they force him to fight for his dreams.

It is the experience of combat which strengthens the warrior of the light.

The right understanding

The warrior of the light knows the importance of his intuition.

In the middle of the battle, he has no time to think about the enemy's blows - so he uses his instinct and obeys his angel.

In times of peace, he deciphers the signs which God sends him.

People say: "he is mad".

Or: "he lives in a fantasy world."

Or even: "how can anyone rely on things which have no logic?"

But the warrior knows that intuition is God's alphabet, and continues to listen to the wind and talk to the stars.

The right choice

“Yes,” the warrior hears someone say, “I must understand everything, before taking a decision. I want the freedom to change my mind.”

The warrior considers this sentence and questions it. He may have the same freedom, but this does not prevent him from fulfilling some duty, even if he does not understand exactly why he does so.

A warrior of the light takes decisions. His soul is as free as the clouds in the sky, but he has a duty to his dream. On his freely chosen path, he must awake at times he dislikes, speak to people who bring him nothing, and make some sacrifices.

Friends comment: “you are forever sacrificing. You are not free.”

The warrior is free. But he knows that an open oven does not bake bread.

The right renouncement

“In any activity, it is important to know what to expect, the means of obtaining the objective, and our capability for the proposed task.

“Only he who, thus equipped, feels no desire for the results of the conquest, and remains absorbed in the combat, can truly say he has renounced the fruit.

“One can renounce the fruit, but that renouncement does not mean indifference to the result.”

The warrior of the light listens respectfully to Ghandi’s strategy. And is not distracted

by people who, incapable of achieving any result, are forever preaching renouncement.

Fighting the one you love

The warrior of the light sometimes fights the one he loves.

He has learned that silence means the absolute balance of the body, spirit and soul. The man who preserves his unity will never be dominated by the storms of existence; he has the strength to overcome the difficulties and move forwards.

However, he often feels challenged by those whom he teaches the sword. His disciples call him to combat.

And the warrior shows his capability: with a few blows, he throws down the students' weapons, and the harmony returns to the place where they are gathered.

“Why do that, if you are so superior?”, asks a traveler.

“Because, in this way, I keep open a dialogue,” answers the warrior.

The law and the fruit

In the desert, fruit was scarce. God called one of his prophets and said:

- Each person may only eat one fruit a day.

The custom was obeyed for many generations, and the ecology of the place was preserved. Since the remaining fruit supplied seeds, other trees appeared. Soon, the entire region was turned into fertile soil, which was the envy of other towns.

But the people continued to eat one fruit a day - they remained faithful to what the ancient prophet of their forefathers had told them. However they never allowed the inhabitants of other

villages to take advantage of the abundant harvest with which they were rewarded each year.

The result was that fruit rotted on the ground.

God called a new prophet and said:

- Let them eat as much fruit as they like. And ask them to share the abundance with their neighbors.

The prophet came to the town with the new message. But he was stoned - for by now the custom was ingrained in the hearts and minds of each of the inhabitants.

With time, the younger villagers began to question the barbaric old custom. But, since the tradition of the elders was unbending, they decided to abandon the religion. Thus, they could eat as much fruit as they wished, and give the rest

to those in need of food.

The only people who remained faithful to the local church, were those who considered themselves saints. But in truth they were unable to see how the world changes, and recognize how one must change with it

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An Arab creation legend

In his book *El Libro del Fantasma*, Alejandro Dolina associates the story of sand to one of the creation legends of the Arab people.

He writes that, as soon as they had finished building the world, one of the angels pointed out to the Almighty that they had forgotten to put sand on Earth; a serious mistake, considering that humans would be forever deprived of walking alongside the seas, massaging their tired feet and enjoying the feel of the ground.

Apart from that, the river beds would always be jagged and rocky, and architects could not use this vital material, the footsteps of lovers would be invisible; in order to remedy the situa-

tion, God sent the Archangel Gabriel with a great bag, in order to pour sand in all the places necessary.

Gabriel made the beaches, the river beds, and when he returned to heaven carrying what was left over, the Enemy - always alert, always ready to ruin the work of the Almighty - managed to bore a hole in the bag, which split, spilling its entire contents. This happened in the place we now call Arabia, and almost the entire region became a vast desert.

Gabriel was distressed and went to apologize to the Lord, for having allowed the Enemy to come near him unnoticed. And God, in His infinite wisdom, decided to compensate the Arab people for His messenger's involuntary error.

He made them a sky filled with stars, like no other in the whole world, so that they should always look up.

He created the turban, which - under the desert sun - is worth more than a crown.

He created the tent, allowing people to move from one place to another, and continually be surrounded by new landscapes, and without the annoying obligations of maintaining palaces.

He taught the people to forge the best steel for making swords. He made the camel. He formed the finest race of horses.

And he gave them something even more precious than all the other things together: the word, the true gold of all Arabs. While other peoples shaped metal and stone, the people of Arabia learned to shape the word.

There, the poet became the high priest, the judge, doctor, chief of the Bedouins. His verses are powerful: they can bring joy, sadness, health. They can unfurl acts of revenge and war, unite

lovers and reproduce the songs of birds.

Alejandro Dolina concludes:

“The errors of God, like those of great artists, or of true lovers, bring forth so many joyful rewards, that at times it is worth wishing for them.”

A man lying on the ground

On 1st July, at 13:05 hrs., there was a man aged about fifty lying on the promenade in Copacabana. I passed him with a glance and went on my way towards a stall where I always drink fresh coconut water.

Being from Rio, I've passed hundreds (thousands?) of men, women and children lying on the ground. As someone who travels, I've seen the same scene in practically all the countries I've been to - from wealthy Sweden to dire Romania. I've seen people lying in the street in all seasons of the year: in the biting winter of Madrid, New York or Paris, where they huddle

around the warm air floating up from the subway stations. In the relentless sun of Lebanon, among buildings destroyed by years of war. People lying on the ground - drunks, homeless, tired - are not a novelty for anyone.

I drank my coconut water. I was in a hurry to get back for an interview with Juan Arias, from the Spanish newspaper *El País*. On the way, I saw the man was still there, in the sunshine - and everyone who passed acted in exactly the same way as I had: they looked, and walked on.

The fact is - not that I was aware of this - my soul was tired of seeing the same scene, over and over again. When I passed that man again, something great force made me kneel down and try to help him up.

He didn't react. I turned his head, and there was blood near his temple. Now what? Was it a serious wound? I cleaned his face with my shirt:

it didn't look serious.

Just then, the man started mumbling something which sounded like: "tell them to stop beating me." Well, at least he was alive; now all I had to do was get him out of the sun and call the police.

I stopped the first man passing and asked him to help me drag him to the shade between the promenade and the beach. He was wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase and parcels, but he put them down and came to help me - his soul must also have been tired of seeing that scene.

Having got the man into the shade, I walked towards my building, knowing there was a police post on the way, where I could get help. But before getting there, I passed two policemen.

- A man has been hurt over there opposite number such-and-such, I said. I put him on the

sand. You should send for an ambulance.

The policemen said they'd make arrangements. Right, now I'd done my duty. A good scout, "Be Prepared". Do a good turn daily! The problem was in the hands of others now, they were responsible. And the Spanish journalist would be arriving at my place in a few minutes.

I hadn't gone ten places when a foreign man stopped me. He spoke in broken Portuguese:

- I had already told the police about the man on the sidewalk. They said that as long as he wasn't a thief, it was none of their business.

I didn't let the man finish. I walked back to the policemen, certain that they knew who I was, someone who wrote in the newspapers and appeared on television. I returned with the false impression that success can, at times, help to resolve many things.

- Do you belong to some official authority?
- one of them asked, noticing that I'd asked for help more urgently this time.

They had no idea who I was.

- No. But let's solve this problem right now.

I was badly dressed, my shirt stained with the man's blood, my shorts were made from an old pair of jeans I had torn up, and I was sweating. I was an ordinary, anonymous man, without any authority beyond that of having grown tired of seeing people lying on the ground, for dozens of years, without ever having done a single thing about it.

And that changed everything. There's a moment when you go beyond any mental block or fear. A moment when your eyes look different, and people know you're being serious. The po-

licemen went with me and called an ambulance.

On the way home, I reflected on the three lessons from my walk. a] everyone can stop an action when it is pure romanticism. b] there's always someone there to say: "now you've started, go all the way." And, finally: c] everyone is an authority, when he is quite convinced of what he is doing.

The stories of the desert priests

During the early part of the Christian era, the monastery at Scete became a center where many people gathered. After renouncing everything they had, they went to live in the desert surrounding the monastery. Many of the teachings of these men have been collected and published in numerous books.

The middle way

The monk Lucas was walking through a village accompanied by a disciple. An old man asked the man from Scete:

- Holy man, how can I come closer to God?

- Enjoy yourself. Praise the Creator with your joy - was the reply.

The two went on their way. Just then, a young man came over.

- What must I do to come closer to God?

- Enjoy yourself less - said Lucas.

When the young man left, the disciple commented:

- It seems to me that you are not sure whether or not one should enjoy oneself.

- A spiritual journey is a bridge with no railings across an abyss - replied Lucas, - If someone is too near the right hand side, I tell him 'left a

bit!' If he approaches the left side, I say 'right a bit!' The extremes veer us away from the Path.

The town on the far side

A hermit from the monastery of Scete went to Abbot Theodore:

- I know precisely the objective of life. I know what God asks of man, and I know the best way of serving Him. Even so, I am incapable of doing everything I should in order to serve the Lord.

Abbot Theodore remained silent for a time. Finally, he said:

- You know that there is a city on the far side of the ocean. But you haven't yet found the ship, nor have you loaded your bags, nor crossed the sea. Why spend time commenting on what it is like, or how one should walk through its

streets?

“Knowing the objective of life, or recognizing the best way of serving the Lord is not enough. Put into practice that which you think, and the way will be revealed all by itself.”

Behave like others

Abbot Pastor was walking with a monk from Scete when they were invited for a meal. The host, honored by the holy men’s presence, served only the finest dishes.

However, the monk was fasting; as soon as the food arrived, he took a pea and chewed it slowly. He only ate that one pea, during the whole meal.

As they left, Abbot Pastor called him:

- Brother, when you pay a visit, do not ren-

der your holiness an offense. The next time you are fasting, do not accept an invitation to dine.

The monk understood what Abbot Pastor said. From then on, whenever he was with others, he behaved as they did.

Work in the field

A young man crossed the desert and finally came to the monastery of Scete. There, he asked to hear one of the abbot's lectures - and was granted permission.

That afternoon, the abbot's discourse was about the importance of work in the field.

After the lecture, the young man said to one of the monks:

- That was amazing. I thought I would hear a fine sermon about virtues and sins, and the ab-

bot spoke only of tomatoes, irrigation and so forth. Where I come from, all believe that God is merciful: all one must do is pray.

The monk smiled and replied:

- Here we believe that God has already done His part; now it is up to us to continue the process.

Judging my neighbor

One of the monks of Scete committed a grave error, and the wisest hermit was called upon to judge him.

The hermit refused, but they insisted so much that in the end he agreed to go. He arrived carrying on his back a bucket with holes in it, out of which poured sand.

- I have come to judge my neighbor - said

the hermit to the head of the convent. - My sins are pouring out behind me, like the sand running from this bucket. But since I don't look back, and pay no attention to my own sins, I was called upon to judge my neighbor!

The monks called a halt to the punishment immediately.

The way to please the Lord

A novice went to Abbot Macarius seeking advice about the best way to please the Lord.

- Go to the cemetery and insult the dead - said Macarius.

The brother did as he was told. The following day, he returned to Macarius.

- Did they respond? - asked the abbot.

The novice said no, they didn't.

- Then go to them and praise them.

The novice obeyed. That same afternoon, he returned to the abbot, who again wished to know whether the dead had responded.

- No - said the novice.

- In order to please the Lord, behave as they do - said Macarius. - Pay no heed to the insults of men, nor to their praise; in this way, you shall forge your own path.

Reflections of an explorer of Kanchenjunga

By an explorer of mount Kanchenjunga:

“I climbed the highest mountain in my land, and could see the whole world around it. While I was there, I could see more than I can put into words, and understood more than I can express.

“If, however, I were to better define what those moments high up on Kanchenjunga really meant, I would say: seen from high up, all things - rivers, trees, snow, grass - seem as one, and my heart was filled with joy, because I was part of everything. When I understood this, even alone

on the top of a mountain, I understood that I was close to all things on this Earth.”

In search of signs

We may think at times that the only thing life offers us tomorrow, is to repeat everything we did today. But if we pay close attention, we will see that no two days are alike.

Each morning brings a hidden blessing; a blessing which is unique to that day, and which cannot be kept or re-used. If we do not use this miracle today, it will be lost.

This miracle is in the small things of daily life; we must live in the understanding that at every moment there is a way out of each problem, the way of finding that which is missing, the right clue to the decision which must be taken in order to change our entire future.

But how to find the courage for this? As I see it, God speaks to us through signs. It is an individual language which requires faith and discipline in order to be fully absorbed.

For example, Saint Augustine was converted in this way. For years he sought - in various philosophical schools - an answer to the meaning of life, until one afternoon, in the garden of his house in Milan, as he reflected on the failure of his search, he heard a child in the street: "Take up and read! Take up and read!"

Although he had always been governed by logic, he decided - in an impulse - to open the first book which came to hand. It was the Bible, and he read part of St. Paul which contained the answers he sought. From then on, Augustine's logic made way for faith to take part in his life, and he went on to become one of the Church's greatest theologians.

The monks of the desert used to say it was important to allow angels to act. Because of this, they occasionally did absurd things - such as talk to flowers or laugh without a reason. The alchemists followed the “signs of God”; clues which often made no sense, but which always lead somewhere.

“Modern man tried to eliminate life’s uncertainties and doubts. And in doing so he left his soul dying of hunger; the soul feeds off mysteries” - says the dean of Saint Francis Cathedral.

There is a meditation exercise which consists of adding - generally for ten minutes a day - the reasons for each of our actions. For example: “I now read the newspaper to keep myself informed. I now think of such-and-such a person, because the subject I read about lead me to do so. I walked to the door, because I am going out”. And so forth.

Buddha called this “conscious attention”. When we see ourselves repeating our ordinary routine, we realize how much wealth surrounds our life. We understand each step, each attitude. We discover important things, and useless thoughts.

At the end of a week - discipline is always fundamental - we are more conscious of our faults and distractions, but we also understand that, at times, there was no reason to act the way we did, that we followed our impulses, our intuition; and now we begin to understand this silent language which God uses in order to show us the true path. Call it intuition, signs, instinct, coincidence, any name will do - what matters is that through “conscious attention” we realize that we are often guided to the right decision.

And this makes us stronger and more confident.

Three reflections on life

When to be practical

This story is attributed to the wise Mohammed Gwath Shattari, who was held in high esteem by Emperor Humayun. He died in 1563, and there is a temple built in his honor in Gwalior.

As three travelers crossed the mountains of the Himalaya, they discussed the importance of putting into practice everything they had learned on a spiritual plane. They were so engrossed in their conversation that it was only late at night that they realized that all they had with them was a piece of bread.

They decided not to discuss who deserved

to eat it; since they were pious men, they left the decision in the hands of the gods. They prayed that, during the night, a superior spirit should indicate who should receive the food.

The following morning, the three men rose together at sunrise.

- This is my dream - said the first traveler.
- I was taken to places I had never visited before, and enjoyed the sort of peace and harmony I have sought in vain during my entire life on earth. In the midst of this paradise, a wise man with a long beard said to me: "you are my chosen one, you never sought pleasure, always renounced all things. And, in order to prove my allegiance to you, I should like you to try a piece of bread."

- That's very strange - said the second traveler. - For in my dream, I saw my past of sanctity and my future as a master. As I gazed at that which is to come, I found a man of great wis-

dom, saying: “you are in greater need of food than your friends, for you shall have to lead many people, and will require strength and energy.”

Then the third traveler said:

- In my dream I saw nothing, went nowhere, and found no wise men. However, at a certain hour during the night, I suddenly woke up. And I ate the bread.

The other two were furious:

- And why didn't you call us before making such a personal decision?

- How could I? You were both so far away, finding masters and having such holy visions! Yesterday we discussed the importance of putting into practice that which we learn on a spiritual plane. In my case, God acted quickly, and had me awake dying of hunger!

What will they say of you?

As a boy, Abin-Alsar overheard a conversation between his father and a dervish.

“Careful with your work”, said the dervish. “Think of what future generations will say about you.”

“So what?”, replied his father, “When I die, everything shall end, and it will not matter what they say.”

Abin-Alsar never forgot that conversation. His whole life, he made an effort to do good, to help people and go about his work with enthusiasm. He became well-known for his concern for others; when he died, he left behind a great number of things which improved the quality of life in his town.

On his tombstone, he had the following epitaph engraved:

“A life which ends with death, is a life not well spent.”

Past mistakes

During a journey, Buddha came across a yogi with only one leg.

“I burn all my past mistakes”, explained the man.

“And how many mistakes have you burned?”

“I have no idea.”

“And how many are left to burn?” enquired Buddha.

“I have no idea.”

“Then it is time to stop. Stop asking God for forgiveness, and go and ask those you wounded for forgiveness.”

