

A truly blind man

An ancient Persian fable tells of a man who had only one thought: to possess gold, all the gold possible.

It was a voracious thought that devoured his brain and heart. He could thus have no other thought, no other desire for anything but gold.

When he walked past the shop windows in his town, he only saw the goldsmiths' windows. He did not notice so many other wonderful things.

He did not notice the people, did not pay attention to the blue sky or the scent of the flowers.

One day he couldn't resist: he ran into a jeweller's shop and started filling his pockets with gold bracelets, rings and brooches.

Of course, on his way out of the shop, he was arrested. The police asked him, "But how did you think you could get away with it? The shop was full of people."

"Really?" the astonished man said. "I didn't notice. I only saw the gold."

"They have eyes and do not see," the Bible says about false idols. It can be said of so many people today. They are dazzled by the glitter of the things that shine the brightest: those that the daily advertisements slide before our eyes, as if they were a hypnotist's pendulum.

Once, a teacher made a black speck in the centre of a beautiful white sheet of paper and then showed it to his pupils.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"A black spot!" they replied in chorus.

"You have all seen the black spot that is tiny," retorted the teacher, "and no one has seen the big white sheet."

In the Talmud, which brings together the wisdom of the Jewish teachers of the first five centuries, it is written: "In the world to come, each one of us will be called to account for

all the beautiful things that God has put on earth and that we have refused to see.”

Life is a series of moments: true success lies in living them all.

Don't risk losing the big white paper to chase a black speck.

A smile at dawn

A touching testimony by Raoul Follereau. He was in a leper colony on a Pacific island. A nightmare of horror. Nothing but walking corpses, despair, rage, sores and horrific mutilation. Yet in the midst of such devastation, one sick old man retained surprisingly bright and smiling eyes. He was suffering in body, like his unhappy companions, but showed attachment to life, not despair, and gentleness in his treatment of others.

Intrigued by that true miracle of life, in the hell of the leper colony, Follereau wanted to seek an explanation: what on earth could have given such strength of life to that old man so stricken by evil?

He followed him, discreetly. He discovered that, invariably, at the crack of dawn, the old man would drag himself to the fence surrounding the leper colony, and reach a specific place.

He would sit and wait.

It was not the rising of the sun that he waited for. Nor the spectacle of the Pacific dawn.

He would wait until, on the other side of the fence, a woman would appear, also elderly, her face covered in fine wrinkles, her eyes full of gentleness.

The woman did not speak. She only sent out a silent and discreet message: a smile. But the man lit up at that smile and responded with another smile.

The silent conversation lasted a few moments, then the old man would get up and toddle back to the barracks. Every morning. A kind of daily communion. The leper, nourished and fortified by that smile, could endure a new day and hold out until the new appointment with the smile of that feminine face.

When Follereau asked him, the leper said, "she is my wife!" And after a moment of silence: "Before I came here, she looked after me in secret, with everything she could find. A sorcerer had given her an ointment. Every day she smeared my face with it, except for a small part, enough to affix her lips to it for a kiss... But it was all in vain. So they picked me up, brought me here. But she followed me. And when I see her again every day, only from her do I know that I am still alive, only for her do I still enjoy living."

Surely someone smiled at you this morning, even if you did not realise it. Certainly someone is waiting for your smile today. If you enter a church and open your soul to silence, you will realise that God, first of all, welcomes you with a smile.

The rose

The German poet Rilke lived for a time in Paris. To go to university, he walked every day in the company of a French friend, along a busy street.

One corner of this street was permanently occupied by a beggar woman who asked passers-by for alms. The woman always sat in the same place, motionless like a statue, her hand outstretched and her eyes fixed on the ground.

Rilke never gave her anything, while his companion often gave her a few coins.

One day the astonished young Frenchwoman asked the poet:

"But why do you never give the poor girl anything?"

"We should give something to her heart, not her hands", replied the poet.

The next day, Rilke arrived with a beautiful, newly bloomed rose, placed it in the beggar's hand and made to leave.

Then something unexpected happened: the beggar woman looked up, looked at the poet, barely lifted herself from the ground, took the man's hand and kissed it. Then she left, clasping the rose to her breast.

For a whole week no one saw her again. But eight days later, the beggar woman was again sitting in the usual corner of the street. Silent and motionless as ever.

"What must she have lived on all these days when she received nothing?" asked the young Frenchwoman.

"The rose, of course", replied the poet.

"There is only one problem, only one on earth. How to give humanity spiritual meaning again, to arouse a restlessness of spirit. Humanity needs to be sprayed from above and for something resembling Gregorian chant to descend upon it. You see, one cannot go on living by dealing only with fridges, politics, budgets and crosswords. It is not possible to go on like this", wrote Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

The boat

One evening, two tourists who were at a campsite on the shores of a lake decided to cross the lake by boat to go for a "nightcap" at the bar on the other shore.

They stayed there until late into the night, draining a fair number of bottles.

When they came out of the bar they were swaying somewhat, but they managed to take their places in the boat to embark on the return journey.

They began to row briskly. Sweating and puffing, they struggled hard for two hours. Finally, one said to the other: "Don't you think we should have touched the other shore by now, long ago?"

"Of course," replied the other, "but perhaps we have not paddled strongly enough."

The two redoubled their efforts and rowed resolutely for another hour. Only when dawn broke did they realise, astonished, that they were still in the same place.

They had forgotten to untie the strong rope that tied their boat to the jetty.

How many people struggle and fret all day long without coming to anything because they do not really free themselves from bonds and poor habits.

The train timetable

I knew a man who knew the railway timetable by heart, because the only thing that gave him joy was the railways, and he spent all his time at the station, watching how the trains arrived and how they departed. He gazed in wonder at the carriages, the strength of the locomotives, the size of the wheels, he watched in amazement as the conductors jumped into the carriages, and the stationmaster.

He knew every train, he knew where it came from, where it was going, when it would arrive at a certain place and which trains departed from that place and when they would arrive.

He knew the train numbers, he knew what day they ran, whether they had a dining car, whether they waited for connections or not. He knew which trains have mail cars and how much a ticket costs to Frauenfeld, Olten, Niederbipp or somewhere else.

He didn't go to the bar, he didn't go to the cinema, he didn't

go for a walk, he didn't have a bicycle, a radio or a television set, he didn't read newspapers or books, and if he got letters, he wouldn't read them either. He lacked the time to do these things because he spent his days at the station, and only when the railway timetable changed, in May and October, would he not be seen for a few weeks.

So he would sit at home at his table and learn everything by heart, read the new timetable from the first page to the last, pay attention to the changes and was happy when there were none. It also happened that someone asked him for the departure time of a train. Then his face shone and he wanted to know exactly what the destination of the journey was, and whoever had asked him for the information certainly missed their train because he would not let them go. He did not content himself with citing the time, he also cited the number of the train, the number of carriages, the possible connections, all the departure times; he explained that one could go to Paris on that train, where one had to get off and what time one would arrive, and he did not understand that people were not interested in all that. However, if someone left him standing there and left before he had listed all his knowledge, he would get angry, insult them and shout at them:

"You have no idea about railways!"

He personally never got on a train.

That would have made no sense, he said, because he already knew beforehand what time the train was arriving (Peter Bichsel).

Many people (distinguished scholars among them many) know everything about the Bible, even the exegesis of the smallest and most hidden verses, even the meaning of the most difficult words, and even what the sacred writer really meant, even if it seems otherwise.

But they do not turn anything written in the Bible into their personal lives.

Progress

An explorer was travelling through the immense forests of the Amazon in South America.

He was looking for possible oil deposits and was in a great hurry. For the first two days, the natives he had hired as porters adapted to the fast and anxious pace that the white man demanded for everything.

But on the morning of the third day, they stood silent, motionless, breathless.

It was clear that they had no intention of setting out again.

Impatiently, the explorer, pointing to his watch, gesticulated and tried to make the leader of the porters understand that they had to move, because time was pressing.

– Impossible, replied the man, calmly. These men have walked too fast and are now waiting for their souls to catch up with them.

People of our age are always moving faster. And they are restless, dazed and unhappy, because their souls have fallen behind and can no longer catch up with them.

The miracle

This is the true story of an eight-year-old girl who knew that love can work wonders. Her little brother was destined to die

of a brain tumour. His parents were poor, but had done everything to save him, spending all their savings.

One evening, the father said to the tearful mother: "We can't do this any more, dear. I think it's over. Only a miracle could save him."

The little girl in the corner of the room, with bated breath, had heard this.

She ran to her room, broke open the piggy bank and, without making a sound, headed for the nearest pharmacy. She waited patiently for her turn. She walked up to the counter, stood on tiptoes and, in front of the astonished pharmacist, placed all the coins on the counter.

"What's that for? What do you want, little one?"

"It is for my little brother, Mr. Pharmacist. He is very ill and I have come to buy a miracle."

"What are you saying?" muttered the pharmacist.

"His name is Andrew, and he has a thing growing inside his head, and daddy told mummy that it's over, there's nothing more to be done, and that it would take a miracle to save him. You see, I love my little brother so much, that's why I took all my money and came to buy a miracle."

The pharmacist nodded a sad smile.

"My little one, we don't sell miracles here."

"But if this money is not enough, I can get busy to find more. How much does a miracle cost?"

There was a tall, elegant man in the pharmacy, looking very serious, who seemed interested in the strange conversation.

The pharmacist spread his arms, mortified. The girl, with tears in her eyes, began to retrieve her change. The man approached her.

"Why are you crying, little one? What is the matter with you?"

"Mr Pharmacist won't sell me a miracle or even tell me how much it costs... It's for my little brother Andrew who is very sick. Mum says it would take an operation, but dad says it costs too much and we can't pay and that it would take a

miracle to save him. That's why I brought everything I have."

"How much do you have?"

"One dollar and eleven cents... But, you know..." she added with a edge in her voice, "I can still find something..."

The man smiled "Look, I don't think that's necessary. One dollar and eleven cents is exactly the price of a miracle for your little brother!" With one hand he collected the small sum and with the other he gently took the little girl's hand.

"Take me to your house, little one. I want to see your little brother and also your daddy and mummy and see with them if we can find the little miracle you need."

The tall, elegant man and the little girl came out holding hands.

That man was Professor Carlton Armstrong, one of the world's greatest neurosurgeons. He operated on little Andrew, who was able to return home a few weeks later fully recovered.

"This operation," mum murmured, "is a real miracle. I wonder how much it cost..."

The little sister smiled without saying anything. She knew how much the miracle had cost: one dollar and eleven cents.... plus, of course, the love and faith of a little girl.

"If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain: 'Move from here to there' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you" (Matthew 17:20).

Who doesn't pray?

A farmer, on a market day, stopped to eat in a crowded restaurant where even the city's elite usually dined. The farmer found a place at a table where other patrons were already seated and placed his order with the waiter. When he

had done so, he joined hands and recited a prayer. His neighbours observed him with amused curiosity; one young man asked him:

"Do you always do this at home? Does everyone really pray?"

The farmer, who had quietly begun to eat, answered:

"No, even at home there are some who do not pray."

The young man grinned:

"Oh yeah? Who doesn't pray?"

"Well," continued the farmer, "for example my cows, my donkey and my pigs...."

I remember that once, after walking all night, we fell asleep at dawn near a grove. A dervish who was our travelling companion let out a cry and walked into the desert without resting for a single moment.

When it was daylight, I asked him:

"What happened to you?"

He answered:

"I saw nightingales chirping in the trees, I saw partridges in the mountains, frogs in the water, and animals in the woods. I thought then that it was not right that all were intent on praising the Lord, and that I alone slept without thinking of him."

(Sudi)

The cleverest son

Long ago there was a man who had three sons whom he loved very much. He was not born rich, but through his wisdom and hard work he had managed to save a lot of money and buy a fertile farm.

When he became old, he began to think about how to divide what he owned among his sons. One day, when he was very old and

ill, he decided on a test to see which of his sons was the most intelligent.

He then called his three sons to his bedside.

He gave each one five pennies and asked them to buy something to fill his room, which was empty and bare.

Each of the sons took the money and went out to fulfil their father's wish.

The oldest son thought it was an easy job. He went to the market and bought a bundle of straw, which was the first thing that came his way. The second son, on the other hand, pondered for a few minutes. After going round, the whole market and searching all the shops, he bought some beautiful feathers.

The youngest son considered the problem for a long time. "What is it that costs only five pennies and can fill a room?" he wondered. Only after many hours of thinking and rethinking did he find something that suited him, and his face lit up. He went to a small shop hidden in a side street and bought a candle and a match with his five pennies. On the way home he was happy and wondered what his brothers had bought.

The next day, the three sons gathered in their father's room. Each brought his gift, the object that was to fill a room. First the oldest son spread his straw on the floor, but unfortunately it only filled a small corner. The second son showed his feathers: they were very pretty, but they barely filled two corners.

The father was very disappointed with the efforts of his two older sons.

Then the youngest son stood in the middle of the room: all the others looked at him curiously, wondering: "What could he have bought?".

The boy lit the candle with the match and the light from that one flame spread across the room and filled it.

Everyone smiled.

The old father was delighted with his youngest son's gift. He gave him all his land and his money, because he understood that the boy was smart enough to make good use of it and would take wise care of his brothers.

With a smile you can light up the world today. And it costs nothing.