

Paulo Coelho

Warrior of the Light

Volume 1

2008

Paulo Coelho's website address is

www.paulocoelho.com

Paulo Coelho's blog address is

www.paulocoelhoblog.com

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ISBN 978-0-557-01573-3

Published by Lulu

On the Road to Kumano

I got out of the train one afternoon in February 2001, and met Katsura, a 29 year-old Japanese woman.

- Welcome to the road to Kumano.

I looked beyond the station to the setting sun shining into my face. What was the road to Kumano? During the journey, I had tried to discover why it was that this remote place had been included on the program of my official visit, organized by the Japan Foundation. The interpreter told me that a friend of mine, Madoka Mayuzumi, had insisted I visit this place, although I only had five days and had to travel by car most of the time. Madoka had walked the Road to Santiago in 1999, and

thought this would be the best way of thanking me.

Back on the train, the interpreter had commented: “the people of Kumano are very strange”. I asked her what she meant by that, and she limited her answer to one word: “religiousness”. I decided not to press the matter: one can often ruin a good pilgrimage by reading all the leaflets, books, guidelines on the Internet, friends’ comments, and arrive at the place knowing everything one ought to be discovering for oneself, not allowing room for the most important element of any journey - the unexpected.

- Let us go over to the stone - said Kat-sura.

We walked a few meters to a small obelisk, inscribed on both sides, set on a corner - and fighting for space among pedestrians, a convenience store, passing cars and motorbikes. From

that point, the road to Kumano was divided in two.

- If you go to the left, you will take the pilgrimage along the path the emperor used to take. If you go to the right, you will take the path of the ordinary folk, said Katzura.

- The emperor's way may be more beautiful, but certainly the way of the ordinary folk will be livelier.

She seemed content with the answer. We got into the car and drove towards the snow-covered mountains. As she drove, Katsura explained some things about the place: Kumano is a type of peninsular full of hills, forests and valleys, where several religions live alongside one another in peace. The predominant ones are Buddhism and Shintoism (Japan's national religion, older than the influence of Buddha, based on the adoration of the forces of nature), but every type of faith

and spiritual manifestation can be found there.

- How many kilometers is the pilgrimage? - I wanted to know.

Apparently, she didn't understand. I asked the interpreter to translate into Japanese, but even then Katsura appeared to be perplexed at my question.

- That depends on where you set off - she said finally.

- Of course. But in the case of the Road to Santiago, if you set off from Navarra it is about 700 kms. What about here?

- Here, the pilgrimages begin when you leave your home, and end when you return to it. In this case, since you live in Brazil, you must know the distance.

I didn't know, but the reply made sense. The pilgrimage is a stage on a journey: I remembered that after having gone on the road to Santiago, in Spain, I only really understood what had happened to me when I spent four months in Madrid, before returning home.

- We see things, and don't understand immediately - continued Katsura. You must leave behind the man you are used to being: he will remain there and only the good part continues to be nourished by the energy of the Goddess, who is a generous mother. The part which does you harm ends up dying for lack of nourishment, since the devil is too busy with other people, and has no time to take care of someone whose soul is not there.

For almost two hours we climbed a small, twisty road up the mountain, until we came to a sort of inn. Before I entered, Kansura commented:

- A woman lives here, we don't know how old she is, which is why we call her the Feminine Demon. I'm going down to the village nearby to fetch a woodcutter who will explain to you how you should follow the road.

Night had begun to fall, Katsura disappeared into the mist, and I stood there waiting for the Feminine Demon to open the door.

The woodcutter and the demon

At an inn lost in the mountains, a woman they call the Feminine Demon, dressed in a black kimono, came to greet me. I removed my shoes, entered the traditional Japanese room, and immediately realized that I would never be able to sleep in such a cold place. I asked the interpreter to request a heater; the old Japanese woman frowned and said I must get used to Shugendo.

- Shugendo?

But the woman had already disappeared, having instructed us to dine soon. Less than five minutes later we were seated around a sort of bonfire dug in into the ground, with a cauldron hanging from the ceiling, and fish on skewers lying around. Soon, my guide Katsura arrived with the woodcutter.

- He knows all about the road - said Katsura. - Ask anything you like.

- Before speaking, let us drink - said a woodcutter - sake (a type of Japanese wine made of rice) wards off bad spirits.

- It wards off bad spirits?

- The fermented drink is alive, goes from youth to old age. When it reaches maturity, it is capable of destroying the Spirit of Inhibition, the Spirit of Lack of Human Relationships, the Spirit of Fear and the Spirit of Anxiety. Howev-

er, if too much is drunk, it rebels and brings the spirit of defeat and aggression. It is all a question of knowing the point beyond which one may not go beyond.

We drank sake, and ate the fish roasting around the fire. The landlady joined us. I asked why people called her the Feminine Demon.

- Because no one knows where I was born, where I came from, my age. I decided to be a woman without a history, since my past only brought me pain; two atomic bombs exploding in my country, the end of moral and spiritual values, the suffering caused by people disappearing. One day I decided to start a new life: there are certain tragedies we can never understand. So I left it all behind, and came to this mountain. I help the Pilgrims, take care of the inn, and live each day as if it were my last. I enjoy meeting different people every day. I always meet strangers - like you, for instance. I had never met a Brazil-

ian in all my life. Nor had I ever seen a black man until 1985.

We drank more sake, the Spirit of Lack of Human Relations seemed to withdraw. I spoke much about Brazil, and began to feel strangely at home.

-Why did people come to Kumano? - I asked the woodcutter.

-To ask for something, fulfill some vow, or they wish to change their life. The Buddhists toured the 99 sacred places which are spread about here, and Shintoists visited the three temples of Mother Earth. On the way they met other people, shared their problems and joys, prayed together, and in the end began to understand they were not alone in the world. And they practiced Shugendo

I recalled what the Feminine Demon told

me, and asked him to explain what that was.

- It's difficult to explain. But let us say it is a complete relationship with nature: one of love and pain.

- Pain?

- In order to dominate the soul, you must also learn to dominate the body. And in order to dominate the body, you cannot fear pain.

He told me that sometimes he went with a friend to the nearby cliffs, tied a rope round his waist, and stayed hanging in empty space. The friend would swing the rope until he hit the rocks several times; when he sensed that he was about to faint, he signaled to be pulled up again.

- Man must know every aspect of nature - said the woodcutter. - Her generosity and her inclemency; only in this way will she be able to

teach us everything she knows, and not simply what it is we wish to know.

Sitting around that fire, lost somewhere in Japan, at an inn, the sake pushing back the distances, the Feminine Demon laughing with (or at) me, I understood the truth in the woodcutter's words: one must learn that which is necessary, and not simply what one wants. At that moment, I decided I would find a way to practice Shugendo on the road to Kumano.

Leaning upon the tree

- Have you ever heard of Shugendo? I was told it is a relationship of love and pain with nature - I said to a biologist Katsura introduced me to, and with whom I was now walking in the mountains.

- Shugendo means: "the way of the art of accumulating experience" - he replied, revealing

that his interests go beyond the variety of insects in the region - By disciplining one's body to accept everything nature has to offer; in this way you will also educate your soul for that which God has to offer. Look around you: nature is a woman, and like all women, she teaches us in a different way. Lean your spine up against that tree.

He point to a two thousand year-old cedar, with a thick rope lying around it. In the local religion, everything which is circled by a rope is a special manifestation of the Goddess of Creation, and is considered a sacred place.

- Everything living contains energy, and this energy communicates. If you put your spine against the trunk, the spirit which inhabits the tree will talk to your spirit, and calm it of any affliction. Of course, as a biologist, I would say that the giving off of heat, etc... but I also know there is truth in the magic explanation of my

forefathers.

My eyes are closed, and I try to imagine the sap climbing from the roots right up into the leaves, and in making this movement, causing a wave of energy affecting all around.

I hear the biologist's voice telling me that, in the year 1185, two Samurai warriors fought a fierce battle for power in Japan. The governor of Kumano didn't know who would win; certain that nature always has an answer, he had seven roosters dressed in red, fight against another seven dressed in white. Those in white won, the governor supported one of the warriors, and made the right choice: before long, that Samurai governed the country.

- Now tell me: do you prefer to believe that it was the governor's support which decided the fight, or were the roosters, representing nature, a divine sign showing who would end up conquer-

ing power?

- I believe in signs - I answered, mentally leaving my comfortable vegetal state, and opening my eyes.

- The sacred journeys to Kumano began long before Buddhism was introduced in Japan; to this day there are men and women who pass on, from generation to generation, the idea that a “marriage” with everything around one must be like a true matrimony: with giving, joy, suffering, but always together. They used Shugendo to reach this total giving, without fear.

- Could you teach me a Shugendo exercise? The only one I know is to tie oneself to a rope and throw oneself against the rocks of a cliff side; frankly, I haven’t the courage for that.

- Why do you wish to learn?

- Because I always believed that the spiritual doesn't necessarily involve sacrifice and pain. But, as someone I met on this journey said, one must learn what is necessary, not what one wishes.

- Each of us does the exercise which Earth asks of us; I know a man who climbed and descended, a thousand times, for a thousand days, a mountain near here. If the Goddess wants you to practice Shugendo, she will tell you what to do.

He was right. The next day, it came about.

The limit of pain

We are on the top of a mountain, beside a stone column with some inscriptions. From high up, I can make out a temple in the middle of the forest.

- That is one of the three sanctuaries the pilgrim must visit, and when he arrives here, he

feels great joy at already being so close to one of them - says Katsura. - According to tradition, no woman may go beyond this point during her menstrual period. One time, a poet came this far, saw the temple, but because of her menstruation, could not go on. She understood that she would not have the strength to go four days without eating, and decided to return without reaching her objective. She wrote a poem of thanks for the days spent walking, got ready to return the following morning, and went to sleep.

“The Goddess then appeared in her dreams. She said she may go on, because her verses were beautiful; as you can see, fine words can even make the Gods change their opinion. The stone column bears the poem she wrote.”

Katsura and I set out on the five kilometers which separate us from the temple. Suddenly I recall the words of the biologist I met: “If the Goddess wants you to practice Shugendo, the

way of the art of accumulating experience, she will tell you what to do.”

- I shall remove my shoes - I tell Katsura.

The ground is rocky, and bitterly cold, but Shugendo is the communion with nature in all its aspects, including that of physical pain. Katsura also removes her shoes; we set out.

The first step I take, a pointed rock pierces my foot, and I feel the deep gash. I stifle a cry, and continue. Ten minutes later I am walking at half the speed when we set out, my feet hurting more and more, and for a moment I think about how far I still have to travel, that I may get an infection, that my publishers await me in Tokyo, all the interviews and meetings which have been arranged. But the pain quickly pushes back these thoughts; I decide to take another step, and another, and to continue for as long as possible. I think about the many pilgrims who have come

here practicing Shugendo, without eating for many weeks, without sleeping for many days. But the pain will not allow me to think profane or noble thoughts - it is simply pain, occupying all space, frightening me, forcing me to think of my limit, and that I won't succeed.

Nevertheless, I can take another step, and another. The pain now seems to invade my soul, and weakens me spiritually, for I am not able to do that which many people have done before me. It is physical and spiritual pain at the same time; it doesn't seem like a marriage with Mother Earth, but rather a punishment. I am disorientated, do not exchange a single word with Katsura, all that exists in my universe is the pain of treading on the small, sharp rocks of the path leading through the trees.

Then a very strange thing happens: my suffering is so great that, in a defense mechanism, I seem to float above myself, and ignore that which

I am feeling. At the far boundary of pain there is a door to another level of consciousness, and there is no longer room for anything else but nature and myself.

Now I no longer feel pain, am in a lethargic state, my feet continue to follow the path automatically, and I understand that the boundary of pain is not my limit; I can go beyond. I think of all those who suffer without wishing it, and I feel ridiculous flagellating myself like this, but I have learned to live like this - trying out the majority of things before me.

When we finally stop, I take the courage to look at my feet, to see the open wounds. The pain, which was hidden, returns again with force; I consider the journey over now, I will not be able to walk for many days. Imagine my surprise when, the following day, everything has healed; Mother Earth knows how to take care of her children.

And the wounds go beyond the physical body; many wounds which had opened up on my soul were expelled by the pain I felt as I walked along the road to Kumano towards a temple whose name escapes me. Certain suffering can only be forgotten when we manage to float above our pain.

The monk and the message

We are in a private part of a Buddhist temple. We can hear a monk singing, praying out loud, playing a percussion instrument. I recall the other times I practiced Shugendo during the previous days: walking with no coat in sub-zero temperatures, staying awake for a whole night, keeping my forehead pressed against the rough bark of a tree, until the pain managed to anesthetize its own self.

During the whole journey, people said the monk now facing me and reciting prayers is the

greatest Shugendo specialist in the region. I try to concentrate, but eagerly await the end of the ceremony. From there we go to another building, from which I can make out a giant waterfall flowing down the mountain - 134 meters tall, the highest in Japan.

To my surprise (and to all those present), the monk is holding three books written by me, and asks me to autograph them. I take the opportunity to ask him for permission to record our conversation. The monk, who never stops smiling, says yes.

- Was it the hardships on the road to Kumanano which created Shugendo?

- It was necessary to understand the nature which forced man to dominate pain and go beyond his limits. One thousand three hundred years ago, a monk who had difficulties concentrating discovered that weariness and overcom-

ing physical obstacles can help one meditate. The monk walked the road until his death, climbing and descending mountains, staying out in the snow without warm clothes, entering the waterfall every day in order to meditate. Since he became an illuminated man, people decided to follow his example.

- Is Shugendo a Buddhist practice?
- No. It is a series of exercises of physical resistance, which help the soul walk together with the body.
- If one could sum up what Shugendo and the road to Kumano mean, in one sentence, what would that sentence be?
- Those who do physical exercise, gain spiritual experience, provided their minds are fixed on God while making the highest demands on their bodies.

- Up to what point is physical pain important?

- It has a limit. Once the threshold of pain is crossed, the spirit is strengthened. The desires of everyday life lose their meaning, and man is purified. Suffering comes from desire, not from pain.

The monk smiles, asks whether I'd like to see the waterfall close up - and with that I understand that our conversation is over. Before leaving, he turns to me:

- Do not forget: seek to win all your battles, including those you fight against yourself. Do not fear the scars. Do not be afraid of victory.

The following day, as I am about the embark, Katsura - the young 29 year-old woman who has been with me since my first day in Kumano - shows up at the airport and hands me a

small manuscript written in Japanese, with some historical facts about Kumano. I lower my head and ask her to bless me. She doesn't hesitate for one second: she says a few words in Japanese, and when I look up, I see on her face the smile of a young woman who chose to be a guide on a road no one knows, who learned to dominate a pain which not everyone senses, and who understands that the path is taken by walking, and not by thinking about it.

The qualities

The warrior of the light has the qualities of a rock.

When he is on flat terrain - when all around has found harmony - he remains stable. People may build houses upon that which he created, because the storm will not be destructive.

When, however, he is placed on uneven terrain - and things around him do not show any respect or equilibrium for his work - he reveals his strength, rolling towards the enemy which threatens peace. At such times, the warrior is devastating, and no one can detain him.

A warrior of the light thinks of war and peace at the same time, and knows how to act ac-

cording to the circumstances.

Paying for the same thing three times

There is a legend in the region of Punjab, about a thief who broke into a farm and stole two hundred onions. But before he could make his escape, he was caught by the farmer and led before the judge.

The magistrate past sentence: the payment of ten gold pieces. But the man alleged that the fine was too high, so the judge offered him two alternatives: to be whipped twenty times, or eat the two hundred onions.

The thief chose to eat the two hundred onions. When he had eaten twenty-five, his eyes were already filled with tears, and his stomach

was burning up like the fires of hell. Since there were still 175 to go, and he knew he would never bear this punishment, he begged to be thrashed twenty times.

The judge agreed. But when the whip tore into his back for the tenth time, he implored for the punishment to be stopped, for he could not stand the pain. His wish was granted, but the thief still had to pay the ten pieces of gold.

- If you had accepted the fine, you would have avoided eating the onions and wouldn't have suffered with whip - said the judge. - But you preferred the more difficult path, not understanding that, when you have done wrong, it is better to pay up quickly and forget the matter.

Nasrudin and the egg

One morning, Nasrudin - the great Sufi mystic who always pretended to be mad - wrapped an egg in a cloth, went into the town's main square, and called the people who were there.

- Today there will be an important contest!
- he said - Whoever discovers what is inside this cloth, will be given the egg inside it!

The people exchanged glances, intrigued, and answered:

- How can we know? No one is capable of divination!

Nasrudin insisted:

- That which is inside this cloth has a yellow center like a yolk, surrounded by a clear liquid like egg white, which in turn is contained inside a shell which breaks very easily. It is a symbol of fertility, and reminds us of birds flying to their nests. So, who can tell me what is hidden here?

All the folk thought Nasrudin was holding an egg, but the answer was so obvious, no one wanted to embarrass themselves in front of everyone else.

What if it wasn't an egg, but something more important, a product of the fertile Sufi mystic's imagination? A yellow center might suggest the sun, the surrounding liquid could be an alchemist's concoction. No, the madman was definitely trying to make someone look a fool.

Nasrudin asked twice more, and no one dared say something foolish.

So he unwrapped the cloth and showed everyone the egg.

- You all knew the answer - he said - And no one dared put it into words.

“Such are the lives of those who haven’t the courage to risk: solutions are generously provided by God, but people always seek complicated explanations, and end up doing nothing.”

The World according to the Mexican Sorcerers

The great majority of spiritual traditions present in the Americas before Columbus's arrival have managed - by some miracle! - to preserve their roots. In other words, they were stronger than the civilizations which were here, and which soon succumbed to the conquistadors.

Among them, Mexican shamanism, which is still practiced by many local tribes, is one of the most widely studied; various anthropologists have carried out serious studies about the way in which the sorcerers understood God's presence and their spiritual search. Here are some of the aspects of this understanding of the universe, drawn from various sources:

1] The absence of the personal story: in order for magical rites to pass from generation to generation, the sorcerer (shaman) must forget all he learned before his initiation into magic. According to tradition, a man or women who are tied to his past, will in the end allow himself to be governed by his parents' way of thinking, or that of the society in which he lives. This is why all those who are initiated choose a new name and seek to free themselves from their memories, both good and bad.

2] The process of forgetting: in order to abandon the story he lived in, the sorcerer spends months on end remembering in detail each of the events of his life. Some traditions require him to spend hour after hour speaking out loud to a glass filled with water, reciting everything which happened at each meeting with each person; thus, the experience is removed from the memory and enters the water - which is then thrown into a river. In this way, the head is left "empty", and

can begin to be filled with new things.

3] Interior silence: once free of his old thoughts, the sorcerer concentrates on his inner silence, and waits for the spirits to begin telling the true story of the Universe. This silence, together with the absence of memories of the past, gives the sorcerer the sensation of total freedom to understand a new world.

4] The web: when he begins understanding his new universe, he enters a sort of trance, and “sees” that everything around us is a giant web of luminous fibers, all linked - in other words, it is a unique object, and part of the same energy. Sometimes, these luminous fibers are condensed in an egg shape, and this means that there is the soul of a human being. (Carlos Castaneda explains this vision very well in his book *A Separate Reality*).

5] The encounter with power: looking at his

own “egg of light”, the sorcerer notices a point, which must join with the luminous fibers capable of conducting the energy of power. This energy, although it can be used by the sorcerer, cannot be manipulated - he must know how to gently lead it to his apprenticeship. Approaching this pointing of joining up is the most difficult work during initiation, and requires silence, meditation and perseverance.

6] The negative energy: some of these fibers of light conduct destructive fluid issued by other sorcerers - who seek not knowledge but control over the souls of others.

7] The “disturbance”: there is always an event in our lives which is responsible for the fact that we ceased to progress. A trauma, an especially bitter defeat, an amorous disappointment, these all lead us towards a cowardly attitude, and we refuse to go on. The shaman, during the process of forgetting his personal history, must first

free himself of this “disturbance point”.

According to Mexican sorcerers (and also, curiously, to some Buddhist thinking), death enters through the region of the navel. At this moment, the “egg of light” disintegrates, and the fibers which were there blend with the energy of the universe, until they regroup again in a new form.

Learning to choose

Saint Antão was living in the desert, when a young man came to him:

- Father, I sold all my belongings and gave to the poor. I kept only a few things in order to survive here. I want you to teach me the way to salvation.

Saint Antão asked the young man to sell the few things he had kept and, with the money, to buy meat in town. He was to return with the meat tied to his body.

The young man obeyed. On his way back, he was attacked by dogs and falcons, who wanted a piece of the meat.

- I am back - said the young man, showing his scratched, bitten body, and his clothes in rags. Why did you tell me to do that?

- To show that what you brought from your past, is of no use in your present. When you must choose a new path, do not bring old experiences with you. Those who strike out afresh, but who attempt to retain a little of the old life, end up torn apart by their own memories.

Changing attitude

A young man went to an abbot from the Sceta monastery, wanting to follow a spiritual path.

- For one whole year, give a coin to anyone who provokes you. - said the abbot.

For twelve months the young man gave a coin away whenever someone provoked him. At the end of a year, he returned to the abbot, to find out his next task.

- Go into town and fetch me food.

As soon as the young man left, the abbot disguised himself as a beggar and - taking a shortcut he knew - went to the gates of the town.

When the young man approached, he began to insult him.

- How marvelous! - said the young man to the so-called beggar. - For a whole year I had to pay everyone who provoked me, and now I can be provoked for free, without having to spend a thing!

Upon hearing this, the abbot removed his disguise.

- Whoever is capable of not minding what others say, is a man on the path to wisdom. You no longer take insults seriously, therefore you are ready for the next step.

Pretending to be a fool matters not

Mullah Nasrudin (the central figure in almost all tales of the Sufi tradition) had already become a sort of attraction at the main market in the town. Whenever he went there to beg, people would show him a large coin and a small one: Nasrudin always chose the small one.

A generous man who was tired of seeing everyone laugh at Nasrudin, explained to him:

“When people offer you two coins, choose the larger one. Then you will have more money, and people will not think you a fool.”

“You are surely right”, replied Nasrudin.

“But if I always chose the larger coin, people would stop offering me money, in order to prove that I am a greater fool than they are. And then I would no longer receive enough for my food. There is nothing wrong with appearing to be a fool, if what you are doing is in fact intelligent.”

We are all responsible

A group of men came along the street; heavily armed soldiers leading a condemned man to the gallows.

“That man is no good”, said a disciple to Nasrudin. “I once gave him a silver coin in order to help him start his life afresh, and he did nothing important.”

“He may be no good, but perhaps he is now on his way to the gallows because of you,” argued the master. “Perhaps he used the alms in order to buy a dagger, which he then used in committing his crime - because instead of helping him with love and care, you chose to give him alms in order to release yourself from your obligation.”

Each thing in its own place

All Nasrudin's disciples were gathered at a feast. They ate and drank for several hours, and talked about the origins of the stars. The night drew on and everyone made ready to go home.

A fine plate of sweets was left on the table: Nasrudin made all his disciples eat it.

One, however, refused.

“The master is testing us,” he said. “He wants to see whether we can control our desires.”

“You are mistaken,” replied Nasrudin.

“The best way of dominating a desire, is to satisfy it. I would rather you had the sweets in your bellies - their rightful place - than in your minds, which should be filled with nobler things.”

The transitory and the definitive

All paths in the world lead to the warrior's heart; he dives without hesitation into the river of passions, which flows unceasing through his life.

The warrior knows he is free to choose that which he desires; his decisions are taken with courage, detachment, and - at times - with a certain amount of madness.

Accept your passions and delight in them intensely. Know that one must not renounce the enthusiasm of the conquests; they are part of life, and please all who take part in them. But never lose sight of the enduring things, and the

solid ties created by time.

A warrior knows how to distinguish between that which is transitory, and that which is definitive.

A type of strategy

A Chinese wise man says of the warrior of the light's strategies:

“Make your enemy believe he will not benefit greatly, should he decide to attack you; thus, you diminish his enthusiasm.

“Do not be ashamed to withdraw temporarily from the battle, if you notice that the enemy is stronger; the important thing is not the single battle, but the outcome of the war.

“Nor should you be ashamed, if you are strong enough, to pretend to be weak; this will cause the enemy to be imprudent, and attack too soon.

“During a war, one’s capability to surprise the adversary is the key to victory.”

When to take risks

A warrior of the light, before entering an important combat, asks himself: “up to which point have I developed my skills?”

He knows that the battles fought in the past always provided him with a lesson. However, many of these teachings caused the warrior to suffer more than necessary. More than once, he wasted his time fighting for a lie.

But the victorious do not repeat the same mistake again.

A warrior cannot refuse to fight; but he also knows that he must not risk important feelings, in exchange for benefits which are not worthy of his love.

This is why the warrior only risks his heart
from something worthwhile.

Belonging to the world

The warriors of the light maintain the glint in their eyes.

They are in the world, are part of the lives of others, and begin their journey with neither a bag nor sandals. Often they are cowardly. They do not always act correctly.

The warriors of the light suffer for useless things, act niggardly, and sometimes believe they are incapable of growing. They frequently think they are unworthy of any sort of blessing or miracle.

The warriors of the light are not always sure about what it is they are doing here. They often stay up all night, thinking their lives have

no meaning.

This is why they are warriors of the light.
Because they err. Because they question. Because
they seek a reason - and they will surely find it.

The best and the worst

A poet says: “the warrior of the light chooses his enemies.”

The warrior knows what he is capable of. He does not need to go around telling others of his qualities and virtues.

Nevertheless - just like in the Old West - someone always comes along wanting to prove that he is the better man.

The warrior knows there is no “better” or “worse”: each has the gifts necessary for his individual journey.

But some people insist. They provoke, offend, do everything they can to irritate him. This

is when then warrior's heart says: "do not accept the insults, they will not increase your ability. You will tire unnecessarily."

A warrior of the light does not waste his time listening to provocations; he has a destiny to fulfill.

Using one's own madness

A warrior of the light studies very carefully the position he wishes to conquer.

However difficult his objective may be, there is always a way to overcome the obstacles. He verifies the alternative routes, sharpens his sword, and seeks to fill his heart with the perseverance necessary to face the challenge.

But, as he advances, the warrior realizes there are difficulties he had not foreseen at the outset.

If he waits for the ideal moment, he will never move from his position; he sees that a little

madness is needed for the next step.

The warrior uses a little madness. Because - in war and in love - one cannot foresee everything.

Moving forward

The warrior of the light does not always have faith. There are times when he does not believe in anything at all.

And he asks his heart: “Will all the effort be worthwhile?”

But the heart remains silent. And the warrior must decide for himself.

So he seeks an example. And he remembers that Jesus endured something similar - in order to live the human condition in all its fullness.

“Take this cup away from me,” said Jesus. He too lost heart and his courage, but he did not stop.

The warrior of the light remains faithless.

But he moves forward nevertheless, and his
faith will return.

Isaac dies

A certain Rabbi was adored by the community; everyone was enchanted by what he said.

Except for Isaac, who never missed an opportunity to contradict the Rabbi's interpretations and point out faults in his teachings. The others were annoyed by Isaac, but could do nothing about it.

One day, Isaac died. During the funeral, the community noticed that the Rabbi was deeply upset.

- Why are you so sad? - someone commented. - He was always criticizing everything you said!

- I am not upset for my friend who is now in heaven - replied the Rabbi - I am upset for my own self. While everyone revered me, he challenged me, and I was obliged to improve. Now he has gone, I am afraid I shall stop growing.

Forgiving in the same spirit

The Rabbi Nahum of Chernobyl was always being insulted by a shopkeeper. One day, the latter's business began to go badly.

“It must be the Rabbi, who is asking for God’s revenge,” he thought. He went to ask Nahum’s forgiveness.

- I forgive you in the same spirit you ask for forgiveness - replied the Rabbi.

But the man’s losses just kept increasing, until he was reduced to misery. Nahum’s horrified disciples went to ask him what had happened.

- I forgave him, but he continued to hate me deep down in his heart - said the Rabbi - Therefore, his hatred contaminated everything he did, and God's punishment became more and more severe.

Of trees and towns

In the Mojave desert one often comes across the notorious ghost towns: constructed near gold mines, they were abandoned once all the gold had been extracted from the earth. They played their part and it made no sense to continue to inhabit them.

When we walk through a forest, we also see trees which - once they have played their part, fall down. But, unlike the ghost towns, what has happened? They have opened up space for light to penetrate, fertilize the soil, and their trunks are covered with new vegetation.

Our old age will depend on the way in which we live. We can end up like a ghost town. Or like a generous tree, which continues to be

important, even after it has fallen to the ground.

The meaning of truth

In the name of truth, the human race has committed its worst crimes. Men and women were burned. The culture of whole civilizations destroyed. Those who sought a different path were marginalized.

One of them was crucified, in the name of truth. But - before dying - he left behind a great definition of Truth.

It is not that which gives us certainties.

It is not that which gives us profundity.

It is not that which makes us do better than others.

It is not that which keeps us in the prison of prejudices.

Truth is that which gives us freedom.
“Know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” said Jesus.

About the rhythm and the Road

- There was something missing in your lecture about the Road to Santiago - a pilgrim told me as soon as we left the House of Galicia in Madrid, where I had just attended conference.

There was much missing, since my intention had merely been to share some of my experiences. Nevertheless, I invited her for a coffee, curious to learn what she considered an important omission.

And Begoña - that was her name - told me:

- I have noticed that the majority of pil-

grims, whether on the Road to Santiago, or on the paths of life, always try to follow the rhythms of others.

“At the beginning of my pilgrimage, I tried to stay with my group. It was tiring and demanded of my body more than I could give, I was always tense, and in the end had trouble with a tendon in my left foot. Unable to walk for two days, I understood that I would only reach Santiago if I obeyed my own personal rhythm.

“I took longer than the others, and had to walk alone for long stretches, but it was only by respecting my own rhythm that I managed to complete the journey. Since then I have applied this to everything I must do in life: to respect my own tempo.”

All turns to dust

The feasts in Valênciа, Spain, have a curious ritual whose origins lie in the ancient community of carpenters.

During the entire year, craftsmen and artists construct giant sculptures in wood. On the week of the feast, they take these sculptures to the main square. People pass, comment, marvel and are moved by such creativity. Then, on St. Joseph's day all these works of art - except one - are burned on a giant bonfire, watched by thousands of onlookers.

- Why so much work for nothing? - asked an Englishwoman beside me, as flames licked the sky.

- You too will come to an end one day - replied a Spanish woman. - Can you imagine if, at that moment, an angel asked God: "why so much work for nothing?"

Begging for alms

Part of the training to become a Zen Buddhist monk consists of a practice known as takuhatsu - a pilgrimage to beg. As well as helping the monasteries which live off donations and forcing the disciple to be humble, this practice has another meaning: to purify the town he lives in.

This is because - according to Zen philosophy - the giver, the beggar and the alms themselves are part of an important chain of equilibrium.

He who begs does so because he is in need; but he who gives, acts in this way because he too is in need.

The alms serve as a link between these

two necessities, and the town's environment improves, since all were able to carry out actions which needed to take place.

Acting on impulse

Father Zeca, of the Church of Resurrection in Copacabana, tells that he was once in a bus, when suddenly he heard a voice telling him he must stand and preach the word of Christ there and then.

Zeca began talking to the voice: “I will look ridiculous, this is no place for a sermon”, he said. But something inside him insisted he must speak: “I am shy, please don’t ask this of me,” he implored.

The inner impulse persisted.

Then he remembered his vow - to give himself up to Christ’s will. He stood - terribly ashamed - and began speaking about the gospels.

Everyone listened in silence. He looked at each of the passengers, and only one or two turned away. He said everything he felt, finished his sermon, and sat down again.

To this day he does not know what task he was fulfilling that day. But he is absolutely certain he was fulfilling a task.

I must live my favors

I must live all the favors God has given me today. A favor cannot be saved. There is no bank where one can deposit favors received, to be used in accordance with our will. If I do not make the most of these blessings, I shall lose them forever.

God knows that we are artists of life. One day he gives us a chisel for sculptures, another brushes and canvas, another a quill to write with. But we will never succeed in using chisels on canvas, or quills on sculptures. Each day has its own miracle. I must accept the blessings of today, to create that which is mine; if I do this with objectivity and without guilt, tomorrow I shall receive more.

San Francisco, United States

I walk through a park with my American editor, John Loudon, and his wife, Sharon. We can see the city of San Francisco in the distance, illuminated by the setting sun. Sharon wrote a book about a Benedictine monastery, and tells us that the afternoon prayers, called vespers, are songs of faith in the certainty that the night will pass.

- The vespers indicate the necessity we have to be near others at nightfall - she says. - But our society has forgotten the importance of this nearness, and pretends to greatly prize each person's ability to deal with his own difficulties. We no longer pray together; we hide our solitude as

if we were afraid to admit it exists. Sharon pauses, before adding:

- I was like that once. Until one day I lost my fear of depending on my neighbor, because I discovered that he too needed me.

Limoges, France

A apprentice in occultism I know, hoping to impress his master, read some handbooks about magic and decided to buy the material indicated in its pages.

With great difficulty, he managed to find a certain type of incense, a few talismans, a wooden structure with sacred letters written in a certain order. Upon seeing this, the master said:

- Do you think that by rolling some computer wires around your neck, you will acquire all the machine's knowledge? Do you believe that, by purchasing sophisticated hats and clothes, you will also acquire the good taste and sophistication of those who made them? Learn to use objects as allies, not as guides.

Kawaguchiko, Japan

I met the painter Miie Tamaki during a seminar about Feminine Energy. I asked about her religion.

- I no longer have a religion - she replied.
Noting my surprise, she explained:

- I was educated as a Buddhist. The monks taught me that the spiritual path is a constant renunciation: we must overcome our envy, our hatred, all anxieties of faith, our desires.

“I managed to free myself of all of that, until one day my heart became empty: the sins had left, and taken my human nature along with them.

“To begin with I was pleased, but I noticed that I no longer shared the joys and passions of those around me. That was when I abandoned religion: today I have my conflicts, my moments of anger and despair, but I know that I am once again close to mankind - and consequently close to God”.

Lourdes, France

When I was on the road to Rome, one of the four sacred ways of my magic tradition, I realized - after nearly twenty days of being practically alone - that I was far worse than when I set out. With the solitude, I began to have niggardly, bitter, ignoble feelings.

I sought out my guide, and told her. I said that, at the outset of the pilgrimage, I thought I would come closer to God: however, after three weeks, I was feeling much worse.

- You are better, do not worry - she said. - In fact, when we light up our inner light, the first things we see are the cobwebs and dust, our weak points. They were there all the time, only you saw nothing in the darkness. Now it will be easier to

cleanse your soul.

The lost horse

Many years ago in a poor Chinese village, there lived a peasant with his son. His only material possession, apart from some land and a small straw hut, was a horse he had inherited from his father.

One day, the horse ran off, leaving the man with no animal with which to till the land. His neighbors - who respected him greatly for his honesty and diligence - came to his house to say how much they regretted what had happened. He thanked them for their visit, but asked:

- How can you know that what has happened has been a misfortune in my life?

Someone mumbled to a friend: "he can't

accept reality; let him think what he wants, as long as he isn't saddened by what happened."

And the neighbors went off, pretending to agree with what they had heard.

A week later, the horse returned to the stable, but it was not alone; it brought with it a fine mare for company. Upon hearing this, the villagers - who were flustered since they now understood the answer the man had given them - returned to the peasant's house, in order to congratulate him on his good fortune.

- Before you had only one horse, and now you have two. Congratulations! - they said.

- Many thanks for your visit and for all your concern - answered the peasant. - But how can you know that what has happened has been a blessing in my life?

Disconcerted, and thinking he must be going mad, the neighbors went off, and on the way commented: "does he really not understand that God has sent him a gift?"

A month later, the peasant's son decided to tame the mare. But the animal unexpectedly reared up and the boy fell and broke his leg.

The neighbors returned to the peasant's house - bringing gifts for the wounded boy. The mayor of the village offered his condolences to the father, saying that all were very sad at what had happened.

The man thanked them for their visit and their concern, but asked:

- How can you know that what has happened has been a misfortune in my life?

They were all astonished to hear this, since

no one could be in any doubt that the accident of a son was a real tragedy. As they left the peasant's house, some said to others: "he really has gone mad; his only son might limp forever, and he is still in doubt about whether what happened is a misfortune."

Some months passed, and Japan declared war on China. The Emperor's envoys traveled throughout the land in search for healthy young men to be sent to the battle front. Upon arrival in the village, they recruited all the young men except the peasant's son, whose leg was broken.

None of the young men returned alive. The son recovered, the two animals bred and their offspring were sold at a good price. The peasant began visiting his neighbors to console and help them, - since they had at all times been so caring. Whenever one of them complained, the peasant said: "how do you know it is a misfortune?" If anyone becomes overjoyed, he asked: "how do

you know it is a blessing?" And the men in that village understood that beyond appearances, life has other meanings.

The two boards

A warrior of the light shares his world with the people he loves. He wishes to encourage them to do what they like, but hasn't the courage.

At these times, the adversary appears holding two boards.

Written on one board: "Think more of yourself. Keep your blessings to yourself, otherwise you will lose everything."

The other board reads: "who are you to help others? Can't you even see your own defects?"

A warrior of the light knows he has defects. But he also knows he cannot grow alone, and distance himself from his companions.

So he throws both boards to the ground, even though he believes they contain some truth deep down. They turn to dust, and the warrior continues to help those near him.

About the way

The wise Lao Tzu speaks about the warrior of the light's journey:

“The Way includes respect for all that is small and subtle. Always know the right moment to take any action necessary.

“Even if you have fired a bow and arrow many times, continue to pay attention to how you place the arrow, and how you draw the bow.

“When the beginner is aware of his necessities, he becomes more intelligent than the wise man who is distracted.

“To accumulate love means luck, to accumulate hatred means a calamity. Whoever does

not recognize the door to problems will one day leave it open, letting tragedy in.

“The combat has nothing to do with the fight.”

True tension

“When my bow is drawn,” says Herrigen to his Zen master, “a moment comes when, if I do not fire immediately, I feel that I will run out of strength.”

“As long as you try to trigger the moment to fire the arrow, you shall not learn the art of archery,” says the master. “The hand which draws the bow must open up like the hand of a boy. What sometimes hinders the shot’s precision is the overactive will of the archer.”

A warrior of the light sometimes thinks: “that which I do not do, shall not be done.”

That is not quite the case: he must act, but he must also allow the Universe to act at the right time.

Maintaining one's concentration

For the warrior of the light, nothing is abstract. Everything is concrete, and everything concerns him. He is not sitting in the comfort of his tent, observing what goes on in the world. The warrior of the light accepts each challenge as an opportunity to transform himself.

Some of his companions spend their lives complaining about the lack of choice, or commenting decisions which do not concern them. The warrior, however, turns thought into action.

Sometimes he errs his objective, and pays - without complaining - the price for his mistake. At other times, he strays from the path, and loses

much time returning to his original destiny.

But a warrior is never distracted.

Threatened charity

Some time ago, my wife helped a Swiss tourist in Ipanema, who said he had been robbed by pickpockets. He spoke terrible Portuguese with a heavy accent, and claimed to be without a passport, money or place to stay.

My wife bought him lunch and gave him enough money to stay the night in a hotel while he contacted his embassy, and went off. Some days later, a Rio newspaper printed a story about this “Swiss tourist”, who was in fact nothing but a creative conman putting on an nonexistent accent, and taking advantage of the good faith of people who love Rio and, eager to exorcise the negative image which - fairly or not - has become our city’s postcard.

Upon reading this news item, my wife's only comment was: "well that won't stop me from helping people."

Her comment reminded me of the story of the wise man who, one afternoon, came to the town of Akbar. No one took much notice of his presence, and he was unable to interest the population in his teachings. After a time, he became an object of laughter and sarcasm among the townsfolk.

One day, as he wandered down Akbar's main thoroughfare, a group of men and women began to insult him. Instead of pretending not to be aware of what was going on, the wise man went over to them and blessed them.

One of the men commented:

- Is it possible that, on top of everything else, this man here is deaf? We hurl abuse at you,

and all you do is reply with beautiful words!

- Each of us can only offer the other that which is his - was the wise man's answer.

How the path was forged

In issue nr. 106 of Jornalinho, (Portugal), I find a story which teaches us much about that which we choose without thinking:

One day, a calf needed to cross a virgin forest in order to return to its pasture. Being an irrational animal, it forged out a tortuous path full of bends, up and down hills.

The next day, a dog came by and used the same path to cross the forest. Next it was a sheep's turn, the head of a flock which, upon finding the opening, led its companions through it.

Later, men began using the path: they entered and left, turned to the right, to the left, bent down, deviating obstacles, complaining and curs-

ing - and quite rightly so. But they did nothing to create a different alternative.

After so much use, in the end, the path became a trail along which poor animals toiled under heavy loads, being forced to go three hours to cover a distance which would normally take thirty minutes, had no one chosen to follow the route opened up by the calf.

Many years passed and the trail became the main road of a village, and later the main avenue of a town. Everyone complained about the traffic, because the route it took was the worst possible one.

Meanwhile, the old and wise forest laughed, at seeing how men tend to blindly follow the way already open, without ever asking whether it really is the best choice.

Tibet and reincarnation

Upon being asked by the journalist Mick Brown, whether he was a reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lamas, the present Dalai Lama answered:

- This is a very complicated matter. Some people are reincarnated, others are merely symbols of the being they ceased to incarnate. Through my previous lives I believe I have strong ties with my people, and all my spiritual work manifests itself in that which I can do to bring back freedom to my country.

In other words: the Dalai Lama doesn't answer "yes" or "no". However, according to Tibetan Buddhist teachings, our subtle conscience - which exists in all human beings, but which is

normally dormant - lives on after death. All the actions, gestures and intentions of the life which has just ended, are stored in this subtle conscience; and all this, after remaining in empty space for a time, ends up finding its physical form once again, in a new body.

The Tibetan people store in this subtle conscience (a variation of that which we know as soul) a cycle of behavior which will help in the next life. The more often one repeats the task, the stronger the mark it leaves behind will be - thus, religious rituals are almost daily.

Mick Brown says that our culture does not accept the idea that a subtle conscience can remain dematerialized in order to then manifest itself once again. However, Peter Kedge believes that the natural talents we see in certain children - such as a gift for music, or mathematics - are the results of a conscience which has lived before, and now manifests itself once again.

In Tibet, this conscience is not only deliberately developed, but when a master dies, he seeks to leave clues so that his next body can quickly be recognized.

One of the better-known recent cases is that of the Spanish boy, Osel, who is now 11 years old and lives in northern India. In 1935 the Lama Yeshe was born, who spent his life studying Tibetan mysticism, was exiled during the Chinese invasion and ended his days in California. On the day of his death, he called his favorite disciple and said that this time he would be reincarnated in the West. Some years passed, and the disciple dreamed about Yeshe, asking him to go and seek him.

Which is what he did: visiting the various monasteries founded by his master, he ended up in the town of Bubion, in southern Spain, where he found a boy who had been born on the exact day of his dream. He showed the boy a series of

bells and counting beads; the boy, who was then 2, selected the very one which had belonged to the Lama Yeshe - and was proclaimed his reincarnation, and taken to a monastery in order to be educated according to Tibetan rituals.

The predecessor of the present Dalai Lama indicated where he would be reborn. Three or four years after his death, monks went to a village in eastern Tibet, and found a child who fitted the description. This child - the present Dalai Lama - was taken to the Potala palace, in Lhasa. As soon as he arrived, he began walking around the palace very naturally, and at a certain moment saw a box.

- My teeth are in there - he said.

And in fact, the box did indeed contain his predecessor's false teeth.

There is a reason for the vague answer giv-

en by the Dalai Lama to journalist Mick Brown: all great Tibetan masters always leave similar clues to the above example, but it is impossible to verify or authenticate them outside their cultural context. This has resulted in a series of false masters popping up here and there around the planet, claiming to belong to a lineage of truly wise men, but whose single goal was to gather a group of disciples to contribute financially to their well-being.

The Dalai Lama's brother, Tenzin Choegyal, says:

“As a Tibetan, I believe in the reincarnation of man. But the West only seems interested in the exotic side to our customs - the oracles, rituals and ceremonies. None of that has any importance: the highest ideal, the miracle of Buddhism, is to allow any human being with an empty heart to become a person filled with love and compassion.”

Stories of kings and wise men

The kingdom of this world

An old hermit was once invited to visit the court of the most powerful king of those times.

- I envy such a saintly man, who is content with so little - said the ruler.

- I envy Your Majesty, who is content with even less than I - responded the hermit.

- How can you say such a thing, if this entire country belongs to me? - said the offended king.

- For precisely that reason. I have the music of the celestial spheres, I have the rivers and mountains of the whole world, I have the moon and the sun, because I have God in my soul. Your Majesty, on the other hand, has only this kingdom.

The ancestor's bones

There was a king of Spain who was very proud of his ancestors, and who was known for his cruelty to the weak.

One time, he was walking with his advisers across a field in Aragon, where - years before - he had lost his father during a battle, when he found a holy man searching a large pile of bones.

- What are you doing there? - asked the king.

- Honored greetings, Your Majesty - said

the holy man. - When I heard that the king of Spain was coming this way, I resolved to recover the bones of your late father and present them to you. But however hard I search, I cannot find them: they are exactly the same as the bones of country folk, the poor, beggars and slaves.

Fetch another sort of doctor

A powerful monarch called a holy father - everyone said he had healing powers - to help him with his back ache.

- God will help us - said the holy man. - But first let us understand the reason for these pains. I suggest Your Majesty confesses now, for confession makes men face up to their problems, and liberates much guilt.

Annoyed at having to think about so many problems, the king said:

- I do not wish to speak of these matters; I need someone who heals without asking questions.

The priest went off and returned half an hour later with another man.

- I believe that words can relieve pain, and help me to discover the right path to a cure - he said. - But you do not wish to talk, and I cannot help you. This is the man you need: my friend here is a veterinarian, and does not generally speak to his patients.

The importance of the cat in meditation

Having recently written a book about madness, I was forced to wonder how many things we do are imposed on us by necessity, or by the absurd. Why wear a tie? Why do clocks run “clockwise”? If we live in a decimal system, why does the day have 24 hours of 60 minutes?

The fact is, many of the rules we obey nowadays have no real foundation. Nevertheless, if we wish to act differently, we are considered “crazy” or “immature”.

Meanwhile, society continues to create some systems which, in the fullness of time, lose their reason for existence, but continue to im-

pose their rules. An interesting Japanese story illustrates what I mean by this:

A great Zen Buddhist master, who was in charge of the Mayu Kagi monastery, had a cat which was his true passion in life. So, during meditation classes, he kept the cat by his side - in order to make the most of his company.

One morning, the master - who was already quite old - passed away. His most adept disciple took his place.

- What shall we do with the cat? - asked the other monks.

As a tribute to the memory of their old instructor, the new master decided to allow the cat to continue attending the Zen-Buddhist classes.

Some disciples from the neighboring monasteries, traveling through those parts, discovered

that, in one of the region's most renowned temples, a cat took part in the meditation sessions. The story began to spread.

Many years passed. The cat died, but the students at the monastery were so used to its presence, they soon found another cat. Meanwhile, the other temples began introducing cats in their meditation sessions: they believed the cat was truly responsible for the fame and excellence of Mayu Kagi's teaching, and in doing so forgot that the old master was a fine instructor.

A generation passed, and technical treatises began to appear about the importance of the cat in Zen meditation. A university professor developed a thesis - which was accepted by the academic community - that felines have the ability to increase human concentration, and eliminate negative energy.

And so, for a whole century, the cat was

considered an essential part of Zen-Buddhist studies in that region.

Until a master appeared who was allergic to animal hair, and decided to remove the cat from his daily exercises with the students.

There was a fierce negative reaction - but the master insisted. Since he was an excellent instructor, the students continued to make the same scholarly progress, in spite of the absence of the cat.

Little by little, the monasteries - always in search of new ideas, and already tired of having to feed so many cats - began eliminating the animals from the classes. In twenty years time, new revolutionary theories began to appear - with very convincing titles such as "The Importance of Meditating Without a Cat", or "Balancing the Zen Universe by Will Power Alone, Without the Help of Animals".

Another century passed, and the cat withdrew completely from the meditation rituals in that region. But two hundred years were necessary for everything to return to normal - because during all this time, no one asked why the cat was there.

I want to find God

The man arrived at the monastery exhausted:

- I have been looking for God for so long - he said. - Perhaps you can teach me the right way of finding Him.

- Enter and see our convent - said the priest, taking him by the hand and leading him to the chapel. - Here are some fine works of art of the 16th century, which portray the life of the Lord, and His glory among men.

The man waited, while the priest explained each one of the beautiful paintings and sculptures which adorned the chapel. Afterwards, he repeated the question:

- Everything you showed me is very beautiful. But I'd like to learn the best way to find God.

- God! - replied the priest. - You said exactly that: God!

And he took the man to the refectory, where supper was being prepared for the monks.

- Look around: soon supper will be served, and you are invited to dine with us. You will be able to listen to the Scriptures, while you satisfy your hunger.

- I am not hungry, and I have already read the entire Scriptures - insisted the man. - I wish to learn. I have come here to find God.

Again the priest took the stranger by the hand and they began walking around the cloisters which encircled a lovely garden.

- I ask my monks to always keep the grass cut, and to remove the dry leaves from the fountain you see over there in the middle. I think this must be the best kept monastery in the whole region.

The stranger walked with the priest a short way, then excused himself, saying he must be leaving.

- Won't you stay for supper? asked the priest.

As he mounted his horse, the stranger spoke:

- Congratulations on your fine church, your welcoming refectory and the perfectly clean courtyard. But I have journeyed many leagues just in order to learn to find God, and not to marvel at efficiency, comfort and discipline.

A flash of lightening struck, the horse reared up and the earth shook. Suddenly, the strange man removed his disguise, and the priest saw that it was Jesus.

- God is wherever He is invited in - said Jesus. - But you have closed the doors of this monastery to Him, with rules, pride, wealth, ostentation. The next time a stranger comes asking to find God, do not show him what you have managed in His name: listen to the question, and try to answer with love, charity and simplicity.

And so saying, He disappeared.

The cracked jar

An Indian legend tells of a man who carried water to his village every day, in two large jars tied to the ends of a wooden pole, which he balanced on his back.

One of the jars was older than the other, and had some small cracks; every time the man covered the distance to his house, half of the water was lost.

For two years, the man made the same journey. The younger jar was always very proud of its performance, safe in the knowledge that it was up to the mission it had been made for, while the other jar was mortified with shame at only fulfilling half of its allotted task, even though it knew that those cracks were the result of many years

hard work.

It was so ashamed that one day, while the man got ready to fetch water from the well, it decided to speak to him:

- I want to apologize, but because of the many years of service, you are only able to deliver half of my load, and quench half of the thirst which awaits you at your home.

The man smiled, and said:

- When we return, observe carefully the path.

And so it did. And the jar noticed that, on its side, many flowers and plants grew.

- See how nature is more lovely on your side? - commented the man. - I always knew you were cracked, and decided to make use of this

fact. I planted flowers and vegetables, and you have always watered them. I have picked many roses to decorate my house with, I have fed my children with lettuce, cabbage and onions. If you were not as you are, how could I have done that?

“All of us, at some point, grow old and start to acquire other qualities. We can always make the most of each one of these new qualities and obtain a good result.

