

## Maturity, Leisure and Spirituality

It is during the middle and later years of our life that the majority of us make the most profound contributions to the human community. The synthesis of decades of experience proves to be the talisman of wisdom that the community eagerly awaits from us. As in *The Prophet*, the teller, on his way to *the other side*, is asked by the wise to give them of his wisdom and tell them all that has happened between birth and death.

Many cultures show their anticipation of being nurtured by the wisdom of the elders. The Persian tale below carries that anticipation with an instruction to stay the course.

The smell of carrion, and a belch of black smoke rode the indiscriminating air currents from the distant mountain into the valleys below. Looking up to assay the formidable dragon in the distance, the youth crept closer. The menacing dragon lay watchful, jealously hoarding the great pearl that belonged by right of birth of the youth. After many harrowing, unsuccessful attempts to overcome the dragon, the youth finally quit, knowing that somehow and at some time, the dragon would have to be reckoned with.

He joined a distant community, married and carried out the duties of a householder. The memory of the pearl and dragon still lingered, however, rendering all else pale by comparison. Deep inside, dissatisfaction lived a shadowed existence.

The ache of dissatisfaction faded with time and the boy became a man, losing himself in his duties. Aging gracefully, he found life a worthy venture. But then he began to remember the pearl and the dragon. The fire of his quest warmed his chest again and pulled his heart back to the dragon's lair in the mountains. He returned to the mountains only to find the dragon withered and shriveled by virtue of the practical daily life the man lived. In his amazement the elder realized that some things are overcome only through the process of living.

The Persian tale speaks directly to the spiritual value of maturity and a long life. Many such tales and myths, address the importance of wisdom gained in the later phases of life. Something wonderful happens to us in each succeeding decade, and like the youth turned elder, the time that befriends maturity virtually shrinks the insurmountable into much more manageable proportions. And while maturing we gain in the potencies of insight and wisdom.

Leisure is essential for that potency, for it is how we locate the dwelling of our inner existence. Leisure is essential for deliberation, for it is the resonance of reflection. Leisure is essential for reflection, for it is how we come to understand a life fully lived. Leisure is essential for maturity for it is how we come to know the inner mysteries.

Translating reflection of mystery into insight yields wisdom, and the union of maturity and leisure is its womb.

As we mature, the community is committed into our able hands for its nurturance. It looks to us for sustenance as the future merges with the present. Such a charge is to be held with reverence. Held warmly in our heart we remember and respond to the unforgotten charge. We return to the community with the talismans of a journey forged by reflection. Upon our return we have nourishment for those who follow later in life.

Through giving the milk of our wisdom, we are renewed. We become alive at every level. Like the sun, we are nourished on our own life-force, enthusiastically growing and giving back every instant of our life. And all of this paradoxically takes place when, in the later years of life, we repose in the grace of our own spirit.

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