

REFLECTIONS ON ROYALTY

A Leadership Parable

The little man sits cross-legged. His hair is receding before its time and his visage is somewhat guarded, somewhat clouded by the magnitude of inhumanity, by the abundance of harsh words. He sometimes feels like a piece of bark being battered by stormy seas. But because he sits cross-legged, he can smile a little – he can allow his eyes to twinkle with the belief of an inner truth which transcends the inhumanity and the harsh words. He dreams he knows of better days.

One day, the King's son, travelling about the realm, recalled the village and realized that although it guarded a critical mountain pass, he had never visited it. And so, runners were sent forward to alert the Lord Mayor and his deputies about the King's son's imminent arrival.

A festive air filled with last-minute scurrying and cleaning, infected the village and all the people began to solemnly mouth his name. The villagers, spirited above the mundane, somehow felt that by touching the King's son and perhaps even conversing with him, they would be transfigured – they would become temporarily important and royal.

The little man, however, merely brushed his teeth, put on clean rags and continued to sit cross-legged, even as the King's son entered the village gates. Oh, one can suppose that he too wanted to feel important and royal – but he maintained that mystic solitude which insisted that any meeting must be on his terms.

The Lord Mayor, in his usual gregarious manner, immediately seconded the King's son (even though they knew each other well) and with his many deputies indulged in conversation and resplendent feasting. After much time, they staggered forward and with slurred words and much ado, the Lord Mayor introduced the King's son to all the villagers. They toured high and low – and in the marketplace the King's son even spoke with young exchange traders. Oh, they all felt so royal, so important.

Suddenly, they were gone. The King's son, the Lord Mayor, the Lord Mayor's deputies – all had disappeared. It took a while for the little man, still sitting cross-legged, to realize that the moment had passed him by.

So many thoughts flooded his brain. Why had he been ignored? The Lord Mayor hated him, the Lord Mayor's deputies were conspiring against him, his cross-legged manner of sitting might be embarrassing, his rags (though clean) might appear offensive, he might say something rude, the twinkle in his eye might be unsettling.

Anger began to pulse. Had he not always tried to do right by the Lord Mayor, by the King? Had he not always satisfied the Lord Mayor's deputies? Did he not originally



enter the village with a significant legacy – a dowry of sorts which sustained the village when it was so young? Had he not always been loyal, especially when others spoke of conspiracy and insolence? Was he not a source of renewal for others? In fact, was he not the very heart and spirit of the village?

This is what the little man thought and felt. One can judge whether he was being realistic or merely self-indulgent. However, one cannot negate these thoughts and feelings, for they were as real and forceful as the King's son floppy hat or the Lord Mayors coat-of-arms with the crossed horns.

And then, the little man sat cross-legged once more. Drinking in the mystic's glow of oneness, he was again able to see with clarity. He smiled a little and the twinkle returned to his eye.

He realized it was just an oversight (one of a repeating fashion, nonetheless), probably attributable to the intoxication of the moment and the feast. "Being just a little man who sits cross-legged under the shadow of the Lord Mayor's door, it must be very easy to be overlooked. The poor Lord Mayor, the poor King's son – how distraught they will certainly feel when they realize that they failed to meet me", he thought.

And then, a solution struck the little man. He realized it was unfair to allow the King's son to feel sorry about something he couldn't control. And so, the next time the little man was in the capital, he strode right up to the palace and boldly announcing himself, asked to have a short audience with the King's son.

The King's son happened to be walking by just then and, surprisingly, agreed to an immediate meeting. The little man, sitting cross-legged of course, related his disappointment in not previously meeting the King's son, his subsequent anger and his ultimate recognition of what he had to do.

Throughout the little man's discourse, the King's son was fascinated by the little man's control and transported by his sincerity. He began to feel great compassion and love for this little man who sat before him in that unique cross-legged fashion.

Their audience concluded, with many officious amends made, the little man rose and prepared to take his leave. At that point, the King's son enrapt with emotion, bent forward and, as with a blessing, kissed the little man on both cheeks.

The little man returned to his village and continued to sit cross-legged and continued to serve the Lord Mayor and the King to his full potential. His smile blossomed over the years and his twinkle sometimes was like an explosion of brilliant truth. Naturally, all the other villagers thought that it was because he had had his private audience with the King's son and had, therefore, been touched by royalty and importance.

In a sense, this was true. For when the King's son had passed the benediction and sealed the kiss upon the little man's cheeks, the little man had been overwhelmed the King's son's incredibly bad breath and ever since had felt very important and royal.



“One man’s ceiling is another man’s floor.”

Circa 1980

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