

Pasquaney *archives*



The roads crossed and met at an almost perfect right angle. Bordering each were gardened rows, all abloom in the summer sunshine. The countryside was flat, and on a clear day like this one, a person could see toward any point on the compass for at least a half-mile.

The infant lay in the center of the intersection. He was loosely wrapped in a green blanket next to a large stone, sleeping. On the other side of the stone, nestled in the cool shade, a scorpion waited for the day's heat to pass.

The first man to arrive came from the East. Dressed in a simple brown robe with a rope belt, his steps were slow and measured. Though clean shaven, his face looked weathered from the passage of time, and his eyes were dark and motionless behind his simple spectacles. He approached the intersection and stood over the child.

The second to arrive was the man from the South. He wore a tunic of white that matched his beard and the sable curls that made their way down from his head and around his ears. His sea-green eyes shimmered as he stopped and glanced down through his white-rimmed circular glasses at the only months old baby in the road.

The man from the West came next, his wine red garments draped around him from head to foot. The motion of his walk was like that a man in a hurry carrying heavy suitcases with both hands; a man caught between where he wanted to go and where he had been. He stopped short at the intersection, his mouth ajar as his blue eyes peered through his black square-rimmed frames.

The man from the North wore black. He saw the others long before they saw him, and he surveyed each in turn with a mixture of pity and loathing. Shorter than the rest and with a sharpness in his eyes, he arched his back as he cast a glance over the boy in the dirt through his own oval rims.

Each of them looked the others over, saw they all wore glasses, then promptly forgot that very fact.

The man from the West spoke first. Pulling red cloth back from his sleeves he almost shouted, "Can you all not see the miracle that is here before you? This child's life is a sign of divine providence! A higher power, the higher power placed the stone there to protect this infant from the scorpion!" The man from the West put his hand to his chest and continued, "Each of us lives to fulfill some divine purpose – that is our reason for being. This child was meant to live. We are not perfect – in fact we are flawed at the very core - but the hand that guides us is the definition of perfection. And if we are wise, we see the divine all around us and know what joys await us in the next world." As he finished speaking his eyes welled with tears of profound hope mixed with profound sorrow.

The man from the North could hold back no longer, and leaning his head back he let out a cutting laugh. "Ha, what a sad fool you are indeed my traveler from the West." His voice was thin, and laced with an anger that seemed to drench every word with thick sarcasm. "Do you really want to know the purpose of life, of this child's life and your own?" he continued. "Then here it is: nothing. There is no divine plan, no divine spark in the world or in people. 'We live as we dream, alone,' and in confusion. There is no higher power caring for us,

no miracles in the everyday. That rock is there between that child and that scorpion simply by chance. You think the child good and the scorpion evil? I tell you that good and evil are illusions – what matters while we live is power, when we are gone there is nothing. And so I say to you that here, the scorpion is to be admired for its power over the child, the child to be pitied for its weakness.” This last word the man from the North spat out like something vile from his mouth. He looked coldly and with a thin smile at the man from the West, whose own anger had begun to be awakened.

The man from the South then spoke calmly and warmly like a schoolteacher diffusing a fight on the playground. “I’m afraid you are both mistaken in your observations. Let me begin simply, and proceed in an organized fashion. All things have purpose. Think of a cow. Its purpose is to provide milk, meat and leather for men to use. Milk and meat make men strong. Leather too has its purpose; it can be made into clothing or saddles for horses. Saddled horses give advantage in battle, which in turn leads to peaceful rule. So, if the cow and its milk, meat and leather have a purpose, must not man? If you observe people and their action, you will see that they seek the good during their lives. What is good? Well, most would say that good is happiness. What is happiness and what gives it? Well, that is where there is much disagreement. My friend from the North, you seem to think it is power. My friend from the East you seem to say it is the service and obedience to a divine being that brings happiness. Others say money or rank and station can bring happiness. I tell you that happiness is the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue. Believe in the divine or not, a man’s action while he lives either give him pleasure or take it from him. To be virtuous is to have courage, be temperate, seek justice and pursue wisdom. Those are the keys to our lives, and to the life of this child before us.” The man from the South rested his posture, making it clear he had finished speaking.

The man from the East then quietly spoke. “We must each seek the way. Showing respect to those before us, striving after benevolence, having reverence for our friendships and cultivating learning. This is the path.”

The four men stood for a few moments longer, then began to speak again. Voices rose and fall as the debate continued. Heads shook, fingers waved, propositions, premises, points, counter-points and rebuttals were made.

Other men on their journeys stopped to listen and give their voice to the discussion. Some spoke of science, others of nature, some to include, some to exclude.

Time passed. For some it passed quickly, for others it drew out slowly, for none was it exactly the same.

The child at their feet was forgotten as the sun moved in its course.

Finally, a young girl, picking the vegetables from next to the road, heard the shouts and boasting and drew closer to hear and to see. She wore a plain dress, carried with her a basket, and though young, her hands showed the calluses of a person who had cared for growing things all her days.

Immediately upon joining the circle of men she saw the child on the ground, the rock, and the scorpion which had now drawn so close as to be within striking distance. With the quickness that shocked the men, she reached down, drew up the child in her arms and stomped her boot over the scorpion.

The men drew back in surprise, adjusting their glasses. In the silence that followed, they all noticed that infant was crying, and seemed to have been for some time. They had not noticed before.

“What is the matter with all of you?” the girl spoke, her voice clear. “This baby could have been killed! He is

crying, probably starving. How can you all stand here and argue about life and not care for the child right in front of you?”

With that she cuddled the baby into her arms, turned on her heel, and left.

The men looked at the empty space on the ground where the child had been, at the crushed scorpion, at the rock. One by one, as their eyes began to run over, they took off their glasses and looked around.

What they saw, they had forgotten a long time ago as well.

Like these men in the story, we all wear our own glasses, and see things our own way.

Our glasses are our philosophies, our fundamental beliefs that shape and give meaning to every aspect of our lives and how we live them. Our philosophies mold our ambitions and are the substance of our dreams. They give us comfort in our worst times, advice and wisdom in our times of confusion.

Our philosophies also divide us. Think of the four men, those views are hundreds and thousands of years old. Men and nations have devoted their lives to teaching them, to passing them on, to constructing governments based on them, to creating art that illuminates their ideas, to dying for them, to killing for them.

Think of the philosophy of the country you live in, of the family you are from. Ask: what do I live by and for? What is my purpose here? What set of glasses am I wearing?

Beware. Those who do not know their own philosophies are ruled by those who do. Know thyself.

Understand. Like the men in the story, our philosophies and beliefs, the glasses we wear over our minds and souls, can blind us to each other, and to caring for life. Everything in moderation – I have yet to hear a voice that has a monopoly on truth. Rather, I have heard pieces of the large puzzle.

I cannot give you your answer, but I do encourage you to question your heart and your mind.

And, while you must think for yourself, you do not have to think by yourself. You can buy the complete works of Shakespeare for less than ten dollars. Plato, Aristotle, Confucius, the Torah, the Bible, the Koran, the Upanishads, the I-Ching and so many other tomes of timeless wisdom cost less all together than a really nice pair of jeans. Read.

Lastly, seek out the many sages among you here this summer. There are great minds here at camp, and almost all of them really like to talk once you get them going.

And remember to travel with your friends. The road is lonely without them.

Thank you.