

SECTION THREE: The Ideal President

Chapter One

SPIRITUAL ASSIGNMENT

Kudo: Good morning, sir.

Sage: Ah, good morning, Kudo, how are you?

Kudo: I'm great.

Sage: Good to hear that. What brings you to me this morning?

Kudo: My usual newspaper column.

Sage: It is amazing how you find the time to keep up with this, in spite of your schedule.

Kudo: I do what I can, sir.

Sage: So what do you want me to speak about?

Kudo: One quality of an ideal president.

Sage: Whao! What do you mean by president? Is it President as a title, as one who superintends over events, places or people?

Kudo: I mean the word in the specific and general senses, as you have described. Same qualities should go for both, anyway, I think.

Sage: Yeah, I think you are right. But why one quality?

Kudo: I realize there may be numerous qualities, but perhaps it is better for my readers and I to chew one at a time.

Sage: You sound like an old teacher.

Kudo: I am trying to be like you.

Sage: Ha, ha, ha, you're funny. Ok, let's see. One quality of an Ideal President (Pause), I would say an understanding that public service is a spiritual assignment.

Kudo: Sir, please explain.

Sage: Before offering oneself for Presidency or any aspect of public service for that matter, it is best to realize that the office is a spiritual trust built on the consent and interest of those one wishes to serve. That office is an abstract phenomenon, which borrows its meaning and significance from the faith and trust that people have placed on it. It is thus a spiritual construction. And as many religions would buttress, all powers to superintend over anything in God's universe derive from God. So, roundly, governance is a spiritual assignment.

Kudo: How would this kind of understanding help?

Sage: It brings the realization that the office is a sacred one, and that the goings on there are of great interest *to interests* beyond human. It also comes with the realization that the office is not for material gains, but for selfless (spiritual) service. That understanding emphasizes that public office is not private property to be run for one's own personal aggrandizement. It, therefore, brings the realization that an office is not only a human but also a spiritual trust.

Knowing that governance is a spiritual assignment carries with it a sense of responsibility, when one knows that he can NEVER escape accountability. It conveys the realization that the incumbent may hoodwink man, but never SPIRIT that is watching over the affairs. Only a fool runs for public office or even takes public office without understanding the enormity of the responsibility. Apparently, fools are not scarce.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: Now with that level of understanding of his duty, he is more likely to carry it out in the awe and love of God, knowing that whatever he does, whatever he says, he is being watched beyond the intelligence of ordinary man.

This is particularly so because his powers can enhance or diminish the prospects in many directions of those he is supposed to cater for, who themselves are all children of God. Whether they realize it or not is a different matter. But ignorance does not change Truth, for surely the Father of all these children cares for them, and any cheat or tormentor in the guise of a President, will not escape the necessary lessons, and if need be, the wrath of the inner penitentiaries.

Kudo: Sir, is this really true what you have described?

Sage: My son, ignorance is no excuse. The spiritual law officers will do their job, without fear or favor. Bribe is meaningless to them. The position of governance is hot and sacred; and the greater the responsibility, of course, the greater the accountability. No one can fool God. Not even the President.

Kudo: So you mean damnation awaits those who misuse office? You sure? I am sorry sir; given how rampant this is in my country, forgive me if I sound deaf.

Sage: I know what you mean, son. Sometimes what should be obvious is not, because we are blinded by negative passions of greed and other beastly inclinations. But it does not change the spiritual laws. It does not change the sacredness of the office. It does not change the fact that the power you wield does not belong to you. It does not change the fact that each must account for his deeds in due time. But this should not scare you. It is just the way it is. People who feel they can serve well, should aspire to govern. It is a great test. And like all tests, it is a major challenge, but also a wonderful spiritual opportunity.

Can you place in perspective the rewards of a faithful servant who realizes the sacredness of his duty as President and performs it from that lofty height of spiritual awareness? I leave you to use your imagination. But the enduring love he engenders in the hearts of men even pale against the shine of heaven for a job well done.

Remember, not only will there be physical accountability; there must be spiritual accountability for we all are Souls, spiritual beings. It is sad that because of ignorance many mortgage the priceless and timeless for a mess of porridge, pans and metals useless beyond earth. This should be enough for now. We'll continue another time. Enjoy your day.

Chapter Two

HUMILITY

Sage: Another attribute of the President, which I would like to suggest, is humility.

Kudo: Humility?

Sage: Yes, humility. By this I mean the understanding that we all are equal as spiritual beings; we each possess as much power as the other, although the levels of acceptance of this may vary from person to person. This attribute of humility tends to tame the superiority or reversed inferiority complex that you often observe in a lot of people in positions of power.

Kudo: Please explain, sir.

Sage: First, let me say that the cause or even effect of superiority or inferiority complex is actually the same. They are two sides of the same coin. When a President believes, for instance, that he has monopoly of knowledge, and that everybody else is stupid, he is merely sitting on that high horse as a protective mechanism. He must lord it over all others by force because he feels inadequate or lacks the self-confidence to engage or confront superior arguments. So what does he do? He climbs a high horse and tries to intimidate or bully everybody into submission to avoid exposure.

Kudo: I do not understand, sir.

Sage: Let us take an illustration. Cast your mind back to your school days. Remember your teachers at school or even lecturers in the university. Recall that the very good ones, who knew their stuff, were often the humble and simplest ones in class. They were usually the ones that would tolerate challenges of their ideas in class.

Recall that they were the ones who were most sympathetic to even the most stupid questions. These humble but confident teachers would make sure that they broke down explanations to even first principles in order to carry everyone along. They would teach and be glad for the opportunity to answer as many questions as possible.

They would be grateful to have an active class, contributing and questioning. Often they refrained from bombastic words, so that

students would understand them. In a sense, they were willing and in cases even eager to reproduce their knowledge in their students. Sometimes you really thought, by the way they went about things, that their mission was to groom students to be better and greater than them, where possible. They rejoiced at even the possibility of that happening.

Kudo: You appear to be describing some of my best teachers whom I will never forget.

Sage: I believe to you and indeed most of your readers, the experience would be common. The worthy and truly qualified you would find humble, confident, happy and even generous. But not so for the impostor; he is the one you would find difficult, intolerant, irritable, brooking no challenge, ever desiring to be praised and worshipped.

Look around you, even well beyond your teachers, and you will find that the experience is common. Look, for instance, at your office, if you work in an office. Subordinates would not threaten a worthy boss, fully qualified to be one. Such boss would be open, not cagey. He would encourage debate and challenge and not stifle it. He would be accessible and calm, not arrogant and irritable.

Kudo: That makes a lot of sense to me.

Sage: The issue you might want to raise rather is, how does one know who would eventually display a complex if given a chance to govern? This is where a study of pedigree is important. Some inadequate candidates for office are often obvious, but most are usually not. In any case most pretend to be humble at least while seeking office, making it very difficult to tell the difference where you do not know them personally.

Kudo: That is correct, sir. We have numerous cases of people we thought were humble, who turned out the haughtiest, arrogant, and intolerant people ever when in power. I could give you clear examples.

Sage: No need to get personal, especially if this discussion is going public. The important thing to learn is how to make the right choices when given a chance. A few clues How much does the person love power? How much does he love notice and dominance? If the answer is "very much," then you are looking at a candidate with a high propensity to display a complex, once in power.

Kudo: Sir, please make this clearer. It is absolutely important.

Sage: Is it?

Kudo: I can tell you that we have suffered tremendously from picking and backing the wrong candidates, whom we thought were humble at first.

Sage: Let me tell you a short story. Once upon a time there lived a king who wanted to pick the best amongst his servants to marry his daughter, knowing that that servant would inherit his stool, since he had no son but only a daughter. He wanted to pick one who would be kind to his people, and improve their welfare. The king was sickly and aged, and knew that he had few days to live. The choice had to be made at once.

He sent for the wisest man in his kingdom. The man arrived and the king posed the question. Rather than respond directly, the wise man decided to question the king.

“How have they all served you?” he asked.

“Very well,” answered the king. “Almost equally well, so it is difficult for me to discriminate using that criterion. But there are two who I must say are exceptional servants,” added the king.

“Aha”, said the wise man, “I knew you would narrow down, for that is the natural order of things.”

“So of these two, which shall I choose?” asked the king.

“Can we interview them?” asked the wise man.

“Yes,” said the king.

“But first we must inform them of the reason for the interview,” said the wise man.

“But that would get it into their heads,” the king retorted.

“That is precisely the point,” said the wise man. “The one of the two who displays tendencies of desperation to be king, having known, would be the wrong candidate,” he concluded.

“How would I know which of them is desperate for the throne?” the king asked.

“Watch out for a willingness to do anything, just anything in order to ascend the throne. Look out for desperation. That’s the key. It leads to recourse to foul means. No true servant will soil or sell himself just to serve another man, a people or a group, selflessly. Selflessly. No true servant would beg, grovel, and mortgage himself or his conscience just to be of service, selflessly. Selflessly. If he so claims, he is merely a deceiver.”

Chapter Three

CONSCIOUSNESS

Kudo: Sir, I would like to return to the issue of humility as a prime element in picking the Ideal President.

Sage: I thought we had dwelt on that sufficiently.

Kudo: I am yet to fully understand it, sir.

Sage: What more would you like to know.

Kudo: Sir, please further clarify what you said about the perception of the equality of Souls as humility.

Sage: I just knew you would return to that matter. Ok, let us repeat in a different way. First, do you realize that you are Soul?

Kudo: What I am taught is that I have a Soul.

Sage: Not quite so. You are Soul. I am Soul. Soul is a spark of God. A Soul is what is made in the image of God, as we all understand. Soul is Spirit. It is from the fabric of the Holy Spirit that Soul is made. Now, made from this quintessence of purity, Soul descended into earth and took on the physical body in order to function on this physical plane. Perhaps that is a bit too far afield for you. It may be sufficient to just note that the equality we refer to is not of the physical or material. It is of our fundamental essence as Souls, as sparks of God. It is as Souls that we are equals. Soul is equal to Soul.

Now, once you know yourself as Soul, as Socrates urged long time ago, it becomes easier to appreciate the next person as Soul, too, a spark and an essence or a child of God. That way you recognize and acknowledge the next person's inherent divinity. It is thus easier for you to accord that person respect. It is then easier for you to give that person the amount of space and freedom, which you desire for yourself.

Now imagine how a subordinate staff, or younger brother who has that level of awareness, will relate to you, as his senior in rank, class, or in the family.

Kudo: You want me to respond?

Sage: You can, of course.

Kudo: I think such a younger brother or subordinate staff would treat me with a lot of respect.

Sage: Good. But how would he relate to his own younger brothers or subordinate staff over whom he has some authority?

Kudo: I think with a lot of respect as well. Perhaps with as much respect as he would relate to his senior.

Sage: Why would he relate with both, senior and subordinate, with equal respect?

Kudo: Because he sees both as Souls, equal sparks of God, bearing the same level of divinity.

Sage: From that level of awareness would he make a distinction between a beggar and a prince?

Kudo: No. He would respect both equally.

Sage: Beautiful. Now if you had that level of awareness, how easy would it be to bootlick or literally worship another individual, group or thing?

Kudo: Never. I would see each for what he is, at best as one just like me, and therefore give him the respect that I would like for myself.

Sage: Perfect. You have answered your own questions. But just to follow the discussion to some conclusion. With this level of awareness, how would you see one who bootlicks, sells his conscience, and mortgages his personal dignity, reason and freedom just to please another for the worldly gains of office?

Kudo: I am sorry to say, sir; but that suddenly appears to me as an inferior state of being; an ignorant state of being.

Sage: Why do you say that?

Kudo: Because by his actions as a bootlicker, he abuses and demeans his own divinity. Born prince he chooses slavery, for temporary material gains.

Sage: Well said. The person acts from the consciousness of a slave. Now, bear that in mind when you determine who governs you. Would your choice be that of a slave consciousness or of a prince or princess who respects your own prince hood?

Kudo: Should I answer?

Sage: You do not have to. Let me rather follow up with another question. If the one with the slave mentality or consciousness were to find himself in power, how do you think he would see you people, who then depend on him to cater for your general welfare?

Kudo: Hmmm. That is a tough one. But what I think is that he would expect us to bow before him or worship him the way he used to worship those who were in power before him. In short, he would see himself as master and the rest of us as slaves.

Sage: Was that difficult to figure out?

Kudo: No.

Sage: So the matter should be clear enough by now. All those who worship those in power will themselves demand to be worshipped once in power. And those who merely treat those in power as first amongst equals, giving them ordinary respect and never worship are more likely to treat others as equals if in power.

Kudo: Sir, unfortunately in my country, those who only respect and who do not bootlick or lose their dignity and sense of worth before people in power are labeled disloyal, treated like enemies by the powerful, and subdued by all means possible including death.

Sage: I see. Maybe that is a testament to how far away you may be from the ideal president. But do not despair; consciousness is growing amongst the people. Tomorrow will be better.

Chapter Four

SERVICE?

Kudo: Sir, I quite appreciate the rather exhaustive manner you have dealt with the issue of humility as an element in governance.

Sage: Did you say exhaustive?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: Not quite. There are still many ramifications of humility that we have not scratched but which are critical to governance.

Kudo: Oh...

Sage: Let me dwell on one or two more.

Kudo: By all means, sir.

Sage: Recall the relationship between humility and confidence as we discussed?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: Only the self-confident one can have the grace to be humble without feeling belittled. As long as a person suffers from a complex, a deep sense of inadequacy requiring of crutches to prop himself up, he would have great difficulty in putting others first; he would have great difficulty in truly serving others.

Kudo: Sir, that is pretty loaded.

Sage: Ok, Kudo. Let us take the last point about putting others first, the point about serving others. There are many factors which propel one to put others first, but amongst them are the issues of self-confidence and humility. You follow?

Kudo: Yes, sir. But how?

Sage: If a team, led by one with a bloated ego, achieved anything; how would the leader report it?

Kudo: Simple, sir. He would report it with his ego in front. He would report it in such a way that helps his ego, appropriate great credit to himself.

Sage: Precisely, because he is incapable of putting others first in any form. And what effect do you think such an attitude would have on team members who actually did the work?

Kudo: A de-motivating effect.

Sage: Do you understand it now?

Kudo: Yes, sir. If he cannot even put his own team first, how would he treat the rest of us?

Sage: His “I”, as far as he is concerned, supersedes “US”, so how do you expect service from such a character. Without humility he cannot serve, rather he wants you to serve him. He acts as master in every way, the very antithesis of service.

His penchant for credit to pad his ego even leads to claims to things he did not actually achieve. As President, he is the classical propagandist and deceiver, paying media to paint him in romantic light, exaggerating minimal success, lying, and doing everything to keep the praise singing. Muscle, money, bribes, blackmail, and just anything is utilized.

Kudo: All this is beginning to fall in place.

Sage: You recognize somebody?

Kudo: Many.

Sage: So lack of self-confidence and humility naturally leads to the love of unmerited praise and flattery. The result is that only those who flatter and praise him, even most undeservedly, are in his good books. He naturally hates those who refuse to lavish flattery on him and would rather tell him home truths. He may even regard them as outright enemies.

Kudo: This is making a lot of sense to me.

Sage: To receive favor or even be treated fairly, you must see the world as made in his image. You must praise beyond reason, bow

with loyalty, echo his warped reasoning, words and wishes. It also helps to dress like him or even cough or fart like him. In a sense see him as a god, in whose image you were made; and you will be his beloved son, in whom he is well pleased.

Kudo: Oh, my God.

Sage: Those are easy manifestations of the lack of humility, the lack of self-confidence in a President or any so called leader for that matter. One of the obvious losses is that the robust contest of ideas, sharpening one another leading therefore to best options in more open governance are lost to servicing the bloated ego.

Kudo: So the people stagnate even in the pool of great ideas, which dare not be expressed for fear of hurting the President's ego. Just to survive many become yes men.

Sage: Correct. I am sure you can imagine what the fate of any opposition must be in such a milieu.

Kudo: Of course he brooks no opposition.

Sage: In extreme cases, not even life is too sacred to be sacrificed to water the ego of the unbalanced character. That is how critical this matter of ego is in governance.

Kudo: I never imagined that personality matters like humility and bloated egos weigh so critically on governance.

Sage: It is a mistake many make. And believe it or not, the bloated ego syndrome is behind the crises of leadership. The inadequacy of the President forces him to cling like a drowning man to the crutches of power; so in many cases it is power or death! How sick can people get?

Chapter Five

WATCH OUT FOR...

Sage: Our discussion so far shows humility is a most critical element in governance, for the various reasons we have discussed and more. A good president, for instance, must be a good listener. He must listen as if he were directly in the shoes of the complainant. He must have the capacity to empathize with those he leads. But how can he if he has a complex, which forces him to demonstrate the superiority syndrome?

Kudo: So what use is he if he cannot listen to those for whom he is President?

Sage: That is precisely the point. Where you find such presidents in corporate organizations, it is true woe for those under them, especially who have possible superior skills than their boss. Suppression would be the order. Nothing would be spared to malign and vilify the quality persons in his organization simply for fear that they may outshine him.

Kudo: But that is again precisely the antithesis of good leadership.

Sage: You certainly get the point. A leader is a booster, an energizer of his team, a facilitator and mentor. But for presidents who lack humility the case is different. Suppression is rather the tendency, for no one must be seen or given the potential to equal them in anyway. Only he must stand as a tree, all others must be pruned to shrubs.

Kudo: Is that why leaders with bloated ego often surround themselves with mediocres as lieutenants?

Sage: Bingo again. A leader who is self-confident and thus has the capacity for true humility looks out for those more skilled than himself in order to build a high performance team. He looks out for lieutenants who can lead him in their various areas of expertise, people he can look up to for sound guidance and advice, but not so Presidents with the complex. The end result is that in governance the only element really served is the ego of the so-called President, for you end up with an underperforming team of a one-eyed man and his blind lieutenants.

Kudo: This sheds a lot of light. Now I can understand why many governments in my country are populated by virtual yes-men as commissioners, law-makers and the lot. Listening to you now, it all begins to make sense. Usually, those who are knowledgeable and have a good sense of self-worth are not likely to survive under a President with bloated ego who must be bootlicked to know that he leads.

Sage: If you find any such competent, self-confident person at all, under such miserable leadership, rest assured that he is going through tremendous emotional pain. Do not be surprised if he tells you that he is ostracized from amongst his peers. Everything he says or does would be regarded with suspicion. He would be often accused of plotting to overthrow the leader. His competence would be grossly underutilized, if not laid to rest for the period he is serving under the bloated ego. In a way he could be serving an emotional prison sentence.

Kudo: Then he should resign.

Sage: Of course that is a way out. But sometimes situations are more complex than what the public sees. Sometimes resignation can itself be a suicide note when tendered before a President lacking in humility. He sees it as an affront, as in fact he sees any genuine idea above his head. If you look carefully at your local history you may find the pages dotted with cases of the woeful fate that befell those who dared to differ and to resign.

Kudo: So the choices are limited.

Sage: For sure. Under the leadership of a bloated ego, your choices are limited to joining the bandwagon of praise singers and bootlickers, enduring the indignities for as long as it may last or risk a life of gross hostility upon resignation. But luckily most of those who surround a leader lacking in humility are likely to be mere lackeys, with minimal sense of self-worth. That is usually the tradition, especially where the egoistic President has the opportunity to pick his team himself; and usually he does.

Kudo: From everything you have said so far, am I right in summarizing that lack of humility is a probable cause of dictatorial tendencies?

Sage: Sure. That is a straight forward consequence. There is no dictator who did not lack self-confidence, and who did not suffer from a complex. It is the complex that leads to dictatorship, no matter the setting - democratic or not. Rather than wait for a superior argument which may not be theirs to win, the inherent dictator lacking in self-worth cannot take that chance. He would rather force the issue one way or the other to ensure that he prevails by all means, foul or fair; although usually foul.

Kudo: I always knew intuitively that humility was critical in governance but never thought it stretched to these extents.

Sage: Unfortunately, it does go even further. A man having a low self-esteem is easily a dangerous man, or at best an unstable one. Sometimes it is difficult to predict what would annoy him. A casual banter, which you absent-mindedly had with him, can plant a seed of acrimony in his heart that would later erupt as an oak of vendetta. And that is yet another dimension of a bloated ego. What eats him up in bitterness is usually not the obvious.

Kudo: So anyone who dares to be his own man before such a person is an endangered species.

Sage: That is for sure because you are more likely to act out of sync from his particular culture and ego, which must not be threatened. This is why the experts in getting along with such incapacitated leaders are what I might refer to as the schooled sycophants. They have the uncanny ability of dancing to the yes music of their master's ego without fail.

Kudo: Those who do not understand that culture are then outcasts.

Sage: Maybe not literarily but certainly practically. They can never get into the core decision making team. They can never belong to what some generally refer to as the kitchen cabinet.

Kudo: So only the yes men take all the critical decisions?

Sage: Clearly. And the implications should be obvious for transparency in governance, for good governance, for the rule of law, for double standards in office, and even for corruption. But maybe these are elements we should touch upon later.

Kudo: I am extremely grateful, sir. Please do not be tired of me for I shall return next week.

Sage: I understand what help you are trying to render through your column, and I would do what I can to help. Thanks for coming.

Kudo: Have a good day, sir.

Sage: I will. You too!

Chapter Six

LISTENING

Sage: Do you realize that listening is a prime duty of every President?

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Think about it for a moment? A President is there to lead in solving either progressive or retroactive problems, essentially.

Kudo: Yes, I get that.

Sage: But how can he, a fortiori, lead in solving problems of the people if he does not understand them; if he does not understand where and how the shoe pinches them.

Kudo: I see. I understand it now. I could compare it to a patient and a doctor scenario. What you are saying is how can a doctor help a patient if he cannot even listen to his complaints. Chances are non-listening doctors would come with wrong prescriptions.

Sage: Now you get it. But notice that for him to listen properly, the doctor must be humble and accede to the patient the pride of place; knowing that it is the patient's body that is being discussed. It is the patient that feels the pain and knows the symptoms first hand. So a good leader, like a good doctor, must be a good listener. But how do you listen well without humility.

Kudo: So humility is what enables you to listen?

Sage: Surely, son, surely. To listen and understand properly you must bring yourself to the level, at least psychologically, of the complainant. You must mentally live in his cultural context, and try to see from his perspective. Then you can begin to truly understand him.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: I will explain further. Listening is a key aspect in communication. And communication is basically a two-way transfer

of ideas with fidelity from one end to the other and vice versa in feedback.

Kudo: Is that the definition of communication?

Sage: I do not know what definition you memorized from school but this is my understanding of the concept. Can we admit it?

Kudo: I am not disputing the definition, I am just marveling at it.

Sage: Ok, good to know. Let's return. Notice that language or signs or appearances are often the medium of communication. And these owe their meanings to culture and situational contexts. So if a man says for example "He is mad"; assuming the language is the same, the context would determine the truth of that sentence.

Communication straddles too many intricacies, including culture, language, context, and sound. An inflexion, for instance, can totally change meaning. "He is mad", for instance, in a tone laden with laughter can convey a totally different meaning. You follow?

Kudo: Yes, sir, please carry on.

Sage: What I am trying to reach is an understanding that to grasp the meaning of any comment or message, the listener must enter empathically into the total cultural context of the situation as if he were the one there. In a manner of speaking, he must wear the shoes of the complainant. This is done mentally.

Kudo: It must take effort.

Sage: Exactly. That is the effort all truly honest listeners make. To listen well is to wear the shoes of the narrator, even if mentally.

Kudo: I get the point. So if the listener is not humble, or suffers from a complex that lords it over the complainant, how can he claim to be listening at all?

Sage: Brilliant. That is it. If I were your President with a complex and therefore arrogant, how do I level with you? How do I truly listen to you?

Kudo: Serious.

Sage: Serious indeed. To govern presupposes an ability to listen well. For how can a mechanic fix a car that he is too arrogant to understand?

Kudo: So every good President must be a good listener.

Sage: Nothing can be more truthful, and humility is what makes it possible. Just to stretch it a little bit further, good listening requires patience. Again only humility can confer patience on anyone. Arrogance is usually snappy and haughty, impatient and rude.

Humility is patient, courteous and thoughtful. But these are precisely the elements that aid the good listener to mentally locate the complainant and enter into his context to hear, feel, and understand his situation and message. You understand?

Kudo: I do, sir. I get the point To govern, first is to listen. But how can arrogance listen? How can arrogance govern? Those are your questions? I understand it, sir, but I am just wondering how such basic truth can lose on governance in these parts.

Chapter Seven

TRUE HUMILITY

Kudo: Sir, I notice that in the past few sessions since this series began we have virtually dwelt on humility as prime in the character of the ideal president. Why did it take up so much?

Sage: Humility necessarily takes priority in any matter involving character. Character is a reflection of the spiritual status of any individual, not what he says or claims. The character would generally give you an idea of how he or she is situated in the spiritual hierarchy or order. And the higher you climb in your spiritual development the more tender your heart grows.

Kudo: Please relate the explanation to humility.

Sage: I thought I already had. Or maybe I hadn't? You see, when your heart grows tender your ability for empathy and compassion grows as well. And it is precisely this ability that helps you to see others as similar to yourself. It is precisely what helps you to love others as yourself. It is precisely the ability that helps you serve others as if you were serving yourself.

Kudo: If I understand you correctly, sir, what you are saying basically is that the tender heart levels easily with others. The tender heart sees others as equally important as himself. But is that humility?

Sage: That is true humility.

Kudo: But that is not the general concept of humility the way we understand it.

Sage: How do you understand it?

Kudo: A general perception is that humility means diminishing or minimizing yourself.

Sage: I see. I guess that is why the act of humility, as you understand it, is so given to pretence. It is a concept that encourages you not to be yourself. Rather than be yourself, your concept of humility is to

pretend that you are less than what you really are. That is the kind of understanding that, for instance, leads people to disastrously believe that they are unworthy of God's love, and worse, inhibits their acceptance of it.

Kudo: Actually, it is a concept that teaches us to grovel, cover ourselves in rags, act undignified, in cases, to show that we are humble.

Sage: That is not the kind of humility that I know. The one I know and which I strongly recommend is that which sees the next person as an equal. That is the kind of humility that will enable you serve your neighbor or your people without feeling either inferior or superior. Indeed, relating to people without feeling either inferior or superior is acting in humility.

Kudo: This is a completely new model for me and, I believe, for most of my readers.

Sage: I am sorry if I took it for granted that we were speaking the same language. But please note that anytime I had used the word humility, what I had meant was feeling neither superior nor inferior in service or in relation to others.

Kudo: So if I give a gift to a beggar, I should give it as if we were equals? How is that possible?

Sage: Of course you and the beggar are equals as Souls. Didn't you know that? As Soul, there is nothing you have that the beggar does not also have. There is no power available to you, which is not also available to him. To crown it all, the Creator loves you both equally. IT's gifts for you are no more than IT's gifts for the beggar.

Kudo: Did I hear you say IT, sir? "IT" for God?

Sage: You have a problem with that?

Kudo: Yes, sir; very much. We do not address God as IT. It is very denigrating and unacceptable. Most would in fact say, totally unacceptable.

Sage: Do not let words distract you. The use of human language to express anything Divine will remain a struggle, because it is a grossly incapable and incompetent tool. Even in translating words from one

human language to another, we struggle because the cultures and contexts are different. Try translating stories or books in your native Ogba language into English, for instance, and see the trouble it takes trying to be faithful to the original meanings.

Kudo: Yes, I appreciate that. It is a tough duty in any language.

Sage: I am glad you see that. Now if it is so difficult to translate human literature to other humans who speak a different language in a common physical universe, imagine how tough it must be to express spiritual essences using the vehicle of a human language. That is why I say do not allow language to distract you. Listen more with your heart, than with your head.

To return briefly to the issue of a pronoun for God, notice that God is neither male nor female. God is beyond biological categorizations. God is beyond gender. And as you grammarians would tell us, once an entity is neither masculine nor feminine, in the English language, we refer to that essence or phenomenon as it. In this case capital IT, for obvious reasons.

Kudo: This is shaking the foundation of what I thought I knew.

Sage: Congratulations! That is always the feeling when you are truly growing. I've got to go now. Let's talk next week.

Chapter Eight

SELFLESSNESS

Kudo: What is it that marks out a great leader?

Sage: Several qualities, not only one.

Kudo: Which would you readily like to discuss today?

Sage: Selflessness.

Kudo: What is the relationship between leadership and selflessness?

Sage: A very direct relationship, I must say; for leadership is by definition an act of selflessness.

Kudo: Please take no offence; given where I come from and the experience we have had as a people, your definition is almost ridiculous.

Sage: Why do you say that?

Kudo: As I said, I do not mean to offend you or question your definition, but placed against the background of the collective experience in my region of the world, leadership appears to be the very opposite of what you say.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: Generally, where I come from leadership is a means of self-aggrandizement. It is the fastest route to ill-gotten wealth. It is the means for the appropriation of what belongs to all for self. Leadership is the quickest, the safest, and the most lucrative means of robbery.

Sage: Interesting.

Kudo: Leadership in these parts is what you assume in order to privatize what belongs to those you are supposed to be leading. Leadership is an instrument of intimidation. It is what you use to cow other citizens into submission, serfdom or even slavery. Leadership is

the muscle you need to appropriate the collective wealth without fear of prosecution. Leadership comes with the power to cheat, to maim, and to kill without qualms.

Let me keep it simple Leadership in our part of the world means selfishness activated. If you were being introduced to a leader here, especially in the public sector, the first assumption should be that you are dealing with a selfish brute, whose primary reason for acquiring the leadership position is access to unmitigated and unmerited opulence through appropriating the public treasury.

Sage: Can this really be true?

Kudo: Generally, it is true. Give an average office-holder two years in office, and he could be catapulted from abject poverty to obtuse nauseating wealth. Of course there are exceptions but these are rare. I am sorry I have gotten emotional; I have spoken more than the interviewee.

Sage: Why not? Ours is not a monologue. My understanding is that it is a discussion between both of us.

Kudo: That is a very kind way of putting it, but I know I have surely overstepped by bounds as an interviewer. Sir, please let us return to your understanding of leadership.

Sage: I would have liked to learn more from you.

Kudo: No, sir. Please let me hear from you. I choose to be quiet more from a sense of shame.

Sage: There is nothing to be ashamed of. The weaknesses you describe of leaders in your place are only manifestations of untamed human frailty. If it is a consolation, know that this cadre of leaders would not last forever. These experiences are not new in history. There are hidden laws at work. These laws in time would take care of the culprits, and inject sanity into governance in your region. But do not ask me how this would happen for I cannot predict the way, out of a zillion plausible options, available to those in charge. Just know that it will all come to pass.

Kudo: Thanks for the consolation, sir. We look forward to the arrival of that time. But please let us return to our discussion.

Sage: Ok, I was saying that leadership has a direct relationship with selflessness. Indeed to be selfless is to lead, and to lead is to be selfless. In fact, until a service is selfless it is not really leadership in the true sense of the word.

Kudo: Please expatiate.

Sage: Can you tell me why a group needs leadership in the first place? What makes leadership necessary?

Kudo: It could be in order to work towards fulfilling the common interests of the group? It could be to take care of the whole?

Sage: A good way of putting it. But beyond serving the common interest, leadership is simply serving others, unselfishly. Leadership is putting others first, and self last. Leadership is what the captain of a ship displays when faced with disaster. He sees first to the safety and well-being of his passengers before considering himself.

The story is told of how an otherwise gallant soldier failed promotion to the enviable rank of a General. At home one day, unknown to him, a situation of crisis, pandemonium, fire and the like were simulated about midnight as part of the test. The General made his escape swiftly to safety before remembering his wife and children. Of course he was not found fit to be promoted a General. This is in areas where Generals are seen as guaranteed leaders, who must serve others first and self last. Kudo, are you listening? You seem a bit lost.

Kudo: I am sorry, sir; I was searching my mental landscape for true generals in leadership. Hmmm - Tough job.

Chapter Nine

BE STRONG

Kudo: Greetings, sir.

Sage: That must be your telephone ringing.

Kudo: I am reluctant to interrupt our discussion. I am sorry, I forgot to switch off before this session.

Sage: That's okay; you could answer your phone anytime.

Kudo: Thank you very much, sir. Hello, hello, good afternoon...I'm in a meeting now, actually conducting an interview...Oh! I understand. What? Did you say the eagle was looking for me? What for? Anyway, I will call you later. Thanks... Sorry. Sorry, sir, for the interruption.

Sage: It's alright.

Kudo: My friend in Government House was informing me that the President would like to see me.

Sage: Interesting. I could not help over-hearing your reference to someone as Eagle. Could that be a code for the President?

Kudo: Very much so, sir. My friend was avoiding calling him by name or position for some reason of convenience.

Sage: I see. I like the reference to a leader as an eagle, which is generally regarded as the king of birds.

Kudo: It is quite common in these parts to associate leaders with the eagle; in one form or the other.

Sage: Because of what the eagle represents in the bird kingdom?

Kudo: I believe so, sir.

Sage: That is really neat, truly apt. Indeed the leader should be like an eagle. Strong, Inspirational, Savvy, Tough, Royal, Elegant, and Courageous. All these, a leader should be.

Kudo: Sir, I have common sense knowledge of the adjectives you have used. Should I assume that we have a common understanding?

Sage: Kudo, I do not know which understanding you have. It may well be the same as mine.

Kudo: Just for learning purposes, could you kindly take them one after the other and elaborate?

Sage: Which would you like me to start with?

Kudo: Strength.

Sage: Ok, let's take strength.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. What do you mean by "strong"?

Sage: There are many ways in which you can be strong. But here I refer to few specific areas of strength. First and most is spiritual strength.

Kudo: What do you mean by spiritual strength?

Sage: By spiritual strength, I refer to the hugeness of the heart.

Kudo: I do not understand.

Sage: You will. A heart generally denotes love. A huge heart denotes an ability to love deeply. It denotes a great ability for forgiveness. It denotes a great ability to overcome emotional pain. It denotes an ability to keep an open heart, in spite of hurt and scathing criticism, in spite of abuse of good intents. It implies an incredible slowness to anger, recrimination or bitterness. It implies a lack of vindictiveness and an awful capacity for tolerance. That is spiritual strength.

Kudo: It is a tall order.

Sage: Yes, it is. True leaders are not *commonplace*. They are gems. They are rare finds and ought to be so cherished.

Kudo: I agree.

Sage: But please do not go away with the impression that the true leaders are only found in high and lofty places. They are not so scarce as not to be available. Look amongst your religious groups, you will find them, the shining stars, quiet, unassuming and humble. Look amongst your football players you would find them. Look amongst your students or colleagues at work you will find them. Look amongst your family members, you will find them. They are usually not those who fight to lead, but their talent is often obvious for those sincerely in search of true leaders.

Kudo: Is this what you mean by strength?

Sage: Yes. Kudo, my son, what did you think strength meant?

Kudo: I saw strength here as a synonym for power.

Sage: In a sense you are right. We are dealing with power all right, but the power of love; the power to be truly a father to all. That is spiritual strength.

Chapter Ten

BE INSPIRATIONAL

Kudo: Sir, last week we dealt with spiritual strength as prerequisite for leadership. Are there other ramifications of the strength that we should be considering as well?

Sage: Well, the others, though secondary, are fairly obvious. These are basic issues of fitness including mental and physical fitness. The reasons why these are necessary, I believe, are obvious.

Kudo: Yes, they are obvious. Perhaps we should turn to your second description of the eagle as inspirational.

Sage: Ok.

Kudo: Sir, how and why should a leader be inspirational?

Sage: I would like us to turn here to the basic definition as provided by a standard dictionary. Check the one on the bookshelf there, and tell me what it says about “inspiration” as it concerns a person.

Kudo: The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines a person of inspiration as “...a person that causes one’s mind, creative abilities, interests etcetera to be stimulated.”

Sage: Excellent. I simply say a leader should be inspirational. He should be a symbol to inspire the performance and creativity of those he leads to greater heights. In a sense he must represent a being of admiration, worthy of emulation. He must have an edifying presence and quality.

It pays for him or her to represent one that most of the people would like to be like. He should be a model of sorts, a symbol to energize the imagination and work of the people he leads. He should be sunshine in gloom, he should be hope in hopelessness, he should be faith in despair, and he should be solace in turbulence.

Kudo: So a leader should be an idol?

Sage: I would rather say that a leader should be a ginger, a source of strength and inspiration. And this he must be, in character and in

deed. To be one and not the other is to be handicapped as a leader. He must walk his talk, to motivate and inspire.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: It is in combining the twins of talk and walk that great leaders emerge, whatever the course, be it religious, political, professional, artistic, or otherwise. The talk and the walk must give the same message.

Kudo: Both talk and walk?

Sage: Yes. The walk and the talk are one. A football captain who only yells at his teammates with direction, but hardly demonstrates dexterity and purposefulness with the ball, will surely be a poor inspiration no matter how loud he yells.

Inspirational communication must be total, utilizing all verbal and non-verbal channels in order to achieve the lofty aim. To reach resonance, the leader must not only be committed to his mission; he must become its synonym. So that consciously, sub-consciously or unconsciously, he exudes the mission with unwavering fidelity, whichever channel of communication you examine. He must become the embodied consciousness of that which he pursues for his people.

Kudo: Sir, you need to break it down for me.

Sage: What do you want broken down?

Kudo: You said inspirational communication must be total and that it must be verbal and non-verbal. I do not fully understand that.

Sage: Ok, I would back up a bit. Notice that inspiration expresses itself in engagement. There is a stimulus and a consequent response. When the stimuli have excited the responses for higher performance, inspiration has taken place. But for the stimuli to excite the response there must be a message to and a resultant feedback from the respondent.

Kudo: So what you are saying is that the inspirational process is basically a communication process.

Sage: You got it. But I add that the communication must be total, by word, deed and appearance.

Kudo: Sir, before you go further, something just struck me from what you've said. Recall that inspiration is basically communication, according to you.

Sage: Yes, that's correct.

Kudo: You have also said that the leader must be an inspiration.

Sage: Yes, that is the basic subject we are dealing with.

Kudo: Now, what I get from all that is that the leader is essentially a communicator.

Sage: Excellent insight. That is what a leader is - a communicator; but more precisely an inspirational communicator. To effectively inspire, he needs to be a total communicator, using all channels of action, words, and appearance to make the maximum impact. He must speak, act and be seen in every way to be faithful to his mission.

Kudo: His words must match his actions and his appearance to be the true leader?

Sage: Correct. Where any is faulty, doubts creep in which harm his believability. And one who is not believed cannot inspire. People must believe in someone before he can inspire them. To inspire you must be admitted into the people's innermost chamber - their hearts.

Let me add that except you actually gain entrance into someone's heart you are not really his leader; you are only an impostor that must expire sooner than later.

Chapter Eleven

WISDOM

Sage: One common attribute which most leaders recognize as vital for their success, is wisdom. This is what I meant to allude to when I spoke of the eagle as being savvy.

Kudo: What is the meaning of that?

Sage: I am sure you have heard the word before. It basically means the possession of common sense.

Kudo: But common sense and wisdom are not the same.

Sage: Who says? My understanding is that deep common sense is what is referred to as wisdom. Note that wisdom and knowledge, especially book knowledge, are not the same.

Kudo: But book knowledge enhances wisdom.

Sage: Well, maybe in some instances - depending on which kind of books you are reading and how serious you take them. But that is a digression. What I mean to convey is that education in the Western sense of the word, may not necessarily confer common sense. You may find cases where a “total illiterate”, again in the orthodox Western sense, may have more common sense than a professor of book knowledge.

Kudo: But common sense is not common.

Sage: Yes, I agree with you, but it is available to all in common. I guess that is why it is called common sense.

Kudo: Is it really available to all in common?

Sage: Very much so. It is in the very source of common sense that we all have our being.

Kudo: If common sense is that common, how come some do not seem to have it?

Sage: I doubt that there is one who does not have it, but there are countless who seldom use it.

Kudo: Why would anyone have such a valuable resource and not use it?

Sage: Difficult question to answer; maybe awareness could be one of the inhibitions.

Kudo: Awareness that common sense is available?

Sage: Awareness that each one has access to the source of common sense.

Kudo: But what can prevent anyone from accessing it? I wish you could answer that directly, sir.

Sage: I thought I did. But let's return to it. My answer would be ignorance, and its offspring.

Kudo: What about unrighteousness, immorality and stuff like that; can't those prevent awareness of this common sense.

Sage: That is a reflection of very common but misleading thinking. It is generally the thinking of moralists and fundamentalists of the orthodox religions that the source of common sense, which is the Creative Spirit that manifests all that is created, cannot be accessed by what people describe as evil. Lie. How do you think that humanity manage to produce evil geniuses? Common sense is available to all. It is impersonal, and is available to be used for good or for evil.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Really, really. It works as impersonally as the laws of physics or chemistry. Once things are combined in their right doses under given conditions, certain results are predictable. It does not matter whether it is being used to produce bombs for the destruction of cities, or for the creation of cures for diseases.

Kudo: If common sense and its source are so amoral, why then are you including it as one of the prime characteristics of an Ideal President?

Sage: I knew that question would come. But before I answer it, let me preface with this Anyone who employs common sense for evil,

must reap unhappy consequences. That is the law. My supposition in alluding to common sense as a factor is that leaders would use them for the general good; not for evil ends.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: Let me add that this warning of evil and unhappy consequences is very often ignored or even ridiculed by people who employ a lot of common sense. In the myopic view of life, they do not see that the cosmos is a self-regulating existence; hence whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap; and possibly with interest.

Again it is ignorance that scoffs at this fundamental, which every leader should be guided by. Sometimes the results of evil machinations manifest openly for all to see; sometimes the results show beyond what the ordinary eyes can see. But manifest they must, as long as the dramatis personae are subject to the law of cause and effect; the law of the lower worlds.

Kudo: Which are the laws of the higher worlds?

Sage: My friend, you are truly curious. Do not worry about that for now. Maybe sometime in the future we could return to it. I would rather that we finish with common sense, the subject of today's discussion. A leader who does not apply common sense is only a programmed robot, better suited for physics laboratories and not for governing people.

Kudo: Anything we can do to know that a prospective leader has common sense?

Sage: Terribly tough question. There is no ready formula. But I am sure you can identify wisdom. It usually flows gracefully from one with easy access to the source of common sense. I am sure you can also identify good intuition - an ability to arrive at the truth of a situation without necessarily passing through mental calculations and the accumulation of objective evidence. This may be an indication of a leader with the grace of common sense.

Chapter Twelve

TOUGHNESS

Kudo: Can we move on to the other elements of the Eagle Leader?

Sage: So you are still recounting the characteristics of the eagle?

Kudo: Sir, I find them a good guide for this interview.

Sage: Not a surprise at all. As an academic, your mind moves in ordered categories. Everything must be methodically fitted into one box or the other.

Kudo: Doesn't your mind work in the same way, sir?

Sage: How would I know that? It is up to you academics to analyze me. I think I am just a simple minded lover of God.

Kudo: Sir, but I still feel we should return to those characteristics you described.

Sage: As you please, Kudo. But which are these characteristics that we have not dealt with?

Kudo: Toughness, for instance. You had mentioned toughness as one of the attributes the eagle must have.

Sage: But we had discussed strength. Toughness for me has a very similar definition to the one we understood strength to be. Do not think by toughness I meant roughness in any form. Far from it. By toughness I refer to the inner strengths of patience, endurance, long-suffering, persistence, steadfastness, steadiness and resilience.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: I hope you get it. The toughness is to help the leader maintain his equanimity in spite of pressures. The toughness is to help the leader remain calm in the midst of crises. Toughness for me means inner ruggedness. Let me illustrate. Last weekend I was at the beach, and witnessed what could have been a disastrous event for one family.

Kudo: What happened?

Sage: A young man and his little children aged probably between 3 and 6 were strolling by the side of the ocean just as most people do when at the beach. The ocean had been calm, occasionally reaching out to the feet of passers-by and receding. This must have been the observed pattern before the young man took the children for the walk. They chatted away oblivious of what was about to happen.

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: Suddenly the water surged to the shore swiftly, powerfully and unexpectedly, pushing down the man and his three children into the water, and then sweeping back in return wave with speed pulling along the little ones.

Kudo: Huh?

Sage: The reason why I recall this event now is in trying to explain the true toughness that a leader requires. Clearly what I witnessed was a major crisis situation that caught most on-lookers with too much surprise to help. But you know what happened?

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: This young man demonstrated an unusual calmness and an incredible awareness in the near calamity. It was more than I had witnessed in anybody in recent times. You know what he did as the wave attempted to sweep his children away?

Kudo: I'm all ears, sir.

Sage: As he lost his balance, he deliberately fell on the smallest child, the one likely to be swept away fastest. This sank the child into the sand under his weight. Simultaneously he reached out for the next smallest one like a goal-keeper while his weight still held down the youngest.

Having waded the two, still flat on the floor, he now tilted his stomach sideways to gain height in his outstretched position in order to act as a wedge for the third and oldest child sliding towards him. But because the oldest child was weightier, the current moved him more sluggishly until the sand friction halted his glide just before his father's body.

All this happened within a twinkle of an eye. The dangerous wave having receded, the young man got up, grabbed his children, again in

the order of the youngest first, and led them out to safety. By this time a sizeable crowd had gathered.

As if oblivious why they had gathered, he goaded his children to his beach hut. When next I looked, a few minutes later, he was washing the sand off his children, joking and laughing as he narrated to his wife who apparently was sitting breastfeeding a baby. My heart filled with gratitude to God and admiration for the young man as I watched from my distance.

When they were leaving the beach, I could not help walking up to him. I asked him how he managed to remain so cool under the situation, keeping his head and taking the right decisions all the way until they were all safe. Throughout the incident he had exhibited no sign of strain or tension. His face was calm and at ease. You know what he answered me?

Kudo: What?

Sage: He said he knew nothing would happen to him and his children. I asked, "You knew?" He answered, with a soft but knowing smile. He said, "Sir, I knew. I knew in my heart that God was with us, and that nothing would happen to us."

Goose-pimples ran down my spine, and I knew in my own heart that I was looking at a very special person.

Chapter Thirteen

ROYALTY

Kudo: I hope you would not get tired of my questioning.

Sage: Why should I? Do I drop some hint of tiredness?

Kudo: No. Not at all. I was just beginning to feel guilty and exploitative of your kindness.

Sage: No need, my son. You may not know it but both of us are partners.

Kudo: Partners?

Sage: Yes, partners.

Kudo: How?

Sage: In the service of life. Especially in the service of life without thought of reward.

Kudo: Sir, I do not understand.

Sage: In time you will, just keep doing what you are doing. I am with you all the way; for as long as you can cope.

Kudo: How so kind?

Sage: You are the kind one, my son. I should thank you. You may not understand but don't worry. Just keep firing the questions.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. I would like to pick on the quality of royalty, which you mentioned earlier as one of the necessary attributes of the ideal president. How should a leader be royally?

Sage: Once again I would like to refer you to the good old dictionary. Read for us the meaning of "royally".

Kudo: It simply puts it as "a splendid manner."

Sage: Which dictionary is this?

Kudo: It is the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

Sage: Good. Just to be sure. The words “splendid” and “manner” neatly capture what I meant by a leader’s royalty. Of course I did not mean it in any sense of having a royal blood or things like that; as if anyone could actually isolate a royal element in anyone’s blood. None of such stuff.

Kudo: I see. I had misconstrued it to mean that actually. I was really expecting you to confirm my understanding. Although that would have made me very sad, for it would have established discrimination against most of the people purely by accidents of birth.

Sage: There are no accidents in life, my son. Everything is in its proper place. People being born under certain circumstances or in certain homes, is not in any way accidental. They are choices made or predetermined by previous actions. Being born in one family and not another is a matter of consequence; not accident.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Maybe we can discuss that another time. But for now let’s return to our definition of “splendid manner” as quintessential royalty. It is the manners that separate the truly royal from the others, not birth, money or the like. The royal displays splendid manners while the commoner displays you-know-what. Is that clear enough?

Kudo: So it has nothing to do with parentage or lineage?

Sage: Without meaning to confuse you, it does.

Kudo: Now I am thoroughly confused. First you say it has nothing to do with what I called accident of birth; and in the same breath you say it has to do with parentage or lineage. Which should I take?

Sage: I knew I was bound to confuse you the way I went about answering the question. But let me explain. I used parentage or lineage a bit imprecisely; in groping for an appropriate word. You see, we all come from one parent. That parent is the Holy Spirit. We all are made from its fabric. Our every constitution as spiritual beings is precisely same as that of the Holy Spirit.

Kudo: But we all are different and indeed act as such.

Sage: No confusion. We all necessarily act differently because we all have different levels of realization of the fact that we all are extensions of the Holy Spirit. By realization I do not mean cognition or acknowledgement. Those may be stepping stones, but what I mean is the extent to which we manifest, consciously align and reflect the truth of being born of the Holy Spirit.

Kudo: You mean like being “born again”?

Sage: Yes and no. Yes because being “born again” actually means returning to our real nature as Soul, spiritual beings. And no, because that birth is not a novelty, but a birth to what we really are and had always been; but which we had forgotten under the foliage and layers of ignorance and the filthy lucre of material and mental power and passion.

Kudo: So being “born again” is not like being born anew?

Sage: No. It is rather like rediscovery of the true self; realizing who we are, as Soul, as spiritual beings, as part of the originator of the universes; as master, not slave of the ephemeral lower worlds including the physical; as compulsive creators and servants of life.

Kudo: Strange.

Sage: Not strange, my son. It is this rediscovery, rebirth, renaissance which draws one to align with the spiritual culture of life, get soaked in it, and thus reflect it in his manners. It is this that curbs the selfishness of the flesh and reveals the nobility and selflessness of Spirit. So when I say the ideal president must be royally; I mean that he must recognize and activate his imperishable heritage as Soul, offspring of the Holy Spirit, the eternal royalty. It is from this vantage position that he can ever be truly royal.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: And it is not difficult to identify who amongst us is truly royal; for “by their fruits we shall know them”.

Chapter Fourteen

TEAM SPIRIT

Sage: I notice you changed your usual interview time today. Anything special?

Kudo: I did not realize that you would notice.

Sage: I noticed and I thought that there might be a reason.

Kudo: There is.

Sage: Let's hear it. Or is it something private, in which case you do not have to bother. Time is immaterial.

Kudo: No, there is nothing private as such about the reason. It was purely for my own convenience that I moved the time of this session. I did not want to miss a football match involving my favorite player.

Sage: So you like football that much?

Kudo: Oh yes, sir. I love football.

Sage: Really, why?

Kudo: That's a good question. I have never really pondered why I love the game so much. But just thinking on my feet now, I think I love the game because it teaches me so much.

Sage: Like what?

Kudo: Football is exciting, to start with - a game of 11 players functioning as one single machine. That, in particular, trips me.

Sage: You mean the teamwork involved in football?

Kudo: Exactly, sir. Nothing teaches me teamwork more practically than football.

Sage: That is a great insight. I never thought about it like that before. But thinking about it now, I see you are right.

Kudo: You think I am correct?

Sage: Sure. A football team is one organism, from the goalkeeper, through the defenders and mid-fielders, to the strikers. It is made up of positions occupied by different persons or personalities united by a common objective of preventing the ball from getting into their net while doing all to get the ball into the opponents' net.

Kudo: That is just how I see it.

Sage: The team players may have their different ideas, idiosyncrasies, or orientations but on that field each one is only a part of a larger team, where no one of them means much outside of the context of the team.

Kudo: Exactly how I see it, sir.

Sage: Fantastic insight you have developed from the love of such a common game. I wonder how many more see it like that.

Kudo: I can bet that most coaches see the game as such.

Sage: Yes, of course. The coach as the manager of the team appreciates more than most, the genius of teamwork. Many will tell you from personal experience about games they lost not because they lacked quality players but because the team did not function as one organism - in sync.

Kudo: That is what many football analysts say of my national team; fantastic talents, but poor blending as a team.

Sage: In that case when they play there may be flashes of individual brilliance, but the team would often flop.

Kudo: Typical.

Sage: This underlines the importance of teamwork. If there is indeed a singular trait by which great leaders could be marked out, it may well be their ability to engender and foster teamwork. This is why the task of the team manager is first to build a team; the way you would build a house; where each component adds value in a co-coordinated and concerted manner to achieve desired results.

Kudo: I agree sir; that that is the primary function of the leader of the team - to forge a unity out of a group of different individuals, so that the team functions as one entity in search of only the collective glory.

Sage: Excellent. Each member donates his entire effort, creativity and talent to the whole without seeking personal glory.

Kudo: That seems to me to define leadership. Given the much you have taught me so far about leadership, it is probably the ability to create an organism whose parts seek the glory of the whole with all their might, without the distraction of personal egos.

Sage: Does your favorite player conform to this spirit of teamwork?

Kudo: Pretty much so. This shows in his most unselfish disposition on the field. He works his heart to feed others with the ball, the best way it helps them perform best. He seems to have studied each member of the team and discovered how each likes best to be served the ball for best results for the team.

Sage: I think in that description you have probably come out with a finer definition of the ideal leader, as one who strives to help team members help the team the best.

Kudo: Watching him, nothing stirs me more than the way he celebrates his goals surrendering the glory to the team all the time. Perhaps it is best to view him in contrast with most other players, who when they score celebrate in accentuating their personal ego through body language such as chest beating, pointing to their own jerseys or jersey numbers, or something individualistic like that.

Sage: But how does your friend do it?

Kudo: When he scores he beckons on all the teammates to come together in celebration and collective ownership of the glory.

Sage: How sweet. That is leadership; glorifying the team always; not the self.

Chapter Fifteen

MAGNETISM OF FAITH

Sage: After our discussion last week I have become a more avid follower of football.

Kudo: Really. I hope you do not find it boring, sir.

Sage: No. Indeed, many years ago I was more of a fan than you probably are today. Back then football meant so much to me, and I learnt so much from the game. I guess my interest faded when there was not much to learn anymore from the game than from other pastimes.

Kudo: It is really cool to hear that you were a football fan.

Sage: In fact a couple of nights back, I watched what some say was the most dramatic of continental championship finals in a decade. You must have seen the match.

Kudo: Yes, of course, sir. I watched it. It was a remarkable experience.

Sage: Yes, it was. But let me hear your points of view on the match. What or who did you find most noteworthy.

Kudo: My kudos...

Sage: You mean yourself in plural?

Kudo: Ha..ha..ha. No, sir.

Sage: Just kidding. Please carry on.

Kudo: My praise goes to the winners, who apparently, and from all calculations of bookmakers, were the gross underdogs who miraculously made it to the final, to face a well-reputed and established giant.

Sage: It must have seemed like a David and Goliath case.

Kudo: You could not have put it better, sir.

Sage: Sorry to interrupt. Please go on.

Kudo: Shortly after the game started the great opponents of the underdogs clearly manifested their skill superiority, as they dominated the game. It was not long before they scored. They went ahead to score again within a fairly short interval.

And before the end of the first half, they scored yet again the goal that most regarded as the final nail on the coffin of the underdogs' ambition. All hope was lost. At least, so it seemed. The match was as good as over. That was the general conclusion of most football followers, including the most ardent supporters of the underdog team. Disillusioned, some fans even stopped watching after the first half.

Characteristically, finals usually record very low scores. In this case, the clearly more superior and more skillful team was already 3 goals on top. This, by itself, was an overloaded score line for a serious cup final like a continental one. So it was no surprise that many, including myself, had concluded that the match was as good as wrapped up in favor of the relatively bigger, more experienced and more skillful team, parading stars that were household names in world football.

Sage: I noticed that even the commentator said that much. He gave no hint of a chance to the underdogs after the third goal.

Kudo: But we all were in for a great surprise. I do not know what the coach did or said to the players at half time, but surely something was added that seemed to give the underdogs a new dose of courage. This manifested clearly in the captain. His every body language, showed that he was on fire, ready to give the fight his very all.

Sage: You noticed that as well?

Kudo: Yes, sir, I did.

Sage: You must be a very keen observer of the game. Anyway, you have said that much already. Please proceed.

Kudo: As they say regarding fortune favoring the courageous, a loose ball soon bounced towards the captain, not far from the opponents' goalmouth. He put all his power behind it, and found the net for the underdog's first goal.

Sage: Apt description.

*Kudo: And you know, sir, what pleased me most was the way this captain, capitalizing on this goal roused all his players by his body language, waving them to rise to the occasion; and more, his sign language to their throng of fans who had journeyed all the way to a foreign land to give their team support. He moved and motivated players and fans **to believe again**.*

Sage: Critical point.

Kudo: Sir, why do you say that?

Sage: Critical point indeed. You see the captain gave his all because he believed; and because he believed that victory was possible against all odds, he raised the morale of the followers, players and fans alike, to believe again. This belief fired their will and desire to win, irrespective of the odds. So what I saw on the field was a contest between a team of skill and some will and an underdog of more will and less skill.

Kudo: In the end, more will, founded on unshakeable faith, won, above more skill with less faith. The catalytic rouser of the faith and energies was the leader.

Sage: And that is the great lesson of leadership I found in the match. A leader, a true leader, must have unshakeable faith in the success of the collective pursuit, and must thus throw in everything to achieve it. This charges him with a strong magnetic aura that infects those he leads, and raises them to performance levels beyond themselves. There lies the magic of leadership.

Kudo: Led by a different person with less faith, the results would surely have been different. Truly, he who wears the captain's band makes a world of difference to the people or the team he leads.

Chapter Sixteen

INTEGRITY FIRST

Sage: There is something I would like us to talk about.

Kudo: What is it, sir?

Sage: Good old **honesty**. Good old **integrity**. Meaning what you say, and saying what you mean.

Kudo: That sounds basic enough to me.

Sage: It is as basic as it is fundamental.

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: One of my favorite examples of a leader is that of one leading a blind man. Clearly the one leading is the leader of the movement, and the blind is the follower. Without the leader, be he a child or not, the blind man can get nowhere. We see many of these couples on the streets of many countries.

Kudo: Mine inclusive.

Sage: I see. So you really know.

Kudo: Yes, sir. Usually the blind just places his hand on the shoulder of a little lad, who leads him everywhere. Whenever the lad chooses to rest, the follower - the blind man - must also rest.

Sage: Apt. The relationship is that close. Together they are one organism, more or less. Inseparable, for all practical purposes, at least, for the blind man. To go, he must see. To do, he must see. So the lad serves as his way shower.

Kudo: His guide, his eyes.

Sage: That's correct. Now have you ever watched them cross a tricky place, like a slippery ground, or a gully or a gutter?

Kudo: Not quite. I have not really studied them doing that.

Sage: Next time you have the opportunity, check. What you are likely to witness is a situation of total trust. With experience, the blind has learned to trust the word of the lad totally and obeys every instruction to the letter. Step to the left. He obeys. Slowly. He obeys.

Now stretch your step to the fullest. He obeys. A little more stretch. He obeys. Through experience, the blind believes the word of his little leader totally.

This is the highest accolade a leader could have; that his followers would go with him, freely, even when blindfolded. Nothing begets this level of trust except reliability, dependability, truthfulness, total honesty; in short, integrity. This is what confers on the little lad the authority to have commanding influence over the blind man.

Kudo: I never saw it that way before.

Sage: But it is the true test of leadership. Will your followers freely follow you blind-folded? If the answer is no, there is still a lot of work to be done to earn their trust. And without trust, you are actually leading no one. For to lead, is to be trusted.

Kudo: So if your so-called followers do not trust you, you are really not leading them, but forcing yourself on them?

Sage: Sure. Let me give you a personal experience. Many years ago, I once had a trusted leader. I should rather say, just a leader, because trust should be inherent in leadership. Through experience I could trust this leader with my life.

If he blindfolded me, took me on a journey to a mountaintop, and asked me to jump off, I would if he personally assured me that I would be unharmed. That was how much I trusted him. Over the years I had come to know that his word was gold, true, reliable, and infallible. He was my leader in truth.

Kudo: How beautiful.

Sage: Truly beautiful. Now what I am about to say may shock you.

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: We lived in two distant cities. But we had reasons to meet quite regularly. One day he promised he was going to come to see me at the weekend, precisely 2pm on Saturday. True to type at 2pm he showed up. We discussed a variety of common issues and he departed.

Kudo: That sounds rather ordinary to me. I was waiting for the surprise.

Sage: The surprise was that I learnt a week later through his relatives that he was poisoned and died days before my appointment with him, which he kept.

Kudo: What? Sure?

Sage: Sure. I was so certain that his relatives were wrong. I immediately took a trip to their city to prove that I was right. I got there and became confused. I was led to the mortuary, where I confirmed that the body was deposited before my meeting with him.

Kudo: This is incredible.

Sage: Yes, incredible. But it was my experience. For weeks I had difficulty coming to terms with it. Then one night he appeared to me in a dream, to explain.

Kudo: What did he say?

Sage: He said that we were all potentially gods. And that those who realize their godness never play with their words. They regard them as sacred, knowing that whatever they say comes to pass. He said, surrounding all are special unseen beings whose duty it is to ensure that whatever we say happens. But unfortunately people toy with their words, wavering at whim, until the special guides don't take them seriously anymore. He finished, smiled and left. Then I woke up.

Kudo: Was it really a dream?

Sage: You ask correct questions, Kudo. Maybe it wasn't.

Chapter Seventeen

MR. KNOW ALL

Sage: Kudo, good to see you. How are you?

Kudo: Excellent, sir.

Sage: I love that very positive response. It's very heartwarming.

Kudo: And you, sir?

Sage: Let me repeat your word Excellent!

Kudo: I am glad to hear that, sir.

Sage: Why not, you are the author.

Kudo: Ah, not quite sir; I'm just learning. After all it is the likes of you that have taught us that as a man thinks so he is.

Sage: Fantastic scripture. Son, I like your familiarity with the word. That is where it actually begins. Keep it up.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. I am learning.

Sage: And, you know, I like that attitude.

Kudo: What attitude, sir?

Sage: The attitude or rather disposition of continuous learning. It is an attribute that we should talk about for leaders, ideal presidents, as you would put it.

Kudo: Glad, sir. I had another set of questions in mind for today but we can shelve those and discuss this, instead.

Sage: It is really nothing new; just basic stuff. A leader should be a good student, ever ready to learn; ever ready to study and understand situations as they evolve; ever ready to study and understand lieutenants and therefore how best to get the team to resonate. A good leader should also be a good student to learn from his colleagues and

therefore enrich governance. A good leader should be a good student of life because ultimately that is what he serves.

Kudo: Sir, please expatiate on these points. I need to fully understand them to enable me communicate them to my audience.

Sage: What points do you refer to? Maybe you can help me by using your notes. What have I said that are of particular interest to you?

Kudo: You said that a good leader should be ever ready to learn. Why?

Sage: A leader should never claim to know it all because he doesn't. In fact the more certain he feels about a course of action the more he should double check. He needs to proceed with extra caution and clarity because his decision affects many outside of his immediate fold of family or company. He must know that in human affairs there is never an absolute best way.

If he does not know that but rather believes that he knows best always, you may be dealing with a maniac of sorts. And like all maniacs, care and service would not be their strength. More importantly, perhaps progress would be limited, because you have a so-called leader who is frozen in time.

In such cases the followers may be ahead in thought and consciousness while the backward leadership does everything to hold them back. Leadership then becomes a yoke of a people, rather than a means of progress. The trouble of such societies may then just be the leadership.

Kudo: That sounds familiar.

Sage: What sounds familiar? What I am saying or what I am describing?

Kudo: What you are describing, sir. It is like the cart pulling the horse; or thugs ruling the princes. Tail wagging the body; or a 19th century coach handling today's world class players.

Sage: So rather than leadership playing its traditional role of liberation of energies and creativity, it becomes an inhibitor, an oppressor and annihilator of creativity and progress.

Kudo: Man is then meant for power; not power for man.

Sage: Exciting. That is a good encapsulation. This is because what then happens is that being backward, incapable of leading from the heart with ideas to touch and transform lives for the better, the backward leader concentrates on power and its retention as the primary aim of governance. Of course at that point your statement holds true. Their only claim to leadership of a people becomes the possession of the coercive instrument of state. No more. They confuse holding the reins of power with leading.

Kudo: But is that not leadership.

Sage: Not at all. Until a follower is willing to follow freely, you are not his leader; only his captor.

Kudo: Sir, you shed so much light through your explanations even unto situations that you are not privy to. It amazes me.

Chapter Eighteen

POWER OF PRAISE

Kudo: I am sorry to be a bit late today. I had planned to come 30 minutes earlier.

Sage: The deviation is not much. Even clocks run late sometimes.

Kudo: But that is when batteries are low.

Sage: Who says human batteries do not run low as well.

Kudo: I know they do, but in this case it was not that of batteries.

Sage: What was it then, traffic?

Kudo: That is a cliché in these parts, I know. It is the ready excuse for even the most chronic latecomer.

Sage: So what happened then?

Kudo: I ran into two of my funniest classmates back in the primary school. Guess what, they are still very funny. And you know something, sir; I have an incurable weakness for jokes. Good jokes. I love to laugh at jokes. Way back at school my classmates knew that I made a good humorist. They were always inspired to entertain me with their jokes. Sometimes I would laugh until I reeled on the floor and tears stood in my eyes.

Sage: They must have been great company.

Kudo: Oh, sir, fantastic company. I love those guys and their jokes. So I am sorry to be late, but that is one of my weaknesses. I make my confession, sir.

Sage: No need to apologize, son. I am not sure that I am much different.

Kudo: Thank you for your kind understanding.

Sage: Suddenly I wish I were that funny myself. I would have liked to entertain you.

Kudo: Me, too. But sir, there was something remarkable about these two guys I met today that I thought I should share with you. Both of them were the worst students in our class way back at school. They always competed for the bottom position of the class, in a manner of speaking. And you know what; they were not even ashamed of their reputation. Instead they turned their predicament into classic jokes.

Sage: They must have a very unique sense of humor.

Kudo: Oh yes, they do. And now their stations in life are vastly different, but you would not have guessed if you saw them joking away today.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: One of them is a professor today and the other a petrol station supervisor.

Sage: Really?

Kudo: Yes, sir. I marveled myself. But I was very happy to see two of them after such a long time. However what intrigued me most was the great disparity in their stations today.

Sage: Did you learn anything?

Kudo: I think I learnt something.

Sage: What?

Kudo: I learnt something about encouragement, about praise. I am trying to avoid the word kudos.

Sage: You can use it, I am not about to poke a joke at you now.

Kudo: Sir, I learnt about the miracle of kudos. In-between my banter with them I tried to figure out how one managed, in spite of series of poor results in the primary school, to today become a professor; while his fellow dullard in school could not even finish secondary school.

Sage: Intriguing.

Kudo: The garage supervisor did not tell me much but the professor did. At the end of our meeting, I realized that he had a most supportive father who led and encouraged him to higher grounds.

Sage: How? Was his father rich?

Kudo: No, nothing near that. In fact the father of the garage supervisor was richer at the time. The secret, from what I deciphered, was that the leadership provided by the professor's father was one that was generous with kudos. He generally did not do well at school, as I knew. But his father lavished him with praise on anything he did well at all. His father always made him believe that in spite of the look of his result he was potentially the best. His father never failed to point out how potentially brilliant he was; and how he could easily be the best if he chose to.

Sage: That must have been great tonic to the young man's ego.

Kudo: I believe so. He never lost faith in himself, because his father used the power of praise on him. That was my lesson.

Sage: The implications of what you have said loom large even for national leaders - a leader without a tongue of praise for his followers may have difficulties raising a winning team.

Chapter Nineteen

CUSTOMER IS KING

Sage: This morning I watched a most hilarious comedy on television.

Kudo: On what channel, sir?

Sage: I do not quite remember. It must have been one of the local channels. I found it quite entertaining; and there were tips on leadership in it, which I thought might be useful to you.

Kudo: Please tell me about them, sir.

Sage: Let's see. There were lessons from various scenes, actually. One of them was about a couple - parents - and their 6-year-old son. Let's just call him Ike. This couple had about 4 children, from what I saw.

The couple had gone shopping and bought some fancy shoes for the children's end of year activities at school. I believe they were billed for some kind of children's party. All the children had no problems with their shoes except this 6-year-old. His feet could not fit comfortably into the new shoes. He was so sad that he started to cry.

This saddened his father greatly and he took turns with his wife to try fitting the shoes comfortably on the little lad's feet, to no avail. The mum tried to arrange alternatives, old canvass shoes and the rest, but this saddened the young boy the more. His cry increased in tempo.

The father abandoned everything he was doing to attend to his son, consoling him and literally racking his brain for a solution. He tried promising to buy another pair of shoes in time, but that did not help matters for the children's show was imminent. The other children were all dressed up, ready to go.

The mother then tried a take-it-or-leave-it solution. She tried to make the child feel guilty by accusing him of making an unnecessary fuss when there were viable options provided. It did not work. The boy cried the more.

All this while the father, who was preparing for a trip, abandoned his preparations and dotted after his little boy in search of a solution. Suddenly, he seemed to have a brain wave and called the boy to come over and try his own shoes. It was a laughable option because he was a big man.

But ridiculous as the suggestion was, Ike played along. He walked into his father's room and into the waiting daddy's shoes. Of course it was ludicrously oversized. Father and son gave up on that solution. But father still would not rest. He wanted badly to make his son happy. And the son just would not stop crying.

Then the man seemed to have another idea. This time he called for the troublesome new shoes of the little lad.

"Please bring me Ike's shoes," he said aloud.

"What for again? Can you both get realistic? Ike, pick one of your old shoes and let me take you to the party!" his wife ordered.

Father and son seemed deaf to her command. Since she would not bring the shoes little Ike had to go fetch them himself. Quick, he was back with the shoes and presented them plaintively to his dad.

"You can go. Leave me alone with the shoes. I will call you when I am through," he told his son. Unquestioningly the boy walked away as if he knew his father would perform magic. When the boy left his father locked the door, so he could be alone. Then we saw the unexpected.

Kudo: What?

Sage: The man sat on the bed and tried to force his big feet into the small shoes. It was extremely funny. To some extent he succeeded. The front parts of his feet were squeezed into the cover of the shoes. But the look on his face was agony. The pain must have been very bad.

As if forcing his feet into the small shoes was not painful enough he started walking around the room, almost in tears as his feet hurt. But he did not give up. He kept pacing up and down the room in the pain. After a while, convinced that he had done enough work on the shoes to expand it for his little boy, he removed them. You needed to have seen the stupid look on his face. It was extremely funny.

Gingerly, he unlocked the door and invited his son to behold the miracle. The joy on the lad's face, in his voice and in his eyes was palpable. He pushed his feet into the new shoes, and surprise, surprise, they fitted! He jumped, and hugged his daddy.

You could see from the father's looks that the joy of the lad far compensated for his pain and foolery. It struck me - what a great leadership trait he had. In the face of his son's "little" problem, he collapsed the briefcase of his own concerns and focused completely at finding a solution to the little boy's problem.

Kudo: What a humorous story!

Sage: The comedy reminded me of the secret of a good businessman. Total focus on customer satisfaction. For this Daddy-Leader, the customers were his family members. Even if only one of them was dissatisfied, he would bend over backwards until he returned the smile to that one's face.

I thought of a story published in one of the dailies of a dedicated wife who doted on her busy husband. The husband was so busy with his professional pursuit that he had no time for anything else including his own welfare. This woman spoke about her unblinking focus on her husband, providing whatever was needed to make him comfortable and successful. Ironically, she spoke of him as her eternal leader.

But I knew in my heart that, of the two of them, she was in fact the leader in that relationship. For she it was who had committed totally to the welfare of her spouse, just like the funny father to his son.

Kudo: It is amazing, sir, how these lessons of leadership visit us in many guises. But sadly only few have the eyes to see them.

Chapter Twenty

CHASTISE WITH LOVE

Kudo: Sir, I particularly enjoyed our discussion recently on the power of praise. From my few days of practice I have found that it is an incredible elixir to all life. But I must confess it has not worked for me in all cases. For instance, I confronted a stubborn case this morning.

Sage: What did you experience?

Kudo: Yesterday, I spent about an hour of my evening discussing with an electrician over a maintenance job in my house. We negotiated and came to an agreement. This morning he came for his cheque. But I had a hunch that he would want to cheat. I had a strong feeling he was going to come up with some trick for more money. My hunch was right.

Sage: Sorry, Kudo, I do not mean to interrupt your story. But what do you mean by hunch? How often do you have it, and is it always right?

Kudo: Wise One, I do not know why you ask, because you must be the master of the subtleties of Spirit which assist us in our day to day life.

Sage: I have my own experiences and notions, but I would be glad to hear from you.

Kudo: It is quite difficult for me to describe a hunch, because for me it is usually very vivid. It is often almost as if I hear a voice, distinct and clear about things or issues not immediately obvious by logic.

Sage: Interesting. Please carry on.

Kudo: They are even more lucid when I do my spiritual exercises faithfully and with love.

Sage: This is getting more interesting. What do you mean by spiritual exercise?

Kudo: Oh my God! Sir, you know these things far better than I do.

Sage: You can assume that. No problem. But I want to hear from you.

Kudo: Ok, sir. I take it that you are testing me.

Sage: It does not matter how you take, but I would like to hear from you. So get on with it. Tell me about the spiritual exercise.

Kudo: Alright, sir. I know everyone is familiar with physical exercise, especially in these days when a lot of people are conscious of the fitness of their bodies.

Sage: Yeeessss.....

Kudo: Spiritual exercise is simply the spiritual counterpart of the physical exercise.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: Let me put it another way. We are HUMAN. HUMAN, I think, is a word made up of two parts HU and MAN. My translation of those two words is SPIRIT and FLESH. By Spirit I mean the God essence, which enters the body, and turns it into a living being. I mean the one that departs and we say the body is dead. Some might call it the Life Essence. Others might simply call it God.

Sage: Fantastic. So HU is Spirit.

Kudo: Yes, sir. HU is the Holy Spirit, which is individualized in each one of us as Soul.

Sage: Amazing! So we are Souls.

Kudo: Yes, sir. We are Souls, not the physical bodies. We, Souls, descend to occupy the lower structure, called man, to then become HUMAN. Let me hasten to add that we HUMANS are not the only Souls living in physical or other forms. Indeed, Animals Are Souls Too, although generally a little less conscious than us.

Sage: So you know we all come from one stream of life?

Kudo: Yes, sir. We all are one. No one differs from the other in Spirit, except in the levels of realization of who we are. But back to your question on spiritual exercise. We jog, for example, to exercise the MAN. But hardly do we exercise our true selves as HU, or specifically as Souls.

Sage: So spiritual exercise is exercising yourself as Soul?

Kudo: Yes, sir. Exercising spiritually is developing spiritual muscles and stamina. A simple exercise, for example, is singing HU, as a love song to God, for a few minutes in a quiet corner. It fills one with Divine Love.

Sage: Does that help with the hunches?

Kudo: Amongst many others. Singing HU gets one more in touch with his spiritual self, which happens to know so much more than the mind of logic can ever know.

Sage: So that is how you knew your electrician was set to cheat you.

Kudo: I do not really know the right answer to give you, sir, and I hope you understand.

Sage: I understand, son. Sorry I led you away from your story. You were about to land somewhere with a question on leadership, I'm sure.

Kudo: Very much so, sir. As the electrician tried to hassle me for some more money, pretending to have suddenly remembered a new wire that he has to buy, I knew he wanted to capitalize on my weak negotiating position in the morning. Being in haste to go to work, he knew I could easily make a concession. I rather chose to pretend to be annoyed with him. It worked, because for the time being, he backed off.

Sage: So...

Kudo: So I just wondered what leaders could do in such situations with difficult people.

Sage: It all depends on what the situation calls for. But whatever choice you make be conscious to make it with love and for the good of all concerned.

Chapter Twenty-One

SEE FAR

Sage: Kudo, how was your weekend?

Kudo: Excellent.

Sage: What did you do that must have been so good?

Kudo: I was at a spiritual seminar - Eckankar Spiritual Seminar.

Sage: You love it at spiritual seminars?

Kudo: It is simply fantastic. The feeling of love is deep beyond what words can express. It is like being continuously in the presence of Divine Love.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: I can hardly describe what I mean. But I know what I feel deep inside. I know what I hear deep inside. I know what I see deep inside.

Sage: You sound like you are in love.

Kudo: I hope I am not sounding wacky?

Sage: No. Not really. You are just sounding like someone in love, someone drunk; drunk with love.

Kudo: Ok, ok, I better shut up. I get the message. Now what about you?

Sage: I went to the zoo.

Kudo: Oh, very interesting.

Sage: I do not like it very much at the zoo; because I would rather have the animals roam free in their natural habitat, like the rest of us.

Kudo: Me, too.

Sage: Although these days there are attempts to make the zoos in the image of the natural environment of the animals in custody.

Kudo: Some approximation.

Sage: Oh, yes. Not quite the same as the original. But I guess they have reasons why there are zoos.

Kudo: At least people can see animals they would otherwise have hardly had a chance to see in their lifetime.

Sage: Well that is a reason - just that it is difficult to judge whether it is a good one or not.

Kudo: Anyway, what animals did you see?

Sage: I saw lion, elephant, hippopotamus, crocodile, alligator, python, fox, hyena, monkeys, tortoise, and different species of birds. But my star of the day was the eagle.

Kudo: The eagle?

Sage: Yes, the eagle. I just love that being. It appears so naturally, so innately aristocratic. It carries itself with gentility and grace, yet it is so strong and so masterful. And you know, I saw the strongest species of eagle in the world. Can you guess where it comes from?

Kudo: Where?

Sage: Your country.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Yes, the guide told us that much - that the strongest and probably the most royal of them come from your native land.

Kudo: I am very proud to note that.

Sage: Who wouldn't be? There was something else I learnt about the eagle, which was quite new to me.

Kudo: What?

Sage: We were told that the eagle has incredible vision. It sees much farther than most. That explained some things that I used to take for

granted, especially the fact that the eagle is often used as a symbol of leadership in many climes.

Kudo: I don't get it, sir?

Sage: It occurred to me that the leadership element exemplified by the eagle was less the physical stamina, and royal grace, but more the vision.

Kudo: Why?

Sage: Because vision is a critical, if not *the critical* defining element in leadership. You think of it. A leader is one who leads, right?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: How can you lead when you cannot see the future? Where would you be leading the people? One can only go as far as he sees. If all he sees is the past, surely that is where that so-called leader will take his people - to the past. If all he sees is the present, surely he has no control over the shape of things to come, and what you will have is chaos - an environment spun out of control.

Kudo: That may be an explanation for the leadership crises in these parts.

Sage: It just may be. For except a man can see far, where is he leading the others to? The first question a prospective leader must be asked is What is your vision?

Kudo: Sadly, here, that is hardly part of the agenda.

Sage: If that is not, then I wonder what is. It must appear ironic that the symbol of leadership is found in its best and most visionary form in your native land.

Chapter Twenty-Two

REWARD ONLY PERFORMANCE

Kudo: Sir, I need some advice.

Sage: Anything the matter?

Kudo: Nothing personal. It was a friend of mine who recently approached me to advise him on an issue in his company.

Sage: What kind of problem was it?

Kudo: It was some kind of staff problem. His staff disagreed with him over his new method of rewarding them at the end of the year.

Sage: What was the old method? And what is the new method?

Kudo: The old method was to ensure that each staff had an increment on his or her salary every new business year.

Sage: Uhu?

Kudo: He thought it was important to do this for staff, all staff, as encouragement.

Sage: Now what has changed?

Kudo: He no longer wants staff to enjoy automatic increments that was usually a flat percentage rate over their previous earnings. The new method bases all earnings on performance; so that increments and the like now have to vary from staff to staff based on their levels of performance the previous year.

Sage: What took him so long?

Kudo: So long to do what?

Sage: So long to realize that rewards should be based on performance?

Kudo: Are you saying he has got it right?

Sage: Sure.

Kudo: But many of his staff are opposed to the new method. That is why he wants my advice. He seems quite worried and unsure.

Sage: Why?

Kudo: Because he is not certain that he is doing the right thing.

Sage: I see. Listen, Kudo, many years ago when I was a student, one of my favorite science subjects was biology. And one of my favorite experiments involved proving plant's dependence on light. We had a controlled experiment where plants were put into two closets which let in no light.

Then one of the closets was perforated for sunlight, while the control remained completely sealed. Over a period we found that all the plants in the completely dark closet started losing color and withering, while plants in the lit closet all tilted towards the light.

This is how it works in leadership. People generally tend to do more of what the leadership rewards. Like plants they tilt towards the light of rewards.

So your friend is surely doing the right thing. There would of course be those that would need to drop off because of the wind of change, but that is not a problem. Shedding off leaves is often a good sign in plants because it precedes new shoots or signifies competence for longevity and survival.

I think your friend is on track, especially if his goal is better service delivery and customer satisfaction.

Kudo: That is most encouraging. I wish he were here to hear this himself. But I would certainly convey same to him.

Sage: You know, son, leadership can be a tricky business. Sometimes you could be so sentimentally attached to your followers or particular followers that you tend to pander to their requests even when such requests are detrimental to the overall good. The happiness of this usually small circle of reactionaries, if you know what I mean, could translate to hurt of the larger community.

Often the choice has to be made, between loyalty to the overarching ideals of the organization or to few supposedly close allies. Many leaders have failed because they would rather please immediate friends and cronies than the larger public who depend on

them to act right; and for whom they are supposed to be leaders, in the first place.

Kudo: We see this often. Laws perverted, policies subverted just for the sake of a few to the detriment of the people. A consequence is that the reputation of the leader begins to wane; and so his trustworthiness and reliability. If in a public organization, he begins to lose respect and in private, it begins to lose customers.

Sage: So in the end it is in everyone's interest for the leader to reward only performance. It is in the interest of the organization's reputation and growth. It is in the interest of the leader's reputation and trustworthiness. It is in the interest of the customers, for they then obtain better service.

And it is in the interest of staff, for better service translates into better profits from which they benefit. Of course it is also in the interest of shareholders. Whichever way you look your friend has got it right a win-win situation for everyone. I would suggest that he stays the course.

Chapter Twenty-Three

WARM AND CARING

Sage: I once served as lift operator.

Kudo: Really? You must be joking!

Sage: No, I am not joking. It was a job I did for one day, and I am proud of it.

Kudo: Surely you must be joking.

Sage: No, I am not. It is a long time ago, though. No kidding. I served as a lift operator for one day. My experience on that day is what I intend to discuss with you today.

Kudo: Oh, I did not realize that. Maybe I should first hear the story and later question the fact.

Sage: Good deal. Let me tell you the story.

Kudo: Alright, sir.

Sage: That day I wore my blue khaki outfit. It fitted nicely. And I made sure I arrived at my station very early before the first callers. I was informed the office was going to experience a good traffic of people that day, for some reason.

Kudo: What are you calling your station, sir? You mean the lift?

Sage: Sure. For that day, that was my workstation, my office.

Kudo: Ok. I accept that, sir.

Sage: As predicted the traffic was heavy. But I must say not many came at a time. They trickled in, in small batches of 2 or 3 at a time. And in most cases, there was only one in the lift with me at a time. It almost seemed as if the people were timed to arrive separately. So I more or less had the privilege of interacting with each person; in cases when we had time to chat as we ascended.

Kudo: It must have been an interesting day.

Sage: Yes, it was. I met various personality types. Indeed I had a note and a pen. Once I dropped one off, I quickly made some notes against the person's name. Luckily they each had their nametags, well displayed.

Kudo: Interesting.

Sage: To simplify things for myself, I tried to classify the people into two categories. Warm and Caring. Cold and Self-Centered.

Kudo: Wow!

Sage: It was a most fascinating experience.

Kudo: What was it like with the Cold and Self-Centered?

Sage: It has been a long time now; however I still recall certain traits that led me into categorizing them as such. When they first arrived in front of the lift, they were frowning, tight-lipped, face making, or admiring themselves for the whole period we were together, oblivious of me.

All their attention was on themselves. They did not bother with me or anything else. And often when they spoke to me, it was in a commanding tone, bereft of courtesy.

They treated me like the lowly worker that I was that day - grunting when I greeted, or not answering my greetings at all. And when they left the lift it was usually without a word. Hardly did they make eye contact, or smile at me. If they bothered to look at all, it was in condescension.

Kudo: Were they conscious of making these kinds of impressions on you.

Sage: Of course not, because I did not matter at all, in their reckoning. You could almost say that I did not exist as far as they were concerned. I was a total nobody. In a few cases I was badly berated for stopping on the wrong floor. I was too unimportant to be allowed the latitude of a simple mistake without a good tongue-lashing.

Kudo: Were there lots of them like that?

Sage: Sadly, yes. For most of them, I could just have been part of the machinery of the lift, programmed to do a routine. Coldly they would come in, coldly they would say what floor, and coldly they would depart. But luckily it was not so all through. There were the refreshing personalities in-between.

Kudo: I cannot wait to hear about them.

Sage: I feel good talking about them myself, because their memories warm my heart. I may not see those young lads again in this lifetime. They may in fact have completely forgotten me. But thinking about those exceptions warms my heart.

Kudo: How nice.

Sage: They seemed to carry sunshine with them. First, there is this warm and friendly smile. And then there is the hearty “hello”, or “how are you, sir”. Perhaps because I was manifestly older than them, a couple treated me with almost embarrassing respect.

While in the lift some would ask about the wound on my face for I had a plaster on it. And then we would talk and laugh, sharing hearty moments even for those brief periods. And when stepping out of the lift, they never forgot to say, “thank you”, so warmly, you had no doubt, they spoke from their hearts. And you know what?

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: Those few exceptional warm hearts succeeded, because I was in charge.

Kudo: Of what? I do not understand.

Sage: The visitors were actually applicants coming for interview for a raft of jobs. I was recruited as an undercover consultant to pick the warm and caring ones amongst them, disguised as a lift operator. It was a crucial leg of their interview series, but they did not know it.

Today I am glad to tell you that those few caring ones have decently climbed the social rungs and are now either running their successful businesses or leading one organization or the other. I saw it in them - the insignia of great leaders the warm and caring heart.

Chapter Twenty-Four

WHY SOUL EXISTS

Sage: For some strange reason I did not sleep early last night.

Kudo: Why? Insomnia?

Sage: Not quite. For most of the evening I was writing. The spiritual energy coming through was so strong, and I kept on and on until I thought it was necessary to force a break. In such conditions I generally find something unusual to do just to unwind. That is how I got into watching a movie.

Kudo: I never realized you were into movies.

Sage: That's what I was trying to explain to you. I am not. But I ended up watching for longer than I would ordinarily have and then went to bed late.

Kudo: What movie was it?

Sage: The Power Game; ever heard of it?

Kudo: No. I am not a movie person, too, although I occasionally find myself watching. Was there anything of interest?

Sage: Yes, there was. As the title of the movie indicated, it was a story of power struggle between rival groups in a university campus. Two professors were contending for the lucrative position of vice-chancellor.

Kudo: There must have been a lot of intellectual debate, given the setting.

Sage: Sure. There was a lot of argumentation as you would ordinarily expect from intellectuals, but that was not all. The surprising element, was that the less qualified, and less popular of the two, hatched a plan to silence his opponent by killing him.

Kudo: What?

Sage: Now you can see why I was arrested by the turn of the events in the movie. Days to the popular election, this lesser professor, for want of a better description, contracted a killer to finish off his opponent; and paid him with all his savings.

Kudo: Did he succeed?

Sage: Surprisingly, he did not. The contracted killer was a prophet in disguise, sent to live amongst the gang of killers for undisclosed reasons.

Kudo: So what happened?

Sage: On the eve of the election when the killer was supposed to waylay the subject on his way home, he rather broke into the home of the one that contracted him and held him at gunpoint. At first the professor thought that his opponent had hatched a similar plan as his and had sent an assassin as well to eliminate him.

Kudo: Then what happened?

Sage: After he successfully had his victim under his control, the so-called hired assassin gently removed his hood to reveal his handsome face. The professor was shocked!

Kudo: God, he must have been shocked beyond belief.

Sage: Shocked beyond description. With the gun still held to the professor's head he began to speak.

Kudo: About what?

Sage: He asked the professor whether he knew the meaning of life. Whether he knew where life came from? Whether he could create life? Whether he knew what the components were that constituted life?

Kudo: And what was the Prof's response?

Sage: Nothing, of course. He was utterly speechless.

Kudo: Of course, he should be.

Sage: The killer further asked the professor if he knew what Soul was; if he knew that Soul was a particle of God, a spark of God;

whether he built the bodies in which the Soul that he wanted to dispatch dwelt.

Kudo: The professor must have been totally perplexed at the words of his contracted killer.

Sage: He did not stop at asking questions. He eventually asked the professor to relax. He put away his gun and started to teach, the way a father would teach a son. He told the professor that Soul was the image of God in us, which enters the body to imbue it with life. When Soul leaves the body, the body dies.

To kill the body, is not to kill the Soul. Because no one can kill Soul, since no one can kill God. What he had contracted him to do was to forcefully eject Soul from its abode - an act that was tantamount to tampering with the Will of the Almighty. He asked the professor if he knew the implications of such an action; of depriving a fellow being of the life granted him by his maker - all just for a mess of porridge?

Kudo: Could the professor answer?

Sage: No. Shame covered him. The so-called assassin taught him further that freedom to live is granted to all by the Source of life, which views all with love and great compassion. He told the embarrassed professor that the Soul of his colleague that he wished to dispatch was loved dearly, the way God loves every Soul. He added that Soul exists because God loves it. No more, no less. He then asked rhetorically, "Who are you to tamper with the beloved of the Almighty who created you?"

Kudo: Did the Prof respond?

Sage: Of course not; only cold sweat and shame covered him. But the questioning continued. Imagine that I succeeded in killing your opponent for you to take power; will that power never end? Will you ever be able to account to yourself, your conscience, and the Creator? Would there be a hiding place for you in God's universe?

Even you have no right to take your own life. I wonder if you know that. If you dare you run foul of tampering with the Supreme, which you can neither understand nor fathom. You know not from where life came, and you know not how it goes; so how dare you tamper with it?

And what is even more ridiculous - all for a mess of porridge, which sooner or later belong in the suck-away pit of history? Is this

the reason you are ready to face the wrath of the unchangeable, unappeasable eternal laws that would hunt you whether you still be in the flesh or out of it?

As the professor fell face down, sobbing like a baby, utterly ashamed, the young man turned and walked away.

Chapter Twenty-Five

WHO'S MY LEADER?

Kudo: Sir, in a company of leaders who should lead?

Sage: You surprise me with this kind of question. Why do you ask?

Kudo: It is something I have been pondering over because of rampant cases of leadership tussles everywhere Within companies, governments and other organizations.

Sage: I see where you are coming from. You associate leadership with positions like President, Manager and Director - things like that - right?

Kudo: Right, sir.

Sage: I will try to address your question from your point of view but let me say that leadership has to be dissociated from positions of authority. I actually find it funny when people beat their chests to say I am the leader of such and such group just because they occupy a certain position.

Position or post is only a function station. That you are manning a railway station or even a motor park does not make you the leader of the passengers. What you have is an assignment to organize the station for the good of the commuters; period.

Kudo: Sir, please explain.

Sage: Of course I will explain. A position or a post is a place of work, the way you would for instance have a security post. The occupant may or may not have leadership qualities.

Kudo: So you could for example have a president, who is not a leader?

Sage: Correct. That he occupies the office of the president does not make him a leader.

Kudo: Sir, I am confused. Who then is a leader?

Sage: Kudo, I am surprised you are asking this because we have been on this your series for over 6 months now. I am sure you know the issues. Maybe you are just temporarily confused.

Kudo: I like the way you put it. But please forgive my naivety. Who is my leader if those in such positions of authority are not, as such?

Sage: I love your care with words. The use of *as such* there was most appropriate. You must have specialized in Theory.

Kudo: I appreciate your kind words, sir.

Sage: Simply put, a doctor is one who takes care of his patients. One to whom patients willingly and voluntarily submit their bodies knowing he can help them. Yes?

Kudo: Yes, sir.

Sage: A driver is one who can manipulate the vehicle with expertise, competent to move it around - one to whom you willingly and voluntarily submit to take you from one physical destination to another. Right?

Kudo: Right, sir.

Sage: In the same vein a leader is one whom you can trust to lead you. He is one to whom you voluntarily and freely submit to lead you. A chain of trust, freely given, is what links leader and follower. The key is willingness, volition, or freedom. Introduce any form of coercion to replace that voluntary link, and you are no longer talking leadership, but probably slavery or dictatorship.

Kudo: So as long as people or followers do not submit themselves of their own accord to be led by another - that person cannot in all honesty claim to be their leader? He could only claim to be their dictator having violated their freedom?

Sage: Excellent. This lies at the heart of the crisis of legitimacy of so-called leaders. It is the trust freely given that confers legitimacy on leadership otherwise it is fake, illegitimate, fraudulent and therefore not leadership. Your leader, in any sphere, is he whom you choose to follow freely. Sometimes the leader you follow may not even know that you follow him because your choice is a matter of the heart.

Kudo: So the choice of leaders lies in the deep recess of the heart?

Sage: Correct. Let me say also that you do not have to have one leader. Different phases of life can throw up different leaders. They are the ones whom, exercising your due freedom, you follow.

Kudo: I imagine that often these leaders chosen in the hearts of the people would be those who can be trusted to further the interest of the persons concerned.

Sage: That goes without saying. No one chooses a leader that would act antithetically to his interest, because the leader is principally an agent of the follower. A leader is engaged to serve the interest of those he leads. Otherwise he loses them and dissolves; for leadership is nothing without followership.

Kudo: So it must then be erroneous to describe leaders that act against the will of their followers as leaders?

Sage: Whoever accepts that kind of leadership but a slave? If your agent, like your lawyer, acts against your interest, wouldn't you fire him?

Kudo: Of course.

Sage: So those acting against your interest and calling themselves your leaders are impostors and probably need to be called to order by you. But beyond that you must be conscious of what you mean when you address someone as your leader. I have heard so many agonize about crude tyrants, whom they turn around to refer to as "our leaders".

Kudo: Sir, it could be because of ignorance.

Sage: I wonder if ignorance will ever be an acceptable excuse.

Chapter Twenty-Six

LEADERS PROVEN BY CRISES

Sage: Kudo, I cannot wait to share this with you.

Kudo: What, sir?

Sage: A conversation I had with some little children on holidays around our block. They now have lots of time to play with grandfathers like me who are happy with their company.

Kudo: Children are great company any day.

Sage: You know what I enjoy most about them?

Kudo: No, sir.

Sage: The wisdom that passes so easily through them to the rest of us, if we are attentive.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Yes. Often it comes straight from the heart, without cosmetics. Just the way it is.

Kudo: Sure. Children are hardly concerned with manipulations, cold calculations or powdering of facts to please some person or the other.

Sage: If your clothes smell, they tell you straight. No diplomacy. And best of all, no hard feelings. Children are simply great.

Kudo: They are.

Sage: Let me return to the conversation I had with them this morning that I found so interesting.

Kudo: Please, sir.

Sage: I was asking about the physical world, trying to find out why things exist. They gave amazing answers. But the one that interested

me most was the answer that one of them gave as the reason why night exists.

Kudo: What did he say?

Sage: The little lad of probably 6 or 7 years said nights existed so that stars could shine. And he went further to explain that but for the night we may never have a chance to see the stars, because they do not show up during the day, when it is very bright.

Kudo: Amazing.

Sage: I tell you, Kudo. Children are truly amazing. The wisdom of that little lad filled my heart with gladness all morning and I kept thinking about children.

Kudo: I have always wondered why great prophets love them so much. Perhaps the reason is the wisdom they exude.

Sage: But beyond that, I think, is the love in their hearts. That love, so humble and so simple, as love often is, is what makes the wisdom possible. But my excitement in this case was with reference to the implications of what the lad said.

Kudo: Is there more to it than I can see.

Sage: I do not know, but his statement, for me, was profound, deep and capable of explaining so many things in life.

Kudo: Such as?

Sage: Periods of temptation; periods of problems; periods of ignorance; periods of crises - all represented by the moments of darkness, which in turn provides the grounds, the opportunity for stars to shine.

Kudo: Are you speaking with reference to our individual lives?

Sage: It applies every way, in industry, in academics, in private lives, in national life. The period of the night, metaphorically speaking, provides the chance, probably the true chance for true stars to shine.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: Take students for instance. All would claim stardom but for exams, the period of tests and strain. That is when to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Kudo: I get it now, sir. Going by this wisdom, if I were a spinster, I would know how best to pick a husband.

Sage: Oh my God, how did your mind fetch that! I do not know if I agree that crisis is what should have helped you pick a good husband, but it is worth mocking up a crisis sometimes just to know who loves you or not - man or woman. For it is true that a friend in need is a friend indeed.

Kudo: Sir, knowing you, you must have told me about your encounter this morning with the children, with an eye to helping me fill my column this week.

Sage: I thought you would get the message.

Kudo: I think I do. But please clarify it for my audience and me. I just want to be sure that I got it right.

Sage: I am sure you did. Let he that must choose a leader among many, look out for him in the periods of crises; surely they would throw up the loving, courageous and caring of the lot. That is when to distinguish the real leaders from the fake ones. If you remind me, next week I shall share a few examples or anecdotes with you.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

THE REAL LEADER

Sage: I promised I was going to tell you a story today.

Kudo: I am glad you remembered. I was going to prompt you, anyway.

Sage: Thanks, but I do remember.

Kudo: I am glad.

Sage: I hope you are not looking forward to some long winding fairy tale from the days of yore. What I have to tell you is an observation I made a few weeks ago while traveling between two relatively neighboring cities by air.

Kudo: It must have been a very short trip.

Sage: Yes, it was. The flight could not have lasted more than 30 minutes.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: While waiting at the airport my attention fell on a gorgeously dressed couple. They looked very important. I particularly liked the way the man carried himself. He reminded me of tough army commanders, full of energy and decisive. He seemed to speak only in commands to all around him including his aides and I believe his wife. I was in no doubt that he was a man in charge of many things and many people.

Kudo: Interesting.

Sage: In contrast, the wife seemed very humble. She spoke softly, and addressed the aides almost like equals. She spoke politely to all. You could have described her as friendly and meek. She was certainly far from anything you could call tough; not by speech or by looks for she was even smallish.

Kudo: She must have cut the picture of a submissive wife as well.

Sage: Very much so. She doted on her husband, at least from the much I could surmise. Again, in contrast, her macho husband hardly paid her attention. His hat, like that of an American cowboy, accentuated his strength and tough mien.

Kudo: There must have been a matching frown of importance on his face.

Sage: Excellent description. Simply apt. No wonder you are a writer.

Kudo: I am just filling in from the picture you are painting.

Sage: You are filling in precisely. His frown of importance, if I may borrow your phrase, seemed permanently plastered on his face. Not once did I see him smile throughout the one-hour delay that we experienced waiting at the sparse lounge.

However the frown is not the meat of my story. The meat occurred when we were air-borne and ran into a minor storm. Because the aircraft was small the effect was much, for the plane became very shaky, rising and descending sharply, gyrating. It was quite scary.

Kudo: I bet the names of God seized the cabin.

Sage: Oh, Kudo, I do not think I have ever heard as many names of God in all my life as I heard in that short interval; in different languages, tongues, and dialects. It was a mad cacophony.

Kudo: I can imagine.

Sage: Interestingly, in this noisy market of God's names, you could identify the tenors and altos of the various strands of religion prevalent in the region. Some were simply wailing the names, some commanding the names; while others were invoking the names and others still were screaming the names. I could not help thinking whether some thought that God was deaf. Or was asleep, and needed to be screamed at or commanded back to attention.

Kudo: It must have been quite an experience.

Sage: It was. I must confess that I joined in calling the name of God, the way that I know it.

Kudo: How?

Sage: The simple name for God that I know is HU.

Kudo: HU?

Sage: Yes, HU, as in Human. I sang it quietly within me, knowing that God was with us.

Kudo: Great faith.

Sage: It is beyond faith, Kudo. It is a deep and unshakeable knowing. It is reality more solid than anything you and I ever know. But don't let me take you away from the kernel of the story, which was that in the crisis, our macho man was one of those wailing like a baby; while his wife, the small diminutive fellow, calm and composed, hugged him tight, patting his back as if to reassure him that all would be well.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: My son, it was a sight to behold. A sight I would not forget that easily. I could not help asking myself who amongst these two is the leader? That event helped me prove to myself once again that crises are always excellent selectors of the real leaders in every group.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

LEADERS ARE UNIQUE

Sage: Years ago I was a friend of a very influential and rich but old man, with a wide business organization. Towards his twilight years, he had difficulty in choosing the successor and leader of his organization. He looked to his sons. He had four of them.

For long he had anticipated this period in his life, when he would have to bow out and usher in one of his sons to take leadership. He had given all four very good education in preparation. He also put them through all manner of disciplines, which he considered good training for leadership.

In the end, all four graduated with very good grades, exhibiting good culture and leadership traits. Clearly choosing a leader from amongst them was tough especially since he did not wish to rely on the traditional measure of age as a differentiator. This was when he consulted me, his friend, to help. I must confess that for me it was quite a challenge trying to choose the best leader from these four sons, properly well groomed.

Kudo: But did you solve the problem in the end?

Sage: I would not say that I solved the problem, but the problem was solved, somehow.

Kudo: How?

Sage: We gave them series of tests, some written, others practical - just to test their knowledge and innovative abilities. I must say they all came back with almost equally good performances. The problem persisted until I decided to look beyond the content of the tests and their performances to the styles adopted for each event. Here I found the difference.

Kudo: What did you find?

Sage: I found that although they all had similar grooming, one in particular always differed in the manner in which he approached the problems. The approaches of three were more or less the same, classic, almost textbook materials. But you could almost characterize that of my favorite as unorthodox.

Kudo: Did they often arrive at the same solution?

Sage: Yes, you could say, more or less, but the solutions of the different one, whom we could just call Dopal, always had a certain way, a certain non-conformist slant; no, no, I think the real word is “unique”. He always came out somewhat truly unique. Although you could not describe the others as second-rate, there was always something about Dopal which smacked of identity.

Kudo: You mean he had a unique DNA imprint on all his ways?

Sage: I think that may be a better way of putting it.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: What was even more unique was the consistency of his uniqueness in all that he said or did. Even in the way he carried himself, spoke or dressed.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Really. Dopal gave you the impression that the schools never tampered with his inner self. Almost everything he did bore his inner character. It truly fascinated me and it was only much later that I got to understand.

Kudo: Was it that he was creative?

Sage: I think it was beyond just creativity. I believe the consistency of Dopal was attributable to a dogged sincerity to himself. He strived always to be true to himself and hardly did anything because others thought or said so, or even because someone had certain expectations of him.

Kudo: He was a free Soul?

Sage: Perhaps you could put it that way. He never let the opinion of the environment or its people constrain him or define his speech or action. He always did it his way. If he conformed, it was because he would have conformed even if no one were watching him.

Kudo: Did this uniqueness show even in answers to the theory tests?

Sage: He answered always with deep sincerity to himself. Where for instance he agreed with a certain philosopher's ideas, he internalized it so much that he spoke of it as if it were originally his and thus almost always ventured to advance the frontiers. He did not just regurgitate things for the sake of kudos or applause.

Even where he knew his father might differ he was never afraid to state his case, though politely. The critical factor was that he acted always out of his own personal conviction. He would never do it just to please or to belong. He acted from deep sincerity to himself.

Kudo: So you chose Dopal?

Sage: Of course! How can one ever lead others sincerely if he cannot even be faithful to himself? Put another way, the more faithful a man is to himself, the more of a leader he is, for the first one to be led is himself.

Be not surprised that true leaders in any sphere can always be spotted in the crowd. Somehow they are always different, because they express their inner self; and every inner self sincerely expressed is unique - an ancient signature of Souls liberated from the prison of social consciousness. That is a hallmark of a true leader.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

SINCERE COMPLIMENTS

Kudo: Good morning, sir.

Sage: admire your politeness, in spite of our familiarity.

Kudo: Thank you, sir. I truly appreciate your compliments.

Sage: I hope you do not mean compliments in the commonplace way it is often given which verges on flattery.

Kudo: Not at all, sir; especially knowing you.

Sage: Thanks for your implied compliments too.

Kudo: I am glad.

Sage: The point I was really going to make is that compliments are probably some of the most pleasant ways of teaching or correcting followers of a leader. I once worked with a leader, who always told you what was wrong with your ways by lavishly but honestly praising a desired course of action or behavior.

Kudo: He looks out for your good behaviour, so he would praise you?

Sage: Yes, but not quite. What he craved, I believe, was just the chance to compliment. And he felt really good if it was the one he wished to correct, or even if the subject were merely within earshot while he complimented another. What seemed important to him was that you knew what was praiseworthy.

Kudo: I do not get it, sir.

Sage: Let me give you an example. For some of the period that he led me, I was in the habit of coming late to meetings. Rather than directly scold the likes of me for coming late to meetings, he would rather lavishly praise the early comers. He would set them up as idols, without making any negative reference to the rest of us.

Kudo: I see what you mean.

Sage: In time, no one asked me to change my ways. Every follower cherishes the commendations and compliments of his leader in any sphere. Be it in the family, at work, or at play. I commend it strongly to you. It works.

Kudo: I can imagine.

Sage: And the greater beauty of it is that it corrects people without antagonizing them. It provides a reference point of action or behavior. To be sure, it could take a while for the correction to dawn, depending on how sensitive or sensible, responsible or responsive the intended subject is.

Kudo: Again you lose me. Please explain.

Sage: I am sorry. I never mean to lose you. It must be my communication skills, which require improvement. What I intend to convey is that some people pick up the correction quicker than others, depending on several variables which may include self-respect, adaptability, and experience.

Kudo: Could trust or integrity also be added to that list?

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: I mean from the point of view of the subject to be corrected. Or let me rephrase the question.

Sage: Ok, go ahead.

Kudo: Would the person to be corrected more easily accept the correction if he had greater trust in the leader?

Sage: Yes, of course. Now I see what you mean. If the leader were not trusted by the subject owing to faults of falsehood or integrity; even his most benign or well-meant criticism or praise would require some salting to be accepted.

Kudo: Exactly, sir.

Sage: Agreed. But in this case I basically assumed that the leader is trust-worthy, and honorable. That way his compliment or praise is

credible, making his followers crave for it. Otherwise who wants the compliment of an untrustworthy one, one who lacks integrity?

Kudo: Thanks for seeing my point. I also fully see your own point about using compliments to correct. I wonder whether there are many other better techniques of teaching than that.

Sage: The taste of the pudding is in the eating. Try it on your children, friends and colleagues and see what great result it fetches.

Kudo: You assume that I have their respect and therefore whatever compliment I give would be credible.

Sage: Of course. Knowing you this much, I believe I can safely assume that.

Kudo: You are so kind and generous with your compliments.

Sage: Because you truly deserve it.

Kudo: Thank you very much, sir.

Chapter Thirty

DECIDE RIGHT ALWAYS

Sage: Tell me Kudo, have you ever wondered why some great leaders manage to always make the right decisions, while most others almost always get it wrong, even with all manner of experts at their disposal?

Kudo: No. I have always thought that right decisions of great leaders were based on good advice.

Sage: That's correct. But good advice from whom?

Kudo: From cabinet members, special advisers, consultants, analysts, kitchen cabinet cooks...you know the retinue.

Sage: And what is usually their basis for advice?

Kudo: I think, sir, that the advice of this long list of advisers who surround a powerful leader is usually borne out of selfish motives, even though they might colour it with semblances of altruism.

Sage: Would this be for almost all the cases?

Kudo: No. I believe there are also some that are based on sound scientific analysis.

Sage: Any other categories of advisers?

Kudo: There may also be those whose advice is borne purely out of altruism. But I must add that this third group is likely to be in the minority, usually ignored or blacklisted.

Sage: Now is it a surprise then that many so-called leaders of nations, organizations, families, armies, clubs, schools etc often end with disastrous decisions?

Kudo: Sadly not.

Sage: I believe however that most advisers, whether canvassing altruistic, selfish or scientific; trust that they are genuinely doing the right thing. Some could swear by their actions and advice, even

though their advice may end up achieving the most negative consequences and sometimes the very opposite of what they intended. Over and over, good intentions have proved insufficient as a basis for advice or action. Experience has at least shown that much. But, of course, people do not learn.

Kudo: So if good intentions are not good enough, what is?

Sage: Here we stumble on the age-old dichotomy between material knowledge and inner wisdom.

Kudo: What do you mean, sir? Please explain.

Sage: Material knowledge is knowledge as exemplified by science - an objective analysis, observation and/or experience of the external world ordered by logic. For example, I could think I need to appeal to the selfish, insecure sense of the leader to help him loot some money, from which I would benefit.

I would remind him that sooner or later he would leave office, so there is the need to secure his future. Perfect material logic it is, but one that forgets that the future is one that is dictated and controlled by pure spiritual essence and non-materialistic logic. I am sure you know of far too many cases of anticipated futures that never arrived, or arrived jaundiced by problems, which no material matter could solve. Still, the lesson is not learnt.

Kudo: But the material logic still works, at least sometimes.

Sage: Of course, it works.

Kudo: So....

Sage: So why shouldn't it be used?

Kudo: That is what I mean. It has to be used.

Sage: Correct, it is irresistible not to use it to advance material interests. But the catch is that life itself is beyond material. Hence it happens often that even the most brilliant schemes of men end up in the smelly dustbins of history. But, of course, it has not stopped men from scheming. The illusion is strong. The illusion of the material is so strong; it constitutes a blindfold in a situation otherwise as clear as daylight.

Kudo: So what can leaders do?

Sage: It is obvious from what we have discussed. Let me add that this applies not just to leaders but also to all men. By the mental and material make-up of man, right decision is near impossible, especially decision over life-events, because life itself is not just material. It is spiritual. Thus only Spirit can truly understand and interpret its own language.

Kudo: Be clear, sir.

Sage: To always make right decisions of certainty one must awake as a spiritual being. A spiritual being necessarily understands the spiritual language of life. A spiritual being sees what the material cannot see and hears what the material cannot hear. Only those leaders tuned to this high frequency to listen to the wisdom within get it right always, as long as they are tuned in and are listening.

Chapter Thirty-One

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE

Sage: Today I hope you do not mind if we talk a bit about defeat.

Kudo: Defeat?

Sage: Yes, defeat.

Kudo: Ah, ah, why defeat? Why not victory? Victory is what leaders always want.

Sage: Yes I know, but hear me out first.

Kudo: I am sorry. I should not be drifting into impatience. Please teach me.

Sage: There is nothing I have to teach you, as you know; but I would rather share a story with you.

Kudo: You know I love stories. Please tell me. I am all ears.

Sage: Decades ago in a far away clan, getting married was not an easy ordeal for young men, especially for the not-so-strong. By custom, the ladies ripe for marriage were only married to the strong and powerful - the good wrestlers.

Kudo: How?

Sage: Once a year the clan organized a wrestling competition amongst all its eligible bachelors. Every one attended, either as a participant or as a spectator. It was the clan's most prestigious event. Families backed their participating sons with all possible support, including cheer leaders, drums, dances and, in some cases, charms. The stakes were high.

Kudo: Why?

Sage: The strongest and victorious wrestlers earned the right to choose first from the ladies; before the next strongest and then the next, in that order. The weakest bachelors often ended up with no

lady, for the stronger men would usually have exhausted the choices before their turn.

Kudo: So what happens where they fail?

Sage: Fail to do what?

Kudo: Fail to win, or prove to be weakest in the ranking; thus losing out, not being able to find any lady to marry for the year; would they then have to wait for the next event?

Sage: Of course! As you can guess, some never made it because by each new wrestling season, new crop of young men would have grown up, who, in cases, were stronger still. That is how some aged without the benefit of a wife. Some of such weaklings usually ended up marrying the total rejects, whom no one wanted; often the ones with incurable ailments or severe handicaps.

Kudo: Now I can see why it meant so much to the families.

Sage: Very much so. They stopped at nothing to support their young men to victory.

Kudo: I see.

Sage: But the story I am about to tell you is a love story. Once, there was a very beautiful girl. She was the most beautiful girl in the clan. She was tall and slender, with an oval face so shapely, the clan referred to her as *Ekhwa*, literally meaning 'Egg'. What an appropriate name it was for she looked so tender, and so sweet. It was the dream of every young man in the entire clan to marry her.

Kudo: I can imagine.

Sage: Indeed, I can imagine what you imagine. Anyway, back to the story. The season eventually came when Ekwa was one of those due to be vied for by the young men. Excitement was wild. Everyone was there.

Kudo: Of course!

Sage: But unknown to the clan, under the veil of the velvety skin, and tender mien of the most beautiful girl lay a very independent mind. Ekwa had fallen in love with an equally handsome but very slender

young man, called Ekwela who was not likely to be a match to the well built, muscular competitors on the village playground that day.

Quiet as Ekhwa sat with the other damsels, her big brown eyes could hardly conceal her anxiety. Nervously she fidgeted with her wrapper, traditionally reaching from just above her bust to her feet. In her heart, she knew Ekwela, her choice, would not make it. She knew it, almost of certainty.

So as the excitement grew, while the wrestling matches and the raised dust hazed the atmosphere, Ekhwa sneaked away into the bush. By the time the matches were done and the young men were ready to choose, Ekhwa was gone.

According to the tradition the choices still had to be made from amongst the bevy present. Reluctantly the bachelors made their choices; in the usual order of strength. Notably Ekhwa's choice, Ekwela, lay on the wrestling ground thoroughly beaten, heart-broken and too ashamed to find his feet. He thought he had lost Ekhwa for good. And so there he lay covering his face while the crowd slowly dispersed, mocking him.

This was when Ekhwa re-emerged from hiding and rushed straight to him. She knelt beside his battered body, lifted up his bleeding face and kissed him, crying and promising "Ekwela, my heart belongs to you. I will always belong to you!"

Soon word spread that Ekhwa was back. The Chief immediately dispatched men to bundle her to him for due sanctions.

Kudo: What a shame!

Sage: What a shame indeed.

Kudo: Go on, sir. Finish the story. Did they ever end up marrying?

Sage: Perhaps another time we would continue. But the import of the story, which I tell, is Like Ekwa, the true leader never abandons his team, whether they win or whether they lose.

Chapter Thirty-Two

LEADING FOR LOVE

Kudo: I came across a phrase in a scripture last night, which I would like to share with you.

Sage: Interesting. Which phrase is this?

Kudo: Just a simple phrase. Something to the effect that whatever you do, you should do for Love.

Sage: That you should do everything for love?

Kudo: Yes. I wondered how that is possible. And specifically for my own special interest in leadership, I wonder how one could lead for love. I could not quite resolve the debate in my mind, and thought you might be able to help me.

Sage: I am surprised that you say you could not come to a resolution, because this is something I believe we have discussed somewhat before.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: I think so, because leading for love is simply leading selflessly.

Kudo: Could I translate that to mean leading without selfish motives of gains?

Sage: Correct. But perhaps more.

Kudo: Please explain.

Sage: Imagine that Love was actually an entity for whom you were working or, in this case, leading. Can you imagine that?

Kudo: I guess I can, if the Mr. Love we speak of here is one who has the qualities of Love.

Sage: Precisely. Imagine you are working for a being of consummate Love, quintessential Love, who is the highest manifestation of love.

Can you imagine that? If you can do that then imagine how you would set about your job. What would be your mode of operation?

Kudo: I guess I would operate strictly according to the laws of love. I would do nothing, which infringes on other person's personal space and freedom. Everything I do would be by mutual consent, having the explicit permission of the person concerned. My administration would be wholly impartial, because all my subjects or customers, as the case may be, would be loved equally.

Sage: There would then be no need for favoritism, nepotism, or partiality, right?

Kudo: Right. Everybody would be rewarded with a harvest of good or evil, exactly as merited for that is the way that Mr. Love would do it.

Sage: Aha, so leading for Mr. Love is leading as if you were Mr. Love.

Kudo: Yes, sir. At least, that is the way I understand it.

Sage: I agree with you. Since you know you are not Mr. Love, you would be conscious that you are representing Mr. Love. In other words, that you are a proxy, a messenger or a mouth piece for the bigger being who sent you.

Kudo: Exactly, sir. I become like an ambassador, making no commitment except I am so permitted by my principal.

Sage: Fantastic. You have got the idea. So there is no representing Mr. Love without a strong communication link with him, and fidelity to his policies and practices.

Kudo: Sir, what you said now reminds me of the predicament that befell a professional colleague a few months ago. He happens to be a General Manager in his company and was asked to represent his boss, the Managing Director/Chairman, at a fund raising event.

Sage: What happened?

Kudo: The Master of Ceremony was a great sweet talker.

Sage: He had to be, if he was given the task of talking the people out of their money.

Kudo: But his method was the usual, he praised and flattered the guests beyond proportion, boosting their egos to bursting limits before inviting them to make their donations. When it came to my friend's turn, he was so carried away with the flattery that he pledged a sum far beyond what had been agreed with the Managing Director.

Sage: He must have gone back to explain.

Kudo: But his explanations did not work. He had to pay with his Christmas bonus for the additional pledge beyond what the boss had approved. Today he is still sore and mad, convinced that he made the additional pledge for the sake of the company's image. Sadly, the MD disagrees.

Sage: Poor fellow, he should have known better and limited himself to the framework set by his principal for even the company whose image he was supposedly boosting belongs to and is run invariably by the principal.

If the principal were Mr. Love, then your friend would surely be a poor representative, a poor leader for love. Or, maybe, even worse. This is because from my understanding a leader of people is always a surrogate for God who created them, and who is their Ultimate Leader. So to lead is to represent God. Indeed to lead at all, at any level, is to lead for God with all the attendant responsibilities.

Kudo: Now this is huge. Do you think leaders understand this?

Sage: I don't know. But this I know "Ignorance is no excuse."

Chapter Thirty-Three

WHEN TO LET GO

Kudo: Dear sage, I have a very sorry story today that I would like to share with you.

Sage: I am listening. Please speak.

Kudo: It is the story, or shall I call it the plight, of a friend of sterling character - a true leader, if I might say so. This friend of mine, for the purpose of anonymity, I will call Bagha.

Sage: That's fine.

Kudo: Bagha simply loves people. He loves to teach, to mentor and to inspire others. Bagha is full of encouragement for almost everyone. He is a great motivator. I use "is" because I believe he still is, in spite of the stain on his name now as an ex-convict.

Sage: What do you mean?

Kudo: Bagha was sent to jail for a day.

Sage: What happened?

Kudo: That is the story.

Sage: I see.

Kudo: Bagha had a very affectionate secretary but who was careless, inefficient and forgetful. Let us call the secretary Ujuma. For years he coped with her against the advice of colleagues. Bagha believed he could groom her. He counseled and advised as often as she defaulted, which was very frequent. He believed that in time she would improve.

Sage: Did she?

Kudo: Sadly she did not, although Bagha stubbornly retained her, hoping that she would change. I must add that as a result of Ujuma's inefficiency, countless number of times Bagha had had to endure embarrassment. Let me recount a favorite instance of mine.

I was there in his office sometime in early December visiting when Bagha, in his usual manner, was showering a staff with gratitude over a card which he received from the staff that morning - a Christmas card. It was an open office so everyone heard the praise. Bagha loves to applaud people in the open.

Sage: Excellent leadership trait.

Kudo: I am glad you say that, sir. But in this particular case, an embarrassing situation for my friend.

Sage: How?

Kudo: The young lady, Ama, that he was praising for the Christmas card openly denied having sent one. Bagha sweetly insisted, even recalling some of the kind words in the card. In return she politely but firmly reiterated her denial.

Now my friend, Bagha, was getting embarrassed. But he tried not to show it. He rather walked to his table to fetch his evidence the card! A second later, he handed it to Ama. Now not only were ears attentive, all eyes were focused on the drama.

Sage: Interesting.

Kudo: Guess what happened. When he showed the card to eager Ama, she took one studied look at it and announced gleefully, "Sir, but this was the card I sent you last year, through your secretary." Chuckle. Chuckle, chuckle, everywhere.

Bagha had to do some quick thinking to limit the damage, replying jokingly, "Thank God! At least it arrived after all." Everyone had a good laugh.

He believed Ujuma would change.

In numerous other instances, official and private, he continued to be embarrassed on the account of his secretary's fault. But he held on to her, consoling himself that after all she had a good heart. He did not want to see her lose her job.

Sage: Poor guy!

Kudo: Another instance I readily recall was of a letter, which he had sent out to his Managing Director following a petition. It was a very urgent and important matter, which Bagha had characteristically treated with dispatch, and passed on to his boss.

The MD called him three weeks later from a distant location, asking if Bagha knew of any such petition since he himself had no knowledge of it, not having received any such correspondence. Bagha was dumbfounded. Of course, he recalled having treated the letter weeks earlier, with instructions to Ujuma to make copies for all his bosses. He found to his utter chagrin that for two weeks that vital document lay dormant in her drawer.

Still he would not bear to let her go.

Sadly today he is an ex-convict, because he trusted Ujuma to parcel materials that he was traveling abroad with on business. They were usually materials accompanied with requisite official approvals from regulatory bodies. These had all been obtained and passed on to Ujuma, to do the simple and routine task of putting them in an envelope, bagged along with the other files he was traveling with.

Having been in meetings till late Bagha could not double check before traveling. On arrival he was nabbed for lack of requisite papers and sentenced. Before his company could rally to his rescue Bagha had become an ex-con. He was quickly released when the papers were produced but this was after the fact.

Sir, where do you think he went wrong?

Sage: You are a wise man. I am sure you know the answer already. But every doctor will tell that at any accident scene, you quickly check for life, and separate the dead from the living. The living can be helped. The dead must be left. Every soldier in combat knows this basic rule. Invest your efforts wisely. No amount of resuscitation can improve a corpse, no matter how pretty the body is.

Chapter Thirty-Four

ALIKA AND HIS MANY WIVES

Kudo: You have not told me a story for sometime now. You know I love your stories.

Sage: But I am not a storyteller.

Kudo: I know, but you tell stories anyway. I would appreciate any story today.

Sage: I do not need any persuasion, because I intended telling you the story of my cousin, Alika, and his many wives.

Kudo: Alika?

Sage: Yes, Alika. Sounds familiar? Anyway, the story is a pretty straightforward one. So, as all stories begin...

Once upon a time, I had a cousin named Alika. He was born a really ugly child. He was lazy. He was indolent. He was uncharismatic in every sense of the word.

Kudo: Forgive me, sir, for the interruption. It is still about this name 'Alika'. It sounds so familiar. It could have come from around my area. Was that really the name of your cousin?

Sage: Well, let me first say that the story is true, as are all the stories I tell you. I guess that is why I emphasize that I am not a storyteller the way you would understand a fiction writer. So, to answer your question, indeed Alika was the name of one of my cousins in a different lifetime.

You may know or not that Soul returns in different bodies through ages, depending on what experience is required for that Soul in that lifetime. I need to be brief on this because I do not want to distract you from the story. We all have been something or somebody else at different lifetimes before. But let me return to Alika.

Kudo: Alright, sir.

Sage: So, as I was saying, Alika was not a likeable person. He was ugly, lazy, short, you name it a lot of the attributes that people would generally not be drawn to. But Alika had something special.

He had the uncanny ability to seek and partner with people who towered above him, whichever goal he pursued. Alika fulfilled many goals in that lifetime. But what interests me here is what he made of his family life. Far more than the rest of us who were supposedly better looking, tall, and seemingly more endowed, Alika's family life was the most successful.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Yes!

Kudo: How did he do it? What did he do?

Sage: Alika applied what most of us regarded then as his magic wand. Quite frankly, towards the end of our lives in that lifetime, many of us, his cousins, became envious of this hitherto ugly character. Perhaps to console or excuse our own failings we all concluded that Alika was some sort of witchdoctor.

Kudo: What did he do to warrant such branding?

Sage: Alika married six fantastic wives!

Kudo: Six wives? He was polygamous? That polygamous?

Sage: At that time and in that culture, it was normal. You know elements of morality are tied to cultural ethos at any point in time. But that is a totally different matter.

Back to Alika, he seemed to have done a good self-analysis before marrying his wives. I can say that now with the benefit of hindsight. He must have arrived at the conclusion that indeed he was ugly, lazy, short etc. In fact he could easily have passed for a dwarf. But you know what Alika did?

Kudo: No, sir.

Sage: He married wives, in turns, according to his weaknesses. For every wife that he married, it seemed that there was an attempt to make up for his deficiencies. Alika did what we thought was impossible. He married the most beautiful girl of our time in that village. How he did it, I do not know, but he did.

Alika, also married a girl that we all spotted as the most hardworking and enterprising of our time within our community. Omereta was her name. Oh, Omereta was beautiful. And then, Alika also married the tallest girl in the community.

Kudo: Incredible! How did he do all these?

Sage: I wish I could ask Alika now. But with the benefit of hindsight, I believe Alika set out to be an outstanding success in spite of his many handicaps. I believe his every move was deliberate. He was fully aware of what he lacked. I believe he was good for the egos of the ladies. I believe he must have always made them feel superior and needed. He must have worshipped them for the value that they truly were and provided him.

Kudo: Would women fall for that?

Sage: My guess is that both women and men would fall for that. In fact beyond falling, they would yearn for it. And that includes you, Kudo, I dare say.

Kudo: Oh, my goodness. I guess I have to give this some thought.

Sage: Please do. But what I know is that all humans yearn to be needed. We yearn to be seen and acknowledged as important in the lives of others. Alika understood this, I think, intuitively. Now I can see that he was far more developed as a spiritual being than the rest of us at that time.

While we moaned with jealousy and bitterness, Alika was creating a wonderful life around himself. Again, I repeat, in spite of his handicaps! He had the gift of great leaders.

He had vision. He had humility. He had enough confidence to surround himself with superior people in various respects. The resulting escalation of superiority around him lifted Alika to success beyond our wildest dreams.

Chapter Thirty-Five

THE SUCCESSFUL LEADER

Kudo: Wise One, looking through the numerous notes you have given me, would I be right in summarizing all the messages as tips for achieving success as a leader?

Sage: Bingo!

Kudo: Sir?

Sage: I mean exactly correct.

Kudo: I see. So following the disciplines you have outlined one should invariably end up a successful leader.

Sage: I would suggest so. But I must however caution that a successful leader is not the same thing as a successful person.

Kudo: But, sir, most people become successful by exhibiting good leadership skills.

Sage: That may be correct. And I may add “many” not necessarily “most”.

Kudo: Really?

Sage: Let me also add that it may be difficult to have a consensus of what determines a successful person. For the definition or conception of success may differ from person to person, success basically being the achievement of set goals.

A man, for example, who has set himself the target of obtaining a university degree in this lifetime, may consider himself a success, while another whose target was a Ph.D, but could only manage a Master’s Degree may grade himself unsuccessful.

One marathon runner who came in last, may regard the mere completion of the race as success for himself; while another who came in second may record himself as unsuccessful having failed to win the first position that was his target.

A businessman who sets out to build a company worth at least 10 million naira, but ends up with one worth 8 million naira, may

consider himself unsuccessful while another whose target was to build an enterprise worth no more than 100 thousand, and exceeds target making 110 thousand may consider himself highly successful.

So you see, measurement of personal successes depends really on what target people set for themselves. But for leadership it is different.

Kudo: How?

Sage: The concept or understanding of leadership appears to me to be largely universally the same. For leading, the way that I understand, means helping people or other beings from one level to a higher level without violating the personal space or freedom of the followers.

Kudo: Sir, are you saying that if you move people from a lower to a higher level by using some benevolent coercion, you are not leading.

Sage: Some may accept that as leadership but it is not really. Leadership must hold the individual and collective freedoms of the followership sacrosanct for it to qualify as leadership; otherwise any trigger-happy dictator or animal in human skin can force a change for the better from an unconvinced and unwilling people or entities and claim to be leading.

Such persons may qualify as dictators, totalitarians, prison warders, but certainly not leaders, otherwise you make nonsense of the rare skill of leadership which requires allowing people to express their freedom, and yet being able to influence them enough for them to willingly surrender to a cause of action leading to a higher or better level for all concerned parties. All those who violate the freedom of the people they are supposed to lead, through the use of force or by bending the rules, are mere impostors.

Kudo: My eyes are opening.

Sage: I am glad, but more because you may not have to make the same mistake as others. Followership, in a way, is like love. It has to be given freely all the time. Once con or coercion gets into the mix, it can neither be true love nor true leadership. Let me illustrate with a story.

Once upon a time there was a king and his three sons who were shepherds, each with a large herd of cattle. To gain the position of the supervisor from amongst the three, a test had to be passed. The three shepherds were taken along with their cattle to very distant places, and asked to find their way back home with their cattle. Shepherd

One arrived well ahead of the others, but with half of the cattle lost; because in a bid to win, he forced, lashed, and coerced his “troops” so much that many died on the way.

Shepherd Two employed all manner of trickery like taking the cattle through artificially created slopes which forced them to glide distances by force. Needless to add some perished in the process, but he arrived second with a fairly larger flock.

Shepherd Three arrived last, but with his entire “troop” complete, fat, robust, well fed and happy. He took time to attend to them with loving tenderness. He made sure they were well fed. He did not overlabor them just to win. When they moved they did happily as a group.

The choice was easy for the king. Neither the first nor the second was chosen. He saw greater leadership in the one that came in last but with a happier team of cattle. He, in the eyes of the king, demonstrated love, care, and respect for the individual and collective freedom of the “team” in his care. Persuasiveness is the tool of the leader, force that of the dictator, and trickery that of the impostor. It was thus easy for him to determine which of the three was the greater as a leader than the rest. I hope you understand?

Kudo: Sir, I do.