

The Legend of Nasrudin

Introduction

This is an adaptation of a Sufi teaching story. Sufis are Eastern and middle Eastern mystics. They are most usually associated with the Islam religion. There have also been Christian, Jewish and Hindu Sufis. Sufis commonly use teaching stories often featuring the wise fool, Mulla Nasrudin. This very old story shows how ancient is the way that those western scientists who are rigid closed minded and superstitious magical thinkers regard each other. It also indicates that there may be a more sensible middle path - a path that is difficult for us to perceive and travel without the lighthearted guidance of a wise fool.

In the afterward, Ken Wilber's "pre-trans fallacy" is introduced. This theory presents another perspective on the same issues.

The Story

A CERTAIN crafty villain was entrusted with the education of a number of orphans. Observing that children have certain strengths and weaknesses, he decided to take advantage of this knowledge. Instead of teaching them how to acquire a skill in learning, he told them that they already possessed it. Then he insisted upon their doing some things and refraining from others, and thus kept most of them blindly subject to his direction. He never revealed that his original commission had been to teach them to teach themselves.

When these children grew up, he noticed that some had detached themselves from his authority, despite all his efforts, while others remained bound to it.

He was then entrusted with a second school of orphans. From these he did not directly demand obedience and respect. Instead, he enslaved them to his will by telling them that mental culture was the sole aim of education and by appealing to their self-pride. 'The mind', he told them, 'will give you universal understanding.'

'This must be true,' thought the children. 'After all, why should we not be able to solve all problems by ourselves?'

He supported the doctrine by demonstrations. 'This man', he said, 'is enslaved by his emotions. What a disastrous case! Only the intellect can control the emotions. That other man, however, is ruled by his intellect. How much happier he is, how free from emotional frenzy!'

He never let the children guess that there was an alternative to the choice between emotions and intellect, namely intuition. Intuition could, however, be overshadowed or blurred by either emotion or intellect. He always dismissed its appearance as irrelevant coincidence or guesswork. This villainous old man thereby distracted the children from noticing intuition and its value at every turn.

Some of the children, nevertheless, suspected that certain miraculous aspects of life did not fit into his fragmentary pattern, and asked him whether there was not, perhaps, something else undisclosed, some secret power. He told one group of questioners, 'Certainly not! Such a notion is superstitious, and due to faulty mental processes. Do not put any value on coincidence. "Coincidence" means no

more than accident, which though perhaps of emotional interest, lacks all intellectual significance.'

To another group he said, 'Yes, there is more in life than you will ever know; because it cannot be acquired by honest extension of the scientific information which I gave you, or which you manage to collect under my direction.'

But he took care that the two groups did not compare notes and so realize that he had given two contradictory answers. Now, from time to time, when the children reported inexplicable events to him, he consigned these to oblivion as having no scientific relevance.

He knew that, without taking stock of intuition, the children would never escape from the invisible net in which he had bound them, and that the intuitive knowledge of secrets excluded from their education could be won only when they were in a certain harmony of mind with the emotions. So he taught them to ignore variations in their mental condition; for once they discovered that powers of awareness vary from hour to hour, they might guess how much he had concealed from them. His training confused their memory of such intuitions as they had been granted and they were willing to think along the logical lines he had prepared for them.

The children whom this villain had mistaught in his first school were now grown up, and since he had let them come nearer to understanding the true nature of life, certain casual remarks that they made to members of the second school disturbed their faith in scientific truth. So he hastily gathered those of the first school who still remained loyal to him and sent them out to preach incomprehensible doctrines purporting to explain the hidden mechanism of life. Then he directed the attention of the second school to these teachers, saying, 'Listen carefully, but never fail to use your intellect.'

The intellectual children soon found that there was nothing to be learned from these doctrines and said, 'They contradict logic. Only with logic are we on firm ground.'

Yet some members of the first school who had broken away from the old villain's teaching reproached them, saying, 'We, too, reject these doctrines, but that they fail to explain the secret mechanism of life of which you are in search does not deny its existence.' They answered, 'Can you, then, put the secret in logical terms?' but were told that to do so would be to deny its truth.

So they protested, 'Nothing is true that cannot face the cold light of reason.' A few, however, cried out, 'We are ready to believe everything you tell us. We think you are wonderful.' But they were as hopelessly lost as the intellectual children and the teachers of the incomprehensible doctrine, because they trusted only to a slavish credulity, not to the habit of intuition.

The old villain who had bred this confusion thrived on it like a madman rejoicing in deeds of violence. Especially his cult of the intellect encouraged egotism and discord. And to those who still felt an inner uncertainty, a sense of incompleteness, or a hankering for something whole and true, he said, 'Distract your minds by ambition!' He taught them to covet honours, money, possessions, sexual conquests, to compete with their neighbours, to immerse themselves in hobbies and diversions.

It is said that when a horse cannot find grass, it will accept hay. For want of the green grass of Truth they accepted the dry hay with which he filled their mangers.

The old man devised more and more distractions for them: vogues, crazes, lotteries, fashions in art, music and literature, sporting competitions and all kinds of achievements which offered them temporary relief from this sense of lack. They were like a patient who accepts palliatives from his physician because he assures them that his disease is incurable. Or they were like the monkey and the crab-apple: he clutched the crabapple inside a bottle, but the neck was too narrow for him to withdraw his hand and the crab-apple too. Unable to escape because hampered by the bottle, he was soon captured and put into a sack. But he proudly cried, 'I still have the apple.'

The fragmentary view of life forced on mankind by the old villain was now accepted; and the few people who tried to point out where Truth really lay were thought insane and readily refuted by the old argument, 'If what you say is true, then prove it to us logically!'

False coin is accepted only because true coin exists, and deep in their hearts many people knew this. But they were like children born in a house from which they had never been allowed to stray, doomed to walk from one room to another without knowing that there could be another house, elsewhere, with different furnishings and a different view from its windows.

Nevertheless the tradition that true coins exist, that there is another house, and that some horses eat grass, not hay, survived in a book which was not a book, delivered by direct succession from an ancient sage to one of his descendants named Hussein. Hussein searched the world until he found the man who through craft and guile would give the teaching of this book fit expression: namely, the incomparable Mulla Nasrudin. Thereupon this book which was not a book was interpreted by the actions of a Mulla who was no Mulla; who was both wise and a fool; who was both a man and many men. And the teaching was thus brought to the attention of the children who had been misled.

A state of educative chaos supervened. So many different ways of thought were current that it was often said, 'I cannot trust anyone. I must find out for myself by the exercise of my supreme will.'

Mulla Nasrudin broke out of the net which had been cast by the old villain. For how can one burn a book which is not a book? How can one name a fool who is no fool? How can one punish a man who is a multitude? How can one strike a man who is oneself?

Study the adventures of Mulla Nasrudin, plumb the depth of the subtleties! He is like a tree which has nourishment in its roots and an edible sap; whose leaves are pot-herbs, whose flowers, fruit, branches and seeds are all variously the same!

Can a tree be a man, or a man a tree?

Afterward - The Pre-Trans Fallacy

Some readers will see a connection between the ideas expressed here and Ken Wilber's "pre-trans fallacy". Wilber would argue that superstitious magical thinking belongs to a stage of development called "pre-rational". This is a childlike stage and can be quite charming. If it is not contained by a rational adult mind, it can however be very dangerous. Consider suicides of 39 members of the

Heaven's Gate cult, in March 1997. Heaven's Gate members believed that Hale-Bopp, an unusually bright comet, was the sign that they were supposed to shed their earthly bodies (or "containers") and join a spacecraft traveling behind the comet that would take them to a higher plane of existence..... Whoops! Their crazy website: www.wave.net/upg/gate

Wilber then sees the strictly scientific approach as the "rational" stage. This stage is characterised by conventional logical thinking and the checking of ideas against reality. People in the rational stage of development usually make substantial contributions to the material wellbeing of themselves and those around them. Many great humanitarians would belong to this group.

Some people who think they belong to this stage would clearly still be in the pre-rational stage. Their attitude to science has the same superstitious and fundamentalist approach that many adopt in regard to religion. They insist on rigid adherence to scientific method beyond the limitations of its valid application. Their superficial use of pseudo-logic points to their underlying superstitious mode of thinking. They in fact rationalise rather than use rationality. Some refer to this rigid pseudo rational approach as "Scientism"

Finally, Wilber would say, when a person is fully capable of being rational, they can then understand the limits of rationality and go beyond it. These people are then able to use their intuition in a grounded way. This can look very like magical thinking just as we see in the pre-rational stage. Wilber calls this group "trans-rational". These people also tend to make substantial contributions to those around them. Their ability to work both within and outside of the constraints of logic in a relaxed way, often confuses those around them. We can sense it is not a regression to irrationality as the person is not stressed, and remains grounded in ordinary, everyday reality. Yet they are asking us to take something seriously that does not make rational sense and cannot be proved in normal ways. Nasrudin's teachings are one way of moving toward trans-rational without regressing to pre-rational. Hellinger's family constellations are another way. If you regress too much into pre-rational you are vulnerable to getting Hale-Bopped! - Not a good idea!

Wilber claims that people in the pre-rational and trans-rational groups look very similar, but they are as different as a rabbit and a kangaroo. Interestingly while the trans-rational person has no problem being highly logical on request, the pre-rational person is only capable of simple logic.

Perhaps Wilber's ideas as expressed here end up being too linear and simplistic. Nonetheless they provide great food for thought - as opposed to rabbit food! More information can be found by clicking these two links :

Ken Wilber: www.wilber.shambhala.com The Pre Trans Fallacy:
www.praetrans.com/en/ptf.html