

## Rowing Against the Current



"The difference between a floating tree trunk and a boat made of the same wood is that the latter has oars and can row upstream."

Dr. N. Sri Ram

I heard these words from him in my distant youth. The phrase was not part of any of his lectures and I do not know if it is in any of his books. It came up spontaneously in a conversation.

I have meditated much on this teaching, and when the time came to give form to the highest Ideals in a School of Philosophy in the classical tradition, the parable of the tree trunk and the boat permeated my every thought, feeling and action.

In general, men and women are like tree trunks that have been launched into the river of life; first dry and whole, then beaten about and wet, they float along with the current which the powerful people of this world have diverted. There they go! Hitting each other in senseless violence, dirty and muddy, without direction or destination, until they disintegrate into splinters and disappear from the surface in this ever-running river, never knowing where it comes from nor where it is going.

Mere tree trunks, torn apart, cut, dragged from one side to the other and barely resisting the current with their own weight! Like a flock of sheep they roam from side to side on their endless journey. They are so tired! During the day, the sun reveals the dark, rotten bark, and at night, the host of shadows flows horizontally on and, only rarely, does one lift its end towards the stars.

The river of tree trunks!

There are more and more of them, colliding, wounding and breaking each other up... The river of tree trunks! How I have meditated on this!

However, over the years I learned the almost forgotten technique of carving out the solid wood -that wood of which we are all made - and making it lighter. Swift blows with an axe on the

surface and then burning coals, repeating the action constantly. The experience, though helped by the inspiration of the great Masters of Humanity, is always painful. And infinitely long. One must dig into the deepest part, where selfishness and cowardice entwine their twisted fibres, and illusion makes you believe that you are the trunk and that you are destroying yourself. But the constant worker, driven by his will, which is above the groans of the rotting matter, continues with his job.

Little by little, the rough trunk is gradually transformed into a vessel. The pointed bow and the rounded stern begin to show themselves. What was once a wound, is now hollowed out, a smooth dwelling for the Traveling Soul. Flexible oars have been made of the remnants, which can be used to row or to steer. With immense patience the rough sides are smoothed down, until they become a light and solid hull.

And... so we have made the boat!

The multitude of tree trunks view it with a mixture of awe and repulsion; it appears to be empty, different, comical, dangerous, unnecessary. But it is no longer a tree trunk...It's a boat! And, what's more, it can row upstream. That's unforgivable! It's not in style. It doesn't change color to match the mud. It has its own color and can row above the mud, barely touching it.

And its strange crew?

The crew says that we are not all alike, that if we were, we wouldn't be able to help one another. That equality does not exist in Nature and that it is neither possible nor desirable. That our differences make us beautiful, and alleviate boredom and free us from a herd mentality. Also, that the different religions are adaptations, in space and time, of the same Message, and therefore, none of them is better or worse than the others, because, apart from that brief original Message, everything else has been added by humans, with their ignorance and appetites. And that they have copied from one another from age to age.

They affirm that they do not believe in God, but rather that they know of His Existence and can observe His many expressions. It is enough to know and to walk along the way to discover it. That the Soul is immortal and uncorrupted and that one must not confuse it with the clothing and costumes that it periodically adopts. That, if there is such a thing as forgiveness, it is through the redemption inherent in the law of action and reaction, and that these are mechanical laws of Nature: He who sows wheat will sooner or later reap wheat, and he who sows thorns will only reap thorns.

There are no miracles as such, only planes of knowledge. Phenomena are of secondary importance. The Babylonian priest who dazzled people with his little lightning bolts that jumped from one hand to the other today would be called an electrician. And Saint Patrick: a chemist who knows what happens when water is poured over white phosphorous or quicklime.

The crew of the vessel has no need to deceive others. They seek and find, slowly but surely, the truth. They put their efforts in the oars and distinguish things that others do not see, because they are rowing upstream. They travel through the water towards its pure and



uncontaminated sources. There is enthusiasm in their Souls and a love of laughter and beauty.

They are irritated by cacophonous noises and prefer the beauty of Strauss' melodies, Wagner's cathedrals of light and shade and Mozart's intimate sonatas. They do not pretend to see a picture beyond the jumble of eyes, noses and tails of the modernists, but prefer to walk on the snow with Goya, look at the gray skies of a Velázquez, gaze at an El Greco or lose themselves in the fantastic streets of the Pompeii murals.

They shun the use of illicit drugs, because those who abuse them turn into degenerate beasts who rob and kill to get more. Nor are they amused by drunken behavior.

They do believe in a harmonious and vital order that overcomes blind mechanisms programmed by others. They believe in freedom, and that people must appreciate and respect the freedom of others. They believe in will, kindness and justice and that a world without these virtues is a ball of mud which must be fashioned into something beautiful, overcoming in the process the resistance of gross matter. They believe in a new and better world. But in order for it to appear on the horizon, there must be many good, new oarsmen. Those who give in to their weaknesses and complaints and give themselves up to the river of life are inexorably dragged to their physical and mental destruction.

They believe in a science at the service of Humanity, animals, plants and, above all, a science that serves the Planet in a global sense, because it is our cosmic home and we are currently destroying and debilitating it. They believe that the old ineffective structures, with their stench of rotteness, shriveled cadavers moving their limbs by the galvanic force of money and power in a horrendous simulation of life, should give way through a natural process of renewal to younger and stronger structures.

And-above all-the crew believes in themselves, and in the boat they have made.

When they travel up the river of life, many men and women of young heart and alert mind set to work to transform tree trunks into boats and come to know the marvelous spiritual adventure of rowing against the current.

November 1989

[Jorge Angel Livraga Rizzi is the Founder and First President of the International Organization New Acropolis]