

PARABLES ABOUT THE ELDER ZOSIMA

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This collection contains autobiographical parables of the Elder Zosima, one of the Divine Teachers, Who is also known as Ngomo¹. These parables tell us about the best that existed in the history of Russian Christian monasticism.

The material collected in this book can be considered as a manual for spiritual life for all who seek to become better before the Face of God.

¹ [5].

Contents

PARABLE ABOUT PRAYER, REPENTANCE, AND MIRACLES PERFORMED BY GOD	4
PARABLE ABOUT THE LIFE OF A SOUL ON THE PALM OF GOD	12
PARABLE ABOUT THE SECRET OF THE “PRAYER OF THE HEART” AND THE ACQUISITION OF INNER SILENCE	32
PARABLE ABOUT GOD'S HELP AND HOW TO HELP PEOPLE	ОШИБКА! ЗАКЛАДКА НЕ ОПРЕДЕЛЕНА.
PARABLE ABOUT THE GOOD: ACCOMPLISHED GOOD AND UNDONE GOOD	49
PARABLE ABOUT THE TEMPLE	60
PARABLE ABOUT HUMILITY AND MONASTIC LIFE	72
PARABLE ABOUT DEATH AND RESURRECTION	95
RECOMMENDED LITERATURE	112

Parable about Prayer, Repentance, and Miracles Performed by God

*“When someone has stumbled and
is trying to get up —
God certainly holds out a helping Hand.
But if this person keeps lying down —
God has to wait.
The help comes when the one
who is looking for salvation
works tirelessly.”*
Ngomo

There once was an elder named Zosima who lived in a monastery. And a rumor had circulated that miraculous healings happened by his prayers.

A lot of people came from distant places to ask for his help.

And the monastic brethren were proud that their monastery had such an elder.

But there were also many who envied him, thinking: “Why does God not hear our prayers no matter how much we pray? We make so many bows, but all in vain! Yet, God, for some reason, accepts the prayers of this elder...”

Once, a young novice decided to find out how Zosima performed wonders and why God listened to him. He thought that since the elder was kind, he might teach him...

He came to the elder and asked:

“Why do your prayers perform miracles, but ours don’t? Teach me your secrets! What if you die suddenly, who will glorify our monastery then?!”

The elder looked kindly at him and said:

“It’s hard to explain... I would say that I don’t pray at all...

“It’s just necessary to kindle in the human heart a light similar to that of a candle or of an icon-lamp!

“This light originates from love.

“And one can expand this light of the soul to immense sizes, like the light of the Sun!

“And then, the Great Light of the Holy Spirit appears and is ready to help! And when I am in that Divine Living Light, I can see everything, as if there were no walls of my cell and as if there were no towers of the monastery. And inside this Light, every human body can be seen through and through and every soul can be understood, regardless of distance.

“It happens like this: I just need to start saying the words of a prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit, and It comes! The Light of God begins to flow like a river and embraces everything with Itself!

“This Light understands the love of the heart, not the words muttered by a person!

“You ask how miracles occur... When I, as a soul, merge with this *Light*, I can no longer distinguish where my love is from where God’s Love is!

“And in the River of this Light, there are numerous Arms. It seems that they are mine and yet, at the same time, not completely mine ...

“I see those Arms of God That do His Work! Just as the arms of a ploughman or cook do their work, so do the similar Arms of the Holy Spirit work!

“It is these Arms That can heal. And, if the Holy Spirit wants, I can — with these Arms — cleanse filth and diseases from people’s bodies. But if the Holy Spirit does not want this, then I can’t move even a fingertip.

“Inside this Light of God, I can see diseases in the body of a sick person and I can see vices in a soul.

“However, not every soul can be cleansed, and not everyone can be helped...

“A soul needs to be taught to love first! Otherwise, later, it may become a debtor to God for that miracle!”

... Zosima said this and smiled gently.

But the young novice, in fright of the elder, fell to his knees and touched his forehead to the floor... Then, crossing himself devoutly, he jumped out of the cell...

Zosima sighed quietly: once again, it seemed that the man, about whom God had spoken, had not yet come... This novice did not want to know about the warmth of the heart or about the spiritual heart love...

So many years had passed already since Zosima started looking for a worthy disciple...

*** * ***

A lot of people with questions came to the elder Zosima.

He tried to help everyone, not only through healing their bodies or through giving advice on how to resolve this or that problem in life but, more importantly, through correcting the path of the soul before the Face of the Lord.

One day, a rich merchant came to him and asked him to heal his little daughter, saying:

“I’m desperate! You are my last hope, holy elder! Help me! My child is dying!”

Zosima answered:

“It is not I who heals! It is the Lord Who helps each soul!

“How does the Lord help? He helps, among other ways, through people that live on the Earth.

“Have you heard about Jesus Christ? Through Him, God has helped many people.

“But, through you, has God helped anyone?”

“I’m a sinner, holy elder, I’ve never even thought about this in that way!... All my thoughts have been only about my profits and benefits...”

“So — think now!

“And always ponder ahead on what the Lord wants from you!

“Now go home, your daughter will be well again!

“And build a free hospital with your money. Call good doctors there to work for God!

“Also, when your daughter has recovered fully — bring her to me!”

... Wiping his tears, the merchant began to thank him.

The elder said to him kindly:

“Hurry to do in your life that good which you forgot about!

“And remember this for the future! Otherwise, something worse may happen!

“God has helped you — and now you should help others!

“And learn to understand what is good and how it’s possible to do it!

“Maybe, your words and actions will be a helping Hand of God stretched to others! God does good and miracles through the kindness of many people!”

*** * ***

Time passed, and the merchant brought his healed little daughter to the elder.

The girl came to the cell but forgot how she had been taught to express her gratitude and just said:

“Was it you who cured me, Grandpa? Thank you! I was very, very sick but now I am very healthy!”

“Good day to you, my child! But it was not I who healed you; it was God! So, you should thank Him always!”

“Yes, I know! God — He is kind!” — the girl nodded.

“Yes! And now you can learn to be kind too, like God! Try to do this!

“Can you hear how your heart is beating in your chest? It is God reminding you that a soul is created for love and kindness!

“So, learn to be gentle and friendly towards everyone! And learn to help everyone — even in small ways!

“While you are little, your help might not be too big; however, it is still very important! And when you grow up, you will be able to help many people!”

“I understand this now, Grandpa! For a long time, I felt very, very bad; but now, I feel good! And I will try to do good for others too!”

The girl ran up to the elder Zosima and embraced him.

... Many years had passed since then, but the girl never forgot that a life on the Earth is given to us by God to cultivate love and give this love to others! And, through this, she opened her spiritual heart and expanded it more and more! And she lived embracing everything and everyone with her love-care.

*** * ***

Once, a middle-aged woman came to the cell of the elder Zosima. She was crying and pleading:

“Give me back the love of my only son! I’ve dedicated all my life to him, giving him everything that he ever wanted! But he grew up, and now he doesn’t even want to remember me!... I have been left alone! I feel so bitter because of how little gratitude he has repaid me for everything that I have done for him! I can’t hold back my resentment, I can’t stop being sad!...”

“Don’t grieve! Think back: did you love your son in the way that God wants us to love people?”

“If children receive only material help from their parents and are not taught to care for others, then these children forget quickly the good done for them and grow ungrateful!

“Love does not consist only in providing pleasure for someone!

“Pleasure is not always useful for a soul! And what is useful — is not always pleasant!

“Doing what is good, is not the same as giving a person immediately what he or she wants!

“It is wrong to just indulge others in their desires! This harms that soul and does not benefit it!

“Everyone should not only give love to others but also awaken in them a desire to give love and do good! We should also teach them to restrain from using angry words and help them learn to say only kind ones!

“You brought up your son badly! You spoiled him, pandering to his whims! You turned him away from love by your everyday reproaches and boring admonitions! You turned him away from the good commandments!

“Now I tell you these sad words, which are like bitter medicine, in order to help you to understand your mistakes and try to rectify them!”

The woman sobbed even more:

“Will God forgive me for my sins?!”

“Forgiveness comes when we have realized what was sinful in us, and have changed ourselves and corrected the consequences of our wrong actions!

“Only after having changed ourselves first, can we make better something around us!

“There is some hope for you now! Soon, your son will come to you and ask for your advice and help. He fell in love with a widow; she is much older than he is. She has a child from her previous husband. Through this love, God wants to help your son learn to care not about himself only, but about others!

“It’s not easy to change oneself... It’s not easy to transform one’s small love into a great all-embracing love!

“The happiness of the child who is growing with that woman should turn into a happiness for all of you!”

... He said this — and the woman went home with a slight hope and with thoughts about the most important things...

*** * ***

This is how the Elder Zosima talked with people.

But it also happened sometimes, that he did not let people with nefarious intentions even enter his cell...

And this caused those people to wonder if this refusal by the holy elder meant that God, too, was refusing them because of their unjust lives...

And due to this, they became afraid of their uncleanness and changed. And if such people came again looking — this time sincerely — for the advice of the elder about how to atone for their sins, Zosima received them kindly and gave them some simple and clear advice.

“Yet to fulfill this advice, people had to transform themselves, that is, they had to stop living idly and start working diligently by the soul and by the body. To work by the soul meant to cultivate love in oneself and eliminate anger, hatred, jealousy, and sadness. To work by the body meant to try to make the lives of others at least a little bit better.

Even for those who were in despair, Zosima found supporting words that brought them to their senses:

“There is no sin or vice which a person can’t get rid of!

“Even if someone has suffered a spiritual fall, God is always ready to help them if they want to get back up!

“A disease or other problem in life is given to us for the healing of the soul and of the body! Diseases and troubles are needed to enlighten those who do not understand the Plan of God for them. These things make possible the purification of souls!

“We are weak and infirm in this world while we haven’t known the Love of God. This Love is the greatest Power in the universe and can be near us and in us always!

“How good it would be if everyone lived with the Love of Christ in his or her spiritual heart!...”

*** * ***

Once, a man came to the elder Zosima. He was neither young nor old. He had a strong body and was a strong soul. But he had gotten lost in the midst of matters that did not bring satisfaction to the soul. Since his youth, he had dreamed about something great and noble... He boldly lived fighting for the truth... But he did not always understand what was the truth and what was not... And many of his plans failed... And many times, he became aware that he was not doing what he should be doing... That is why it was hard for him to live now, and he did not know how or for what reason to live further...

The man told his story to the elder Zosima. It was similar to the stories of many others whom the elder usually listened to... Nevertheless, there was a great difference: this man cared not about himself but tried to live for others, helping others!

“This is how almost my entire life has passed... I wished to do so many things, and I dreamed about many beautiful things... But, in the end, it turned out that everything was in vain: I haven’t changed any-

thing, and I haven't really helped anyone... And now, I don't know how to live further... Teach me if you can..." — with these words the traveler finished his story.

"All that wasn't in vain! Through what you did in your life, you became wiser and stronger! In this way, God led you to Himself!

"So, are you ready now to devote your whole life to the Lord alone?"

... At this point, Zosima began telling this man about the purpose of human life, about the Great Divine Love...

The man stayed with the elder. He learned from Zosima the silence of the heart, in which the fire of love is kindled. He also learned to merge with the Holy Spirit and to do everything, being in conscious Unity with God and as Service for Him...

* * *

Did the elder Zosima manage to help many people? Only God knows... But the Power of God was in his words. And the advice that he gave stayed in each person's memory for a long time. People directed their sights of the soul to God and they directed their actions towards helping other people. And through this, God was able to participate in their lives.

Parable about the Life of a Soul on the Palm of God

An elder named Zosima lived in a monastery. People believed that he was so pure as a soul that God endowed him with the gift of performing miracles. It was said that miraculous healings happened by his

word, people's lives changed, and souls became transformed! And a lot of people came to the elder with their requests...

* * *

Once, a man entered this small town where the monastery was by taking one of the typical broken and dusty roads of Russia.

He was no longer young, but he wasn't old either. He had a strong body and a stature much higher than the average one. Remarkable strength could be seen in his body. However, in the soul, restlessness and brokenness were evident to attentive eyes.

... A beggar was sitting near the road on a pile of dirty rags.

The man asked him where he could rent a room or find an inn and gave him a ruble, which was a lot of money in those days.

The beggar saw the ruble and changed suddenly, as if something woke up in him for a moment out of surprise! He said:

"It would be better if you went to Aksinya! In the inn, there are drunken fights and lots of noises... But in her house, those who come to the elder Zosima often stay.

"Aksinya is a kind woman! When I'm not drunk, I ask her for soup — and she gives it to me! Her soup is delicious, though always lean..."

"Wait, what elder are you talking about? I didn't come for any elder... Uh, it doesn't really matter! It's all the same! So, how to get to your Aksinya?"

"Go there! And tell her that Nicodemus sent you!"

Having said this, the beggar switched his thoughts to the ruble and to the idea of buying some vodka and many snacks...

* * *

The traveler came to the house of Aksinya and knocked.

A slightly plump woman of middle-age opened the door to him. Her face was lit up from within with calm kindness. She looked at the traveler tenderly, as if she were meeting an old friend for whom she was waiting.

“May I rent a room, Aksinya? I was told that you rent rooms...”

“Why not? I’m always happy to welcome a good person into my home!”

“Why do you think, Aksinya, that I’m a good person? What if I am the opposite,” — the traveler said with certain sarcasm and deep bitterness.

“Well, if I can’t call you a good person, then what should I call you?” — the hostess said without any fear and in a playful tone.

“Call me Nicholas.”

The traveler by the name of Nicholas examined the cozy, clean, and simply furnished room. He paid the rent for a week ahead, giving twice the amount of money which the landlady asked.

He was about to go to his room, but Aksinya said gingerly:

“Don’t go to the elder Zosima on the first day! Think alone first, in calm, about what you want to ask him! Walk along the river... To be able to truly hear his words, it’s necessary to calm down a little bit.”

“Just what kind of elder do you have here? I didn’t come to see him... I don’t go to the monasteries! God doesn’t help people! Just take a look at everything that’s happening in this world!...”

At that point, the conversation was interrupted: someone knocked at the door, and Aksinya went to open it.

* * *

A pale and tired woman with a child in her arms came in. The child, who was no longer very small, was obviously seriously ill. He was a thin boy of about five or six years of age. The child was conscious, but not completely, as if the ability to live in this body had left him partly.

The woman was holding him in her arms with the last of her strength.

“Why are you just standing there?” — Aksinya asked Nicholas. — “Hold the child!”

When Nicholas took the boy in his arms, he groaned slightly and opened his eyes. Nicholas very carefully and cautiously carried the boy to the room — next to the one in which he stayed.

... Falling asleep, Nicholas heard a soft, heartfelt voice of Aksinya and the muffled sobbing of the other woman.

“Zosima will help!” — Aksinya said, trying to calm her down. — “Don’t doubt this! Go to him tomorrow morning! And don’t worry that you have no money! He doesn’t take any money! The one who wants, may donate then to the hospital or to the monastery. And you may live here without paying! I’ve got a generous guest! So, everything will fit together nicely!”

* * *

The next morning, Nicholas was woken by hushed voices and by the sound of preparations behind the wall.

“What a ‘quiet’ place Nicodemus recommended to me,” — he thought.

Yet, for some reason, he felt no irritation. On the contrary, there was a warmth in his heart, like in his early childhood, when falling asleep, he heard his mother’s voice...

It was still dark outside.

Aksinya knocked at his door:

“You’ll have to excuse me, Nicholas! The sick boy can’t go by himself, and his mother is completely exhausted! Could you accompany them to the elder?”

Nicholas agreed without hesitation. This distraction from his oppressive thoughts seemed unexpected and joyful to him. The elder Zosima from yesterday increasingly piqued his curiosity.

Nicholas always wanted to help people. He saw in this the meaning of his whole life. And from this, he got his greatest disappointment, failing in his attempts to transform human lives...

* * *

It was cold outside.

Nicholas was carrying the child in his arms. The woman, being out of breath because of the brisk pace, was telling him how it had happened that her son Ilya hurt his leg.

“Wouldn’t be better to go a hospital instead?” — Nicholas asked. — “A doctor could examine and cure him! They say that there is a good hospital here.”

“We already went to different doctors, and spent so much money, but no one could help... They said that an amputation was necessary and that it might already be too late... The elder, on the other hand, does miracles from God! He will certainly heal him!”

Then, the woman began to recount in detail their life and troubles...

Nicholas was carrying carefully the child and was hardly listening... Holding such a fragile body, in which a spark of life barely glowed, caused him to start thinking: “This is a child who most likely is going to die soon... And even if he doesn’t, then he will probably be lame for the rest of his life... So, maybe death is actually a better option for him... Why is it so? For what rea-

son? Why is it impossible to change anything in this terrible and senseless human life?... I am, for example, an adult and a strong man, who does not see any sense in continuing this existence. I will live... but this boy will die... If only I could give my life and my strength to him so that he could live and be in good health!... But it's impossible... So, where are You, 'Almighty God'? Why do You allow this?!..."

They came to the monastery, but the monks did not want to let them in:

"Come tomorrow! The elder will be receiving people then. Today, you can't come in!"

In spite of this, Nicholas confidently passed by as if they had not tried to stop him. He decided that, no matter what, he would get this "audience with the holy elder" over with today, so that he could then persuade the mother to carry the child to the hospital before it was too late...

* * *

Nicholas quickly walked through the garden to the monastic cell of the elder. The path to the cell stood out from the other cobblestone paths of the monastery because of how worn it had become over the many years of people visiting the elder.

Nicholas firmly entered the cell with the child in his arms. The boy's mother followed after him.

Zosima was not old and decrepit, as Nicholas had imagined.

On the contrary, he was a slender man, full of a *particular peace*. Only his hair and beard were completely white. And his eyes...

Nicholas only for a moment met his eyes and realized that he had never seen such eyes before... They radiated a warm, soft, and quiet light, and a special confidence, strength, peace, and kindness.

The mother of the boy knelt down and began to tell the story about the misfortune of her son. She was wailing and asking him to heal the boy...

The elder interrupted her:

“Is your name Alexandra? Please go to the chapel and pray, dear!”

She fell silent out of surprise, then bowed and went out meekly.

Nicholas put the boy on a broad bench near the wall, bowed slightly without crossing himself, and wanted to go out too...

“Help me, Nicholas!” — the elder said. — “Do you truly want Ilya to be well?”

“Yes,” — Nicholas said without having time to wonder about what was happening. He recalled what he was thinking on the way to the monastery while carrying the boy...

“Come here.”

The elder put the hands of Nicholas on the body of the boy: one — on his chest, the other — on his injured leg. Zosima did not take his own hands away...

... But what happened after that, Nicholas could not comprehend for a long time...

He and everything around submerged into the *Light*. It was pure white-golden *Light*, like that of the morning sun... Nicholas saw the gently moving streams of this *Light*... Then, it seemed as if he blacked out, as if he fell asleep...

* * *

When Nicholas regained consciousness, he was sitting in the corner of the cell, and the elder Zosima was talking with the boy’s mother. The boy was not there...

“You’re a widow, you say?...” — the elder asked her.

“Yes, I’ve been a widow for five years now... I will pray for you for the rest of my life! And I will teach Ilya to pray for you, our savior!...”

“What are you saying!... It’s not I but God Who healed him!”

“I’ll pray to God!... I will thank God!”

“It is good to *give thanks!*...”

“I’m going to teach you how you can express your gratitude. Here’s a little note from me. Go to the hospital to a doctor named Fyodor and tell him that I asked you to work three or four months as a nurse with severe patients. He will pay you for this and that will help you and Ilya get home.”

“Thank you!...”

“Wait, I haven’t finished! Listen to me! There is one man in the hospital by the name of Gregory. He underwent a difficult operation. The life of his body was saved, but he lost his leg. He doesn’t want to be lame. He’s already tried to kill himself... If you manage to heal this soul, this will be your first expression of gratitude to God! And your son will help you. Sometimes, it happens that when patients see children, hope for a happy life arises in them again...

“Now go!...”

“Ilya, please come here!” — Zosima called.

... What Nicholas saw next amazed him more than everything else: the healed boy ran — and not walked — into the cell from the monastery garden. He had changed in an incredible way!

The child could not only walk now, but he seemed to have been awakened from death! There was real life in him — pure and sunny! This rarely can be seen even among healthy people... Joy and light shone from within his body! That radiant, pure *Light*, which was seen by Nicholas during the healing, was now in the body of the boy!

“Mummy, mummy, I’m completely healthy now! And my leg doesn’t hurt anymore! I can even run!”

They both bowed before the elder with gratitude and went...

* * *

The elder Zosima stood on the threshold of the cell and followed them with his eyes.

He looked into their future with affection and the Power of God. He saw... the man by the name of Gregory quietly lying on his bed... with a hopeless gaze full of pain and despair... Zosima saw Alexandra, the mother of Ilya, whispering gentle words to Gregory. Zosima saw how little Ilya ran into the hospital ward, looking for his mother and how love kindled in the child's heart when his main dream came true:

“Mummy, mummy! You've found our daddy!” — Ilya said with joy and embraced Gregory with these words... And Gregory tearfully embraced the boy... Love and hope returned to these souls and healed them...

Zosima saw three happy people leaving the hospital. They were cured despite the fact that the man walked on crutches. And people looked at them out of the windows, wishing them happiness...

“Let it be, oh Lord! According to Your Will — let it be!... Hearts filled with love will fulfill Your Will!...” — Zosima whispered.

* * *

Nicholas and the elder remained in the cell alone.

“How often do you perform such wonders?” — Nicholas, being amazed, asked without yet comprehending completely all that had happened.

“This happens quite rarely... Yet it was not only I, but you too, in Mergence with God's Will, who healed Ilya! It's obvious that for you too it was necessary, so

that the greatness of God's Power could be revealed before you!

“Go now! Think about what you want to ask and why you don't see any meaning in your life... Think — and then come back! Come tomorrow if you want! We can talk then! You will be able to do what you dreamed to do for people! You will do this not by yourself only, but by merging with God's Power!

“Go now, I'm tired...” — Zosima said quietly...

*** * ***

On his return from the elder, Nicholas thought about what had happened.

Everything had changed in an incredible way... Death, which he thought of as a way out of the futility and hopelessness of life, suddenly disappeared from view. And a new, previously unknown, horizon opened up to him...

And now, it was time for him to think on his own about how to live further...

Disbelief in the existence of God, which had become a firm conviction during his difficult life, was apparently easily crushed by the elder...

But faith did not fill the empty place yet, since Nicholas was searching not for faith but for clarity of understanding and fullness of knowledge.

All the questions that had plagued him during his entire spiritual search, rose in him once again.

These were the questions that he had rejected as those “which have no answers”. All these questions were rejected together with the belief in the existence of God.

... In those times, he decided to look by himself — without God — for a way to help people to become happy... And a lot of his initiatives failed completely... And many of his friends betrayed him... And many of

his bright ideas were perverted by his former fellows and used for evil ends...

All his previous activity helped a lot of people, but it brought sorrow and destruction to many people as well...

... The thoughts of Nicolas returned to the miraculous healing and to that *Light* which he himself saw. "Well, could this mean that there is a real Power capable of changing human destinies? Could it be God?"

He realized that tomorrow he should visit the elder tomorrow again.

* * *

Nicholas walked to the monastery still being oppressed by doubts and thoughts. "What do I hope for? What changed yesterday when I saw the *Shining Light* united with the elder who healed the boy?... What do I want? To confess? To unburden my heart? Or do I want to obtain the 'faith in Christ'? Or to ask my questions? Or, perhaps, to find the meaning of my life? Maybe this elder really knows the Truth, for the sake of which it makes sense to live on the Earth..."

Approaching the monastery, Nicolas overheard the talk between a mother and her daughter who were returning from the elder.

The mother was a big, plump woman, evidently of a high income.

She angrily shouted:

"How is he not ashamed to entice people with his healings and miracles! He can't do anything! Only deception is all around!"

"Don't worry, mom!" — the daughter said, trying to calm her down. The girl was holding her partly paralyzed left arm by her right healthy arm.

"I told you, mom, that all this was nonsense, fairy tales for fools and children! But you didn't believe me!"

In spite of the efforts of her daughter, the mother couldn't calm down and continued speaking emotionally:

“How could he invent this?! ‘Every morning you should knead dough using your almost paralyzed arm, then bake bread, and give it to the poor!’ And he said to do this for three years! What kind of holy man is he!? Deceiver of deceivers! And I'm amazed that there are fools coming to him for advice!”

“Well, calm down, mom, calm down!...” — the daughter kept trying to soothe her.

... Nicholas heard their voices fading into the distance...

Then, he sat for a long time among the people who waited to be received by the elder, examining the faces of those who were coming out...

... When no one was left, he entered the cell.

Zosima was waiting for him and, seeing Nicholas entering, rejoiced as if the closest friend or son had come, and not some accidental stranger who had not believed in God for half of his life.

* * *

“So, you decided to come after all?”

“I have...”

“And what for?”

“I myself do not know... Maybe, I only need to talk... Or, maybe I came to understand how you live, and for what purpose...”

“Why do you perform miracles?”

“It's not I who works wonders! It is God Who manages all affairs, although man himself participates as well...”

“You didn't succeed in healing the girl with the paralyzed arm, did you?”

“No, I didn't,” — Zosima said with a touch of sadness.

Nicholas clarified:

“But if she had agreed to knead dough for three years, would she be healed?”

“It depends on how she would carry it out... If her spiritual heart became awakened when she was giving bread to hungry children, if she began to think about how to relieve human grief while kneading dough, and not about how to heal her paralyzed arm; in this case, she would be healed! Hands that do good and give good, always become healthy!”

Nicholas said:

“But I — with my own hands and with my own thoughts — worked for my whole life trying to do good... And I came to a point where I started thinking that it would be better for me to leave this life completely than to live with the understanding of my own incapability to change something in it for the better...”

“Do you think, Zosima, that the boy healed by you will be happy or, like everyone else, will he become older and finish his earthly journey in sins and vices? And if so, why, then, did you heal him?”

“I healed him for the future, for love! And what his future will be like — depends on many things...”

“You, for example, when you were little, loved God very much... And as a young man, you also had a pure heart!”

“Yes, I loved and believed... I believed but lost faith!... It was a long time ago. I believed fervently and prayed fervently... But God did not answer my prayers!...”

“And later, I saw human afflictions and suffering and decided that a good, all-powerful and merciful God could not create such hell on the Earth for His children! I decided that I, by myself, would do for people all that I could do within my power... Yet, it didn’t turn out as I planned...”

“I can see many things that happened to you... You lived as if you were in a boat moving against the

current of a river. You worked hard, hoping to reach the ocean, but you reached only a small source from which the river starts... However, you haven't worked in vain: your strength has developed! And your abilities have developed too! You've learned a lot! And now you can direct your boat in the right direction. And all the power of the river will help you. Do you want this?"

"I do not know yet what I want... This is why I came to you probably... Can you heal me of the disbelief and meaningless emptiness in the soul?"

"But God has already healed you of your disbelief! If not, you wouldn't have come back here!

"I can teach you, if you want, how to obtain love for God and silence in your spiritual heart."

"First, explain to me why I came back to you!"

"To learn to do the work for God, together with God, and with understanding, instead of doing it as your mind wants!"

"Tell me another thing: you yourself believe in what?"

"I believe in One Almighty God the Father, the Creator of everything visible and invisible... And although I say to you the usual words of prayer, I always feel God in my heart, and His presence is as evident to me as your presence here. However, I cannot teach all people to do this..."

"Do you really see Him?"

"I see and hear Him..."

"But I don't see Him and I don't believe you... at least, not completely..."

"Do you see Aksinya's house right now, in which you rented a room?"

"No, I don't..."

"So, this means that this house doesn't exist, right?..."

"No, it exists..."

"So, you don't see it now, but you say that it exists..."

“In the same way, you don’t see God and don’t feel His Love, but He, nevertheless, exists.

“When Jesus lived among people like an ordinary man, He could always converse with the Heavenly Father, and He could always feel the Great Power coming from the Father. And He did a lot to show people how man can live on the Earth! And the most important thing was that He commanded us to become like Him, saying: ‘Be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect’². But how many people are trying to live so?

“While the soul lives in despair, disbelief, and anger — God cannot help this person in the best way, since that person denies God’s Almighty Love, Help, and loving Care!

“What can we change in this world? Where to start?

“First of all, we should straighten and correct ourselves by cleansing ourselves, as souls, filling our spiritual hearts with love, and living not by our will, but by God’s Will. Only then will we be able to really help our neighbors!

“Everyone can do this because God gives us this possibility.

“And, in this case, the soul ascends, illumined by the love in its heart, to another life, although it keeps its body. The body remains the same, the hands are the same; but the soul is transformed and lives now as if in another world, in paradise! It lives being full of love and having the advice of God about everything! Everything seems to be the same around — but the life of such a person is completely different now!

“You wanted, through irrepressible speeches and disputes, to pour out to me during confession all your fervent thoughts and heavy doubts, yes? You thought that it would make you feel better, right?

² Mt 5:48.

“But there is no peace in you since you have not cognized the silence of the heart!

“Moreover, God already knew and knows all that you wanted to tell me during confession!

“He knows your past and your every thought!

“Everyone is always on the Palm of God, so to speak! But only when we know about this, can we get great benefit from it! Because if we know that God sees all our thoughts, even the most secret, and all our actions, and even the motives of these actions, then we will be more attentive to how we live!...

“It is said that we must have fear of God in order not to sin. But I don’t think so. When we choose good instead of evil because of fear — God sees that fear in us instead of love... And such decisions do not improve our destinies...

“The purity of the soul before God should be kept not because a punishment may follow the sinful actions and thoughts! Our intentions are not a secret from God, and we cannot hide them from His sight!

“But if God sees my imperfections — then I should be ashamed of that. And it’s indecent for the soul to live in shame and disgrace...

“If someone knows that he or she thought badly or did something wrong, and feels shameful about this before God — then this person will try not to sin again next time!

“It is important to prevent falsehood from appearing in us! I speak about that internal falsehood that makes us blind to our flaws... When such a falsehood appears in us, we begin to ignore the quiet voice of our consciences and try to justify ourselves, blaming others around us!

“On the contrary, when we truly start longing to correct ourselves as souls — it is a great joy for God! God then begins working together with us, helping us to improve ourselves.

“While we do not know that God observes us constantly — we are likely to consider the evil and good offered to us as equal... The souls that live in this way — live very slowly, as if they were asleep or blind and deaf... And there is not much benefit from such a life...”

“Tell me, elder, what do you, yourself, live for? Do you live without seeing evil, lies, and crimes? How can you forgive all these awful things that happen around?”

“I can’t answer all your questions...”

“You have a lot of reproaches for people who call themselves servants of God. You want to tell me about the hypocrisy that happens in different religions — and this is what constitutes your disbelief, as you call it. But Jesus said the same about the faith of the scribes and Pharisees. What you think is nothing new! The ‘scribes and Pharisees’ haven’t disappeared!...”

“Look, the wall in this cell was built badly; even a crack has appeared in it. Maybe, a mason was unskillful. Maybe, it’s because of time, which inevitably destroys people’s material constructions... And so many churches of different faiths have been built by people! It’s impossible to count them all! Many of them were destroyed long ago; many others will be built instead...”

“Yet only that temple is indestructible which is raised by us in our spiritual hearts! Here, there is a real throne of the Lord before which we can lay our sacrifices: vices that we have renounced in order not to sin anymore! Those vices are pride, envy, anger, condemnation, sloth, sadness, fear, self-love lack of attention to others, as well as many other vices...”

“The spiritual heart is that altar on which the lamp of undying love is kindled!

“And only that soul which has been cleansed of wickedness can work for God! This is our first perfect gift for Him!

“In this case, the rules of life, established by people’s laws, will be replaced by the Laws of God, which we can and should comprehend only with our heart love.

“God’s Love has no boundaries, and there is no power that can hinder the Will of God!

“We, as souls, can open ourselves to God! We can open our hearts so that they become filled with His Love! Only having cognized this, will we be able to see and receive evidence that we always have been before the Loving Eyes of God!

“Only then does the human pride finally surrender!

“At present, thoughts about the just and unjust are raging in your mind... Instead of this, peace and love should be in your spiritual heart. However, you can obtain them only when you open your cleansed spiritual heart to Christ — and Christ enters in!

“... Yes, everyone can change his or her condemning mind with the help of the all-forgiving Love of God!

“Something similar to your situation once happened to me.

“I also looked for justice among people. I expected them to quickly begin putting into practice the Teachings of God as soon as they heard the Words from Him... And when they behaved contrary to what I dreamt about, despair overwhelmed me sometimes. I did not understand what I should do when I saw hypocrisy even among the ‘pastors’ and when I could not manage to change anything in human souls... And I prayed fervently and passionately, asking God to help me and tell me how to live.

“Then, for the first time I saw Jesus and heard from Him only two words: HUMILITY and GRATITUDE!

“I comprehended the Lord Jesus and humbled my pride... And afterwards, I learned to accept everything that comes into my life with humility and gratitude.

“A lot changed when I learned this, since great love grows in a soul when it understands what true humility means, and practices it. In this case, gratitude for all that the Heavenly Father sends, fills the spiritual heart. This gratitude extends to all beings through whom this or that thing comes from God!

“It was then that my rebellious mind became replaced forever by the *great silence* of my spiritual heart!

“I have been living this way ever since then, understanding what I can understand and doing what I can do for the glory of the Lord!

“And when I am ready, God will reveal to me what I don’t know now and teach me how to do that for which I don’t have enough strength yet...

“I live — being free — among the rules that restrain freedom, and I try — to the extent of my strength and understanding and being always in harmony with the Will of God — to manifest His Almighty Love...

“This is what I can teach you if you stay with me.

“This can be done not during one conversation, but during a monastic life in the constant interaction with God.

“And what I can’t teach you — the Lord will teach...

“What is not in my power to change, and what is not covered by my understanding — I will not speak about... And when I have the understanding and knowledge from God about what to say and how to act — then, the power will be granted to me for transformative acts...

“Living in harmony with the Will of God brings great happiness to the soul!

“Humility purifies the soul from selfness and pride; and, after that, understanding and forgiveness come.

“The Infinite Source of Love then opens in the vast spiritual heart!

“The one who has found this Source in the *depths* of oneself-soul — in the *depths* of the spiritual heart connected with God — cannot be saddened by the external anymore! This person’s happiness is then great, for the Heavens opened to him or her, even while living still on the Earth! And God is always with and inside such a person!

“This is the monastic Path.

“This is how I live and serve the Lord. This is how I try to help people. And when a soul begins to kindle with love, it is similar to a candle being lit for the glory of God! And after this, those souls will shine, illuminating everything around! And other souls will be able to receive from them the sparks of love!”

*** * ***

Nicholas was surprised to realize that as the elder was speaking, he heard not only words. A special understanding entered into him, and he received the main answers to all his questions that he wanted to ask!

A completely new and unusual warmth filled the inside of his chest... He realized that now his life could begin anew, as if everything that had happened was nothing but a rough draft... And that now he stood as a naked soul before God, not only before the wise elder, but before the Great and Almighty Divine Power, Which controls everything and, as it turns out, has been always near...

At that moment, he knew for sure that the heart love, felt by him, was the true lamp that illuminates the entire Path up to the full cognition of the Truth!

It was like a prodigal son returning to his loving father.

Now, he was completely ready to start this new life — the life on the Palm of God, the life for God!

Parable about the Secret of the “Prayer of the Heart” and the Acquisition of Inner Silence

*“There is the highest prayer of the perfects ones —
...when
by unsaid aspirations of the soul, they approach God,
Who sees their open hearts.”
From the “Ascetic Teachings”
of Nilus of Sinai*

*“There is a state in which a person, filled with ardent
Love for God, contemplates Him, the One. And his or
her mind, being thus enveloped and imbued with such
love, is then able to converse with Him in the most di-
rect way.”
From the “Observation of Spiritual Battle”
by John Cassian*

There once was a small monastery where an elder by the name of Zosima lived. Amazing miracles accompanied his service to God! Many people looked to him for advice, help, and to be healed from diseases of the body and soul.

But only a few wanted to find the knowledge that would help them to comprehend the Love of Christ. And even among those few, no one tried to learn what the elder could do for people and for God. This happened because they considered the feat of his monastic life impossible for them.

Yet, one man by the name of Nicholas stayed with the elder to learn from him how to communicate with God and cognize Him.

* * *

One day, Nicholas was walking to the elder Zosima and met a deacon who repeated a prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"

Having approached Nicholas, the man looked at the new novice with disapproval and condemnation:

"For heaven's sake! Again you to go to the elder! Do you want to change from atheist to saint immediately?"

"Yes, I'm going to Zosima. He called for me." — Nicholas replied calmly.

He already had become accustomed to the fact that some inhabitants of the monastery didn't like him because of the attention paid to him by Zosima. And although the prior of the monastery had authorized the elder Zosima to prepare Nicholas for monkhood, the new novice caused the disapproval of many, the cause of which was envy.

* * *

Nicholas entered the cell of the elder. Zosima, as usual, knew in advance about his arrival. Nicholas always marveled at how inexplicably the elder knew who was going to visit him, what a person thought about him, and what problems concerned him or her.

The elder was sitting in deep calm and gently looked at the newcomer. In the cell, there was always a special state that Nicholas called the presence of God. It seemed that even the air was filled with transparent and tender silence!

They both were silent for a while, sitting close to each other.

Then Nicholas asked:

"Why is it so hard for monks to work with the 'Jesus Prayer'? I have heard and read once about this prayer, which is also called the 'Prayer of the Heart'.

Tell me about it. Why does it not help anymore? Is it true that its secret was lost over the centuries?"

"Why are you saying that it doesn't help? It does help!"

"Just now I met a man who repeated that prayer..."

"... but the Love of Christ was not emanating from him, right?"

"Yes..."

"So, you think that this prayer doesn't help someone who doesn't know its secret, right?"

"Yes..."

"But there isn't any secret!"

"It was never hidden from people that the most important thing to begin the spiritual self-transformation with is to master heart love! Jesus clearly taught about this, saying that God is LOVE!"

"There were great workers on this Path who strived to put into practice the commandments of Jesus.

"They were looking for a method that would allow them to dive into the silence of the spiritual heart. This silence is called *hesychia* in Greek.³ This is the silence in which the Voice of God is clearly heard.

"Another thing that they were looking for was the purity of the spiritual heart, which allows one to see the Light of the Holy Spirit with the eyes of the soul.

"They chose the monastic way of life, in which everything is only for God and nothing is for oneself!"

"They were looking for spiritual methods that would help them avoid sinful thoughts, maintain crystalline purity of the soul, and live in continuous contact with the Lord.

"And many of them recited the following prayer: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a

³ You can find more details about the tradition of Hesychasm in [6-7]; see also [8].

sinner!’ They repeated these words continuously in every moment of their lives so that their minds would not deviate from the Lord and so that they, as souls, could constantly bow before the Greatness and Wisdom of God. And it sometimes happened that, due to this work of the soul, their minds would dive into their spiritual hearts.

“They also called Jesus to come into their hearts. They not only believed in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, but they always tried to feel Him! They tried to learn to talk with Jesus — just as Paul the Apostle did. They wanted to receive the possibility to ask advice directly from Jesus!

“Yet to do this, one should develop heart love and direct this love to the Lord.

“Many wanted to achieve this, but not all succeeded...

“They did not all succeed, because to achieve this, it is not enough to have only understanding and desire...

“‘Create a pure heart in me, oh God...’ — many people pray. Yet, who — but us — is going to cleanse our hearts! Who will make us behave in accordance with the precepts of God? We, by ourselves, must work on the purification and transformation of ourselves as souls!

“And this could be the most important thing in life!

“Have you heard that God created man in His image and likeness⁴? It means that God made man wonderful! But why is it not so in real life? Maybe, people themselves are to blame for making the souls dirty?

“Where, under numerous ‘clothes-covers’, does the Divine Origin dwell in every one of us?

“How can the image of God be manifested in a human body?

⁴ Gen 1:26-27; 9:6.

“Where is this image hidden?

“In what are we similar to God?

“What was cognized by hesychasts, who comprehended the Glory, Power, and Love of Christ and even spoke about the divinization of the flesh of their bodies?

“Such a possibility really arises when a human soul becomes connected with the Soul of God and receives power over the flesh. Then, the infirmities of the body and soul start obeying the will of that person — a will that is always in harmony with God’s Will!

“How does one learn all this?

“First, one needs to cleanse the soul of impurities.

“A soul can be purified by repentance, humility, and forgiveness.

“It is impossible to eliminate all the vices of the soul at once. Repentance is a great work dedicated to the correction of one’s own imperfections. During this work, all wrong thoughts, emotions, and actions should be rectified.

“Monks gradually learn to experience themselves before God. They strive not to sin every day of their lives.

“And then, being thus freed from the weight of one’s past and one’s desires for the future, the purified soul stands still in front of God, and says: ‘All that is good in me is for You, O Lord! And all that is wrong in me — let it be crushed! For the sake of You, O Lord, I will not allow myself to sin anymore!’

“God needs such work from us! If we do it, our past is then ‘washed away’!

“And when only purity remains in one’s life — the future, too, becomes clean!

“In this amazing moment of being before God — a great silence reveals itself. It is tender, pure, and endless!

“But one can feel it only inside the expanded spiritual heart!

“Now you can start mastering all this.

“Here is a simple initial exercise for you:

“Can you hear the bells tolling? It is as if they are calling people to remember about God...

“This sound fills the space for miles! It expands and expands... And far away — where the sound of the bells is not present — the silence continues to expand beyond the sound...

“Now, imagine that you are also a bell, hollow inside and huge. This bell begins to swing... There is no sound but only a silent call to Omnipresent God! And silence then seems to be ringing!...

“Listen to this silence! In it, you can feel God!”

... Tangible silence filled not only the space around their bodies but also the whole cell... It also expanded in the vastness above the small town situated on the bank of a wide river... It was expanding and embracing all those who aspired with love for Christ! It also embraced all those who did not know this love...

Gently, like the air, which all beings breathe, the silence was filling everything around, and soon it was inside all things...

“This is an amazing miracle!... All my thoughts have stopped, and only silence has remained!” — Nicholas said being astonished.

“Yes, you’ve just felt the silence of the heart. This is the first step.

“After this, the silence can be filled with love for God.

“Look at the candle. Its flame is warm, gentle, and bright. The tongue of the flame is rising up. And if there is no movement of the air around — this flame seems to be motionless.

“Let a similar flame of love for God appear in your chest — and let it grow, filling all the space around!

“And then illuminate with it all the corners of your body, trying to expel all that is dark, heavy, and gloomy. Let all darkness ‘burn out’!

“Submerge your mind in this light as well.

“Let your arms, too, be filled with this light! Let this light flow through your arms — as it happened to the Apostles when they healed human ailments through the laying on of hands!

“Let your entire body, including your head and legs, be filled with this light. Just as a transparent vessel can be filled with clear water — so let your body be filled with this light!

“It needs to be repeated many times! You should work thus on the transformation of both the soul and body! And then — after some time — the body can become a vessel for the Holy Spirit. It will become a source of God’s Light! Just as the flame of a candle emits light — so you can emit and carry such a steady and gentle fire of love in and around your body!

“And then... In fact, a human body can become a carrier of the Image of God — of the internal Christ!

“In this way, you should learn to gain peace of the soul and kindle the love for God in yourself!

“And when you feel warmth and light inside your expanded and refined spiritual heart, call the Lord Jesus into it! And thus you will be able to cognize that God is Living God!”

*** * ***

At this point, the deacon whom Nicholas met on his way to Zosima came into the cell.

He bowed to the elder.

“Hello, Rodion!” — Zosima greeted him.

“I have sinned, condemning my neighbor. Help me! Tell me how to atone for this sin!” — Rodion said, looking away from Nicholas.

“Here is your neighbor! Ask for forgiveness from him — and don’t think badly in the future. That’s all!”

Yet, it turned out that it was not so easy. A few minutes passed in deep silence until Rodion, addressing Nicholas, said:

“Forgive me!...”

And heaviness left the souls of both of them, though Nicholas did not hold a grudge against that man...

“Can you feel now the Joy of God?” — the elder asked, smiling.

Nicholas nodded silently.

And tears flowed from the eyes of Rodion...

“How should I pray from now on? How should I live? What should I do?” — he whispered.

Zosima paused for a moment and then began to tell a story:

“One day, during the Nativity Fast, a woman with a son came to me. I don’t remember what she asked. But what her son asked me about — I will remember for the rest of my life. He said:

‘This Nativity Fast means that the birthday of Jesus is soon! I want to make Him a present. I see that people make presents to each other on Christmas, but nobody gives any presents to Jesus... Tell me what would be best to give Him! Ask Him about this... What if He has a wish, but I will never find it out?’

‘Have you yourself thought what present Jesus would like to have from you?’

‘I’ve thought about it... I have been thinking for a long time about what would be pleasant for Him, but since He lives in the Heavens, He already has everything. Everything that He wishes — He receives immediately! That is why, I have this difficulty and asked my question...’

“Then I told to him:

‘Jesus teaches people to love God — the Father and Creator of everything that exists! And Jesus also teaches us to love our neighbors. He said, when He was preaching, that when one person does good to

another person, it is as if this good is done to Jesus Himself. This is the gift that the Lord cannot give to Himself! Only people, doing good to one another, present such gifts to God!

‘And people can do this not only once a year but every day! And it will be a great joy for God!’

“You, Rodion, can also try to live like this!

“And when you really love your neighbor, every kind word that you say can become miraculous!”

Rodion walked out of the cell, being happy. Perhaps, for the first time in his life, he felt what the word *love* means...

... Nicholas asked:

“Why don’t you teach him what you are teaching me now?”

“Many times I’ve tried to teach this to others...” — the elder Zosima said. — “But while the soul is like an untidy house, full of unnecessary stuff, impure thoughts, and unjust actions, while a person does not see this, does not understand, and does not want to transform himself or herself for God — it is impossible to help him or her! The understanding comes very slowly to such people...

“It requires a lot of patience to straighten out their lives even slightly, to help them even a little bit...

“Now, Rodion has taken a small step towards the light and love... But, perhaps, tomorrow he will forget completely about this...

“Thus, it turns out that it is not so easy to learn to love God...

“Yet, I see that you will succeed...”

* * *

Nicholas again recalled the amazing miracle of inner silence and warmth in his heart that he experienced.

He tried to call Jesus and felt that there was not enough room in his chest for the growing state of love!...

Nicholas tried hard not to lose that wonderful state of the presence of God...

And then he saw Jesus!

It was like everything else stopped existing at that moment...

The cell was filled with soft, transparent, and slightly golden Light. In this radiance — Living Jesus stood! He was Living! It was not an image from some icon!

Jesus looked gently into the very depth of the soul! His slightly curly hair, falling over His shoulders, was gently swaying in the subtle waves of light, as if during a breeze.

Jesus approached Nicholas and touched him with His Hand. The body of Jesus was not material. It consisted of Light and could pass through everything material. But His Touch was quite tangible!

Jesus said:

“You wanted to see Me! You wanted to know that I am real! Now I am before you: I — Who have cognized God the Father, I — Who have been resurrected in the Light and Truth, can be here and speak with you!

“You can learn to do My Work on the Earth! You can help people to understand the Laws of the Divine Power, Which governs the lives of all beings!

“You can help people to live according to My commandments of love instead of just following some established rules and rituals! To learn this, you will have to work hard! I give you my blessing for this!”

... When Jesus finished speaking, His Face began to grow more and more, covering the whole space with transparent Light... Just as silence had previously filled the whole world — so now the presence of Jesus filled everything around! His huge soft Arms were holding the Earth’s surface, home for so many people...

Among these people, there were those who loved God and those who had forgotten about His existence... And then Jesus became even bigger and bigger... The space was filled with His words:

“They all are My children! Love them, as I love them!”

“... I saw and heard Jesus...” — Nicholas whispered.

“Now live according to His words!” — Zosima said, confirming that everything was real.

Parable about God's Help and How to Help People

There once was an elder named Zosima who lived in the monastery of a small provincial town. He performed many miraculous healings and helped many people to understand their problems and improve their lives before the Face of God.

He had a disciple — a novice named Nicholas. Nicholas wanted to learn those things that the elder could do, namely: to understand always the Will of God, to help people to heal their diseases, and to find the right words that would help each soul become aware of its problems.

* * *

When the elder was receiving visitors, Nicholas was often with him. He tried to see and understand how God allowed Zosima to touch so miraculously such depths of human souls that the words of the elder became curative for these people. He also tried to understand how, by laying on of hands, he removed pain, restored eyesight, and made it so that many other dis-

eases went away completely by the Will of God; and it all was manifested through the elder...

Once, Nicholas asked:

“Why can’t I heal like you, like Jesus and His Apostles? I would like to help people and heal as you do, but I can’t...”

Zosima was silent for a little, then he said:

“It doesn’t come right away.

“You already were granted to see Jesus with the sight of the soul. You can already hear God’s Voice sometimes. Yet, you are still grumbling...”

“Yes, I’ve learned to hear God — it was easy! But I want to heal like you...”

“Now it is pride speaking in you, saying that you cannot work wonders. You should learn to recognize God’s Providence in everything!

“Sometimes it’s possible to fulfill God’s Wishes with just the help of your own hands or by saying simple words! A miracle of kindness can be done through ordinary work if the love of the heart gives strength to it. After all, as long as our hands are working for God — they are connected with the Divine Hands!”

“I understand all this and I’m learning. Still, I can’t do as you do. You just lay on your hands — and a person becomes healthy...”

“Don’t be sad! Continue working and learning in order to be able to find appropriate words in every conversation to relieve emotional pain, give hope, and explain the meaning of life! Through words and warmth of the heart, a great healing of a soul can be accomplished — even without visible miracles! Through this, sometimes it is possible to help someone even more than through miraculous healings!”

“Nevertheless, will you teach me to heal?”

“Sure! Let’s start right now.

“There is the Great Silence! The Divine Wisdom and Power are acquired inside it. You have already learned how to enter this Silence by staying in the love

of your heart! Here, inside it, it becomes clear to the soul that God always lives near us. God embraces us from all sides! God is everywhere: to the left and to the right, forward and backward, up and down — no matter how far we go!

“In each blade of grass, in every tree, in any bird, in each flower or fur-bearing animal life is supported by the Power of God! The Love of God dwells near each soul. To see It, one needs only look attentively!

“Everything and everyone is fed and washed by His Bliss and Caress!

“His life-giving Light permeates everything! Just as the air, which all living beings breathe, is inside and outside of every creature — both big ones and small ones — and each creature lives because it breathes — so God’s Light, seen by the spiritual heart, is both inside and outside of everything and everyone!

“Everything and everyone is filled with life that comes from Him: from His Love and Omnipotence!

“If you learn to love God with all your heart and with all the soul — then you will learn to feel the breath of God’s Light in every being and be able to see and understand the Will of God in His every manifestation.

“And through this, a great Peace will come, a Peace inside Which the Love of God reigns undividedly!

“Inside and outside of your spiritual heart, as well as inside and outside of this cell — God is Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Loving! Imagine — as strongly as you can — the Greatness and Infinity of God, Who created everything. And then open your spiritual heart from the inside and go out! Go out — as if out of some kind of a cramped cell — into the Light of God, Which is everywhere!

“This Light is the Holy Spirit, the Great Doer of God’s Will! In this Light, there are Arms of God that are full of Love! They appear in this Light when there is some work for Them. As if from nowhere, these Gentle

Arms appear and can do everything. They, in particular, can heal, directing the flow of the life-giving Power of God — into people’s bodies.

“If you — with love and forgetting about yourself — do good, then God works through you! And soon, that which seemed to be impossible, becomes realizable! The Infinite Power of God stands behind all the actions of the one who does good in harmony with God! Miracles will be possible when this person understands that he or she doesn’t work alone but together with God and that God works through him or her!”

... Nicholas made continuous daily efforts on learning how to: enter the Union with the Holy Spirit, perceive the Divine Arms, and see how God’s Power can enter one’s body for healing others...

* * *

One day, a monk of their monastery came to the cell of the elder Zosima...

He was pale and held his belly with both hands...

“Elder, heal me, help me! I suffer from a stomach ache, and I can’t bear it anymore...” — he moaned pitiously.

“Go to the hospital, to Doctor Fyodor, he will help you...” — Zosima said, almost without looking at the monk.

“Why do you heal strangers, but do not want to help me?” — the monk said, feeling offended.

“Because you, a monk, gave vows to God, but do not keep them! You ate meat and drank wine! And so, you got this pain deservedly!” — Zosima said with a soft but stern voice.

“But I have confessed this sin! Our prior granted me absolution!”

“I told you: go to the hospital! They will treat you! In addition, ask God to help you to see what you haven’t repented and what is wrong in you. May God help

you to understand what is the purity of a monastic life and what are sins committed because of one's own desires..."

The monk groaned even louder because of the pain, hoping to provoke pity and compassion in the elder. And his pain really increased.

Getting his breath back with difficulty, he sat down on a bench.

Nicholas, who observed all that happened, asked the elder:

"May I try to help him? I really want to learn to heal!"

"Yes, you may help him! Accompany him to the hospital!"

"I'm not talking about this!..."

"Do as you wish..." — the elder said and went out of his cell into the monastery garden, which began right behind the door.

* * *

Nicholas tried to do everything as Zosima explained to him. He saw the Light of the Holy Spirit and numerous Divine Arms, Which were in that Light. But those Arms did not obey him, as if that Light did not want to heal...

Nicholas attributed all these difficulties to his lack of skill and, with even greater power, tried to alleviate the pain of the monk.

Finally, it seemed that he managed to do it.

The monk's surprise knew no bounds:

"How do you like that! You also can heal! The pain has disappeared as if by magic! The elder couldn't heal me, but you could! He must be getting old! Look at that! Nicholas has learned to do miracles!"

"Give thanks to God for your healing..." — Nicholas, exhausted by fatigue, said quietly.

The monk devoutly crossed himself and went out...

“I did it!” — with these words, Nicholas greeted Zosima who entered the cell.

“I’m not so sure...” — Zosima said quietly.

“Do you think this disease will come back to him?”

“We will see... Everyone is responsible before God for his or her sins! The only way to help in such cases is to explain how one can change oneself by cleansing the soul.

“We should allow people to receive God’s lessons...”

* * *

The next morning, Nicholas woke up because of pain. Everything that was happening yesterday to the sick monk started happening to him.

His first impulse was to go to the elder and ask for advice and help.

But whether from this thought or from his attempts to move his body, which was full of suffering, the pain only increased.

Then Nicholas asked God about this situation. An understanding came to him that yesterday’s healing was not for the good of the patient: the healing of the body, obtained so easily, caused harm to the soul. That soul did not pass the lessons about the purity of a monastic life, which God wanted to teach it. The evil in that monk, which could have been understood and corrected, consequently wasn’t corrected.

Nicholas began to apologize for his mistake and also started thinking about how to talk with that monk to help him understand.

The pain began to recede. The Ocean of Light of the Holy Spirit embraced him tenderly from all sides! His body, which almost stopped feeling pain, looked

tiny and insignificant inside this Ocean! Nicholas tried to cleanse his body and fill it with that Light, but didn't have enough strength for this.

At this time, Zosima entered:

“Hold on a bit longer! It will pass right now!”

The elder sat down and patted Nicholas on the head like a mother who comforts a little naughty boy who did not listen to her advice.

“Yes, it has passed now!” — Nicholas smiled, feeling how the last bits of pain left his body. He was smiling blissfully and, in fact, felt like a mischievous boy: the elder had known in advance that the healing should not be done, but he wanted to do it so much! He wanted to feel like he was a healer!...

As if answering his thoughts, the elder said:

“Not everything that we would like to do is allowed to us. Sometimes, God teaches people through pain. It happens when they can't understand in a different way. And it is wrong to allay such pain until God allows this!”

“But why have you healed me just now?”

“It was not I, but God! When you understood everything, God helped you!

“I, too, at one time had to endure a lot of pain until I realized that I should obey God in all cases.

“People can thank God even for pain: for the understanding that it brings!

“Before helping someone through healing, it would be correct to understand whether it is good or harmful for that soul!

“Nevertheless, it's always better to try to help rather than to do nothing, being afraid that ‘something may happen’. Without providing help, you will never learn to help wisely!

“Now you should master the Great Tranquility of God! If you learn this, you will start making fewer mistakes! You will not rush to help someone in an untimely manner or against the Will of God!

“God will be able to manifest His Will through you only when your will is merged with His Will — when only His Will exists!”

Parable about the Good: Accomplished Good and Undone Good

In a provincial town, situated on the bank of a large river, there was a monastery. An elder, who was revered by many people as a saint, lived in that monastery. His name was Zosima. It was said that wonders happened by his words, that people’s lives changed for the better, and that souls became transformed!

One wealthy merchant, whose daughter was miraculously healed by Zosima, built a free hospital in that town. A lot of people came from far-off places to have a conversation with the elder and ask for his advice. The help of God came to many through the words and actions of the elder, and a large number of people, after conversing with him, changed their lives before the Face of God, trying to do good...

Yet, another life existed in the same town. There were bars with drunken parties and murders. There were also those things that should not even be mentioned... And people multiplied their woes because they did not know the meaning of their lives, as souls, in bodies... They did not even think about this!... People — by their unjust lives — caused harm both to themselves and to others. And they passed by, without looking at other people’s troubles and did not think about what they were doing...

* * *

Once, a young woman came to that free hospital.

In the reception room, she said that she needed to talk with the most important doctor.

A nurse who kept records said in response:

“You, my dear, do not need to go to him! We have another doctor for pregnant women! She is also very good, so you have nothing to worry about! She came here from the capital! Doctor Fyodor is very busy! He is a surgeon and performs very difficult surgeries. He is with a seriously ill patient right now. So, we shouldn’t distract him!

“No, I must talk with him,” — the young woman said, dropping her eyes. — “I can wait...”

“All right, I will book for you an appointment with him. What’s your name?”

“Nadezhda Veresova.”

At that very moment, a tall handsome and broad-shouldered man in a white coat appeared in the doorway.

“Doctor Fyodor, you are just in time. Here is a woman looking for you!”

“Okay, let’s go to the room!

“You may sit down. I will listen to you! However, please know, that it will have to be a brief conversation. I have a surgery soon.”

Doctor Fyodor sat in front of the woman and looked at her.

She, feeling embarrassed, was crumpling the ends of her shawl, which covered her shoulders and her already very noticeably rounded belly.

“I need an operation, I cannot give birth to this child... I will lose my job at Taisiya’s hotel...”

She forced herself to say these words, turning pale and blushing, since it was well known that the so-called “hotel” was a famous place in the town where

carouses took place. And, undoubtedly, the doctor knew this.

She expected a reaction of condemnation and contempt for her words, but it didn't happen. The doctor was looking at her calmly, so Nadezhda continued:

"I went to Angelina. She always helped every one of us in such situations. But she sent me away, saying that it was too late and that she was not a killer..."

"So, you came to me thinking that I could be a 'killer', didn't you?"

"No... I'm not saying this... Forgive me, please, forgive me!... But I have no choice! Help me!... I thought that he would really marry me, that a new life — a different and pure one — would start for me... That is why, I waited for so long!... I thought that, perhaps, he could have been deceiving me. He did it on a bet with his friends... But I didn't want to admit this... And now... I even saved some money! I'll pay you! if it is not enough — then I will give you more later, no matter how much it is..."

"My dear, do you understand what you are asking of me? You offer me that which is contrary to my conscience and for which I will be put into jail! Do you want this hospital to be shut down after I commit this crime? Do you want me to take the life of this child who may be born very soon probably?"

"Besides, you wanted this baby!..."

"There are other ways out! You said that you had saved some money; this means that, for the first time, you will have enough to survive..."

"I'm not good at carrying on edifying conversations. But I have no right to do what you are asking! I simply can't do this and do not want to..."

At that moment, someone knocked at the door:

"Doctor, we are ready for the surgery! We are waiting only for you!"

"Yes, I'm coming!"

“Sorry, I understand... Sorry...” — the young woman whispered with her lips that turned pale and went to the door...

Doctor Fyodor started walking towards the operating room with a fast pace, but suddenly the voice of the elder Zosima sounded inside him:

“And who will be responsible for the good that you haven’t done?”

Doctor Fyodor looked back at the exiting woman.

He understood her thoughts. He had dealt many times with those who were pulled out from the noose at the last moment or saved after self-poisoning...

He turned back and, with a brisk pace, caught up with the departing woman, took her shoulders and slowly turned her around. He saw her pale, but very beautiful face, her hopeless eyes...

“Wait! Listen to me! Now I have no time, but promise me that you will wait for me here. After the operation, we will talk. Or shall I lock you up so that you can’t do anything bad to yourself? We will find some solution! Be sure of that! If you want, I’ll allow you to work here: to clean and to take care of the sick... There are no hopeless situations, but just spiritual blindness! And life is given to us by God for a very important purpose! And we need to find that important purpose and accomplish it! You are so young and beautiful! You must understand this right now! Sit down here — and wait for me! And do not try to leave!”

“I’ll wait...” — Nadezhda whispered in a trembling voice, and tears rushed into her eyes.

* * *

The operation was successful, and the thoughts of doctor Fyodor turned back to the problem posed for him by the young woman:

“Well, what will happen if I allow her to work here? She will give birth. Then she will try to start love affairs

with doctors, with patients... Then she will leave her child and go back to her former life...

“Will I be able to bring up this child as mine? Will I have strength for this? I myself could not create my own family yet because no woman could accept my way of life, in which the hospital has turned into my main ‘beloved’...”

“Yet, a child requires care and love!

“Of course, it’s possible that this woman might start to change herself. But would she want to?

“I do not know how to explain such things to people, but I must. Right now, I must find the right words... The elder Zosima can explain how to find the right way out of a blind alley. Once, he saved me too...”

* * *

Memories flooded doctor Fyodor:

It was ten years ago. He was a young and very successful surgeon in one of the famous clinics of the capital. But suddenly a patient died on the operating table...

Fyodor was not officially accused by anyone. His colleagues tried to comfort him, saying that this happens to all doctors, that it is their inevitable life experience...

But Fyodor could not stand it. He left his job and moved out of the capital to a place where no one knew him... There, he began to drink incessantly... It was the end: no vestige of hope was left, darkness surrounded him on all sides...

He didn’t remember who told him about the elder, but Fyodor suddenly decided to visit him.

When he came to Zosima, he expected to hear some comforting words, to receive forgiveness of his sins...

However, he heard something different and unexpected:

“Why are you asking me to forgive your sin? And who will answer to God for the good that was not done by you?”

... Fyodor again recalled clearly and minutely everything that had happened. He bluntly said:

“I killed a person...”

He poured out these terrible words and lapsed into silence... He felt pity for himself and for his ruined life...

“Yes... But how will you ever be a good doctor now if your hands are shaking because of vodka...” — the elder replied quietly.

Then he looked so kindly into his eyes — as if he addressed a man who had worked as a doctor, who had seen a bright future ahead and dreamed about saving people...

“How do you know that I’m a doctor?”

“No, you are no longer a doctor! You are now like a coward who pities himself and who has betrayed his work!...”

“I have come to get your advice, but you....”

“I’m just telling you the truth! Are you scared of it? Are you drinking vodka in order not to see the truth?”

“If we start covering with vodka every one of our sins — a multitude of even more terrible sins will only grow!

“Will you listen to me or have you just come to get some consolation from me?”

“I came to confess... I don’t know how to live with such a sin...”

“Then confess: what do you think your sin was?”

“It was my mistake! If I had not made this mistake — that person would have survived!... But he... died right away...”

“And if you had not performed that surgery — would he have survived?”

“No, he would have died too... But not right away...”

“... He would have died a very long and painful death...”

“Maybe. But if I had done everything right — he would have survived and would have been healthy... So, it turns out that I am a killer.”

“God determines the time when a soul should leave its body! And you, as a doctor, had many chances to see how patients who should not have survived according to all medical rules survived and recovered! Or, vice versa, a patient who should have recovered died suddenly because his or her heart stopped or something similar happened. Sometimes, even healthy people die, and sometimes even terminally ill patients recover.

“Nothing happens without God’s Will for this! This Will is carried out, among other ways, through different — good or bad — people: through their work, their feats, their crimes, or their errors.

“The feeling of one’s own guilt is useful for the soul, since regret comes in this way. Yet afterwards, this person should keep living and correcting that which can be corrected!

“But if, instead of this, one digs a grave for oneself out of one’s own guilt and puts a tombstone on it — then it will be a great harm both to this soul and to everyone around.

“People are accustomed to blaming themselves only for that evil which they have done. But we also must answer to God for that good which we might have done but didn’t do!

“So, decide now: the Lord will be able to bring many people who need your help to you if you overcome your weaknesses and your pity for yourself and begin to do again that service for which you were called!”

... Fyodor saw some pictures floating in front of him: many people — children, young ones and old ones — become healthy thanks to him...

Zosima continued, as if he knew what Fyodor had seen with the eyes of the soul:

“They all are people who will die before their proper time if you do not come back to your work! Your fault before God will be great if you do not save those whom you could have helped but didn’t, because you left your most important service!

“Now you can easily ruin yourself by drinking and indulging your worthlessness! It is easy for you to betray your vocation! It is much easier not to change yourself, leave everything as it is, and cry until the end of your days since ‘everything is so bad’! But it is similar to the situation when one does not treat a disease of one’s body! In this case, this disease will inevitably become worse and worse! And, as a result, one’s body soon dies!

“The same happens when someone does not treat a disease of the soul.

“This problem then will remain unresolved even after the death of the body because the soul is immortal, and it will have to hold the answer for its life before God!

“If you do not transform yourself and do not save yourself from such fatal flaws as fear, sadness, lack of willpower, or others — your destiny will become worse and worse!

“No matter how strongly someone tries to ignore the problem put before that person by God, he or she inevitably will have to understand it and resolve it in the future!

“Hurry to help yourself and others! Don’t spill in vain the ‘water of life’ given to you by God for important service!

“People think that only the evil that they have done is a sin before other people and God. But the undone good is also a sin!

“For example, one man is drowning in a river, and another man, capable of helping him, sees this. If he doesn’t save the drowning man, then, without a doubt, the undone good will result in the drowning man’s death.

“Another example is when some children are suffering from hunger in a nearby house or when a cruel person does an injustice.

“If we look around with attention — we will see so many woes of people! Those woes they carry inside themselves or create and multiply around... Souls are drowning in their woes! Some people see those woes, some don’t... When we live being concentrated only on our own sorrows, we do not see the suffering around us, the suffering that we can relieve!

“On the contrary, when we seek to help others, God’s Help comes to us!

“Still, we shouldn’t do good foolishly, but with discernment! We need to learn this discernment! Maybe, it will take our entire lives to master it!...

“To do good doesn’t mean only to pull someone out of a river or heal some terrible disease. Sometimes, even a word said in time can prevent someone from committing a terrible deed! Sometimes, we just need to listen silently to someone, and this person will understand even without our help where the good is, where the evil is, and where the truth or falsehood is!

“Jesus could speak with people in that way.

“God can help someone rise even from the very depths of vices and sins! For example, Paul the Apostle was a murderer and persecutor of Christians. But he recognized God in Jesus, Whom he heard once, and managed to change himself!

“There is the highest purpose in our lives: to rise to the state of Christ!

“Not everyone can start living like this immediately, but everyone can try to cleanse and transform themselves!

“Besides, everyone has a possibility to help his or her neighbors!

“Every soul has its vocation in the earthly life. Some can heal diseases, some can build houses, some can teach children, some draw pictures, some compose songs or music.

“When a person finds that vocation which can bring the most love and kindness to other people — this person becomes happy because of his or her work! And there is a lot of benefit to everyone around from the work of that person, even if he or she only bakes bread or cleans the streets! The one who cultivates land or lays out gardens is also happy and righteous before God! The same is with the one who can hear by the soul the Divine music and tries to convey it to people. The same is with the one who raises children and gives them education.

“And your lot is to heal people from diseases! And if you do not fulfill this purpose of your life — then it will be your great fault before those who could be saved and rescued through you!

“Do you want me to help you now?”

“Yes, I do.”

“A rich merchant built a hospital in our town. He pays salaries to the doctors and nurses, and everything should be free for all patients. This hospital may become very good if a good doctor heads it. It’s true that this isn’t the capital and that a person would not be able to reap a lot of glory... Do you agree to head this hospital?”

“Me?... Will I be able to manage it?”

“Alone — you won’t, but with God’s Help — you will. It won’t be easy! But it may become good! Additionally, I impose penance on you for your sin: you must never drink any alcohol until your death!

“Now choose by yourself: either you dig your own grave or save others from death!

“Have you decided?”

“I will try to fulfill it!”

“Do you understand what is necessary for all this to be accomplished? God’s Will? Yes. But not only that! Your work, your daily efforts are needed! In other words, by your hands — God can create here many wonderful things!

“If you do not start this work, then who will do it instead of you?”

... Fyodor remembered how the elder spoke with him: in some moments sternly, in some moments gently, like a mother with a small child...

Zosima succeeded in turning him to a new life! He was saved from the hellish nightmare and born again, so to speak! Since then, he never drank alcohol! And the faith in himself and in God came back! And the hospital had been working well for ten years already! And hundreds of lives were saved! And how many good people were brought by God and worked now with him!

*** * ***

“Lord, help me to find right words!” — Fyodor thought and with a deep sigh went to the place where his morning visitor was waiting for him.

Suddenly, he saw the gentle eyes of Zosima and relaxed completely. Such calm usually descended upon him before difficult operations. In these cases, the rush of thoughts disappeared; everything inside him became gathered into one single state and every action was accurately determined by his intuition.

He entered the room where Nadezhda waited for him.

She was sitting near a window, and her face was shining with amazing beauty and tenderness.

Fyodor realized that she had already made her decision: she would give birth and bring up this child. No matter what he would say now, the main thing was already decided!

He sat down in front of her. The weariness of the operation receded, but he still did not know what to say...

She lifted her eyes of amazing beauty and quietly asked:

“How was your operation? Is everything all right?”

“Yes, I hope that everything will be all right.”

“I, too, will be all right!” — she said, smiling affectionately to something new, yet unknown and beautiful. — “Thank you, you helped me a lot! I will find some job by myself! I will sew at home or find something else...”

She smiled again gently:

“I will go...”

“Wait a minute! Will you marry me?”

She looked at Fyodor probably as Mary Magdalene looked at Jesus when people wanted to stone her but He stood up for her...

* * *

Soon after the wedding, in the family of doctor Fyodor and Nadezhda a daughter was born. She was named Sophia. Zosima baptized her and that is why, perhaps, everyone began to call this girl affectionately Zosia...

But that’s another story...

Parable about the Temple

There was a small monastery in a provincial town. An elder called Zosima lived in that monastery.

And the rumor about him reached even the capital. The elder was known because of the Divine miracles that accompanied many of his acts and words, and his advice helped many people to a great extent.

One day, the prior of the monastery, archimandrite Ignatius, received information that a minister would visit the elder. That man was not only a minister, but a person close to the monarch!

The prior called Zosima and told him:

“Tomorrow a minister will visit you. You, Zosima, try to do your best! It will be great if he donates money to our monastery, so that we can build a new temple! Don’t let him leave you without this!”

Zosima lowered his head and said quietly:

“What are you saying, Ignatius? Why do you think like this? We still do not know if we will be able to help this person, but you already are looking for some gifts of gratitude from him...”

Ignatius, who was not accustomed to hearing any objections to his words, replied quite sternly:

“What is this? Are you trying to teach me, Zosima? Do you not care about the good of the monastery?! Do you want to achieve the glory of a disinterested miracle worker for yourself only? Have you forgotten how you came to this abode like a beggar? Do you remember how you were received here kindly in memory of our former friendship? Do you understand that with my permission you live here ignoring some of our strict regulations?”

“I haven’t forgotten, Ignatius! I haven’t forgotten our friendship! And how you received me — I also remember! I always remember all the good and forget all the evil and bad, as if it hadn’t happened...”

“So, if you remember, then you should repay me and the abode that received you!

“I know how you act and think! If you had authority, you would give away all the property of the monas-

tery! Look, what a hospital we have built thanks to the donations! But we still don't have a new temple!

"This, Zosima, may be the dream of my life — that a new temple will remain in the monastery after my administration! We both are not young anymore, so we need to think about what we will leave on the Earth after us!"

"I can't ask him about this... You yourself can tell him later if everything succeeds... You can invite him for a dinner and tell him about your dream.

"I'll go..." — Zosima said this even more quietly, almost in a whisper.

He lowered his head as if in shame and was at the point of walking towards the door.

"Promise, at least, that you will try to do your best with the minister!" — the prior said, already mildly.

"Sorry, Ignatius, I can't promise you anything! All this will depend on that man and on God... You and I are only His servants, only the instruments of His Grace..."

* * *

The next day, a fuss started in the monastery because never before had a visitor of such a rank come there.

A monk ran up to the elder Zosima and said that the minister had arrived!

However, Zosima said:

"Let him wait. Let him sit in the room where everyone waits. God has brought other people before him, so I must listen to them first."

"What are you saying, Zosima?! Are you crazy, or what?! This is — a minister! How can you make him wait?! Just yesterday you were informed that he would come!..."

"And what? Is a minister not a human? And what is a human? A soul that lives before God, being

dressed in a body... And what ranks are assigned to that body is not interesting to God! He differentiates people in other ways! So, let him wait for his turn.”

“But how can I tell him this? You, Zosima, go and tell him yourself!”

“I’ve already told him,” — Zosima smiled...

In fact, the minister was standing at that moment in front of the open door, being accompanied by another monk, and heard everything that the elder, who spoke loud deliberately, had said...

To the surprise of everyone, the minister bowed to the elder Zosima and quietly said:

“It’s all right, I’ll wait... God, in the next world, does not evaluate people according to earthly titles or positions. He uses a different criterion... Please show me where I can wait.”

Zosima calmly prepared himself to listen to his visitors.

The minister was accompanied to the room where other people were waiting to be received by the elder.

* * *

The minister had a big and tall body that looked to be about fifty years old or more. He already had some grey hair and was wearing a black frock coat instead of a full dress uniform. It was evident that he had been preparing himself for this visit and had thought through a lot...

When the monk who accompanied him began saying that he would report to the prior and the latter would make the elder receive him, the minister calmly objected:

“Don’t! Let him do his work! Don’t disturb him! I’ll wait. How many people each day wait in lines for my audience!... So now it’s my turn to wait in a line for the grace of God!”

He sat on a bench next to a small wizened old woman of about eighty years old...

She was knitting a sock very quickly, skillfully moving her knitting needles, without even looking at her handiwork, tenderly saying comforting words to her neighbor, who was wiping her tears with a handkerchief:

“Do you remember, I told you that they would not send us away?! God is real! And the elder will receive every one of us!”

The minister was not stupid and understood that “they” wanted to send all the visitors away so that the elder would listen only to him.

He looked with curiosity at the old woman.

She also, in response, paid attention to him:

“Don’t worry, my dear man! I will not delay you! My visit today will only take a moment! The elder has helped me a lot, and now I only want to give him some socks and mittens so that he can give them to good people!”

She pointed at a canvas bag full of her handi-crafts: small ones for kids, big ones for adults.

“Would you, my dear man, like for me to give you a pair of socks as well? They are warm! You can put them on for the night and sleep very well!”

With these words, she pulled a pair of wool socks out of her bag and handed them to the minister.

He took these socks with a slightly trembling hand...

“Let me buy them! In this way, you will get some extra money,” — he said, handing a large banknote to her.

“What are you saying? This is a monastery, not a market! Take the socks for your health!”

They were silent for a while, and then the minister asked:

“Tell me, if it’s not a secret, how did the elder help you?”

“Yes, many afflictions happened to me... The Lord took all my family, but left me, the old one, here. I was sitting near the graves of my relatives but had no tears to cry... I became grey because of sorrow... I did not know how to ask the Lord to take me to Him as well... It was not possible to live: I had no means for this and no reason to carry on! But death did not come!

“Then, one pilgrim took pity on me and brought me to the elder.

“He taught me how to live joyfully with God so that my relatives in the next world would not be sad looking at my tears! He also advised me to get a nanny goat, my Marusinka! This is how we live now. She is my ‘breadwinner’!

“In the summer, we go together to pick mushrooms, berries, and medicinal herbs. In the winter, I spin yarn from her wool and knit mittens and socks for children and adults. They all are like family to me!...

“During my last visit, the elder hinted that I will not have to wait too long: I will pass away soon, thank You, Lord! That is why, I hurry to give away all that I have made, for winter is coming soon!

“My neighbors promised to take my nanny goat so my Marusinka will not perish!...

“Oh! It’s my turn already! I probably have bored you with my talk, my dear man! Forgive me!...”

She quickly picked up her knitting and bag and hurried to the elder.

*** * ***

The minister’s turn came.

Zosima welcomed him kindly:

“Come in, Alexey! I am glad that you waited calmly! It has helped you already!

“Now tell me, what is your fear?”

“It is some stupidity! It is embarrassing to say it! But I cannot overcome this fear...

“Once, a fortune-teller foretold that I would be killed by a revolutionary terrorist...

“And now I suspect that every unknown person is my murderer and that this person is going take out a gun and shoot me! Or I see in someone’s hands a suspicious package and immediately think: ‘A bomb!’ I doubled my guard! I fear leaving my house! I cannot sleep because of nightmares!...

“I’ve already confessed and took communion... I asked to sanctify my house... I went to the doctors... I am taking sleeping pills... But nothing helps!

“Intellectually, I understand that all this is nonsense, that one cannot escape one’s own fate! And I know that death can happen to anyone at any moment and that everything happens according to God’s Will!

“Nevertheless, this fear keeps torturing me! My life has become a living hell!... Help me! I do not know what I should do!...”

At this point, the elder suddenly got up and threw something at the minister... This something hit him in his chest...

The minister, losing consciousness from fear, fell heavily on the bench...

... He saw his body from above... And the object thrown at him by the elder was slowly rolling across the floor...

The *Living Light* — caressing and gentle — was all around! And Alexey was allowed to enter this *Light*... It felt so good to be in It. The feeling was indescribable!

Then he felt that something gray, as if a heavy burden, pulled him out of this *Light*. He saw what this burden, which didn’t allow him to stay in the *Light*, was...

He saw his entire life: his significant faults before the Face of God and that good which was already done by him and which could be done in the future...

... When the minister found himself in his body again, the elder Zosima was standing near him and holding out a cup of water:

“Drink some, Alexey!”

The minister started drinking this water in sips, realizing slowly what had happened to him.

The elder sat down next to him.

Words were unnecessary. The understanding was penetrating into the soul.

They were sitting like this for a long time, being immersed in that silence in which God’s Presence is so vivid. Inside that *silence*, understanding comes without words.

“You will not have this idle and silly fear anymore since you now have known your death. But don’t forget in the bustle of worldly life what God has shown to you! If you correct the evil inside yourself and do that good which is not done by you yet — then you will live your life on the Earth not in vain,” — Zosima said slowly after a long period of silence.

“Tell me, elder, what did you throw at me instead of a bomb?”

“It was a ball of wool yarn that old Matryona forgot here; you see how it served us!” — Zosima smiled tenderly.

... The minister went to lunch with archimandrite Ignatius.

And other visitors began entering the elder’s cell again...

* * *

The minister indeed started trying to do many good things.

He fulfilled what archimandrite Ignatius had asked him to do and sent a lot of money for the construction of a new temple in the monastery.

... One day, the novice Nicholas, observing the process of the construction of the new temple, asked Zosima:

“How would you spend this money if it was given to you?”

“It’s not my place to decide this! For our prior, this temple is a great joy! For many monks too! For the congregation, it is also important...”

The elder smiled and added:

“Ignatius was right: I would never be a good prior of a monastery! I would probably give this money to Aksinya, who once sent you to me. Then she could open an orphanage and a temporary shelter for people in troubles. She knows how to discern people and — through her attention — she could provide necessary help to many people.

“It’s not only through earthly temples that people can come closer to God! The Presence of God can be felt everywhere! And everyone should always fulfill His Will!

“One of the main tasks of a soul that lives on the Earth consists in building a *Temple* inside itself — a *Temple* for the Living God!

“This *Temple* should be raised in a spiritual heart full of love! In this case, God can live in this *Temple* built for Him! God lives then in the spiritual heart of such a person! And this person becomes gradually *inseparable* from God! This soul becomes God’s Soul!

“Such Souls are Those Who are invited to the *Eternal Life!*

“On the contrary, those people who do not seek God during their earthly lives will also not find Him after their deaths!... In the end, they will have lived in vain: they will have pursued wrong things and acted in a wrong way...”

“Does it mean that their existence on the Earth was completely useless?”

“God does not create anything useless. Everything has its use and purpose. This is true for the life of every creature, be it an animal, tree, grass, or grain.

“Yet the predestination of each being is different, and the benefit that God obtains from their earthly lives is different too.

“It is important for people to understand the meaning of their lives!

“People are distinct from other creatures, which cannot understand their predestination, even though they, too, have one. That is, they can’t comprehend what benefit they can bring by their lives...

“But people can comprehend this!...

“Here is an example for you:

“Do you see those people who are building the new temple right now?

“Among them, there are those who think that their job is only to carry stones.

“There are also those who think of this work as just a way of getting money. And that, with this money, they will live well.

“But there are also those who put their efforts into this activity because they believe that they are building an earthly temple for God, and they consider this as the most important thing. For this reason, such work brings them joy!

“Similarly, we can live as if we were carrying heavy stones, without seeing the meaning of our lives. And such an existence brings neither light nor joy to us! And there is little benefit for us from it!

“We also can live doing our work as if it were some sort of obligation, some sort of duty for which we get money: if we work well, we get lots of money; if not, only a small amount.

“Or, we can live being aware of the meaning of our lives before the Heavenly Father! In this case, our lives change completely!

“When we live in this way, we do everything, whether it is a small task or a large one, with love for God! Every day of life then becomes important since each day we put new ‘bricks’ in the construction of us as souls. Each good deed becomes such a ‘brick’!

“And love grows in our spiritual hearts! And we perceive ourselves more and more before God! Then God becomes for us — during every action — the Assistant, Advisor, and Friend!

“Then we begin to build a *Temple for God* in our spiritual hearts!

“... Earthly temples are necessary. But they are only symbols that remind us about the fact that God also lives here, on the Earth, and that He is always looking at us. Earthly temples remind us about Heaven, about another life, and about our Heavenly Father!

“But even in an earthly temple, we can stand as emotionless wooden statues, not feeling the Presence of God.

“Or it could be the other way around: in every place, wherever we find ourselves, we can choose to feel God in the *Temple* built in our spiritual hearts. In this case, we are *inseparable* from God. And the Path to Heaven is opened!

“To transform oneself as a soul, to become a soul similar to a huge burning candle, which shines and scatters the darkness, is also that work which is done for God!

“It implies transforming oneself-soul into the *Fire of God’s Love* that illuminates the *Temple of the Heart* and all the space around!

“Not everyone considers this as work...

“But this is the most important work in a human life because it is done for God!

“... The light of a candle is not big. But hope is born when we look at its light: as if the darkness has no more power in that place where a candle burns...

“On the other hand, the *Fire of Love* kindled in the spiritual heart can be huge!

“... Everyone can live a life of light and joy, illuminated by the love of the spiritual heart!

“Why does the light appear in the spiritual heart? And why does it happen sometimes that there is no love in the soul?

“The Presence of God in the spiritual heart kindles the Divine Light in the soul!

“God’s Love flows from the heart of such a person and begins to kindle other hearts with this *Light-Fire!*

“And then the *Fire of Love* in such souls can become stronger and stronger!

“Have you heard the word ‘hearth’? People say this about that house where love reigns. Yet this cannot be said about the house where there is no love.

“People, in whom the *Love of God* has become strong, can be the *Fire* That warms, feeds, and protects everything and everyone around!

“And it is not necessary for such people to live as one family in one house. It’s possible to build such a relationship with anyone, in the same way, if we remember that all people are the children of God: brothers and sisters to each other!

“These people can carry the *Light of God* and be It!

“If the *Fire of Love* burns in their hearts stronger and stronger, then these people cognize what it means to have the *Heart of Christ!* In this case, they cognize the *All-Embracing Love of God!*

“And from that time on, the *Source of the Inextinguishable Love of God* shines in the souls! It’s like the Sun! The Sun illuminates equally all creatures and warms them!

“This is how the *Temple of God* should be built and illuminated! And then we should shine from It, serving in this way both God and people!”

Parable about Humility and Monastic Life

*“... In lowliness of mind,
let each esteem the other better than yourself.”*
Phil 2:3

*“If disgrace befell over you, be glad,
for if it is unjust, then your reward will be large;
and if it is just, then, having learned from it,
you can avoid the retribution.”*
From “Ascetic Directions”
of Nilus of Sinai

*“Those of lowly mind are never in a hurry or confusion;
they have no hot and superficial thoughts; but they al-
ways stay in peace. There is nothing that can make
them amazed, confused, terrified... On the contrary, all
their joys are in what is pleasing to the Lord.
When they touch the forehead to the ground and direct
the sight of the heart to the Holiest of the Holy,... they
dare to pray only thus: whatever is going to happen to
me let it happen by Your will!”*
From “Spiritual Directions”
of Isaac of Syria

In a small monastery, located in a provincial town situated on the bank of a large river, an elder Zosima lived.

With the Support of God, he had been helping people for many years, and numerous miraculous healings were carried out by God through that elder.

Many other things also happened thanks to his work, although people often did not consider them as miraculous signs. Those who talked with the elder ob-

tained faith, hope, and love and learned to live consciously and in harmony with God's Providence.

The elder had a disciple — a novice Nicholas.

* * *

Nicholas once asked the elder:

“Zosima, why did you decide to become a monk? Have you ever dreamed about having a family and about children? Or from the very beginning you dreamed only about God?”

“No, not from the very beginning. Everything has happened in my life...”

“Yes, I've dreamed about children. But God had made it so that all His children became my children, and thus I had an opportunity to care not only about the children of my own.

“There are people who live on the Mother Earth like orphans, without feeling God the Father! They live in their loneliness and pray to God, Whom they consider as a ‘Terrible Incognizable Judge’, to be merciful with them! They do not perceive the One with Whom they are trying to talk. They do not feel His Great Love and do not give Him their love in response!

“It seems that people have forgotten about wonderful opportunities given to them by God! They have forgotten how to see, hear, and understand their Heavenly Father! They have forgotten how to work miracles of God...”

“Why do people live as if God does not exist? Why do they immerse themselves into hell while living on the Earth in their bodies?

“This happens because they have lost the purity of souls! And in order to return to this purity, one should wish this first!...”

* * *

At this time, a young novice came to the cell of the elder Zosima. He crossed himself, bowed to the ground, and wished good health to Zosima and Nicholas.

Then he asked:

“How can I learn to hear the Voice of God?”

“You tell him, Nicholas, and I’ll listen.”

The story about the sick monk healed by Nicholas increased greatly the respect of other people towards him. And many were ready to listen to him, even though he hadn’t accepted a monkhood yet.

Nicholas began:

“In order to hear God’s Voice, we should learn to stay in the silence of the spiritual heart; that is, the silence of the mind submerged into the expanded spiritual heart. In this state of the heart, opened by inner love and filled with warmth and tranquility, we understand the Lord! We can ask Jesus to come to such a purified and opened for Him spiritual heart.

“Initially, a spiritual heart is limited by the volume of the chest of the body. But it is so only at the beginning, while the love of the soul has not learned yet to expand and merge with God’s Love, which has no boundaries!

“The Heart of God is endless! It contains everything and everyone, embracing them with Its Love!

“To begin with, inhale and exhale slowly several times. Feel that space in your chest which becomes filled with the air. This is the place where the spiritual heart is located.

“Try to send love to all creatures of God from this center — towards all directions.”

“How so? I’ve heard that love can lead to the sin!”

“That is not love but lust! Real love is a ladder that leads us to Heaven! Love is the lamp of the soul

that allows us to see the right path in the midst of darkness and evil!

“Moreover, we should not consider as lust that desire which appears in a man towards a woman or in a woman towards a man. This desire is destined to teach souls to love and care about each other! For people who live in the secular world, this is a great means that helps them to develop their ability to love!

“Only the life by one’s own bad desires should be called lust! And it doesn’t matter whether a man has desired a wife of another person, sinful food because of his gluttony, or that which another person can’t give him.

“Love, as opposed to the lust, is when one thinks, wants and does good for the others, but not for oneself...

“You can learn to look forward from your spiritual heart so that your sight of the soul will be caressing kindly all that you see — like a ray of sunlight!

“You can also learn to look back from your spiritual heart, to that space where God can always be seen.

“When you start seeing the *Unearthly Light* with the eyes of the heart — come to me or to Zosima. We will teach what to do next.”

At that moment, they saw through the window how a dead body was transported to the temple for a funeral service.

The young novice asked the elder:

“Can you, Zosima, like Jesus, bring that person back to life?”

“No, I can’t. God doesn’t need to prolong the life of that man in that worn body.

“You may recall that Jesus didn’t heal everyone and didn’t return all the dead to the life on the Earth. The purpose of His work was not to make disabled people walk and blind people see! He didn’t work either in order to return the souls, which were already given

to death, to their bodies! If He only had healed the sick — people would not have remembered about Him for thousands of years. The Power of God was revealed through Jesus so that we could comprehend the Teachings of God and learn to live according to these Teachings!

“Each one of us is the soul that doesn’t die with the death of the body! This soul can learn to live in Unity with God during the life in its body.

“Here is a dead body lying in a coffin. It is the same as during its life: it has arms, legs, head, and a heart... But it’s not alive! It is so because God took the living soul out of it!

“Thus, by God’s Will, the soul is united and separated from its body.

“Therefore, that is important what a person has time to do while God fills his or her body with life. This depends on what we direct our strength and thoughts.

“You, for example, want to become a monk. This desire is commendable! But who is a monk? It is that person who lives one to one with God and does everything for Him!

“You want to hear God’s Words and Advice. It is good! It is important! The easiest way to do this is to start listening to the voice of conscience.

“Conscience is the manifestation of the Voice of God in us — the very first manifestation. And thanks to an attentive attitude towards it, the Voice of God can become quite clear for us.

“If we try to ignore the pangs of conscience, do not pay attention to the problems posed before us and act against conscience because of our self-interest — then its quiet voice gradually ceases. And the soul then stops perceiving the problems that are to be solved. In this way a person can fall into the abyss of sins, and then he or she lives without conscience, without God! Such a person is called — unconscionable.

“If, on the contrary, we listen carefully to the voice of conscience and try to behave in a way that we have nothing to reproach ourselves for — then, quite soon, we will be able to hear the Voice of God, Who is always ready to give us advice!

“Learn to observe with attention how you live before God! Try to maintain the purity of the soul — and then everything will be easy: you will be able to feel your spiritual heart and later God!”

*** * ***

When Zosima and Nicholas stayed alone, they continued talking about a monastic life. They talked about this many times but again touched this theme:

“Now you should make the choice that not everyone has a chance to make. The knowledge and skills that you already have are gained by others usually only after several years of a monastic life. You, on the other hand, have learned a lot already: you can feel God’s Will and hear God’s Advice. Now you can start doing in the secular world what you have learned from me. You will remain a monk before God, and you will be able to speak freely about Him before people.

“Soon I will leave this place — and it will be difficult for you to be here: your life can take different courses...”

“Are you testing me again? My decision is firm: I don’t want to go back to a worldly life. And the austerity of the monastery will reduce pride in me and give me more humility...”

Zosima became silent, as if he was looking with the inner sight at the path passed by him... He recalled how he was persecuted and humiliated, how he was accused of being attracted to diabolical machinations because he could... hear God! Nevertheless, through those difficulties, he united even stronger with the Will of God...

He did not tell Nicholas about all this.

The latter guessed but did not try to clarify. Instead of this, he asked about another thing:

“May I ask you now why you don’t administer this monastery? You could change many monastic rules... And why don’t you teach other monks that which you’ve taught me?”

“These are good questions. It seems to me that in the future you yourself will be responsible for everyone in this monastery...”

“As to your second question, I need to explain that in order to teach someone something in the spiritual field — the desires of both parts are necessary: of the one who teaches and of the one who learns.

“Sometimes it happens that a person comes to the monastery and is accepted there. Because of this mere fact, this person begins to believe that he or she has come closer to the holiness. It seems to this person that avoiding the temptations of a worldly life is a great feat in itself...”

“Often such a person thinks that now the prior will be responsible for him or her before God, that the prior will edify him or her and give the absolutions of the sins and that the life in a monastery by itself will bring him or her closer to God... But this is not true! It’s possible to live in a monastery as in the secular world, being fettered by the passions!

“Only a person alone can change himself or herself! It is he or she who should cleanse the soul of the vices! Only to that person who lives so, God allows to approach Him! Even if a teacher full of holiness is near, that teacher won’t be able to make clean the disciple who does not keep himself or herself pure!

“The task of the teacher who can see better the flaws of the soul consists only in explaining what the vice is and how to correct this defect.”

“You’re right. I also often rely on you more than on myself and on God. I think that I can make mistakes in understanding the Will of God...”

“... You also believe that I am never wrong and that I will save you from all your errors...” — Zosima added, and they laughed in unison.

The elder again rejoiced inwardly at the ability of Nicholas to listen attentively to each one of his words. He also was happy that through these words, his disciple not only came to the understanding of the problems of other people, but also found in himself even the smallest traces of wrong thinking. “It was not in vain that God led him to me! It is not in vain that I teach him! Maybe he indeed will manage to perform the true and great service! Maybe later the whole monastery will be under his guidance...”

They continued their conversation:

“Many people believe that if someone’s sin is absolved by a priest — then it disappears. But this is not true. And it’s important that you learn to explain this to people!

“The defect of the soul will disappear completely only when every sinful act provoked by that defect becomes repulsive for that soul! In other words, then that person will stop wanting to do those types of indecent things and will no longer be able to! Only then he or she will be free from that vice or defect!

“Among our brethren there are those who could master the inner silence with the help of the Lord. They began to learn the heart love. But not all of them have understood that only this is necessary, that only the spiritual heart, opened for God, allows living a truly monastic life! Only the heart full of love allows us to cleanse the souls and to do everything as a service for God!”

Nicholas listened attentively and then said:

“But I still can’t always subdue my mind... Sometimes I condemn what is bad. I still have unanswered

questions. When I see evil and hear spiteful words, rejection raises inside me!”

“To see and understand that something is bad is not the sin of condemnation! If you can’t see evil in someone — you can’t help him or her!”

“Yes, I understand this, but I still can’t discern this totally.

“In my youth, I saw only the good in people, and many times I was wrong about them and betrayed by my best friends... After that I, on the contrary, started noticing only the bad in people — only the filth and dirt in them. And then despair came, and I even lost faith...

“Now I am learning to see everyone as you see them. That is, I try not to condemn, but to seek the light in every soul, even if it shines only slightly, and appeal to this light, and not to the darkness of vices that are trying to extinguish it.”

“Yes, this is exactly what you need to do. It is essential to see all the vices and problems of the soul, but also to find that light which is still shining in it. If we appeal to the best in someone — then there is a chance that this person will feel the Hand of God, always stretched out to him or her! And if that person feels the Presence of God and holds His Hand — then he or she can begin to get out of the abyss of vices. Of course, it will be possible only if this person is capable of understanding the meaning of this work on the transformation of the soul.”

“I understand all this with my mind. But sometimes I keep condemning others... For example, when they say unfair words about you...

“Just yesterday our prior called you again... He probably lectured you and humiliated you in every possible way, as he always does! Why do you listen to his accusations, as if they were fair? You never object the slander, said against you! God speaks through you and the miracles happen through you, glorifying this

monastery, but you, it seems, even don't have a right to object?"

"Don't judge someone precociously when you don't know everything about him or her..."

"It is easy to see flaws of that person who is in full view of everyone and undertook to administrate people..."

"Comprehend, Nicholas, nothing ever happens to anyone that isn't necessary for God! Only those events come to our lives through which we can become wiser and purer or through which our neighbors can realize something important!

"Even if a person who is reproached unjustly is not guilty, then — through this — others can see their own flaws!

"But this can happen only when a righteous soul is in the state of peace and gentleness, similar to the smooth surface of a lake in calm weather.

"On the contrary, when one tries to object and prove one's rightness — nothing but debate will result from this. And there is little benefit from a debate because the debaters always hear only themselves and try to prove only their own rightness. Even if you hold the objections within yourself and do not say a word — even in this case such inner state will hinder you from helping another person.

"It is necessary to look at all situations from deep calm and together with God! From this deep calm — the words rise that are proposed by God and that can be said aloud.

"Moreover, only from the calm that exists in the depths of your expanded spiritual heart, can you perceive God clearly and communicate easily with Him, as well as see distinctively the difference between the good and the evil!

"... Nevertheless, sometimes there is no reason even to talk with an unreasonable person full of vices: words won't change anything in him or her... This

means the time to understand hasn't come yet to this person... it's not possible to help everyone right away...

“Our prior is a good man: he is strong and persistent. We had been close friends for a long time, dreaming of a pure life before God and of spiritual accomplishments... Afterwards our destinies parted. When I came here, he already had been a high-ranking head of the monastery and already had done a lot here. I, on the other hand, was persecuted by everyone... and had nothing but God in my heart...”

“So, probably, he accepted you here because of the miracles you perform, in order to bring glory to the monastery?”

“I don't think so — he didn't know about this at that time. I already knew that God could manifest His Power through me, but he didn't know this fact, yet he helped me...”

“Ignatius is not envious! Still the earthly holds him tight and doesn't let him go towards the Freedom of God. It's a pity because he might have achieved a lot, since his power of the soul is great!...”

“When someone has risen high above others — it's not easy for him or her to start perceiving himself or herself as the 'small one' and start learning! It's not easy for such a person to replace completely his or her own will with the Will of God! It's not easy to deny everything perishable in oneself!

“For a person who aspires to live for God, it is also difficult to humble the pride and become the instrument of God's Providence!”

* * *

Zosima fell silent for a long time. He recalled what united them in their youth with Ignatius: their high dreams, their desire to serve God... He also recalled how, many years later, he came to the monastery. God

then said to him: "This is the place where you will live and work for the Glory of God till the last days of your body. Here you will be able to do a lot of good things!"

Ignatius then looked at him as at some miserable person that couldn't manage to achieve anything in life... He began telling Zosima about his important plans and affairs... He did not send the miserable away but allowed him to live in the monastery...

It was good, although from that moment Zosima had to do a lot of almost useless things for all day long or even work on something completely meaningless...

During this time he passed through numerous lessons of patience and humility and learned to be in Union with God, no matter what his body was doing. He reaped a lot of benefit from these humility and patience tests.

Zosima recalled how later Ignatius saw for the first time the Power of God manifested through Zosima.

At that time, a blind boy was healed. God did this for all to see.

Ignatius realized what had happened and turned pale...

Then they talked in private:

"From what time could you do this, Zosima?"

"It happened for the first time long ago, about ten years... I didn't understand then how all this worked... But at present I know the Will of God and follow It relentlessly. And God can do through me what is necessary for His Glory! Without Him, I can't do anything."

Ignatius then assigned a special cell to Zosima and allowed him to receive people. He also allowed him to ignore some rules of the monastery.

And he himself drifted apart, retired into himself, thinking, 'God has not given me this...'

He did not begin learning what he could master.

Afterwards, there was another moment when Ignatius could make progress...

Zosima recalled how he hoped that he would be able to help Ignatius to cognize God...

Ignatius fell very ill then. He was in pain, could barely stand on his legs or speak but did not stop the liturgy...

After that — monks carried him on their hands to his chamber. However, he did not call Zosima, did not ask him for help...

Zosima then came himself.

Ignatius lay on his bed, being pale because of pain. In spite of this, he was suppressing his moans...

“Is it time to die?” — he asked.

“No, not now, Ignatius. It is just kidney stones coming out. Soon you will feel better. Forgive me, God does not allow me to remove your pain completely...

“When you feel very severe pain, recall all the evil that you thought and did, ask God for forgiveness! In this case, together with these stones, all that is dirty and heavy will leave you! You will be well! You will even outlive me! God has sent this to you for the purification of the soul!”

“Forgive me, Zosima! I was unfair to you... Maybe it was envy... I believed that only I was right and righteous before God... But He works miracles through you, He chose you...”

All that week, Zosima was with the prior.

During this time, Ignatius became softer, listened attentively and did a lot...

But then he again changed. He decided to experience the Power of God in himself; however, it did not work... He tried one time, another time, but nothing happened... And then it was as if a door was shut... He himself chose this: he himself stopped trying to build a new life with God from the very beginning... It seemed that he kept feeling the resentment about his incapacity...

It is not easy to let only love rule over you! The mind impedes this! Human selfishness impedes!

In spite of everything, he could have done this...

* * *

After a pause, Zosima continued their conversation:

“Ignatius helped me a lot. Thanks to his help, I also could help other people. But I still couldn’t help him much...

“From our every conversation he obtains a little understanding each time... He also permitted me to teach you! And not just to teach as I teach other people, but to prepare you so that you can replace me when I leave...”

“What are you talking about? Who can replace you?”

“Well, replace or not, but you will have to do my work after me!

“I said many words to people from the peace of the heart, where the Creator dwells. But now to be silent is more appropriate for me than to speak.

“Sometimes one should first hear the words in order to realize what God’s Love is and how to experience His Great Silence and His Presence in it.

“And you should learn to speak in such a way that the Silence of the Creator, our God the Father, becomes apparent behind your words. Now you should learn, whether you are speaking or staying silent, to convey the Presence of God to that person who has come to you for advice and help.

“It can be often heard and read that Jesus — Living and Resurrected — is now with us and that the Heavenly Father is Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient! But as long as the soul hasn’t experienced this by itself, as long as God’s Love hasn’t touched the heart, these words will remain just words, repeated over and over again in prayers or in empty sermons...

“It is important how you keep silent, how you speak, how you listen! All this determines whether or not God’s Presence will reach the spiritual heart of the person with whom you talk, whether or not the door to the innermost sanctuary of the soul will be opened!

“Now it is your turn to give spiritual help to people. Now you, instead of me, will listen to everyone to whom I’ll point.

“So many people come every day... I’m tired... I’m tired of human wanting...

“If they realized that we live not for ourselves but for God — then, maybe, they would come to their senses... But it’s not easy to explain this to people... How much has been said already about the love for our neighbors...”

Zosima sighed and offered:

“Let’s go to the garden... People brought me a cherry sapling. Let’s plant it together!”

*** * ***

The next day a middle-aged couple came into the cell of Zosima.

Nicholas sensed that they did not trust him. It was not surprising, since they surely came to get advice from Zosima, and not from a novice whom no one knew!

However, this didn’t disturb Zosima at all. He greeted them kindly and said:

“Now you will talk with him, and God will give you advice through him.”

“But how is that? We came to you...”

“Not to me, to God!”

God’s Silence fell upon them all. Soft and transparent Peace embraced them and filled them from inside.

Nicholas could not figure out whether he could create this state of God by himself or if it was Zosima

who helped make God's Presence so palpable. Maybe it was God Himself Who manifested His Help...

The visitors started their story:

"We came here to ask God about a baby. We have been praying for many years but without any result. We still have no children. In the Bible, there are stories when God let people in old age give birth to a child... But maybe we are not worthy of this grace. How can we find this grace? What should we do to deserve it?"

Nicholas immediately felt what he should say in response. He was picking his words for some time, then said:

"Why do you want necessarily to have a child of your own? A lot of children are already born; they live in orphanages and don't have parental care.

"Take a child from there and bring it up. In this case, you will receive happiness and a child will find caring parents!"

"We thought about this as well... But what if we fail to love a child that is not our own? What if its character is difficult and we can't cope with it?"

"Doesn't it also happen with one's own children? Doesn't it happen so that parents can't cope with the upbringing of their own children?"

"We thought the Lord would help us..."

At that moment Zosima entered into their conversation:

"God indeed helps, but only when you listen to His advice! Will you be able to accept His Help with humility? Will you be able to help another person?"

"A hundred miles from your estate, there is an orphanage. A girl Tanya of twelve years old lives there. She is thin and a bit sickly. But when she lives with you, she will get stronger in the fresh air! This girl could have been born by you, but you didn't want children at that time. Now she is an orphan and you are alone... Nevertheless, it's easy to fix this situation. She can become your daughter..."

“Maybe we should take a small child so it wouldn’t know that it was adopted. We have dreamed so much...”

“You’ve come to ask for advice and help from God...”

“Now think and decide by yourself what to do further.”

“Many people are willing to adopt little children. But if you adopt Tanya, this can change a lot in her destiny! It also can change a lot in your life! Everything will begin anew... And what concerns nursing — you will nurse grandchildren...”

Zosima smiled in a special way. He did so when God allowed him to look at the beautiful future:

“You indeed will get that miracle about which you asked God! You can do this in accordance with His Will! Now go...”

The couple bowed to the ground and went.

Outside the woman quietly asked her husband:

“Will we go for Tanya right now?”

Nicholas did not know if he heard those words or just understood what was happening in the souls. But joy and tenderness flooded him!

“Did it work?” — he asked the elder Zosima.

The latter smiled gently:

“Don’t you understand it yourself?”

“I understood. Still I can’t do it as you do. Until you said it, I hadn’t seen the girl...”

“Don’t worry! You will learn to penetrate deeply into every situation with the help of God!”

*** * ***

Nicholas could not feel God in all the occasions when people addressed him their questions and concerns.

Only when they were together with the elder Zosima, everything was easy. But when Nicholas was

alone and people came to him with their sorrows, he felt that the whole responsibility lay only with him, and sometimes nothing happened! So after a few serious failures, he said to Zosima:

“It is clear that I am not ready yet! Don’t force me to do something that I am not ready for...”

Zosima did not object.

It was hard for Nicholas! He felt unworthy, did not know what to do and suffered...

One day Zosima handed him a thick notebook with pages yellowed by time:

“Take it. I haven’t written sermons, and I haven’t written down all that I’ve heard from God. I didn’t think that it would be useful for someone... Still it is something. Maybe it will serve you.”

Nicholas took it with reverence, thanked Zosima and went to his cell.

He opened the notebook at random and read:

“Despondency means the absence of God in your life.

“If you are despondent — this means that your love for God has cooled and that your love for your neighbor has diminished too.

“If you keep God in your heart, if your heart generates love, light, and warmth every second — then sadness can’t arise.”

Nicholas read these words and they scalded him! He thought that he was already firmly established in the field of spirituality, but it turned out he was not.

He kept reading:

“Why does weakness appear? Because the will-power has become weaker in a person. The previous aspirations of this person have become less appreciated by him or her. And the most important reason it happens is that this person does not see the need of God for his or her work!

“How did the Apostles perform their great deeds? They — by Their love for Jesus and the Heavenly Fa-

ther — opened access for the Power of God to flow through Them! And They directed that Power to those people to whom They were trying to help.

“They strove to leave for people the knowledge received by them from Jesus!

“The world of people condemns, judges and punishes...

“God, on the contrary, does not do so. He loves all His children. He loves even lost ones. And He wishes the good to everyone and is ready to show everyone the Path to the happy life in the Light!

“This is the essence of the forgiveness of God!

“Human courts should be on the Earth to stop the evil of those who are blind and deaf because of their hatred and other vices...

“And what is ‘God’s judgment’? It is when we, perceiving ourselves before God, see our flaws and our future destinies...

“The one who services God should master God’s forgiveness: God’s unconditional Love, which, like the Light of the Great Sun, flows equally to everyone!

“For every human soul, sent by God to the Earth, there is a feasible task. And to fulfill this task may constitute a great feat of transforming oneself and all around!

“Even if the work entrusted by God to the soul is not great yet — it will be very good if one does it happily!

“It will be fine if, out of the aspiration to do good, we start to act in accordance with the Intention of God!

“It is important not just to say comforting words to a person. Such words are easily forgotten — and then this person will again start seeking the comfort from other people...

“Apart from this, we need to see what would be good for that soul and show that person the possibility of resolving with joy and understanding the problem posed by God!

“Why do you condemn the folly of your younger brothers?

“Everyone will come to the understanding in his or her own term!

“It is said, ‘from love to hatred there is one step’. It is not true! The one who can hate one’s neighbor, whom, as one thought, one loved before, did not love that neighbor at all!

“Love forgives the offences!

“It is said, ‘God commanded to endure...’

“And a stupid one will suffer and endure while others are doing bad things with him or her...

“But the wise will step aside from the evil that they cannot correct and change.

“If your hands suddenly become dirty — you need just to wash them.

“There is no need to wait for the dirt to fall off by itself.

“And don’t ask for the help of God for this.

“In the same way, it is necessary to keep the soul clean!

“One should cleanse everything in oneself through one’s own efforts — including the body, the mind, and the emotions! And this cleanliness should be maintained! Without this, it’s impossible to perceive the Most Beautiful One or, in other words, to hear and feel God!

“How can one rid oneself of the resistance to God’s Will?

“Sand allows water to pass through it; clay doesn’t. Natural properties of matter are different.

“Why does the matter of the body become ill? Normally, because bad properties of the soul affected it.

“It is necessary to transform those soul’s qualities.

“And then the disease of the body will leave, and the soul will shine with purity!

“When the soul does not love — it is dying, so to speak!

“We can lift ourselves out of the abyss of sins, vices, and suffering, and rise, ascend to the life in purity and God’s Love!

“Silence of the spiritual heart becomes filled with the Words of God — and then the understanding penetrates the soul!”

Reading again and again these notes of Zosima and recalling everything that he had already learned from him, Nicholas again and again raised the state of the soul to the perception of the Holy Spirit. He was mastering the continuous Union with God.

*** * ***

Time was passing, but Zosima still did not call Nicholas to help him with the visitors.

That day Nicholas was busy, chopping wood for the monastery. He loved such work, and it was delightful to watch his robust and strong body wielding an ax.

Unexpectedly, he was called to the elder Zosima, who said that there was an important task for Nicholas.

In the cell of the elder, there was a boy of about fifteen years of age. His right arm was hanging like a whip. It was evident that he had come to ask for the healing.

Zosima said to Nicholas:

“Here is some work for you: you can heal Paul!”

Immediately, Nicholas sensed what he should do. He didn’t need even to think about this for a long time. The Light of the Holy Spirit embraced him like the Flow of the Great River!

He said cordially to the boy:

“Let’s go: you can help me to chop wood for the monastery! I stopped this work and ran here.”

The boy replied sadly:

“I’m a bad worker: my right arm has been paralyzed for a long time. I don’t feel it at all...”

“It’s doesn’t matter! We will look at it! Let’s go!”

While they were walking, Nicholas felt clearly and strongly how the Holy Spirit was flowing through their bodies. He only slightly directed this Flow, Which was coming from the *Depths*, to the spine of the boy and to his injured arm...

He was observing those Streams of God’s Light, merged as a soul with Them and heard, as if from far away, how the boy was telling him that he was ashamed of his weakness, that he liked one girl, but couldn’t court her because of his defect... Besides, what can a man do in a village without an arm?...

When they came to a woodpile, Paul with surprise moved the fingers of his right hand:

“I have some strange sensations in my hand... Look! Fingers are moving!”

Nicholas did not give him time to keep thinking about this:

“If they move — then take an ax! Help me! I am already exhausted! Not like this! Hold it with both your hands! With one hand, you won’t do much!”

They worked for about an hour, taking turns: working with an ax and then making a woodpile. All this time, God’s Light flowed through their bodies.

“Well done, my friend! You’ve helped me a lot! We did it quickly together! Tomorrow your arm may have some pain, but don’t worry! It is because it was without work for a long time. Go to a bathhouse to warm up! And ask the elder Zosima to give you some medicinal ointment.”

They went to the temple. The service had not started yet. It was very quiet.

“Paul, thank God for your healing!”

“I don’t know many prayers... Which one should I use?”

“Say it in your own words! Don’t use a prayer! God hears any words and even thoughts!

“And remember that since God restored the strength of your arm, you should always do good with it! Never do evil!”

Nicholas was standing next to the boy and could not find words to express his gratitude to God...

On the way back to the cell of the elder, they met a kitten. In the monastery, there were a few cats that regularly brought a fair offspring.

Nicholas took this gentle and purring animal into his arms and said to Paul:

“Stroke it!”

Paul gently touched fluffy fur with the palm of his recovered arm...

“It’s so nice!... Once, when I was a child, I was forced to drown some kittens. I didn’t want to, I cried, but in spite of everything did this. Since then, I had never stroked any cat, feeling guilty before them...”

“Maybe your beautiful girl will be glad to get such a gift.”

“Yes, sure! Can I?”

“Of course! Take it! For the luck of both of you!”

*** * ***

When the door of the cell closed after Paul, Zosi-
ma praised Nicholas:

“Well done! And you were saying that you couldn’t work! With God — everything is feasible!

“But how to determine where the limit of human capabilities is? The reality is the following: when you come to the limit — God opens before you new gates, giving you new possibilities for new achievements. He offers new tasks for the soul!

“The mind united with the spiritual heart and illuminated by God’s Love cannot anymore be obscured by anything! In this case, God directs the will of the

person who entirely devoted herself or himself to the service for God! And each time, those words arise which can help another soul! And the Power of those words is great!

“God fills those words with His Power through your opened and expanded spiritual heart!”

Parable about Death and Resurrection

In a small provincial town, there was a monastery. The elder Zosima lived in that monastery. He was highly respected by many people for the wonders of God that accompanied his words and acts.

Yet there were also those deeds of the elder about which only a small number of people knew, and the greatness of those deeds was hidden from the rumors of others.

The elder was able to nurture and cultivate, softly and gently, kindness and love in human hearts. And then that love blossomed and bore fruits.

In that town, there was also a free hospital, founded by a rich merchant whose daughter was healed by Zosima. Much was done in that hospital due to the donations of those people whom the elder helped. The head of the hospital was Doctor Fyodor.

* * *

In the family of Doctor Fyodor, a daughter was growing up. The girl was named Sophia, but usually people called her affectionately Zosia. Perhaps they called her so because the miracle of her birth, known to a few people and related to the elder Zosima.

Zosima paid special attention to the upbringing of this girl.

When Zosia grew up, she became a frequent visitor of the elder.

She loved to ask him questions. She loved to listen to his answers or just to sit quietly in that particular silence which always was in the cell of the elder.

In the last case, everything became calm inside her. Her joy — alive, radiant, and shining to all sides — turned into a special state of tender light, gentle calm, and the concentration on the Presence of God.

The parents of Zosia dedicated almost all their time and effort to the work in the hospital.

Playing with dolls or race-and-catch with other children could not capture Zosia's attention for long. And her role in the life of the hospital grew year after year.

Just as a ray of sunshine slides and touches gently everything with its warm light and remains pure no matter what it touches but rather, on the contrary, makes everything more beautiful — so Zosia ran through the hospital wards as if she was doing her own ward round. Sometimes she stayed for a long time with one or another patient. Sometimes she told fairy tales to sick children. Sometimes she cheered up adults.

At first, Doctor Fyodor tried to guard her, at least, from the communication with the severe patients. He wanted to prevent the girl from being scared by the human suffering. But once he found Zosia near a moribund patient, whom he could not help by any medical means. He saw the girl talking with that patient and how the state of that patient suddenly changed...

That person then told Doctor Fyodor:

“I was granted God's mercy: an angel came to me! And now I am not afraid of dying!”

From that time, it was no longer prohibited to Zosia to visit even seriously ill patients. She was always ready to give water, to call a nurse, or to simply say a kind and gentle word and give a sunny smile.

When a novice Nicholas appeared in the monastery and was accepted by Zosima as a disciple, Zosia and Nicholas became great friends quite soon. Nicholas taught Zosia to read and write. When she learned this — she was given a special privilege: she carried notes from some patients with their requests or questions to the elder Zosima and delivered his answers back to them.

* * *

Once Zosia came, as usual, to the cell of the elder and asked him:

“Tell me why some people are kind while others are not. Why is it so? Isn’t it possible to change something so that everyone becomes kind?”

“You, Zosia, can look at different plants. Some are strong and healthy; they grow well and turn towards the sun. Others, on the contrary, are stunted. There are also plants with crooked trunks... It depends on many factors: on the quality of the seed, on the type of soil where the seed fell, on the environment in which the plant grew...

“It is the same with people.

“Any plant will grow better if we begin to look after it correctly. Yet it’s impossible to make straight the trunk of the tree that grew crooked for a long time...”

“Yes! I understand! Just now we have such a patient with a ‘crooked trunk’.”

Zosia thought by herself for some time and then told the elder about the new patient who was causing big troubles to the entire hospital:

“She is very noisy and shouts at everyone, as if she is the only one in the whole world! She wants everyone to take care and attend only to her! And she considers everything to be wrong: kasha is cooked wrong, a prick is done painfully, the bed is hard, and a nurse doesn’t come quickly! She’s a rich landowner,

and she lived alone for many years with a lot of servants who fulfilled her every whim... She is used to the situation when everything was only for her... And she speaks as if a swarm of gadflies is in her mouth! She sees only bad in everything around! She rails and condemns everyone and everything! She thinks that all around her are stupid, lazy, and clumsy! She believes they cannot treat her and do not know how to please her!... This woman was brought to our hospital by her personal doctor because he didn't know how to help her. And the saddest thing of all is that it's impossible to help her since she will apparently die soon. Her disease is incurable and her age is very advanced. Nevertheless, she doesn't even think about the death of her body, as if this can't happen to her. And we do not tell her either. She causes only problems to people around her...

“My dad asks how we can help her in this situation.”

“She has to be told that her time has come... It will be good practice for you, Nicholas! Today you can accompany Zosia and then talk with this woman.”

Zosia was happy because it was always interesting for her to be with Nicholas.

Being glad to the promised support, she gave Zosima those notes that she brought from patients.

“Well, Zosia, let's get to work!” — the elder said.

Zosia sat at a desk, took a pen and ink and prepared to write the answers.

Zosima chose the first note, read it, looked with the inner sight at the destiny of the person who wrote the question, and gave this note to Zosia. She turned the sheet of paper to write the answer.

Pronouncing words slowly and clearly, Zosima formulated two short sentences. The girl carefully and accurately wrote the words of the elder.

Thus they answered all the notes.

* * *

Soon Zosia with Nicholas went to the hospital. That day they still had to do a lot.

The hospital was close to the monastery. The road passed on a sloping hill towards the river. There was an extraordinary beauty all around!

Nicholas, who had been inside the monastery walls for a long time, was happy to see the majesty of the powerful river carrying gently its waters, the green hills, and the expanse of the blue sky with light clouds.

Little and warm palm of Zosia in his hand filled him with tenderness...

Zosia was walking next to him, being too full of joyous delight:

“I love this place so much! It is always so beautiful here, during the winter and during the summer... And I always feel so happy when I visit this place! It is as if I can push myself off the ground and fly above the earth! I even play sometimes like this: I imagine that I am a flying bird and can see everything from above...”

When they came to the hospital, Zosia said to Nicholas:

“This woman, her name is Lizaveta, I think she is very unhappy. And she is very afraid of death. That is why, she tries not to think about it at all...”

“I also have asked myself whether I am afraid to die or not. Now it seems to me that I will be not afraid if my body has to die. Of course, if it’s not very painful. The soul can’t die...”

“Have you thought about this too?”

“I’ve thought a lot, Zosia. I believe I won’t be afraid either if God calls me to Him. But how to tell this to another person, I still don’t know...”

They kept walking in silence. Zosia just squeezed his hand tighter with her own little hand as if trying to show her support for him.

They entered the ward.

“Ah, Zosia! You’ve come, at last! You are always not here when I need you! I have been waiting for you for four hours! I want you to read me that book! I sent someone to look for you, but he couldn’t find you anywhere!”

“Today I am not going to read for you. I brought him...” — Zosia pointed to Nicholas.

“And who asked you about that? He is going to beg alms for his monastery! I know these people! Do you want my money? You won’t get it! Or do you want me to confess? They can’t heal me! At last, her soul will be saved if she gives all her money to the church? This is what you think, right? I’ll be saved for my money! Yes? And if I don’t donate — then I will go to hell, right? I hate priests!”

“I can’t confess you, Lizaveta: I’m still just a novice. Zosima sent me to talk with you. And if you, in fact, want to confess and receive communion, it will be easy to organize.”

“Do you want to bury me here? You are talking as if I were dying!”

“This is true: your illness is incurable. And when the hour of death comes — God decides... And it is better to be always prepared for this hour.”

Lizaveta became pale and, with a trembling voice, but quietly and not loudly as usual, asked Zosia:

“Is it true, Zosia? I know you can’t lie. Is it true?”

Zosia nodded.

The silence felt, in which only the heavy breathing of elderly, corpulent woman was heard, woman whose days in this body were numbered...

Zosia left quietly and closed tightly the door of the hospital ward.

“Do you want me to leave, Lizaveta?” — Nicholas asked.

“No... Sit down if you have come. Begin your sermons! But know that you won’t get any money from me!...”

Nicholas felt the Presence of God and, suddenly for himself, began to speak about how he had come to God. He spoke frankly and simply:

“I came to this town especially because no one knew me here. I thought this would be a good place to end my earthly life, from which I didn’t see any benefit... I thought that God doesn’t exist since so much evil is all around! And this evil often reigns over the good. And we can’t change anything in this world...”

Nicholas kept telling her his story about how a good woman Aksinya saved him from such an end, about how she asked him to carry a sick boy to the elder Zosima...

Then Nicholas spoke about the elder, about the purity of the soul, about Living God...

He thought that the woman, being shocked by the news of her impending death, was not listening to him at all... He thought she just wanted that someone to be nearby, so that it was not so frightening to die.

However, everyone crosses the threshold of death alone...

When Nicholas paused, Lizaveta, unexpectedly for him, asked:

“So now you want to become like that elder, right?”

“Yes, I would like to learn to help those who can be helped...”

“But I see that it is already too late to help me... So why has your elder sent you to me?”

“For you to have time to do what you still can do.”

“And what is that?”

“You yourself need to think about this... I, on my part, would say that the time you still have might be used for a great benefit of the soul. I am not talking about money. You are the one who decides what to do with your own money. You can make a will.”

They stayed silent for a while...

“You know what I’ve thought up, Nicholas! I will bequeath all my property to Zosia. Although I am a bad and nasty old woman, I understand something in people: I have seen many of them during my lifetime... Zosia can do good! Do you think God guides her? If you want, I also bequeath some of my money to your Aksinya. You, probably, didn’t thank her for real! Will she be able to manage it correctly?”

“There was little use of my life... So, at least, there will be some benefit of my death...”

... They continued talking for a long time...

Because her last hour was close, many things became clear to Lizaveta: what is important and what does not really matter...

From that day, she changed significantly. She stopped pestering everyone around with her whims and fancies, put in order her earthly affairs, and drew up a detailed will.

Her state also changed greatly since she perceived herself as the soul before God and began to prepare herself for the transition to another life.

*** * ***

One day, when Zosima and Nicholas were alone, the elder said:

“It’s time for me to leave...”

He said it quietly but clearly.

“Where?” — Nicholas did not understand.

“To the other side... Where Heavenly Father is calling me now...”

“Why are you saying this? You’re completely healthy!”

“Why does one always have to leave in suffering and pain? It’s possible to do it happily and being ready for another state of the soul — for the life without a mortal bodily shell!

“The infirmities of the body are often given to a person in order to facilitate the transition of the soul. In other words, it is done in order to convince the soul of the fact that the separation from the body will be good for it, and in order to stop the soul clinging to the life in the body and turn it completely to the life in another world.

“But if the soul has subdued the whims of the mind and body and if God is always near — then you can happily accept the death of this mortal shell!

“Let me go now, Nicholas...”

“But how? And what do you mean in saying ‘let me go’? Don’t I let you go? And how can I stop loving you and start wishing you death?”

“You are used to loving me in this body, hearing words that come out from it, feeling God’s Love flowing through my body, embracing this corporeal frame of mine in response...

“You are saying: ‘I can’t stop loving you!’ But can the death of the body be an obstacle for love? When I leave, will you stop loving me? And I won’t stop loving you either.

“Why do people shed tears when the body of a person they loved dies? Because they do not see the soul, can’t hold it, can’t talk with it... They understand the death of the body... as separation.

“Another case may be when they feel sorry for themselves because they have stayed alone...

“However, for the early Christians, for example, the death was not a tragedy, as people often perceive it now! They expected the happiness of the reunion of the soul with God beyond the threshold of the death!

“They were waiting for this union with God, Whom they learned to love with all their heart! They learned to love Him more than everything else in their earthly lives!

“The first Christians accepted the baptism not because everyone around was baptized and it was the

tradition! In those times, all people around, on the contrary, lived in other traditions... Those who wanted to receive the baptism did it because they wanted to build their lives according to the Teachings of Jesus! They wanted to live in the new spiritual purity and beauty, keeping the commandments of Jesus!

“You have already learned a lot, and when I leave — you will learn even more... Love that exists between us will teach! God will teach!”

“How do you know that it’s time?”

“God said! He is calling me...”

“Should I tell this to the prior?”

“No, don’t tell anyone...”

* * *

Someone knocked at the door...

“Here’s our joy! The Lord has led Zosia to us!” — Zosima smiled.

The girl ran into the cell, shining with radiant joy, freshness, and tenderness! Locks of white-goldish hair came out from under her kerchief... She was holding a basket full of cranberries in her hands...

“I brought you some berries! I picked them by myself! Look how many!”

Zosima took some berries. He ate slowly, with a blissful expression on his face, as if taking his last communion. He embraced the girl tenderly:

“Thank you! You’ve made us happy with these delicious berries!...”

Zosia wanted to leave all the berries to Zosima and Nicholas, but the elder objected:

“Please, leave only some for us. You can put them into the plate. And carry the rest to the hospital. Tell them that the elder ordered thus: these berries will bring health to them.”

They were sitting together for a long time, surrounded by the Presence of God. There were no con-

versations or questions... It was as if they, as souls, embraced one another!

When Zosia was about to leave, the elder said:

“Tell your father and mother that tomorrow they will hear the news and that they should accept it with great joy. Will you remember it?”

“I’ll pass it word for word! You’ve taught me how to remember important words exactly! So, then I go?”

“Go, Zosia... Go with God!”

* * *

Zosima died...

This news quickly spread around the small town...

Nadezhda, the mother of Zosia, could not hold back her tears. Her husband, Doctor Fyodor, was stroking her head, embracing her tenderly. Nadezhda kept saying through her tears:

“How it is possible? Zosima died... He was absolutely healthy!...”

Their daughter ran up. Nadezhda, wiping her tears with a handkerchief, said:

“Zosia, the elder Zosima died yesterday...”

Zosia stood still, as if a radiant golden sun, which always tried to finish all its affairs in constant motion, stopped its movement for a while:

“So this is what he was talking about yesterday. He said that you would receive some news and should rejoice... I did not understand then...”

“Mom, dad! He knew about this yesterday! And he wanted you not to cry about him, because he is with God and should feel good! And we should be glad for him!”

With these words, Zosia embraced her parents with great warmth and love, as if she were older, wiser, and stronger than they were...

Fyodor lifted her in his arms, and the girl hugged again her most beloved people. They stood in silence for a long time, embracing each other.

Then they went home...

Influenced by non-childish words of their daughter, Fyodor and Nadezhda were looking at their Zosia.

Nadezhda said:

“Don’t you feel sad, Zosia, that you will never come to the elder’s cell? To whom will you ask your questions now?...”

“It’s a bit sad...” — Zosia replied. — “But I think he will find how to answer my questions so that I could understand! When I was very small and silly — he always invented new ways to explain to me in such a way that I would understand. And now he will think up something!”

“Mom, dad! Look! Here is he walking next to! He consists of Light!

“Do you know what he is saying? He is saying: ‘God is always near us! And God will answer all the questions, we just need to learn to love and listen to His Advice!’

“It turns out that now I can hear and see him! But... why then do people say that he died?”

* * *

The spring came and all the trees in the monastery garden bloomed simultaneously. They were covered with white and pale-pink flowers. Fragrance! Peace! Wondrous beauty!

Nicholas was standing in the garden near the cell of the elder Zosima. Tomorrow he would take monastic vows and then continue doing what Zosima did.

The prior, archimandrite Ignatius, believed firmly that all that had been done by Zosima should be continued. So Nicholas must receive the visitors, listen, and give advice...

... He recalled how Zosima taught him to communicate with the visitors... Yes, he knew how to do some things already. But it was easy when Zosima was near. In that time, Nicholas knew that Zosima would not allow him to make mistakes that could cause harm. He corrected him and let him know if something went wrong... But now? Will I manage to do everything without Zosima?

Or Zosima is here, but just can't be seen?

Nicholas thought about this, standing near the cherry tree, which they planted once with the elder. He admired its flowers, which appeared for the first time in the life of the tree, and stroked its still tiny trunk. There was no sadness in him. There was warmth in the heart, as during the conversations with the elder.

He recalled what they were talking about while planting this cherry tree.

Zosima said then: "When it flowers, I will not be here!". He said it so happily!

"So you can't see it, right?" — Nicholas asked being upset.

"I think I'll see it! Why would God create the beauty in this world if He could not see it by Himself from His Abode or in some other way?..."

"Pythagoras, for example, called the whole universe with the word 'cosmos', which in Greek means 'beauty', 'harmonious order in the world!'"

"Have you read the works of the ancient Greeks?"

"Yes, of course. And I got a lot of benefit from them. Many sages before Jesus wrote about God and about the purity of a human life. And, probably, people strive for virtue less right now because only a few of them read these works..."

"By the way, what is *virtue*? It means to do good and implies good thoughts, good words, and good deeds!"

“Did you really think that I had read only one book in my life?” — Zosima laughed youthfully and joyfully and continued:

“I believe that those people who help God to create beauty on the Earth won’t be deprived of the opportunity to see it... However, it’s not so important! Great and wonderful blessings await those to whom God allows approaching Him! So, we have to work to multiply the good and create the beauty in actions and in souls... In this case, we will be worthy of entering the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father!”

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At this time Nicholas was called:

“Some people have come with a blind boy. They do not want to go back: they don’t believe that Zosima is not here anymore...”

“They are right when they don’t believe this!” — Nicholas replied happily. — “Call them!”

A young, slim, beautiful, and richly dressed woman was walking towards the cell, holding by the hand a boy of about ten or eleven. She behaved as if she was trying to make every step instead of him so that he wouldn’t stumble or strike.

Seeing a broad-shouldered well-built man in a dress of novice instead of a gray-haired elder, she made a displeased gesture...

Nicholas invited them to enter the cell, saying:

“Let’s talk for a while. Come in, sit down.”

The woman made her son sit on a bench against the wall and sat herself. She directed her eyes towards Nicholas, but looked somewhere else, not at him. Finally, she said:

“Well, speak if you know what to say...”

Nicholas felt the state when the Light of the Holy Spirit allows seeing the souls and all that is happening to them.

He saw that she came to ask for a miracle, but she herself didn't believe in the healing Power of God and was a barrier to the healing of her son...

He looked at the boy once more and saw that he felt sick, unhappy, and never dared to make a single step without support of adults... He couldn't be healed right now... But his disease will go away quite easily if they change this situation...

How to find right words to help her understand? She doesn't want and is not ready to hear the advice... She wants the saint elder...

Nicholas internally asked God to help these people and then entered more deeply in mergence with the Divine Light.

At this moment Zosia ran into the cell — and it was as if the sunlight began playing and sparkling all around.

She bowed and asked pardon for interrupting the conversation.

“Zosia, can you play with the boy in the garden for an hour while we are talking with his mother?”

Zosia happily agreed at once:

“What's your name?”

“Kostya.”

Kostya's mom, like a bird that protects its baby with its wings, looked at the girl anxiously and said:

“He is blind! He can't see at all! Take care of him, please, so nothing bad will happen to him...”

Zosia came to the boy confidently and took his hand.

“Don't worry about him! Everything will be all right!”

Then she said to Kostya:

“Come on, I'll show you something!...”

“How are you going to show me something when I can't see?!...”

“You will find out! Let's go!”

Kostya's mother anxiously watched the children leaving...

It took a lot of effort to make her not only hear his words, but listen.

At first, he asked about the boy's illness and found out that he lost his sight after he had slipped on some wet logs and hit his head. They went to many famous doctors, who said that although his eyes were not damaged, they couldn't recover his sight...

Nicholas himself saw with the developed vision of the soul that the damages of the nerve endings could be healed only with the help of God, and not by medical means... Yet he was not allowed to do this right now...

Then Nicholas said that it was possible to return the sight to the boy. But for this it was necessary to change that "hothouse" style of life in which he was under the continuous care. To strengthen his body, it was necessary to teach him to swim, to run, to ride a horse... And the most important thing for Kostya was to begin to take care of others. Thanks to this, he would stop feeling unhappy, weak, and terminally ill, but, oppositely, would start doing everything he could, pushing himself to the limit. And the adults should try to raise the level of this limit more and more each time. And then...

It seemed that the conversation was over...

Yet Nicholas knew that he should say or do something else so that the words he said would really touch deeply this woman.

Zosima, in such cases, usually gave some simple advice: "You have to do this and that"...

Nicholas started examining the options: "To advise them to acquire a dog and it will become a friend to the boy... a horse may be even better... Probably, I need to ask the boy himself right now..."

He opened the door of the cell and called:

"Zosia, Kostya!"

In the garden, happy children's laughter was heard.

"Come on, catch me!" — Zosia was running, and Kostya was running after her, avoiding confidently the trunks of the trees!

Zosia, having heard the call, yielded and Kostya caught her!

They walked side by side... without holding their hands!

The boy's eyes couldn't see yet, but the miracle had already happened!

Kostya entered first and went to his mother:

"Mom, Zosia taught me to look and see in a very special way: with the soul! We even played tag — and I caught her! Now I can see you too! She said that I would be completely cured soon, because if the soul obtains the sight, then the eyes of the body also begin to see. Zosima taught her so!"

Kostya's mother burst into tears and hugged her son, while he kept trying to explain to her how splendidly Zosia taught him.

"Here is a miracle." — Nicholas thought and smiled happily...

Later, when everyone calmed down a bit, Zosia said to Nicholas:

"My dad sent me to you. Two days ago, we found a girl of about two years at the entrance of the hospital. She was abandoned. There was a note with her, saying that her parents died and no one wants to take care of the child. Her name is Olga. She is pretty and has blue eyes, golden curls, and a beautiful smile! The only thing is that she hardly speaks: she knows only a few words. Apparently, no one talked often enough with her.

"My dad asked to find good parents for her to avoid giving her to the orphanage."

Then Zosia suddenly became radiant of joy because a great idea came to her mind:

“Kostya, would you like to have a sister? Madam, the girl is so nice, healthy! My dad examined her, and he is a very good doctor! Let me show her to you! Do you agree?”

Kostya’s mother, being astonished by all that had happened, agreed at once. Kostya said confidently that he would teach Olga to speak, so they should definitely take this girl.

Zosia happily led the new mom and the brother to look at Olga...

Nicholas knew that everything had connected perfectly in this chain of destinies guided by God. He sighed happily and thanked God for His wonderful care manifested through Zosia!

Then he came out of the cell into the silence of the garden, where just a few moments ago the children’s voices sounded joyfully.

He began to think about how much he couldn’t do yet...

And then he saw gently smiling Great Face of Zosima consisting of Light. The elder said:

“Work hard, My son! You already are doing everything very well with the Help of God!”

Recommended Literature

- 1. Antonov V.V. — Spiritual Heart — Religion of Unity. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2010.**
- 2. Antonov V.V. — How God Can Be Cognized. Autobiography of a Scientist Who Studied God. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2009.**
- 3. Antonov V.V. (ed.) — How God Can Be Cognized. Book 2. Autobiographies of the Disciples of God. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008. (in Russian)**
- 4. Antonov V.V. (ed.) — Spiritual Work with Children. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008.**

5. Antonov V.V. — Classics of Spiritual Philosophy and the Present. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008.
6. Antonov V.V. — Ecopsychology. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008.
7. Antonov V.V. — Forest Lectures on the Highest Yoga. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008.
8. Antonov V.V. — Tao Te Ching. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008.
9. Antonov V.V. — Anatomy of God. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2012.
10. Antonov V.V. — Life for God. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2012.
11. Tatiana M. — On the Other Side of the Material World. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2012.
12. Teplyy A. — Book of the Warriors of the Spirit. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2012.
13. Zubkova A.B. — Fairy Tale about Princess Nesmeyana and Ivan. “New Atlanteans”, 2007.
14. Zubkova A.B. — Dobrynya — Bylinas. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008. (in Russian)
15. Zubkova A.B. — Dialogues with Pythagoras. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2012.
16. Zubkova A.B. — Divine Parables. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2012.
17. Zubkova A.B. — Book of the Born in the Light. Revelations of Divine Atlanteans. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2008. (in Russian)
18. Zubkova A.B. — Parables of Lao Tse. Bancroft, “New Atlanteans”, 2012.

Video Films

1. Immersion in the Harmony of Nature. Way to Paradise. (Slide show). 90 minutes (on a CD or DVD),
2. Spiritual Heart. 70 minutes.
3. Sattva (Harmony, Purity). 60 minutes.
4. Sattva of Mists. 75 minutes.

5. **Sattva of Spring. 90 minutes.**
6. **Art of Being Happy. 42 minutes (HD-video).**
7. **Practical Ecopsychology. 60 minutes (HD-video).**
8. **Keys to the Mysteries of Existence. Finding Immortality. 38 minutes (HD-video).**
9. **Psychical Self-Regulation. 112 minutes in 2 parts (HD-video).**
10. **Yoga of Ancient Russians. 105 minutes in 2 parts (HD-video).**
11. **Yoga of Jesus Christ. 128 minutes in 2 parts (HD-video).**

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www.philosophy-of-religion.org.ua
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www.atlantis-and-atlanteans.org
www.path-to-tao.info
www.new-ecopsychology.org
www.meaning-of-life.tv**

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