

THE VOCATION OF WISDOM

A text used to be engraved onto the door of traditional houses in the Bukovine and Transylvania, that was called the "Advice of the Sages". The text was written in verse and was a kind of Decalogue. The door became thus a table of laws. You had it daily under your eyes, a perpetual memento. We who are members of both the last rural/pastoral generation and the first cybernetic/electronic one, were still brought up with the "Advice of the Sages" engraved onto the door of our parents' houses. This advice was also called "the secret lecture" or "the mysterious teachings" (predania tainică). There were also engraved onto those doors astral symbols of our esoteric civilisation, and the wreath of life, inspired from the Bible.

For a lecture I gave to the Romanians in the Australian Diaspora, at Sydney and Melbourne, in March, I selected the topic "The vocation of wisdom with the Romanians". I still don't know if the topic is a folkloric cliché or a hidden reality, or one of my personal passions, or all that together. If it were a cliché, it would still be worth making it circulate, meaning it to be a kind of positive suggestion, to have the role of activating latent wisdom, to program our nation's subconsciousness with prophetic statements. To build up a winner's psychology in a nation whose reflexes have been shaken and disrupted by the shocks of contemporary history.

We can, of course, prove that a traditional civilisation that has produced the ballad *Miorița* with its 1200 variants has the vocation of wisdom. It is a culture that has also given Ioan Cassian (4th century AD), Dionysius Exiguus (6th century AD), Nicodim of Tismana (14th century), Anton Pann (18th-19th centuries) and Petre Țuțea (20th century).

"And what have you benefited from so much wisdom?" a westerner having the vocation of efficiency and capital might ask, shrugging his shoulders.

In other words where has this vocation of wisdom led us? Why have we stumbled, socially? Why does "our originality lie in failure"? (I quoted Emil Cioran's words from a dialogue I had with him in September 1991). Why do we have poverty, economic bankruptcy, crushing debts? Is it because communism has drained all our vigour? Well then, how come that the East Germans, the Czechs and the Letts who also spent 50 years under communist rule are now thriving?

Similar perplexities have been generated by the Indians and Tibetans. They, too, have proved to have a great vocation of wisdom and very low living standards and they have experienced great misfortunes in modern times.

An answer to all these perplexed questions might be the following:

Wisdom will not help you get rich, but help you live even without riches. It will not help you rob or seize, but live even when you have been robbed. It will not help you amass possessions, but live even when you have been dispossessed. And this on a soil where we are visitors and transient.

Even if in Dimitrie Cantemir's Council or in Vishnu-Sharma's Five Books of Wisdom "recipes" for getting rich are also given, these books insist on the real values of life and on how you can live without riches. This is how the transition is achieved from corporeal, coarse life to spiritual, redeeming life.

I met very poor people in India: there are 500 million poor people there... a comparatively high figure if we think of the only 15 million poor people in Romania! What is, however, revealing is that in India poverty doesn't mean suffering, it does not generate neuroses or nervous breakdowns. I was impressed by the mental health of this poor nation. There is with these people a steady (philosophical!) satisfaction that preserves their health. We can – perhaps amazingly – notice that India is a country with a very low mortality rate, though there are many flaws in its health service system.

Wisdom, naturally extended to everyday life can help you live even when you lack everything. It helps you survive against all odds. Emotional balance helps you live longer more efficiently than expensive, golden salts. I would extrapolate these remarks to Romania; not to the whole country, however, but only to that part of it that hasn't yet broken away from the source of its vigour: wisdom.

In about 1949, an annus mirabilis, Emil Cioran wrote:

"Wisdom is the last word of a dying civilisation."

We can "translate" that by understanding wisdom as a last will, whose beneficiary is precisely its author. And instead of "the last word" I will read "the last remedy", a subtle rebirth of life.

I will only mention one of the aphorisms about wisdom that we have in Romania:

"Happy is he who is satisfied with a little less than he has."

And I will only quote a verse from the door of my house in the Bukovine:

"Do good as long as you live!"

It is to a large extent a moral utopia and a lost message.

My daughter is fortuitously living in France now. When she learned about the "Advice of the Sages" from her grandparents in the Bukovine, she was impressed and moved as by a kind of revelation. During that holiday she spent in Romania she chose many things that she wanted to take with her to France... and she is now asking me how she can engrave/carve onto the door of her house in France the "Advice of the Sages", the secret teaching. "In what language are you going to do that?" I asked her. "In Romanian," she said.

On a planet of migrating people, can the trauma of uprootedness teach you a better lesson of wisdom?

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