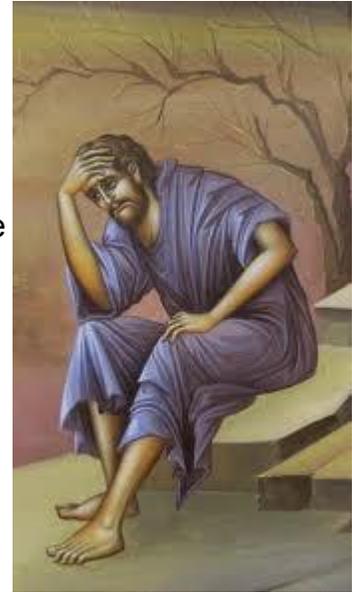


THE PASSIONS - TA PATHE

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In a story written by the author Victor Hugo, an episode describes a ship sailing on the sea and encountering a storm. The waves lash the vessel and the sailors are in terror... Will they survive? Will they get through the storm alive? Suddenly, the sailors feel a shudder and a thud. They look at each other and know ... the cannon in the hold of the ship has broken loose from its moorings. Each lurch and sway of the ship sends the cannon crashing into the wooden hull of the vessel. Which is more dangerous? The waves of the storm on the outside or the loose cannon ripping apart the ship from the inside? The sailors run in horror down into the dark hold, their faces drained of colour. They crouch and dodge as the monster cannon threatens to pin them to the wall. Finally, they manage to chain the cannon back into place and the ship is saved.



This is an image of every human being. Although life can be a storm, the real danger is often the enemy within. In the *Philokalia*, the enemy is... the passions - ta pathe. The first thing that comes to mind for the modern person when they hear the word passion, are words like desire, perhaps obsession, maybe chocolate and ice-cream. The word pathos means 'suffering', and it is with this denotation that we Orthodox Christians understand the concept in our culture... a passion can be a habit, an obsession, an addiction... something that we choose to indulge in, but in fact is the cause of different degrees of 'suffering' in our life. In our tradition, you could easily re-arrange the syllables of the word 'hedone' and you will get the word 'odyne'. ΗΔΟΝΗ - ΟΔΥΝΗ. Pleasure and pain. There is balance between the two. Pleasure is often followed by pain. Over-eating can make you sick. A lustful encounter will hurt someone emotionally. Our desire to dominate others, can destroy our reputation forever. Our greed for money will leave us without friends. Have you ever noticed that when you look into the mirror for too long, you suddenly get that uncomfortable feeling of emptiness? The old fashioned word for emptiness is none other than vanity.

St Gregory of Nyssa describes the passions as those aspects of our being that we have inherited from animal nature.

"...the animals came into this world before we did and we have inherited some of their qualities... those qualities which secure self-preservation in animals have been transferred into human life and become passions... Human nature... has a double likeness. In the

urge of the passions it reflects the marks of the animal creation, but in the soul [in the psyche- ψυχή] it has the features of the divine beauty.”

In common speech we say: “He eats like a pig”, “he is as stubborn as a mule”, “he is as proud as a rooster”. A treacherous person is called “a snake in the grass”. A grouchy person is called an “old crocodile”. A coward is called “chicken”. Truly, there is a zoo of passions within us.

Thousands of years before the pioneers of psychoanalysis Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud scientifically laid the foundations of modern psychology, the athletes of Orthodox Christianity, had empirically delved into the soul, wrote down their experiences and passed them down to us. The soul was understood as an inner kingdom that was ‘mapped’ with valleys and meadows and lakes and rivers, but also dangers such as cliffs, jungles, seas and oceans. ‘Virtue and vice’ in Christian terminology, ‘behavioural patterns’ in psychological terminology.

Plato described the human soul as a charioteer whose task it is to drive a chariot with two harnessed horses. One horse is of noble breed, and the other horse is untamed. The noble horse is *reason-logos* and the untamed horse is *passion-pathos*. The untamed one will pull in the wrong direction, jump and resist and even threaten to overturn the entire chariot. It is a picture of tension and warfare. The Apostle James wrote: *“What is the cause of the fighting and quarreling that goes on among you? Is it not to be found in the passions which struggle for mastery in your bodies?”* (James 4:1)

So what *are* these animals within us? What can we find in this zoo? Well, there are many lists. The famous ‘seven deadly sins’ of St John Cassian, is just one such list. Pride, lust, gluttony, greed, wrath, envy and laziness. The Philokalia has much to say about an eighth, which is very relevant to our times, and that is *akedia* - which covers such states of low spirits as despondency, depression and melancholia. Other scholars list many dozens of vices. In any case, the beginning of all vice is pride, selfishness, ego. St Maximos the Confessor said: *“Whoever has pride, has all the passions.”*

Then there is that trinity of perdition: *philedonia*, *philargyria* and *philodoxia*: being a friend of money, a friend of money and a friend of glory. In the modern age, we can throw in to the menagerie such addictions as gambling, drinking, pornography, drugs and smoking.

In 1905, St Silouan the Athonite spent several months in Russia, often visiting monasteries. On one of his journeys, he sat opposite a shopkeeper, who in a friendly gesture, opened his silver

cigarette case offered him a cigarette. St Silouan thanked him, but refused to take one. The shopkeeper began talking, asking, "are you refusing, father, because you think it is a sin? ... smoking is often a help in life. It relaxes you, and makes a few minutes break. Smoking helps one to get on with one's life work or have a friendly chat..." and so on, trying to persuade St Silouan to have a cigarette. In the end, the saint made up his mind to say to him, "Before you light up a cigarette, pray and repeat the "Our Father..." To this, the shop-keeper replied, "Praying before having a smoke somehow doesn't work." To this St Silouan observed, "So I'd better not start anything which cannot be preceded by prayer."

Which brings us to how we can overcome the passions. The Philokalia goes into great detail as to how to control our animal instincts. Some animals can be bridled, others can be trained to actually be useful, whereas others need to be caged. For example, pride can be controlled by the practice of humility, obedience and self-denial. Gluttony is controlled by fasting. Anger can be controlled with prayer and chanting. Jealousy can be channelled to become *'amilla'* - a healthy competitiveness where the person seeks to learn from others and constructively seeks improvement of self. Drastic action needs to be taken for other stronger passions. Addictions need to be starved of their source, manual labour needs to replace idleness, and when it comes to lust and all variety of sexual perversion, one needs *phyge*, one needs to flee, to run, to drastically say "no". Lust has been described as craving for salt, while dying of thirst. Evagrios Pontikos wrote a book called *Antirrhetikos*. It is an armoury of scriptural quotes that can help combat any passion.

As mentioned earlier, many passions, being inherent and instinctual within us, can be transformed, can be transfigured, can be channelled to doing good. The grub can become a butterfly, the weed can produce flower, dung can produce fruit! Which brings us to what we shall talk about next week... climbing the ladder of virtue. We will hear of life-changing virtues such as *metanoia*, *eros theou*, and *apatheia* - freedom from the passions.

I will finish by quoting St Nikodemos who wrote the following in the preface to the *Philokalia*... *"Once, when Alexander the Great was praised for having conquered the whole civilised world, he responded with a prudent remark: 'All my victories will prove to be in vain, if I do not succeed to conquer myself.'"*