THE DIVINE COMEDY

Coffee Pilgrims
Sharing the Journey
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Substance has been overthrown by form. The world has become a giant Circus, where mad clowns masquerade as…mad leaders!!!

'*Leadership must be a choice driven primarily by talent, purpose not by responsibility nor ambition.*'
Mr K.

When I think of leaders of old, they were people presiding over wars, complex crisis, and their apparent ethos was often motivated by a sense of calling, honour, family values and self-sacrifice. Today's leaders, on the other hand, are better known for their lack of noble motives, spurred by self-promotion, social media posts and, so it seems, even…financial gain.

We live at a time of incredible uncertainty, little predictability, rising anger of people who appear to want to resist what they perceive to be the poor/unfair decisions of their elected and self-appointed leaders. And yet, it is said that we always get the leaders we deserve as we are the ones that have put most of them in power, elected or tolerated them in the first instance.

"One of the penalties for refusing to participate in politics, is that you end up being governed by your inferiors." **Plato**

Plato makes the point that if good, honourable and talented people do not wish to serve in government, disengage from the calling of leadership, then they will be punished by being ruled by those who are incompetent, dishonourable, and greedy. The actual sentence is: '*But the chief penalty is to be governed by someone worse if a man will not himself hold office and rule'*. And, as for the silent majority, those who elect not to vote, then their punishment is wholly justified, fully deserved as they merely reap what they have 'failed' to sow. Welcome to the *Divine Comedy*.

The Divine Comedy-

Written in the first person, the poem tells of Dante's journey through the three realms of the dead, lasting from the night before Good Friday to the Wednesday after Easter in the spring of 1300AD. The Roman poet Virgil guides him through Hell and Purgatory whilst Beatrice, Dante's ideal woman, guides him through Heaven. The purpose of Dante's Divine Comedy was to show people the horrors their souls would go through if they did not obey God's laws and did not live righteously. It is composed of 3 books- *Inferno/hell, Purgatorio/purgatory & Paradiso/heaven.*

1. *Inferno*



Today, global headlines are dominated by stories of rape, fraud, lies, crimes committed not by the expected crowd of thieves and gangsters but….by our elected and, in some countries, self-appointed leaders.

They make buffoons of themselves by showing up in embarrassing 'reality shows', in courts of law as defendants, on social platforms, behaving beneath the accepted tenets of their public role and should be image. And, these same people decide whether our nations should go to war, how much tax we should pay, how we should live. They control our health/hospitals, our security/police, what and how we learn/education, and even influence what gender we/they think/feel we/they might be? How have we granted such people so much power?

Moreover, it seems that the rule of law no longer applies to the elite, that such rules are designed to maintain order, keep the 'herd' under control, within pre-defined boundaries, determined by those in control and power. We are being shepherded by people wearing suits, track and/or formal, leaders following the popular belief of the day, as opposed to deep convictions driven by morality, staring at 'truths' coming out of a screen driven through and by a virtual world.

In the UK, an outgoing leader has the privilege of putting forward an honours list- to reward those who have been loyal if not competent in their duties. And, since we have had an abundance of would- be leaders of late, the House of Lords is being besieged by those who aspire for glory, as opposed to those whose aim is to serve. Leadership should be a burden and not a reward.

How is a leader expected to resolve all the issues of the day? Take immigration for example- why would a sea of refugees want to escape from their land of birth, the place where their ancestors have lived and died for generations in order to replace that meaningful life with becoming a 2nd class citizen in a cold and foreign land? Could it be because their countries have been ransacked by the greed of wealthy

nations- as well as that of their own leaders, and that aside from hunger, even their faintest hopes have been quashed into the crimson dust? It is despair that leads people to embark on a voyage with so little odds of survival let alone prosperity. Why can't Africans benefit from the incredible resources that lie within their fertile wombs, hidden beneath the surface of their scorched earth? Why not assist them in genuinely developing their economies, so as to become truly independent, self-sufficient?

And when will wealthy nations be satisfied/satiated with what they have and allow other people to benefit from the fat of their own land? How much is enough? And why are some countries sending rockets to the moon, building expensive weaponry when their bewildered citizens are still steeped into poverty and hopelessness? How can a singular leader send 100K's soldiers to an untimely death under the pretence of a sordid war? How can some terrorists hide behind innocent people, use them as human shields in order to demonise 'would be aggressors. Wake up people, the world has lost its moral compass, true North is no longer a cardinal point. The global demise of faith is giving rise to a new dawn driven by the spirit of man and the result is…..*Inferno.*

Furthermore, economies of the world appear to be stagnating, at this point in time. I appreciate that this is a rather complex situation, but it seems to me that the disparity between the haves and have nots is increasing, that the middle classes are being eroded and that we could soon find ourselves living in a world in which we have only 2 classes- the super -rich and the incredibly poor with the latter watching the lives of the former on Netflix. *Inferno….*

2. Purgatorio



The dream of the eagle. By John Flaxman and Tommaso Piroli

Virgil and Dante ascend the mount of Purgatorio to try to overcome the 7 deadly sins. Thomas Aquinas called them the 'capital sins' as they are the source of all other evils.

Purgatorio is the place of repentance and, in the world of today, there are few leaders who choose to come to that place as the Spirit of our age has silenced the voices of reason, values have become outdated, replaced by false interpretations of what freedom and truth are. Substance- in our day, has been overshadowed by form. All that glitters….

Truth is no longer absolute but subject to interpretation. Freedom describes everyone's ability to do what they please, regardless of how it may impact the boundaries, sensitivities of others. Fame and wealth have become the recognised traits of success as wisdom, character and religions have been relegated to the confines of archaic values, partly due I must say to the way these spiritual tenets have been falsely expressed by those wearing the cloth.

"A tyrant must put on the appearance of uncommon devotion to religion. Subjects are less apprehensive of illegal treatment from a ruler whom they consider god-fearing and pious."
Aristotle

Freedom has truly become an anarchy of sorts where everyone has become a judgmental tyrant.

Purgatorio is the place of repentance, but, the entrance to it has to be initiated and driven by free will, not by coercion, force. To repent requires a recognition, acceptance of one's errors as seen through the eyes of humility, an inner conviction that our deeds have fallen short of our values. Purgatorio is also the precursor to paradiso and there are no shortcuts. An absence of repentance leads to a life devoid of purpose, meaning and fulfilment. Wealth and activity may for a time produce 'feelings' akin to joy but they are ephemerous, mere placebos that never satiate the soul.

3. Paradiso



The Empyrean (by Doré)

This is the place of reconciliation between creator and creation, a world in which light has overcome all darkness, a place of true peace where justice has finally outlived the 'fairness 'of our present world.

Paradiso is simply a world devoid of evil with all of the other elements of life present. People work, live, love and also die. Values are clear, character matters and decisions have consequences.

But can creation's growing sense of awareness, ego, accept to exist in the 'shadow' of a righteous God? Can we accept our failings, shortcomings and mistakes and have the humility to handover the sceptre, responsibility of leadership to the one who made us in the same image and imparted us with the gift, not the curse, of free will.

Character is formed, developed in the crucible of life, determined yet not defined by mistakes/failings. Character is not a death sentence but a rebirth, as through a humble heart it provides our Spirit the necessary platform to rise above our limitations, our fears, see destiny with purpose and clarity…and soar. *Paradiso*.

O LIGHT that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.
George Matheson

Happy New Year.

Kamal Bengougam
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