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The Golem

As a man in prison with children, it is not always easy to bridge the distance of prison life and reestablish those very necessary bonds; feelings of hurt, depression, anger, and confusion from the children block the path to familial reconciliation. In my own situation before I was convicted, the children already suffered due to my volunteering for duty in Iraq; I can imagine the children's angst concerning my decisions and actions.

One of my daughters was kind enough to reach out and reestablish contact; although the last time I spoke to her she was twelve, she grew to be a very beautiful and talent artist. While I will never venture to suggest that my daughter change her ways, I can definitely change my outlook on life; thus, during my incarceration, I've strived to reinvent myself to such a degree that my children might not recognize their father. As I've mentioned in a previous essay, people come to problems in a tabular or graphical manner. For example, some people love reading, writing, number-crunching, and computer programming; those people into intellectual pursuits are considered tabular people. Others love stories, painting, drawing, music, poetry, and love data presented in charts, graphs, or pictures; those people into pictorial pursuits are considered graphical people. My daughter is graphical in the extreme; if I were to live 100 years, I could not match her skills in art. However, she likes 'nice stories.'

I do not feel the following story, The Golem, is a 'nice' story, but I feel it's a story that calls for humility and patience in a fast-food, commercialized democracy. While greedy corporations are trying their most to sell us something we don't need (especially during COVID-19), we as individuals need to sell ourselves to the most important person: Ourselves. Oftentimes, many do not allow ourselves to develop the way we want to develop; people develop how their parents, friends, teachers, or government say they must develop. As I was writing this essay, a song ran through my mind; without trying to date myself, I believe it was from Fleetwood Mac and it spoke of going one's own way.

While there might be a strong, American urge to break from the reins of society and do "it" what the greedy corporation tells us, sometimes following the form and instruction of elders might also be a key to success. In light of the recent law enforcement conflicts, Corona virus pandemic, and "Black Lives Matter" campaigns springing up across the county, we might take a step back and a few breaths to take focus on the issue at hand. My point here is that many of these same issues have risen before in years past; the Jewish population has been persecuted for thousands of years. While I fully support any rational solution of the problems above, persecuted people and their generational myths may help us put current issues into perspective.

The myth of the Golem stems from a disillusionment from thousands of years of persecution, unfair treatment, to include both corporal and capital punishment over religious and perceived

civil crimes. Somewhere along the time of the 15th century, the myth of the Golem sprang. The golem represents a 'magical' creation that is created to defend against wrongful persecution of the Jewish people. In the Jewish peoples' past, they have many heroes akin to America's Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King or India's Gandhi. Many of these Jewish heroes are highly respected scholars or mystics; as with all myths, there is some 'truth' weaved into the tale.

One of the lessons that I've learned by reading Jewish literature is that they lean heavily on what their master-teachers or religious teachers (e.g. rabbi) say and do. Very much in flavor to the Biblical Moses of the Bible, Jewish rabbis and their words are treated with great reverence. I think, especially in America, we've lost this reverence with teachers: K-12, college, university; many in the teaching profession are paid peanuts so-to-speak compared to other professions. I can safely profess, the one time I failed to remember my instructor's lessons, I ended up in prison. So, my story of the golem represents my struggle to reinvent myself by humbling myself and listening to others who are in power over me at this time. Nothing good can come from direct conflict when everything we know, knowledge-wise, is turned on its head.

So, my version of the golem (Minatani, 2019) is a conceptual model that I have used to recreate myself; the idea is to move from one mental state to another: unformed substance, simpleton, mythical. Working now with a felony, I need to consider myself as unformed substance; my past is my past, and I leave it willingly in the past. Thus, I am unformed substance. As I learn to navigate the world post-conviction, I am again in life, a simpleton. Learning to follow the rules and the advice of knowledgeable people, I become the mythical; in this sense, I become the golem: powerful, adaptive, and law abiding. Personally, the mythical state of mind comes from God as He continues to imbue His 'magic' in me; at once, I can readily state I've never been more successful in my personal life despite my being in prison.

Without further ado, I present The Golem.

The room was musty, dark, and filled with smoke, laughter, and good cheer. One stage, the master bard stood with his lute in hand, strumming a magical tune weaved with a magical tale. He told of a hero who stood out against the grand wizard and his magical creation, the golem. As the details of how the battle was joined, the audience lowered their voices and opened their ears.

The young apprentice, Jucado, could see that the crowd was ready for the stalwart hero to defeat the wizard's magical creation, and put down the evil wizard. Jucado could see Ponti had the audience at the edge of their seats, as the hero struck the first blow with his long sword and the magical creation, the golem, made of stone, punched with fist. The first attacks of the melee would decide the battle. The hero's sword broke and the golem broke the hero's face!

"Yea, evil wins again!" said the Magnificent One Ponti.

"Dang! I was sure the story would've ended differently," remarked Dennis the bartender.

"Yeah, no doubt! Another story. This is too much like life already," yelled a customer.

After taking in both the applause and complaints, Ponti bounced off the tavern stage, and announced, "As you wish, my loyal audience! Once I wet the whistle, I will tell the tale of the giant Nephilim race and the Thunder-axe Dwarf Clan." All in earshot cheered loudly.

"Master, why do you always begin with a sorrowful tale of defeat?" asked Jucado.

"Hmm. Interrupting my drink, eh? Well, young one, usually because the gold and silver flows when one starts low and ends the night with a high. You've apprenticed with me for four years now, and still you ask these questions?" explained Ponti.

"I guess you're right. Why the story of the golem such as the one you told. What is such a creation? Sometimes, you call me a golem," remarked Jucado.

Taking a pull from his drink, Ponti explained, "Typically, in a land far from Ren'a'do, to a people you have never heard, exists the myth of the golem¹. I bought the tale from a local gangster named Rodolfo, some sort of court jester-gangster type who visited the Oriental lands. His wares, when he sells them..."

"Master? The Golem?" interrupted Jucado.

"Golem? Oh yes, anyway, the golem is an unthinking, magical creation. What the golem's master orders, the golem does. Now, in the story I told earlier, the golem was made of what?" asked Ponti.

"Um, stone?" responded Jucado.

"Yes. Stone. Some stories use wood, some clay. Some stories of how our people came about, humans that is, tell that we were made from clay. The clay, in an artist's hands, can be something special. However, before it is formed, it is simply clay. The people who spoke of the golem myth call people a golem to denote unformed substance," said Ponti.

"Unformed substance?" asked Jucado.

"Yes. Basically, when your father, cursed be he, dropped you off to apprentice under me, you were a golem of unformed substance. Clay that had yet to be dug up and put into something useful!" explained Ponti.

With eyes squinting into slivers, Jucado said, "Go on."

¹ Specifically, Jewish folktales of the 15th and 16th century.

“As you enter into your apprenticeship, you are not yet a master, just a simpleton. Hence, the second meaning of the word, golem. You are at that stage now,” declared Ponti.

“Yes, I see. So I’m clay or an idiot?” asked Jucado.

“Exactly! You understand!!” remarked Ponti taking another pull from the mug.

“But what of the story?” again asked Jucado.

“Well, although I’m no wizard. At least, I’m not of the spell book type. I’m teaching you to become like the one in the story, but one of music, magic, and storytelling. Before you ask, you simply need to do what you’re told; it’s the way of old. Follow what I do by using your ears, eyes, and body. Notice, the mouth was not included,” explained the bard. “Many masters before me used these patterns to make other masters.”

Years later, to the tune of two, Jucado was the bard who sang at the tavern in Kintaro, replacing Ponti the Magnificent. The Magnificent One was now singing at The Painted Lady in Montano. Montano is a wizard-run city that defends the frontier against the barbarian hordes of orcs, goblins, and gnolls.

In the sixth year of apprenticeship, Jucado the Jaundice (as his master-teacher forced him to be called), now commands the crowd with his tales of inspiring heroes that fight for freedom.

His latest tale, a freedom fighter who jesters, mimes, and used to crime, the leader of The Harlequins. They, working with a band called, Heroes of the North have become the most popular tales at Dennis’ tavern in Kintaro. Why? They all once frequented the establishment.

That is another tale for another day...

There you have it, my spin on the story on the golem myth. I’m not sure whether or not my daughter would feel this is a ‘nice story.’ As I write this essay, I know my daughter is out there somewhere writing her own story; as she does, I write my own here in prison. One day I hope to meet her again, after all is said and done, and we can write a story together. Ah, which also brings another song to mind, I think from the Beach Boys, about ‘it’ being nice! Who am I to argue with the Beach Boys?

Works Cited

Minatani, C. (2019, January). The Golem. (Z. Jakstas, Ed.) *Larch Corrections Center "I Hope" Newsletter*(36).