

## Spiritual Lessons from Popular Media and Culture

### This session is about:

- The communication of spiritual ideas.
- The ability to reflect upon spiritual ideas ourselves using media we might otherwise pass over or reject.

### Why?

- Communicating spiritual concepts to others.
- Especially generations who have grown up without the Word.
- A spiritual discipline in itself, a practice of charity.
- If we can't or won't see this, there is no basis for charity! (NJHD 86,88, see below)
- A means of reflecting upon our own lives and experiences - "stones of fillings" (De Charms, *The Tabernacle of Israel*, see below).

The distinctions in the neighbour ..., depend upon the good present in each individual. Because all good proceeds from the Lord, it is the Lord who is in the highest sense and in the fullest degree the neighbour, the source of good. (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*, paragraph 86)

...in a universal sense the neighbour is good, because a person is the neighbour in accordance with the nature of the good he has from the Lord. (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*, paragraph 88)

The "stones of fillings" represent the external memory, from which past experiences may be recalled at will by conscious reflection. On this memory depends the ability to think, to form judgments, and to determine the direction of one's life. By recalling the teaching of the Word with affection, religious conscience is formed. This memory, therefore, is the medium by which man receives practical illustration and guidance from the Lord." (De Charms, *The Tabernacle of Israel*, p. 95)

### Looking for what is good and true

'He saw his father's nakedness' means that he noticed the errors and perversities. This becomes clear from the meaning of 'nakedness', dealt with just above and also previously in 213, 214, as evil and perversity. Here Ham's noticing his father's nakedness, that is, his errors and perversities, describes people with whom faith is separated from charity. Such people see nothing else but errors and perversities residing with a person. But **those who have faith that inheres in charity** are different. They **notice the goods, and if they do see evils and falsities they excuse them, and if possible endeavour with that person to correct them**, as is said here of Shem and Japheth.

[2] Where charity does not exist self-love is present and consequently hatred towards all who do not show favour to self. As a result they see in the neighbour nothing except his evil. Or if they do see anything good they either perceive it as nothing or else place a bad interpretation on it. It is altogether otherwise with those with whom charity is present. And from such presence or absence of charity these two kinds of people are distinguished from each other. Especially when they enter the next life, with those who have no charity, a feeling of hatred is manifest in every single thing; they wish to try everyone and indeed to pass judgement on them. Their one desire is to discover what is evil in them, all the time having it in mind to condemn, punish, and torment. But **those who have charity hardly notice the evil in another person, but instead notice all the goods and truths that are his; and on his evils and falsities they place a good interpretation. Of such a nature are all angels, it being something they have from the Lord, who bends everything evil into good.** (*Arcana Caelestia*, paragraph 1079)

We tend to be intellectually and affectionally blinkered - if it's not from us or like us it must be bad - an intellectual form of self-centredness.

... those in a state of self-love ... acknowledge as the neighbour those who love them best, that is, to the extent that they are their own. They embrace them, kiss them, do good to them and call them brothers; or rather, because they are evil, they call them above others the neighbour. They regard the rest as the neighbour in proportion to their love for themselves, so in accordance with the nature and depth of their love. Such people's idea of the neighbour springs from themselves, because it is love which causes and determines it. (*New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*, paragraph 89)

But we rightly admire someone who is broadminded, widely read and able to make connections to other perspectives or points of view.

e.g. Hercules:

"It having reached the Devil's ears that the prophets had foretold the coming of Christ, the Son of God, he set the heathen Poets to bring forward a great many who should be called the sons of Jove. The Devil laying his scheme in this, to get men to imagine that the *true* history of Christ was of the same characters the prodigious fables related of the sons of Jove." (Justin Martyr, First Apology)



The religious beliefs of many peoples were drawn and transcribed from that Word, passing for instance from the land of Canaan and various parts of Asia to Greece, and thence to Italy; and by way of Ethiopia and Egypt to some African kingdoms. But in Greece they made up myths by means of correspondences, and turned the attributes of God into as many deities; they called the greatest of them Jove. (*De Verbo* paragraph 15, section 5)

REQUIRES:

- looking for what is good and true in perspectives other than our own.
- that we look beyond what we don't like, or instinctively react against, in our evaluation of a particular example (e.g. swearing)
- imagination

I have found it of enormous value when I can permit myself to understand the other person. The way in which I have worded this statement may seem strange to you. Is it necessary to permit oneself to understand another? I think it is. Our first reaction to most of the statements (which we hear from other people) is an evaluation or judgment, rather than an understanding of it. When someone expresses some feeling, attitude or belief, our tendency is almost immediately to feel "that's right," or "that's stupid" "that's abnormal", ... "that's not nice." Very rarely do we permit ourselves to understand precisely what the meaning of the statement is to the other person. (Carl Rogers, quoted in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, by Dale Carnegie, p. 155)

## Little Miss Sunshine

Dwayne: I wish I could just sleep until I was eighteen and skip all this crap - high school and everything - just skip it.

Frank: Do you know who Marcel Proust is?

Dwayne: He's the guy you teach.

Frank: Yeah. French writer. Total loser. Never had a real job. Unrequited love affairs. Gay. Spent 20 years writing a book almost no one reads. But he's also probably the greatest writer since Shakespeare.

Anyway, he uh... he gets down to the end of his life, and he looks back and decides that all those years he suffered, Those were the best years of his life, 'cause they made him who he was. All those years he was happy? You know, total waste. Didn't learn a thing. So, if you sleep until you're 18... Ah, think of the suffering you're gonna miss. I mean high school? High school - those are your prime suffering years. You don't get better suffering than that.



## Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets, p. 244, 245 (J K Rowling)

'And so you met Tom Riddle,' said Dumbledore thoughtfully 'I imagine he was most interested in you ...'

Suddenly, something that was nagging at Harry came tumbling out of his mouth.

'Professor Dumbledore ... Riddle said I'm like him. Strange likenesses, he said ...'

'Did he, now?' said Dumbledore, looking thoughtfully under his thick silver eyebrows at Harry 'And what do you think, Harry?'

'I don't think I'm like him!' said Harry, more loudly than he'd intended. 'I mean. I'm - I'm in *Gryffindor*, I'm ...'

But he fell silent, a lurking doubt resurfacing in his mind.

'Professor,' he started again after a moment, 'the Sorting Hat told me I'd - I'd have done well in Slytherin. Everyone thought I was Slytherin's heir for a while ... because I can speak Parseltongue ...'

'You can speak Parseltongue, Harry' said Dumbledore calmly, 'because Lord Voldemort - who is the last remaining ancestor of Salazar Slytherin - can speak Parseltongue. Unless I'm much mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar. Not something he intended to do, I'm sure ...'

'Voldemort put a bit of himself in *me*?' Harry said, thunder-struck.

'It certainly seems so.'

'So I *should* be in Slytherin,' Harry said, looking desperately into Dumbledore's face. 'The Sorting Hat could see Slytherin's power in me, and it -'

'Put you in Gryffindor,' said Dumbledore calmly. 'Listen to me, Harry. You happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. His own very rare gift, Parseltongue, ... resourcefulness ... determination ... a certain disregard for rules,' he added, his moustache quivering again. 'Yet the Sorting Hat placed you in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think.'

'It only put me in Gryffindor.' said Harry in a defeated voice, 'because I asked not to go in Slytherin ...'

'Exactly,' said Dumbledore, beaming once more. 'Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.'

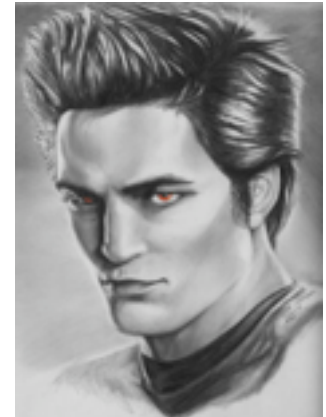


### **Harry Potter [other examples]**

- Harry Potter IV [and the Goblet of Fire] - sullen, uncommunicative, angry
- Harry Potter V [and the Order of the Phoenix], final battle with Voldemort - the power of love against evil
- Harry Potter VII [and the Deathly Hallows], after Harry is “killed” by Voldemort - life after death
- Harry Potter [all] - the nature of evil

### **Twilight series (Stephanie Meyer) -**

- Edward is the personification of self compulsion, both in terms of his struggle against his inner “killer”, and sexually in his relationship with Bella.



### **Jamie Oliver’s Food Revolution**



### **How to win friends and influence people (Dale Carnegie)**

### **What about RICHARD DAWKINS? JACK SPONG?**