

The Portrait of Moses

Yasuhiko Genku Kimura

©1999

In the Talmudic literature there is the following parable about Moses':

The whole world was shaken and enthralled by the miracle of the Exodus. The name of Moses was on everyone's lips. Tidings of the great miracle reached also the wise king of Arabistan. The king summoned his best painter and bade him go to Moses, to paint his portrait and bring it back to him. When the painter returned, the king gathered together all his sages, wise in physiognomy (the art of judging human character from facial features), and asked them to define by the portrait the character of Moses, his qualities, inclinations, habits, and the source of his miraculous power.

"King," answered the sages, "this is the portrait of a man cruel, haughty, greedy of gain, possessed by desire for power, and by all the vices which exist in the world." These words roused the king's indignation. "How can it be possible," he exclaimed, "that a man whose marvelous deeds ring through the whole world should be of such a kind?"

A dispute began between the painter and the sages. The painter affirmed that the portrait of Moses had been painted by him quite accurately, while the sages maintained that Moses' character had been unerringly determined by them according to the portrait. The wise king of Arabistan decided to verify which of the disputing parties was right, and he himself set off for the camp of Israel. At the first glance the king became convinced that the face of Moses had been faultlessly portrayed by the painter. On entering the tent of the man of God he knelt down, bowed to the ground, and told Moses of the dispute between the artist and the sages.

"Until I saw thy face," said the king, "I thought it must be that the artist had painted thy image badly, for my sages are men very much experienced in the science of physiognomy. Now I am convinced that they are quite worthless men and that their wisdom is vain and worthless."

"No," answered Moses, "it is not so; both the painter and the physiognomists are men highly skilled, and both parties are right. Be it known to thee that all the vices of which the sages spoke have indeed been assigned to me by nature and perhaps to an even higher degree than was found by them from my portrait. But I struggled with my vices by long and intense efforts of the will and gradually overcame and transcended them within myself until all opposed to them became my second nature. And in this lies my greatest pride."

Personality vs. Character

Today, we live more in a culture of personality and (popular) psychology than in a culture of character and ethics. We have been taught to develop a 'good' personality (often in the name of character) so that we can get along well with others, and can succeed in life by the standards set by our society. We have been taught: "If you have some 'negative' personality traits, improve them by

eliminating the 'causes' of those traits by looking into your psychological make-up and your upbringing."

We have learned that the term "personality" stems from the Latin word "persona" which means "mask." Therefore, personality by definition is not who you really are. Literally, it is a mask with which you appear playing a particular role in public, which is to be seen by others. Personality is inherently social and other-oriented. When you are truly alone with your self, you will discover that the self with whom you are being is not your personality at all.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with having a personality. We all perforce have personality. The problem arises when you identify your self with your personality. And indeed, for the large majority of people, their personality is their self-identity. They have been wearing their masks for so long, they have taken their masks to be their identities for so long, that they do not doubt the verity of their beliefs that their personalities are their self-identities.

Yet, you are not your personality. Your personality is nothing more than an acting role you have got and developed for the stage of your life. Therefore, a better personality only means a better role to play in the theater named your life. Your looks, your intelligence, your upbringing, all contribute to the configuration of your personality. However, your personality is never who you are—never your true identity.

Personality is formed reactively. It is formed in reaction to situations into which you have been cast throughout your life. Personality, therefore, is situational; it is the product of self-adaptation to a series of situations that constitutes your life story. Your personality is a composite artifact of your desire for self-preservation through self-adaptation. However, in reality, personality exists solely for the purpose of preserving its own identity—not your true identity. For the role that the actor plays is not the actor. The identity of the role is not the identity of the actor.

You have a personality or a group of personalities but you are not it. Personality is nothing other than what I call a constellation of floating identities. Then, what is your true identity? Your true identity is your character. Your character is a component of your being, not of your having. It is that which you bring to the acting role (personality) that you play on the stage of your life. And here lies the fundamental difference between personality and character: character is a causative factor of the constitution of your being, whereas personality is an operative factor that constitutes the patterns of your behavior. You cannot fake your character, while you can fake your personality. In fact, by its nature, your personality is a kind of faking.

Those who have developed character do not need to have any extra personality. In other words, their character (the inner self) matches their personality (the outer self). They enact and play who they really are, and the projector (character) becomes the projected (personality). The art of living an authentic life is to develop and enact your character in the theater of your life and to play your authentic self (character) without the need for a mask (personality). Moses, through "long and intense efforts of the will," did

not undertake to improve upon his negative personality traits, of which he had many. He developed his character, his true self, to the highest degree by transcending the realm of personality all together.

Character Development

What is character? Etymology tells us that the term "character" comes from a Greek word, which means "to inscribe." In Middle English, character was *carecter*, which meant "distinctive mark" or "imprint on the soul." Therefore, character can be defined as "distinctive mark inscribed or imprinted on the soul."

Character is that by way of which the Over-Soul divides itself to become the individual soul, and that by way of which the individual soul unites itself with the Over-Soul. Character is the individuation of the universal, and the universalization of the individual.

Your character is your essential distinction. It is that which distinguishes you from others at the level of the soul. To develop your character means to differentiate your soul from the primordial oneness of the Over-Soul in order to give individuality to the universal and universality to the individual. In the development of your character, you become an individual consciousness-center in the Universal Amphitheater of Kosmic Unfoldment; you become a singular kosmic destiny, through which the Over-Soul unfolds itself in the world.

Originally, psychology was meant to be the study (logy) of the soul (psyche). However, with the modern trend of increasing shallowness, it has become the study of the personality (persona) to a significant degree. To be sure, there have been some great pioneering psychologists, such as Jean Piaget, who studied the intellectual, cognitive, and emotional development of human beings, or Lawrence Kohlberg, who studied the stages of moral development. Furthermore, transpersonal psychology deals with the spiritual dimension of our psyche. But, the subject of character development has not been a distinct province of western psychology. Like the study of thinking, there is no academic discipline that is devoted to the study of character development.

Therefore, we must invent such discipline, which will be an essential component of what Alexis Carrel called the Science of Man. So how do you develop your character? Whereas you develop your personality in response to the social environment wherein you live — self-adaptively along the line of your cognitive and emotional development, you develop your character on the basis of universal philosophical/moral/ethical principles — not self-adaptively but self-evolutionarily — not along the line of, but as the basis of, your cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development.

That which drives your character development is your desire and intent for the self-unfoldment of the Over-Soul, whereas that which drives your personality development is your desire for self-preservation through social adaptation. You develop your character in order not to fit better in the social environment but to respond to the call of the Over-Soul for greater self-unfoldment and higher self-evolution.

Moses says, "I struggled with my vices by long and intense efforts of the will and gradually

overcame and transcended them until all opposed to them became my second nature." Moses thus transported himself first from the sphere of personality into that of character in response to the call of the Over-Soul within. He then transformed himself by recreating his soul-character in accordance with the character of the Over-Soul—the the character of love, truth, and beauty.

Where there is love, there is giving; where there is truth, there is integrity; where there is beauty, there is balance. Character grows in the soil of love, truth, and beauty, manifesting its growth in giving, integrity, and balance. Character development is self-realization in the true sense of the word, which includes spiritual, intellectual, and emotional growth. Your soul longs to evolve, while the Over-Soul longs to unfold. In the harmonic longings of your soul and the Over-Soul, your character develops to effloresce, sharing the fragrance of Heaven and Earth. In this efflorescence, there is happiness, for happiness is the resonance that you feel in the harmonics of your soul and the Over- Soul.

Leadership and Character

"Only a few achieve the colossal task of holding together, without being split asunder, the clarity of their vision alongside an ability to take their place in a materialistic world. They are the modern heroes. . . . Artists at least have a form within which they can hold their own conflicting opposites together. But there are some who have no recognized artistic form to serve this purpose, they are artists of the living. To my mind these last are the supreme heroes in our soulless society." — Irene Claremont de Castillejo

The evolution of your soul through character development is the only game there is in life. All the other games that you play are variations on the same theme — regardless of whether or not you are aware of it. The purpose of your existence lies in the evolution of your soul through the giving of your self to the achievement of your vision and to the people who share their lives with you along the way. Character development is an end unto itself; it is a purpose unto itself, for which a lifetime of commitment is required.

To live your life inside the commitment to self-evolution and character development is to live a romantic life. Romanticism is the creative expression of man's highest aspirations in the arts and life. Romantic art sets a soul afire and never lets it expire. Romantic life is the eternal destiny of a soul aflame with vision that illuminates the world in its ascendance toward its furthest reach.

The world, however, is permeated with the conspiracy for mediocrity. Mediocrity is so pervasive that the great majority of people have no distinction between what is mediocre and what is not. Mediocrity is a revolt against the common destiny of the soul to self-evolve, to self-realize through self-transcendence. Mediocrity is the complaisant acceptance of the status quo — of the world and of the self.

If you are not continuously striving toward an ever higher achievement or state of being, if you have nothing original to say or offer and are only good at repeating what someone else has said or created,

if you are 'proud' that you can swim faster than others in the pond of mediocrity, or if you compare yourself only with those in your vicinity without ever striving to be the best in the world, then you are caught in the invisible web of conspiracy for mediocrity.

It is only through genuine romanticism and impassioned commitment to the highest possibility of the human soul that you can ascend beyond the heavy cloud of the conspiracy for mediocrity — that you can awaken from the mediocrity existing within and without by breaking the spell of the all-pervading conspiracy for mediocrity. And it is a hallmark of a great leader to enable others to lead romantic and impassioned lives toward self-realization through character development.

Konosuke Matsushita, Founder of Matsushita Electronics Corporation, of which Panasonic is a division, used to say that the primary business of Matsushita was the development of people, and that only secondarily it developed electronics products. What made him one of the greatest business leaders of this century is his profound understanding of and passionate commitment to the Cosmic Truth that humanity's highest value in the world is humanity itself, that every human being is an end unto himself/herself, and that the whole purpose of industry is to create the best possible environment for the achievement of happiness, prosperity, and self-fulfillment.

Konosuke Matsushita, Andrew Carnegie, and so many of the great business leaders of the last centuries are gone. Likewise, Buddha, Jesus, and so many of the great spiritual leaders of human history are gone. It is now your turn to take on the task of leadership to build a new world, a new civilization, through the development of human character, and the evolution of the human soul. Whatever it is that you do in life, ultimately this is the only game in life worth playing. To play a game lesser than that is to fail the dignity of your soul.

NOTE:

1. This parable is taken (with minor modifications) from P. D. Ouspensky's short essay "Superman" included in his anthology of essays, *The New Models of the Universe*.