

THE MESSENGER

A messenger was once sent by his king to deliver vital information to a distant city in the kingdom. Since the messenger bore the king's authority, he was rehearsed over & over to be sure he had the message right and could deliver it without error.

The first day went well, with good speed and few distractions. The messenger again rehearsed the information in his care to keep it fresh & accurate.

On the second day the messenger met a lost child who begged to be restored to her family; and though not without anxiety about the cost of time and concentration, he took the child along a different route to find her home. That night he rehearsed the message with greater difficulty and the beginnings of concern that he might have lost small parts of it.

The third day brought the messenger into a village whose well had gone dry, leaving its inhabitants too weak even to send for help. They begged him to take word to the next town, lest they all perish of thirst and disease, and the messenger reluctantly agreed to do so. That night the message was in parts unclear and his worry increased.

Each day thereafter found the messenger more distracted, more interrupted. People talked to him, beseeched him, clutched at him and in his decency he responded as best he could. But each evening, when he rehearsed the king's message, it became less accurate, less clear. When he finally reached his destination, he was in agony, for he knew that he could not deliver what he had been sent to say, and he knew too that the penalty for his carelessness would be severe.

To the governor of the distant town he presented himself and told his tale reciting in succession the agonies that had distracted him; beating his breast in repentance for getting himself so misled from his sworn duty as agent of the king, and ending with his confession that he could not now say the vital words he had so carefully rehearsed in the king's presence.

The governor reached out to the by now trembling messenger and bade him rise from where he had fallen in his shame and fear. "You were not the only messenger, my son," he said. "Our king, on the day of your departure dispatched yet another servant, unskilled in memory or perception but carrying in written form the same message entrusted to you. You may read what it says. The message was as follows:

My Dear Governor: There is great suffering in the land, but our people's hearts are hardened. I must find someone with eyes to see, a will to respond, and the courage to share the pain that lies about us to act as my vicar. Pray, tell me if you have such a person, and send him to me at all speed, for the time is short and the responsibility heavy.

The messenger looked up in confusion; his understanding grew as the governor said, "Until you came, I had no such person to send, but now it is clear that you are he. Return to the royal service of your king, for you have brought the message ten times over and far more clearly than ever you rehearsed it."