

A Strike from the Right

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There are many sayings of the Fathers in the “**Paradise of the Fathers**” which deal with the topic of spiritual discernment, the “middle path,” and obedience to a spiritual father.



An Elder said, “true discernment cannot be except through humility, and humility is in exposing our thoughts and deeds to our fathers, and not relying on our opinions, but seeking the counsel of experienced elders who have gained the grace of discernment, and doing according to all their counsel for us.”

An Elder said, “Extreme asceticism is of the demons. So walk in the royal path as the Scriptures say, do not go left nor right, but follow the middle path in things.”

St. Seferniki said, “We prefer obedience over asceticism, for one teaches pride and the other teaches humility. So we should not worship our own self-will.”

St. John Climacus said, “He who has no [spiritual] guide will have no peace.”

A young man once said to Abba Paphnutius (the disciple of St. Macarius the Great): “Father, I have heard of a group who fast two, four and even six days at a time. I am filled with jealousy and wish to do like them. He responded “He who does these things without counsel, are greatly exalted by the demons, and then bring him down low very quickly. For he who does what is above his own ability kills his body, then he becomes broken just as a bow breaks if it is pulled more than it should.”

There was a man in Edessa whose name was Aspianus. This man composed lyrics and musical works which are used to this day. He was overcome by thoughts of pride so he entered into extreme asceticism and labors without discernment in order to gain the praise of people. Finally, Satan deceived him to go up to a high location in order to be taken up to heaven by a chariot of fire like Elijah the Prophet, since he had become higher than all people and it is befitting for him to be taken up to heaven alive. Unfortunately, he asked for no one’s advice, not even his father of confession, and after the chariot took him high up into the air, the delusion ceased and he fell to the ground from a great height...

Thus we clearly see that such extreme over-zealousness, despite how attractive it might seem to some who aspire to “greatness,” nonetheless gradually leads a person who follows it to perdition.

(To be continued)

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