

Mille Fleurs

On the Occasion of the UN Millennium Assembly

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The few short verses and poems that I have chosen are from different eras and cultures. Their common denominator is their relationship with or connection to the United Nations and the purposes and principles of the World Organization.

The first verse is from Dag Hammarskjöld's "Vägmärken" (Markings). Dag Hammarskjöld (1905–1961) was Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1953 until he died in an airplane crash at Ndola in Africa in 1961. The translation from Swedish is my own attempt to convey the terse poetry in his sententious message. How often do we not allow our emotions to prevail when we are confronted with things that upset us? This makes it difficult to act in an organized manner. Hammarskjöld's challenge is a lodestar : be rational; force yourself to define the problem clearly; and then act accordingly!

Robert Burns (1759–1796) is very much present also today, and in particular in the many Scottish societies around the world that celebrate "The Immortal Memory". It is striking to note the relationship between some of his poetry and the ideals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. "A Man's a Man for a' That" is one example. Needless to say, in a modern interpretation also women should be included in our thoughts when we read the pithy verses.

It is now almost a thousand years since the Persian poet Omar Khayyám composed his famous "Rubáiyát". I have included two stanzas (in Edward Fitzgerald's well-known interpretation) that often come to my mind. The first verse reminds us of how the Earth—the battered Caravanserai—is being ruled by one master after another, not necessarily in the interest of humankind. And each time a ruler "goes his way", the Caravanserai is left—still more battered. How much can it endure? The second verse is a reminder of man's littleness. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes. What we may have accumulated, we must leave behind. But today, the United Nations International Bill of Human Rights makes it clear that every human being is entitled to lead a dignified life during his or her little while on the earth. Do the masters of the world agree—or demonstrate that they agree?

"Hávamál" (The Sayings of the Vikings) of the so called Eddaic poems, composed probably sometime around AD 700–900, contain much wisdom. The translation from Icelandic of the poem that I have chosen is by Björn Jónasson, who suggests that the Eddas signify for the northern culture what the Vedas mean to India and the Homeric poems are for the Greeks. The poems of "Hávamál" do not have titles, but the translator has taken the liberty of adding such in the English translation. The title given to the present poem is "Experience". I have included it with special regards to those who think that they are suited to govern great and mighty nations without even holding a passport.

I have taken the liberty of including a few lines of my own, written in a United Nations context. I had been asked to deliver a traditional Swedish "Värtal" (Ode to the Spring)

at the Swedish Church in Manhattan on 30 April 1998—Walpurgis night. On 20 February, I was on my way to Baghdad in the company of Secretary—General Kofi Annan. (His intention was to defuse the tense situation in the Gulf region because of Iraq's refusal to accept UNSCOM inspections of the Presidential Palaces. I was to assist the Secretary—General during his meeting with President Saddam Hussein and, in particular, in drafting any agreement reached. The mission resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding, signed on 23 February 1998 and subsequently endorsed by the Security Council.) Everybody in the small aircraft provided by President Chirac was resting. My thoughts wandered. All of a sudden I remembered my promise to the pastor. I scribbled down the few lines somewhere over Syria. Later, I included them in my speech at the Swedish Church. The translation from Swedish is my own.

People frequently ask: "What are you going to do next?" I never understood that question, mainly because I have been privileged; interesting tasks have tended to absorb all my professional attention. However, many seem always to think that the grass is greener somewhere else. That, in my view, is a dangerous philosophy of life. It is important to learn to enjoy the present—the ordinary working day. The Swedish poet Sven Johansson (b.1936) has formulated a memento. The two lines of "Förlusten" (The Loss) often come to my mind—like a mantra: "All these days---".

The last poem is by Karin Boye (1900–1941). The poem "I Rörelse" (On The Move) is one of the most commonly known in my country. It was written by the young Karin in the 1920s and became an appeal to the youth who experienced new hope after The Great War. Filled with will and energy, they wanted to build a new world. The translation is my own with the permission of Karin's brother Ulf, who died in May 1999, aged 95. I have included the poem as a tribute to the coming generation, both as a message of hope and as a reminder that "it is the pathway, which is worth our while".

The message in the two last poems is similar—perhaps a Nordic variation of Horatius' *carpe diem*. They give me peace of mind and inner strength.

Ur Vägmarken

Öppenheten för livet ger en blixlik insikt i andras livssituation. Ett krav: att från känslotvinget driva problemet till en klart fattad intellektuell gestaltning—och handla därefter.

Dag Hammarskjöld

From Markings

Openness to life grants a swift insight—like a flash of lightning—into the life situation of others. A must : to force the problem from its emotional sting into a clearly conceived intellectual form—and then act accordingly.

A Man's a Man for a' That

Is there for honest poverty
That hings his head, an' a' that;
the coward slave—we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
Our toils obscure an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gawd for a' that.

What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey, an' a' that?
Gie fools their silks,
and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
Their tinsel show, an' a' that,
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.

Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that.

For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that,
The man o' independent mind
He looks an' laughs at a' that.
A prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that;
But an honest man's aboon his might,
Gude faith, he maunna fa' that!

For a' that, an' a' that,
Their dignities an' a' that,
The pith o' sense, an' pride o' worth,
Are higher rank than a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may,
(As come it will for a' that,)
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree, an' a' that.

For a' that, an' a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that.

Robert Burns

Vår 1998

Om några dagar vet vi
Skall förnuftet tala- eller vapnen?
Syftet med förhandlingen är klart
Han följs av mångas förbön
Förväntningarna stiger i mediebruset
Rubrikernas fetstil är säkrad
—oavsett resultatet
Cynismens logik
i människors verk

I ett längre perspektiv förändras bilden
Svunnen samtid reduceras
En skymt historia är allt som skall bli kvar
Du inser ödmjukt: det finns andra skeden
Som ett mäktigt pulsslag i en annan tidrymd
skall den åter vara här
Våren—ständigt ny
Skapelsens logik
i ett verk av högre hand
Mätte samma hand
leda honom i hans uppdrag

Hans Corell

Springtime 1998

In a few days' time we will know
Will reason speak—or the arms?
The purpose of the discussion is clear
The prayers of many accompany him
Expectations rise in the murmur of the media
Headlines in bold are assured
—whatever the outcome
The logic of cynicism
In deeds of men

Taking the long view the picture changes
The present, once passed, will fade away
A glimpse of history is all that will remain
Humbly you realize: there are other phases
Like a mighty pulse beat in another lapse of time
It will be here again
Springtime—ever new
The logic of creation
In the act of a superior being
May the same being
Guide him on his mission

From Rubáiyát

Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai,
Whose Portals are alternate Night and Day,
How Sultán after Sultán with his Pomp
Abode his destined Hour, and went his way.

And we, that now make merry in the Room
They left, and Summer dresses in new bloom,
Ourselves must we beneath the Couch of Earth
Descend—ourselves to make a Couch—for whom?

Omar Khayyam

Ur Hávamál

Sá einn veit
er víða ratar
og hefir fjöld um farið
hverju geði
stýrir gumna hver,
sá er vitandi er vits.

From Hávamál

He is truly wise
Who's travelled far
And knows the ways of the world.
He who has travelled
Can tell what spirit
Governs the men he meets.

From "The Sayings of The Vikings"

Förlusten

Alla dessa dagar som kom och gick
Inte visste jag att de var livet.

Sven Johansson

I rörelse

Den mätta dagen, den är aldrig störst.
Den bästa dagen är en dag av törst.
Nog finns det mål och mening i vår färd—
Men det är vägen som är mödan värd.
Det bästa målet är en nattlång rast,
Där elden tänds och brödet bryts i hast.
På ställen där man sover blott en gång,
Blir sömnen trygg och drömmen full av sång.
Bryt upp, bryt upp! Den nya dagen gryr.
Oändligt är vårt stora äventyr.

Karin Boye

The Loss

All these days that came and went by
Little did I know that it was life.

On The Move

The day of plenty, never is the greatest.
The best day is a day of craving thirst.
Yes, there is a meaning in our journey—
But 'tis the pathway, which is worth our while.
The thing to aim for is a nightlong rest,
Where the fire's lit and bread is shared in haste.
In places, where you go to sleep but once,
Your sleep is safe, your dream is full of song.
Move on, move on! The new day dawns ahead.
Endless is our marvellous adventure.