

Once there was a young man, rather immature in his life, but ready to learn. He had a strong liking for antique things and enjoyed visiting different antique stores in European countries which he went to on holidays. Over time he developed a strong interest in antique pottery and especially in tea cups. He felt that each of them had a unique story to tell.

Once while he was at an old fortress in Serbia which had been partially transformed into a museum, he spotted an exceptional tea cup in a dusty antique store which clearly had Turkish influences. He asked the seller: "May I see that exceptionally beautiful tea cup over there? It seems to come from Turkey..." As the man handed him the tea cup, our young man suddenly heard the tea cup speak up:

"You don't understand," it said, "I have not always been a tea cup. There was a time when I had no idea what service meant. I was just a dumb lump of red clay. Let me tell you my story, you will learn from it."

"I've lived for many, many thousands of years. I've witnessed wars and peace coming and going. Whole civilisations rolled over me as I sat there waiting... For what I don't know. Then one day my master came. He took me, brought me home, rolled and pounded me on a wooden table. Again and again, he poked his fingers into me until finally I yelled out, 'Don't do that!' Imagine if someone would take you like this... 'Leave me alone!', I cried. But he only smiled and gently said, 'Not yet!'"

The tea cup became more and more alive as he spoke to the shocked young man: "Then, whoommmm! I was placed on a spinning wheel and suddenly spun around and around and around until I lost all my sense of direction: 'Stop it, don't you see that I'm getting sick? Quickly, take me from the spinning wheel!' I yelled. But the master only nodded in understanding and quietly said, 'Not yet!'"

"He just bent me in and out of shape to suit his plan for me. Then he placed me carefully into an oven. I have never felt such heat. I yelled and knocked and pounded at the door: 'It is hotter than hell - I'm burning to ashes! Please get me out of here before it's too late!' I could see him through a tiny hole. I could only read his lips as he shook his head from side to side and silently pronounced, 'Not yet!'"

"When I thought I wouldn't be able to bear the heat for another minute, the door opened. He carefully took me out and put me on a shelf where I began to cool. It felt so good to be left alone. But more was going to come... After I had cooled down he carefully picked me up, looked at me and brushed some dust away. Then... he brought the colours! And something transparent - the glaze. The fumes were horrible! I thought I would gag! 'Please,... you have no mercy!,' I cried. 'Don't you understand my misery!? Please, please, please...! Stop it!' But he only shook his head and said, 'Not yet, you're not ready yet!'"

"Then unexpectedly and very quickly he put me back into the oven... only it was about twice or trice as hot as the first time - this was the most intense. From the beginning I felt this is my

death... I begged... I pleaded... I threatened... I screamed... Finally, I cried without tears... Not even hot tears. I was convinced I would never make it. I was ready to give up. Just then, at the last second, when I was slowly fainting, the door opened and he took me out. And again placed me on the shelf - where I cooled and waited... and waited ... and waited..."

"What was going to be next? An hour or so later he came back and placed a mirror before me and said, 'Look at yourself!' And I did. What I saw amazed me. It is what you see now. 'That's not me!' I said. 'That cannot be me... It is too beautiful, too ...' With a very compassionate voice he spoke, 'This is what you are meant to be.'"

"And then he explained: 'I know it hurt you when I rolled and kneaded you on the table. But if I had not gotten the air out of you, you would have broken. I know you must have lost all your sense of orientation when I was spinning you. But without this you would never have come into this form. I know the fumes of the colours in the glaze were intolerable when I painted you. But if I had not done that, you would not have had any colour in your life and you would not have hardened. And when I placed you in the second oven I knew that this would be the most severe part. But without it you would have broken very easily when the realities of life would have come. Believe me, all that I did was for your own good. Now you are what I had in mind when I first saw you on the ground. Now you are a finished product.'"

With this the tea cup stopped speaking - but there was a tear of gratefulness coming from its beautiful rim.

The young man purchased the tea cup and only used it when he offered something to God. He never forgot the lesson he had received from it. And whenever he himself was in a difficult situation and felt like calling out, "Stop it! Leave me alone!," he remembered the words of the tea cup maker: "Not yet...!" At the same time, he also became grateful - for he knew that everything that happened was designed by the Lord to make him what he was meant to become: a pleasing servant.

He also had faith that God knows what He is doing to each of us. He is the potter and we are the clay. He will mould us and make us ready. And He will expose us to just enough pressures of just the right kinds so that we will become perfect in His service.