

The Legend of Peresvet

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This is the story of the life of the monk Alexander Peresvet. It also includes details about the development of Hesychasm in the Orthodox tradition and the beliefs of pre-Christian ancient Russia. It is a story of an attempt to prevent bloodshed in the battle at Kulikovo Field, of heroism and friendship, and of love between people and love for God.

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Chapter One: **Songs of the Shorebirds**

**Matters from long ago,
Tales from ancient times...
*A.S.Pushkin***

**Ancient Knowledge shall appear again!
Love will once again be the basis for life!
With the power of repentance,
pain will be washed away!
Goodness and peace will prevail!
*Peresvet***

Peresvet, who was named Alexander after taking his vows as a monk, was standing on the river bank at dawn.

The beauty of spring was all around!

A gentle mist rose on this wonderful, windless morning...

His thoughts were full of light and joy:

“How fine is this expanse, this natural beauty!

“Divine Bliss is everywhere, in every drop of mist!

“In every blade of grass, there is the Love of God!

“You can feel the streams of Bliss! They flow like the mist now, gently and softly shimmering in the rays of the rising sun.

“The Grace of God is inside the spiritual heart and around — as far as the eye can see... And on, and on...

“God is Omnipresent! On sunrises like this, it is so easy to experience this in the transparent breath of life of dawn, which pulsates everywhere and manifests itself in everything! One just needs to quiet oneself and become attentive! And then the marvelous and wondrous is revealed by God to the soul!”

From the flooded meadows, came the voices of great shorebirds, which are also called steppe waders. These birds are the biggest of waders, about the size of large chickens, with long, thin beaks bent downward. Here, in the river floodplain, they joyfully lek in the spring. Their resounding voices, tinkling calls and gurgling trills fill the clear air, coming from the huge flood meadow next to the monastery.

And other spring songs of birds filled the transparency of the morning.

... Peresvet was no longer young. A long life as a warrior-hero preceded the taking of monastic vows.

Almost half a century had passed since his birth in a noble boyar family.

His thoughts flowed smoothly:

“Yes, I have lived many summers, I have met many winters...

“... In former times, listening to such trills of the waders, I would have thought of a successful hunt...

“Why did I not admire their songs before? On the contrary, I was ready to cut off this marvelous music of life!

“Why is it that good thinking does not often arise in man by itself? Why does not caring arise naturally and clearly from the love of the heart?”

“Why do men make war and take revenge on one another, attempt to occupy each other’s lands, or seek to subjugate others to collect tribute and taxes?”

“Why can’t people live in peace — amidst this beauty of God’s Creation? Where is hidden the evil beast in man? Where is hidden the spark of God that will warm the heart and not allow hardness to enter?”

His thoughts were interrupted by the monk named Yegor. The skinny youth who wanted to become an iconographer... His main dream was to see the Divine Images with the soul so that he could learn the art of creating icons and learn to portray the Faces of the Purest Ones. Many people in the monastery thought that Peresvet already had this skill, even though he told almost no one of his visions.

Yegor loved conversations with Peresvet and loved to be together in silence or when doing monastic obedience or other related work.

Often Yegor asked Peresvet to tell about his life in the outside world, about his military past. Many young people dream about heroic deeds and valor. And not only in the spiritual field but also in earthly life, many people would like to become significant.

And Yegor himself was born during a lean year, growing up sickly and weak... He came to the monastery because of poverty in his family. He did not want to be a burden to his father and mother, taking a share of bread that could have otherwise been given to his brothers and sisters... And when, in the light of the candles, he first saw the icon in the temple — it was as if a feeling of the unknown world of

the Highest, flared in the soul! The presence of God invisibly touched his heart.

Peresvet helped Yegor, God willing, to improve his health. Every morning he poured cold water from the river over Yegor's body. And his body became healthier.

... Now, Peresvet was waiting for Yegor. And together they went to the river. The water was cold, the ice had only recently disappeared. But Peresvet suggested to bathe.

He took off his clothes, went into the burning cold of the transparent water, submerged, swam like this for a few meters, came up and looked at Yegor.

Yegor overcame his fear — and also went into the water. He dove into the water, breathed heavily — and began to shine with joy! He quickly got to the shore.

After the bath, they started carrying water for monastic needs. Many times they went up the hill with full buckets.

Yegor warmed up and his skin colored.

After finishing the task, they sat down on a hill to have a rest.

Yegor asked:

“How did you know that you can be cured by water?”

“Well, people have always known about this. After all, people make different extracts and water is often blessed...”

“But what about this cold water? How did you know about pouring it on ourselves and bathing in it?”

“This has been known by people since time immemorial. And I have experienced it myself when,

in my youth, I almost died from wounds and it took a long time for my body to regain its former strength. Now you know it too, and you can help others.”

“Please, tell me more”, — Yegor asked reverently.

“Later! Come with me to chop wood! I’ll tell you while we’re resting. And now — it’s time to pray!...”

Chapter Two: The Elder

There is Knowledge, hidden from idle eyes.
There is the Wisdom of the Primordial Silence.
And there are those who possess it.
They can share this Preciousness with others.

Peresvet

Peresvet thought about how to tell Yegor about his youth, not just to amuse the adolescent’s curiosity and occupy his time with a conversation, but to fill him with the knowledge gained from his own hard-won life experiences.

And there were many experiences!

There were joys, delights, and the fire of youthful recklessness... There was friendship, courage, readiness to risk one’s life, aspirations to accomplish various deeds, and striving to be true to one’s word... There was pain and despair, and bitter disappointment... All this had long since passed...

... Yes, there were life lessons, both very bright and very hard...

And in order to help Peresvet understand how and what God teaches a person through the many events and meetings of life, an Elder, in Peresvet's youth, began teaching him these lessons.

* * *

The Elder, or Grandfather, as he was sometimes called, was not at all related to Peresvet, even distantly.

He was a very strange and unusual man.

He lived as a hermit in the forest, but was not an Orthodox monk. No one knew how old he was. Many who had known him for a long time, said that even thirty years ago he was already white-haired and looked exactly the same as now. On the one hand, he was perceived as old, like the divine elders of the tales, but on the other — he was full of strength and not old at all.

The Elder was tall, had a powerful build, never stooped, and even had heroic physical strength, but rarely showed it to people. And his spiritual strength was immeasurable! It was as if it was always hidden in the depths of his stingy words or silent peace.

He was not especially affable or polite. He could choose not to answer idle questions or to tell the whole truth about a person or a situation in a harsh and brief manner.

He did not help everyone, and very few people turned to him for help. People were afraid of him and went to him with requests only in extreme need.

But wild animals approached him without fear and fawned on him, birds ate from his hands. Even

feral dogs whimpered wantingly, like puppies, and were ready to rub against his feet with devotion. A huge bear lived near the Elder's house. And with the Elder himself, the bear was quite obedient, gentle and meek, but strangers could become so afraid of it that they never went into that forest again.

The Elder did not hunt, did not fish, but lived on other gifts of the forest. He had never eaten any food of animal origin, neither in Lent nor outside of Lent.

Although some may have thought so, no one ever called the Elder a warlock, sorcerer, or wizard for fear of what could happen by doing so.

Only with time did Peresvet understand that the Elder called God the One Great All-creating Power, the Only Creator. But the Elder rarely explained in words how he himself understood everything in the world order.

... Peresvet often recalled the Elder.

He often wished that he could ask the Elder now about many important things that he had not considered asking about in his youth...

Now Peresvet was collecting and comprehending bit by bit what he perceived then. Now he was trying diligently to combine the Knowledge introduced by the Elder — with the Teachings of Jesus Christ, which illuminated Peresvet's life now.

The words of the Elder, as if imprinted in the memory of the soul, sometimes rose from the depths — and a meaningful understanding gradually came: secret things were opened, obvious things were understood... The Knowledge, the Universal Knowledge to which Peresvet so diligently strove in his spiritual discipleship, was slowly being understood.

* * *

Yegor always excitedly waited for Peresvet's stories. In anticipation of an interesting conversation — it was easy to work! Peresvet chopped wood with measured and strong movements, and Yegor stacked the logs. And he felt so good beside Peresvet as if he plunged into a stream of pure power and unearthly peace!

... When the work was done, they sat together. Yegor, feeling slightly embarrassed, reminded Peresvet that he had promised a story.

“Well, listen!

“At the time, which I'll tell you about now, I was younger than you— about fourteen years old.

“My friend and sworn brother, Rodion, and I were dreaming of feats, looking for a chance to show off our prowess and strength...

“One day, when our fathers were away, we went to the fair, we fought fist fights, and had all sorts of fun...

“A story happened there. Rodion saved a little girl from under the wheels of a cart, but he broke his right arm. He broke it badly! And the wound healed badly, it festered... The doctor said that if he didn't cut the arm off above the elbow, he would die of the black fever. Rodion flatly refused: **‘What kind of a warrior would I be without my right hand? It would be better to die!’**

“Then an old servant who lived in our house told us that there was an old man who could cure any disease, if he wanted to.

“And Rodion was burning like fire, he was fading in and out from the heat...

“I saddled the horse, put Rodion on it, and sat behind him to support him.

“I did not know how to find that man. The servant only gave a general outline of the way.

“... When we arrived at the Elder’s house, the broad-shouldered old man came out onto the doorstep without my knocking... He took Rodion in his arms and brought him into the upper room.

“He told me briefly:

‘Sit here in the corner and think good thoughts! If you believe in God, pray; if you do not believe, keep quiet and do not interfere!’

“And he began to examine Rodion’s hand.

“I started to look for an icon with my eyes... But there were no icons in the room.

“The Elder, without turning around, said:

‘You should not look for God in icons, but in your spiritual heart!’

“I got goose bumps on my back! I felt that this old man could see even with his back turned, though he leaned over Rodion’s body and guided his hands in a special way over the patient’s arm.

“After a minute or so, the Elder said to me:

‘Get a bucket and fetch some water! The well is in the yard.’

“I took the bucket from the threshold and went out of the hut. And there was a huge bear in the yard, without a chain, without a leash, looking at me intently...

“The Elder, as if he had seen everything himself, said from the hut:

‘Don’t be afraid of the bear: it won’t hurt his own! Bring water quickly!’

“I — under the bear’s rapt attention — crossed the distance to the well and drew water.

“The bear did not move, but just looked at me back and forth.

“The old man took the bucket and dipped Rodion’s hand, which was all black, into it. The water turned black and his hand became a little lighter.

‘Bring more water!’ — the Elder commanded. — ‘And pour this one out so that it does not get on anything living!’

“This repeated several times until Rodion’s hand became normal color with a little pinkish tint...

“After that, the Elder fiddled with the hand for a while more, combining the bones and stitching up the wound.

“Then he told me to take a wide bench out of the chamber and put it by the well. He put Rodion on it, took off all his clothes, and doused him with several buckets of water. Then he wrapped him in a linen and took him back to the room.

“Rodion’s fever seemed to have been washed away by that water.

“The old man bandaged Rodion’s arm, covered Rodion with a blanket and went about his business as if I was not there at all.

“Then he glanced at me:

‘Your brother will live! If you want, you can stay here, or you can leave and come back to get him after three days.’

“I decided to stay.

“I also tried to pay the Elder for the treatment. But he gave me such a look that I almost fell under the ground with shame...

“... The next day Rodion was almost well.

“The Elder was a little nicer to him than he was to me. He told him that his arm would be healthy.

“And then, while Rodion’s hand was healing, we stayed at the Elder’s cottage for two weeks.

“And the Elder began to teach us to do everything with our left hands that we were accustomed to doing with our right hands.

“We laughed at our embarrassment, and the Elder himself showed us how he could do everything with his left hand just as easily as he could do with his right.

“He explained a little more about his miraculous abilities in healing, so that there would be no superstitious fear in us:

‘It is not witchcraft, but ordinary knowledge! But not everyone is able to use it.

‘And there is knowledge about the earthly life and the life of Heaven! If they are known, then mysteries are revealed which are really simple. And in this way, one can acquire useful and important skills. It is not only about how to heal diseases. But this knowledge is about how man on the Earth is commanded by God to live!’”

*** * ***

Yegor listened with bated breath. The scenes told by Peresvet came alive before his inner eyes.

Then the bell rang. It was time for prayer.

“Well, I will tell you the rest at some other time!” — Peresvet said.

And they went to a small temple that was a little bit unfinished and unpainted inside, but it was already consecrated, and services were held in it.

The brethren of the monastery were gathering. The setting sun with its red and golden rays was shining all around.

Peresvet felt warmth in his heart now that God filled his entire life! Now, His Caress was palpable and His Presence was so significant!

This joy merged with the beauty of the sunset and shone in the flame of the candles! It resounded in the space with the chiming of the bells and the singing of the birds in the surrounding groves. Special hymns praising God sounded in the invisible space...

Life with God — is there any greater happiness?!

Chapter Three: Seeing and Listening with the Heart

The “connecting thread”
between us-souls and God is invisible.
And it is important for us to feel this connection.
Then there is an end to idle worries!

There is the Infinity of God,
the Silence is in It...
And the life of the soul resounds in It
like an instrument string of love!
Ngomo

For several days, Peresvet and Yegor took part in cutting firewood in the forest together with the other monks.

At Peresvet's suggestion, only dry trees that had already died on their own were felled. It was more difficult than simply felling all the trees in a row. However, in addition to protecting the lives of the living trees, this method provided dry wood, which burned better, and it also prevented the dead trees from later being blown over by a windstorm. This helped keep the forest floor clear of dead logs, and this, in turn, made it more comfortable for the monks when they would go on walks looking for mushrooms and berries.

They spent the nights here, in a shelter of branches.

One evening, after the prayer, when everyone had already gone to sleep, Peresvet still sat near the campfire.

Yegor came up to him:

“I can't sleep, I'm cold! Can I warm myself here?”

“Yes, sit next to me, it's warm here!”

... The spring nights were cold but clear.

The sky was covered with bright stars. Tall fir-trees stood around a small glade where the fire was burning.

There was no wind, it was quiet.

Night beauty is special, both mysterious and majestic!

The fire burned brightly. Yegor quickly warmed up, but did not go to sleep.

“Tell me more about that Elder”, — he asked Peresvet.

“All right, listen!

“The Elder started to teach Rodion and me as if in passing, little by little.

“One evening by a campfire, we had a conversation, much like you and I are having now. The Elder was more talkative that time than usual. So, we took the opportunity to ask questions. I asked:

‘Why do we need to be able to do everything with our left hands, if Rodion’s hand will soon recover and my right one isn’t even injured?’

‘And while Rodion’s right hand is recovering, are you going to spoon-feed him yourself, to raise his helplessness?’

‘I’ll also ask you, why do you look with two eyes instead of one?’

‘A person has many abilities — many God-given talents! But not many people know about this — and that is why they do not use them.

‘You may wonder, how can I see everything, even if I am standing with my back turned to what is going on or even when I’m in another place? Or how can I know many things about you that you have never told me about yourself?’

‘A human being is a soul. And a soul can see without a body and hear without a body too! And it is even possible for a human soul to cognize the unknown, learning from God Himself!

‘You are only half-humans still, but you can become true Men! And for this, the first skill is to learn to look at the world with the spiritual heart.’

‘How can we do it?’ — we asked.

‘A soul can see with the eyes of the spiritual heart what is invisible for ordinary eyes. Also, it can hear that which cannot be heard by ordinary ears. It

will always be clear to that soul what kind of person is in front of him or her, and whether that person is lying — or telling the truth. And there are many other things that can be understood if you learn to look with the soul, such as understanding how to act righteously, according to your conscience, or how to direct your life.'

'And how do we learn to look with the soul?'

'Start by looking at the fire from that place in your bodies where the inhalations and exhalations occur...

'Then, for a better understanding, look from your head, then — from your belly, and then — again from the center where the soul can see from.

'Now turn your backs to the fire and try to look the same way.'

"... We got curious and started trying to do this...

"The Elder said:

'Take your time! Let the fire and its light be the most important things for you now.

'Try to feel the space around you. First, do this by trying to feel this space with your body. It is like how we can feel the warm water around us when submerged in water. Or try to feel the space of the warm air. Then, in the place where your heart beats in your body, you will begin to feel a caressing warmth. This makes it easier to begin seeing with the soul.

'The soul will look with love!'

"We became very curious. Not that we saw clearly the light of fire with our backs, but we had a special feeling that, with just a little more, we would start to see the light, the fire, the Elder, and the bear,

who was lying some distance away and who was also looking at the fire and noisily sighing sometimes...

“Later, the Elder said:

‘And now — listen with the spiritual heart to the crackle of the fire, the hoots of the owl, and the bear’s breathing...

‘Everything that exists — exists and sounds in the *Great Silence*...’

“This is how the Elder taught us to understand what he himself called *Life with God in everything*. He wanted us to understand the *quietness in the heart* and the *Oneness* of all living beings...

“Yes, we were not very diligent students: for us it was just fun...”

‘Would it be a sin if I tried to do that too?’ — Yegor asked.

‘Why would it be a sin? Hegumen Sergius also explains to us the same thing about Hesychia — how to cognize the quietness of the heart. And he also tells us about the spiritual heart, which is where a monk’s love for God is kindled. And the Elder taught us the same thing...’

Yegor began to try to look and listen. But because he was trying far too hard, he ended up not being very good at it.

Peresvet comforted him:

“Not every skills comes at once. You look from your heart, but at the same time you think: ‘Did I succeed?’. Because of this, the fullness of the perception with the soul does not come; the fussy mind prevents this!”

“But how can I not think when all kinds of thoughts come by themselves?”

“Think about God with love! Right now, God is next to us! He is closer than this fire! God is always here! Only we don’t often feel it...”

... Peresvet and Yegor submerged into the silence filled with the Divine Presence, and for a long time they sat side by side in the circle of light of the dancing fire.

And God was filling their lives with His Great Love... And this Love of God flowed like a great river...

Chapter Four: **Hesychia**

**Let this silence ring out
with the good news, the holy message:
God is near at every moment!
God is Love! God is right here!**

**Open the doors of your heart, open it — and you’ll
know His Love!**

**God is right here, He is — within,
in the Radiance of Eternal Purity!**

**And only a fussy life
in captivity of the mind and evil passions
prevents you from cognizing
the Love of the Father of all people...**

Revelation from Matthew the Apostle

In the morning, after the prayers, hegumen Sergius again explained in his sermon to all the brethren of the monastery about *Hesychia*, a special inner silence. He said that prayers must not come from one's head but must instead "go down" and come from one's spiritual heart, from being within the spiritual heart. He also spoke about the purification of thoughts and about keeping one's attention on God at all times.

He reminded the monks of the great words of the Gospels: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God!" (Matt 5:8), "The Kingdom of God is within you!" (Luke 17:21), "When you pray, enter into your chamber (chest) and, shutting your door, pray to your Father in secret" (Matt 6:6), and "He who unites with the Lord is one Spirit with the Lord" (1 Cor 6:17).

* * *

Sergius always spoke with a heartfelt and laconic voice.

The monks listened in awe; they marveled at Sergius' holiness!

For most of the brethren, the mystery of the "intelligent prayer", which was always active in the spiritual heart, seemed inaccessible and unfathomable, the summit of spiritual achievements, despite the hegumen's explanations about how this spiritual silence could be attained.

Yegor also dreamed of achieving inner silence, but so far he had little success in doing so. Only sometimes, for a brief moment, his mind quieted and his spiritual heart filled with joy.

That is why Yegor was sad after the morning sermon. He thought with sadness that his failure must be because he was a sinner and unworthy of God's Grace...

Peresvet, with the blessing of hegumen Sergius, looked after Yegor and instructed him in monastic life. Yegor, in turn, helped Peresvet in many matters of the monastery, acquiring through this various abilities, both simple worldly ones and special spiritual ones.

* * *

On this day, Peresvet and Yegor were gathering young goutweed **for** the whole brethren: to make soup for a meal. The supplies of food in the monastery had greatly depleted during the winter.

Hegumen Sergius, who made it a rule for all the monks of his monastery to live in non-acquisitiveness, strictly prohibited begging in towns and villages. Ever since the founding of the monastery, this rule had been in place and was strictly observed, even though in other poor monasteries in those days, monks often collected alms to survive.

Another one of Sergius' rules was that all the property of the monks should be part of their communal belongings. And everyone, to the best of his ability, worked **for the good of all**. And the meal **for all** was communal as well. It was a joy for Peresvet and Yegor to gather young green sprouts of goutweed. Yegor's morning sadness was dispelled by this simple task in the open air of the flooded meadows.

Everywhere, the gentle and vivid manifestations of spring could be felt. **Blue and white primrose flowers covered the slopes of valleys, ravines, and**

hollows. The spring sun was warming the air. Birds were singing their spring songs. A gentle breeze — still a little cool, but not strong — as if spreading its wings, flew over the earth, bringing to every corner the joyful message: “Spring! Spring is here!”. The lapwings cried out over the meadows, and the trills of the larks hovering in the sky decorated the beginning of the day.

* * *

Peresvet and Yegor sat down to rest on a knoll with sacks full of goutweed.

Yegor asked Peresvet:

“Tell me, please, more about you, Rodion, and that Elder!”

“Now is not the time: a long conversation will make us late! I’d rather show you something that the Elder taught us back then. These birches here are reminding me of that since they are very suitable for this! They are not too thin and not too thick, and they are growing in abundance! Look: what a beauty!”

Peresvet approached a young, slender birch, which swayed slightly in the wind, as if dancing. Raising his head, he admired how the thin branches with the first sticky green leaves swayed in a special rhythm against the blue sky.

Yegor came up too. He stroked the trunk with his palm:

“How white it is! As if with the spring all its beauty awakened in it!”

“Hug this birch tree, cling to it with all your body! So that you feel every movement of it from the wind! Sway with it in this expanse of spring beauty and spaciousness! When embracing a tree in such a

way, you can feel how God cradles everything around us and in us, how He caresses and embraces all of us with His Care, like a mother rocking her child in a cradle.

“And then it becomes clear to us that the Holy Spirit permeates all living things with Its Light, and that it is the Power of God that enables everything in the world to live! And then we, in response, irrepressibly pour out our love to God!

“Try to feel God’s Love not as a human being but as a little birch tree! And then your body becomes like a graceful dancing birch! And the soul can dissolve in the Flow of God’s Grace!”

Yegor pressed his body against the trunk and fell silent. The wind gently rocked the white trunk of the birch tree together with Yegor’s body...

Peresvet sat down far away. He habitually felt the River of Divine Light, and allowed this Light to become visible to the soul and united with the Flow of Divine Love-Caresses.

He did not hurry the lad, so that the beautiful Gifts of the Holy Spirit could be revealed to Yegor himself.

... Afterwards, Yegor said with tears in his eyes:

“I saw the Light of God! I heard a special silence! I had never been able to do it before! And I so wanted to know the silence and warmth of my heart! I wanted to, but I couldn’t! And then it just happened! It happened! It was as if only the birch and the Light of God remained, and I was not!”

Yegor whispered words of thanks to God.

Then he and Peresvet picked up the sacks full of goutweed and went to the monastery.

* * *

Peresvet rejoiced at Yegor's success. For many in the monastery the peace of heart, even for just a short time, was an unattainable dream. Hegumen Sergius himself was able to do many things and instructed others in them. But not everyone was able to do it...

Peresvet often tried to understand this, wondering: how and why does everything happens so with souls? Why do some people find spiritual knowledge easy, while others do not? Maybe the Elder was right in saying that a soul lives on the Earth more than once? And could it be that some souls are just young and unskilled, only just now starting to mature and learn, and therefore, learn more slowly?

Peresvet met people who were not the brightest mentally, but were kind, with hearts full of love. And on the contrary, he had seen others who boasted of knowledge and were important people who, at the same time, had no notion of love in their hearts, even if they possessed flawless logic and never missed a chance for profit...

Peresvet had started learning long ago how to see souls and understand people, but he still hadn't learned how to best help such a wide variety of souls...

He had many conversations about this with hegumen Sergius. Peresvet told about his understanding, about his special visions. Sergius listened attentively, and he never criticized anyone, but he was careful — not to introduce something new into monastic practice.

... And now — Peresvet was glad for Yegor! But for a moment, he imagined teaching all the

monks to embrace birches and realized how quickly it would all turn into nonsense! Everyone would have thought it was ridiculous!...

If, of course, hegumen Sergius himself had commanded it, then everyone would have obeyed. But would anyone have succeeded...? Who knows?

“Yegor is a pure, transparent soul! He is so sensitive that even a subtle touch causes an immediate reaction in him, as a soul. Much like how a crystal glass begins to ‘sing’ when touched a certain way, the soul seems to ‘sing’ in response to such love and purity! But it’s not like that with others...” — he thought.

Peresvet thanked God for His Love, for His Great Joy, and for such a wonderful day! All felt right in Peresvet’s heart! The future seemed bright!

The response of God’s Love came instantly, as It always does as soon as one directs all of one’s love to Him. And He opens His Embrace to such souls, allowing them to dissolve in His Light and live thus — with Him, and in Him!

Chapter Five: **Unusual Power**

**If Light shines in the soul,
darkness is powerless!**

Soon, Yegor shared his experiences and new successes with Peresvet:

“I started to look at the candle from my heart in the evenings, as you taught me. And it is so blissful!

It is as if that candle is lit in my spiritual heart, as if the light of love burns for God there! And the *silence* comes by itself...

“I told hegumen Sergius about it in confession. I was afraid that he would scold me. But he even praised me! And I showed him drawings of various birds and flowers that I made on small planks, and he praised me for that too! He blessed me to keep on learning to draw. He even said that when you finish teaching me how to read and write, I will be allowed to copy the Holy Gospels and decorate their pages with patterns.”

Peresvet had already been teaching Yegor for some time. And in these studies, much like in his other studies, Yegor showed great diligence. At this point in time, the boy had already mastered a little and could read and write by syllables.

* * *

On that day, Peresvet and Yegor collected various herbs for brews, and after that they began preparing some medicinal remedies.

Peresvet was very knowledgeable in this — hegumen Sergius entrusted him with this job completely.

Yegor was diligently learning the skill, and he tried to memorize everything he could about the herbs and their medicinal properties!

And Peresvet told him to take notes also so that he could both better remember everything and practice his writing.

They were grinding the herbs in mortars and mixing in a special proportion of the medicinal mix when Yegor asked:

“Tell me more about the Elder, about how he taught. He taught you how to distinguish between herbs, didn’t he?”

“Yes and no. It was my wife who taught me the most about herbs. But that was later, much later...”

“And there are more interesting things to tell you about the Elder than this. I’ve been thinking a lot about these events, but I don’t even know how to begin...”

“Let us consider the life of an ordinary warrior, one who serves his prince faithfully, dreams of heroic deeds, and kills others in battles — those whom his prince considers enemies. Where is the line: what is military duty, and what is a terrible sin? Many of Rodion’s and my dreams and aspirations in our youth were to become brave soldiers — strong, successful, and invincible ones — to gain the glory of heroes in many battles.

“The Elder did not approve of our striving for military heroism at all. And we could imagine no other future for ourselves than serving with the prince’s squad. We dreamed of battles, of heroic deeds...”

“I think that is why our training with the Elder ended so soon, almost without having started...”

“And the external reason for this was one occasion.

“A rich and noble-looking man came to the Elder’s house. Six armed servants were with him.

“The bear was ready to pounce on that man and not let him come near. He could feel the malice in this man immediately.

“But the Elder told the bear sternly:

‘Sit still! Until I give you a sign — do not interfere!’

“The unexpected guest came into the upper room and spoke to the Elder alone for a very long time.

“After, he came out very unhappy, as if he was torn with indignation and anger that the Elder had refused to fulfill his wishes.

“He went to the edge of the glade to the path where the servants were waiting for him, but suddenly he turned around and, drawing his sword, headed back to the Elder with a clear threat, and not as a petitioner. He shouted at the Elder:

‘I told you in kindness, but you still didn’t understand! So now I will force you to come with us! You’ll do what I want! In this case, I will keep you alive and reward you! And if you don’t do it, then your death will be your fault!’

“The Elder, who came out to escort the uninvited guest, stood quietly in the middle of the clearing.

“The angry visitor with his sword unsheathed came up to the Elder and said:

‘Listen you, old man, come with us — or I’ll cut you down right now! In this very place, you will die!’

“The Elder just grinned and said:

‘You’re stupid, it turns out...’

“This broke the uninvited visitor’s remaining patience. He swung his sword.

“Everything else happened in an instant.

Rodion and I rushed to the rescue, grabbing the first thing that was at hand — a pole and an oven fork...

“The bear got up on his hind legs and went in the direction of the servants who had already unsheathed their weapons.

“The Elder himself stood quietly and did not move. He only put his open palm towards the sword — and the blade stopped in the air without touching his hand, as if it crashed into an invisible wall.

“The Elder said softly, but in such a way that even we had goosebumps on our backs:

‘That’s enough! Get out of here! Now!’

“The attackers were as if shackled by a special fear. They obediently left the clearing and raced away, showing no more aggression.

“... We were shocked by what had happened, and, most of all, by the special invisible power of the Elder, with which he stopped the attacker’s sword with his bare hand.

“The Elder said:

‘Evil has no power over good, darkness has no power over Light — didn’t you know that? Sometimes, when words alone are not enough to help someone to learn the wrongness of evil will, it becomes necessary to teach through more direct means.’

“Of course, we began to ask to be taught this power.

“The Elder, at first, just kept silent, but then he explained:

‘Power must correspond to human understanding, not surpass it. For you now, a pole and a shank are just right for your minds!’

‘But we wanted to protect you, we had no time to run to get weapons!’ — I said with some offense.

‘That’s what I’m talking about! It’s good that everything turned out that way!’

‘What’s the use of explaining it to you now?... This power is directly connected with the Power of

the Universal Divine One. It is not only for becoming invincible warriors, as you both want right now! Those who want to fight enemies do not need this skill yet!

‘Now it’s time for you to go home! Don’t say too much about me! Your fathers will be back tomorrow. And it’s time for you to go home, because your mothers have already buried you in their minds! And the servants haven’t been able to find you for two weeks!’

‘Can we come back later, so that you can teach us such things?’

‘No, your reasons for wanting power are not right yet! It’s too early for you to learn from me!’

“It was unthinkable not to obey the Elder. And so, we left that same day.

Yegor asked Peresvet:

“So you never met the Elder again?”

“We did, but it was much, much later...”

“Of course, we went to his forest house about a month later. We thought of begging him to teach us...”

“But when we approached, we saw that only ashes remained of his house! Only the well was intact in the middle of the clearing!

“We guessed that those bad people had done it on behalf of the man who hated the Elder.

“We did not know then whether the Elder was alive or was killed in the fire. We hoped that he had left before what had happened, knowing, as usual, everything that was coming beforehand.

“We drew water from the well and filled our canteens, as if trying to keep the memory in that water.

“And then, I found and picked up from the ground a plank that had been lying beside the well. There was an inscription carved on it:

‘If Light shines in the soul, darkness is powerless!’

“It seemed to us that it was a message from the Elder for us... It was as if he knew that we would come to him, and that we would find this tablet, and that we would read it...”

“We believed that the Elder was saved then. But our next meeting with him did not happen until fifteen years later.”

Chapter Six: **Andrey Oslyabya**

It seemed to me at times
That everything in the world was wrong!
I wondered: “How shall I live?
“God, give me a sign!”

And then I stood with my friend
In the midst of battle, shoulder to shoulder.
And blows rang from our armor,
And sword clashed against sword...

Having known both wounds and sorrows,
We searched for our true path.
We learned the lessons of life
And were now prepared to look for the Lord!

Peresvet

Yegor was looking for an opportunity to listen to Peresvet's story further. And so, when the time was right, he asked Peresvet to continue:

"I can't wait to hear how it all turned out! Tell me!"

And so, Peresvet continued his narration:

"After the events in my last story, my life with Rodion continued more or less in the way that we wanted. We became warriors in one of our prince's squadrons. And we became very famous for our strength and courage.

"Were all our battles righteous? No, not all, apparently...

"Often, the princes quarreled among themselves, made alliances, and seized power over their neighbors. Then they made completely different alliances, so that former friends became enemies...

"It was like we wanted to protect our people and land and to defend our towns from attackers... But the truth and purity of those deeds did not always work out...

"Sometimes, it so happened that those soldiers, with whom we fought shoulder to shoulder in one battle, at other times were our enemies...

"The soldiers of one prince could even choose to go to another prince, and this happened and was not forbidden.

"... And one day, before a battle, I felt such anguish that not even words can describe it!

"... In those days, Rodion and I sincerely considered ourselves believers. But our faith in God's existence, both his and mine, was very incomplete.

We went to church on holidays, attended services as we should have, and took communion.

“But we felt like we were still ‘missing something’, as if what we were doing wasn’t at all related to a life with God.

“Our faith and prayers were separated from the rest of our life.

“Only very little time and space were given to God in our lives.

“And it was as if the rest of our lives was not connected with God, but was tied with battles, victory feasts, and funeral rites for fallen comrades...

“Suddenly, I couldn’t bear it at all! Heavy thoughts came over me!

“I was sitting with Rodion by the fire the night before the battle. And he saw that there was something wrong with me.

“He asked:

‘What’s wrong?’

‘Let’s get away from the prince, Rodion! You and I seem to believe in God, but we live like non-Christians, fighting against our own people! One day the princes make alliances with Lithuanians, and then, another day, — with the Horde¹, fighting for power and influence. And we — what are we fighting for?’

‘If you want, we’ll leave after the battle. But to leave before the battle would be a betrayal! Now, we must keep our word to the prince! That’s the honor of a soldier! Cheer up, or they’ll think you’re a coward!’

¹ Golden Horde.

'Who cares what they think? My conscience commands me to not raise my sword, neither against my brethren nor against my former comrades.'

"Rodion and I decided to leave the prince after the battle and live peacefully. At this time, Rodion was already married, and his son, Yakov, was growing up..."

*** * ***

"That battle was unsuccessful for our warriors.

"And in me, there was not that special heady courage and prowess, which usually naturally arose in battles. Before, it was as if a common strength for the entire squad was born during the battle. Through this, the valor of the army strengthened! Through this, the fear of death and pain from wounds was easily overcome in a joint, furious outburst! And that time I had no fear, but I had no desire to fight either. I was only waiting for this fight to be over! I tried not to kill or wound anyone..."

"And, of course, I was soon very badly wounded. I fell to the ground at the feet of Rodion. He and I always fought shoulder to shoulder..."

"The prince then ordered everyone to retreat.

"Rodion didn't listen to the order, he stayed.

"I said with all my might:

'Rodion, go away, I can't get up... Live for both of us, my brother!'

'Be quiet! I'm not going anywhere!'

"He covered my body with my own shield. Then he took my sword in his left hand and threw his shield over his back to be at least somewhat covered from the rear.

"So he stood and waited..."

“An avalanche of attackers seemed to break against him as the current of a turbulent river breaks against a huge rock.

“He did not even know if I was still alive — or already dead...

“So he stood over my body. He did not take one step back!

“He stood his ground and saved my life... When our men saw this, they rushed to help...

“None of our opponents could even hit Rodion. And the courage he displayed that day earned him great respect from everyone! And for a long time after that battle our warriors and harp singers retold the heroic deed of Rodion Oslyabya in epic tales to raise the warriors’ spirits before battles..

“And so that’s the story! Now you know, Yegor, that I owe my life to my brother Andrey and that many warriors died on the battlefield, but here I am, alive to this day...

“From that day on, Rodion and I never fought or took part in another battle.”

Yegor listened, widening his eyes with surprise, and said:

“So is that monk — Andrey Oslyabya?

“I didn’t even guess that he is your sworn brother Rodion! Andrey, they say, came to the monastery much later than you. I thought Andrey was your brother, and Rodion — your childhood friend...”

“He’s more than a brother to me. Life has connected us tightly. We swore to be brothers when we were six years old — and so we live!

“And now in Christ we are brothers!

“Rodion took monastic vows after me when his wife died and his son grew up.”

“Did you take the monk’s vows then?”

“No. For soon, fate brought me and the Elder together again. But it’s a long story, I’ll tell it another time.

“I’m going to Pereyaslavl tomorrow. Hegumen Sergius sends me. The bishop promised books for our monastery and an icon. And if you truly want to know so much, ask Andrey to tell you. He remembers that time better than I do. It took me a long time to recover from my wounds: everything was like a fog...”

Chapter Seven: **Vlada**

She is gentle like the morning sun
And quiet like silence itself!
She is as pure as a holy transparent spring
And beautiful, like a springtime fairy!

Peresvet

Andrey Oslyabya and Alexander Peresvet stood out among the monastic brethren by their high stature and bogatyr² physique. In shoulders, Oslyabya, perhaps, was wider than Peresvet and therefore looked more powerful. Despite his respectable years, his strength was the same — calm and powerful.

² In the epic poems and stories of Russia, a “bogatyr” is warrior of legendary strength, purity, and virtue.

Yegor asked the hegumen for permission to help Andrey in his work. Sergius smiled a little, but allowed him.

Andrey was laying large stones to make steps on the path to the river which was rather steep. This path would often wash out in the rains and then become slippery with clay.

Yegor, who came over to help, filled the gaps between the laid cobblestones with bonding mortar to fasten the stones in the steps.

The work went on.

When they finished their work, Andrey and Yegor went to the river to bathe, change into a new set of clothes, and wash the clothes that had been stained with dust and mortar.

Afterwards, they sat near the river and rested.

Yegor said:

“Peresvet told me about you, about your youth, about the Elder, about how you saved his life in battle. And then, he said that you should be the one to tell me what happened afterwards, because he was ill and unconscious for a long time. Will you tell me?”

“All right, listen!

“Did Peresvet tell you about Vlada, his wife?”

“No.”

“Well, I’ll start with that, then.”

* * *

“All our warriors who were wounded in that battle were taken to one place, where they were treated by healers and those fighters who had at least some knowledge of healing.

“Understanding that Peresvet had little chance to survive, I tried to determine which healer could heal the best. I carried Peresvet in my arms and looked closely at all the healers.

“I noticed a young lady, whose movements — for all her actions — seemed to me something special. I looked and could not take my eyes away... My mind was spinning: ‘What could such a young maiden understand about the treatment of serious wounds?’. But my heart seemed to be telling me that this was the only hope.

“I put Peresvet near her on the ground. It seemed to me as if she startled slightly when she looked at his face, as if she recognized a loved one, but chose not to show it.

“I stood beside her and waited while she examined, washed, and bandaged the wounds. I asked:

‘Is he going to survive? Can you heal him?’

“She raised her clear gray-blue eyes to me, shook her head, and said softly:

‘I cannot heal him... I can only make it so that he doesn’t die now. I can prolong his life time... But I know someone who might be able to do such a healing. But I make no promises.’

‘He is my friend, my sworn brother! I would give anything to save his life! But as a cripple, he will not want to live...’

‘I want nothing in terms of money. And that healer isn’t interested in gold at all... Find a cart and put hay on it so that your friend won’t be shaken on the way. Let’s go to that man. It’s far away. Three days’ journey.’

‘What’s your name?’

‘Vlada.’

‘My name is Rodion, my friend’s name is Peresvet.’

“Vlada, moving her lips slightly, as if kissing the sounds, repeated his name softly, like an echo.

“... Then I said goodbye to the prince, found a good cart, and prepared a comfortable bed on it.

“Vlada approached the horse harnessed to that cart, stroked it very gently, and whispered something to it. Only then did she sit down on the cart and take the reins with one hand. With the other hand, she squeezed Peresvet’s hand in hers.

“I rode beside her. Peresvet’s horse obediently followed behind.

“When I tried to speak to Vlada, she asked:

‘If you want us to bring your friend there alive, do not distract me by talking without an important reason. I must try to support the power of life in him...’

“And so, we rode in silence.

“We stopped for the night only for a short time and made a campfire. It was late autumn, and it was cold.

“Vlada sat down near to the fire. She could not warm up and tried to hold back her trembling. All day, looking at her, I felt her special confidence and clear strength. And now, she seemed so fragile and defenseless! I tossed in some more firewood, covered her with my cloak, and sat down next to her.

“Vlada said softly:

‘Sometimes it’s tiredness that makes it so hard to stay warm. But now, by the fire, it will pass quickly...’

“She spoke on her own, so I asked a question that was especially important to me at the time:

‘And this healer, what Gods does he worship? Peresvet and I are of the Christian faith, so it will not be good if that sorcerer is of some other one...’

“... Vlada looked at me sadly:

‘It’s too late for you to remember this! After all, we cannot turn back now, can we?’

‘Well, I had been thinking to tell you for a long time, but you told me not to say anything!’

‘Have no superstitious fear! He’s not a sorcerer! He’s not even a healer! He’s a Magus! Do you remember? — in the Scriptures about Christ Jesus, there is a story about the adoration of the Magi. These Wise Men heard *from above* about the birth of Jesus and came to worship Him. He is the same kind of Wise Man.’

‘Did he come from the lands of the East?’

‘No... In dark times, Great Souls are born across many nations to support the forces of Light in the world so that darkness does not completely swallow people... He serves only God!’

“Vlada thought for a while, then made up her mind and said an important thing:

‘God — He is One and the Only One for all peoples! But people forgot about this — and so there are different faiths. That is why people call Him, the One Who created everything, by different names...’

“Vlada was silent.

“I did not ask any more questions...

“After a few hours of rest, we continued our journey.

“... On the third day, close to evening, we approached a river.

“Vlada said sternly:

‘Wait here. And don’t make any noise!’

“... I had to wait a long time, more than half an hour.

“She came back in a boat. Her long blond braids were quite wet. So she had swam across the river in this cold!

“We carefully laid Peresvet into it.

“Vlada said:

‘Get in the boat with me now. We’ll take care of the horses later. I can’t carry your friend to the cave without you.’

“We sailed a little way down the river, to a place where the river made a steep turn. There was a crevice in a high, steep bank. It seemed very narrow, but the boat slipped through. Vlada and I had to duck under the trunk of an overhanging tree that made this narrow channel inconspicuous. Then the channel widened, becoming like a round deep lake of clear water surrounded by high, steep, rocky banks. A waterfall flowed down the opposite slope in a narrow stream. It was apparent that this stream, falling from a height over many centuries, had hollowed out this lake.

“We docked on a small sandy beach and began to climb the steps carved into the almost vertical wall to the cave.

“Vlada led the way. I carried Peresvet in my arms and made every effort not to stumble. When we entered the cave, there was in front of us a tall old man in white clothes.

“With incredible surprise, I recognized the Elder!

‘Well, hello, Rodion!’

“I was amazed that we already knew each other, and that he remembered my name, and that he

seemed to have grown younger since our last meeting fifteen years ago!

“He looked majestic, even though he wore simple clothes. His long white robe was without any embroidery or ornamentation, and it was belted with a linen rope. His gray hair and beard were snow-white.

“For the first time in the last few days, I was at peace and happy: I knew for sure that everything would be all right!”

Chapter Eight: **Love and the Growth of the Soul**

“... Let us love one another,
because love is from God...!
Whoever does not love — does not know God,
because God is Love!” (1 Jn 4:7-8).

“... If we love one another,
then God abides in us,
and His perfect Love
is in us!” (1 Jn 4:11-12).

“God is Love,
and all who live in love
live in God,
and God lives in them.” (1 Jn 4:16).

**"... My Joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be full!
This is my commandment:
Love one another,
As I have loved you!" (Jn 15:11-12).**

**"... Whoever is united with the Lord
is one with Him in Spirit!" (1 Cor 6:17).**

**"... The Kingdom of Heaven is taken
with great struggle,
and those who make the effort
shall reach it!" (Matthew 11:12).**

**"... When... we shall be like Him... —
... we shall see Him as He is!" (1 Jn 3:2).**

**The path that led to Pereyaslavl was far away
and that town could not be reached in one day.**

Peresvet traveled lightly and did not hurry.

**It was blissful in the open air of the country-
side!**

**How many times before had he walked and
rode on the earth!...**

**When peace and tranquility are not disturbed
by people's battles and fights, the beauty of nature
always brings joy to the heart!**

**From the pure expanses of meadows and
steppes the soul opens wide and embraces every-
thing, as far as it is strong enough! It is as if, effort-
lessly, the huge, invisible arms of the soul grow to
embrace all this beauty! And then, they ever so ten-
derly begin to hold on their huge, caressing and**

strong arms all the blooming meadows and endless steppes!

And in the thick forest, the soul plunges into a special silence, as if the body disappears among the trunks of trees, and only the forest is rustling with its leaves on all sides!

Somewhere up there, the tree branches touch the blue sky with a beautiful lace of leaves, and the roots go deep into the serenity and power of the Earth!...

Then there is only the forest and the high clear blue sky above it!

Beneath the sky, there is the depth of the Earth nourishing all life, and carrying all beings on its back.

And the body of man among all this is like a tiny blade which grows and lives by the Will of God...

In this body, the soul has to develop. It was predetermined so by God, and this is how life on the Earth is organized by Him!

And a human soul lives so that it can cognize its Creator-God, so that it can love Him so much that the Heights of God will open! And the Heavenly Father Himself shall appear to the soul!

... The forest road took Peresvet from the thicket of the forest to the open meadow expanses. In the distance, the river Kubr was blue.

“Wonderful, more than half of the road has already been passed!”

... Peresvet sat down to have a rest under a powerful and tall poplar. He leant with his back on its trunk.

The huge tree kindly accepted the traveler in its shade. It was easy and natural for Peresvet to feel bright currents of life-power in the trunk. And he

could feel the immensity of the crown with its slightly rustling leaves, and the depth of the roots connecting the tree with Mother Earth! It was as if, for some time, the poplar became kindred with Peresvet, Peresvet became like it, its roots grew deep into the Earth, its three-reaches-wide trunk stretched upwards, and the tree even reached the sky with its many arms-branches and stroked the air with its leafy fingers...

“This is so easy — to feel the power and peace of a tree like this and to feel its connection with the whole Creation of God and with the whole Creator! Why have people forgotten such simple possibilities — to feel Divine Life in everything that exists?

“And Vlada taught me all this...”

... Peresvet went out to the river bank.

The memories of Vlada, of that great earthly love, which awoke in him the love for God, — came involuntarily.

Peresvet did not resist those pictures of the past. On the contrary, he allowed his memory to reproduce the states of love, dear to his heart, which he experienced then so intensely for the first time!

This love did not go anywhere, it continued to live in the soul — as a treasure, as an unquenchable light that could never dim, not even with the passing of so many years. Instead, this love became him, in it, he purified and grew, matured, became closer to the understanding of all Life and of God Himself! This love revealed to him the World of God!

* * *

... When Peresvet opened his eyes after severe wounds and oblivion, he immediately saw her — Vlada — amazingly gentle and so beautiful!

Light-blond hair braided into plaits, eyes calm and deep like the depth of a lake... A slender and flexible body... Amazingly gentle and smooth movements... Purity of the soul — through bodily hands — touched everything around easily, and light streamed through her eyes.

Her gaze could fill everyone with a special tenderness and care.

Her presence transformed all the space around her, filling it with love, which was felt by the soul like a subtle touch.

Together with this return to life, a love for Vlada also came to Peresvet. It was as if this love had been sleeping in the soul, like a blossom waiting to open — and it awakened suddenly, and so strongly that it gave him strength to survive and recover!

This love was mutual, and Vlada did not hide it.

... Vlada was very happy when Peresvet woke up.

She called Rodion. He came and leaned over his friend's bed:

“Finally! You’ve been unconscious for over a week!

“Do you know who is treating you?”

“Vlada... It was as if I was dreaming about her face and hands.”

“Yes, Vlada! She is a great healer!

“And — you won’t believe it! — the Elder is here. Do you remember him? Vlada is his disciple.”

... The Elder almost did not interfere in the treatment of Peresvet, he was busy with other things.

Only sometimes he came to the bed and looked attentively, as if he saw through everything. Then he would say a few words — and go away.

For example, it was like this:

“Why are you breathing here barely, as if you are only half alive? The breath in man can be united with the Divine Spirit! Breathe in the air, together with the Light of God! And breathe out so that — except this Light — there is nothing else in your body! Then the wound in your chest will begin to heal!”

... Afterwards, Vlada would explain in detail these meager instructions from the Elder.

... Rodion was soon sent home by the Elder. The Elder said:

“Your wife is waiting for you, your son is growing up. Go! By summer, Vlada will have finished nursing your friend!”

... Rodion, of course, obeyed and left.

... Strength very slowly returned to Peresvet. He was lying on his bed in a very large cave, well-equipped for permanent living. In the center of the largest room, there was always a burning fire, the smoke from which went up easily through a hole in the ceiling. The cave itself went deep into the soft limestone rock. It had several rooms well adapted for living.

One night, Peresvet heard Vlada pleading with the Elder:

“Cure him, please! There is no one in the world who is dearer to me!”

“I know! That’s why you’ll cure him yourself! And you will use everything that I taught you, and

new Knowledge will come to you from God! You understand that if I heal him at one moment with the Power of God, it will not be of much use! But when you yourself help him to cognize the power of the soul and awaken the Power of God in himself — then the benefit will be great! A person can cure oneself of any ailment with God's Help, but one usually does not know how... And you do know! So cure him!"

... And Vlada treated him.

She taught Peresvet a special kind of breathing, whereby air-light filled the whole body and moved inside it.

She taught him to feel the power of Mother Earth — directly from the cave — to feel its surface with grass, with trees, with birds and gentle beasts.

She taught him to feel it with the soul so that its power would penetrate into his body and fill it.

When Peresvet was able to leave the cave, she taught him to bathe in the ice-hole so that all the remains of weakness could leave his body and his strength could renew.

At other times, she taught him how it was possible to feel the water, becoming the silence, peace, and the transparent depth of the lake.

She taught how to cleanse oneself by using fire and the light of a candle or campfire.

And later, in spring, she taught him how to unite with the light and fire of the shining sun.

Vlada also revealed to Peresvet greater depths of spiritual cognition. For example, she showed him how to perceive the Light of God — the Light of the Holy Spirit — and merge with It.

How simply she taught it all! Everything around — the cave, the campfire, trees, the small wa-

terfall, the river, the lake, the expanse of meadows, the forest — they all provided wonderful opportunities for her lessons!

* * *

Peresvet took his shoes off on the bank of the river. Slightly cool water flowed, caressing his feet which were tired from walking, and warm memories filled him.

He remembered how Vlada had taught him in spring to feel as if he were lying on a river bottom, while his body was standing on the bank.

She had said:

“A soul must not be a prisoner to the flesh of a body! Here is a simple experience for you: feel yourself lying on the bottom.”

“As if I was drowned?”

“No. As if — you can easily breathe underwater, admire the sunlight through the water, touch the sand on the bottom, and observe the swaying algae...”

You also can swim — as a soul! — in the current of this river...”

... Now Peresvet tried to do this exercise and felt how the jets of river water washed around him and through him and how easily and freely the soul could swim just like that — in a stream of water saturated with sunlight! He recalled how such a simple action helped Vlada to teach him to float in the Flow of the Light of the Holy Spirit, to dissolve in that Flow!

Peresvet was surprised at how naturally the memory of the soul resurrects the memories of those exalted states that had been experienced before. For

now — the Flow of Living Light of God became the naturally perceived Reality! His body stood on the bank of the river, and the soul floated in Mergence with the Great River of Divine Light, Which gently flowed far and wide!

Easily, as if by itself, the prayer-meditation “Heavenly King” sounded in the subtlest Light.

And there were no contradictions between the ancient knowledge of the Magi, which the Elder and Vlada possessed, — and the Teachings of Jesus Christ about the Heavenly Father and about the Love of God!

In the purity of Love all this was One Eternal Knowledge of the Divine!

Chapter Nine: On Cognition of God. The Meeting with Jesus

God, Who made the world and all things in it,

...

does not dwell in temples made by hands;
and He isn't served by people as if He needed
anything.

He... is not far from any one of us.
We ought not to think that the Divine...
is like gold or silver or stone,
or an image
formed by the art and thought of man.

Acts 17:24-29

Peresvet was returning from Pereyaslavl with the bishop's gifts.

Among these, were two books: the Bible in Greek and a list of the Gospels in translation. Both books were marvelous handiworks. But the most precious gift was an icon with a beautifully painted face of Jesus.

The icon was small and new, but executed with great skill. It seemed that with a little more — and this face would come to life in the material world. It was as if Jesus Himself touched the world with His Divine Presence if you looked at the picture with a loving heart for a long time.

Peresvet felt this as soon as he took it in his hands and gazed at it reverently...

However, neither the bishop of Pereyaslavl nor the monks there called this icon special or miraculous: evidently, they did not notice this.

Peresvet remembered how the Elder and Vlada had told him and showed how the Holy Souls can reveal Themselves to incarnate people, i.e., how They can become visible and fill the space with Divine Love. They also explained that not all people can perceive this immediately and that the ability of the soul to see and hear God can be developed in oneself.

*** * ***

Peresvet noted with an inner smile that he still called (to himself) the Elder the great Magus Beloyar, with whom fate brought him together twice in his life.

... Of course, he had many important conversations during his long recovery.

He remembered how he once asked:

“Can man see God?”

And the Elder answered: “Both no, and yes...”

“How so?”

“To begin with, a ‘blind’ person who is imprisoned in the body, must learn to see through the eyes *of the soul* and perceive the world with the spiritual heart.

“And to see God, you have to understand what you mean by the word *God*, what meaning do you assign to it?

“You can see Jesus or Goddess Lada, for example. They lived in bodies on our Earth. Sometimes, over the course of thousands of years, such Great Souls came to this world and brought the True Teachings to people. There were a lot of such Messengers in this world — not only Jesus!

“And even after Their earthly lives have ended, Their Divine Images can easily be remade by Them when needed! This is a great help for those who strive for spiritual knowledge. Such Divine Souls can say important words to man or simply bestow Their Bliss upon him or her, supporting their faith and aspiration. Such are the Sons and Daughters of God!

“But people sometimes see other things: imaginary images worshipped by many believers. However, even through such images, the Holy Spirit can sometimes choose to manifest Itself in order to help those sincere aspirants.

“Who is the Holy Spirit? You don’t understand this either, do you?

“This is the Divine Power, Which is the Master of everything in Creation, acting everywhere. The Holy Spirit is the Unity, the Union of all the Perfect Souls!

“Sometimes They act undivided, simultaneously merging together, like how many rivers flow into one great river. And sometimes They manifest Themselves as if separately, but all of Them proceed from the One Divine All-Consciousness.

“The Holy Spirit can be seen as a Divine Light or Fire. Or It can be revealed as Divine Appearances.

“You do not understand this yet, your understanding is only at the level of my words.

“But true understanding happens when you see clearly with the soul and live it — as a real experience that you will never doubt!

“I’ll tell you more, since you asked.

“There is Something else, Which is also called *God* by people. This is a Great All-Creating Power, abiding in the Primordial Calm. This is God the Father, Svarog, the Highest — as different peoples call Him! He is transparent and invisible to the common eye. He exists everywhere, permeating everything with Himself.

“But the Primordial Consciousness does not mix with anything, for It is the Subtlest of the Subtle. It is invisible in ordinary situations, but can be felt and seen by those who are ready to enter into the Heavenly Kingdom, who have approached that state themselves, as souls.

“You’re used to calling the Abode of the Creator the Kingdom of God, aren’t you? And have you heard that it is necessary to enter that Kingdom?

“Or they also call the Abode of God — Heaven? Do you realize now that this is not a blue sky with clouds, but the vastness of God’s Being?

“Jesus said: ‘My Father and I are One’³. But how many people today understand what this *One* is?

“And All Who have Attained are united in this *One*, that is, God!

“God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit... Do you understand even a little bit now — Who They are? Have you ever read or thought about this before?”

“No, I have not read much... I have not sought knowledge of spiritual things...”

“And now you’re looking for it?”

“Now I want to understand everything, but maybe not in the right way...”

“Yes, not so yet...”

“Well, now that the conversation is over, learn that in all manifested things there is God, because He created everything from Himself; and He did this by as if making the most subtle things more and more dense, but not coarse.

“... Perhaps, this is why many peoples worship the forces of nature: the sun, fire, trees. But gradually, the Knowledge about the One Creator — behind all His visible and invisible Manifestations — goes away and disappears. And then a very sad thing results: all faith is reduced to idols, stones, groves, or ritual fires...”

The Elder then became silent, stood up abruptly, and went deep into the cave...

³ Jn 10:30

* * *

During these conversations with the Elder, Peresvet heard many things for the first time.

And after each conversation, he tried to study what he learned, trying to gain a true understanding. And not immediately, but very slowly, this true understanding came. Gradually, a clear vision in the subtlest Divine worlds was revealed. This, little by little, happened as the soul developed abilities through the techniques that the Elder and Vlada taught him.

... Now, on returning to his monastery with the gifts, he experienced a wondrous joy — a vivid awareness of the Divine Presence!

It was the feeling that behind his back, right where the bag with the gifts was, the Doors to the Infinity of Divine Light and Love were opening. It was as if immediately behind the back of his body, there was an Infinite Wall of the Light of the Holy Spirit. And there, where the spiritual heart resides in his chest, — there was a passage to that Infinity! It was as if two worlds existed side by side — and between them, was an invisible transparent border.

... The forest road lay ahead, the sun shone through the leaves, the birds sang. But as soon as he looked back from his spiritual heart — there was a boundless expanse of Holy Light and Divine Love!

Peresvet stopped for a while not to lose this amazing Divine Gift. But the Wall of Clear Light did not disappear. And the gentle Light gradually surrounded and enveloped Peresvet from all sides...

... And then Peresvet saw Jesus. It was not an icon but the Living Face of Jesus consisting of the subtlest Light. This Light shimmered, grew!

Jesus approached Peresvet! Everything external disappeared from perception! There was only Jesus!

Jesus said:

“Why are you, brave knight Peresvet, still afraid to believe fully in My Reality and in My Omnipotence? Why do you, at times, doubt what you clearly and forever already know?”

Jesus came very close, took Peresvet by the hand and continued:

“Do you feel this? Here, I am with you! I will continue to guide you always, even until your bodily death, and will meet you beyond its threshold! Do not be afraid to be close to Me, to be dear to Me! I am here with you now, not in icons or in the words of Scripture. All this is only a reminder that I am with each of those who turn to Me with love! I take each of those who trust in Me by the hand and lead them through life, as I do with you!”

Then Jesus began to move away, dissolving Himself in the Light. Peresvet tried to follow Him... But he could not go there forever: into the Infinity; he remained in the world where his body stood on the ground. But the soul, overflowing with the Love of Jesus, shone brightly and vastly!

... Previously, Peresvet had seen the Face of Jesus only a few times — with Vlada and with the Elder. But at that time, he thought that it was through them that the Love of God was given to him. And it was a long time ago. And it was not as clear as it was now, but like a dream or vision...

And now, came a clear Knowledge of the reality of everything that happened to him!

* * *

Peresvet continued on his way.

Sometimes, a slightly disconcerting thought suddenly rose in his mind: “How can I tell Sergius that I have seen Jesus, heard His words, touched His hand? If I do, I — a simple monk — will either be recognized as a saint, or all this will be called ‘a temptation from the evil one’.”

But Peresvet had no doubts: the Living Jesus talked to him! And it must be so: because Jesus — the Risen One! — is alive forever!

The Clear Light continued to shine in him, and his body was filled with inexpressible light, as if even his earthly body became a Part of this Light!

* * *

It was already evening when the robbers attacked Peresvet. There were two of them.

He felt their approach from behind him as some dark shadows. He smiled a little at the thought that now he himself, like the Elder, could also see “with his back”.

With the same smile, he turned around — and in a few moments intercepted a club, which one of the attackers wanted to stun him with. Then he knocked the knife out of the other’s hands.

Peresvet didn’t have much trouble with all this. His former strength had only increased with age and become different: calm and powerful.

After the robbers who attacked him were on the ground, he did not even tie them up, but calmly asked why they dared to do the crime?

They answered:

“We have not eaten for three days...”

... Peresvet took bread from his bag, unhooked the flask with water from his belt and handed it to the men:

“Here, there is no more food in my bag. Only holy books and an icon.”

Peresvet carefully took out the icon:

“Pray — and then eat!”

... They shared a long night together by the campfire! Important were Peresvet’s words about Jesus, faith, and a righteous life...

And, as a result, the two men, who in the last years of their lives were engaged in robbery, asked Peresvet to take them to the monastery to repent...

Chapter Ten: **Hegumen Sergius**

Humble the pride in yourself!

Keep peace in the soul!

Forgive and forget all wrongs!

Be charitable and merciful in deeds!

Hegumen Sergius

The fact that hegumen Sergius could both understand God and know His Will, and the fact that he strove to live so always, was something that Peresvet has guessed at — or, more precisely, felt clearly. But Sergius himself hardly ever told him or others about this.

Sergius was usually silent and taught the same to all his brethren. He taught not only external si-

lence, the daily habit of laconism, but also a special inner silence, which can be found in an open spiritual heart. In the Christian tradition, such silence is called by the Greek word *hesychia*. Sergius explained that this word means more than just the practice of ascetic silence, and that the attainment of this silence is very significant on the spiritual Path. In this silence, God's Love grows and blossoms in the devotee's soul, and God becomes so close that no one is nearer!

That state of love, calm, and peace of mind, in which Sergius himself always lived, was special and expansive. It was as if he embraced the whole monastery with the soul. It was a marvelous calm and clear space of all-encompassing silence.

It was as if a transparent, slightly golden, boundless Light spread everywhere in the space of the monastery and around it! That is how Peresvet perceived Sergius — as a special soul, a Great Soul!

Through this state of his, the hegumen helped everyone in the monastery to gain spiritual achievements. He helped even just by the fact that in this space of his love and peace — the monks lived. And he also explained the ways of finding purity of soul and inner silence.

This space of Light-Love, natural to Sergius, was visible only to a soul developed to the necessary level. Usually, it seemed as if all this Light was smiling and sparkling with gentle joy. True, Sergius could also become quite stern. But even his severity consisted of great kindness and a loving understanding coming from the *Depths*.

Peresvet never tried to hide his spiritual experiences from Sergius. He understood that Sergius al-

ready knew much directly from God. But all the same, Peresvet told everything both in confessions and in simple, private conversations. So now, he was going to tell the hegumen about his meeting with Jesus.

* * *

Sergius met Peresvet with great joy! He accepted the icon and the books.

Afterwards, Peresvet said to Sergius:

“There is something important I must tell you about: I have seen and heard Jesus...”

... The hegumen listened attentively to Peresvet. His face was full of light.

Then he asked:

“Do you want everyone to know about this event? So that the ranks of the higher clergy will make an inquiry as to whether the miracle really was revealed to you — or if it was only a temptation? Do you want to be glorified for seeing a miracle of God?”

“No, I do not want and do not seek glory in it! Whatever you decide, so be it!”

“Then do not speak of it needlessly! Today there are few true believers, but there are many who are envious! You may make an exception only for those who know you well and love God deeply, so that an understanding of the great possibilities of the soul and of the Love of God may be revealed to them.

“And one more thing — keep on learning humility! I know that you have already learned much, and that you see and hear messages from Heaven. Therefore, now you have to watch more diligently for your pride in yourself: so as not to regard yourself as chosen, so as not to set yourself higher than others!

“Just remembering this is one thing, but truly humbling *oneself* will require more attention to one-self-soul!”

“And if someone from higher ranks asks me in confession — should I keep silent?”

“It is not a sin — to see Jesus! What is there to repent of?” — Sergius said with a calm smile.

Then he continued:

“Remember, Alexander, that even truth should be told with caution! It is not always good to tell a person what they cannot yet comprehend, no matter how hard you try! Sometimes silence is better! Such silence is not a sin but wisdom!

“Try to feel the Will of God with your heart and strive to follow it!”

... After a short silence, Sergius said:

“Now tell me about the bandits! How did it happen, where did you get these dashing people, and why did you bring them to the monastery? Tell me the whole truth!”

... Sergius looked with a soft smile at the slightly embarrassed Peresvet.

“It is as you say: they were robbers! What is there to tell, what is there to hide?”

“So..., what then...? They attacked you from behind, and you, grabbing one with your left hand and the other with your right, dragged **them by the scruff of their necks like blind kittens?..”**

“Well — sort of... They were starving, they thought I had food and money in my bag, but I had only some bread. I showed them the icon. And afterwards, well, we had a meal, we talked... They repented of their lives for a long time and asked me if they could come to the monastery.”

“And do you think they really want to go to God? Or do they just want to live in warmth and comfort at someone else’s expense?”

“I think they are sincere in their desire to repent and purify themselves as souls...”

“Well, call them to me, I’ll listen to them, and I’ll decide! Through these people, God is now setting up some difficult tasks for our brethren. You will soon see and understand how God’s providence is realized through you for many.

“This is important! Begin to notice it! Accept without pride and with great humility — that God wants to give evidence of His Will through you in this world!

“The Will of God is realized through every person. But those who understand this are very few!”

*** * ***

Afterwards, the two former thieves stood before the prior. The older of the two spoke up, making excuses:

“Our life before becoming robbers was not a good one. With our former prince, in the squadron, we were mercenaries... And, one day, our houses were burned down during an enemy raid. Our families perished! The prince didn’t protect them, didn’t defend them! He had other tactics and other benefits...

“But how to live? We didn’t want to serve that prince anymore, we were embittered by what he had done. We had no home and no money, but we were strong! We began to plunder along the roads, taking out our pain and sorrow on others... It was as if because we ourselves felt bad, we wanted to make oth-

ers feel even worse. And that's exactly what we did. For five years, we lived as robbers...

“We had no idea how repulsive we were to our victims and no one had ever tried to resist us before!

“And your monk, Alexander Peresvet, — he has a mighty, heroic strength! He not only stopped us, but he as if shook out all the rottenness in us, as if overturning everything in our lives! Even thinking of that previous way of life is impossible to us now!

“And then he showed us the face of Jesus on the icon.

“And he told us about Jesus...”

... The speaker's voice trembled:

“And it turned out, he had an icon in his shoulder bag. And on it, was the Lord Jesus Himself!

“And behind his back, Heaven seemed to open! It was as if we were robbing the Lord Himself! It was the Lord Who stopped us, Who made us to see reason!

“We repented and will repent to the end of our days and be thankful that God stopped our lawlessness!

“Your monk told us afterwards that he was once a vigilante, that he buried his wife, and that now he lives with God in peace and joy.

“And not just in this icon is there protection from trouble, but in full surrender to God, in the love of the heart for everyone and everything! And then God Himself and all the host of Heaven will be with us always! And even if death comes — then we must accept it with humility!

“And if you are clean, Heaven will be open to you!

“We now want to be cleansed! Accept us into the cloister, and punish us for our sinful life — at least until the end of our days!”

... Sergius did not allow these former criminals to be monks. But, he accepted them as probationary novices for a long time.

And he didn't send them away.

*** * ***

The new inhabitants of the monastery were met by the monastic brethren unkindly, and with great wariness. It turned out that these men were the same robbers who attacked the monastery wagons a year ago, and they were why the brethren had experienced hunger and starvation for a long time. One of the monks, who suffered from that event, recognized them and didn't hold back, telling everyone everything.

And they themselves did not deny their sins...

There was much indignation among the brethren because of this! It is very difficult for people to forgive those who are directly responsible for one's suffering...

... The following day, Sergius spoke in his sermon about forgiveness:

“Do we know how to forgive? How can we learn this virtue?

“Jesus said of those who crucified Him: ‘Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do’.⁴ Through this, Jesus teaches us great forgiveness...

“Matthew told us how Peter asked Jesus: ‘Lord, how often shall by brother sin against me, and

⁴ Luke 23:34

I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him: ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’⁵

“Jesus teaches us to forgive!

“And He also teaches us to see in every person that which draws them to God.

“It is important to gain the ability to look closely at ourselves-souls — to uncover anger, to dislodge it, and to replace condemnation with deep understanding...

“Let us also try, my brothers, to show this not in words but in deeds!

“Let us always try to treat our fellow men with love, and live in peace among ourselves!”

*** * ***

That evening, Yegor asked Peresvet:

“Is it true that these bandits took our carts with provisions last year? Did they tell you about it?”

“I do not know, Yegor. Maybe it was our carts, maybe not... Is there any difference: whether it’s our misfortune or other people’s? They have repented now... They were wicked men, and now they are trying to turn to good. I think we can help them.”

“How?”

“Through kindness, I think... Try to see what a wonderful miracle of God it is that now two people, who had been robbers for five years, want to change from evil to good!”

“But how is that a miracle? It was you who converted them!”

⁵ Matthew 18:21 – 22

“No, Yegor, it was not I, it was God! That is the most important miracle — when God touches a soul! Then a person makes an important choice, choosing how to live further, so that he or she tries not to sin anymore and strives towards God!

“All miracles, no matter if they are ones of healing and salvation, unusual food multiplication, or of any other kind, are performed with that end goal as their purpose. It sometimes happens that even a very simple action, which does not even look like a miracle at first sight, starts a transformation in human souls. It is through such actions as this, that God reveals His Love!

“We can help our new brothers greatly at this time. We have to see the light that is in them and strengthen the hope that has appeared in them on the path of salvation.”

“Yes, I’ve understood that.

“Hegumen Sergius spoke very well about that today.

“I also thought about forgiveness. It is easy for me to forgive our new novices. But how can I forgive those who, in fact, have done great evil to me personally and to my family, my friends? Even if I imagine that someone has killed my brothers and sisters, then such anger boils up in me! I do not have such love in me that I could forgive such evil deeds!”

“Yes, it is very hard. And not always — not even with the passing of many years — do such wounds of the soul are healed from bitter losses! It is primarily through vengeance that grows stronger and hatred that never stops — that wars in our world keep multiplying and multiplying. And there is no end to the bloodshed!

“I have thought a lot about how to bring kindness and justice into this world.

“For example, the people of one prince, at his order, go on a raid on the settlements of another neighboring prince, ravaging homes in retaliation for some offense between people who were once neighbors... Others, after some time, attack in response... And so it goes on for a long time...

“It may seem that all these people are Christians. But, when given an order, they do violence and cruelty, causing suffering and death to the innocent. It is terrible and shameful!

“And it is bitter to say, Yegor, that I was one of those who — at the dictate of a prince — did deeds that were sometimes not righteous at all! I didn’t even think then about what was true or untrue, or what in it followed the goodness dictated to us by God, or if it pleased God.

“And now I understand that we must not allow anger and malice in ourselves! And love and forgiveness must be increased in our hearts and in all our deeds. If everyone begins to act in such a way, it will be the fulfillment of God’s Commandments!

“Maybe through this, people will gradually realize the Teachings of Jesus Christ?

“Will they understand then the Truth, which is — Love for God?

“Will they understand the unacceptability of all kinds of evil, including murder and violence?

“Perhaps, such times will come?

“I often dream now about a peaceful and beautiful life. It’s like a different country there, but very much like ours... There, the beauty of nature is so lovely! Fields, meadows, birch groves, clean rivers

and lakes! And people live there — peacefully, happily! Loving families, happy children! Laughter resounds and joyous songs fill the air! Brightness shines on all faces! Happiness and peace are in every heart! There's no war and strife there...

“Maybe this is God showing me real paradisaical places? Or maybe it's up to us to create such a world?”