



***St Isaac the Syrian: On the Harm of Foolish Zeal That Has the
Guise of Being Divine, and on the Help That Comes of Clemency
and on Other Subjects***

A ZEALOUS MAN never achieves peace of mind. But he who is a stranger to peace is a stranger to joy. If, as it is said, peace of mind is perfect health, and zeal is opposed to peace, then the man who has a wrong zeal is ill with a grievous disease. Though you presume, a man, to send forth

your zeal against the infirmities of other men, you have expelled the health of your own soul; be assiduous, rather, in labouring for your own soul's health. If you wish to heal the infirm, know that the sick are in greater need of loving care than of rebuke. Therefore, although you do not help others, you expend labour to bring grievous illness upon yourself. Zeal is not reckoned among men to be a form of wisdom, but as one of the illnesses of the soul, namely narrow-mindedness and deep ignorance. The beginning of divine wisdom is clemency and gentleness, which arise from greatness of soul and the bearing of the infirmities of men. For, he says, 'Let the strong bear the infirmities of the weak', and 'Restore him that has fallen in the spirit of meekness.' The Apostle numbers peace and patience among the fruits of the Spirit.

Pearls from Saint Isaac of Syria

His feast day has been settled from elder Paisios of Mt Athos on
September 28th /October 11th

This Holy Father of the 7th century, was born in the region of Qatar on the western shore of the Persian Gulf. Gifted with a keen intellect, he thirsted also for spiritual knowledge, and, when still quite young, entered a monastery with his brother. He gained considerable renown as a teacher and came to the attention of the Katholikon Giwargis (George), who ordained him bishop of Ninevah, the former capital of Assyria some distance to the north. For reasons not entirely clear, he requested to abdicate after only five months, and went south to the wilderness of Mount Matout, a refuge for anchorites. There he lived as a solitary for many years, in strict asceticism, eating only three loaves a week with some uncooked vegetables. His constant study of the divine writings strained his eyes, and eventually blindness and old age forced him to retire to the monastery of Shabar, where he died and was buried.

It was already towards the end of his life in the wilderness that, out of love for his neighbor, he felt compelled to share the experience he had gained. The result was a collection of incomparable texts on the spiritual

life, from which we have gathered the following pearls.

- What salt is for any food, humility is for every virtue. To acquire it, a man must always think of himself with contrition, self-belittlement and painful self-judgment. But if we acquire it, it will make us sons of God.
- Let us love silence till the world is made to die in our hearts. Let us always remember death, and in this thought draw near to God in our heart--and the pleasures of this world will have our scorn.
- Walk before God in simplicity, and not in subtleties of the mind. Simplicity brings faith; but subtle and intricate speculations bring conceit; and conceit brings withdrawal from God.
- As a man whose head is under water cannot inhale pure air, so a man whose thoughts are plunged into the cares of this world cannot absorb the sensations of that new world.
- It is a spiritual gift from God for a man to perceive his sins.
- Ease and idleness are the destruction of the soul and they can injure her more than the demons.
- The purpose of the advent of the Saviour, when He gave us His life-giving commandments as purifying remedies in our passionate state, was to cleanse the soul from the damage done by the first transgression and bring it back to its original state. What medicines are for a sick body, that the commandments are for the passionate soul.
- A life of spiritual endeavor is the mother of sanctity; from it is born the first experience of perception of the mysteries of Christ--which is called the first stage of spiritual knowledge.
- To bear a grudge and pray, means to sow seed on the sea and expect a harvest.
- A small but persistent discipline is a great force; for a soft drop tailing persistently, hollows out hard rock.
- The key to Divine gifts is given to the heart by love of neighbor, and, in proportion to the heart's freedom from the bonds of the flesh, the door of knowledge begins to open before it.
- Dispassion does not mean that a man feels no passions, but that he does not accept any of them.

- This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits.

Other texts by Saint Isaac can be found in Early Fathers from the Philokalia, Faber & Faber 1954; The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian, Holy Transfiguration Monastery 1984; and On Ascetical Life, SVS Press 1990.

The icon is from Russia, painted in 1802

<http://misha.pblogs.gr/tags/isaac-the-syrian.html>