
Sayings of Elder Paisios

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Elder Paisios was born in Cappadocia on July 25, 1924. Almost immediately his family was forced to flee with the general exodus of Greek refugees from Asia Minor. They settled in Eperos in North Western Greece. He first visited Mt. Athos in 1949 after his time in the army. He returned in 1950 and, after a short time in the neighbourhood of Karyes, settled in the Monastery of Esphigmenou. In 1954 he was tonsured there as rasophoros monk with the name Averkios. That same year he moved to the Monastery of Philotheou, which at that time was still idiorhythmic. The elder observed in later years that one could even live a more ordered and stricter ascetic life in an idiorhythmic monastery than in a cenobium if one was under close supervision of a good spiritual father. After two years he was tonsured to the small schema in Philotheou and given the name Paisios. In 1958 Fr. Paisios left the Mountain and went to the Stomio Monastery of Konitsas north of Ioannina. He stayed there four years and in 1962 went to Mt. Sinai where he lived in the Skete of St. Epistime on Gebel Mugufa. In the two years that he stayed there he gave himself to strict physical asceticism which he later said was the breaking of his health. In 1964 he returned to Mt. Athos and lived in the Cell of the Archangels in Iveron Skete. He was hospitalized in 1966 and while on

the mainland became acquainted with the nuns of the Hesychastirion of St. John the Theologian, whom he helped greatly in years to come and where he died and was buried. In 1968 he went to Stavronikita Monastery and was tonsured to the great and angelic schema by Papa-Tychon of the Kelli of the Holy Cross. After Papa-Tychon's passing he left the kelli to Geron Paisios and the elder remained there from 1968 to 1979. In 1979 he moved to the kathisma of Koutloumousiou Monastery known as Panagouda near Karyes. At his request the kathisma was made a kelli and the elder was given an omologo/life-lease. Many of his monastic spiritual sons settled nearby in kellia or in kalyvia of Koutloumousiou Skete, but the elder lived alone. Many, many pilgrims came to visit him there. He finally died and was gathered to the Lord on July 12, 1994. Within a year two books about him and recording his teaching had been published in Greek.

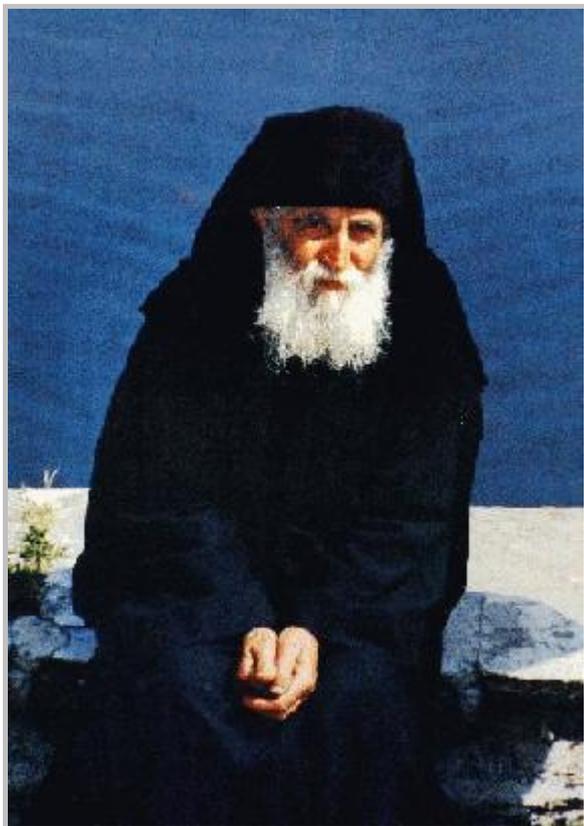
SAYINGS

Concerning the Spiritual Life

Father Paisios said: As a person becomes more spiritual, so much fewer rights does he have in this life. It is obligatory to be patient, to accept injustice, to accept evil words from others. A crooked stick (perverted person) who is distant from God has many rights: to strike and shout and act unrighteously. God keeps our rights for the other life. Out of ignorance however we often seek our rights here. Let us not damage things at all. If they say anything to us, immediately we give them the right. And later we think we trust in God. That is a big joke. Human justice doesn't mean anything to a spiritual person. But it is a great concern for the perverted person.

The elder said: It is not good for one to change spiritual fathers. Imagine a building which continually changes engineer and builder. It's not likely to turn out right.

Concerning Prayer



The elder said: In order for you to have time for prayer you must not concern yourself with things that other people can do. Let's take an example. A doctor should not be concerned with gauzes and bandages. A nurse can do that. The doctor will take care of the serious matters. He'll do the examinations and operations, etc. If he was concerned with gauzes he won't get to the serious work and then many who have need won't benefit. The same with

you. Pray for your suffering parishioners (applied to the correspondent and two other priests) remember their names and note those who have greater need. It's better for you to know the pains of each other. That way the prayer is better.

The elder said: Whether we pray for ourselves or for others, the prayer must be from the heart. The problems of others should become our problems. You have to prepare for prayer. Read a bit of the Gospel or the Gerontiko and then pray. It requires an attempt to take the mind to the divine space. Study is like a gift which God gives us to direct us to greater spirituality. With

study the soul is warmed.

The elder said: Some say that when a person prays he should have his mind on the icon or the words. No. Not on the icon nor the words. Let him have his mind in his sinfulness, but with discernment. Many times the devil can cause trouble there too. He'll tell you that you are sinful, to make you despair. You should answer him abruptly: saying "What's that to you? When I want to say that I am a sinner I will and not when the devil wishes; because when the devil wishes he'll bring me to despair.

The elder said: The person should experience his sinfulness and have trust and hope in the mercy of God, because that way he'll be saved. That way the mind is recollected and experiences the prayer as a need. That way he begins to say: Lord Jesus Christ, come...", and the heart gains rest.

Stillness and freedom from worry help to recollect the person in prayer. On the other hand, distraction does not help because it scatters the mind.

God will not require the same of everybody. But you should know that the one who prays arrives at a condition in which he says the prayer even in sleep; not as in a dream but in reality.

Hearing the above saying of the elder someone said that those in the world don't have the possibility to reach such a state. And Father Paisios answered, "Do you suppose that I've attained it? Only I know people who have attained it."

Concerning Stillness

The elder said: When we have stillness there is a desert.

The place is not a desert. In the desert I must make myself deserted of all my passions. When I adjust the desert to myself, I do not live in the desert. I must adjust myself to the desert. And in the world one can accomplish a lot. It's enough to try to do away with mistakes. If you have, for example, a faucet that leaks continually: drip, drip, drip - or an alarm clock that continually: tick, tick, tick, - you'll change it. One can do a lot.

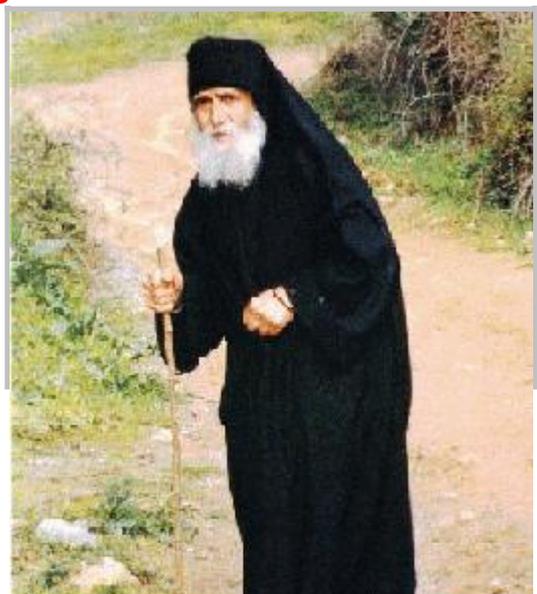
Outer stillness, with discerning asceticism, very quickly brings also interior stillness (the peace of the soul), which is an essential preparation for delicate spiritual activity. For as much as one distances oneself from the world so much more is the world distanced from within you and worldly thoughts leave and the mind of a person is purified and he become a man of God.

The elder said: And by itself stillness is a mystical prayer and aids greatly in prayer, like the unceasing breath of a person.

Stillness (far from the world) very quickly brings also interior stillness in the soul with ascesis and continual prayer. Then the person is not disturbed by exterior disquiet, because in essence only the body is found on earth but the mind is found in Heaven.

Concerning Humility

The elder said: Humility is acquired after struggles. When you know yourself you acquire humility, which become a (permanent) condition. Otherwise one can become



humble for a moment, but your thought will say to you that you are something although in reality you're nothing. and you'll be deluded like that to the moment of death. If death finds you with the thought that you are nothing, then God will speak.



If however your thought says at the hour of death that you are something and you don't understand it, all your effort goes to waste.

Concerning Freedom

The elder said: It is not freedom when we say to people that everything is permitted. That is slavery. To improve one must have difficulties. Let's take an example. We have a little tree. We take care of it. We place a stake and tie it with a rope. Naturally we don't tie it with wire because that way we would injure it. With their method they would not constrain the tree; and it doesn't develop properly otherwise. And look at the child. We limit his freedom from the beginning. When he is first conceived the poor thing is limited in his mother's womb and remains there nine whole months. Later he is born and immediately they swaddle him in a blanket, they tie him up, as soon as he begins to grow they set a railing, etc. All of this is necessary for him to grow. It appears to take away freedom, but without these protective measures the child will die in the first moment.

The elder said: Freedom is good when the person can use it appropriately. Otherwise it is a disaster.

General Sayings

The elder said: Often we see a person and we say a couple spiritual words to him and he takes a turn. Later we say, "Ah, I save someone." I believe that the person who has the disposition and goodness within him, if he doesn't take the turn from us will take it from a bear or a fox or from anything else. Let us watch out for false evangelization.

The elder said: We must not compel others to follow the spiritual struggle. You can not compel him if he does not have the disposition. It is like what happens with food. If one is not disposed to eat and we give him food under compulsion, he will vomit it up.

The elder said: The world today has need of good confessors. Good spiritual fathers are few today and the few that remain have to do their work in a hurry because of the many who go to them. Like a good surgeon who does many interventions and is wearied by the results so as to not give all as he should. If there were good spiritual fathers, there would not be so many psychiatrists.

The elder said: My greatest enemy is my name. Woe to the monk who gets a name, because he'll not have quiet, but the people will begin to shape various things, which are not the reality.