

TEACHERS

“A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” (Luke 6:40)

This biblical truth is driven home by the story of Amala and Kamala, the wolf girls of Midnapore. Mythology is replete with stories of children who were raised by animals. One of the most famous, of course, is the mythical story of twin brothers, Romulus and Remus, who were suckled by a she wolf and later founded the city of Rome. The story of Amala and Kamala, however, is different. The account of their lives is not a myth, but well documented history. They have been the subject of scientific articles by noted professors like Arnold Gessel M.D. of Yale, Francis Maxfield, Ph.D. from Ohio State, and Kingsley Davis, PhD. from Penn State, etc.

The story begins in North India in 1920. The Rev. J.A.L. Singh found two young girls in a cave inhabited by wolves. They appeared to be about 3 and 5 years of age, or perhaps a little older. The mother wolf died protecting them. The girls seemed to have no trace of being human. They refused clothing, ate only raw meat, slept curled up like a ball, and growled in their sleep. They howled at the moon, never smiled, and showed no interest in human companionship. They had walked on all fours for so long that their tendons and joints had shortened so that it was impossible for them to straighten their legs or walk upright. The point is, as Jesus said, the student is like the teacher. These girls behaved like animals because animals were their teachers.

Since Singh and his wife ran an orphanage the two girls became a part of their family. Singh did his best to wean them away from their animal habits and allow their hidden humanity to emerge. Unfortunately, the younger girl, Amala, soon got sick and died. This proved a great setback to Kamala who was just starting to lose her fear of humans.

The older girl did make progress, but it was painfully slow. After 3 years she only had a vocabulary of 12 words. A normal two year old, by comparison, can easily learn 40 new words in a single week. Even though they massaged Kamala's legs and did everything possible to coax her to stand and walk, she never felt at ease while standing. Especially if she was in a hurry she would revert to running on all fours. After nine years in the orphanage Kamala was said to have the mind of a child only 3 ½ years old.

The story broke in the news paper in 1926 and the experts debated whether this poor child would ever overcome her wolf like habits. Unfortunately, the question was never answered for she died of typhoid fever in 1929. The detailed story and pictures are available in a rare volume published by Harper in 1942, *Wolf Children and Feral Man*, by the Rev. J.A.L. Singh.

But now let us return to the words of Jesus: “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.” For better, or for worse, we ape the actions and mirror the behavior of our mentors. If we are raised by Russians we grow up speaking Russian. If we are raised by Chinese we grow up speaking Chinese. If we are raised by wolves we grow up using the only vocabulary we have heard and growl like an animal.

But our teachers shape far more than our vocabulary. Amala and Kamala were also affected physically, emotionally, and even spiritually by their mentors. How vividly I recall a young man in the youth group more than forty years ago. He would periodically throw a tantrum when he didn't get his way. Even by today's lax standards his conduct was “out of the ordinary” and “over the top”. His behavior came sharper into focus, however, when I visited his home and witnessed the same embarrassing conduct by his mother. Most parents seldom consider the influence exerted over children by the power of example. Think again about Amala and Kamala!

Today, like every day, is a day of teaching. No man lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. Someone is invariably watching what we do and listening to what we say. The more time we spend with someone the more we shape and tint their lives. The actions we take today will either bring someone closer to God, or further away from Him. No one goes to heaven alone, and no one goes to hell alone. Let's live today with the prayerful hope that our influence will draw someone closer to Christ!