

The Spiritual and Physical Needs in Leo Tolstoy's "How Much Land does a Man Need?" and "God Sees the Truth, But Waits"

Hayder Ali Abdulridha Al-Zubaidi
Education directory in Wasit, ministry of education, Iraq

Abstract

The similarities and differences between Leo Tolstoy's "God Sees The Truth; But Waits" and "How much Land Does a Man Need" through the protagonists Spiritual and physical needs.

INTRODUCTION

During his life, Leo Tolstoy wrote many pieces of literature. He began his literature career while he was in the army with childhood (1852). Followed by the sequels *Boyhood* (1854) and "Youth" (1857). But in 1857 he made his first trip abroad and abandoned literature to manage his estate. He then established a school and wrote and published a periodical describing his theory and education. This most striking idea being "Who should learn to write from whom, the peasants children from us or we from the peasants children?"

In 1869 he turned his back on literature again and returned to pedagogical work. In 1873, he turned once again to literature producing "Anna Karenina", but emotional distress and depression caused him to think that life was meaningless. "What meaning can a person's life have which would not be annihilated by the awful inevitability of death?" bringing about his conversion to religion. He described the period of crises and conversion to religion in his confession (1882) but publicity was forbidden. He had considered confession his first step along a new road in his life. He then wrote a group of three books on religion "A study of Dogmatic theology, (A polemic against the teachings of the established church. "A Harmony and Translation of the four Gospels" and "What I believe. (A reasoned statement of his version of Christian teaching). Tolstoy devoted the rest of his life to his religious views expressing them in essays and works. Such as "One life" (1886-87) which is the philosophical heart of his teaching, mentioning the dualism of body, (the primal life of man) and spirit. (the true life) followed by "What then we should do?" (1886) "the kingdom of God is within you" (1893) and "What is Art?" (1898). In the mid 1880's, Turned back to literature with a series of stories written for the common people, especially peasants, published under the name "Stories for the people". It is here we can see that he used a style of writing accessible to the common people which was much simpler than his usual complex style.

He used narrative models and subjects from fairy tales and religious legends to express his concern of bringing the message of his religious teachings to the common peasants through his stories. The question of freedom and necessity is taught by Tolstoy, through these stories, freedom being, the freedom to act according to the needs of the spirit in other words the spiritual needs of a person, and necessity; controlling fears and desires, necessary for the body (animal life) and physical death.

In "God sees the truth; But waits" the main character portrayed by Tolstoy is a young peasant named Ivan Dmitrich Aksinov who lives in a town of Vladimir. He is the one who expresses the spiritual needs of man through his hard time of twenty-six years in prison. He is a young, handsome man with a wife and small children. He doesn't listen to his wife's warning after she sees a bad dream and he ends up in prison after being wrongly accused of killing a fellow merchant and stealing his money. He dies at the end of the story as a prematurely aged man who has given up all hope even when the real murderer has confessed his sins. Whereas, the character used by Tolstoy to express a person's physical and materialistic needs is the protagonist Pahom in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" (a well-crafted adapted Short Story) who is also a poor peasant and has a family. He dreams of becoming a successful farmer of his own land as he is tired of having to pay fines when his cattle cross over into someone else's land. He eventually travels for days and goes a great distance to obtain a large area of land but his greed of becoming wealthy and owning too much land leads to his death.

As both characters die; Aksinov peacefully but Pahom full of sorrow, an important question that may be asked and answered with the aid of these short stories could be, "What is necessary to a man for him to live and die in peace? The answer; physical, materialistic wealth or spiritual happiness.

In the beginning of "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" we can see a wife content with her way of life. She is satisfied with what she has and is happy to live the life of a peasant. We can see this in sentences "I would not change my way of life" and "We may live roughly, but at least we are free from anxiety (p355) which she says to her elder sister stating she doesn't have to worry about losing what she doesn't have. But while her elder sister was boasting about town life, living comfortably with good clothes and good things to eat and drink, Pahom was listening to their conversation and thinking to himself. As soon as he hears about the finer things in life which he doesn't have the time and money for, he decides that the cause of not having these luxurious unnecessary things is because he doesn't have enough land. "We peasants have no time to let any nonsense settle in our heads. Our only trouble is that we haven't land enough (p355) He says, then he makes a mistake by adding

“If I had plenty of land, I shouldn’t fear the devil himself”(p355) so his quest of buying more land begins. The seed of temptation, considered the work of the Devil mentioned by Tolstoy through many of his religious teachings, has unfortunately been planted.

On the other hand, “God Sees the truth, But waits” begins with Aksionov as the owner of two shops and a house of his own. He has given up drinking and has a happy marriage. He seems spiritually content with his situation and also works hard for his living. His wife has a bad dream and asks him not to start his journey to the fair in order to sell his goods but as he is a joyful, content person who likes to joke he says “you are afraid that when I get to the fair I shall go on a spree” (p349) to her and tries to ease her anxiety and fear. In her dream she sees him as an old man with grey hair which worries her a great deal, but he doesn’t worry about such things as dreams. He also starts a journey just like Pahom but not in the need for land or worldly goods but a journey of finding ones-self, of turning to God in times of need and looking to him for strength and power. The strength and power Pahom is looking for is acres and acres of land, crops, cattle and profit.

Pahom’s first test with the devil in “How Much Land Does a Man Need, starts with the stewards fines he has to pay each time his animals cross over to the lady’s land. No matter how careful he was, he had to pay a fine. When winter came he was relieved and free from anxiety because he didn’t have to worry about fines until he heard the lady was going to sell her land and that the inn keeper who wanted to buy it would charge higher fines. Therefore, the peasants of the commune arranged for the commune to buy the whole estate. A dispute among the peasants prevented them to come to an agreement. Tolstoy mentions the Evil one being the reason for the dispute amongst the peasants. It can be considered as another one of his attempts to get Pahom into his power and pull him towards the temptation and greed of buying more land. In the end, he decided to buy land elsewhere acting upon what he heard from a neighbour. He had to have this land. “Other people are buying” said he “and we must also buy twenty acres or so. Life is becoming impossible” (p357). He even hired out one of his sons as a laborer for money so he could buy forty acres of land. Eventually, within a year he paid off all his debts and he was very happy because he had become a land owner. At last he was content again with what he had. But was it worth being in debt to the landlady and his brother-in-law and selling his son for forty acres of land? It can be said that Pahom needs more land to satisfy his physical needs. For him, to live means to desire and reach the best condition of well being. But in reality, what is best for man while all his pleasure is temporary and the most precious thing to him is exposed to suffering? Pahom is thus a man unhappy with his life and fails to see happiness in the right place. He feels he will be happy only if he has enough land. His boast “If I had plenty of land, I shouldn’t fear the Devil himself (p355) is a symbol of his need for only materialistic wealth.

Spiritual needs and faith also have symbols and signs which can be seen in “God Sees the Truth, But waits”. We can see Aksionov cross himself and weep when the soldiers bind him, put him in cart and take him to prison. He needs his spiritual belief to overcome the hard conditions of being sent to prison for a murder he didn’t commit. He feels he is going to lose everything. They take all his money and goods, the petition sent the Czar is not accepted showing they are willing to let an innocent man perish for something he didn’t do, even his wife suspects him and doesn’t believe in his innocence. “Vanya dearest, tell your wife the truth; was it not you who did it?” (p 350) She says. At that moment he says goodbye to his wife and children and says to himself “It seems that only God can know the truth; it is Him alone we must appeal, and from Him alone expect mercy” (p 351). He has no one else to turn to so he turns to God and asks for his mercy, the mercy he neither got from the Czar nor his wife.

Pahom, by now has become restless and has started to face more troubles because of his greed. The village cows, stray into his corn and he at first forgives their owners but decides he has to teach them a lesson so the peasants are forced to pay a fine. Disputes begin and he argues with the Judges and his neighbours causing his place in the commune to become much worse than before. In contrast, in the twenty six years Aksionov lived as a convict in Siberia, he is liked for his meekness and respected by his fellow prisoners. When there were disagreements among the prisoners he would help solve them. During these long years, his hair turned white as snow and his beard grew long, thin and grey and he became a different man. “All his mirth went; he stooped; he walked slowly, spoke little and never laughed, but he often prayed” (p 351). He read a book called “the Lives of the Saints”, went to church on Sunday and sang in the church choir, earning the names “Grandfather” and “the Saint”. Here we can see a continuation of spiritual nourishment used to resist the difficult situation he is in, turning to God, either in his house or by singing (praying) to him, gaining strength from his spiritual beliefs. On the other hand, Pahom shows his weakness by listening to yet another rumor of people moving and buying new land. First, he decides to buy land from those who are leaving then considers a greater opportunity brought to him by a passing peasant. The peasant gives Pahom news of acres of land granted to people settling beyond a place called Volga. He considers his home cramped and compares it to a narrow hole all because of his desire to buy more land. In order to satisfy his greed, he travels to this new place, finds out he can buy land at a cheaper price, makes a profit by selling his homestead and his cattle, withdraws his membership of the commune and waits for spring. Spring; the symbol of new beginnings, new life and now Pahom is dreaming of a fresh start with all his money. With all the land he was granted he became ten times better off than he had been. First he

was pleased with it all but yet again he yearned for more. He needed to satisfy his greed by getting more land. He was never satisfied with what was enough land and allowed his desire to ruin everything. He bought more land and the sense of security and pleasure it would bring as he no longer wants to pay rent to other people: "If I were to buy some freehold land and have a homestead on it, it would be a different thing altogether, then it would all be nice and compact (p 360).

The opportunity arises when a passing dealer tells him about the land of the Bashkirs, These people have a lot of land and all the man care about is drinking kumiss and tea, eating mutton and playing on their pipes. They are happy with their simple lives. However, the leader of the people has to be persuaded so Pahom can land from them. Pahom takes many presents of tea, dressing gowns, carpets and wine with him and the Bashkirs decide to give him as much land as he wants in return for the presents he gave them. The chief states Pahom can choose which ever piece of land he wants but Pahom expresses the need of a property sealed deed. "You have much land and I only want a little. But I should like to be sure which bit is mine. Could it not be measured and made over to me: Life and death are in God's hands. You good people give it to me but your children might wish to take it again" (p362). This necessity of a little deed also expresses the importance of physical needs to Pahom. The chief reassures him and says he can have all the land he covers by foot in a day on the condition that he returns to the spot he started at by the end of the day. Pahom was delighted but even though he had been given a feather-bed to sleep on he stays awake all night thinking deeply how to obtain as much land as he can to satisfy his physical needs. He finally dozes off just before Dawn and has a terrible dream.

He thought he was lying in that same tent, and heard somebody chuckling outside. He wondered who it could be, and rose and went out, and he saw the Bashkir Chief sitting in front of the tent holding his side and rolling about with laughter. Going nearer to the Chief, Pahom asked: "What are you laughing at?" But he saw that it was no longer the Chief, but the dealer who had recently stopped at his house and had told him about the land. Just as Pahom was going to ask, "Have you been here long?" he saw that it was not the dealer, but the peasant who had come up from the Volga, long ago, to Pahom's old home. Then he saw that it was not the peasant either, but the Devil himself with hoofs and horns, sitting there and chuckling, and before him lay a man barefoot, prostrate on the ground, with only trousers and a shirt on. And Pahom dreamt that he looked more attentively to see what sort of a man it was laying there, and he saw that the man was dead, and that it was himself! He awoke horror-struck. "What things one does dream," thought he. (p364).

He starts as early as he can and decides to go towards the rising sun. "Pahom's eyes glistened, it was all virgin soil as flat as the palm of your hands, as black as the seed of a poppy, and in the hollows different kinds of grasses grew breast high" (p365). It is important to notice that the weather gets hotter as he continues to walk around the land. Is Tolstoy trying to mention the heat of hell? Pahom makes some rash decisions about the length and the shape of the land he has marked. "If only I have not blundered trying for too much! What if I am too late? (p367). It can be said that Pahom accepts the humiliation his greed has brought upon him "What shall I do", he thought, "I have grasped too much and ruined the whole affair, I can't get there before the sun sets" (p367)

"And this fear made him still more breathless. Pahom went on running, his soaking shirt and trousers stuck to him, and his mouth was parched. His breast was working like a black smith's bellows, his heart was beating like a hammer, and his legs were giving way as if they did not belong to him. Pahom seized with terror lest he should die of the strain" (p367)

Pahom realizes that he has been lost through all his struggles and also realizes how he has become lost. He has strayed because he lived foolishly with the materialistic and physical needs of life as his aim in life. Even though he has gained much land, or seems to have, God doesn't let him live on it. He loses everything in his life and also loses his life chasing a dream of materialistic wealth. "there is plenty of land", thought he "but will God let me live on it? I have lost my life, I have lost my life! I shall never reach that spot!" (p368) "All my labor has been vain (p368).

While Pahom is the humiliated character in "How Much Land Does a Man Need?", the humiliated character in "God Sees the truth But Waits" is Makar, who is one of the new convicts boasting about not being caught after he had done something wrong but had now been caught for something not worthy of imprisonment. "I once really did something wrong and ought by rights to have come here long ago, but that time I was not found out. Now I have been sent here for nothing at all..." (p351). He recognized Aksionov and he was surprised to see him in prison but did not tell the other prisoners where he had seen him before. With the mentioning of the bloody knife used to kill the merchant and his bag being under his head the night of the murder, Aksionov feels that Makar is the man who killed the merchant. He rises and goes away. He has a sleepless night just as Pahom did but he doesn't stay awake planning success, He feels terribly unhappy and all sorts of images pass in front of his eyes such as how his life used to be and all of what had happened while he had been in prison. Aksionov

needs spiritual support to overcome his hopeless situation of wanting to kill himself. He begins to blame Makar for all that has happened and longs for revenge even if he is punished for it. He prayed all night but could not find peace so he decides to not even look at Makar the next morning. His chance to take revenge comes when he catches Makar digging a the hole under the wall planning to escape. Makar threatens him by saying he will kill him if he tells anyone. Aksionov simply replies by saying it is not up to him to tell.

“Aksionov trembled with anger as he looked at his enemy. He drew his hand away, saying “I have no wish to escape, and you have no need to kill me, you killed me long ago! As to telling of you--I may do so or not, as God shall direct” (p353).

He again turns to God in his most troublesome time showing the importance of man’s spiritual needs to able to do the right thing and make the correct decisions in life. As for Makar, he is left at the mercy of his victim Aksionov the day the Governor questioned all the prisoners to find out who had dug the hole. Even then he doesn’t give Makers name “I cannot say, your honour. It is not God’s will that I should tell! Do what you like with me; I am your hands” (p353)

That night Makar comes to him and asks for his forgiveness. He confesses it was he who killed the merchant and kneels before him asking for his forgiveness. Tolstoy describes Aksionov as a man with graying hair and a long beard with the name “Saint” giving him a holy image worthy of respect. With Makar asking for forgiveness we are shown how he is scared of God’s punishment and ask for mercy to relive himself of his sins. “forgive me! For the love of God, forgive me!” (p354)

Due to the fact that Aksionov had pitied Makar by not giving his name to the governor and that Aksionov had not seeked revenge, Makar realised he had been in the wrong for making Aksionov suffer in prison for the last twenty-six years. He cannot bear even the thought of what he had done and asks for forgiveness and begins to cry.

“For Christ’s sake forgive me, wretch that I am!” And he began to sob (p354)

Another example of Aksionov’s spiritual satisfaction is where he too cries with Makar and states that God will forgive him for what he had done. Aksionov’s belief in God never failed him during the years he was in prison and after Makar’s confession of the truth, He was ready to die a free and happy man. The TRUTH had finally been told.

“He no longer had any desire to leave the prison, but only hoped for his last hour to come” (p354).

In short, Tolstoy’s “How much land does Man Need?” shows how greed and an excessive desire for materialistic goods can destroy a person when they ignore their spiritual needs.

The necessity of physical of physical items such as buying land, making profit, and increasing human wealth, bring the destruction of Pahom who is tested by the Devil many times. Pahom prefers to listen to other people and rumours, and is humiliated in the end when he accepts he has made mistake by trying to gain more land than that necessary to a person loses all he has including life. “All my labor has been in vain”(p368) It is all ironic that he gives a cry before collapsing to the ground. It can be considered as final cry for help as he excepts his death understanding God will not let him live on all his land he has gained. Pahom doesn’t mention God or any belief in God until the very end of his struggles. Tired and exhausted from walking under the sun from dusk till dawn, he begins to understand that if he had been content with less land and controlled his earthly desires than maybe God might have let him live a happier, life and he may have been granted a better physical death. The answer to Tolstoys “How does a man need? Is then 6 feet of soil from head to toe which is quite enough.

On the other hand, in Tolstoy’s “God sees the truth, But waits” emphasis is put on the necessity of spiritual needs and beliefs in order to overcome difficulties and obstacles that may occur in life.

It is well known fact, that humans turn to God and religious beliefs when they are in need of spiritual help and strength.

Expecting will come when God believes it is time and believing life is not meaningless, are only a few beliefs mentioned in religious works

Tolstoy himself turned to the religious teachings of Jesus and Christianing during the period of his life where he was in emotional stress, depressed and suicidal. He himself found strength in God and overcome those troublesome years. He found spiritual satisfaction with writing books on religion and later wrote literary works with the aim of giving messages about his religious teachings to the educated and uneducated people of every society.

Aksinov, a common peasant also turned to bas during for years in prison, the prayed for mercy, strength and learned to forgive Maker who had been the reason of his imprisonment.

He too cries in his last hour, and waits for death to come after Makar confesses the truth.

Reference

Leo Tolstoy; *How much land does man need?* (1885) [355-368]

Leo Tolstoy; *God sees the truth but waits.* (1872) [349-354]

Victor Terras; *Handbook of Russian literature*, New Haven CT Yale University Press, (1985) [476-80]

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

Academic conference: <http://www.iiste.org/conference/upcoming-conferences-call-for-paper/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

