

Triptych

They called it Triptych when they found it. This was a word from before the Time, before the long dark centuries of grief.

A triptych was this: Two stone tablets that were to be set side by side in some special place, with words or images on them.

From this the Triptych brought with it from before the Time the idea of Special Places. Set-aside places, dedicated places.

So the Triptych came to be translated to the language of Now and stood up on special tables in set-aside places, in carved wood or stone. These were built in every village, in every town in the markets, the courts, the living areas, education centres. Some of the set-aside places were small, with just a table for the Triptych and a small place where people could stand and read it and think about the things it said. Others were larger with rows of seating and a place where someone could read the Triptych aloud or draw lessons and explanations from the things it said.

Triptych

The things it said were these:

Panel One:

- Treat others as you would have them treat you
- Honor your parents
- Take one day in each seven in which you oblige none to work for you, nor you for others
- Wash yourself every day
- Be understanding of others; you know not what they are going through
- Do not deprive people of the things that they own
- Do not tell untruths about one another but cleave to the truth

Panel Two:

- Love one another as you love yourself
- Take only that which is freely offered or voluntarily exchanged
- Kill no person who is not in arms against you
- Forgive those who admit their wrongdoing against you
- Value what you have and do not hoard more than you need
- Look after those who take refuge in your land, that one day you may take refuge in theirs
- Tread lightly in the World in which you find yourself

Triptych

The world prospered for some thousands of years, guided by the sayings on the Triptych. New technologies were developed, while societies grew and flourished so that everyone benefited from new things as they came.

In time the Set-Aside Places grew in stature and became institutions, remaining mainly a source of the good. In the place where the Triptych was first discovered these institutions had their main global home and a huge edifice had grown up. The original Triptych was displayed here in a giant vaulted chamber decorated with frescoes of people across the ages who had lived by its precepts. Around this chamber, which was only a few hundred years old, layers upon layers of buildings had grown up and around it during the many periods of history that had passed. Beneath the ground were more layers: crypts, buried chambers and set-aside places from across the ages, almost back to the Time.

One day some builders were working on the lowermost chamber beneath this edifice, digging down into the raw earth to install a heat exchanger so that the institution could tread more lightly in the world. Beneath a layer of clay and soil they unexpectedly came upon a hard, flat surface made of stone. Glints and whorls of ancient language tried to catch the mind.

They whistled gently. Experts were bought in; experts in history, with brushes. Gradually they uncovered the ancient thing. It was a tablet, identical in size and material to the two panels of the

Triptych

Triptych that were on display in the chamber far above. The experts translated what it said.

These were the things that it said:

- I am a great being much to be feared; give to me your reverence and your deference
- I am a small minded and vengeful being; you shall put no other great beings above me
- Do not speak my name if you do not mean it
- Do not make any carved figure or any image, either of things in the skies above or of the earth below
- Sacrifice to me one tenth of the increase that comes from your land, your animals and your affairs
- Your body is a temple to Me. Use it only as I intended and seek not pleasure for its own sake
- Seek not knowledge, or to know good from evil, but do only as I command

They quietly bricked it up.