

Who killed the cow

Once upon a time there was a community who owned a small piece of land. They owned a couple of cows that provided them with milk and a few chickens that provided eggs. They planted and harvested fruit and vegetables. They lived humbly and worked hard, but they enjoyed the fruit of their labour – some fruit and vegetables from the land, some milk, from the cows – and they learnt to make butter and cheese. They got some eggs from the chickens and occasionally, they had a surplus to trade for other things.

One day they had a visitor who told them that things were great on the other side of the tracks. This man was well dressed and appeared well-informed about world affairs. He had many modern and trendy gadgets and ideas to show off and gave the impression that everyone on the other side of the tracks lived lives of grandeur and that all people had a right to a better life.

After he left, the group sat around the fire and talked about having a grander life and in this mood they decided to slaughter a cow and have a feast. During the months that followed they had more feasts and this continued until they killed the last cow; and eventually the chickens too. Soon they had no more eggs, no more milk, no more butter nor cheese. They had no more surpluses to trade and life got tougher. They began to speak about how unfair life was and gradually they complained more and they worked less. The work that they did do progressively deteriorated in quality and so their words came true *'Life was tough!'*

Sadly they had forgotten that their past success (although humble) came from the ability to live within their means. The idea that all people had a right to a better life was a good one, but their information was incomplete. They failed to realise that a better life usually comes about from doing better things or from doing things in a better way and not from people demanding more and doing less.

There are so many ways in which we may kill the cow; for example:

- Businesses can be destroyed when employers and employees demand too much from one another and then work against, rather than with, one another. This stifles productivity and future prospects.
- Striking workers can close down a company and even when their demands are met - the businesses eventually pass their increased costs onto their communities and all we actually do is add to inflation.
- Too many executives get paid excessive amounts when profits could be more fairly distributed between them, their staff and other shareholders.
- Too many organisations habitually increase their prices year on year as a substitute for increasing productivity and as inflation rises we kill off any real growth.
- People generally aim to take more than they give - one example is when they overstate insurance claims (including medical bills) and then the insurance companies increase prices to cover the extra costs. In such cases we end up fooling one another and costing society more.
- Too many business practises enslave consumers with debt - which is strangling communities worldwide. Advertising campaigns condition our minds (and especially our young) to look for the way to easy riches, quick fix remedies and also to spend now and pay later. In this process we have cultivated a society that spends too much on vanity items, is over-burdened with the results of wasteful expenditure and that lives with the horrible sense of entitlement.
- Too many people have been entrapped by credit providers and are heavily in debt - similarly many governments have burdened entire nations with unmanageable debts.
- Business cartels collude and fix prices which destroys fair trade practises and breaks down the culture of productivity. In many ways this corrupt practice has been responsible for widening the gap between rich and poor which could eventually start a war between such classes.

- Citizens feel over-taxed, but society also carries too many people that cheat and pay too little tax when they can afford to pay their dues. At the same time, many would argue that our taxes are poorly managed and too much is lost to corruption and maladministration.
- Our children need to be educated, but schools and parents who demand too much from one another will eventually breakdown the respect we so desperately need to work together. We then end up processing children through a system that provides lots of knowledge, but little integrity and little respect.

I could go on and on and add so many examples, but these are just some of the many ways in which different people contribute to killing the cow. I hope you get the idea that everyone will at some point be tempted to play some part in killing the cow that feed us. Generally, we seem content to carry on this way, just as long as we have someone else to blame for killing another part of the cow.

Sadly we fail to see that we are all connected as South Africans – and as humanity! We must all learn to do things differently. We cannot be satisfied to continue as we are in the hope that someone else will fix the mess around us. We must instead all find a way to play a positive role. We must learn to do things better as a nation. We need homes for hundreds of thousands of families. We need improved healthcare. Our capacity to supply clean running water and power is under strain. We need real improvements in education. We need more investment in commerce and industry so that we may grow the economy and create more work opportunities. At the same time, there are thousands of job vacancies that have not been filled because we do not have the people with the correct skills. Thus we need more jobs but we must develop the right skills.

We desperately need stability and lasting stability must be built on 4 things:

- 1 We must cultivate the desire for peace.
- 2 We must build with integrity if we want things to last.
- 3 We must replace the prevailing culture of entitlement with a productive one.
- 4 We must cultivate respect – and commit to treating others as we want to be treated!

We cannot destroy those with whom we disagree without adding to the destruction of our country and we must not think that we will succeed if we fight evil with evil!

Right now we desperately need leaders to pull the people of this nation together so we must be especially careful not to allow the blind to lead the blind. When we see this happen we must know that sitting on the side lines, complaining and criticising will not help at all. We must learn to make the most of what we have and we all need to learn more about communicating and listening to one another so that the best ideas may emerge from among those who make the most sense.

Let's work and pray together for stability and for peace and prosperity for all.

Let's also be grateful for every opportunity that we get to make this a great nation and let's count this as a privilege and not a burden.

God Bless South Africa.

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