

Why we have to be 'wise as serpents'

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'Father' said someone, 'Holy Scripture advises us to be "wise as serpents". Explain to us the meaning of the phrase'.

'When the time comes for the snake to change its skin', he answered, it goes through a narrow place. In this way, it gets rid of its old skin easily. The same with us. To get rid of our former self, we have to pass along the narrow path of the Gospel. But there's something else, as well. When it's in danger, a snake is interested in protecting only its head. We should imitate it. Our first concern should be protection of our faith. As long as we keep the faith, everything else is fixable.



Somebody else asked: 'Father, when, without me wishing it, disgusting thoughts go through my mind, is that a sin?'

'Listen, son. There was a female hermit, Ekaterina Seneïskaya, who was tormented for a long time with unclean thoughts. In the end she was visited by Christ and He immediately dispelled them. 'Where were you all that time, sweetest Jesus?', she asked him. 'I was in your heart', He answered. 'In my heart? But it was full of unclean thoughts'. 'I was in your heart because you didn't welcome any of those thoughts. On the contrary, you tried to get rid of them. You couldn't and so you suffered. But you fought against them. In that way, you made a place for me in your heart'.

So what's the conclusion? If we don't give in to bad thoughts, we're not guilty.

Issues that the starets often touched upon in these assemblies he held were patience, amiability and the exercise of violence towards ourselves.