

The father is happy ... no he seems to be more than happy .. he is overjoyed
To have his lost son back .. He brings out the best of his household to reflect
his joy.

For the father the situation is crystal clear:

My son was lost and now is found

My son was dead and now is alive!

It is easy to understand, the father's joy .. I think any parent can understand
the joy of this parent .. a child you had thought lost is now back... back home
and together with the parent.

The Lost son is happy ... probably more than happy. What he was hoping
for was to be hired as a servant ...What he was hoping for was to fill his
belly with a warm meal and maybe to get a place to sleep in the barn.
He had climbed down the social ladder to the bottom .. he was in the gutter ..
He didn't ask to be reinstated as a son, he knew in his mind that he had lost
that place .. all he wanted were some crumbs to still his worst hunger.
I can imagine his thoughts on his way home being full of shame and
embarrassment.

Didn't he set out with soo much. And all he got from his father .. all gone.
But he remembered how kind the father was to the servants .. maybe ..
maybe he could stay as one of them.

And then as he approaches home the father is running toward him .. he
kisses and hugs him.

And then he gets a feast and best clothes and all seems to be like in a fairy
tale .. all seems to be well, all matter of things seem to be well.

No accusations, no judgments, no scolding, no condemnation!

No feelings that evoke shame or embarrassment .. just joy!!

And now finally we come to the older brother .. the one that is not happy
The one that is angry.

He is angry with the father .. not with his younger brother. What I glean
from the older brother's speech is that he feels contempt for his younger
sibling And here we can hear the accusations, judgments, the scolding
and the condemnation about the behavior of the younger brother. But the
anger of the older brother is directed at the father:

How can you be so nice to that son of yours who devoured your property.

I worked soo hard for you, did all the right things, never spoke against you

What is it I get? .. you never made such a fuss over me.

The story ends with the fathers plea and explanation about the issue.
He was dead and now is alive again.
For the father the issue is clearly not about property or ethical behavior.
The issue for the father is having a son again!

The issue for the older brother is clearly about favors and property.
It is clearly about behavior, about fairness in the common sense.
He did all the work, the brother squandered, now the brother gets the feast
And he .. what does he get???? This is not an eye for an eye!

There is nothing written about Love and/or affection between the brothers.
It is unclear if the father's pleading with the older son will be successful?!
The story is open ended.

And here is where it starts for us to become interesting:
What we have in this story are two conflicting ethical principles,
A comparison between apples and oranges, a conflict between quality and
quantity: between an eye for an eye and LOVE
The older brother is looking at the situation from an "eye for an eye"
mentality, a mentality that looks at fairness. And from that point of view
the older brother seems right. It is the view of the blindfolded Goddess of
justice that holds the scales in her hand. The younger brother messed things
up ..So he shouldn't get the preferred treatment.

But God .. the father in the story ...doesn't look blindfolded towards his
children ...God sees when we repent God sees our anguish and pain
God is not fair in our sense! God's love doesn't know limitations or bends to
our sense of fairness ...What is important for God, is God's Love, that wants
all of his children to be with Him and to be alive.

For the older brother the real issue is: Can he work himself through to love
his Brother in the same way His father Loves both of his children or is he
stuck in a mentality of judgment, deserving, and envy which seems to me the
real issue of the older brother!

Both brothers have to learn in this story:
The younger one to get past his shame and embarrassment and the older to
get past his envy hidden behind his sense of fairness!
Both of them underestimate God's love! God's love will never be confined
by us or bend to our rules and regulations or our sense of fairness.

The fathers/God's hope for the older brother is that he will also come to the place of rejoicing; having found a brother that was dead and is now alive.

And as the story is open-ended we are open – ended... we will find ourselves during the course of our lives in both roles again and again. May our conflict be with shame and embarrassment or with envy and pride. Things will be well only in and with God's LOVE!
And then all things will be well!
Dear God let us see the world, each other and ourselves through the eyes of your love so that we take part in your joy! Amen!